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« Rare Poems Ask Rare Friends » : Literary Circles and Cultural Capital. The Case of Montreal's

Jubilate Circle.

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Composition of the Jury

“Rare Poems Ask Rare Friends”: Literary Circles and Cultural Capital. The Case of Montreal’s

Jubilate Circle.

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Dedicated to the memory of Jacqueline Cayer (1929-2010)

Abstract

The field of literature taken as a sociological phenomenon has enlightened and deepened our knowledge and appreciation of several national literatures, and the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Georg Simmel in this field are now considered ground-breaking. In Québec, the Groupe de recherche sur l'édition littéraire au Québec (now operating under the name « Groupe de recherche sur l'étude du livre au Québec ») has been particularly active in studying the sociological conditions that make literature possible in this Canadian province. Parallel to this, the Équipe de recherche interuniversitaire en littérature anglo-québécoise (ÉRILAQ) has gathered researchers interested in the “contact zone,” to borrow an expression from Catherine Leclerc and Sherry Simon, that is Anglo-Quebec literature. This dissertation will combine these two interests in order to study in greater depth the discourse and works of the poets of the Jubilate Circle, a network of poets writing in English in Québec at the turn of the twenty-first century. It will not only seek to prove the existence of a literary circle, it will attempt to showcase how the circle itself has contributed to advancing its members' literary careers.

In keeping with Pierre Bourdieu's theories of cultural, symbolic and social capital, this dissertation will present, from the outset, a prosopographical sketch of the four poets that make up the Jubilate Circle, and examine the conditions in which they met, bonded as a group (of friends and of colleagues) and came to found the Jubilate Circle. Following this, the instances in which capital of all kinds (symbolic, cultural and social) were exchanged by the four poets will be examined through a close reading of correspondence, dedications, book jacket blurbs and even of the poetry itself. In an attempt to identify the homogeneous in the

cacophony of discourse, to paraphrase Marc Angenot, the Jubilate Poets' discourse on Canadian poetry, enunciated in interviews, essays, book reviews and in the press will then be examined. This will provide a better understanding of the position they hold, or wish to hold, within the field of Canadian poetry and indeed within its canon, existing or future. Finally, an analysis of the poetry they have produced will serve to underscore those aspects of their discourse that are deemed particularly relevant and will highlight areas in which some contradictions may be observed. As a whole, this dissertation will shed some light on the production of poetry, of its criticism and of its publication not only as a literary phenomenon, but also as a profoundly social one.

Résumé

L'étude du champ littéraire en tant que phénomène social a su éclairer et approfondir notre appréciation de plusieurs littératures nationales, et les travaux de Pierre Bourdieu et de Georg Simmel à cet égard sont aujourd'hui considérés fondateurs. Au Québec, le Groupe de recherche sur l'édition littéraire au Québec (aujourd'hui connu sous le nom « Groupe de recherche sur l'étude du livre au Québec ») a jeté les assises dans l'étude des conditions sociologiques qui rendent le phénomène littéraire possible dans cette province canadienne. Parallèlement, l'Équipe de recherche interuniversitaire en littérature anglo-québécoise (ÉRILAQ) réunit des chercheurs qui s'intéressent à cette "zone de contact", pour reprendre l'expression de Catherine Leclerc et de Sherry Simon, qu'est la littérature anglo-québécoise. Cette thèse combinera effectivement ces deux champs de recherche afin d'étudier de manière plus approfondie le discours et les œuvres des poètes du "Jubilate Circle", un réseau de poètes

publiant en anglais au Québec au tournant du vingt-et-unième siècle. Elle cherchera non seulement à prouver l'existence d'un cercle littéraire, mais tentera également de démontrer par quels moyens ce même cercle a pu contribuer à l'avancement des carrières littéraires de ses membres.

Suivant les théories sur le capital culturel, symbolique et social énoncées par Pierre Bourdieu, cette thèse brossera, dans un premier temps, le profil prosopographique de chacun des acteurs du Jubilate Circle et se penchera sur les conditions qui ont favorisé leur rencontre, le bourgeonnement d'une amitié et d'une collaboration littéraire à long terme et la création du cercle littéraire. En second lieu, les instances dans lesquelles des échanges de capital ont lieu seront scrutées grâce à une lecture détaillée de la correspondance, des dédicaces, des textes de quatrième de couverture et même de la poésie elle-même. Dans le but de faire ressortir l'homogène que recèle la cacophonie du discours, pour paraphraser Marc Angenot, le discours tenu par les poètes du Jubilate Circle au sujet de la poésie canadienne contemporaine, énoncé lors d'entretiens, dans des essais littéraires, des comptes rendus et dans les quotidiens de ce pays sera examiné. Une telle étude permettra de faire la lumière sur leur posture et sur la position qu'ils occupent, ou souhaitent occuper, dans le champ de la poésie canadienne, voire dans son canon littéraire, présent ou futur. Enfin, une analyse de la poésie produite par ces quatre poètes sera l'occasion de souligner et d'illustrer certains aspects particulièrement significatifs de leur discours et révélera quelques instances dans lesquelles certaines contradictions peuvent être observées. Dans son ensemble, cette thèse vise à jeter un nouvel éclairage sur la production d'une poésie, de sa critique et de ses instances de publication non

seulement en tant que phénomène littéraire, mais bien en tant que phénomène profondément social.

Key words : Canadian poetry, twentieth century, literary networks, Anglo-Quebec literature, formalism, discourse, David Solway, Eric Ormsby, Michael Harris, Carmine Starnino

Mots clés: poésie canadienne, vingtième siècle, réseaux littéraires, littérature anglo-québécoise, formalisme, discours, David Solway, Eric Ormsby, Michael Harris, Carmine Starnino

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My sincerest gratitude goes out to my advisor, Dr. Patricia Godbout, for her insightful and attentive reading of this dissertation and for her belief, expressed from the outset, that I was the right person to explore this aspect of contemporary Canadian poetry. I would also like to thank the members of the jury, Dr. David Leahy, Dr. Jason Camlot and Dr. Domenico Beneventi, whose thoughts and comments have greatly contributed to the improvement and professionalism of this dissertation.

I have had the opportunity to meet and discuss with the four poets under study in this dissertation, and would like to take this opportunity, insufficient though it may seem, to express my heartfelt thanks to Michael Harris, Carmine Starnino and David Solway in particular, who have patiently and kindly answered my questions, given me access to their archives and imparted to me their love of well-crafted verse. Their contribution has been invaluable to this research, and I hope in return to have shed some light on the works and careers of these very significant Canadian poets.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for all the work, support and guidance that Dr. Gregory Reid, initial advisor in this project, has provided throughout the first four years of my doctoral studies. Although he retired before the dissertation could be completed, this project is nonetheless the fruit of the lengthy discussions, exchanges of insight and advice and patient encouragement he has so generously shown me. It has been a blessing and indeed a great privilege to have had the opportunity to work with him.

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Introduction

“Any given work of art,” Craig Stewart Walker notes in his study entitled *The Buried Astrolabe: Dramatic Imagination and Western Tradition*, “is informed in relation to existing works of art, and the meaning of the work is mainly determined by its perceived relation to other human creations – the culture into which it enters” (4). No work of art is ever created in isolation from other works, nor indeed from other individuals. For this reason the study of networks, of rival literary circles and of competing discourses on the state and future of Canadian literature must be taken into account within Canada’s literary history, as they are intrinsic to Canada’s literary development. This dissertation will focus particularly on the genre of poetry and will highlight how one group, the Jubilate Circle, made up of Anglo-Quebec poets David Solway, Michael Harris, Eric Ormsby and Carmine Starnino, has contributed to its country’s literary history by the collective stance that its members have upheld, as well as by the poetry they have produced.

This study of the Jubilate Circle, of its poets, their discourses (both individual and collective) and of their poetry will be a multi-faceted one, and will draw upon the notions of literary friendships, networks and sociability. It is our belief that literary history cannot be dissociated from the profoundly social aspects of a poet’s or a writer’s life and career. A discourse held by a literary agent, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term, is a reflection of his or her time, influences, prior readings, political and ideological views and relationships (existing or desired) with an existing canon. For these reasons, this dissertation will rely upon the theories of several renowned sociologists – and *not* literary critics or historians – to shed some light on the circumstances that brought Michael Harris, David Solway, Eric Ormsby and Carmine

Starnino together, as well as the various ways they have each benefited, personally and professionally, from their public (and private) association with one another.

The Jubilate Circle's common ground was Montreal, from the mid-nineties to approximately 2005. Their common objective was to write and promote a poetry that innovated, all the while rooting itself firmly within the tradition of English-language poetry and claiming its rightful place within this larger canon, as opposed to the more limited Canadian canon, to whose representatives they strongly objected. The group's name, initially thought up as a joke by David Solway and Carmine Starnino, was meant to mock other seemingly self-supporting groups of poets such as the League of Canadian Poets, whose widely inclusive policy permitted any individual having published words placed vertically on a page to become a member.¹ The name "Jubilate" would circulate among Canadian poets, Solway and Starnino joked, and letters with the "Jubilate Circle" letterhead would be sent out to deserving poets inviting them to join the ranks of other unidentified poets who were also members of this exclusive group (Starnino, Personal Interview 2007). The plan was never carried out, but the name stayed on, albeit informally, and ironically the four poets involved in the initial joke did, in fact, come to form an exclusive literary circle that has played a significant role in the field of Canadian poetry, as this dissertation hypothesizes. The origin of this literary circle, one that began as fiction and came to exist through its members' utterances and publications, underscores the importance of irony in its members' discourse. As such, throughout this dissertation, it is important to be conscious of the presence or potential for irony, and the

¹ It should be noted, however, that Michael Harris was nevertheless a member of the League of Canadian Poets.

effect that this interpretation may have on the conclusions drawn here (for, as Linda Hutcheon notes, “irony isn’t irony until it is interpreted as such” [6]).

The basis of this literary group was the same as that of any other: to establish its members *in opposition* to another contemporary group. Canada’s literary history is replete with such opposing literary groups, whose presence is particularly strong in the field of poetry: the *First Statement* and *Preview* groups in Montreal in the 1950s, as well as Vancouver’s *TISH* and the nationalists, form some of Canada’s most discussed literary rivalries. Interestingly, the rivalry that will give rise to the creation of Signal Editions, a Montreal-based poetry series that has exerted a centripetal force on the members of the Jubilate Circle, introduced to one another through the means of the series’ first editor, Michael Harris, revives a number of the old arguments that fuelled the animosity that existed between the members of the groups mentioned above. Thus the importance of Signal Editions and of its related press, Véhicule Press, not only as a publishing enterprise successfully producing English-language books in Montreal but as a launching pad for what would come to be the two opposing groups, the Signal poets (and the Jubilate Circle) and the Vehicule Poets, must be examined in order to enlighten the origins and trajectory of the Jubilate Poets and of their collective discourse. Although the Signal/Vehicule rivalry was short-lived (largely because the Vehicule Poets disbanded in the early 1980s) and in all likelihood was established retrospectively, it did represent the seedling which would eventually grow into the Jubilate Circle and gave a preview of the position it would hope to occupy in the Canadian poetry canon.

Véhicule Press

The creation of Signal Editions, Véhicule Press's poetry imprint, cannot be dissociated from radical changes that the Canadian book publishing field underwent in the 1960s.² With the creation of various para-governmental funding institutions, most notably that of the Canada Council in 1957, Canadian publishers began receiving government grants that allowed them to survive in spite of the ever-increasing presence of American and British books in the Canadian book market. Small presses quickly began to appear and even thrive in the following decade, and in English Quebec in particular the sixties would become the golden age of small press publishing.³ In 1972, a group of thirteen artists founded the Véhicule Art Gallery, located at 61 Ste-Catherine St. West in Montreal. Characterized as an "alternate space" (Véhicule Art [Montréal] Inc. Fonds Finding Aid), that is, a multidisciplinary space devoted to visual arts but also to performance art, dance, music and poetry readings, Véhicule Art was committed to providing a platform and increasing visibility for local artists. The following year, a printing press donated by Kenneth V. Hertz after the dissolution of his small press Ingluvin Publications was installed in an adjacent room and was used to print flyers for the gallery as well as Tom Dean's *Beaux-Arts* magazine (Véhicule Press fonds, Finding Aid). Soon, Guy Lavoie, Annie Nayer, Marshalore and Vivian Jemelka-White began using this *ATF Chief 20* printing press to print out contracted work, and Véhicule Press was created in 1973, maintaining administrative ties to the Véhicule Art Gallery. Simon Dardick, the press's current proprietor, joined the team in the

² For more information about this tumultuous moment in Canada's literary history, see Julie Frédette, "L'édition en langue anglaise" in Jacques MICHON, ed. *Histoire de l'édition littéraire au Québec, Volume 3*. Montreal: Éditions Fides, 2010, 289-320, as well as Roy MACSKIMMING, *The Perilous Trade. Book Publishing in Canada, 1946-2006*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 2006.

summer of 1973. Originally from Kingston, Ontario, Dardick had come to Montreal to study art at Sir George Williams University.⁴ When he was welcomed into the Véhicule Press team, he taught himself typesetting, became increasingly committed to Véhicule Press and its activities, and early on in the press's history became the sole owner and publisher of Véhicule Press, which he ran with his wife Nancy Marrelli. In 1975, the Coopérative d'Imprimerie Véhicule, a cooperatively-owned printing company, was created (Véhicule Press fonds, Finding Aid). The Véhicule Art Gallery, Véhicule Press and the Coopérative d'Imprimerie Véhicule remained affiliated until 1981, when the printing coop was dissolved. The Véhicule Art Gallery would remain active until 1983, although it had functioned as a separate entity since 1981. By the early 1980s, Simon Dardick had cut all ties with past Véhicule Art Gallery-related activities and steered his small press in an entirely different direction: according to Roy MacSkimming, the new owners of Véhicule Press "endowed the press with a broader vision, coloured by personal enthusiasms for Montreal's cosmopolitan social and cultural history" (259). It is this change of scope that would eventually bring Simon Dardick to Montreal poet Michael Harris.

The press's first decade, however, was very much tied to its Véhicule Art Gallery origins. A group of poets had begun using the space to host poetry readings which quickly became renowned in the city's English-speaking community. Michael Harris, a poet and teacher of English at Montreal's Dawson College, teamed up with Claudia Lapp, who had been teaching at John Abbott College, to host a series of poetry readings called "Books and Bagels," inviting poets from Montreal and other parts of the country to read their work for an audience

⁴ Now Concordia University (Sir George Williams University and Loyola College joined to become Concordia University in 1974).

essentially made up of their own students (Michael Harris, Personal Interview 2007). Though the series was short-lived, Claudia Lapp soon became associated with six other Montreal poets – Ken Norris, Artie Gold, Andre Farkas,⁵ Stephen Morrissey, John McAuley and Tom Konyves – who began giving readings at the gallery every Sunday. Though the association was an informal one, the group became known as the Vehicule Poets (a term coined by Concordia professor Wynne Francis [Norris et al, *The Vehicule Poets: Recollections* 2007]), taking care to drop the acute accent on the gallery's name to highlight their belonging to the English-speaking community. The poets, according to Ken Norris, “shared an interest in hip American poetry and experimental European art movements” (Norris, *Vehicule Days* 7). Influenced by the poetry being created by Vancouver's *TISH* group (George Bowering, Frank Davey, James Reid, and Fred Wah, to name but a few [Gervais 7-8]) – itself largely informed by the poetics of the American poets Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan, and by American poet Cid Corman's little mag *Origin* (Gervais 8, 150) – its members collaborated in a number of writing and performance projects and the group gradually grew into a significant movement in the field of English poetry in Montreal, which was still, in the 1970s, “rather conservative”⁶ according to Ken Norris (*Vehicule Days* 8).

Some of the Vehicule Poets, however, resisted the idea of being identified as a cohesive group; Artie Gold was very vocal about this fact, as was Claudia Lapp, who has stated

⁵ Andre Farkas changed the spelling of his name and became known as Endre Farkas in the 1980s.

⁶ Though it is impossible to state with any certainty what Norris may have meant by “conservative,” it is reasonable to assume that the influence of the post-war generation of poets (Dudek, Layton, Cohen), and even that of the first half of the twentieth century (namely the poets associated with *The McGill Fortnightly Review* – Frank Scott, A.M. Klein, Leo Kennedy, A.J.M. Smith) was still being felt in the early seventies and that the Montreal poetry scene had not yet known the influence of more contemporary, experimental movements such as the Beats and the Black Mountain Poets.

that “[they] were friends of the same generation but were NOT united in a common Poetics at all” (Norris et al. “The Vehicule Poets: Recollections”). Ken Norris, on the other hand, identified from the outset as the “Gang pusher, pushing [the poets] to do collective publishing projects [...] [and the] historian who knew how what [they] were doing fit into the great literary scheme of things” (Endre Farkas, “The Vehicule Poets: Recollections”), was proactive in promoting the Vehicule Poets as a group and an important chapter in Montreal’s literary history. In his introduction to *Vehicule Days: An Unorthodox History of Montréal’s Poets*, Norris recollects that the Véhicule Art Gallery in fact

hosted the first of many Sunday afternoon poetry readings, giving impetus to a renaissance in Montreal poetry and to the Vehicule Poets movement in particular. [...] ⁷ The gallery, the poets and [Véhicule Press] all shared a space and time and cultural commitment which revolutionized the Montreal cultural scene. Had the gallery never opened in 1972, the cultural community of Montreal would now be much poorer on a number of fronts (Norris, *Vehicule Days*, 4)

The Vehicule Poets generally looked to the west and south for their poetic influences. Chief among these was George Bowering, a founding member of Vancouver’s *TISH* group and later (very briefly) a professor at Sir George Williams University, where he taught Creative Writing to several of the Vehicule Poets (Ken Norris, *Vehicule Days*, “Introduction” 15). Their writing was also informed by poets such as Gerry Gilbert and bpNichol, and by the poetry being published by Coach House Press⁸ in Toronto (Norris, *Vehicule Days*, 15). Stephen Morrissey

⁷ It can be presumed here that Norris was referring, with the word “renaissance,” to a renewal of activity and enthusiasm for English-language poetry in Montreal after the perceived “lull” between the momentous first half of the twentieth century and the 1970s.

⁸ Directed by Victor Coleman, who had apprenticed with the Black Mountain poets in the United States, Coach House Press boasted the designing craftsmanship of Stan Bevington and published the poetry of young, innovative

recalls how Sir George Williams University hosted poetry readings by beat and Black Mountain poets such as Robert Creeley, Jackson MacLow, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Diane Wakoski, as well as Canadian poets such as Roy Kiyooka, George Bowering and Gerry Gilbert (Norris et al. "The Vehicule Poets: Recollections"), poets who would later become major influences for several members of this Montreal-based group. As they began producing their own poetry, precociously experimenting with multidisciplinary performances in the gallery itself (poetry and dance, poetry and music, video installations, concrete poetry, that is, poetry in which the typographical arrangement on the page is central to the production and transmission of meaning) and committing their more conventional poems to paper, they turned to Véhicule Press as an outlet for their creations, publishing their own books of poetry there before going on to found their own presses.⁹ Indeed, among the first twenty books published by Véhicule Press between 1973 and 1979, eleven were penned by members of the Vehicule Poets, and each member published at least one book with the press.¹⁰ In 1975, three members of the group (Ken Norris, Artie Gold and Endre Farkas) were asked by Simon Dardick to form Véhicule Press's editorial board. From 1975 to 1980, the Vehicule Poets therefore had "ready access to Véhicule Press, CrossCountry Press and Maker Press, [which] enabled them to produce their early books without much outside editorial interference" (Norris, *Vehicule Days* 8). Their

Canadian poets, notably bp Nichol, who would "become central to Coach House as both author and editorial conscience." (MacSkimming 170-172).

⁹ Several small presses were created by members of the Vehicule Poets in the 1970s and 1980s, namely CrossCountry Press, Maker Press and The Muses' Co. See Julie Frédette, "L'édition de langue anglaise".

¹⁰ According to Library and Archives Canada's AMICUS database, the books are: Ken Norris, *Vegetables: Poems* (1975); John McAuley, *Nothing Ever Happens in Pointe-Claire* (1977); Ken Norris and Endre Farkas, ed. *Montreal: English Poetry of the Seventies* (1977); Claudia Lapp, *Honey* (1977, published in collaboration with CrossCountry Press); Endre Farkas, *Murders in the Welcome Cafe* (1977), Tom Konyves, *No Parking* (1978); Ken Norris, *The Perfect Accident* (1978); Stephen Morrissey, *The Trees of Unknowing* (1978); Artie Gold, *Before Romantic Words* (1979); John McAuley, *What Henry Hudson Found* (1979); Ken Norris, *The Book of Fall* (1979).

presence on the editorial board certainly accounts not only for the predominance of books by the Vehicule Poets published by the press in this period, but also for other titles such as George Bowering's *The Concrete Island: Montreal Poems, 1967-1971* (1977) and David McFadden's *I Don't Know* (1978)¹¹, among others.

In the early 1980s, Véhicule Press went through a period of change and reorientation. Having relocated to Montreal's Chinatown (1000 Clark St.), it moved once again to an industrial space on Ontario St. East for a year (Véhicule Press fonds Finding Aid), before moving to its current home, in the basement Simon Dardick's and Nancy Marrelli's residence on Roy St. The Coopérative d'Imprimerie Véhicule was dissolved at this point, and in an effort to diversify the press's catalogue Simon Dardick opted for the creation of a poetry imprint which would be run independently from other Véhicule Press titles of fiction and non-fiction (Dardick, Marrelli Interview). Norris, Gold and Farkas left the Véhicule Press team, and Michael Harris took their place, creating the Signal Editions poetry imprint. This change brought about a bitter rivalry between the Vehicule Poets and those who would become associated with Signal Editions, Michael Harris and David Solway in particular. Endre Farkas colourfully details the Vehicule Poets' side of the story: "[We] got stabbed in the back. [...] We, the editors, had started to get funding for books while the printing side was not generating the finances that they had hoped for. [...] So while we weren't looking [Simon Dardick] brought in Michael Harris and wrote us a 'nice' fuck-off letter" (Norris et al. "The Vehicule Poets: Recollections"). This embittered

¹¹ David McFadden published his first poems in *TISH*, and although he is originally from Hamilton, Ontario, he has lived on the West Coast since 1978. He was in close contact with the TISH group and with George Bowering in particular, and his poetry is aesthetically close to that of the Vehicule Poets.

rhetoric will be echoed by some of the Signal poets under study in this dissertation and will be the object of a closer examination in Chapter 2.

What both groups consistently fail to note, however, is that initially the aesthetic and ideological distinctions between the Vehicule Poets and those who would become Signal Poets (and members of the Jubilate Circle) were not as clearly defined in the 1970s as they are perceived to be today. Poetry readings at the Véhicule Art Gallery actually began as a result of collaboration between the founder of Signal Editions (Michael Harris) and a future member of the Vehicule Poets (Claudia Lapp); in 1975, Michael Harris edited a poetry anthology entitled *Poetry Readings. 10 Montreal Poets at the Cégeps* (Delta Can), featuring poets that would become generally associated with the Signal Editions series and the Jubilate Circle (Peter Van Toorn, Michael Harris, David Solway and Bob McGee) and with the Vehicule Poets (John McAuley, Artie Gold, Andre Farkas, Claudia Lapp).¹² Farkas' and Norris' anthology, *Montreal: English Poetry of the 70's*, did the same, featuring Artie Gold and Claudia Lapp alongside Michael Harris and Peter Van Toorn, among others; Ken Norris and Peter Van Toorn, now considered affiliated with opposing groups, followed suit and collaborated in editing *Cross/cut. Contemporary English Quebec Poetry*, an anthology featuring seventy Montreal poets, spanning several generations, and including Michael Harris, Robert McGee, Ann McLean, David Solway and Peter Van Toorn¹³ (today associated with Signal Editions) as well as Endre Farkas, Artie

¹² The anthology also features the poetry of Richard Sommer and Marc Plourde, who were associated with neither group.

¹³ Van Toorn's association with Signal Editions is due to the fact that the imprint reprinted his important collection, *Mountain Tea* in 2003. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, the Jubilate Poets, Solway and Starnino in particular, frequently name Van Toorn as an exemplary Canadian poet: though his poetic aesthetic may be far from the Jubilate's more formal approach to prosody, his exuberant language is celebrated on more than one occasion by the poet-critics. This being said, Van Toorn remains a poet unaffiliated to any group of poets or school of poetry

Gold, Claudia Lapp, John McAuley, and Ken Norris (five of the seven *Vehicule Poets*). In the introduction to this volume, the editors make no distinction between the aesthetic and ideologies favoured by the opposing schools of poetry (the rivalry between cosmopolitanism, advocated by, among others, A.J.M. Smith and his fellow *McGill Fortnightly Review* poets, and “native” poetry that promoted a stronger national identity) that had characterized English poetry in Quebec through the first half of the twentieth century; rather, they speak for all Anglophone poets in Quebec, claiming that their “pluralistic identity, [their] passionate complexity, and [their] detachment from merely political solutions were in themselves a source of strength and insight” (34), and noting that

[s]ensitive to the wastefulness of the conflict, even a little envious of his Québécois [*sic*] counterpart’s more congenial environment, and despite all affection and sympathy he feels for the new Québec (and doubts, reservations, fears, and antipathies too), the Anglophone poet now finds himself in a situation which was evident all along, but which he closed his eyes to: cultural dereliction. For his community, language, and identity have abandoned him. (34)¹⁴

In retrospect, however, one can identify aesthetic and discursive distinctions between the Anglo-Quebec poets represented in these anthologies. These distinctions, particularly those embodied by the Signal Editions poets and by the four core members of the Jubilate Circle, will be this dissertation’s object of study.

on the Canadian poetry scene, and in terms of poetic aesthetic, language and themes cannot be said to correspond to those of the Jubilate Circle, whose aesthetics will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

¹⁴ It will be interesting to note that David Solway and Carmine Starnino will hold a similar discourse about the poet writing in English in Montreal in their respective essays, “Double Exile and Montreal English-Language Poetry” and “Michael Harris’s ‘Boojwah Appalachiana’”. Their discourse and rhetoric in these essays and a number of others will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Signal Editions: A Poets' Press

Over the course of the 1970s, Michael Harris was given the opportunity to cut his teeth in the field of poetry publishing, both as a poet (having published with New Delta) and as an editor, having joined Richard Sommer in editing Delta Can. Signal Editions, the poetry series he created in 1981, thus represented the culmination of his writing and publishing projects undertaken over the previous decade. The series represented a clean break from the poetics and the poets favoured by Véhicule Press's previous poetry editors (the Vehicule Poets). Furthermore, it seemed to be an extension of the poetic project undertaken by Richard Sommer (later to be joined by Michael Harris) at New Delta, the small offspring of Louis Dudek's Delta Canada.¹⁵ Indeed, New Delta had published, in the late 1970s, collections of poetry by David Solway, Michael Harris, Anne McLean and Robert McGee, all poets who would later be recruited by Signal. At the time when the Véhicule Poets were running small presses of their own, New Delta's presence on the publishing scene in English Quebec most likely contributed to a certain polarizing of the field, wherein poets began associating with small presses *and with each other*, thus operating a symbolic *prise de position*. Interestingly, the aesthetic debates and the positioning of different affiliations that will be discussed at a further stage in this dissertation took root even before Signal Editions' creation.

Titles began appearing under the Signal Editions imprint in 1982. Simon Dardick entrusted Michael Harris with the responsibility of selecting and/or soliciting manuscripts for the series, giving Harris a yearly working budget that varied according to the grants that

¹⁵ When Delta Canada shut its doors in 1972, it divided into two separate entities, Delta Can, led by Glen Siebrasse, and New Delta, with Richard Sommer at its helm.

Véhicule Press had obtained. For the first two years, Signal published two titles per year, increasing to three titles per year for 1985 and 1986. Two collections by David Solway opened the series, with *The Mulberry Men* and *Selected Poems* appearing in 1982. In *Selected Poems*, Solway republished excerpts of six previous collections published in the 1970s. Both *Selected Poems* and *The Mulberry Men* set the tone for the Signal poetry to come: the poems of the latter especially, upon first reading seemingly destined to children, are written in rhymed metrical form. A friendship already existed between Harris and Solway at the time Signal was created, and Solway had been a prolific poet in the previous decade, publishing very nearly one collection a year; it is likely that Harris knew Solway had a manuscript on hand and that it corresponded to the aesthetic he was trying to bring to Signal Editions. Not all future Signal poets would go on to write such formal poetry, but the collection would come to be known in time as one in which poets operate a return to more traditionally defined forms of poetry: Nathalie Cooke has indeed referred to the Signal poets as “contemporary Modernists,” and has noted that “the poetry is sophisticated in its use of poetic device and form” (Cooke 13). However, no editorial guidelines were disclosed to the public, nor were any statements ever made by Harris or Dardick expressing a desire to orient the poetry series in a particular direction. In his introduction to *The Signal Anthology*, a selection of poems published by the imprint in its first ten years, Harris states that the Signal poets come from all over the world and write poems that “share the highest rank in terms of craft and use of language” (Harris, *Signal Anthology* 16).

Harris also notes that “a small, but vital part of Signal’s publishing program is translation” (16). Indeed, among the first ten titles published by Signal Editions, three were

translations of Québécois poets: Marie-Claire Blais (translated by Michael Harris), Michel Garneau (translated by Robert McGee) and Robert Melançon (translated by Philip Stratford). These Québécois poets helped establish a network of connections between the contemporary Anglo-Quebec poets publishing in the series and renowned and respected poets of the French language tradition. By the time Harris published his translation of Marie-Claire Blais's poetry in 1984, Blais had already become an internationally renowned author, having won several prestigious national and international literary awards, namely the Prix France-Canada in 1965, the Prix Médicis in 1966, two Governor General's Awards (in 1968 and 1979), the Prix de l'Académie française in 1982 and the Prix Athanase-David, Québec's highest award for literary excellence, in the same year.¹⁶ Michel Garneau's first poetry collection, later translated by Bob McGee for Signal Editions, had been critically acclaimed and the poet had been awarded the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1978.¹⁷ Robert Melançon's first publication, *Peinture aveugle* (VLB Éditeur 1979), had won the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1979. Michael Harris thus established the series as one of prestige from the outset.

In the first decade of its existence, Signal Editions published predominantly, but not exclusively, Montreal poets, among them Ross Leckie, Bill Furey, Errol MacDonald, Ann McLean, Susan Glickman (who was raised in Montreal) and Robert Allen. Many of its titles are first books, though the series did attract previously published poets such as Solway, Don Coles, Robert Allen and Michel Garneau. Over time, the series began to take shape, and although Michael Harris did not solicit manuscripts from individual poets, several have published in the

¹⁶ It should be noted, however, that these prizes were awarded mainly in recognition of Blais's works of fiction.

¹⁷ Garneau refused the award for political reasons.

series more than once (David Solway, Don Coles, Ann McLean,¹⁸ Susan Glickman, John Reibetanz, Robert Allen and George Ellenbogen, to name a few, as well as Michael Harris himself, who published his own collections of poetry, *In Transit* [1985] and *New and Selected Poems* [1992] in the Signal Editions series). Largely dependent on Canada Council grants (given to Véhicule Press, whose director Simon Dardick divided the funds among the press's various imprints and publishing projects), funds only trickled in on an irregular basis for the first 10 years; Dardick also maintained (as he does to this day) the final word on the number of manuscripts to be published by the series (though the series' editor is entirely free to select the manuscripts).¹⁹ Reviews of Signal titles were mixed, some highlighting the poets' display of craft and linguistic virtuosity,²⁰ others claiming that these qualities are in fact evidence of artifice and conceit.²¹ However, upon studying Signal's publications in its first decade of existence, as well as the reviews its collections have received, it is not possible to identify a specific editorial slant. Formally and thematically, the series was eclectic. It contradicted Gérard Genette's statement that "le label de la collection [...] indique immédiatement au lecteur potentiel à quel type, sinon à quel genre d'ouvrage il a affaire" (26). The name Signal was indeed associated with the genre of poetry, although the type of poetry it represented was not clearly defined in its early years.

An aesthetic was gradually developed, however, and the series eventually became renowned as

¹⁸ McLean would later change her name to Ann Diamond

¹⁹ A detailed study of Canada Council funding for Véhicule Press is available in Julie FRÉDETTE, "Étude de l'édition littéraire anglo-qubécoise de la Seconde Guerre mondiale à nos jours", M.A. Thesis, Université de Sherbrooke, 2008.

²⁰ See, for example, Ray Filip's review of Michel Garneau's *Small Horses and Intimate Beasts* (transl. Robert McGee) in *Books in Canada*, as well as Gideon Forman's and Carmine Starnino's reviews of John Reibetanz's poetry collections in *Books in Canada*. Ray Filip, "Beasts of the Field", *Books in Canada*, November 1986, 20; Gideon Forman, "Review of Ashbourn", *Books in Canada*, June-July 1987, 24; Carmine Starnino, "A Lover's Quarrel", *Books in Canada*, 25:6, September 1996, 21-22.

²¹ See Raymond Filip's review of Ross Leckie's *A Slow Light* and Carmine Starnino's review of John Reibetanz's *Morning Watch*, (quoted above), both published in *Books in Canada*. Raymond Filip, "Eyes, Ears and Navels," *Books in Canada*, February 1984, 21-22

one that resolutely opposed itself to experimentalism. Michael Harris has spoken of the collections he selected for publication in his series in enigmatic terms; he claimed, in his brief introduction to the *Signal Anthology*, that his impulse had been to “look for insight and revelation – clear evidence of life lived, and then caught and transformed – in work that stirred and exhilarated” (15). Although Harris was careful to never openly define an aesthetic, a uniformity of style can be easily identified within the anthology, one that Richard Stevenson characterizes in the following manner: “highly crafted lyric or narrative poetry with clean, sculpted lines, clear but arresting imagery, a strong personal signature; very accessible mainstream Modernist or Postmodernist work rooted in actual experience or that acknowledges and extends the dominant tradition” (“Here Is Poetry of True Insight and Revelation,” A6). The declaration that *Signal* was not initially based on any clearly defined aesthetic during the series’ beginnings will prove particularly interesting when analyzing the discourse of the poets of the Jubilate Circle, for certain contradictions will become apparent (see Chapter 2), and a certain poetics will indeed emerge *after* the bulk of the poetry written by the members of the Jubilate Circle has been published.

Creating a series or a publisher’s imprint represents both a symbolic method of literary representation destined to condition a reader’s expectations and a marketing strategy for the publisher. From the outset, it is important to distinguish the terms “imprint” and “series”, taking care not to confuse them with their French equivalents, *collection* (a publisher’s series) and *série* (an imprint). Both, as Martin Doré notes, are regroupings of published titles with common characteristics (461). As such, it is not always possible, as was the case for *Signal Editions*, for an imprint to acquire enough symbolic capital over time to become designated as a

series.²² Pierre Bourdieu indeed teaches us that the conferring of symbolic capital on a cultural artefact of any kind (in this case, a series) is the result of a form of legitimization:

Le capital économique ne peut assurer les profits spécifiques offerts par le champ (...) que s'il se reconvertit en capital symbolique. La seule accumulation légitime (...) consiste à se faire un nom, un nom connu et reconnu, capital de consécration impliquant un pouvoir de consacrer des objets (c'est l'effet de griffe ou de signature) ou des personnes (par la publication, l'exposition), donc de donner valeur, et de tirer les profits de cette opération. (Bourdieu 1992, 211)

Books published under the same imprint can be defined by clear guidelines, be it educational requirements in the case of textbooks or children's literature, a recurring character in the case of fiction, or a genre, such as tourism guide books or "how-to" books, for example (461). A series, or *collection*, on the other hand, has greater symbolic value and can come to condition a reader's expectations (Bouvaist 66; Michon 164). John Spiers notes that

[the series] is itself a cultural formation. It is a material artefact. It is a component of cultural hierarchies in the experience of reading. It is intricately involved with the problem of literary value, with ideologies of authorship, with the question of the cultural status of the literary, and with the complicities, opportunities and compromises of the market. (3)

Spiers effectively highlights the series' double function: a symbolic indicator of its contents and an economic tool designed to target a specific readership and respond to consumer demands and expectations. As a marketing strategy, both the series and the imprint will commonly

²² Indeed, the title pages of all Signal publications contain a small note explaining that "Signal Editions is an imprint of Véhicule Press". Despite this, we are still justified in referring to Signal Editions as a series.

transmit to consumers and readers an idea of genre, but also an idea of value: well-informed readers will not only know, when they read or hear the name “Signal Editions,” to expect poetry, but, after a certain time, to expect a certain type of poetry. Indeed, as Claire Squires notes, the “conjunction of brand and genre, and how an author’s work might best be supported in a publishing context through its association with the brand leader in the genre field, asserts the importance of imprint, or the publisher’s ‘brand name’, in marketing” (90). Squires does specify, though, that brands (be they series or imprints) are not relevant to approximately 80% of book consumers. As a result, the creation of a series by a small press, whose readership is limited from the start, could be interpreted more as a symbolic gesture than as a marketing strategy. However, it should also be noted that the readership for small press poetry books, on the other hand, is likely one that is made up of members of the publisher’s and the authors’ immediate networks of friends, family and colleagues, and thus likely consists of fellow poets as well as students and/or teachers of poetry, that is, individuals who would be likely well-informed of the symbolic value of the series. The creation of a series becomes a form of implicit contract with the reader: once the ideologies, values, and aesthetic programme it chooses to promote have been identified, the series’ editor has little room for change and innovation, unless such changes are necessary for the survival of the series as a result of a change in readership (if the series has a succession of directors, for example, as is the case for Signal Editions). The first established readership will expect the books in the series to correspond to a certain standard; a change in this standard could result in the loss of a strong base of readers. On the other hand, if the series cannot adapt to the changing tastes of its readership, it might then also become outdated (see Jacques Michon, “La collection littéraire et son lecteur” 167).

Michael Harris remained Signal Editions' editor for twenty years, a period during which a solid readership base was established and, as noted above, a roster of poets became associated with the series' name, to the extent that in 2001 Joel Yanofsky could confidently claim that Signal Editions "has arguably become the most respected poetry publisher in the country" (13), with over 80 titles to its name.²³ In 2000, Michael Harris stepped down as editor of Signal Editions and passed the torch to 30-year-old Carmine Starnino, his former Dawson College student, a Concordia University graduate²⁴ and one-time Signal poet. Starnino had published his first book of poetry, *The New World*, with Signal Editions in 1997 and was publishing his second, *Credo*, with McGill-Queen's University Press. In spite of his young age, he had already published poems in the *Malahat Review*, *Poetry Canada Review* and *Fiddlehead*, three respected Canadian literary journals, and had been anthologized in *Breathing Fire: Canada's New Poets* (Harbour Publisher), edited by Lorna Crozier and Patrick Lane, in 1995. His first collection of poetry had been shortlisted for the 1997 A.M. Klein Prize²⁵ and for the 1998 Gerald Lampert Memorial Prize. Although he was a newcomer, he was already an important presence in the field of Canadian poetry. As early as 1994, he was providing literary reviews for Montreal's *The Gazette*, and soon began contributing articles and interviews to *Matrix*, *Books in Canada*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Montreal Review of Books*, and the *National Post*. As he began to make his mark in the field of Canadian poetry, Starnino was shouldered by his two mentors and friends, Michael Harris and David Solway, who provided him with a literary education, support and knowledge of the field of Canadian letters through the sharing of social and

²³ Despite this success, it should be noted that in terms of volume and sales Signal Editions still cannot rival other long-standing poetry presses such as the Toronto-based Coach House and Anansi.

²⁴ Under the supervision of Robert Allen.

²⁵ A prize given in the context of the QSPELL – Quebec Society for the Promotion of English-language Literature – Awards.

cultural capital, thus helping him rapidly achieve a more central position at a very young age in the field of Canadian poetry.

In taking up the role of Signal Editions' editor, Starnino acquired the title of "double-agent": although he remained a poet (turning, for his subsequent collections, to Gaspereau Press, a Nova Scotian small press, thus breaking with the tradition of self-publishing that had been widely practiced in Anglo-Quebec small presses, among others by Michael Harris himself)²⁶, it was now his turn to select and reject manuscripts, and to choose whether to renew Signal's image and position in the Canadian literary field²⁷ or to maintain the status it had acquired over the previous twenty years. Starnino chose to do both: he published collections by Eric Ormsby,²⁸ John Steffler,²⁹ David Solway, Don Coles, Robert Allen and Susan Glickman, as well as retrospective editions of Peter Van Toorn and Anne Wilkinson. However, he also became committed to publishing new voices in Canadian poetry, and published the poetry of Newfoundland poets Mary Dalton and Patrick Warner, Vancouver poet Elise Partridge, Cape Breton poet Anita Lahey and Montreal poet Asa Boxer. Unlike Harris, however, Starnino solicited manuscripts from those poets he felt corresponded to the Signal "voice"

²⁶ For a more detailed discussion of self-publishing in Anglo-Quebec literary publishing, see Julie Frédette, "L'édition de langue anglaise".

²⁷ The term "Canadian literary field" will be used throughout this dissertation in keeping with the definition of literary field, or *champ littéraire*, provided by Pierre Bourdieu: "Le champ littéraire est un champ de forces agissant sur tous ceux qui y entrent, et de manière différentielle selon la position qu'ils y occupent (soit, pour prendre des points très éloignés, celle d'auteur de pièces à succès ou celle de poète de l'avant-garde), en même temps qu'un champ de luttes de concurrence qui tendent à conserver ou à transformer ce champ de forces." (P. Bourdieu, "Le champ littéraire" p. 3-4).

²⁸ Ormsby had previously published with ECW and had become a reputed poet, having won the QSPELL Poetry Prize in 1991 and the Ingram Merrill Foundation Award for Outstanding Poet in 1992.

²⁹ Steffler was awarded the Smithbooks/Books in Canada Award and the Thomas Raddall Award for his novel *The Afterlife of George Cartwell*, and was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award and the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book. His poetry collection, *The Night We Were Ravenous* (McClelland & Stewart 1998) had won the Atlantic Poetry Prize in 1998.

(Starnino Personal Interview 2007), and did not sift through hundreds of unsolicited manuscripts. The predominance of Maritime poets in the Signal Editions series under Starnino's editorship was a result of this change of policy. According to Starnino, being a poetry editor in Montreal allowed him to keep a finger on the pulse of the Canadian publishing scene while being sufficiently distanced from it to remain free from having to cater to the various Toronto-centric "schools" of poetry, and enabled him to publish poetry that might otherwise get lost in anonymity if sent to a larger Toronto publishing firm (Starnino, Personal Interview 2007). He attempted to close the geographical gap between the Atlantic poets and those publishing in Montreal and Toronto, providing the former with greater exposure all the while giving Signal Editions a fresh and unique outlook on Canadian poetry.

Like Harris before him, Starnino also published some of Québec's French-language poets in translation, notably Pierre Nepveu, whose collection *Lignes aériennes* (Noroît 2002) won the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 2002, its translation by Judith Cowan (*Mirabel*, Signal Editions 2003) bringing home the Governor General's Prize for Translation the following year. Also like Harris, Starnino published a poetry anthology, ambitiously entitled *The New Canon. An Anthology of Canadian Poetry* (Signal Editions, 2005), that showcased his selection of Canada's most exciting new voices in poetry, limiting his selection to poets born between 1955 and 1975.³⁰ In this anthology, Starnino argued for a new aesthetic in Canadian poetry, one that is in many ways in line with the aesthetic favoured by the Signal poets (it is significant that of the fifty poets represented in the anthology, eleven are Signal poets). Boldly defining his vision

³⁰ This anthology, along with the discourse upheld by Starnino in its introduction, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

of Canadian poetry, Starnino suggested that poets in Canada should not ignore the European models of the past, but innovate in forms, styles and themes while acknowledging the work of their predecessors. The result, Starnino argued, was the creation of a poetry that is “at once linguistically speculative and emotionally moving, poetry that fashions its experiments from the rib of tradition and converts those experiments into the skiddings and veerings of conversational speech” (*The New Canon* 36). In so doing, Starnino reasserted Signal’s position in the field of Canadian poetry as one that was still relevant even after two decades of existence, yet one that was, at the same time, still very much focused on the respect and observance of traditional forms, however the new generations of poets may choose to adapt them.

Through their careful selection of manuscripts and subsequent anthologizing, both Carmine Starnino and Michael Harris have attempted to elevate Signal Editions from imprint to the status of a poetry series of national and international significance, albeit one that is still associated with the city of Montreal through the continued strong presence of Montreal poets in the Signal roster. This symbolic capital acquired by the brand name “Signal Editions” is valuable, as it may translate into economic capital (sales may be boosted by Signal poets winning important prizes such as the Governor General’s Award, for example, although in the field of poetry these will always remain modest) and the kind of recognition that comes with institutional sanction. Editing a poetry series is indeed a part of canon-making,³¹ as Starnino’s anthology suggests: it is what John Spiers calls “a temple of many columns, both of renewal and remembrance” (4). A poetry series is almost invariably created with posterity in mind, an

³¹ See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for a discussion of the relationship between Signal Editions, the poets of the Jubilate Circle and the notion of a “canon.”

interesting notion to consider when reflecting on the fact that Signal Editions was built on the premise of looking to the past for models and inspiration.

The Jubilate Circle would eventually grow out of Signal Editions and become an entity distinct from the small poetry series, although it would continue to promote Signal's unofficial poetics. Through the various discourses upheld by Michael Harris, David Solway, Eric Ormsby and Carmine Starnino, a collective persona was established that became intrinsic to the Jubilate's poetry and to the position they held within the Canadian poetry canon. This dissertation will first examine the genesis of the group of four poets and provide a prosopographical sketch of each in order to understand the group's social and cultural background. The possession and exchange of social and cultural capital between its members will then be examined in order to demonstrate how belonging to a literary network such as the Jubilate Circle can influence a poet's career and contribute to his or her successful navigation of the literary field. Following this, the Jubilate Circle's discourse on Canadian poetry will be studied in detail in order to identify these four poets' stance with regards to their predecessors and contemporaries. Finally, the Jubilate poets' poetry will be studied in light of their discourse in order to highlight consistencies and discrepancies between their discourse and their poetic output. In order to do so, a vast corpus of poetry, dating back to the 1970s and extending to 2010, will be drawn upon, as will several essays, articles, interviews each member has penned or given throughout his career.

Chapter 1: Genesis of the Jubilate Circle

Although the Signal Editions poetry series is not the only thing that Michael Harris, David Solway, Eric Ormsby and Carmine Starnino have in common, it is a series in which all four have published, and represents the poetic aesthetic they have all adopted and promoted, that is, a formally conservative poetry (generally strophic and regular), with an emphasis placed on diction, a clear narrative line, and prosodic elements (alliteration, assonance, consonance and rhyme) that contribute to the poem's meaning and imagery. This aesthetic, as I will later argue, makes up the foundation of the literary network these four poets have formed, and promoting this aesthetic within the field of Canadian poetry will be one of the network's main functions. However, it is first necessary to examine how Harris, Solway, Ormsby and Starnino can be said to form a literary circle, that is, a type of literary network.

Although proximity of members is not a network's defining characteristic (especially in the age of electronic communications wherein symbolic association with an individual or group in any part of the world is now possible), the study of literary networks within a given geographic space has dominated the field of network analysis and has contributed to acquiring a better knowledge of a given area's literary history, or what Richard Giguère has coined "la cartographie d'un milieu intellectuel" (36). In this particular case, the study of the Jubilate Circle will come to enhance our knowledge of Anglo-Quebec literature as a whole and of the sub-field of Anglo-Quebec poetry in particular, for all networks are created with the purpose, as has been noted in the introduction, of delineating the group from adjacent groups. A prosopographical study of Michael Harris, David Solway, Eric Ormsby and Carmine Starnino will enable us to understand how and why these individuals have come to form a literary network.

Capital and Habitus

Social interactions, Pierre Bourdieu teaches us, can be understood in economic terms in that they allow for the exchange, accumulation and comparison of the various forms of capital with which individuals are endowed. In its simplest form, capital can be defined as “accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated,’ embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” (Bourdieu 1985, 46). Economic capital, that is, money or goods that can be valued in monetary terms, is the type of capital most frequently referred to and taken into account, but in the study of networks and particularly of literary circles, cultural and social capital actually take precedence over economic capital, although, as we shall see, the three types of capital can rarely be fully dissociated.

The first of these, *cultural capital*, can take on a number of forms and is generally the most difficult to quantify or even to identify. In its embodied state, that is, in the set of internal dispositions that are transmitted through education, be it formal (schooling) or informal (upbringing), cultural capital is reflected in an individual’s culture, or cultivation: an accent when speaking, for example, or the knowledge of more than one language, of manners; in other words, what the Germans call *bildung* (Bourdieu 1985, 48). The objectified state of cultural capital, on the other hand, consists of the knowledge and ability to use, appreciate, evaluate (to *consume*) a material artefact (texts, art, tools for example). The artefacts themselves can be transmitted from one individual to another, but the ability to appropriate them is a form of cultural capital that must be acquired and which is valued proportionally to its

scarcity (Bourdieu 1985, 50). Finally, institutionalized cultural capital essentially consists of academic credentials. As Bourdieu notes, institutionalized cultural capital can be valued independently from the other forms of capital with which the bearer is endowed: “This objectification is what makes the difference between the capital of the autodidact, which may be called into question at any time, [...] and the cultural capital academically sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications, formally independent of the person of their bearer” (Bourdieu 1985, 50). In the literary field, institutional capital can take the form of literary prizes or of inclusion in the curricula of various educational levels, something John Guillory considers a form of canonization (see Guillory, *Cultural Capital*).

Bourdieu’s interest in the forms of capital was developed in the context of his studies on education: he noted that the Western educational system was structured in a way that favoured those endowed with cultural capital, leading these individuals to powerful positions within the social sphere (positions that lead to economic wealth), where it would thus be possible to reproduce, or transmit, these various forms of capital to the next generation. This idea is relevant in a study of literary networks because it illustrates not only how individuals well-endowed with economic and cultural capital will tend to hold homologous positions within their respective fields (Bourdieu 1989, 127), but also why certain individuals will choose to regroup in an informal network such as a literary circle. It may even go as far as providing an angle of analysis of an individual’s or a group’s literary output: Bourdieu observes that social interactions are often implied in a given work of art:

[Il faut] relever [...] les indices du rapport social qui se trouve toujours impliqué dans le rapport à l’œuvre d’art (par exemple dans les couples d’adjectifs tels que pur et impur,

intelligible et sensible, raffiné et vulgaire, etc.) et mettre cette relation cachée, mais fondatrice, en relation avec la position et la trajectoire de l'auteur dans le champ (philosophique, artistique, etc.) et dans l'espace social. (Bourdieu 1992, 406)

It is in these various ways that economic and cultural capital will combine, in literary circles and other types of networks, to provide agents with social capital. The acquisition of social capital is, in fact, the main function of any network.

Social capital, according to Bourdieu, is the

aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of a collectivity-owned capital, a 'credentials' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (Bourdieu 1985, 51)

Social capital can be institutionalized, or consecrated, for example by belonging to a family, a school, or a select club, but can also result from informal networks (in the case of the Jubilate Circle, where a name exists even though the group itself has never been formally identified, the network appears to sit astride the formal/informal divide). Unlike the acquisition of cultural capital, each agent must make a constant and conscientious effort to acquire social capital, and must skilfully barter his or her own economic and cultural capital in exchange for membership in a group:

[t]he network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly unstable in the short or long term [...] into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt

(feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionalized (rights). (Bourdieu 1985, 52)

The Jubilate Circle would therefore have the primary function of combining each poet's cultural capital and creating a collective social capital that would allow these individuals to better navigate the literary field. Belonging to this particular network would give them advantages such as recommendations within prize juries or upon series editors (other than all having published in the Signal Editions poetry series, it is worth noting that Solway, Ormsby and Starnino have all published collections of essays and/or reviews with *The Porcupine's Quill*, under the editorship of none other than John Metcalf, who was, at that time, non-fiction editor for the small Ontarian press). As Bourdieu notes, agents of any field – the literary being no exception – engage in a struggle within it in order to achieve a coveted position, be it central or marginal, both of which confer upon the agent a certain form of legitimacy. Such a struggle corresponds to what Bourdieu calls the *illusio*, or the collective belief that one must “play the game”: “Pour donner une idée du travail collectif dont [*illusio*] est le produit, il faudrait reconstituer la circulation des innombrables actes de crédit qui s'échangent entre tous les agents engagés dans le champ artistique [...]” (Bourdieu 1992, 319). The field itself, according to Bourdieu, is but a network of relationships (dominant or subordinate, partnerships or antagonisms) that exist between agents holding various positions (Bourdieu 1992, 321). Moreover, these positions are determined by their relationships with other positions: “Chaque position est objectivement définie par sa relation objective aux autres positions. [...] Toutes les positions dépendent, dans leur existence même, et dans les déterminations qu'elles imposent à leurs occupants, de leur situation actuelle et potentielle dans le champ” (Bourdieu 1992, 321).

Belonging to the Jubilate Circle can thus be summed up as the desire to occupy a certain position, or to establish one's position in relationship (be it adverse or favourable) to that of the other agents in the field. This dissertation will examine how the Jubilate Circle allows such positions to be occupied.

At first glance, Solway, Harris, Starnino and Ormsby appear to have vastly different backgrounds and life experiences, although upon closer study this initial impression is inevitably revised: not only do the four poets form a relatively homogeneous group, they share (or have shared) a common geography, that of Montreal.³² Their works have been published by a variety of Canadian presses, and most have published their poetry in Canadian literary journals such as *Fiddlehead*, *Matrix*, and the *Antigonish Review*, or in international periodicals such as *Atlantic Monthly*. If meeting one another was the work of chance, their ensuing friendship and professional collaborations were the result of affinities that seem to confirm, in part, Bourdieu's theories on habitus. Indeed, habitus, which is defined as "the set of internalized dispositions that mediate between one's (or a group's) social position and one's practices, causing agents who share the same habitus to favor the same options" (Codde 109, n23), would dictate that individuals from similar backgrounds, with similar education, would develop similar tastes and affinities in the literary or artistic fields (Bonnewitz 33). Bourdieu develops this idea even further in *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (1979); Patrice Bonnewitz summarizes Bourdieu's theories on class and personal tastes as follows:

le champ culturel fonctionne donc comme un système de classement, opposant les goûts qui sont aussi des dégoûts : ils fonctionnent à la fois comme facteurs

³² Eric Ormsby now lives in London, England.

d'intégration, attestant l'appartenance à une classe, mais aussi comme facteur d'exclusion. [...] Dans un champ culturel, les stratégies des agents diffèrent selon leur position : les individus aux positions dominantes opteront pour des stratégies de conservation; en revanche, les individus en position dominée pratiqueront des stratégies de subversion en cherchant à transformer les règles de fonctionnement du champ. (33)

As we shall see, the poets of the Jubilate Circle have a number of affinities that include but also go beyond race, class and educational background. They are white, male upper-middle-class individuals who work in the literary field; all have received a university education, one has become an academic (Ormsby), two Cégep teachers (Solway, Harris) (although one of these has obtained a Ph.D. in North American Studies³³), and one has made his living working solely as a writer, publisher and magazine editor (Starnino). None can be said to hold a marginal position within the literary field, although it is worth noting that in the sub-field of Canadian poetry a central position does not necessarily imply financial success, but rather symbolic success (institutional recognition, publication by prestigious presses, etc.). The network (that is, the literary circle) is therefore predicated upon a homophilic bias (Degenne and Forsé 33): the tendency to associate with a similar other is manifested in the Jubilate Circle, and as Alain Degenne and Michel Forsé have observed, “achieved status (e.g. educational level) tends to outweigh ascribed status (e.g. social origin)” (33). This will become much clearer when a prosopographical study of each poet is undertaken. Prosopography is defined by Laurence Stone as “the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in the history by means of a collective study of their lives” (Stone, 25). It is not unreasonable to

³³ David Solway obtained an MA in Education from the Université de Sherbrooke in 1996 and a PhD in North American Studies from Lajos Kossuth University (Hungary) in 1998.

hypothesize that the choice of associating with like-minded individuals in order to share cultural and social capital is one largely, though not openly, predicated upon notions of class.

When Bourdieu refers to individuals in a dominant position in the cultural field, he is not only alluding to individuals with great personal wealth, but to those individuals endowed with sufficient cultural capital and/or social capital, that is, with assets such as education, a certain type of upbringing, social status and reputation, to have earned the respect of their peers, to have established a reputation as a major (central) figure in the field, and whose publications (for those agents in the literary field) have acquired sufficient symbolic capital as to translate into economic capital (through sales but also, mainly, through prizes, fellowships, writer-in-residence positions, etc.). As such, the four poets under study do hold similar positions in the Canadian poetry field: their more traditional formal aesthetic has earned them high praise and institutional recognition, but they are ideologically opposed (one gathers from the discourses they've held in various publications and interviews³⁴) to other dominant and major figures in Canadian letters, figures such as Margaret Atwood, Anne Carson and Al Purdy (to name a few). Regrouping, participating in collective projects and uniting their voices in order to promote their own vision of poetry are examples of the "stratégies de conservation" to which Patrice Bonnewitz was alluding. Forming a network will allow these poets to secure and maintain a dominant position within the field.

³⁴ See Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Network Theory

The theory of literary and social networks will shed some light on the way the production of literature, in this case of English-language poetry in Quebec, is carried out in the overlapping spaces of the social and the literary fields. This sociological approach provides a number of angles which, combined, help to determine why Harris, Solway, Starnino and Ormsby decided to form a network (should such a decision have been a conscious one), what impact this gesture has had on their poetry and on their respective positions within the literary field and how they each benefited from the network itself. Network theory has informed numerous studies on the role of institutions, informal gatherings (among others, the popular *salons littéraires* of the French literary tradition), and publication venues such as little magazines, publishing houses and publishers' series. Drawing upon the works of German sociologist Georg Simmel, scholars have studied the interactions of literary agents in order to elucidate the human, social aspects of literary life.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Simmel began reflecting upon the nature and impact of socialization and established what would later become the foundations of network studies. In his *Questions fondamentales de la sociologie* (1917), he noted that socialization among agents was indeed “la forme qui se réalise suivant d’innombrables manières différentes, grâce auxquelles les individus, en vertu d’intérêts – sensibles aux idéaux, momentanés ou durables, conscients ou inconscients, causalement agissant ou téléologiquement stimulants – se soudent en une unité au sein de laquelle ces intérêts se réalisent”³⁵ (Simmel, qtd. in Pelletier

³⁵ Georg Simmel, *Questions fondamentales de sociologie*, transl. L. Gasparini, Paris : PUF, 122, qtd in Denis Pelletier, « LECTURES : Georg Simmel : la sociabilité, “forme ludique des forces éthiques de la société concrète” »

34). Individuals will therefore regroup to share and promote their common interests, and such socialization, as French historiographer Maurice Agulhon later notes, rests upon a mutual recognition and respect of the equal worth and social capital of the peers within the group. This is particularly true of the literary circle. Agulhon, who has authored a number of publications on the existence of literary circles in provincial France, argues that the specificity of literary circles, whose popularity peaked in the mid-nineteenth century, was their essentially masculine nature (as opposed to the *salons littéraires*, generally led by women belonging to the social elite) and the absence of a hierarchy of power: “[l]e cercle est un lieu d’innovation sociale dont la pratique égalitaire s’oppose à celle du salon, aristocratique et hiérarchique” (Agulhon, in Racine, Trebitsch 32). Network studies are thus now commonly used in order to shed some light on a country or a region’s “literary life” (*la vie littéraire*), an increasingly popular facet of literary studies; among the possible literary networks of a given area, informal literary circles are some of the most common. They are a particular form of sociability that allows networks to overlap and interact, for every actor, as Alain Degenne and Michel Forsé have demonstrated, belongs to several social circles at once (not all of them, obviously, literary). Although social circles (and, therefore, literary circles) are fluid and often tenuous, as well as difficult to define due to their informal nature, they nonetheless remain an essential element of networks (Degenne and Forsé 61).

Michel Trebitsch’s seminal text entitled “Avant-propos : La chapelle, le clan et le microcosme,” published in 1992, discusses the notion of *sociabilité littéraire*, or literary sociability, in its geographical context (*lieux*) and in its social context (*réseaux*). In the former,

in Nicole Racine and Michel Trebitsch, eds. *Sociabilités intellectuelles : lieux, milieux, réseaux*, Paris : Cahiers de l’Institut d’histoire du temps présent, 20, March 1992.

sociability can be reduced to a question of geographic proximity, brought about by belonging to institutions, that is, the networks that are likely to be formed solely because individuals navigate within a similarly delineated space. Trebitsch indeed notes that in the *lieux de sociabilité littéraire*, “une sorte de sociabilité [est] induite des ‘institutions de la vie littéraire’ ou ‘instances de consécration et de légitimation’ de type institutionnel (académies, organismes universitaires de recherche, conseils et commission), professionnel (colloques, jurys, associations corporatives, syndicats) ou marchand (maisons d’édition, prix littéraires)” (15). In the latter, sociability is organized, the result of an individual’s choice to consort with others made with particular objectives in mind. Trebitsch associates the *lieux de sociabilité littéraire* with institutions (universities, academies, conferences, juries, professional associations, councils, publishing houses, etc.) and the *réseaux de sociabilité littéraire* with individuals. These latter networks can be described as

des structures de sociabilités ‘productrices’ comme les écoles, les mouvements, les revues et même les cafés et salons, où le rapport à autrui est organisé de façon délibérée par l’adhésion partagée à des valeurs, souvent incarnées par des individus, notamment la nébuleuse des intermédiaires intellectuels, critiques, hommes de revues, ‘passeurs’, ‘liseurs’, ‘éveilleurs’, etc. (Racine, Trebitsch 15)

Trebitsch notes that historically the author or poet began investing geographical spaces with a certain literary value when, as an intellectual, he/she became a public figure: public space, therefore, precedes any intellectual environment and in fact defines it: “aussi faut-il prendre les lieux de sociabilité non comme décor mais comme condition de l’élaboration intellectuelle” (Trebitsch, in Racine, Trebitsch 19). This new value taken on by the public space will become

known in the literary field, and certain agents will flock to it while others will choose to avoid it. Thus, each space holds the potential for the creation of a group, circle or network.

Several authors have contributed to defining and illustrating the nature and function of literary networks, and it would not be relevant to highlight them all here. In Quebec, however, one of the leading scholars in this field has certainly been Michel Lacroix, a professor of Literary Studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Lacroix reflects upon the relationship between literary networks and social capital and attempts to see how such socializing strategies as *la mondanité* (social events) can be marketable in the literary field. Lacroix observes that belonging to a literary network is a crucial step in an author's initiation to the literary field, for the field is of such a unique sort that no type of education, upbringing or culture can really prepare an individual for its inner struggles:

Les acteurs ou agents n'adoptent pas des stratégies nées d'une connaissance parfaite du champ. [...] Découvrir qui sont les acteurs majeurs de la scène littéraire, apprendre la disposition des forces en présence, connaître l'état des relations entre acteurs : ces quasi-nécessités de la carrière littéraire font plus souvent qu'autrement appel à un savoir collectif, à un savoir réparti dans le réseau des relations. (Lacroix 2002, 101)

According to Lacroix, an author or poet who seeks to join a literary network is first and foremost looking to acquire social capital that will translate into symbolic and economic success (that is, a central position within the literary field). In the *salons littéraires* of 19th century France, the social capital acquired in social gatherings in which men and women of letters were given the possibility of meeting and interacting with members of the political sphere, or of other influential fields, was quite concrete: a young author who was lucky enough to be

admitted to such gatherings was introduced to wealthy members of society who might become patrons, or to individuals who might secure him a job that would sustain him while allowing him to continue writing. Patronage remains a reality in contemporary formal and informal networks, although the nature of the process and of the capital to be exchanged might differ: a blurb for a book jacket, a letter of recommendation for a prize, introductions to other authors or to publishers, etc. However, as Lacroix notes, there are cases where simply associating oneself with reputable agents in the literary field is sufficient social capital in and of itself. It is the very idea of association that makes up this social capital, for in many informal networks, no goods or favours are actually exchanged by the members themselves: it is the nature of the relationship that is beneficial for all. Finding strength in numbers, the members of a literary network might be better armed against their adversaries. Moreover, being associated with some authors or poets and not with others might confer upon an individual a certain identity, or persona (*posture littéraire*), that will contribute to carving a niche for the poet in question. Lacroix sees this as one of the most powerful consequences of belonging to a literary network and as having repercussions that can sometimes reach far beyond the literary field:

Par ailleurs, parce que le fait d'afficher ou non une relation a des conséquences, que toute information sur l'écheveau des relations littéraires contemporaines a un prix, qu'associer un acteur à un groupe c'est lui coller une étiquette esthétique, politique ou sociale et qu'en définitive, chacune des relations nouées par un écrivain peut influencer l'état de son capital – aussi bien social que symbolique – dès lors nulle mention de relation, nul aveu, ostentation ou mise au secret d'un lien entre acteurs ne sauraient être considérés comme neutres. (Lacroix 2002, 109)

In another article, entitled “ ‘La plus précieuse denrée du monde, l’amitié’. Don, échange et identité dans les relations entre écrivains”,³⁶ Lacroix provides a succinct and enlightening overview of the various issues underlying literary *friendships*, without a doubt a notion relevant to the current study. He underscores how such friendships are predicated upon reciprocity, the act of giving (support, encouragement, help) and upon a certain measure of *disinterestedness*. “L’amitié,” he states, “si elle n’est pas ‘toute sociale,’ [...] est malgré tout socialement déterminée, jouant ainsi le rôle paradoxal d’une ‘institution sociale non-institutionnalisée’ » (parag. 4).³⁷ Just as a friendship can contribute to building one’s social identity, it can have a similar formative impact on an author’s literary identity. Moreover, as in a more formal network, mutual exchanges, or what Lacroix refers to as “la dynamique du don,” (parag. 5) are at the core of literary friendships. Such exchanges are not always perceptible to the outsider: encouragement, praise or honest criticism of one’s work are more likely to go unnoticed and usually only accessible when a literary correspondence is made public. As in a regular friendship, however, correspondence may reveal more basic forms of giving or exchanging: lending money, sharing a coffee or a drink, rendering a service (a humorous exchange between Michael Harris and David Solway comes to mind, in which the former, in his usual dead-pan manner, hilariously offers thanks to the latter for minding his Chihuahua during his absence). For this reason, literary friendships remain difficult to define, and thus are rarely theorized within studies of literary sociology (indeed, Lacroix notes that the concept of “amitié

³⁶ M. Lacroix, *CONTEXTES*, « Don et littérature », 5, 2009, online, <http://contextes.revues.org/4263>.

³⁷ Because *CONTEXTES* is an online publication, paragraph numbers will be indicated instead of page numbers when quoting from this source.

littéraire” is all but absent in French-language encyclopaedias of sociology or social sciences, although their English counterparts do dedicate an entry to this topic [parag. 3]).

Such friendships bridge the gap between the social and literary spheres. Lacroix therefore concludes that “[l]’amitié entre écrivains, par conséquent, ne peut pas et ne doit pas se réduire à un lien littéraire, à une relation dont le cadre exclusif est celui du champ littéraire, car l’amitié introduit entre les écrivains des enjeux autres, des ressources ‘étrangères’ au texte et au capital symbolique » (parag. 14). The friendship is therefore intrinsic to the network, for it contributes to that exchange of social and cultural capital that, as has been previously demonstrated, is its main function. However, not all members of a given network can be said to share a literary friendship with the other members of the network.

For the reason stated above, Pierre Bourdieu, on the other hand, rejects the possibility of disinterestedness, or gratuity, in any social interaction and in literary friendships in particular: “la sociologie postule que les agents sociaux n’accomplissent pas des actes gratuits” (Bourdieu 1996, 150). Although a friendship may not be predicated upon economic gains, other types of exchanges may operate (favours, support, advice, networking), the “don” to which Lacroix alludes, that are a necessary condition for the friendship’s existence. In a literary friendship, such exchanges in which a clear disinterestedness in financial gain is expressed can result in a precious form of symbolic capital: “[p]lacer l’échange littéraire sous le signe de l’amitié manifeste ainsi l’éthos de ‘pureté’ esthétique des interlocuteurs,” Lacroix concludes (parag. 18). This dissertation will therefore posit that such purity will in fact be central to the

discourses held by the Jubilate poets and an intrinsic element of the persona they have respectively created for themselves.

It will therefore be necessary to map out the exact relationships between each of the agents in the literary circle in order to identify what kind of identity each has forged as a result of belonging to the Jubilate Circle, and the ways in which inter-recognition (*interreconnaissance*) has contributed to solidifying the relationships that bind each member to the others. However, Lacroix does offer a certain caveat to anyone embarking on the study of a network: he reminds us that all manifestations of the existence of a network (references to other members, dedications, blurbs, correspondence, archival documents, etc.) exist because the members of the professed network *want* them to. If belonging to a network is a strategy for achieving success within the literary field, it is a double one: the author does indeed benefit from the social capital acquired as a result of his or her contact with the other members of the network, but he or she can also benefit by *being perceived as belonging to the network*:

Qu'il s'agisse de mémoires, de photographies, d'extraits de procès-verbaux ou de quelque autre médium, l'on accède jamais à la relation concrète telle quelle, mais à un objet second par rapport à celle-ci et *qui la met en scène*. [...] toute manifestation d'intimité peut aussi bien être le signe d'un lien étroit qu'une démarche faite par un des acteurs pour transformer un lien plutôt lâche en relation intime. (Lacroix 2003, 484, italics mine)

This type of strategy corresponds to the creation of a literary persona (*posture littéraire*), a concept brought to the fore by Jérôme Meizoz to see how and why authors will go to considerable lengths to present themselves to the public the way they do. Meizoz's theory of literary personae will be described in detail in Chapter 3. However, the discussion of literary

personae will be greatly enlightened by prosopographical sketches of each poet, for the concepts of persona, habitus and cultural capital are, in many ways, inseparable.

The Poets of the Jubilate Circle

The following section consists of a series of overviews of each poet's personal, educational and professional backgrounds. It will then be determined whether the Jubilate Circle is, in fact, a homophilic network (that is, one in which individuals tend to be associated with similar others [McPherson *et al* 416]), and how each member might be in a position to share his cultural capital with other members of the network and thus contribute to the group's (and each individual member's) social capital. It is worth repeating at this point that it is our hypothesis that the four poets under study make up the core of the Jubilate Circle; the network itself certainly includes a number of other poets (not all of them male, it should be noted) and, as all networks do, has broadened over time. Although all four poets have, at the time of writing, expanded their professional fields beyond that of poetry (Michael Harris runs an online commerce devoted to selling used books, specializing in Canadiana, Carmine Starnino has become editor for *Reader's Digest*, David Solway has turned his attention, albeit not exclusively, to political writing, and Eric Ormsby, now living in London, is the Deputy Head of the Department of Academic Research and Publications at the Institute of Ismaili Studies), signs of the Jubilate Circle remain, though they are not as present as they once were.

Michael Harris

Born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1944 of British and Scottish parents, Michael Harris immigrated to Canada with his family as a child. After losing his mother to leukemia as a young child, Harris was sent by his father to British-modelled private boarding schools in Quebec between the ages of eight and fourteen years old (Solway, "A Brilliant Career" 20). He enrolled in an Arts programme at McGill University, but by his own admission his academic record was less than exemplary, and he reoriented his studies, earning a degree in English Studies from Concordia University (Solway, "A Brilliant Career" 20). As an undergraduate, he had been hired as a research assistant by Laurier LaPierre³⁸ at the Institute of French-Canadian Studies at McGill, where he "clipped newspapers" (Solway, "A Brilliant Career" 20) and experimented with fonts and page layout on an electric typewriter in the Institute office, an experience he claims sparked an interest in the way type interacted with the page and influenced the experience of reading (Michael Harris, Personal Interview, 2007). In 1969, shortly after Cégeps were created in Québec, Harris was hired to teach in Dawson College's English Department, where he taught Poetry, Literature, Film and Creative Writing for thirty years (Solway, "A Brilliant Career" 20).

Harris published his first collection of poems, *Text for Nausikaa*, with Delta Canada in 1970. This was his first and only working experience with Louis Dudek, who, along with Glen Siebrasse and Michael Gnarowski, had founded the press in 1965. According to Harris, the manuscript's selection and publication had not been unanimous among the three editors, with Dudek opposed to its publication (Harris, Personal Interview 2007). The event may have been at the source of an antagonism between Harris and Dudek that lasted several years, for Harris

³⁸ LaPierre was named senator in 2001.

claims that he and the famed Montreal poet, professor and publisher had never seen eye to eye with regards to poetry (Harris, Personal Interview 2007). The three editors of Delta Canada parted ways in 1972, and Glen Siebrasse kept the Delta name to found Delta Can, which became New Delta when poet Richard Sommer joined the editorial team. Siebrasse and Sommer published Harris' *Sparks* in 1976, the same year the small press published David Solway's *The Road to Arginos* (the two books were printed in the exact same format). That New Delta published these two books in the same year is particularly interesting. It marks the beginning of a long-standing literary association, and represents an artistic turning point in both poets' careers (see Keith in Starnino, ed. *David Solway. Essays on His Works*, 44-45). The poets (Solway in particular) began to adopt more traditional forms and write in carefully metered, rhyming verse. A few years later, this new aesthetic would find a home in Signal Editions, and Solway will be the first poet that Michael Harris will invite to publish in his newly-founded poetry series in 1981.

It is in Harris' next collection, *Grace*, published by New Delta in 1977, that the poet finds the voice for which he is now known: the poems are sober; some (though few) are humorous, and the careful observation of nature, seasons, plants and insects makes up this poetry collection's predominant theme. The acknowledgments section of the book informs readers that a number of poems were reprinted in the collection with permission from *Atlantic Monthly*, where they had first been published. This alone is an indication given to the reader of the type and quality of poetry the book contains, for then as now *Atlantic Monthly* was considered one of the world's leading and most prestigious literary periodicals in English. The second half of the book contains a sequence of poems grouped under the sub-title "Death and

Miss Emily,” in which the poet posits Death as Emily Dickinson’s final (and only successful) suitor. In the Author’s Note, Harris states that this sequence of poems had been inspired by Michel Garneau’s *Cousine des écureuils*,³⁹ in which Emily Dickinson also figures as a character “wearing yellow dresses and making the best jams in the village” (Harris, *Grace* 11, Garneau, *Émilie ne sera plus jamais cueillie par l’anémone* 102). Harris’ sequence was later translated into French by Jacques Marchand and published under the title *Miss Emily et la mort* (VLB Éditeur, 1984). Marchand, in his “Avant-propos,” comments on Harris’ poetry :

C’est dans la description de phénomènes concrets, naturels très souvent, que Harris trouve sa langue et sa force. [...] [Il] ne se contente jamais de décrire pour le simple plaisir de décrire. L’immédiateté, la présence presque tactile de ses objets et de ses espaces concrets sont des pièges bien tendus : ils nous font basculer, dès qu’on s’y arrête, vers un autre ordre des choses. Cette nature piégée, métaphorique, est d’ailleurs avant tout animale. (Harris, *Miss Emily* 11)

In Harris’ verse Dickinson becomes a mythological figure, representing the life/death, mortality/immortality binaries, preoccupations Harris has stated are at the root of his work (Starnino 2001, *The Matrix Interviews* 31). In spite of the insistence that members of the Jubilate Circle would later come to put on the importance of form, *Grace* and Harris’ subsequent, self-published collections, *In Transit* (Signal 1985), *New and Selected Poems* (Signal 1992) and *Circus* (Signal 2010), are not particularly characterized by the strict formal qualities of their poems. Harris does include some (but little) rhyming poetry; many poems are written in regular stanzas (the sequence entitled “Death and Miss Emily” is written entirely in couplets;

³⁹ Michel Garneau’s interest in the figure of Emily Dickinson did not end with the publication of this collection. The celebrated Québécois poet and playwright went on to write a critically-acclaimed play, performed four years after the publication of Harris’s *Grace*, entitled *Émilie ne sera plus jamais cueillie par l’anémone* (1981).

the sections in “Turning Out the Light,” the long poem published in *In Transit* and based on his brother Jeffrey’s death [also of leukemia] in 1977, vary in length [as do their stanzas], but are consistent units in themselves). However, Harris pays careful attention to meter, and in their display of alternating stressed and unstressed feet (with variations as to the form, which according to Paul Fussell are crucial to a successful poem on a formal level⁴⁰), his verses possess qualities that make them formally accomplished poems, that is, “when natural rhythmical movements of colloquial speech are heightened, organized, and regulated so that pattern – which means repetition – emerges from the relative phonetic haphazard of ordinary utterance” (Fussell 4-5).

Although references to Quebec or Montreal are almost completely absent from Harris’s poetry, he has not cut himself off from the province’s French-language literary community. His close friendship with Québécois poet Michel Garneau dates back to the early 1970s; he has also translated the poetry of Québécois novelist Marie-Claire Blais, who only wrote two collections of poems, *Pays voilés* (1963) and *Existences* (1967).⁴¹ Moreover, although he has published relatively little, his poetry has not gone unnoticed by Quebec’s Francophone literary community. In 1980, Thérèse Romer de Bellefeuille, wife of Pierre de Bellefeuille, M.N.A.,⁴² wrote to Gérald Godin, M.N.A. and Denis Vaugeois’⁴³ parliamentary secretary, not to mention

⁴⁰ Indeed, according to Fussell, one of the ways that “meter can ‘mean’ is by varying from itself: [...] departures from metrical norms powerfully reinforce emotional effects.” (12)

⁴¹ *Veiled Countries/Lives*, Signal Editions, 1984. Harris was a finalist for the John Glassco Translation prize for his translations of Marie-Claire Blais’ poetry.

⁴² As evident in Michael Harris’s early correspondence, Pierre de Bellefeuille was also a close friend of Harris’. De Bellefeuille was also a journalist and writer.

⁴³ Denis Vaugeois is a man of letters who was active in the field of publishing in Quebec in the 1970s (and remains so today). He was a member of the Parti Québécois and worked as “ministre des Affaires culturelles” and then as “ministre des Communications” between 1978 and 1981.

an accomplished poet himself, asking him to consider the poetry of Michael Harris for a prize, honourable mention or medal for literary achievement following the publication of *Grace*:

Michael Harris est en train de se tailler une réputation internationale. Son talent, le sérieux de son travail, laissent peu à envier à tout ce qui se fait de mieux aux USA ou en Angleterre. Il est méconnu au Québec, sauf parmi quelques amis tels que Michel Garneau ou Jacques Larue-Langlois. [...] Toutes proportions gardées avec ce qui se fait pour la poésie contemporaine francophone au Québec, j'aimerais que l'on ne passe pas sous silence, que l'on trouve au contraire un moyen de célébrer la poésie brillante de ce jeune Québécois anglophone. (Michael Harris Papers, 1980)

Thérèse Romer de Bellefeuille's request appears to have gone unheeded, for the government of Quebec did not offer Harris any type of recognition for the publication of *Grace*.⁴⁴ He did, however, win the CBC Literary Competition in 1989 for two of his poems, "Turning Out the Light" and "Spring Descending." Although several Signal poets and titles have received prestigious prizes, Harris's early work was largely ignored by prize juries (as is very often the case), though lauded by other poets, most notably Irving Layton, who wrote to Harris praising his accomplishments in *Grace*: "A belated thank you for *Grace*," Layton writes, "a lyrical triumph page after page. If there's a poetical Mount Everest, this latest book of yours puts you on its crowning top from where, if heights don't make you dizzy, you can look down on all of your contemporaries – excepting [David Solway] who alone is your equal in cunning and versatility" (Letter from Irving Layton to Michael Harris, 20 April 1978, Box 7, "Correspondence 1978"). Of the four poets under study in this dissertation, Harris has produced the least and has devoted most of his career to the publishing of poetry, and later on to bookselling. After an

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note, however, that the poetry of Gérald Godin was published in translation in the Signal Editions series in 1991: *Evenings at Loose Ends*, transl. Judith Cowan.

eighteen-year hiatus, Harris released his latest book of poetry, *Circus* (Signal Editions) in 2010. The collection was nominated for a Governor General's Award for Poetry. The Governor General's Award is considered one of the most prestigious Canadian awards for literature of all genres; such a nomination is therefore not insignificant, as it indicates a potential shift in status within the Canadian poetry field, from marginal to central poet.

David Solway

David Solway was born in Ste-Agathe, Québec, in 1941. Of Sephardic Jewish descent, Solway claims that his mother “was the daughter of a long line of Sephardic rabbis going back, she swore, to the time of Maimonides whom she claimed as a distant ancestor” (Solway, Personal Communication, November 2010); his father was an accomplished pianist⁴⁵ who had emigrated from Georgia, in the USSR. As a child Solway spoke English at home, learned French in his community, which he describes as being an extremely anti-Semitic environment in the 1940s and 1950s (Solway, Personal Communication, November 2010), and learned Hebrew from a local teacher, Rabbi Levinson.⁴⁶ However, he did not embrace his Jewish heritage until much later in life, and was given what he describes as an “entirely secular upbringing” (Solway, Personal Communication, November 2010). Interestingly, much later in life, Solway established

⁴⁵ As well as, Solway claims, “a ruthless racketeer” (Solway, Email to Julie Frédette, 12-11-2010)

⁴⁶ Pierre Nepveu, in his biography of Gaston Miron entitled *Gaston Miron: la vie d'un homme* (Boréal, 2011), describes in detail the anti-Semitic phenomenon in the Sainte-Agathe community of the first half of the twentieth century: “[...] le thème de la « menace juive » trouve un terrain particulièrement fertile dans les Laurentides, et en particulier dans les environs de Sainte-Agathe. Dans aucune autre région du Québec à l'extérieur de Montréal les Juifs ne sont en effet plus visibles et plus nombreux. Très tôt, les familles juives de condition modeste vivant à Montréal ont pris l'habitude de monter dans le petit train du Nord pour aller passer leurs vacances d'été dans la région de Shawbridge (Prévost). Certaines s'y établissent en permanence, comme aussi à Piedmont, à Val-Morin, à Val-David. On verra bientôt apparaître des affiches qui leur interdisent certaines plages. [...] Miron lui-même racontera plus tard qu'il descendit avec d'autres jeunes de son âge chasser les Juifs de la plage de Sainte-Agathe à l'aide de fouets (sans doute des branches de roseau ou des branchages). » (47)

a relationship with another native of Sainte-Agathe, namely Gaston Miron, one of the most important names in the field of Québécois poetry. Solway talks about this connection in an interview to Sonja Skarstedt and claims that, upon meeting Miron for the first time at the Rencontre Québécoise Internationale des écrivains in 1989 in Québec City, he learned that “[he and Miron] actually grew up on the same street” (Skarstedt 29), although he notes that due to their age difference, Miron had left Sainte-Agathe around the time that Solway was born. Nonetheless, this meeting proved significant for Solway, who claims he was “astonished by [Miron] and [his] work” (Skarstedt 29).

His chief literary influences in his formative years were two fellow Montreal poets, Irving Layton and Louis Dudek, the latter Solway’s professor of English at McGill University, where Solway obtained a Bachelor’s degree in English and Philosophy in 1966. Dudek also published Solway’s first book of poetry, *In My Own Image*, with the McGill Poetry Series in 1961. During this period Solway also developed a friendship with Leonard Cohen, who, as a number of scholars (namely W.J. Keith and Richard Sanger) have noted, was another strong influence; Solway attempts to deny the extent to which his friendship with Cohen was particularly influential, however, claiming that “to me, [...] [Leonard Cohen] was a ‘sort of god’. [O]wing to the force of his personality and his mythic sense of self, I eventually understood I had to keep a certain distance from him” (Solway, Personal Communication, November 2010). Nonetheless, similarities between Cohen’s formative years and Solway’s abound: the two developed as poets under the guidance of Louis Dudek, and both turned to Greece for inspiration and respite, a “spiritual home and a poetic atelier” (Solway, Personal

Communication, November 2010) (see also Keith, "A Prosodic Itch," in Starnino ed. *David Solway. Essays on His Works* 50).

Following his studies at McGill University Solway worked for two years as a broadcaster and scriptwriter for the CBC, an experience he claims "would have simply squeezed [him] to death" had he stayed on (Starnino ed. 2001, *David Solway: Essays on His Works* 16). He left Canada for Crete, where he taught English as a second language, before returning to Canada and taking up a permanent position in John Abbott College's Department of English. By the time he decided to undertake an M.A. in Creative Writing at Concordia University (a degree he obtained in 1988 under the supervision of Gary Geddes⁴⁷), he was already a widely published poet. He had published a collection of poems every year during the 1970s, and continued publishing at an astonishing rate, producing seven collections in the 1980s (four of them appearing under the Signal Editions imprint).

Having turned his back on the poetics (and aesthetic) of his former teacher Louis Dudek, Solway instead found support in Irving Layton, who was an internationally renowned and formidable figure in the field of Canadian poetry. Layton was also feuding with Dudek at this time, and it is interesting to note that both Solway and Harris chose to "side" with Layton. Layton reserved the highest praise for Solway as well as for his friend Michael Harris, stating, upon receiving a copy of Harris's *Grace*, that the two poets are indeed a light in the darkness that was, according to him, Canadian poetry at the time: "It does my aging heart good to know that the two of you [Solway and Harris] are out there in the gathering dark, still striking fire when every subsidized mediocrity and university-sheltered poetaster is vigorously pissing on

⁴⁷ The thesis, entitled *Bedrock*, would later be published by Signal Editions under the same name.

whatever embers still remain” (Letter from Irving Layton to Michael Harris, Michael Harris Papers, 20 April 1978). Like Layton and Leonard Cohen, Solway (and, to a lesser extent, Harris) looked to Greece for inspiration, models and a reprieve from the necessity of identifying as a “Canadian” poet, a stance he would later develop in his essay entitled “The Flight from Canada”⁴⁸. Of Layton, Solway would later say, in the ornate language that has become something of a trademark, that he was “a powerful avuncular presence one could learn from but whom one should not get too close to lest one be burned to a crisp in the fires of his wonderful egotism” (Solway, Personal Communication, November 2010).⁴⁹

According to Richard Sanger and W.J. Keith, Solway’s early poetry echoes that of Cohen in its surrealist tone and its representation of a highly spiritual, mystical experience of life (Sanger 73). Scholars of Solway’s poetry all seem to agree that the publication of *The Road to Arginos* (New Delta) in 1977 seems to represent a turn in Solway’s poetics. Here the poet turns progressively to a more formal poetry, one inspired by W.B. Yeats, Robert Graves and Richard Wilbur (Starnino, ed. 47). He experiments with prosody, rhyme and forms such as the sonnet, the pastoral and the sestina, and nearly all of his poems are written in a regular stanzaic pattern.

In 2000, Solway pushed his poetic experiments even further when he invented the heteronym Andreas Karavis and published *Saracen Island: The Poetry of Andreas Karavis* with

⁴⁸ David Solway, “The Flight from Canada,” *Director’s Cut*, Erin, Ont.: The Porcupine’s Quill, 25-32. W.J. Keith would later refer to this as “Solway’s cosmopolitan emphasis” [Keith 2001, 39]. Such a qualification has particular significance in Canada’s literary history, the adjective having been used by A.J.M. Smith in his quarrel with what he dubbed “native” poetry. As will later be noted, this debate has been revived in the prose writings of the Jubilate Poets.

⁴⁹ Keeping a certain distance from his mentors seems to be a recurrent concern for Solway, but this could be interpreted as a persona-building strategy.

Signal Editions, along with a companion book, *The Andreas Karavis Companion*, containing fictitious correspondence, essays explaining the poetry of Andreas Karavis (relying heavily on the Greek concepts of *katharevousa* and *dhimotiki*, “the ‘high’ or pure and the common or ‘low’ linguistic levels” in the Greek language (Solway, *An Andreas Karavis Companion* 59). The invention of pseudonyms became a way for Solway to renew his poetic voice (Godbout 96). Solway went on to publish a number of pseudonymous collections: *The Pallikari of Nesmine Rifat* (Goose Lane Editions 2005, in which he takes on the persona of Turkish poet Nesmine Rifat) and *Reaching for Clear: The Poetry of Rhys Savarin* (Signal Editions 2006, as Dominican poet Rhys Savarin). He also experiments as a translator of Québécois poetry, and in *Demilunes: Little Windows on Quebec* (Frogs Hollow Press 2005) translates into English the poetry of Québécois poets such as Paul-Marie Lapointe, Pierre Nepveu, Gaston Miron, Jacques Brault and Denise Boucher, to name a few.

Parallel to his career as a poet, Solway pursued a career as an educator, teaching in John Abbott College’s English Department and obtaining a M.A. in Education from the Université de Sherbrooke in 1996 and, two years later, a Ph.D. in North American Studies from Lajos Kossuth University in Debrecen, Hungary. His critical prose reflects these academic interests: besides his two collections of literary criticism,⁵⁰ Solway also published works of non-fiction devoted to educational reforms and methods.⁵¹ Although this aspect of his career is not related to the literary sphere, Solway’s academic credentials do confer upon the poet

⁵⁰ *Random Walks: Essays in Elective Criticism*, McGill-Queen’s University Press (1997) and *Director’s Cut*, The Porcupine’s Quill (2003).

⁵¹ *Education Lost*, OISE (1989); *Lying About the Wolf: Essays in Culture and Education*, McGill-Queen’s University Press (1997) and *The Turtle Hypodermic of Sickenpods: Liberal Studies in the Corporate Age*, McGill-Queen’s University Press (2001).

institutionalized cultural capital that conferred upon his discourse on poetry a certain degree of authority. In the post-9/11 years, Solway has turned his attention to politics, adopting a decidedly right-wing discourse with the publication of *The Big Lie: Reflections on Terror, Antisemitism, and Identity* (LMB Editions 2007) and *Hear, O Israel!* (Mantua Books 2009). He now writes for the U.S. political publications *FrontPage Magazine* and *Pajamas Media*, all while “keeping one hand on the poetry steering wheel” (Personal Communication, March 2010).

It was with his two works of critical prose, *Random Walks: Essays in Elective Criticism* (1997) and *Director’s Cut* (2003) that Solway drew the Canadian literary community’s attention to Canadian (and particularly Montreal) poetry, with controversial essays on widely-acclaimed poets such as Erin Mouré and Anne Carson, as well as laudatory reviews or articles (or sections of articles), though fewer in number, on some of his acolytes (Peter Van Toorn, for example) and other literary figures (Tennessee poet Mark Jarman, for example, or Shakespeare, whose linguistic acrobatics are much admired by Solway). The two collections are clearly meant to provoke readers,⁵² but also seem to have the secondary purpose of promoting the stance and traditionally formal aesthetic of the members of the Jubilate Circle. *Director’s Cut* (2003) in particular focuses on Canadian poetry, arguing in favour of a more cosmopolitan outlook and criticizing verse that attempts to promote a Canadian identity. With “anti-Canadian” remarks such as “Canada has too little individual self and too much artificial unity” (*Director’s Cut* 30) or “[Standard Average Canadian] as a poetic dialect was (and is) a prosy sort of medium, much susceptible to narrative pathos and weirdly reproducing in spades the palaverous superfluities that supposedly went out with the Edwardians” (*Director’s Cut* 93), Solway portrays himself as a

⁵² See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the provocative discourse in this and other publications.

curmudgeonly, somewhat embittered Canadian poet who repudiates his country's literary tradition, an attitude which has inflamed many of his contemporaries and inspired others. His excessively erudite vocabulary was sometimes described as pedantic (Barber) or as "stylistic pyrotechnics" (Donnelly), but his polemical critical stances were praised by others as being refreshing, bold and honest (Cude, Laird). He was criticized for ad hominem attacks directed at poets Anne Carson and Lorna Crozier (Donnelly, Laird), but applauded for his "forthright moral criticism" (Cude 51). His article entitled "The Problem with Al Purdy," published in the *National Post* shortly after Purdy's death, inspired an angry onslaught of letters to the editor accusing Solway of "sweeping generalizations, misguided interpretations, leaps of logic [...] [and] hollow assertions" (Gudgeon). Finally, one of the more sustained criticisms Solway's tirades have attracted was Ian Rae's rebuttal to his attacks against fellow Montreal poet Anne Carson in his essay entitled "The Trouble with Annie: David Solway Unmakes Anne Carson," originally published in *Books in Canada* in 2001 and republished in *Director's Cut*. Rae not only undercuts each of Solway's arguments against Carson's poetry (he himself is a scholar of Anne Carson's works), but suggests that the article might be less an honest piece of criticism than an "editorial stratagem" (Rae 63) destined to boost *Books in Canada's* sales, Solway having just been named associate editor of the publication.

With these polemical publications under his belt, Solway has made few friends within the Canadian literary community, other than the poets, few and far between, whose works he has praised (Starnino, Peter Van Toorn, Norm Sibum, Michael Harris and Eric Ormsby, all Montreal poets, close friends of Solway's and associated, in one way or another, with the Jubilate Circle. It is worth reminding the reader that because the Jubilate Circle was initially

conceived as a joke, it is impossible to state with certainty who is – and who is not – a member of the group, save within published writings or archival documents in which the group is named, along with individual poets who are said to be close to the group. It is important to view the “Jubilate Circle” as an informal network rather than a formal one). Quite the contrary, he has carefully crafted a literary persona with which he positions himself in opposition to the bulk of contemporary Canadian poets.

Carmine Starnino

Carmine Starnino was born in Montreal in 1970. He was raised in Montreal North in an Italian community and educated in English, though the language spoken at home was invariably Italian (his parents, both natives of Sipicciano, Italy, emigrated to Canada in the late sixties [Email sent to Julie Fr dette, 20 December 2010]). After high school Starnino attended Dawson College, where he met Michael Harris who was teaching there at the time. Harris would become a mentor and important literary influence for Starnino, who claims that he “wouldn’t be writing poetry today if it weren’t for Michael” (Briscoe). Under Harris’s guidance, Starnino began writing his own poetry and publishing in various literary periodicals such as *Arc*, *The Malahat Review*, *Poetry Canada Review*, *Quarry*, *The Antigonish Review*, and *Fiddlehead*, to name a few. His poetry was anthologized by Lorna Crozier and Patrick Lane in *Breathing Fire* (Harbour Publishing 1995), as well as in *The Urban Wanderers Reader* (Hochelaga Press 1995), edited by Raymond Beauchemin and Denise Roig. At the age of 27, after receiving a Canada Council Writer’s grant, Starnino published his first collection of poetry, *The New World* (1997), with Harris’s Signal Editions. Starnino’s literary debut was astonishingly successful: it was

nominated for the 1997 QSPELL A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry, for the 1998 Gerald Lampman Award, and selected by *Quill & Quire* as one of the best Canadian books of 1997. *The New World* was deemed “a cut above many collections published by older poets with much larger reputations” (Bowling), and its poems were qualified by one critic as “pockets of intellectual bedazzlement” (Fitzgerald). The collection contained translations of Italian poems, as well as poems inspired by the art of the Italian Renaissance painter Caravaggio, and reflections on Starnino’s own Italian ancestry, family members and childhood. The Italian-Canadian poet sprinkled his native language into his poetry and closed the collection with a glossary of the Italian terms and expressions used, along with their translations.

Starnino pursued his studies in Concordia’s English Department and in 2000 submitted an M.A. thesis in Creative Writing under the supervision of Anglo-Quebec poet and professor Robert Allen. The thesis, entitled “What Do You Call This?”, was a collection of poems that “deal with issues of immigration, exile and cultural loss” (Starnino 2000, “What Do You Call This?” iii). The thesis was published the same year in the Hugh MacLennan Poetry Series at McGill-Queen’s University Press under the title *Credo*. Robert Melançon and Derek Webster have said of this collection that it displays “the accumulative genius of detail and narrative craft, humility and wonder” (Melançon, Webster 21). The poems expand on the previous collection’s themes, that is, family, immigrant life and Italian heritage, as well as the Italian language, for it too is punctuated with Italian words and expressions. It also includes a sequence entitled “Cornage,” made up of sixteen poems that explore and celebrate medieval English and its forgotten words. Starnino’s Catholic upbringing equally comes across in this collection (he indeed confided to Eric Ormsby in an interview that at one point he was “headed straight for the seminary”

[Starnino, 2002, 199])⁵³; several poems are inspired by biblical texts, and others still are spiritual reflections on death or the existence of an afterlife. The collection was awarded the Canadian Author's Association Prize for Poetry in 2001, as well as the David McKeen Award for Poetry.

By the turn of the century Starnino's literary career was well-established. He had been writing literary reviews for the *Gazette*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *National Post*, as well as publishing his poetry in the most prestigious literary journals in Canada and abroad. He became Associate Editor of *Books in Canada* (along with his friend and mentor David Solway) in 1999, took over for Michael Harris as editor of Signal Editions in 2000-2001, and became Associate Editor of *Maisonneuve Magazine*, a culture and arts magazine edited by Derek Webster, in 2002. In 2004 he published a third book of poems, *With English Subtitles*, with Nova Scotia's Gaspereau Press, as well as a collection of his reviews entitled *A Lover's Quarrel* with the Ontarian small press The Porcupine's Quill. In the former the poet experiments even more than in his previous collections with form, particularly with the riddle poem and humorous "Worst-Case Scenario" sonnets, and explores once again his now-signature themes: reflections on household objects and the quotidian, family members and Italian heritage, once again including the Italian language directly in his poems. Starnino was awarded the QSPELL A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry in 2004 for *With English Subtitles*, as well as the Italian Cultural Centre's F.G. Bressani Literary Prize for Poetry for the same book in 2006. He was shortlisted for the A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry in 2009 for his collection *This Way Out*, which was also shortlisted for the Governor-

⁵³ It is worth noting that this interview of Ormsby by Starnino reveals almost as much about Starnino as it does about Ormsby. This dissertation will seek to show that such methods are, in fact, an example of the exchanges of capital that exist within the Jubilate Circle.

General's Award for Poetry. It is noteworthy that after Starnino took over the editorship of Signal Editions in 2000 he chose to publish his own poetry with other presses, settling finally for Gaspereau. Gaspereau's books are produced in the fine press tradition, and the press has won several book design prizes;⁵⁴ a number of its authors and poets have also been awarded prestigious prizes.⁵⁵ Choosing Gaspereau was a significant step in defining Starnino's literary persona, and the move endowed him with social and cultural capital that could not only be transferred to Signal Editions, for he would attract several other renowned Canadian poets to the Montreal imprint, but that would allow him to achieve a more central position within the literary field early on in his career. It allowed the new editor of the Signal Editions imprint to avoid the accusation of vanity publishing, but also enabled him to cast a bridge between his own network of Anglo-Montreal poets (although arguably Starnino had by then collaborated and forged relationships with poets in various parts of Canada and the United States) and those of the East Coast, particularly with the roster of poets and authors associated with Gaspereau. The move to Gaspereau Press also coincided with an increase in the presence of East Coast poets in Signal Editions' catalogue. Although he was still firmly rooted in the Montreal literary field, the young poet and editor was increasingly turning his gaze eastward for voices that would help him renew Signal's voice while maintaining its reputation as a poet's press.

⁵⁴ Gaspereau won the Alcuin Award for Book Design in 2001 for J.J. Steinfeld's *Anton Chekhov Was Never in Charlottetown*, and brought home the same prize in 2002 for George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems* and Don McKay's *Vis à Vis*. All books were designed by the press's co-owner Andrew Steeves. The press won four more awards in 2003, three in 2004, and was shortlisted for the Canadian Booksellers Association Book Design Award in 2005; for two consecutive years (2005, 2006), the press was named Small Press Publisher of the Year by the Canadian Booksellers Association.

⁵⁵ George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems* earned him the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 2001; in 2004 three of its titles were nominated for Governor General's Awards, and three more brought home Atlantic Book Awards in 2005.

Starnino's latest collection of poetry, *No Way Out* (Gaspereau 2009), further contributed to solidifying the young poet's literary reputation, earning a nomination for the Governor General's Award for Poetry, winning the QSPELL A.M. Klein Award for Poetry (for the third time) and receiving widely positive reviews. Again, Starnino adopted a somewhat formalist approach, experimenting with forms such as the ballad or the sonnet, in particular in a nine-poem sequence entitled "Nine from Rome," in which each individual sonnet acts like a postcard or short missive sent from Starnino in Rome⁵⁶ to friends in Montreal, many of whom we can recognize as well-known Anglo-Montreal poets.⁵⁷ Yet in his latest collection, Starnino departs from his previous themes and focuses in particular on the working-class and issues of class mobility, on the quotidian, and on the evolution (or deterioration) of language and the act of writing in the twenty-first century.

However, it was with *A Lover's Quarrel*, a collection of reviews, that Starnino earned the reputation of being a mordant and unforgiving critic. His newly acquired position as a significant poet and man of letters in Canada empowered him to take on some of Canada's most cherished and long-standing literary figures (Margaret Atwood, George Bowering, Patrick Lane, Lorna Crozier and Susan Musgrave, to name a few) (Starnino 2004, 74). He appeared to be following closely in the footsteps of his friend and fellow Signal poet David Solway, who had published *Director's Cut* the previous year, also with *The Porcupine's Quill*. Both of these poets were equally emulating John Metcalf and his book of criticism entitled *Kicking Against the Pricks* (ECW, 1982); significantly, Metcalf was in fact working as *The Porcupine Quill's* non-

⁵⁶ Starnino sojourned in Rome on a Writer's travel grant in 2006.

⁵⁷ Eric Ormsby, Michael Harris, David Solway, Norm Sibum, Robyn Sarah, Asa Boxer.

fiction editor (a position Starnino would eventually take over in 2007) and had done the editing for both Solway's and Starnino's books of essays. The collection received mixed reviews and, along with Solway's *Director's Cut* (the two books are quite similar in content, scope and tone) seemed to further polarize the Canadian poetry field: in their reaction to both poets' polemical essays, poets across Canada seemed to be taking sides.⁵⁸

Eric Ormsby

Eric Linn Ormsby was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1941 and spent his childhood in Florida. A polyglot and intellectual, he obtained university degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, where he completed a B.A. in Oriental Studies (Arabic and Turkish), Rutgers University, where he obtained a Masters of Library Science, and Princeton University, where he completed another M.A. and a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies. The only university professor of the group, Ormsby is both a widely-published scholar of Islam and specialist of the Arab language. He was Director of Libraries at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. from 1983 to 1986 before coming to Montreal, where he worked at McGill University, first as Director of Libraries and then as Associate Professor in McGill's Institute of Islamic Studies. In 1996, Ormsby was promoted to full Professor and Director of the Institute, and remained there until 2005. He then moved to London, England to work as Chief Librarian at the Library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

⁵⁸ See Harry Vandervlist, "A Lover's Quarrel", *Quill & Quire*, vol. 70; Asa Boxer, "In Loving Anger", *Books in Canada*, May 2005, 34, 4, p. 33; Fraser Sutherland, "Ferocious critic, soft poet", *The Globe and Mail*, January 13, 2005, p. D5. As will become clear in my discussion of literary networks in Chapter 2, this is indeed a strategy on behalf of both poets to develop a literary persona and to acquire symbolic capital.

In a short, autobiographical sketch of his childhood in Florida published in his collection of essays entitled *Facsimiles of Time. Essays on Poetry and Translation* (The Porcupine's Quill 2001, also edited by John Metcalf), Ormsby reflects on the role Shakespeare played in his life and that of the women who raised him. Although the objectivity and historical accuracy of any autobiographical text can be called into question, Ormsby's text does paint a picture of a childhood in the American South, of a fascination with the words and poetry of Shakespeare, and of growing up with an authoritarian and powerful grand-mother who was the very image of southern propriety. His grand-mother, who was born in London, was an avid reader of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and of the English Romantic poets, and she would have her grandson memorize poems and reward him with pocket money in exchange (Sarah 239). Some French was spoken in his home by his grand-mother, whose mother had been a native of France, and, as Ormsby has stated in an interview with Carmine Starnino, he grew up in a home where French novels and books of poetry filled the bookshelves, books that he truly discovered in his teenage years when he learned to speak and read the language (Starnino 2002, 202). Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* made a strong impression and remained a powerful influence, and as a young adult Ormsby dedicated himself to the French literary tradition, reading Villon, Hugo, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Claudel and Valéry. He goes as far as stating that "[a]t times [he] became so steeped in this tradition that [he] fancied [himself] a French poet condemned to write in English" (Starnino 2002, 202). But a passion for languages also led him to discover other literary works that marked his own development as a scholar and writer: Ormsby majored in Greek and Latin in college, and went on to learn Arabic, Persian, Italian,

Spanish and German, as well as Czech, his wife Irena Murray's mother tongue (Starnino 2002, 202).

Although Ormsby turned his attention to building an academic career as a scholar of Near Eastern Studies and as a librarian, he also began writing early on, as a teenager, greatly influenced by Paul Hoffman, a close friend who was also experimenting with poetry and creative writing. This activity remained a very private one, a "secret vice" (Starnino 2002, 197), and one he felt was somewhat looked down upon by his academic colleagues. When Hoffman died unexpectedly in 1982, however, Ormsby undertook the necessary steps to get his friend's poetry published posthumously, and began considering publishing his own work as well (Starnino 2002, 197).

By the time he moved to Canada in 1986, Ormsby had published in some of the world's most prestigious literary journals but had yet to publish his poetry in book form. He did so for the first time in 1990: Toronto's ECW Press, run at the time by Robert Lecker and Jack David, published his collection entitled *Bavarian Shrine and Other Poems*, which was awarded the QSPELL A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry in 1991. The predominant theme in the collection is the observation of fauna and flora, something Ormsby attributes to growing up in Florida and obsessively observing his natural environment (Starnino 2002, 200; Sarah 244). One year later, with only one full collection in print, Ormsby was awarded the Ingram Merrill Foundation Award for "outstanding work as a poet". He quickly followed with *Coastlines* (ECW 1992), nominated for the QSPELL A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry in 1993, and later published *For a Modest God* (Grove Press, NY) in 1997. In 2001, Carmine Starnino published Ormsby's fourth collection

of poetry, *Araby*, with Signal Editions. *Araby*, while maintaining Ormsby's interest in form and rhyme as well as his "exuberantly baroque poetic lexicon" (Sarah 244), turned to his field of academic interest, the study of Islam, and depicted the quotidian activities and reflections of two characters, the Muslim poet Jaham and his friend and sidekick, the Muslim mechanic Adham. He nonetheless focuses, as he has in his previous collections, on the natural qualities of the terrain and its animal, insect and human inhabitants with the same keenness of observation he had shown in his previous collections. He then published *Daybreak at the Straits* (Zoo Press, Lincoln, NE) in 2004, and collected his published poetry, along with some uncollected poems, in *Time's Covenant. Selected Poems*, published by the Ontarian press Biblioasis in 2007.

Despite claims that "the world of poetry" – that is, the world of submitting, publishing, selecting and rejecting poems and collections – is one that he "detest[s] with all [his] heart" (Sarah 242), Ormsby has been closely involved in the Canadian poetry publishing scene. He was a member of the Hugh MacLennan Poetry Series editorial committee for McGill-Queen's University Press; he then became poetry editor for *The Porcupine's Quill*, and reviewer for *Books in Canada*, *The New Criterion*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and *Parnassus*. Although he has been living in London, England since 2005 with his wife Irena, an architectural historian, he has maintained ties with the Canadian literary field, publishing a second book of essays, *Fine Incisions. Essays on Poetry and Place*, with *The Porcupine's Quill* in 2010. In several ways, these experiences tie him to the Jubilate Circle: besides publishing a volume of poetry with Signal Editions, he publishes his criticism, like *Solway* (and later *Starnino*) with *The Porcupine's Quill* (a collection in which a volume of poetry by David Solway is extensively and favourably reviewed), and contributes reviews of poetry collections to *Books in Canada*, a periodical with which the

other Jubilate Circle have had a long association; as I will describe in detail in the following chapter, his collaboration to the Hugh MacLennan Poetry Series coincided with the publication of a fellow Jubilate Poet in this same series. Thus, although Eric Ormsby's collaborations with the other members of the Jubilate Circle have not been as elaborate or long-standing, it is impossible to deny, as Chapter 2 will demonstrate, his belonging to the network.

The four poets identified as being the core members of the Jubilate Circle come from somewhat different backgrounds, and have followed dissimilar trajectories in terms of education and career choices. It is insufficient to state that the common elements for all four poets are most certainly the city of Montreal and their passion for poetry, for this would certainly apply to all of the numerous (Anglophone) poets in Montreal. Theorists of the sociology of literature, however, would argue that such biographical sketches, or prosopography, are essential to literary study, for they help scholars grasp how and why a given author, poet or artist would come to occupy a symbolically dominant space within the literary field (that is, why they would have gravitated towards mass culture products or the avant-garde, for example).

Prosopography, when undertaken in conjunction with an analysis of the successive positions occupied by a given author, poet or artist within the literary or artistic field, will paint a portrait of the strategies undertaken by this individual in order to navigate the literary field and the reasons behind his or her success. To this end, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* has

been particularly helpful. Habitus takes into account education, family background, and personal wealth in order to determine an agent's *espace des possibles*, or the total potential positions the agent may come to occupy within the field. The theory, based on empirical observations of the literary field of 19th century France, seemed at first to rely heavily on class distinctions, for Bourdieu noted that individuals endowed with sufficient economic capital will be predisposed to more audacious literary productions and economically dominated (but symbolically dominant) positions within the literary field, as they might tend to be more indifferent to monetary profits resulting from their work (Bourdieu 1986, 40). However, Bourdieu does offer the following caveat:

il est vain de tenter d'établir une relation directe entre l'œuvre et le groupe qui a produit le producteur ou qui en consomme les produits : il y a entre eux tout un monde social, qui redéfinit le sens des demandes ou des commandes et assigne aux habitus des producteurs leurs lieux d'application en leur imposant *l'espace des possibles* dans et par lesquels ils se réalisent et passent à l'acte. (Bourdieu 1991, 17)

Thus, it is already possible to see that the notion of habitus will not suffice to explain why the poets of the Jubilate Circle have adopted a particular poetic aesthetic or why they have adopted a certain defensive, somewhat elitist stance with regards to Canadian poetry. The poets under study come from both working-class and bourgeois families; they've turned to education, bookselling, publishing, and the academic environment in their professional lives, although for all four of them writing poetry has been a secondary activity from which they've acquired little or no economic capital. It is their social environment, the *monde social*, that has contributed the most to developing their tastes in poetry and affinities with each other: for Michael Harris, the early support of Michael Gnarowski and Irving Layton played a pivotal role

in the development of his initial poetic voice; for David Solway, although Louis Dudek gave him his first “break” in poetry, the voices of Leonard Cohen and Irving Layton were the ones that coloured his early poetry. Carmine Starnino, belonging to the next generation, benefited from an early contact with both Harris and Solway and from the tutelage of Robert Allen during his university studies. Finally, Eric Ormsby grew to love and respond to the styles of the English Romantic poets largely because of his grand-mother’s influence, and came to write poetry as a result of his early friendship with fellow poet Paul Hoffman. The *monde social* was also largely responsible for forging the networks of individuals – poets, publishers, journal editors, as well as a small community of poetry readers – that would eventually welcome them and lead them to meet one another. Finally, their contact with one another and their various professional collaborations have played key roles in their development as Canadian poets, as well as in the creation of their respective “postures littéraires,” or personae. In this sense, the Jubilate Circle network has been a breeding ground for a number of exchanges in capital (social and cultural), leading to the valuable acquisition, for all four poets under study, of symbolic capital. Carmine Starnino’s and Michael Harris’s Governor General’s Award nominations (2009 and 2010, respectively) indicate that their poetry is increasingly being considered by the Canadian literary institution, which may – or may not – be the type of symbolic capital the poets strive for by forming the network, for such an award of this kind (the most prestigious in the country in the field of poetry) can be said to represent an access point to the “canon”. Indeed, literary networks are crucial in any literary career, and as Chapter 2 of this dissertation will demonstrate, Starnino, Solway, Harris and Ormsby have openly exploited the benefits provided by such networks.

Chapter 2: Social Capital and the Jubilate Circle

In some cases, literary networks and the characteristics on which they are premised (genre, aesthetic, ideological positions, etc.) are easily identifiable: they are sometimes associated with small presses or literary magazines; their members might have published a manifesto of some kind in which the network is named, its objectives and influences openly stated. Some networks have spokespersons; in other cases there is ample documentation that allows scholars and researchers to refer to a group of individuals as a network, cenacle, literary school, literary circle or merely as a coterie or clique. The Vancouver-based literary school TISH, for example, associated with a magazine bearing the same name, is richly documented: the magazine operated according to clearly defined aesthetic principles, expressed in various editorials, and individuals such as Warren Tallman and Frank Davey took it upon themselves to regroup various writings by members of this group and to provide scholarship on the TISH phenomenon, thus ensuring that the TISH poets could claim a permanent position in Canada's literary history. In Montreal, the Vehicule Poets, who in many ways can be described as the antagonists of the early Signal poets, were not as formally organized as the TISH poets were, but they shared a venue (the Véhicule Art Gallery, and later Véhicule Press, which would publish many of their collections of poetry in its early years), and archival documents reveal the nature of many of their collaborations. One of the poets, Ken Norris, has been very active in creating anthologies, histories and in writing articles that provide scholars with a portrait of the English-language poetry scene in Montreal in the 1970s, a scene in which the Vehicule Poets, from Norris's point of view, played a prominent role. In the case of the Jubilate Circle, however, the parameters of the network are more difficult to define. Although all four poets have published in the Signal Editions poetry series, most have also substantially published with other

presses as well, so publishers' catalogues are not actually evidence of the existence of this network. They are not associated with a particular magazine or journal (although Starnino, Solway and Ormsby have all contributed reviews to *Books in Canada*), have never written a manifesto that defines the aesthetic, ideological or political underpinnings of their association with one another, and the group itself is, by their own avowal, fictional, the name "Jubilate Circle" having been conceived of only as a joke. Is it therefore possible to claim, as this study seeks to do, that they do in fact form a literary network? What signs point to the existence of this network, and what distinguishes it from a mere friendship between like-minded individuals? This chapter will touch upon the functions of the literary network and illustrate how the existence of the Jubilate Circle has played a role in Michael Harris', David Solway's, Carmine Starnino's and Eric Ormsby's development as poets and prose-writers.

Archival documents provide researchers with unique opportunities to glimpse the inner workings of "literary life." Discussions and debates that lead to the awarding of prizes, grants or fellowships, the circumstances in which authors, publishers, magazine or journal editors and other agents of the literary field come into contact with one another, and the reactions to reviews or rejected manuscripts expressed by authors and poets and sometimes shared with their peers are but a few examples of those elements that are not usually made visible to the general public. In the study of a literary network such as the Jubilate Circle, correspondence between the members of the network not only confirms the hypothesis that such a network does in fact exist, but provides insight as to the exchanges of social capital between its members, be it in the form of encouragement, of critical readings and evaluations of first drafts or of endorsements. Correspondence, as Manon Brunet has pointed out in her

study of Henri-Raymond Casgrain and his literary networks, can also help determine the geographical extent of the network, and although it is rarely possible to determine the beginning or the end of a network, correspondence can in fact indicate how bridges are built between agents and networks and how social capital can actually concretely translate into benefits (professional, financial) for the members of the network.

Such bridges represent the potential social capital that can be gained from belonging to a network. Vincent Lemieux has studied the bridges, or links between actors, that are formed as a result of belonging to a network and has noted that it is often the leaders or central figures of a group that are responsible for creating these links among the members of their various networks (33). Such links between actors within a network and between various networks have a very concrete function: the sharing of social capital. It is not enough, according to Lemieux, to merely establish that relationships exist between actors. These relationships must have an outcome that is, in theory, mutually beneficial to all actors involved: « Un réseau n'est pas un simple agrégat d'acteurs dont les actions sont convergentes. Il faut qu'il y ait des mises en commun, qu'il s'agisse de normes, d'information, de ressources monétaires ou de ressources humaines » (86). Such outcomes can essentially be summed up as an exchange of social capital but can also include mutual support, establishing contacts between other agents in the field, or having a certain amount of influence over editorial policies and/or literary reception (Brunet 235).

Unlike other types of networks, according to Manon Brunet, the main objective of literary (or cultural) networks is a type of legitimization in the eyes of other networks (237). Such legitimization can take on many forms. For example, if government-funded granting

bodies or juries of literary prizes are considered to be institutional networks with the authority to legitimize literary production (what Bourdieu calls “le pouvoir de consécration” [Bourdieu 1991, 33]), the social capital generated and shared by a literary network should lead to recognition from such institutional networks, resulting in career-boosting grants or prizes. In turn, members of a network who have received such grants or prizes are then endowed with a social capital that will be shared with the other members of the network. The more prestigious literary prizes the members of a literary circle have been awarded, the more those agents associated with the said literary circle will be likely to achieve a central position in the literary field with relative ease, in part by power of association.

Mere association, however, is only a fraction of the capital that a member of a literary network can inherit from the other members. Mentorship also plays an important role. In his study of the literary networks to which Québécois poet Alfred Desrochers belonged, Richard Giguère noted that mentorship, or “la relation maître-disciple” (45), represents how young authors or poets are “inducted” into a literary circle under the influence and patronage of another member. Such mentorship allows the younger author to establish key contacts within the literary field. It also allows newcomers to the literary field to benefit from the expertise of the veterans of the network (50). It is thus necessary to distinguish between the *real network*, that is, the relationships that exist and are manifest between the members of a group (the network under study in this dissertation corresponds to a real network) and the *potential network*, that is, the relationships that can potentially be created between agents and are initiated by their contact with another member of a network: a veteran member of a network might introduce a younger author to a publisher or magazine editor, for example. Once the

introduction is made and a relationship resulting in an exchange of capital has been established, the younger author and the publisher or editor become members of a real network. Until then, however, they must be considered as members of a potential network (Lemieux 39).

Publishing in a series or under a certain imprint is also an indicator of the existence of potential networks. An author or poet might have no existing relationship with the other authors or poets in the series, yet solely on the basis of sharing an imprint the members of this potential network are linked by its editorial guidelines: aesthetic, ideology, genre, etc. (N. Giguère 24). The name of the series and the authors associated with it will go a long way in conveying meaning to readers, especially if these readers are cognizant of the various series that exist in the literary field. As Jean-Marie Bouvaist notes, “[c]elui qui connaît le style de la collection sait ce qu’il cherche et ce qu’il va trouver” (66). A reader familiar with the aesthetic of Signal Editions will know, for example, not to expect a Vehicule or TISH poet to publish under this imprint. Moreover, publishing in a given series upon the recommendation of a fellow network member or as a result of an introduction given by him or her is an example of capital – both symbolic and economic – that can result from belonging to a network. To the general readership these relationships and exchanges of social capital are generally hidden, yet they underlie much of the inner workings of the literary field: a manuscript submitted by an unknown author or poet to a publisher or editor who sees literally hundreds of such manuscripts in any given year is much more likely to go unnoticed than the manuscript that comes with the recommendation of a well-established member of the literary field. Once that author is published in the series, his or her name becomes permanently linked with that of the

other individuals who have published there (and who will publish there in the future): as such, the editor of a series is in fact a type of bandleader, bringing about relationships that would otherwise not have existed and creating bridges between various networks (Schuwer 787). Consequently, as Nicholas Giguère notes, “la collection apparaît donc comme un creuset propice à la sociabilité littéraire ainsi qu’à la formation et au développement de nouveaux réseaux réels et virtuels » (25).

New and potential networks are also generated by the press, or the series, itself: in the case of Signal Editions, the series operates a particularly vital role in keeping English poetry writing and publishing in Quebec alive and thriving, and does so by creating a critical mass of networks of collaboration. Véhicule Press (and, by extension, Signal Editions) can remain operational thanks to a diversified publishing program that allows it to continue to foster a network of Montreal English-language poets. The press publishes a series of (relatively) high-profit publications, such as restaurant guides and city guides, as well as specialized series which will attract very specific buyers⁵⁹: those books make it possible to take risks on low-profit genres such as poetry as well as on first-time authors. This type of practice has allowed Véhicule (under its Signal imprint) to publish Stephanie Bolster’s first volume of poetry (as well as Carmine Starnino’s, significantly); Bolster then went on to a relatively prosperous career as a Canadian poet after bringing home the Governor General’s Prize for Poetry in 1998. This may not have been possible had she only applied to larger presses, or presses that were not so interested in promoting local poets. Moreover, a series such as Signal has a few “staple” poets, poets who have published two or more volumes of poetry with the press and have contributed

⁵⁹ The history of jazz in Montreal, for example, or of certain Montreal “institutions” such as Schwartz’s Deli, which will appeal to aficionados of Montreal history.

to defining the press's mandate and guidelines for the wider community of poets. This type of author retention puts new poets alongside well-established poets, who act as virtual "mentors" just by transferring the symbolic capital attached to their names onto the newcomers. This way, profitable "potential" networks are created for English-language poets of Montreal.

Thus far the indicators of literary networks are elements that generally go unnoticed by the general reader, being found in an author or a poet's personal life and only occasionally given to be seen by the public through archival research. What the reader *can* see, however, are signs of the network within the text and paratext of the books themselves, signs which might in fact influence reception and even sales. Gérard Genette's research on the paratext, that is, the printed elements that are external to the text itself but that are given to read on and around the artefact that is the book, sheds some light as to how these elements can influence readers and reveal relationships between various agents, relationships that might point to the existence of a network. Elements such as the title, subtitle, publisher's imprint, series' name, blurbs, introduction, preface, dedication, epigraph, etc., which all appear on or within the book, correspond to a subdivision of the paratext known as the "peritext." Elements completely external to the material artefact that is the book (interviews, essays, archival documents, writing journals, personal diaries, etc.) correspond to a second subdivision of the paratext known as the "epitext." Both of these elements represent a potential symbolic capital that will not only benefit the author/poet in his or her quest for achieving a coveted position, be it marginal or central, within the literary field, but that will also condition readers who are attentive to these signs. However, Genette takes care to note that not all readers read the paratext equally (10): very few will consult archival documents, for example; many will skip the

preface or introduction or will fail to recognize the name of the individual(s) to whom the work is dedicated or that of the author(s) quoted in the epigraph, if there is one. Some readers will see in blurbs found on the book jacket adequate and authoritative sources on the book at hand, and others will be wary of praises published on the book jacket and will dismiss them as marketing schemes. For the purposes of this study, the text, peritext and epitext of Jubilate books published by various presses will be examined in order to identify and highlight the presence of the Jubilate Circle in each of the four poets' works and the capital that its members come to bestow upon one another.

Social Capital and the Jubilate Circle

The Epitext: Evidence of a Network

The social capital generated by the existence of the Jubilate Circle and each poet's affiliation with it can be observed in a number of instances. Correspondence will enable us to identify signs of mutual encouragement, criticism, debate and recommendations. Moreover, textual references to one another, the presence of the network in the paratext, exchanges of admiration within the prose writing of David Solway, Carmine Starnino and Eric Ormsby, and finally collaborative efforts in projects such as the Andreas Karavis "hoax" are concrete examples of the function of this network.

It is particularly interesting to remind ourselves at this point that although the Jubilate Circle was initially thought up as a joke, as something that was never meant to become reality, the members of this informal network have committed to this notion of an exclusive literary

circle and have indeed breathed life into this idea. Originally meant to “mock” the existence of groups such as the League of Canadian Poets, a group predicated upon, according to Carmine Starnino, the ability to write in a vertical disposition on a page rather than on true poetic talent (Carmine Starnino, Personal Interview, 21 May 2007), the poets had merely decided to spread the rumour that an exclusive group existed, one in which poets were admitted through invitation only, with the objective to titillate those poets who had not yet received such an invitation. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that the Jubilate Circle, or the idea of a network, an “us,” is recurrent in these poets’ correspondence, as is a constant celebration of their friendship and of each other’s works. If there is indeed strength in numbers, it could be argued that this is, in fact, the main benefit of belonging to the network. In the following excerpts from archival correspondence between the Jubilate poets (that is, elements of the epitext), we can see that the Jubilate Circle has in fact evolved from being a fictional group to a very real one indeed:

(...) I have inducted a new member into the august Jubilate Circle, namely, Jeffery Donaldson. He compares us original four to giants, viz. Mahler, Brahms, Strauss and Schonberg [*sic*], and himself to a chihuahua. (Had he known Oliver, he would have realized that certain chihuahuas may have stupendous impact, dwarfing Great Danes.) [...] Jeffrey is certainly one of us.⁶⁰ (David Solway Papers, Email from Solway to Ormsby, Jan. 14, 2008)⁶¹

A belated thanks to you and Karin for the dinner at Molivos. What went into my mouth was, as always chez Leo, a delight. What came out of the mouths of our beloved conferes [*sic*] tested even the sweetness of the loukamades. So much for the jubilation of the Jubilate, a group whose members (if it existed in manifesto or charter) would be

⁶⁰ Oliver was the name of Michael Harris’ Chihuahua, fondly remembered by the poets of the Jubilate Circle and the subject of a poem in Harris’ latest collection, *Circus*.

⁶¹ It is impossible not to notice a certain ironic tone when Solway uses the adjective “august”; nonetheless, the Jubilate Circle is named, making the fictitious group a very real one indeed.

bound to honour The Cause and, ideally, each other. [...] Not that what was said did not need to be said, but squabbling among what I feel are my literary siblings (and amidst such fine fare, to boot) unnerves me – and it’s such a small fraternity to begin with...” (David Solway Papers, Email from Michael Harris to David Solway, Nov. 9, 2005)

Although the second excerpt betrays some discord within the group, whose members participated in a heated debate over some of Carmine Starnino’s inclusions in his poetry anthology entitled *The New Canon*, a sense of belonging and unity can be gleaned from the use of words or phrases as “us original four,” “one of us,” “literary siblings,” and “fraternity,” not to mention direct and indirect references to the Jubilate Circle in the two passages cited above. Further, the comparison that Solway claims Jeffrey Donaldson⁶² made between these poets (Solway, Harris, Starnino and Ormsby) and central figures in the German and Austrian – it would be no exaggeration to say Western – musical canon betrays a willingness on Solway’s part to hold a similar position in his own field and indeed in the Canadian (and the global English-language) canon. Such a discourse does in fact go beyond a mere statement of mutual admiration: it points to a conscious construction of a collective identity, of a *posture littéraire*, or literary persona, that is, a self-image deliberately projected by the agent (in this case, the poet) as a strategy to gain a coveted position in the literary field and condition, to a certain extent, the reception of his works. That Solway chose to relate a comparison of his literary circle with Mahler, Brahms, Strauss and Schönberg is certainly not as innocent as it may seem. It is in fact evidence of like-mindedness (between himself and Jeffrey Donaldson), and of a

⁶² Jeffery Donaldson is a poet and Professor of English at McMaster University. He has published a collection of poetry with McClelland and Stewart (*Once Out of Nature*, 1991) as well as two more with McGill-Queen’s University Press (*Waterglass*, 1999; *Palilalia*, 2008).

project that goes beyond a mere nickname given to a group of friends; rather, the group was conceived with posterity in mind. It also illustrates the perception Solway has of himself and his peers and of the contrast they uphold with other Canadian poets.

This type of “us vs. them” rhetoric, in this case not meant for the general public’s eyes, will find its echo in the way these poets address outsiders, be it in letters to editors of magazines or journals, or to other poets or peers in which they clearly stake their literary positions and once again affirm their belonging to this Anglo-Montreal network. In a letter to Martin Levine, for example, Solway uses the idea of the Anglo-Quebec double exile, an argument he will later develop in an essay bearing the same name, in order to defend Montreal poetry against an apparent “Western Canada bias” and the invasion of “a veritable posse of Westerners” in literary pages of *The Globe and Mail* (David Solway Papers, Letter from D. Solway to M. Levine, Oct. 10, 2000). Solway refers to a “Montreal poetic renaissance,”⁶³ although he acknowledges that not all Montreal poets contribute to this phase of literary flourishing. Rather, he seems to be positing his own literary circle, broadened to include such Anglo-Montreal poets as Asa Boxer, Stephanie Bolster and others (many of whom were or would become Signal poets) as the legitimate heir of Montreal’s poetic golden age, that of the first half of the twentieth century, with voices such as those of A.M. Klein, F.R. Scott, A.J.M. Smith and, later, Irving Layton being hailed as leaders in the field of Canadian poetry.⁶⁴ In comparing Norm Sibum and Erin Mouré, two Western poets who have made Montreal their

⁶³ It is worth noting here that Ken Norris also employed the term “poetic renaissance” to refer to the 1970s in Montreal, when the Vehicule Poets were busily performing and publishing their multidisciplinary creations.

⁶⁴ In his essay entitled “Double Exile and Montreal English-language Poetry,” David Solway states that the poets associated with *The McGill Fortnightly Review*, *First Statement* and *Preview* (A.M. Klein, Frank Scott, A.J.M. Smith, Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, P.K. Page, Patrick Anderson and John Glassco) had conferred upon Montreal “a spirit of renewal and invigoration” (*Director’s Cut* 64). He later identifies these same poets as Canada’s most prominent “major” poets (*Director’s Cut* 127).

home, David Solway draws clear barriers: “the only ‘West Coast’ poet writing with flair and competence today is Norm Sibum, who moved here a few years ago and has become a genuine Montrealer insofar as what he offers in his work is crafted, substantial and made to last. Unlike Mouré, he belongs.” (David Solway Papers, Letter from D. Solway to M. Levine, Oct. 10, 2000).⁶⁵ Membership in this network, that is, that of the “real” Montreal poets, therefore seems to be closely guarded (by Solway himself, among others), and like with any exclusive club or group, the verb “to belong” takes on great significance in that it betrays a willingness to associate oneself only with those individuals or only with those networks whose collective cultural capital will lead to concrete social capital gains that will ensure the coveted position in the literary field.

Such social capital gains can take on numerous forms, among the most important being opportunities for professional advancement. Examples of these abound in the correspondence found in the archives, be it a recommendation for a prize or grant (“PS – I did my jury stint at the Conseil [des arts et des lettres du Québec] and managed to get healthy grants for Norm [Sibum] and Carmine, both deserving. (...)” [David Solway Papers, Email from Solway to Ormsby, Jan. 7, 2008]) or for a teaching position:

⁶⁵ The expressed hostility toward Erin Mouré could be interpreted as being a rhetorical strategy designed to promote the Jubilate Circle aesthetic – formal, lyrical poetry – by setting it in opposition to the more experimental, free verse style Mouré adopts. In the same letter to Martin Levine, Solway adds that he “[has] not met *anybody* who understands what she is trying to impart” (David Solway Papers, Letter from D. Solway to M. Levine, Oct. 10, 2000, italics in the original). Interestingly, correspondence between Solway and Mouré has shown that the two poets are actually on fairly friendly terms: in a note from Mouré, inviting Solway for a coffee, she notes that “we’re different, yes, in our works, but not opposite. I have lots of respect for you and your work, even when it differs from mine. Your voice is important and transcends differences, and I wish you all the best in your workings” (David Solway Papers, Email from Erin Mouré to David Solway, November 23, 2007). To this, Solway replies positively to the invitation, adding: “I’ve been reading through *O Cadoiro*, feeling at times somewhat baffled, at others deeply moved. You’ll have to explain your devices to me, but there’s no doubt that something in me resonates to the upwelling anguish expressed in many of these pieces [...]” (David Solway Papers, Email from David Solway to Erin Mouré, November 23, 2007)

What other news? Young Carmine is making great strides on the literary circuit [...]. I wrote him a letter of reference for a one-month, well-paying stint at UNB [University of New Brunswick] as a visiting professor this summer and now, I hear that he's about to become a regular reviewing contributor at *Poetry*. It's a bird, it's a plane, no, it's superCarmine!" (David Solway Papers, Excerpt from email from Solway to Ormsby, April 04, 2008).⁶⁶

The poets of the Jubilate Circle will readily endorse one another, often with the highest praise, as this letter of support written by Eric Ormsby for Carmine Starnino's application to a doctoral programme at McGill illustrates:

I do not know Mr. Starnino as a student, nor as an academic colleague. I do know, however, that he is both a highly gifted and astute and knowledgeable critic and reviewer, especially of poetry. He has an impressive command of contemporary literature, both Canadian and American. I have regularly followed his reviews, which I have always found (even when I was not in agreement with them) to be judicious, acute and well-grounded in a wide and sympathetic reading. [...] (Eric Ormsby Papers, 1999)⁶⁷

Likewise, Eric Ormsby also supported Michael Harris's request for admission in the Yaddo programme, an artists' retreat in Saratoga Springs, New York, in 2001:

In my opinion, Michael Harris is one of the best poets now writing in English, not only in Canada, but anywhere; he is also a distinguished editor. For the past few years he has been writing a new collection that represents a daring departure and a wholly original voice. I have the highest regard for Michael as a poet and believe that, given support, he will write a major work. (Eric Ormsby Papers, January 10, 2001)

⁶⁶ At once humorous and revealing, Solway compares Starnino to Superman by using the line made famous in the DC comics: "It's a bird, it's a plane, no, it's Superman!"

⁶⁷ It should be pointed out that this letter, though laudatory on the surface, is in fact a very cautious one: "I do not know Mr. Starnino as a student, nor as an academic colleague" would probably not have been very persuasive among the members of an academic selection committee. It appears here that Ormsby is at once trying to help a friend and protecting his own reputation as an academic.

As a professor at McGill University, a distinguished poet and recipient of the prestigious Ingram Merrill Foundation Prize for “outstanding work as a poet,” among other prizes, Eric Ormsby is a well-respected figure in the field, and one that moreover bridges the gap between academia and the non-academic literary community, a vital link in any literary network seeking to enhance its cultural and social capital without alienating individuals from one or the other of these fields. A poet like David Solway, on the other hand, may have fewer links with academia but is very effective in “working the field”: active in a number of juries, prize committees and editorial boards, his extended network of contacts in all spheres of the Canadian literary field, both French and English, is impressive, and is one he readily draws upon in order to “honour The Cause,” to use Harris’ words.

Michael Harris and Carmine Starnino, who have been active chiefly as editors and critics, have equally contributed to the network’s foundation and to its collective social capital through the foundation of a poetry series that would be the point around which the four poets would rally in the case of the former and through a strong and continued presence in the editorial boards of several Canadian periodicals and a prolific output of prose (essays and reviews) in the case of the latter. Interestingly, it often appears that it is Michael Harris, the least vocal of the four (he tends to shy away from public discourses and readings and has not published essays and reviews like the other three poets of the Jubilate Circle), who has been largely responsible for rallying the poets and founding the literary circle; he has taken on the role of bandleader or master of ceremonies, in a manner of speaking. As founder of Signal Editions, he laid the groundwork for the aesthetic qualities for which this group would come to be known and thus carved out its niche in the Anglo-Montreal – and English-Canadian – literary landscape, using

the imprint to attract “skilled and well-known writers” as well as to “cultivate new talent” (Cooke 13) . He published David Solway’s early work under the New Delta imprint and then recruited his friend into his newly-founded poetry series; he “discovered” Carmine Starnino and published his first collection, serving as a mentor for the young poet; he then oversaw Starnino’s passage from poet to series’ editor, ensuring that the symbolic torch would be successfully passed on and that the series’ mission would be safeguarded. Finally, he frequently opened the doors of his home to his friends and other poets, scholars and colleagues and saw to it that these various agents were given the opportunity to meet and discuss and especially to forge friendships and new collaborations.⁶⁸ As such, his contribution, understated though it may seem, is widely recognized by the other members of the Jubilate Circle: as previously stated, Starnino has claimed in an interview that his relationship with Michael Harris “has meant everything to [him]” and that he “[didn’t] think he’d be writing poetry today if it weren’t for [Michael]” (Briscoe); David Solway interviewed Harris for *Books in Canada*, allowing him to gain greater visibility among Canadian readers, calling attention to his “brilliant career” and particularly to the important behind-the-scenes work a poetry editor must do (Solway, “A Brilliant Career”). Finally, both David Solway and Carmine Starnino have, on more than one occasion, identified Michael Harris as one of the few outstanding contemporary Canadian poets in their numerous essays and reviews.

⁶⁸ This was witnessed first-hand when this dissertation’s author was invited, on more than one occasion, to a dinner at Michael Harris’s home where a number of poets and other friends were invited. Some of these poets indeed stated that such dinners were in fact a regular occurrence. Such dinners are certainly less frequent than they used to be when Ormsby lived in Montreal, though they still take place whenever Ormsby visits, as was the case when the author of this dissertation was invited.

The Text and the Peritext: Sites of Mutual Promotion and Admiration

Attentive readers of Michael Harris', David Solway's, Carmine Starnino's and Eric Ormsby's poetry will immediately notice that an intimate relationship exists between the four poets merely by the evidence given within the text (the poems written by the four poets) as well as within the peritext and epitext. Such signs are not gratuitous, but rather reveal an intention on behalf of each poet to make public and permanent his association with the other members of the literary circle. As we shall see, these signs are so abundant that they cannot be overlooked and must be read as a collective discourse, one that might replace the non-existent "manifesto or charter," to echo Michael Harris once again. In order to evaluate these signs, however, it will be necessary to include all of the printed works published by these four poets. This will enable us to examine the network both synchronically and diachronically and may point out evolutions within the collective discourse held by the members of the Jubilate Circle.

In a study of the text and paratext of the volumes of poetry published by the poets of the Jubilate Circle, one would rightfully expect to see signs of the network as early as the 1970s and 1980s, when Michael Harris' and David Solway's friendship had evolved toward professional collaborations. This is in fact the case: David Solway dedicated his collection entitled *Modern Marriage* (1987), the third of his collections to be published in the Signal Editions series, to "Michael Harris". Interestingly, within this same publication Solway publishes a sonnet in which the following lines appear: "Some need the stubborn nacre of the shell; / and still others like our friend, Mike Harris, / would wish to be 'among the essential kissers of all time'" (16). As subtle as this reference may be, readers with a keen memory for verse will

remember a poem by Michael Harris entitled “Art,” published in his 1977 collection entitled *Grace*, which opens with the following stanzas:

I want to be the man
 in Rodin’s The Kiss
or Brancusi’s The Kiss

I want to be among
 the essential
kissers of all time. [...] (27)

Here David Solway acknowledges Michael Harris as a friend but also and above all as an admired poet whose verse will be given a second life in Solway’s own poetry. Solway thus openly affirms his literary affiliation relatively early on in his career, and by not only naming Michael Harris but by publishing his works in Harris’ new poetry series (one that, it should be noted, had yet to earn the reputation it enjoys today), he adopts and endorses the aesthetic that the series and its editor chose to represent.

In keeping with the first reference to Michael Harris in his collection *Modern Marriage*, David Solway would continue to use his poetry as a venue for openly boasting his literary affiliations, a practice that Carmine Starnino would also later take up. In his collection *Chess Pieces*, Solway includes a poem entitled “Writers on Chess,” dedicated to Trevor Ferguson, Scott Lawrence and Michael Harris.⁶⁹ The poem reads as a dialogue between the three Montreal authors and David Solway himself. The final stanza reads as follows:

⁶⁹ Trevor Ferguson, who has also published under the pseudonym John Farrow, is a novelist and playwright who lives in Hudson, Québec, Solway’s own place of residence. He has published nine novels, among them the critically acclaimed *Onyx John* (McClelland & Stewart, 1988) and four plays. Scott Lawrence is a writer of short fiction in English, professor of Creative Writing at Concordia University and has acted as small-press columnist for the Montreal *Gazette*. He has since edited several collections of short fiction published by Véhicule Press.

DAVID: Perish the implication. Late or soon,
 what could possibly replace
 the sovereign game of chess
 and all its noble complements?
 MICHAEL: Squash, for one.⁷⁰
 SCOTT: Sailing, for another.
 TREVOR: Point taken. I must see my broker. (29)

Solway will refer to his friends once again in an unpublished poem entitled “Lady’s Mantle,” (a plant also known as *alchemilla*) probably originally written for inclusion in his 2007 collection *The Properties of Things* (Biblioasis 2007, edited by none other than Eric Ormsby), this time naming the Jubilate poets in a more subtle manner:

Michel de Maisonneuve in his princely *Etymology*
 deposes that its common name
 derives from the scalloped edges
 of its lobed, camisole leaves.
 But Brother Carmino di Caserta
 in his dissenting *Florilegia* thinks otherwise.
 [...]
 Rabbi Asa in his *Treatise*
 writes of Lady’s Mantle
 that it is a major miracle of the Lord
 [...]⁷¹

The poem, meant to imitate the tone of “an obscure thirteenth century scholar” (*Properties* 9), the fictional Bartholomew the Englishman, refers obliquely to Michael Harris who, few readers will know, lives on de Maisonneuve Boulevard in Montreal, to Carmine Starnino, whose parents are natives of Sipicciano, province of Caserta, to the north of Rome in Italy, and to Asa Boxer,⁷²

⁷⁰ Readers who are members of Solway’s and Harris’s circle of friends will know that Harris was once an avid squash player. They may also know that David Solway himself is a chess player, as is his son, as he admits to Sonja Skarstedt in an interview (see Carmine Starnino, *David Solway. Essays on His Works*, 16-38).

⁷¹ David Solway archives, MS. Coll. 227, Email sent by David Solway to Asa Boxer, 16 November 2007.

⁷² Son of the deceased Montreal poet Avi Boxer.

a Jewish poet from Montreal who joined the ranks of the Jubilate Circle and who published his first book of poetry with Signal Editions, under Carmine Starnino's editorship, in 2007.⁷³

Carmine Starnino, in his collection entitled *This Way Out* (Gaspereau Press 2009), also adopted Solway's strategy of naming his friends in verse in a group of sonnets meant to be read as postcards sent by the poet sojourning in Rome⁷⁴ to several friends in Montreal, identified by their first names only: several are members of Montreal English-language literary community, and the poems entitled "To Michael," "To David" and "To Eric," as well as "To Asa," "To Norm," and "To Marius"⁷⁵ are clearly addressed to Starnino's fellow members of the (extended) Jubilate Circle.⁷⁶ Such nods to their friends and accomplices can be interpreted as signs of respect, of mutual admiration but also as signs of a certain complicity that exists between the poets, who write largely for the general public (limited though it may be) but also, to some extent, *for each other*, by including references that few people outside their literary circle will recognize. The "us vs. them" rhetoric previously identified is therefore echoed in these textual references to each other.

In 1992, Eric Ormsby published his second volume of poetry, *Coastlines*, with ECW press. Although he had only known David Solway for one year, the friendship between the two men

⁷³ *Mechanical Bird*, Montreal: Signal Editions, 2007.

⁷⁴ Starnino did in fact receive a writer's grant from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec that enabled him to take on an artists' residency at the Québec Studio in Rome, January-June 2006. Sojourns in this Italian residence are offered by the Québécois government to artists and writers counting over ten years of artistic practice. (Conseil des arts et des lettres website, "Studios et ateliers-résidences".)

⁷⁵ Norm Sibus (Anglo-Québécois poet of German origin, he has lived in the United States and in Vancouver before finally settling in Montreal), Marius Kociejowski (Canadian poet now living in London, England, where he continues to write poetry while working as a bookseller).

⁷⁶ It is worth reminding the reader, at this point, that because the Jubilate Circle was begun as a joke and remains an informal network, no true "members" can be clearly identified. "Fellow members of the (extended) Jubilate Circle" here refers to those Canadian poets who are sympathetic to the four poets under study in this dissertation, who have been publicly acknowledged by them (in essays, reviews, interviews or personal communications, for example) and who share their aesthetics and ideologies in poetry.

was already solidly established, as the collection, wherein a poem, “Nova Scotia” is dedicated to David Solway, illustrates. His third collection, *For a Modest God* (ECW 1997) contains an eponymous poem dedicated to Karin Solway, David Solway’s wife, and his fourth collection, *Araby*, published this time by Signal Editions, is also dedicated to David Solway. Likewise, David Solway will dedicate his 1993 collection, *Bedrock* (Signal Editions) to two poets, a dedication that reveals a literary circle that transcends linguistic communities and barriers: “For Robert Melançon qui se penche à la fenêtre. For Eric Ormsby, secret fabricator.”⁷⁷. Likewise, Solway will dedicate his *Andreas Karavis Companion* to Eric Ormsby. Our study of the subsequent Andreas Karavis hoax will illustrate just what Solway meant when he referred to Ormsby as a “secret fabricator” in the dedication of *Bedrock*. Finally, as late as 2010 Eric Ormsby will provide a blurb for the jacket of Michael Harris’s long-awaited collection of poetry entitled *Circus*, stating that “[...] *Circus* is the finest collection to date of a major poet” (Harris 2010, book jacket).

Upon Carmine Starnino’s arrival in the group in the mid-1990s, a close friendship between the other three poets had already been founded, and through his role as mentor Michael Harris not only inspired the young Starnino to write and provided him with guidance, he also provided him with a publishing outlet, Signal Editions (not an insignificant contribution for someone whose literary career is nascent). Michael Harris also gave Starnino access to the other members of the network, David Solway and Eric Ormsby, the former a poet whose

⁷⁷ “Robert Melançon qui se penche à la fenêtre” refers to a poem by Robert Melançon entitled « Éveil, » in which the following lines can be read: “Je me penche à la fenêtre / Et l’étrangeté / Du matin me surprend.” (*Peinture aveugle*, VLB Éditeur, 1979). Robert Melançon has long been a close friend of David Solway’s. His poetry was published in translation by Signal Editions, and he was instrumental in helping Judith Thibault publish her anthology of poetry, *Le Groupe des Huit*, with Les Éditions du Noroît. Though he is francophone, he could readily be counted as an honorary member of the Jubilate Circle.

reputation was already solidly established and the latter a recently published poet greatly respected in the world of academia. Thus Carmine Starnino's literary career was given an initial boost, a head start, and his very first collection of poetry, *The New World*, bears a blurb provided by Eric Ormsby in which the latter describes the volume as "infused with an unusual tenderness of perception and delicacy of touch, particularly in the realm of familial relations. This is a book of small but moving, delicate epiphanies" (Starnino 1997, book jacket). This would not be the last endorsement Eric Ormsby would give to his young friend. The opening pages of Starnino's second volume, *Credo* (2000), dedicated to Lucy Starnino and Michael Harris, inform readers the book was published in the Hugh MacLennan Poetry Series at McGill-Queen's University Press, and that Eric Ormsby was a member of the selection committee. The previous year, the same series (with the same selection committee) had published David Solway's collection entitled *Chess Pieces*.⁷⁸

The prose writings published by David Solway, Eric Ormsby and Carmine Starnino are also sites in which they all declare their admiration for one another as poets and word-smiths, and a cursory look at four collections of essays (*Random Walks*, Solway [1997]; *Facsimiles of Time*, Ormsby [2001]; *Director's Cut*, Solway [2003] and *A Lover's Quarrel*, Starnino [2004]) reveals how the four poets openly support one another by endorsing each other's work, going so far as to provide readers with insight into its possible interpretations, and how, by associating their fellow Jubilate poets with central figures of the Canadian and Western literary canon, they are in fact claiming their network's own place within that very canon, much in the

⁷⁸ It would be fallacious to imply that Ormsby was instrumental in securing a publishing contract for David Solway and Carmine Starnino as a result of his influence on the committee; however, it is reasonable to assume that it is not pure coincidence that two members of the Jubilate Circle would publish their poetry with this series at a time when Ormsby was a member of its selection committee.

same way David Solway was privately doing when he shared Donaldson's comparison of the Jubilate poets to four giants of the realm of classical music at the turn of the twentieth century. In this case, however, the project is a very public one.

David Solway's 1997 collection of essays, *Random Walks*, opens with a foreword by Eric Ormsby. The short text appears to serve a double purpose: to draw the reader's attention to some of the salient features of the texts they are about to read and to show that those very features will lead to a consecration into the canon of prose writing, where literary giants will welcome Solway among their ranks. Being a widely-respected figure both in the Anglo-Québécois literary field and the academic field, Ormsby brings credibility and precious authority to statements that would otherwise have appeared hyperbolic. A few excerpts will suffice to illustrate this argument.

From the onset, Ormsby calls attention to Solway's language, something he claims to be just as important within the collections as the contents of the essays themselves:

There is scarcely a sentence in *Random Walks* that does not call attention to itself, sometimes slyly but sometimes in the most bravura fashion. Solway's prose, like his marvellous poetry, never resembles the inert, exiguous, virtually comestible sentences of his contemporaries who write a prose so vapid that it dissolves as it is read and, like junk food, leaves neither taste nor nourishment behind. Solway's prose, by contrast, is memorable; it is also lithe, mischievous, shapely, impudent, and ceremonial. (xvi)⁷⁹

⁷⁹ According to the theory of linguistics as elaborated by Roman Jakobson, this quality endows Solway's prose writings with the poetic function of language, comprising "the focus within the verbal message on the message itself" (Linda R. Waugh, "The Poetic Function in the Theory of Roman Jakobson," *Poetics Today*, 2:1, autumn 1980, 58. In her study of Jakobson's theory of the poetic function, Linda R. Waugh sums up what could be the Jubilate Circle's creed: "poetry is not about the real world or life, but about itself" (60).

Here Ormsby adopts a strategy that will be later taken up by Solway and especially Starnino, that is, praise through comparison with those deemed of lesser merit. It is to be noted as well that the adjectives used by Ormsby to describe Solway's prose ("lithe, mischievous, shapely, impudent, and ceremonial") also neatly sum up what the Jubilate Poets claim to be their common aesthetic. Notwithstanding this fact, which will be studied in greater detail in Chapter 3, Solway's prose has earned him, according to Ormsby, a place in the pantheon of great authors of the English-language tradition: "Solway's prose, like the prose of Nabokov or Joyce, like the prose of Sterne or Donne, says to its readers: *Stop. I am not disposable. I too am a thing among things, a being among beings, a creation among other created things*" (xvii, italics in the original). Although Ormsby does point out the influence of A.M. Klein and Leonard Cohen, and he states that

[Canadian literature] is too limited a context in which to judge his [Solway's] achievement for he is a thinker and a writer of international scope and import. [...] More importantly, Solway is one of the first Canadian essayists and poets consciously, and with admirable ambition, to envisage and address a global readership, and not merely some local coterie. (xx)

As has just been shown, the poets might actually, in fact, be addressing a "local coterie" through references to each other (by name or by quoting each other's work), despite Ormsby's claims to the contrary. Furthermore, although the claim for a more cosmopolitan verse "of international scope and import" is an idea often repeated by the poets of the Jubilate Circle, we are rarely given to understand just what this means. We can conclude, though, that the poets are arguing in favour of a poetry that compares with that of international poets whom they identify as representing the highest standards in the field. We are given examples of such

comparisons in a number of essays written by Eric Ormsby, David Solway and Carmine Starnino (the latter especially is given to enumerating poets he admires and those he deems inferior. Only a small sample of such enumerations will be given in the discussion of his works of prose).

Eric Ormsby's *Facsimiles of Time. Essays on Poetry and Translation* (Porcupine's Quill 2001) is a collection of essays on and reviews of the poetry and translated works of a wide range of authors. Among these is a review of David Solway's *Bedrock* (Signal Editions 1993), originally published in Carmine Starnino's collection of essays dedicated to Solway's works (*David Solway. Essays on His Works*, Guernica Editions 2001). No mention is made of the fact that the collection is dedicated to none other than Eric Ormsby himself, but the review is nonetheless a glowing one, in which Ormsby claims to hear "echoes of [...] Goethe, Tennyson, Cavafy, Nikos Gatsos, Elizabeth Bishop" (103). Ormsby goes on to state that one of the collection's poems, "Amorgos," has a "Wordsworthian intensity" (113). The review is not only evidence of a discourse made by one member of the network in order to promote the position that the poets of the Jubilate poets hold (or ought to hold) in the international canon of English-language poetry, it is a very public and very powerful endorsement of the work of a fellow Jubilate poet. Ormsby does not merely gush about the beauty of Solway's poems, he unpacks them, uses his erudition to point out metrical variations, literary influences, and mythical sources of inspiration, quoting Plato, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Roland Poulin and Nikos Gatsos along the way, particularly to illustrate Solway's formal and linguistic qualities:

Bedrock is as metaphysical a book of poems as has been written in Canada and perhaps in North America, at least since the death of Wallace Stevens. [...] The Austrian poet Hugo

von Hofmannsthal put it with consummate succinctness in one of the aphorisms from his *Book of Friends*: ‘Depth must be hidden. Where? On the surface.’ (Ormsby 2001, 107)

David Solway will certainly not fail to return the favour. In his 2003 collection of essays entitled *Director’s Cut*, Solway publishes essays that are much lighter in tone and generally more humorous, yet nonetheless provocative, as the book jacket description (possibly written by John Metcalf, who was non-fiction editor for *Porcupine’s Quill* at the time *Director’s Cut* was published), suggests:

[Solway] contends that almost all of the poetry (and much of the fiction) being written in Canada these days is turgid, spurious and pedestrian, the result of two highly questionable developments: the proliferation of creative writing departments in universities throughout the country, and a largely subsidized literature industry, abetted by a press of cousinly critics and reviewers, intended to construct a patchwork national psyche, create a sense of ideological cohesion and glorify the tribe.⁸⁰

This element of the peritext prepares readers for the often provocative essays the book contains – it republishes Solway’s deeply critical essay on the works of Al Purdy, as well as bitterly scathing essays on Erin Mouré and Anne Carson – but also sums up an idea that is recurrent not only throughout this publication but in the writings of Eric Ormsby and Carmine Starnino as well: good poetry should not be held up to Canadian standards but rather to international ones (such a discourse, as Starnino will later point out, harkens back to the period

⁸⁰ It is relevant to point out at this point that the discourse on Solway’s book jacket seems to echo Irving Layton’s words in his letter of congratulations sent to Michael Harris upon the publication of *Grace* (quoted earlier in the dissertation). This could be taken as a sign of a polarized field of Canadian poetry, one that divides the “self-taught” poets, those who possess an innate talent (note that this notion will be expressed in the poets’ discourse, as will be examined in Chapter 3) and those who have participated in the country’s various creative writing programmes. Moreover, it is worth noting that neither Metcalf nor Solway have shirked from benefiting from such opportunities.

of colonialism in Canadian poetry). Poetry of real formal and intellectual scope is rarely to be found in Canada, according to Solway (an opinion shared by Starnino), although a select group of poets, many of whom are members in good standing of the Jubilate Circle, make up a certain exception to this rule. His essays will drive home the point:

Michael Harris's *Grace* and *In Transit* represent the kind of work that Ted Hughes would have wanted to write had he been able to. (I have long maintained that Harris is a better poet than his beloved mentor.) *For a Modest God*, as has been noted by more than one reviewer, displays the verbal gemminess of Hart Crane and the meditative sweep of Wallace Stevens, but it is entirely Eric Ormsby: it stands as one of the major poetic achievements of the decade in English-language poetry. His latest book, *Araby*, is perhaps even more impressive. [...] Finally, *Credo*, Carmine Starnino's second book, with its innovative sixteen-part sequence 'Cornage,' has brought him early and justified acclaim. (*Director's Cut* 61)⁸¹

In this instance, Solway was attempting to show that Montreal poets today generally stood out as the finest in Canada, just as they had done in the first half of the twentieth century, an argument made all the more powerful by comparing Harris and Ormsby to Ted Hughes, Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens, respectively, going as far as saying that the poets of the Jubilate Circle not only compare to these masters but indeed surpass them. Likewise, in an essay entitled "Canadian Poetry as a Busted Flush" published in his collection of reviews *A Lover's Quarrel* (Porcupine's Quill 2004), Carmine Starnino claims that "Eric Ormsby, David Solway and Michael Harris are three Canadian poets whose respective bluffs seem to be operating on another level – in fact, they seem to be playing a different game altogether. They are poets who

⁸¹ Solway refers to Ted Hughes as Harris' "mentor". It should be noted that the two poets never actually worked together or communicated with one another, though the former was a model and significant source of inspiration for the latter. (Michael Harris, Interview, Montreal, 21 May 2007).

have grounded their work in a tradition they understand [...]” (163). But Starnino goes further than just naming his friends: he includes a poem by each poet in his essay and proceeds to interpret it, much like Eric Ormsby did with David Solway’s “Amorgos,” allowing readers to better appreciate technically difficult poems and supporting his argument that these poets are, in fact, superior to many of their Canadian counterparts. This is a strategy that Carmine Starnino uses often, though he does not hesitate to go further still in promoting the work of the Jubilate poets: he edits a collection of essays dedicated to the works of David Solway (referred to above) and pens an essay celebrating the poetry of Michael Harris, published in a collection of essays entitled *Language Acts: Anglo-Quebec Poetry, 1976 to the 21st Century* edited by Jason Camlot and Todd Swift.⁸² In the latter, Starnino claims that Michael Harris belongs to “a coterie of poets whose ideas were forged in a line of development that has continued uninterrupted for nearly eight decades,”⁸³ (233-4), a group which includes, according to Starnino, John Glassco, R.G. Everson, Robyn Sarah, Robert Allen and David Solway, with whom Harris forms “a distinguished society” (234). He compares Harris’s poetry to that of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Robert Frost and claims that “[Harris’s] intonation is so complex and nuanced he has the Dickensonian ability to endow ho-hum words with severe particularity, making them crackle” (251). He also identifies the place and role of some Canadian poets within the country’s canon of poetry, claiming that although they have not always received their due recognition, they do in fact write poetry that can be held up to the highest standards:

These poets have profoundly complicated the concept of veneration, have made it subversive; slyly undermining English tradition by furnishing it with a distorted

⁸² “Michael Harris’s Boo-Jwah Appalachiana,” 232-253.

⁸³ The word “coterie” has a positive connotation here.

reflection rather than a [*sic*] easy confirmation. This can be seen in how they have taken the English-language poem and refined it (Robyn Sarah), coarsened it (Irving Layton), challenged it (David Solway), deepened it (Don Coles), compacted it (Margaret Avison), mastered it (P.K. Page), thickened it (Eric Ormsby), intellectualized it (Richard Outram), freshened it (Michael Harris), toughened it (Milton Acorn), regionalized it (Charles Bruce), civilized it (George Johnston), vernacularized it (Peter Van Toorn), purified it (A.J.M. Smith), roused it (A.M. Klein), limbered it (E.J. Pratt). (Starnino 2004, 86)

Like Ormsby and Solway, Starnino supports his claim by showcasing his command of Canadian and American poetry and provides ample quotations from other poets, reviewers and scholars to underscore his arguments. Each poet has indeed brought his own unique combination of skills and experience, in each case translating into an expression of erudition, to serve and benefit the other members of the group, and each has in turn benefited from similar strategies by the group's members. As a result of belonging to the Jubilate Circle, the four poets have found ready and willing advocates for their work and their aesthetic in general, advocates who have more than once risen to the occasion and openly endorsed the works of their fellow Jubilate poets.

This type of promotion (not of the poets as a group, but of individual members of the group by other members) can also be seen in a variety of interviews that Starnino, Harris, Solway and Ormsby have conducted *with each other* and have published (and sometimes republished) in a number of venues. To give a few examples, Carmine Starnino interviewed David Solway for the Montreal-based literary magazine *Matrix*, an interview he republished in *David Solway. Essays on His Works* (the collection also contains a review of Solway's *Chess Pieces* written by Starnino himself); Starnino also interviewed Eric Ormsby for a collection of

conversations between Canadian writers edited by Tim Bowling.⁸⁴ Finally, David Solway published a humorous interview with Michael Harris in *Books in Canada* (David Solway, “A Brilliant Career”). With each of these interviews, the poets provided each other with an opportunity to introduce themselves to the Canadian public and to shed some light on their work, as well as shed some light on their views of poetry in general and of Canadian poetry in particular. They also used this forum to draw attention to their fellow Jubilate poets’ supposed exceptional qualities, as Carmine Starnino does in his introduction of David Solway: “Few Canadian poets have explored voice – in both its declarative and musical aspects – with greater doggedness, greater virtuosity, and more cornucopian success than Solway” (Starnino, “David Solway Interviewed”, *The Matrix*, 51, 9). In other instances, the nature of the questions asked not only openly expressed admiration for the poet but informed readers, in case the interviewee was too modest to do so himself, of the critical behind-the-scenes work that the latter had accomplished, work that often goes unnoticed by the interview’s readers. This is very much the case when David Solway asks Michael Harris: “Whatever possessed you to found a press and devote so much time and energy to it? It must certainly have taken away from your other pursuits and eaten into your personal life as well” (Solway 2001, “A Brilliant Career”). Solway thus gives Harris the opportunity to provide the following answer, creating, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, a very particular type of persona, that of the literary benefactor: “If teaching provided me a forum to talk unhesitantly [...] about something I loved, and which had [...] become my life, then editing other poets’ work [...] and seeing the books through to publication became a way of honouring what had kept me, in all senses, alive” (Solway 2001, “A

⁸⁴ C. Starnino, “Going Down to Where the Roots Begin,” *Where the Words Come From. Canadian Poets in Conversation*. Tim Bowling, Ed., 2002.

Brilliant Career”). These interviews were also a golden opportunity for the members of the Jubilate Circle to openly express the aesthetic and ideological principles that defined them as a group: Carmine Starnino and Eric Ormsby have a lengthy discussion on the value of form, for example; they share their literary influences and are mutually supportive in criticizing their literary adversaries. When Ormsby stated that “there are poets and whole ‘schools’ of poetry which are admired by many but in which I see little of value. Olson, bp Nichol, the Black Mountain poets, for example” (Starnino 2002, 209), the interviewer, Starnino, replied by saying “I don’t have much sympathy for those poets either” (210). These interviews, which are considered elements of the epitext, along with other clues found in the paratext of these four poets’ works, betray a strong sense of solidarity within the group, a constant and conscious attempt to promote the group’s aesthetic, to help each other reap benefits of various kinds (awards, a wider readership, more favourable critical reception being but a few examples). It could therefore be stipulated that Harris’s statement that a manifesto or charter for the Jubilate Circle does not exist is in fact wrong: such a manifesto can be found scattered within the paratext surrounding each man’s poetry, including within their discourse on poetry in general and on each other’s poetry in particular. The Jubilate poets openly and proudly associate themselves with one another and see the reception of their works and their own reputations as Canadian men of letters enhanced as a result.

Works of the Jubilate Circle: Anthologies and Literary Hoaxes

On occasion, members of a literary circle might collaborate professionally in order to produce a collective work, an anthology, for example, that unites their names and works in one publication and allows readers to examine them side by side and understand how the aesthetic

and/or ideological principles the members group may have stated in other venues actually translate into the poetry they produce. Montreal's Vehicule Poets have done so on several occasions,⁸⁵ to name but one Canadian example. In the case of the Jubilate Circle, two examples of such literary collaboration exist: one more overt, consisting of an anthology of poems by members of the Jubilate Circle (never identified as such) translated into French, and the other a more covert, elaborate form of literary collaboration in which the Jubilate poets combine their efforts to orchestrate a literary hoax. While the first is definitely a prime example of pooling a group's resources in order to generate social, economic and even symbolic capital for each member of the group, the second is rather a strategy used to garner media coverage, to attract the attention of the literary field and, by constructing a literary hoax, reinforcing the "us vs. them" attitude discussed earlier in this chapter.

In 2008, Judith-Louise Thibault, a teacher of French as a second language at John Abbott College published an anthology of Anglo-Quebec poetry in French translation (including the original English poems) entitled *Le Groupe des huit. Huit poètes anglo-québécois* with the Éditions du Noroît. The anthology contains translations of poems by Stephanie Bolster, Michael Harris, Eric Ormsby, Robyn Sarah, Norm Sibum, David Solway Carmine Starnino and Peter Van Toorn. The anthology's presentation text openly states that the project was a result of a friendship and collaboration between Thibault and two John Abbott colleagues, David Solway and Peter Van Toorn, both English teachers at the College, and that her contacts with the other poets of the anthology were made possible "grâce à Solway" (11). The title Thibault chose for

⁸⁵ Louis Dudek. *A Real Good Goosin'. Talking Poetics*. (Montreal: Maker Press, 1980); Artie Gold, ed. *The Vehicule Poets*. (Montreal: Maker Press, 1979); Ken Norris. *Vehicule Days. An Unorthodox History of Montreal's Vehicule Poets*. (Montreal: NuAge Editions, 1993).

her anthology is a very significant one: the coinage “the Group of Eight,” inspired by another coterie of Canadian artists, the celebrated “Group of Seven,” underscores how these poets do not merely represent a random sample of the poetry being written in English in Quebec during the first decade of the twenty-first century, but in fact represent a coherent and cohesive phenomenon within this small field.⁸⁶ Thibault states that her choices were the result of “un dialogue soutenu avec le poète David Solway” (11). It is not unreasonable to assume that Solway was instrumental in pointing out poets that might be considered for inclusion, even though the anthology editor states that “le choix précis de ces huit auteurs est la résultante d’un parcours subjectif” (11). It is worth pointing out from the onset that besides the four Jubilate Circle poets under study in this dissertation, the other four poets, Norm Sibum, Peter van Toorn (touted as exemplary poets by the poet-critics of the Jubilate Circle), Stephanie Bolster (a Signal poet) and Robyn Sarah (a long-time friend of the group and a poet who espouses in many ways the aesthetic of the Jubilate Circle⁸⁷) are logical inclusions in an anthology of Jubilate Circle poetry. All Montreal poets, close friends of Solway, Harris, Starnino and Ormsby, are poets that Starnino, Solway and Ormsby have often championed in their essays and reviews. Their presence in the anthology does not break with the aesthetic of the Jubilate Circle.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, as a direct result of David Solway’s contacts within the French-language literary milieu of Quebec and of his intervention with regards to Judith-Louise Thibault’s translation project, the Jubilate Circle poets have benefited from a potential

⁸⁶ The association of the Jubilate poets with an institutionally sanctioned group such as the Group of Seven is also a not insignificant source of

⁸⁷ A friendship and correspondence exists between Robyn Sarah and Eric Ormsby in particular, as his Papers conserved at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library reveal. An enlightening interview of Ormsby by Sarah was also published in Robyn Sarah’s *Little Eureka: A Decade’s Thoughts on Poetry* (2007).

⁸⁸ The aesthetic of the Jubilate Circle will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

widening of their readership by reaching French-language readers. Of course, we can infer that this translation project was also the result of overlapping networks: Paul Bélanger, founding director of the Éditions du Noroît (and co-signer of the anthology's introduction) had previously been a collaborator of Véhicule Press publisher Simon Dardick's and had published (and would go on to publish) some Véhicule Press titles in translation (Simon Dardick, Personal Interview)⁸⁹; Signal poets would not be unknown to Bélanger, and he would already have solid grounds for believing that Noroît readers would be favourable to the poetry anthology.⁹⁰ The links or bridges being cast by Solway between his network, the Jubilate Circle, and other literary networks benefit not only himself but the members of his network.

It is with another publication, however, that the poets of the Jubilate Circle garnered the most media attention, not only in Montreal but indeed across Canada and abroad, even though their individual names (other than Solway's) were not always at the fore. The Andreas Karavis literary hoax, perpetuated in the fall of 2000 (but arguably begun long before, with the publication of David Solway's *Bedrock* in 1993, which included a "translation" of Andreas Karavis's poem "The Dream Masters") was a project in which all four core members of the Jubilate Circle collaborated, partly as a lark but also, upon closer study, as a playful toying with the various agents of the field of Canadian poetry, once again adopting an "us vs. them" pattern

⁸⁹ Stephanie Bolster, *Pierre Blanche*, trad. Daniel Canty, 2007; David Solway, *Passage de Franklin*, trad. Marie Frankland, 2012; David Solway, *Poèmes choisis (1963-2003)*, trad. et prés. Yves Gosselin, 2004.

⁹⁰ It should be pointed out that the only poets in the anthology who are not Signal poets are Robyn Sarah and Norm Sibum. The latter, however, is a close friend of the poets and had frequently been championed in several essays they had penned. Archival documents also point to a long-standing friendship between him and David Solway and Eric Ormsby in particular. Peter Van Toorn, another long-time friend of David Solway's, published *In Guildenstern County* in 1984 with McClelland & Stewart. The book was reissued in 2003 by Véhicule Press as Part 1 of a collection entitled *Mountain Tea & Other Poems*. It is also worth noting that not all Signal poets are included in the term "Jubilate poets". Because the Jubilate Circle is, in fact, a fictitious one, it is not possible to determine who is and who isn't a "member", other than those names, previously quoted, evoked by the four poets under study in jest within their personal correspondence.

that underlies the very exclusive nature of their group. Although the Andreas Karavis affair caused much ink to flow, in the end, by David Solway's own admission, it was only really a project that was "begotten in laughter among friends at the supper table" (Solway 2001, "Medicine").

In 1999, David Solway introduced the poetry of Greek poet Andreas Karavis to English-language North American readers of verse. Karavis was, according to Solway, an individual he had met during one of his numerous trips to the islands of the Aegean Sea, a recluse living on the island of Lipsi and avoiding the limelight by spending most of his days aboard his fishing caique. Solway, who speaks the Greek language as a result of his numerous sojourns in that country (a fact that is well-known, at least in the Anglo-Quebec literary community), translated a few of Andreas Karavis' poems and published them in a number of prestigious North American literary publications, both Canadian and American, namely the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, *Matrix*, and, in 2000, the *Antigonish Review*. *Books in Canada* also published a feature on Andreas Karavis, an interview the poet had given to Greek journalist Anna Zoumi, originally published in a Greek magazine entitled *Elladas* and translated into English by Solway. That same year, David Solway published his "translations" of Andreas Karavis's poetry with Signal Editions (while Michael Harris was still at the helm) under the title *Saracen Island. The Poetry of Andreas Karavis*.⁹¹ He also published, with Véhicule Press, *The Andreas Karavis Companion*, consisting of interviews with Karavis, excerpts of the Greek poet's journal translated into English, and correspondence, all meant to enlighten readers with

⁹¹ The volume is signed "David Solway," the mention "translated by" glaring by its omission.

regards to the identity of an extraordinary poet who, up until that moment, had been completely unknown.

From the onset rumours flew about Andreas Karavis's identity, with some critics, journalists and even readers questioning whether the Greek poet existed or not while others vehemently affirming that he did. In spite of this, Karavis's poetry was reviewed in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* and the *Fiddlehead Review*. Yiorgos Chouliaras, dignitary for the Greek embassy, helped organize a book launch and reception in honour of Andreas Karavis at which the Greek poet made a brief appearance. Chouliaras did not entirely dispel the rumours about Karavis's non-existence. He rather contributed to blurring the discourse by claiming that "it was just a year after I came to Ottawa that I met both David and Andreas. [...] there are people who seem to believe that today Greek writers do not exist, but [David Solway] has most ably demonstrated their continuing hold on the Canadian imagination."⁹² Members of the Jubilate Circle were instrumental in keeping the rumour mill well fed: Eric Ormsby had referred to Andreas Karavis in his review of David Solway's *Bedrock* and named the Greek poet as one of Solway's many Hellenic inspirations: "[the poem] 'Amorgos' takes its ostensible impetus from the long poem by the same name by Nikos Gatsos, a contemporary Greek poet who, like his compatriot, the enigmatic and magisterial Andreas Karavis, has influenced Solway profoundly" (*Facsimiles* 108). Interestingly, in *Bedrock*, a book dedicated to Eric Ormsby, "*secret fabricator*," (italics mine) Solway reflects on the difficulty of translating Karavis's verse and states: "As I work I have the uncanny feeling that I am translating material which I myself have written in another time, another dimension, another life" (63). Astute readers should therefore have been

⁹² Yiorgos Chouliaras, Speech made at the launch of *Saracen Island* on October 24 2000 at Molivos restaurant in Montreal. <http://www.vehiculepress.com/subjects/karavis/karavispress3.html> Retrieved 15 April 2010.

alerted to the possibility of a hoax when they encountered, in the *Andreas Karavis Companion*, a letter written by Eric Ormsby to David Solway in which he related a chance encounter with the Greek poet while on a trip to Turkey:

Dear David, I may have some interesting news for you about your celebrated friend and mentor. Last Sunday I was having coffee with Nesmine Rifat at the Pera Palas Hotel in the old Stamboul section of the town, when she tugged at my sleeve and said, "Look over there!" I looked and saw a bearded gentleman of foreign aspect – definitely not a Turk – examining the trays of pastries by the window. [...]

"My dear Nesmine," I replied, "the man looks like a dentist on vacation." "That," she shot back, "is Karavis effendi, the great poet of the Greeks." [...] So then, at last, I had seen your famous Karavis, but what was he doing in Istanbul?" (49)

It would be entirely credible that Eric Ormsby, a scholar of Islam, be travelling in Turkey, where he would already have a network of friends and colleagues, a Turkish journalist⁹³ among them. His friendship with David Solway was already well-known, so a letter from Ormsby to Solway, published in *The Andreas Karavis Companion*, would only lend credence to the Andreas Karavis myth.

On January 6, 2001, David Solway puts an end to the rumours by admitting, in an article published in the *National Post*, that he was in fact the author of the poems signed by Andreas Karavis, that he had invented not only the Greek poet, but also Nesmine Rifat, the Turkish journalist who had allegedly had coffee with his friend Eric Ormsby in Istanbul, as well as Anna Zoumi, the Greek journalist who had interviewed (and later on, according to Karavis lore, married) Andreas Karavis. He also revealed that the bearded man who spoke no English

⁹³ It should be added that Nesmine Rifat is, in fact, a *non-existent* Turkish journalist, and is rather the name of David Solway's second heteronym.

who had made a brief appearance at the *Molivos* book launch, claiming to be Andreas Karavis, was in fact Mel Heft, Solway's dentist (in light of this fact, Ormsby's statement, in his letter to Solway, that he had seen a man who looked like "a dentist on vacation" is hilariously accurate). Solway justifies his prank by stating that he wanted to shake some life into an otherwise dull poetry scene in Canada: "[Karavis and his poetry] might equally be understood as a sort of *moly*, a drug intended to combat the arid, sanctimonious, overly earnest and presbyterian atmosphere in which much of our own literature malingers" (Solway 2001, "Medicine"). However, Solway would choose to maintain a somewhat muddled rhetoric when he reminisced, *in the very same article*, that "[w]hen I first interviewed [Karavis] in the early nineties, he had no idea that [Canadian poetry] even existed" (Solway 2001, "Medicine") and closed by announcing to readers that "I've just received an invitation from Karavis to visit the island to celebrate the birth of his second son, Athanasios" (Solway 2001, "Medicine").

Carmine Starnino, in an article printed in *The Gazette* entitled "Beware of Greeks bearing poems: Who is Karavis and why do we suddenly care?"⁹⁴ carefully maps out the story and its various characters, both real and fictive, and raises the question of a literary hoax. Referring to hoaxes of the past, Starnino reinforces Solway's argument that such a fabrication is indeed beneficial to the world of letters in general: "Imposturings of this sort have lived in the interstices of literature for centuries (Ossian, Thomas Rowly, Ern Malley, Araki Yasusada; all celebrated and all fictions). At their best, the fabrications are gambits of such vexing and sophisticated mischievousness that readers are nudged toward an altered conception of authenticity" (Starnino 2000, "Beware"). He goes on to wonder whether the journals and

⁹⁴ The title of Starnino's article is an allusion to the famous phrase "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts", inspired by the Greek's ruse of offering a "Trojan horse" to the people of Troy.

presses that published his poetry were victims or accomplices of David Solway's: "Did the above-mentioned magazines [*Atlantic Monthly*, *Matrix*, *The Antigone Review*] know the truth about Karavis? If not, how culpable are they for their credulousness? Was their lapse in judgment a consequence of our common practice of corroborating a poem's "truth" according to the writer's socio-cultural position?" (Starnino 2000, "Beware").⁹⁵ Starnino nonetheless proceeds to compare Karavis's verse with that of his translator, noting major differences that would suggest that the poems are, in fact, written by two different poets: Solway's poetry is, according to Starnino, "dense, intellect-driven and a tad imperious" whereas Karavis's verse is rather "sparse, detail-nubbed and persuasive" (Starnino 2000, "Beware"). He notes that there are, in fact, two distinct *voices*, that of the translator and that of the translated poet. Starnino does not, therefore, openly state that Karavis is a fictitious character, nor does he support the statement that the Greek poet does in fact exist. Rather, he contributes to a blurring of the discourse that made this literary hoax a particularly successful one. On one hand, he questions Andreas Karavis' very existence, but on the other, he clearly states that the poetry itself is nonetheless quite real.

Heteronyms would become a strategy used by David Solway to explore different voices and styles (Godbout 96), to manipulate readers' expectations by providing his pseudonyms with an identity, a social and professional background and with biographical information. He would go on to pen collections by Turkish poet Nesmine Rifat, introduced to readers in the Karavis affair (though readers were likely no longer duped by the pseudonym), Dominican poet Rhys Savarin and several others. No other heteronymous publication took on

⁹⁵ Interestingly, this relationship between one's socio-cultural position and the poetry is one that truly exists, according to Pierre Bourdieu, and is to some extent the object of study of this dissertation.

the scope of the Karavis affair, however. The “success” of the Karavis hoax lay, in part, in the participation of the members of the Jubilate Circle: Michael Harris’s willingness to publish the books and to keep quiet about their veritable author, and Starnino’s and Ormsby’s contributions to the muddled discourse on Karavis’s true identity. Other individuals contributed as well: the critic W.J. Keith, who reviewed Karavis’ poetry for *The Antigonish Review* and for the *University of Toronto Quarterly*; Ben Downing, editor of *Parnassus*; Yiorgos Chouliaras, Greek poet and diplomat, and several others. Such a collective project reveals overlapping networks as well as potential networks. It is also a rare occasion to map out a literary field, to identify alliances between agents as well as those agents deliberately kept “out of the loop”.

The Karavis hoax was also used as a context for a public discourse on the state of Canadian poetry, a discourse held by David Solway but arguably supported by his Jubilate Circle accomplices. Contrary to his essays on poetry, Canadian and international, which were destined to a limited readership (Solway had by then only published one collection of essays with McGill-Queen’s University Press), this time his discourse was given to the public at large, in the pages of widely-read periodicals as the *National Post* and reproduced in other venues such as *Canadian Notes and Queries*, affiliated with *The Porcupine’s Quill*. In his “*mea culpa*,” David Solway claimed that inventing Andreas Karavis had been a way to “counteract [...] the coast-to-coast slackness and blandness that devitalizes so many of our writers” (Solway 2001, “Medicine”), adding that the field of Canadian poetry was a generally humourless one, one in which mediocrity was generally rewarded and where the handful of outstanding poets that claimed Canada as their home generally remained unrecognized. This would come to represent the general discourse upheld by the poets of the Jubilate Circle, a discourse in which the native

vs. cosmopolitan debate⁹⁶ would resurface once again and in which the adjective “Canadian” would come to represent the type of poetry *against* which these poets would position themselves. Starnino’s comments on the Karavis hoax are particularly revealing of the Jubilate discourse:

Can we still call these poems [those written by Solway/Karavis] “Canadian” when their tactical supports are so completely borrowed from another culture? In an early essay called *The Flight from Canada*, Solway asserts that “our poets are most truly Canadian when they [...] seek tributaries from elsewhere to swell the national brook.” And if Solway is right – if the flight from Canada is an act of fidelity – then Andreas Karavis could still be one of our greatest Canadian poets. (Starnino 2000, “Beware”)

Hence, the clues provided by the paratext as well as the presence of the Jubilate Circle in the works of poetry and prose penned by these four poets allows us to conclude that the hypothesized network, or literary circle, does in fact exist. This is amply demonstrated by the numerous instances of exchange and of mutual support enjoyed by the four poets under study. The Jubilate Circle therefore meets the criteria of a circle as outlined by Maurice Agulhon and, later, by Michel Lacroix: its existence is predicated upon the acquisition and the subsequent exchange of social capital, it is the site of initiations of new members into the literary field as the result of an endorsement of a veteran member, and its members are able to forge a *persona*, or *posture littéraire*, as a direct consequence of their belonging to the network. In the

⁹⁶ This important debate in Canadian poetry surfaced with the publication of A.J.M. Smith’s anthology entitled *Book of Canadian Poetry* (Toronto: W.J. Gage & Co, 1943) In it, Smith noted that “[p]oetry today is written for the most part by people whose emotional and intellectual heritage is not a national one; it is either cosmopolitan or provincial, and, for good or evil, the forces of civilization are rapidly making the latter scarce.” (7)

following chapter the discourse of the Jubilate Circle upheld by David Solway, Carmine Starnino and Eric Ormsby will be examined, a discourse they have promoted in order to better situate their poetic practice at the centre of the canon of English-language poetry and, ironically, at the margins of Canadian poetry. This type of *prise de position* is significant, for it sheds some light on the somewhat rebellious nature of an otherwise rather conservative mode of writing and toys with the distinctions between central and peripheral positions within the field of Canadian and English-language poetry.



Dentist Mel Heft, David Solway. 2000.

Source: David Solway Papers, MS Collection 227, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.



David Solway, Eric Ormsby. Winter 2000.

Source: David Solway Papers, MS Collection 227, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.



Norm Sibum, Michael Harris, Eric Ormsby, David Solway. Lunch party at Eric & Irena Ormsby's, Sept. 3, 2000.

Source: David Solway Papers, MS Collection 227, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.



Left to right: Carolyn O'Neill Harris, Eric Ormsby, Karin Solway, Collene Cercone, Phil Cercone, [obscured], Irena Murray Carmine Starnino, David Solway, Michael Harris. Undated.

Source: David Solway Papers, MS Collection 227, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

Chapter 3: The Jubilate Circle's Discourse on Poetry

The poets of the Jubilate Circle have, in essence, created an inner circle of poets for themselves within the field of Canadian poetry, a circle that allows them to better and more forcefully address an outer group, that is, those Canadian poets *not* admitted to their group. In their prose writing (essays, book reviews, interviews given and conducted, etc.), these four poets have established a discourse that has had a twofold effect: they have claimed (or have attempted to claim) their own position within the field of Canadian poetry (and, to some extent, that of Anglo-Québécois poetry)⁹⁷ and, consequently, within the field of global English-language poetry; further, to some extent, they have provided insight, points of view and arguments that might lead their readers to a new appreciation of their own poetry. In doing so, these poets articulate a discourse that allows them to clearly establish not only their own poetics, but that of their group as one coherent unit. In order to examine how these poets – particularly the poet-critics (this category excludes Michael Harris) – use discursive and critical tools to achieve these two goals, contemporary theory of discourse analysis, of personae (*postures littéraires*) and of ethos will be drawn upon. The following two chapters address two basic questions: have the members of the Jubilate Circle jointly elaborated and shared a “literary discourse” or a “poetics”? Did the poetry that they have produced respond to, confirm and live up to that literary discourse? It is relevant, at the outset, to define the term poetics, central to this section, in order to better shed some light on the key elements of the discourse under study. Tzvetan Todorov informs us that a poetics is, in fact, that which “questions the properties of that particular discourse that is literary discourse” (6). The poetics “breaks down

⁹⁷ Although their relationship to other Anglo-Québécois poets does not feature prominently in their discourse, it is mentioned on a few occasions, namely in Solway’s essay, many times republished, entitled “Double Exile and Montreal English-language Poetry” (*Director’s Cut*, 59-66) and in Carmine Starnino’s essay “Michael Harris’s Boo-Jhwah Appalachiana,” published in *Language Acts: Anglo-Québec Poetry, 1976 to the 21st Century* (232-253).

the symmetry [...] established between interpretation and science in the field of literary studies. In contradistinction to the interpretation of particular works, it does not seek to name meaning, but aims at a knowledge of the general laws that preside over the birth of each work” (6). Thus, the poetics is the interaction of poetry and discourse. A study of the Jubilate Circle’s poetics, as enunciated by its four core members, will contribute to a better understanding of the discourse these individuals have developed and promoted for, as Jérôme Meizoz points out, discourse (which allows the poet to establish a persona) and poetics are in fact intrinsic (Meizoz 2007, 32). Central to this discussion will be the resolutely cosmopolitan stance that Solway, Starnino and Ormsby have adopted, one that seems to revisit the old native vs. cosmopolitan debate that caused so much ink to flow in the mid-twentieth century. Such a stance is well represented by the following statement made by David Solway in an essay entitled, fittingly, “The Flight from Canada”:

we must absolutely drop this ‘Canadian’ shibboleth that so restricts and oppresses, this puerile, involuted and autistic pursuit of our *mythical* selfhood, and cultivate instead a healthy indifference to that collective self-consciousness which is at present one of our most distinguishing, if least distinguished, characteristics. (Solway 2003, 30-31)

As a result of this collective *prise de position* (for this chapter will seek to demonstrate that this is indeed the main common element in the discourses upheld by the members of the Jubilate Circle), these poets are doubly marginal within the field of Canadian poetry: they write in English in Quebec, and they favour a more formal aesthetic and an attention to poetic language that they see as standing in opposition to other major Canadian poets writing in what David Solway has dubbed a “standard average Canadian” idiom (Solway 2003, 93). In terms of their

geographic location, as David Solway points out in another essay entitled “Double Exile and English-Montreal Poetry,” these poets are cut off from a greater potential readership not only as a result of their poetics but also as a result of living within a francophone majority: Solway indeed states that he and a “small cadre of anglophone poets in Montreal” live in a condition of “double exile” that may partially cut them off from an immediate and sympathetic readership (Solway 2003, 60). Such a condition of exile, however, as Solway presents it, is far from being a disadvantage; quite the contrary, the Jubilate poets benefit from it:

The odd thing is that this relative segregation has by no means been an unmitigated disaster. Quite the contrary. For some time now it has brought along with it certain inestimable advantages from which [Anglo-Quebec] poets have profited as *writers* though obviously not as celebrities. [...] [t]hese Montreal writers have worked in substantial isolation not only from the various nationally syndicated poetries at large [...] but also *from one another*. Especially with regard to diction and prosody, the private shaping of a public medium has led to genuine originality. (Solway 2003, 60, italics in the original)

It should be noted that other than this form of “double exile”, the poets of the Jubilate Circle do not claim to be influenced by their French-language compatriots, nor does their poetry demonstrate any particular closeness to Québécois poets, their professed friendships with some, namely Robert Melançon and Michel Garneau, whose poetry has been published by Signal Editions in translation, notwithstanding. In fact, the absence of any mention of their *quebecitude* can be said to be another common element of their discourse and contribute to

their collective persona, that of “loners” within a field of poetry once dominated by the presence of groups. As a result, the Jubilate Circle poets find themselves on the periphery of a number of overlapping literary fields: Québécois, Canadian, the literary field of poetry as well as that of book publishing, and finally the field of English-language poetry throughout the world. However, as their discourse reveals, their claimed ex-centric position in the field of *Canadian* poetry is in fact one that they claim and hold dear, for, according to their discourse, this distance between them and Canadian poets considered “central” in the field has allowed them to avoid what they consider to be an aesthetic of mediocrity and to strive instead to write to international standards.

Ethos, Personae and Discourse Analysis: A Brief Introduction

Ruth Amossy and Jérôme Meizoz have conducted parallel studies on the concepts of ethos⁹⁸ and of literary personae, or *postures littéraires*,⁹⁹ the former being a concept applied to studies in rhetoric and the latter encompassing all enunciations of the “self” in the author’s works, public statements and behaviour. The two concepts do overlap: Meizoz in fact states that ethos is a fundamental component of the literary persona:

[La notion de posture littéraire] a une double dimension, en prise sur l’histoire et le langage : simultanément elle se donne comme une *conduite* et un *discours*. C’est d’une part la présentation de soi, les conduites publiques en situation littéraire (prix, discours, banquets, entretiens en public, etc.); d’autre part, l’image de soi donnée dans et par le discours, ce que la rhétorique nomme l’*ethos*. (Meizoz 2007, 21, italics in the original)

⁹⁸ Ruth Amossy (ed.). *Images de soi dans le discours. La construction de l’ethos*. (Paris : Nathan, 1999).

⁹⁹ Jérôme Meizoz. *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l’auteur*. (Geneva : Slatkine Érudition, 2004).

By projecting an image of him or herself, the author conditions, to a certain extent, the reception of the discourse being enunciated. Various rhetorical devices, described by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* and given new life by scholars such as Roland Barthes, Jean-Claude Ascombre and Oswald Ducrot,¹⁰⁰ contribute to the successful projection of the ethos: the pathos, or appeal to the addressee's (the reader's or the listener's) emotions, and the logos, or argumentation (Meizoz 2007, 22). The literary persona, or *posture*, that results, though it may be conditioned by an author's ethos, is nonetheless collectively fabricated in part by the readers, who absorb the discourse, react and judge those elements they are given to interpret (Meizoz 2007, 10). Foucault's concept of *author-function* also supports this theory when he claims that the very concept of "author" is in fact constructed in part by discourse and in part by those who receive the discourse:

[author-function] is not formed spontaneously through the simple attribution of a discourse to an individual. It results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author. Undoubtedly, this construction is assigned a "realistic" dimension as we speak of an individual's "profundity" or "creative" power, his intentions or the original inspiration manifested in the writing. Nevertheless, these aspects of the individual, which we designate as an author [...] are projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handling texts, in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice. (Foucault 126)

¹⁰⁰ Barthes, Roland. "L'ancienne rhétorique. Aide mémoire" in *Recherches rhétoriques*. (Paris : Seuil, 1994, first edition in *Communications*, 16, 1970); Anscombe, Jean-Claude; Ducrot, Oswald. *L'argumentation dans la langue*. (Liège: Mardaga, 1988).

Because a number of rhetorical strategies are widely exploited in David Solway's, Carmine Starnino's and Eric Ormsby's essays on Canadian poetry, as well as in interviews they have given, each one of them constructs a literary persona. The common elements in these poets' discourses also contribute to the creation of another persona, that of the Jubilate Circle as a cohesive group of individuals sharing a poetics. It is in fact around this poetics that the group revolves, and, coupled with the potential gains in social and cultural capital detailed in the previous chapter, is in fact what justifies the very existence of the network. The literary circle in itself equally provides a form of consecration for its members, conferring upon them an "aura" which supports, nurtures and articulates the individual personae that the poets develop. Walter Benjamin defines the aura as an impression left upon the reader when they are in the presence (although at some distance) of an original work of art, confirming the work's authenticity: "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (21). Another poet might imitate the form, the language, the style of the Jubilate poets, but the mere fact of "unbelonging" to the circle would render his or her poems inauthentic: it is this feature of the literary circle – though unseen – that makes up its aura. This notion is central, though rarely enunciated, in the Jubilate poets' discourse: they will dismiss the poems of the New Formalists as being inauthentic ("I have no sympathy for the "New Formalists," says Eric Ormsby, "who write villanelles to show that they can do so" [Starnino 2002, 206])¹⁰¹ and value instead the poetry and *persona* of Canadian poet Irving Layton, whose aura confirms his poems' authenticity (Solway, *Random Walks* 101).

¹⁰¹ Solway does, however, praise the work of Timothy Steele, a spokesperson of sorts for the New Formalists.

The self-image projected by these poets also extends to their peers, to those poets they choose to promote and support, and is in fact constructed in part by those they reject. It thus has significant bearing on their position within the Canadian literary field. Finally, these four poets will attempt to make sure their discourse is effective and credible by adopting a scholarly tone and by supporting their arguments with numerous academic references, proving that they are widely read, highly knowledgeable poets with a solid grasp of literary history, literary criticism, prosody and even linguistics, all of which goes to create a persona of intellectualism. Such intellectualism is also manifested by their rejection of the experimental and by their sustained discourse that poetry is not a democratic medium, one that can be practiced by all, but rather one that requires skill, knowledge and innate talent. All of these elements contribute to their collective ethos.

As Jérôme Meizoz notes, the description of an author's ethos is an essential part of any "sociopoetic" study, « en ce que cela permet de penser à la fois sa 'stratégie' dans le champ et ses options formelles, à savoir sa poétique propre » (Meizoz 2007, 16). By observing not only the content of Solway's, Ormsby's and Starnino's essays, but the strategies employed in enunciating their critical discourse, much can be revealed about their own poetics: "l'adoption (consciente ou non) d'une posture me semble constitutive de l'acte créateur. Une posture s'élabore solidairement à une poétique: elle est une façon de *donner le ton*" (Meizoz 2007, 32, italics in the original). Literary personae are not only indicators of the position an author or poet holds (or wishes to hold) within the literary field, they are also indicators of the discursive community or communities to which he or she belongs, and inextricable from his or her literary production. It is therefore relevant, in a study of a literary circle, to examine both the poetic

output *and* each member's discourse: can a common discourse and a precise poetics be identified? If so, what relationship can be established between the poetics and the poetry – are the poets consistent with themselves, that is, do they “practice what they preach,” providing the reader with keys to reading their own poetry, or is the purpose of the discourse, in which they claim a certain poetics, merely to establish their *prise de position* in an ongoing dialogue about the nature and quality of Canadian poetry?

In a study focusing on the symbolic and social capital to be gained by belonging to a certain literary network, the study of literary personae becomes particularly relevant as it provides insight into the motivations underlying the creation of a network: why would an author or poet associate him/herself with a given group rather than another? Doing so is, in fact, an effective way of acquiring the literary persona that will ensure (or lead to) the coveted position (marginal – that is, producing works in which symbolic value trumps economic value –, central, avant-garde) within the field in question (Amossy 2000, 67; Bourdieu 1991, 6). This aspect of the network, that is, the potential gains in social capital that the network confers upon its members, has already been examined. One also needs to juxtapose the adoption of a common poetics, supported by a common discourse. Both by power of association and because the old adage “strength in numbers” is also true in the literary field, banding together as a group is yet another strategy that confers authority and credibility. As Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, “les principes stylistiques et techniques sont prédisposés à devenir l’objet privilégié des prises de position et des oppositions entre les producteurs (ou leurs interprètes)” (Bourdieu, « Le marché des biens symboliques » 60). The identification of a discursive community and the creation of a network that both supports and promotes the discourse is simultaneously a

strategy that is consciously undertaken by these poets and also one that occurs naturally within the literary (or any other artistic) field.

Discourse and poetics are therefore intrinsically linked: in essence, a poetics is, more specifically, a type of literary discourse, one that sets the parameters of how readers ought to read, engage with and appreciate a certain corpus. In this case, the Jubilate poets provide a poetics for their own poetry. This poetics rests on principles of formalism, heightened language and cosmopolitanism, and takes to task poets who do not uphold the same aesthetic. The final two chapters of this dissertation thus seek to underscore how, within the Jubilate Circle, discourse and poetry work together. In his introduction to Todorov's *Introduction to Poetics*, Peter Brooks highlights the fact that "poetics must offer a systematic understanding of literary discourse as that which comprehends its individual manifestations, and it must understand in systematic fashion its own discourse on literature" (ix). Because the Jubilate Circle poets essentially enunciate and justify a poetics, the study of this poetics must be juxtaposed with some aspects of discourse analysis. Marc Angenot's studies over the past decades have largely contributed to the elaboration of a methodology of discourse analysis which will be applied throughout this chapter. In order to identify those elements of discourse that allow us to establish the author's persona, which, as Meizoz informs us, can be manifested consciously or unconsciously (Meizoz 2007, 20), Angenot¹⁰² states that one should "rechercher des invariants, des 'lieux communs', des dominances et des récurrences, de l'homogène et du régulé dans la diversité et cacophonie apparentes [...]" (parag. 8). In other words, each poet states and

¹⁰² Quotations from Angenot's article will not be referred to by page numbers, as no page numbers exist in this publication, but by paragraph number, identified for this paper within the publication itself. See note 30.

defends his own poetics; however, the common elements among the discourses enunciated by each poet allow us to draw out the poetics of the Jubilate Circle. Angenot also advises us to take note of the genre in which the discourse is enunciated, for one should not dissociate the content from its form, that is, “what is said” from “how it is being said” (parag. 11). Amossy, who focuses on the role of discourse in the production of an *argument*, speaks to this notion as well and states that “la notion de ‘genre’ suppose que dans chaque champ certaines formes sont accréditées, qui modèlent l’argumentation en lui offrant une distribution des rôles et une régulation” (Amossy 2000, 224). It is relevant to begin by noting that, in the hierarchy of genres, the essay is considered a nobler, more authoritative genre than the book review. The book review is frequently published in popular periodicals (newspapers, popular magazines) and serves a different purpose: while some reviewers merely politely comment on or summarize the content of the book, others are more polemical and their reviews are constructed using a rhetoric that is destined to spark the interest of the reader and either convince him or her of the book’s merit (or lack thereof), or entertain the reader with the critic’s colourful reactions. Moreover, it is an opportunity for the author of the review to assert his or her own credibility as a critic. The academic article, on the other hand, found in literary journals with a narrower readership, in collections of essays that are generally not read by the general population but by a specific group of readers who are equipped to recognize its codes and references (other authors, academics, specialists in the field in question, for example), will generally be written with a view to establishing its author’s authority in a given field and will rely on solid background research to support the arguments it contains. This type of text answers to defined rules as far as methodology and a theoretical grid are concerned. Finally, the essay, located

between the review and the article, consists of an in-depth study of a topic from a subjective, personal vantage point. David Solway's two collections, *Random Walks* (1997) and *Director's Cut* (2003), although very different in tone and content, consist essays published by McGill-Queen's University Press and by The Porcupine's Quill, the latter under the editorship of none other than John Metcalf. Eric Ormsby's *Facsimiles of Time* (2001), a collection of both literary essays and book reviews that are nonetheless written in a more scholarly tone, was equally published at the latter press. Finally, Carmine Starnino's collection of reviews, *A Lover's Quarrel* (2004), was also published at The Porcupine's Quill. The collection opens with a substantial essay, but it is followed by a series of book reviews and editorials pertaining to Canadian poetry. This publication therefore differs from those published by Solway and (later) by Ormsby, something Starnino justifies by heightening the symbolic role of the reviewer: "I believe that reviewing can very effectively carry out – albeit on a different front – criticism's august elucidatory and taste-correcting duties, and has every right to belong to the grander precincts of creative literature" (17). Starnino thus clearly – and ambitiously – attempts to raise the symbolic value of the book review by likening it to a short essay; nonetheless, the confined rhetoric of the book review remains. Moreover, several texts published within these collections of essays and/or reviews had been previously published in periodicals, ranging from daily newspapers (*The Gazette*, *The National Post*) to specialized trade publications such as *Books in Canada*. Publication in book form changes the author's projected readership as well as the reader's expectations because, as Wolfgang Iser notes, the "implied reader" has changed. The "implied reader," or the "textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him" (Iser, *The Act of Reading* 1976, qtd in Selden ed. 214), is in this case

partly determined by the paratext: publication in book form by a press renowned for scholarly essays, for example. However, it remains that the Jubilate Circle discourse is mainly enunciated in a series of essays or reviews, both subjective genres and as a result not institutionally sanctioned. This gives the poet-critics a certain freedom of expression, yet remains fairly poor in cultural and symbolic capital.

The following examples of the discourse upheld by the poets of the Jubilate Circle demonstrate how these poets construct a “discursive ethos” by which they establish their authority as speakers and condition their argumentative strategies (Amossy 2000, 84). In order to do so, the poets combine erudition and elitism in a number of discursive acts that take into account the effects that style, genre, registers of language and vocabulary bear on the act of enunciation.

Elements of the Jubilate Circle Discourse: The Creation of a Poetics

The Jubilate Circle’s Call for Heightened Language

A common thread running through the discourse held by the Jubilate Poets is the role of language in poetry, language that calls attention to itself, that is celebrated for its own sake, language that forms the core of the poem; in a sense, for the poets of the Jubilate Circle, language is “heightened” because the poem becomes a pretext to showcase the language rather than language being used as a tool to render an idea or a theme (this aspect of their prose writing has previously been shown to correspond to what Roman Jakobson has called the poetic function of language). Because of David Solway’s role as a senior member of the Jubilate Circle and, arguably, its most active spokesperson, who has published numerous collections of

essays as well as articles, reviews and interviews that all forcefully enunciate what will come to be the Jubilate Circle discourse, we begin with his first collection of essays, *Random Walks*, published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 1997. In this book, Solway presents, as the title suggests, a sampling of texts that are not particularly united by theme (other than that they are broadly literary).¹⁰³ They are instead a collection of reflections on the act of writing poetry and criticism, on the weight of words within poems, and on various aspects of the works and lives of writers such as Irving Layton, Franz Kafka and James Joyce, to name a few. The essays are scholarly in content and, as Ormsby points out in his foreword, written in "the most bravura fashion" (xvi). The central essay in this collection is arguably "The Word and the Stone," in which Solway first outlines the thesis that Starnino and Ormsby will later repeat, namely that the purpose of poetry is to deepen a reader's experience of the world through language. In one sentence Solway effectively sums up what we believe makes up the essence of the Jubilate Circle's discourse: "poetic language finds its central purpose in purifying the dialect of the tribe, renovating the medium not only to enhance and clarify our perception of the world but to purge and intensify our relationship with language itself" (*Random Walks* 51). Much contemporary English-language poetry, particularly Canadian poetry as Solway points out, "has by and large forfeited the power to move by its determined attempt to factor language out of the poetic equation" (54). As a counterpoint, Solway will effectively give us the key to reading

¹⁰³ In his Preface, Solway explains the collection's "randomness" as follows: "As I survey this collection of essays I am at a loss to find a simple unifying theme or a general subject that proceeds to unfold, whether concentrically or longitudinally. If there is unity, it would appear to be an emotional one: a certain animus alternating or mingling with a certain love. (...) [T]rapped in the midst of institutional constraints that are growing more and more wiredrawn and coercive, we have forgotten what it means to be intellectually free: to take random walks across the literary landscape, to choose one's directions in consulting a private, interior compass, to remain indifferent to what is current, fashionable, "correct," or scholastically dominant. And, most of all, to proceed with the sort of cognitive insouciance that pays no attention to any principle of unity that is not implicit." (xi)

poetry and to recognizing a “great poem,” that is, one that combines the musical powers of language and the force of a lived experience:

For the great poems inevitably participate in both dimensions of our experience, situated in language that is constantly recuperating itself as something unique, memorable, noble, opihcleidic, and resonating, and at the same time urging us outward towards the world in all its beauty and ugliness as something that demands our recognition and involvement. Great poetry is both *in language* and *in the world* simultaneously, dividing our attention into two complementary halves and then reuniting these halves stereoscopically or stereophonically so that our experience is one of depth or immersion. (52, italics in the original)

Solway’s argument that heightened language and lived experience must *be combined* in order to create a truly effective poem seems to recall T.S. Eliot’s concept of the “objective correlative,” something that Ormsby will refer to directly and comment upon at greater length in his own collection of essays, *Facsimiles of Time*. Let us examine Eliot’s words more closely:

The only way of expressing an emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in a sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. If writers etc. want to create an emotional reaction in the audience, they must find a combination of images, objects, or a description evoking the appropriate emotion. The source of the emotional reaction isn’t in one particular object, one particular image, or one particular word. Instead, the emotion originates in the *combination* of these phenomena when they appear together. (Eliot, 49).

Although Eliot does not refer to the role of language specifically with his “formula of [a] particular emotion,” this does in fact seem to be the interpretation that the Jubilate poets have

given to the American poet's concept of the "objective correlative." For them, language is not merely a vehicle that leads to the transmission of an idea: language is the idea itself, and through a judicious use of language the poet can conjure sounds, images and emotions that give the reader a new experience of the world.¹⁰⁴

Solway both illustrates his point and establishes his authority through his own use of language, one that borders on the opaque.¹⁰⁵ Commented upon (admiringly) by Eric Ormsby in his foreword to *Random Walks*, Solway's use of a rarefied language is a strategy most widely exploited within his prose: "only in Solway's work does one come across such *rara aves* as borborygm and sordine, anamorphoscopic and nisus, exantlation, lenticular, ipsissimosity, bregmatic, despumated and [...] ultracrepidarian" (xvii). The following example combines Solway's penchant for wordiness (what Sonja Skarstedt has referred to as "the 'too-muchness of the prose'" [qtd in Starnino 2001, *David Solway*, 14]) with a strategy mentioned earlier in this chapter, that is, the use of academic references to establish the speaker's (or the writer's) authority to uphold a given discourse:

Although today we speak of dehabitualization, 'ostranenie,' the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* or simply the A-effect, displacement, estrangement, and so on,

¹⁰⁴ Another famous Canadian poet, one already identified as a precursor of the Jubilate Circle, was equally influenced by the poetry and thought of T.S. Eliot: A.J.M. Smith. Indeed, in a book chapter entitled "Impersonality, Imitation and Influence: T.S. Eliot and A.J.M. Smith", Brian Trehearne states that "the relation of influence between T.S. Eliot and Canadian poet A.J.M. Smith (1902-1980) was one of the principal conduits of modernism's influx into Canadian literature in English between the wars. The influence has been widely recognized, not least by Smith himself" (195).

¹⁰⁵ David Barber, reviewing for the *National Post*, commented on Solway's use of language in *Random Walks*: "[...] these essays, written originally for academic or literary journals, are too often academic, and pedantically written. I consider myself fairly well-read, but such needlessly highfalutin words as cadastrally (having to do with land valuation), repristinate (to restore to original condition) and haruspicy (oy!) had me scurrying to my dictionary, sometimes the big OED with the magnifying glass." "It's not CanLit's job to 'glorify the tribe,' *National Post*, February 7, 2004, p. RB 08.

modern formalism has basically articulated a standard and venerable insight into the essential nature of the poetic transaction with the world in a renovated (i.e., critically defamiliarized) idiom that enables us to grasp an old truth with renewed vigour. (*Random Walks* 50)

This statement makes a claim for a heightened language that will allow the poem to convey its meaning and images, however commonplace they may be, in such a way that the reader's experience of these images will be one of rediscovery and enlightenment. Solway here openly adopts the poetics advocated by the Russian Formalists in the early 1920s, explicitly quoting Viktor Shklovsky's call for poets to "make the stone *stony*" (51). A closer reading of Shklovsky's essay entitled "Art as Technique" reveals that the Jubilate Circle's discourse on poetics does, in fact, revisit the Russian Formalists' idea of poetic language creating an effect of estrangement: "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important*" (Shklovsky qtd in Selden 274, italics in the original). Where David Solway, and by extension the Jubilate Circle, may differ from the theories of the Russian Formalists is in his application of Eliot's "objective correlative," according to which there is a clear relationship between language, form and content. As Terry Eagleton informs us, the Formalists, "far from seeing form as an expression of content, [...] stood the relationship on its head: content was an occasion or convenience for a particular kind of formal exercise" (3).¹⁰⁶ These thoughts on form can also be applied to the Jubilate Circle's thoughts on language, that is, poetry that is

¹⁰⁶ It should be noted that in my study of the poetry of the Jubilate Circle presented in the following chapter, I will in fact conclude that poems or collections – such as Solway's *Chess Pieces* for example – do precisely this: they provide the pretext for formal exercises.

conceived of as an exploration of all that language can do if one rejects the quotidian and organizes the idiom to create sounds, effects and images that surprise the reader and nourish his or her imagination.

Finally, Solway reiterates this point in an interview with Sonja Skarstedt (originally published in the little magazine *Zymergies* 1989 and republished in Carmine Starnino's *David Solway. Essays on His Works* in 2003) as well as in the *Andreas Karavis Companion*, the literary prank orchestrated by the Jubilate Circle under his leadership. Here Solway once again outlines his thoughts on what he feels is appropriate poetic language. Drawing upon the notions of *katharevousa* and *dhimotiki*, respectively the “‘high’ or pure and the common or ‘low’ linguistic levels” (*Andreas Karavis Companion* 59) of the Greek language, Solway notes how Andreas Karavis, i.e. his own alter ego, “defends the moral values of courage and language,” committing himself to “the *linguistic integrity* which enables us to articulate our condition in a medium that resists adulteration, that is, in a language that is not deployed as a form of self-deception and evasion but [...] that preserves the core of wakefulness in the midst of the dream life which deludes and enfeebles us” (*Companion* 59, italics in the original). As noted previously, Karavis’s embracing of the *katharevousa* is in fact Solway’s own. A poet that does not exploit all of the possibilities and excesses of a given language, or that consciously refuses to do so and opts instead for a layman’s vernacular, is guilty of *lèse-poésie*. Solway indeed tells Sonja Skarstedt that his time spent in Greece, where he became familiar with these two levels of language, was

a kind of university, [not] a university in terms of the study of Homer, or the classical language, but in terms of how one can bring different languages to bear upon the same

focused experience and see that these different languages are a way in fact of coming to terms with and even creating that experience. (Starnino 2001, *David Solway* 22)

Thus David Solway's discourse promotes a poetics that represents a constant and fruitful struggle (or rubbing) between lived experienced and a "properly laundered language" (Starnino 2001, *David Solway* 22).

Be it the result of mere mischievousness or the desire to provoke readers of Canadian poetry into renewing their dialogue with poetry and reviewing their reading habits (for let us not forget that Solway is also a pedagogue), David Solway inflames readers' sensibilities by lashing out at well-loved poets of the Canadian canon. A prime example of this is the article he published on the poetry of Al Purdy shortly after the latter's death in 2000,¹⁰⁷ precisely at a time when tributes to the poet were being penned by poets, novelists and critics all over Canada. Entitled "Standard Average Canadian," the essay highlights the qualities that made Purdy's poetry renowned throughout the country: verse written in the language of the common man, that is, everyday speech. This is precisely what Solway objects to:

What Purdy and the swelling Tribe of Al have failed to take into consideration is that poetry lives in language, not in list, incident or narrative effect – which is to say, in language that is structured, alert, robust, patterned and mettlesome, language that does not simply evaporate with reading, leaving only the subject behind. Language *is* the subject as much as the subject is itself. (*Director's Cut* 90)

If, as Marc Angenot suggests, we are to draw out the coherent, the homogenous and the repetitive from the apparent cacophony of discourse, it would again appear that Solway's own

¹⁰⁷ The article first appeared in *Canadian Notes and Queries* and was republished in Solway's 2003 collection of essays, *Director's Cut*.

particular use of language rises to the surface and that his critique of Purdy is merely a pretext. Solway's attack on such a central figure of Canadian poetry, published at this particular moment, was sure to draw attention.¹⁰⁸ Poetry, Solway says once again, does not belong to the common man. Although the inspiration, the themes or topics may be commonplace, the medium is not. With such a discourse, one that could be qualified as "elitist," Solway seems to both contest one canon (the canon of Canadian poetry, if one does indeed exist) and to claim his rightful place within another, broader canon, perhaps that of global English-language poetry. He accomplishes this by reengaging in a dialogue with the discourses of those he considers "masters" (Layton, Eliot, Shklovsky and others), renewing the discourse, making it contemporary and relevant, thus proving that he has not only dutifully studied certain masters, but that he has incorporated their teachings and pushed them further in order to renew the art of poetry all while staying in line with a greater, noble tradition.

Eric Ormsby will in turn take up this dialogue with other critics of poetry and reflect on the power and weight of poetic language. His first collection of essays, *Facsimiles of Time* (2001), published four years after Solway's *Random Walks* (1997) (and two years prior to his *Director's Cut* [2003]), will generally echo Solway's sentiments on the qualities that make good poetry. Like the essays in *Random Walks*, Ormsby's essays and reviews reveal that their author is widely read, a polyglot and an intellectual; unlike those that would appear two years later in *Director's Cut*, however, they are not provocative or controversial, but rather soft-spoken and

¹⁰⁸ And it did: critics have replied to Solway's intervention in print, some, as Wilfred Cude, favourable, while others, like Pat Donnelly, who, with some degree of outrage, asks "What should a self-respecting critic do with a book like *Director's Cut*? As I mentioned before, I do believe in recycling. That thud you just heard was Solway's unworthy pack of insults landing in my blue box." See Pat Donnelly, "A Cruel Cut at CanLit," *Times*, Victoria, B.C., January 25 2004, D10.

prudent. Ormsby chooses to open his collection with an essay on the art of poetry, “Poetry as Isotope” (reminiscent of Solway’s “The Word and the Stone,” although the latter does not open the collection). The essay’s subtitle, “The Hidden Life of Words,” and its epigraph in which Robert Pinget proposes that we should “jouer avec les mots” in order to reveal an unknown world that is nonetheless our own,¹⁰⁹ is perfectly in line with the discourse held earlier by David Solway, that is, that poetry, as the direct result of the poet’s use of language, has the power to make its readers rediscover their world, their reality, or emotions that they might have been taking for granted or seeing as commonplace. The epigraph also illustrates from the onset Ormsby’s primary concern in the art of writing verse: for Ormsby, poetry is a celebration of “the august witchery of language” (*Facsimiles* 7). The essay discusses the importance and the role of rhyme, a tool that can “complete a circuit of thought” (13), define and highlight units of meaning and provide a certain sense of closure (for, as the following chapter will explore in closer detail, the poets of the Jubilate Circle generally favour narrative poetry). The essay also illustrates the way effective similes and metaphors, through the various connotations they invoke, have a kind of transformative power that serves to multiply meanings and intensify the imaginative scope of a poem:

[P]oetry uses those common elements out of which all discourse is made, the very words in our mouths, the plain daily words we use all day every day, in such a manner that while they remain recognizable as words, as the words we know, they take on a heightened force and a power of evocation that sometimes appear uncanny. The art of writing poetry involves the act of placing one word next to another in such a way that a particular transformation occurs between them, which subtly changes them both and

¹⁰⁹ “Les mots ont une vie indépendante de notre raison. Jouer avec eux nous révèle un monde étranger qui pourtant est le nôtre. » (Robert Pinget, *Tâches d’encre*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1997.)

creates something new, some unexpected verbal energy, out of the juxtaposition itself.
(*Facsimiles* 15)

Here, contrary to Solway, Ormsby affirms that ordinary words, “plain daily words,” can in fact be the backbone of an effective poem, but that it is the way the poet uses them and creates unexpected associations that fleshes out the poems in order to move their reader. This is where Ormsby explicitly draws upon T.S. Eliot’s concept of the “objective correlative,” by which words will aurally enact an external reality: “In the aural replication of reality, the poem discovers not only that object in external reality which corresponds with the emotions evoked in the words of the poem – what T.S. Eliot famously called the ‘objective correlative’ – but it also re-enacts this reality in perceptible harmonies” (25). To illustrate this, Ormsby points out how passages from Shakespeare, Racine and Baudelaire make “the pressure of language and the pressure of reality coincide and become visibly aligned” (25). Language is therefore, in Ormsby’s view, the tool that allows readers to differentiate prose from poetry, for the medium of poetry is better suited to explore the idiomatic possibilities that underlie the English language.

Finally, Carmine Starnino’s “quarrel” with language manifests itself most clearly in the eponymous essay that opens his collection entitled *A Lover’s Quarrel* (2004) and in a short essay on the poetry of Canadian poet Christopher Dewdney, “Get Tay Fuck Ootma Road: The Avant-Garde’s Friendly Face,” in which Starnino challenges the widely accepted notion that avant-garde’s poetic experiments do not actually expose new linguistic resources but are rather a misguided attempt to camouflage a poet’s lack of knowledge and skill when it comes to the linguistic resources that the English language has to offer. Because the former is necessarily incidental to his discourse on Canadian poetry in general, and more particularly to his belief

that to write in English is to write using the entire linguistic wealth that this language represents (as opposed to trying to identify a specifically Canadian vernacular, as some poets advocate), this aspect of Starnino's discourse on poetic language will be discussed at greater length in the following section. However, it is worth noting that the essay "A Lover's Quarrel" does make a call for a use of the English language that displays "linguistic variety, [...] lexical zest and descriptive panache" (44). Starnino indeed allows for the fact that there exists a minority of Canadian poets who have not in fact forfeited poetic language but who have produced verse that is generally "more musically focused, more imaginatively surprising, more seriously motivated and more verbally memorable" (45). Such qualities are the direct result of careful lexical choices and juxtapositions and not dictated by the randomness of whim or by the somewhat artificial and sensationalist desire to represent the language of the nation or to be innovative or original.

The latter point is discussed at length in his review of the poetry of Christopher Dewdney and on the general view upheld by those he identifies as avant-garde poets that their iconoclastic approach to language and poetry will result in "radical versifying" (105) and in a revolutionary new poetic mode. Here Starnino takes Dewdney to task and notes that random juxtapositions of lexicons result in cryptic verse that, like pyrotechnics, are impressive but fleeting, leaving no trace of meaning or of structure in their wake. Lines such as "Air foetuses billowing like the desert night, their water-brains open enough for detail. Thought impulses and thunder my fingers water dispersing porous into the land [...]" (Dewdney, *The Natural History*, qtd in Starnino 2004, 107), foregoing narrative, metre, assonance and relying upon an accumulation and concurrence of images, is, for Starnino, a free-association technique that is

not conducive to the creation of poetry: “This pell-mell compositional buildup – feeding freely and imprudently on whatever pastoral detail and attention-grabbing vocabulary comes its way – results in a kind of enunciatory froth” (106). As a poet, Starnino has never hidden the sheer delight with which he encounters and utilizes rare words – the sixteen-poem sequence entitled “Cornage,” included in his 2000 collection *Credo* and which rediscovers the long-forgotten words of medieval English, is a perfect example. But as a critic he objects to a use of language that precludes meaning. Starnino reminds the reader of the importance of meaningful language in poetry by quoting philosopher Simon Blackburn: “[i]ntelligibility [...] is a precondition of truth. If you cannot tell whether a string of words says anything, you cannot tell whether it says anything true” (Blackburn 46, qtd in *Lover’s Quarrel* 109). Although he will openly and enthusiastically laud linguistic innovations, as he does in “A Lover’s Quarrel” when showcasing the originality of lines penned by Charlotte Hussey (lines such as “big bad wolfing whitecaps” to describe the turmoil of an angry sea), when reading Dewdney’s works Starnino laments that

[f]ar from capturing the churning, chaotic state of language at its most indeterminate, Dewdney is merely reproducing his favourite portrayal of indeterminacy. His sentences therefore fake the activity of innovation, because innovation, for Dewdney, is not a creative impulsion – an impatience, say, at the unexplored resources of language – but a party-platform obligation, an abstract activism. And this is the case with most experimental poetry where innovation tends to get programmatic because the language has to be predictably disruptive. (110)

In Dewdney’s poetry, as in the poetry of other poets who call themselves “experimental,” Starnino sees a desire to arbitrarily combine words in a conscious *but meaningless* rejection of prosody and narrative. The effect is not one of heightened perception (one that is achieved,

Starnino notes as an example, by Eric Ormsby's linguistic juxtapositions, such as referring to the "coal chiaroscuro" of a crow's feathers, thus adopting a linguistic strategy that is innovative in its "shocking aptness" [111]). Rather, Starnino sees in poetry such as that written by Dewdney "the interrupted coherence, the syntactical deferrals, the anarchy of registers [that] suggest an aroused aestheticism, a stimulated surfeit" (113). In sum, Starnino acknowledges that any good poet is consumed with the desire to push language to its limits, but that to do so arbitrarily, in a "circumlocutory cheapening of language" (110), with the desire to create superficial effects rather than new insights on the world being represented in the poem, is to effectively render it –and the poem – unintelligible and meaningless.

Interestingly, these three poets' discourse on poetic language is, in almost every case, inextricably linked to their critical outlook on Canadian poetry in particular. Indeed, they all note with varying degrees of indignation that Canadian poets are, perhaps more than those of any other nation, guilty of blatantly ignoring the very principles of poetic language that the Jubilate poets so forcefully advocate. Consequently, the Jubilate poets forcefully reject the "Canadian canon" of English-language poetry.

The Jubilate Circle's Discourse on Canadian poetry

In his essay entitled "The Flight From Canada," published in his 2003 collection *Director's Cut*, David Solway notes that as a direct result of its "quest for ancestors" (26),

Canadian poetry “is on the whole lamentably parochial and insular” (25).¹¹⁰ Canadian poets’ inward-looking gaze, their “search for [their] roots,” has had an insidious effect on the poetry being produced in the country, for it is inauthentic in its claims for belonging (Solway reminds readers that “the EskiMohawk and his legends are as foreign to us as Agamemnon and the House of Atreus” [26]) and distracts the poet from the greatest challenge of writing verse, that is, “simply to write well about anything and everything in what [he has] elsewhere called seraphic speech, in language that is charged with vitality and metaphoric power” (27-8). The use of poetry to build up a sense of patriotism and national pride is more a political tool than an artistic one, and as such should be rejected in bulk. In keeping with the Jubilate Circle’s discourse on language, Solway notes that Canadian poets should not strain to include Canadian themes (landscape, history, fauna and flora, etc.) but should strive instead to write poetry that denotes a love of language, and not a love of one’s country: “Canada, after all, is not Zion. [...] [A]s *poets*, as lovers of language, as privileged transgressors of the commonplace, we have more in common with ground-breaking figures like Blake and Spenser than with conservative placeholders like Carman and Sangster” (28, italics in the original). Solway’s discourse is one that openly rejects the Canadian canon as a body of works that consists of *models* of Canadian poetry and advocates instead, using lines that will later be echoed by his protégé Carmine

¹¹⁰ Such a discourse finds a parallel within the Québécois discourse on poetry held some thirty years earlier. Indeed, as Nicholas Giguère notes, although in the 1960s poets from the “Poètes du Jour” series, under the imprint of “les Éditions du Jour,” particularly André-Pierre Boucher, Jacques Godbout, Michèle Lalonde and Gilles Marsolais, « prônent une poésie engagée tant socialement que politiquement » (129), barely a decade later another group of poets, associated with the little mag *Les Herbes rouges* and publishing their early poetry in the “Poètes du Jour” series, would come to alter this discourse (139) and favour formalism in poetry. Such a change would be influenced, particularly in Claude Beausoleil’s case, by Hubert Aquin’s work, highly intellectual, focusing on language rather than on the message (143). As Giguère notes, this renewed focus on language and form (to be understood differently from its English definition of poetry in which elements of prosody are central) would evolve and change, coming to incorporate, among other things, “le discours des femmes” (152).

Starnino, “a sense of diction and form that links [Canadian poets] to the whole tradition of verse, certainly of English-language verse, from auroral times to the present” (29). In a previous essay published in *Random Walks*, Solway speaks admiringly of Irving Layton, one of the rare Canadian poets who, according to him, embodied this poetic vision and whose poetry successfully took into account and expanded upon the works of his literary predecessors to become a remarkable *oeuvre* in itself, one that could never be identified as Canadian:

‘Layton’ has incorporated and rewritten the seminal or initiating texts that go by the name of Blake, Nietzsche, and Lawrence, setting up as Counter-Sublime a self-constructed, legendary presence: the sonorous, oratorical voice, the clear, unCanadian elocution, the studied magnanimity of gaze and gesture clouded suddenly with prophetic fury and denunciation, the grandeur of phrase doubly conspicuous in common circumstance, the familiar citations from the illustrious dead, the calorific greeting and valedictory rodomontade, and the sense of apodictic assurance, of absolute lexical confidence, all of which go to make up his aura. (*Random Walks* 101)¹¹¹

Interestingly, Solway’s observations of Layton seem to echo this study’s observations of Solway’s own discourse as well as that of the Jubilate Circle itself, in that Layton’s “aura” (or persona) was, according to Solway, knowingly constructed by the poet through his unique use of language and through his rejection of a colloquial, “common-man” tone, syntax and/or vocabulary, opting instead for the persona of a marginalized and sometimes misunderstood, curmudgeonly intellectual.

Solway’s discourse builds upon a poetics advocated by his literary predecessors: the voice of A.J.M. Smith in particular, who argued in favour of a more cosmopolitan Canadian

¹¹¹ Layton’s name is placed in single quotation marks in this quoted because it is written as such in Solway’s *Random Walks*. Solway uses the quotation marks to distinguish Layton the individual and “Layton” the persona.

poetry, is easily recognized. In both tone and content, Smith's colourful admonitions in his "Rejected Preface" (first printed in *Canadian Literature* in 1965) seem to have influenced Solway's discourse on Canadian poetry: "The Canadian poet [...] is a half-baked, hyper-sensitive, poorly adjusted, and frequently neurotic individual that no one in his sense would trust to drive a car or light a furnace" (Smith, 7). David Solway's low opinion of what he presents as a generic image of a Canadian poet thus has a familiar ring:

If the stereotype "Canadian" is anything, he is a largely undifferentiated creature, historically in transit, stridently infatuated with the idea of landscape per se, busy assembling a ramshackle identity from mute, refractory materials, and turning his apparent humility before place and time into a subtle form of self-idolatry. (*Director's Cut* 27).

In this quotation, taken from the essay "The Flight from Canada," Solway seems to depict a poet who does not know himself, who is unfamiliar with his history and who constructs an identity by capitalizing on clichéd images now associated with Canadians. The result is, according to him, a sadly parochial and misguided attempt to promote Canadian nationalism. In fact, Solway deplores attempts to charge poetry with a political discourse or with an aim to consolidate a Canadian identity: "'Canadian content' as a local rallying cry, a political expedience, is a perfectly understandable phenomenon, but in poetry its influence is pretty well pernicious" (25). Nationalist or political poetry is fundamentally opposed, according to Solway, to the poet's imperative "to write well about anything and everything [...] in language that is charged with vitality and metamorphic power." However, it is interesting to note that nowhere in the essay entitled "The Flight from Canada" does Solway actually identify a poet or poem that actually sins against poetry in the manner he bemoans. Nor does the essay reveal to

its readers the author's impetus for writing it in the first place: what poetry did Solway read that motivated him to pen these words? Can it really be established that at the turn of the twenty-first century Canadian poets are really promoting a nationalist discourse within their verse? Because of this absence of justification, Solway's discourse rather seems to reveal the poet's desire to remain on the periphery of the Canadian poetry field. But to what end? When one recalls that prior to this essay's publication Solway had already published dozens of volumes of poetry, not one of which had received a nod of recognition on behalf of the juries of Canada's most prestigious institutional awards (the Governor General's award being chief among them), one can reasonably wonder if such a discourse might not be fuelled by some measure of resentment. On the other hand, receiving such an award or refusing to uphold such a discourse might be perceived by his peers as a form of "selling out." The *prise de position* or stance adopted by Solway may very well be one that rejects the mainstream (in this case the mainstream being, ironically, Canadian poetry and its most experimental practitioners, as the following section will demonstrate) and its (relatively) broader readership. Perhaps Solway prefers instead to write for the few readers who possess the codes (the cultural capital) to appreciate his poetry, a somewhat elitist stance, or persona, that would nonetheless be perfectly aligned with his discourse. Such a persona might also allow the poet to fulfill another ambition, that is, inclusion in a much broader canon alongside poets who are considered masters, a move that would lead to posterity and perhaps to his (and the poets of the Jubilate Circle's) future acknowledgement as master in his own right.

Eric Ormsby's discourse on Canadian poetry, although less forceful and less dominant than that of his friend, nonetheless expresses similar sentiments. In his foreword to Solway's

Random Walks, Ormsby states that Solway's "profound reverence for language and literature [...] is, sadly, unique in Canadian letters" (xx), adding that the Canadian context is one that is "too limited [...] to judge his achievement for he is a thinker and a writer of international scope and import. He is the least parochial, the least regional, of Canadian writers" (xx). This passage has the double effect of reinforcing the Jubilate discourse that Canadian poetry is, in fact, overly parochial (an aspect Starnino will develop at length in his essay "A Lover's Quarrel") and of providing support for a fellow Jubilate poet, which, as we have established in Chapter 2, is one of the dominant characteristics of this network. Ormsby will relate in more detail his perception of Canadian poetry in an interview given to Carmine Starnino. Upon discovering, in the *Contemporary Canadian Poem Anthology* (1998), the works of Patrick Lane and Lorna Crozier, Ormsby states that the verse left him wholly unimpressed: "The constant muting of the voice, the smug understatements, the obsessive use of the plain unadorned phrase, was unappealing. It seemed as though most Canadian poets were refugees from some American poetic movement of the fifties" (Starnino 2002, 210). Ormsby does acknowledge, however, that poets such as Irving Layton, E.J. Pratt and Québécois poets Robert Melançon, Gaston Miron, and St-Denys Garneau had made a highly favourable impression. Interestingly, of the Québécois poets in particular Ormsby notes that they have capitalized on their "access to a larger poetic tradition" (211), embodying the very claim made by David Solway in "The Flight from Canada" and later reiterated by Carmine Starnino in "A Lover's Quarrel." He also notes that "the writers who are usually held up as typical of Canadian poetry fail to do justice to what poetry might be, both in manner and content" (211). In an almost exact echo of David Solway's admonition that poetry should never be a vehicle for national propaganda, Ormsby tells Starnino that

too much Canadian poetry focuses on matters inimical to poetry and which diminish it as art. Inserting irrelevant political messages, for example, [...] or self-censorship in conformity with political correctness. That, I'm afraid, is what appears too frequently in the average Canadian literary journal: carefully monitored verse with no element of surprise or of audacity (212)

Interestingly, Ormsby makes a similar claim for American poetry (after admitting to Starnino that he neither feels wholly a part of the Canadian literary scene nor of the American one, in which he no longer "seem[s] to fit" [205]). American poets, according to Ormsby, in their overarching search for an American "voice," have largely rejected other models of English-language poetry, namely (but not exclusively) British ones, in such a way that "the notion of 'voice' has imposed itself in fact to the point of eccentricity" (211). Instead of writing of (or for) a particular nation, Ormsby has openly stated that he writes poetry infused, through his use of language, with a sense of the sacramental: "words vibrating over many octaves and possessing transformative power" (200). One can therefore summarize Eric Ormsby's particular discourse on Canadian poetry by saying that Canadian poets have generally failed in their use of language to produce a body of poetry that is surprising, moving and enlightening, and that those who have used poetry to express ideology of any kind have effectively side-stepped what poetry really ought to be, that is, an exploration of all the linguistic and formal possibilities underlying the English language.

Finally, Carmine Starnino seems to have followed in the footsteps of his mentors: he opens his own collection of essays and reviews with a lengthy essay in which he clearly outlines his discourse on poetry, particularly (arguably more so than Solway and Ormsby have done before him) on Canadian poetry. More forcefully than Solway, Starnino openly rejects the

canon of Canadian poetry as it stood, in his perception, at the time of publishing (2004). The reviews that follow within the collection support this thesis and provide illustrations both of that which is being rejected and, to a lesser extent, that which is being applauded.

In the sixty-page essay that opens *A Lover's Quarrel*, Starnino seeks to show that colonialism has bred in Canadian poets a feeling of inferiority and intimidation when faced with the global English-speaking literary tradition. As a counter-measure to colonialism, Starnino notes that Canadian poets have promoted instead not only a nationalist discourse but a nationalist aesthetic, one that prescribes themes, images and a certain language for what would be the ultimate "Canadian poem":

What we've been told – and now believe instinctively – is that to be baptized 'Canadian' a poem must trawl the country for content: its history, its values, its geography, its seasons, its people. [...] Such a project, however, seems to have quarantined our independent thinking. It has nurtured a generation of intimidated readers who fear too much self-consciousness, who are too cowed to probe accepted attitudes (attitudes they are told are inarguable in their rightness) and who therefore don't fathom Canadian characteristics so much as invoke them as spells. (41)

Where Starnino strays from the path previously laid out by Solway and Ormsby is in this indirect condemnation of an enduring garrison mentality,¹¹² that is, an inward-looking group of poets who are so preoccupied with observing themselves and identifying themselves as Canadian that

¹¹² Phrase coined by Canadian critic Northrop Frye to describe Canada's literary imagination: "Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological "frontier," separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together [...] are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality" (*The Bush Garden* 227).

they remain blind to the productions of the “outside” and are especially wary of any judgement coming from non-Canadian sources:

We [Canadian poets] define colonialism, for example, as any viewpoint that forsakes Canadian tradition, belittles Canadian achievement, and stymies Canadian artists from moving beyond the bounds of foreign trends into new, nativist idioms. But it seems to me that our refusal to accept that the ‘real’ critical methods are only those fashioned elsewhere – while honourable – has fatally blinded us to the possibility that those methods are indeed a more effective means of discovering and discussing the best of what we’ve produced. (46)

Here Starnino seems to be stating that Canadian poets – and Canadian critics – lack the necessary distance and objectivity to fairly and accurately evaluate their own work. So preoccupied are they, according to Starnino, with their national identity, this aspect easily trumps aesthetic criteria in determining what makes a good poem. Once again Smith’s “native vs. cosmopolitan” argument (obviously in favour of cosmopolitanism) seems to resurface. Starnino contests the presence of nationalism in poetry by arguing that in fact “one consolidates a national literary culture by writing to world standards” (47). Such an argument, however, is clearly insufficient for discussing a poetic aesthetic, for nothing is more difficult to define than the expression “world standards”. Nonetheless, Starnino believes that Canadians are not sufficiently objective to evaluate their own poetry and that anthologies of Canadian poetry edited by Canadians might be just another manifestation of Canadians’ propensity for an

inward-looking attitude to literature.¹¹³ An external reader of poetry might be better qualified to identify those Canadian poems worth anthologizing:

We need foreign editors willing to publish influential, representative anthologies of our poetry much like John Leonard's *Contemporary Australian Poetry*, released in 1991 by Houghton Mifflin, and Vincent Buckley's *Faber Book of Modern Australian Verse*. As long as we are on the wrong side of publishing practices the world's perception of Canadian poetry is bound to be a distorted one. (40)

When arguing in favour of cosmopolitanism, Starnino rejects a canon that rewards Canadian content without paying special attention to language, particularly to what he judges to be a poetic use of language. The desire to be exclusively Canadian, to "[find] our own voice – not a borrowed or derivative accent" (46) says Starnino, obliquely referring to Dennis Lee's essay entitled "Cadence, Country and Silence" (a text he refers to explicitly later in his essay) is to write using only a fraction of the resources the poet possesses: "[t]he activity of writing in English binds us inescapably to the legacy of English poetry, a legacy that stretches as far back as Chaucer and *Beowulf*. Canadian poetry's great failure is its decision not to take this debt seriously" (52). It is, in a sense, the classical return of the pendulum: after a period in which the language of the "common man" (what Solway had referred to as "Purdyism") is celebrated (a form of "low art"), the dichotomy is completed with a renewed call for a heightened language (or "high art"). This is where Starnino's discourse catches up once again with that upheld by his predecessors. He laments Canadian poetry's poor reception globally and the exclusion of any Canadian poem in the 1998 anthology *World Poetry: An Anthology of Verse from Antiquity to*

¹¹³ Starnino will nevertheless edit and publish *under his own imprint*, Signal Editions, an anthology of Canadian poetry entitled *The New Canon* (Signal, 2005). Moreover, an important contradiction should be underscored: as critics, the poets of the Jubilate Circle do exactly what Starnino admonishes, that is, provide critical commentaries on Canadian poetry.

our Time. As a result, he concludes that Canadian poetry is, in fact, “an utterly unwanted article of trade” [34] and that Canadians are “by and large, the only ones who care about the stuff” [34]). A possible remedy to this situation would be, in his opinion, a greater attention paid to form and to the use of poetic language: “Canadian poetry will never represent itself as a body of any literary distinction until it acknowledges that to read a poem is to read it aesthetically” (42). However, Starnino does take care to note that there *are*, in fact, some Canadian poets that go or have gone against this trend and that indeed represent what Canadian poetry really ought to be. As he demonstrates in his discussion of the narrative and epic poetry of E.J. Pratt, particularly of *The Cachalot*, it is language that makes a poem leap from the page, not content. Significantly, although Starnino has so emphatically rejected the call for Canadian content in poetry, he does not fail to notice how even those themes typically associated with Canadian geography, history and culture (themes widely exploited by Pratt) can in fact sometimes translate into effective poetry, if only the poet possesses the skill and instinct to properly craft the language into verse. It may appear as though he were contradicting himself, but he is careful to note, effectively rebutting critics who might point this out, that “poems are not creatively appraisable in terms of national identity or cultural philosophy; they are, instead, a phenomenon of language, and should be reckoned with accordingly” (54). Somewhat combining the stances upheld by Solway and Ormsby, Starnino neither argues in favour of a rarefied language or of a happy combination of everyday words that gives rise to unexpected images or emotions, but promotes instead poetry that is “more musically focused, more imaginatively surprising, more seriously motivated and more verbally memorable [...] placing its

poetics front and centre, shaking off the trappings of culture so as to batten all the more scrupulously on the stylistic aspects that give the work its unique tendencies” (45).

Starnino’s discourse does not differ significantly from Ormsby’s or Solway’s other than that he, perhaps more than his two mentors, focuses more specifically on *Canadian poetry*, an aspect that had been important although not necessarily central to the latter’s discourse. Starnino is in fact the only one to give a name to this aspect of Canadian poetry first condemned by Solway and echoed, to a different extent, by Ormsby: that is, nationalism, one that is in reaction to an early colonialism. It is a subject he has researched thoroughly, and he does not fail to mention the contributions made and stances adopted by Canadian poets who have dedicated themselves to this issue, namely (but not exclusively) Octave Crémazie, A.J.M. Smith, John Sutherland, and later, Robin Mathews and Dennis Lee. One reasonably wonders why, in 2004, Starnino chooses to revive this debate, not only echoing Solway but pushing the argument much further. In the mid-forties to mid-fifties, the influence of American poetry movements was strongly being felt, and poets like Robert Creeley, *Origin* magazine editor Cid Corman and William Carlos Williams were being discovered with great interest by some and with some wariness by others in Canada. Later, American politics, particularly the United States’ involvement in Vietnam, became a subject of great interest in Canada and marked a national discourse in which Canadians sought to demonstrate that they were *not*, should anyone have such an illusion, Americans, nor were they by-products of American mass culture (see Dennis Lee’s “Cadence, Country and Silence” for an example of one poet’s elaborate discussion of this particular aspect). In the early twenty-first century, it could be argued that this desire on the part of Canadians to differentiate themselves from their southern neighbours was revived

partly as a result of the September 11 terrorist attacks and the Americans' invasion of Iraq, although such a contemporary political discourse is utterly absent from Starnino's essays and should be rejected as a possible source for tabling once again the question of nationalism in Canadian literature. Rather, the essay "A Lover's Quarrel" seems to support the discourse on poetry that Starnino will enunciate through the reviews that will follow and should be read as an essay on *poetics*. Starnino claims that Canadian nationalism cannot in itself be the basis of a poetic aesthetic, for the purpose of poetry is not to claim or support a national identity but rather to create aural effects that are independent of any political, social or cultural motivation, in other words that are a form of *art for art's sake*. And indeed, the reviews contained in the book will generally applaud those poets who seem to adhere to these principles and be strongly critical of poets who seem to forego form, whose language is, in his opinion, bland and inarticulate and whose poetry has, again in his view, no particularly distinctive features other than its vertical layout on a page. His essay on the bane of Canadian poetry, that is, its nationalist overtones, merely provides a scholarly support for his enunciation of a poetics, one that rests largely on the formal qualities of poetry.

The Formalist Aesthetic of the Jubilate Circle

If the rejection of the Canadian poetry canon is one of the predominant features of the Jubilate Circle discourse, its views on form in poetry is certainly another. In fact, these two aspects are often juxtaposed and difficult to extricate from one another in order to study them separately. Nonetheless, all three poets under study in this chapter have devoted essays to this

very question and have enunciated a discourse on formalism in poetry that is in fact so coherent that it can be said to form the very poetics around which this group revolves.

The first poet to have held such a discourse is David Solway, who included in his *Random Walks* an essay on contemporary poets' rejection of form. In the essay entitled "The End of Poetry," Solway states that the conventions of formal poetry are considered irrelevant by the current generation of active poets and that instead today's poetry must reflect the chaos of the modern world. According to today's poets, says Solway, to structure verse according to formal constraints is to limit its possibilities of expression and thus be doomed to inauthenticity. He points out, however, that there is a certain irony to the fact that in order to stay "true" to the world they are trying to present, contemporary poets glean their subjects and create new forms out of materials extracted from the concrete world ("found poems" in a sense). Hence, form, once considered artifice, has been replaced by something just as artificial. Solway argues instead that form and prosody can, in fact, more effectively communicate meaning and actually *compensate* for the chaos of the real world:

[...] does not a poetry that *resists* its time, opposing lucidity to obscurity, order to chaos, sense to senselessness, by that very token indirectly or elliptically participate in its time, if only through the medium of a problematic recognition? [...] May not rhyme, let us say, constitute a plea for harmony and not an atavistic ineptitude? May not the very existence of, if not metre, then a discernible cadence suggest the need for internal continuity and psychic momentum rather than the ineffectual hope of dim Arcadian symmetries? In short, may there not be historical periods in which poetry, if it wishes to survive, is compelled to live *in partibus infidelium*, carrying on a sort of guerrilla warfare against the pervasive assumptions and dominant "realities" of the day? (*Random Walks* 40)

Solway laments the disappearance of form in today's poetry: "[p]oetic conventions are passé: rhyme is obsolete [...]; metre is infantile, and even stress-count is a throwback to Anglo-Saxon artlessness" (42) and that according to "the prevailing dogma" formal poetry is doomed to be frowned upon by the canon-makers: "[a] poetry that honours the canons and attitudes of its masonic past, reveres the illustrious predecessor, recognizes degree and precedence, and deploys a complex, formally appropriate, and distinctively memorable language is dismissed as either hieratic snobbishness or creative senility" (42). The essay in its entirety is an example of pathos as an argumentative strategy, one that does not accuse contemporary poets of "killing" poetry (as its title "The End of Poetry" might suggest) but rather presenting this as a *fait accompli*, casting a nostalgic gaze on what poetry once was. The lexical juxtapositions ("illustrious predecessor," "formally appropriate," "distinctively memorable" as opposed to "technical vacuum left by the extinction of conventional form," "prosaic or documentary prototypes" [43], "novelistic parallax" [44]) lead the reader to adopt the author's position. The absence of any example of the contemporary verse that is responsible for the alleged "end of poetry," however, as well as the absence of scholarly references (this is indeed one of the few essays in the collection that is not scholarly in form or intent, though it is in tone) are nonetheless signs of a subjective discourse, a *prise de position* by which Solway, in a somewhat roundabout but effective manner, defends and justifies his own poetics.

In an essay entitled "Pliny's Villa" included in his second collection, *Director's Cut*, Solway once again takes up the battle in favour of form over free verse, the latter being, in his opinion, synonymous with contemporary poetry (79). He will repeat the argument brought forth in the essay "The End of Poetry" when he states that "the forms, modes, attitudes and

assumptions associated with the poetry of the past are judged inadequate to the task of expressing or surviving the horror and complexity of the present” (80) and will challenge the assumption that free verse, coupled with “street talk, uncensored expletives, slum currency, phatic utterance” (81) allows for a closer and more faithful rendering of the Truth than does form. The poets who still persist in writing formal poetry – Michael Harris and Eric Ormsby being identified as members of this elite though somewhat untrendy group, along with James Merrill, Philip Larkin, Seamus Heaney and Geoffrey Hill¹¹⁴ – represent “a modicum of hope for the intermittent survival of craft, competence and corpus in what was once honoured as the *discipline* of poetry” (82-3). This essay, more openly aggressive towards “free-versists” and not as pathetic (that is, relying on pathos) as the previous, is an opportunity for Solway to claim his poetics (and that of his peers) and identify his adversaries by name or by school and to attack the type of verse they create: the “democratic poetry” of Williams and Cummings, the Beats, language poetry, performance poetry (“a kind of second-rate hip hop living only by audacity [80]) and what he dubs to be “deconstruction,” that is, “a fashionable poem [...] that deconstructs itself, leaving the reader to wonder why it bothered to get itself constructed in the first place” (80). Such movements, according to Solway, are a distraction from what the poetry these individuals produce is *not*: a carefully and skilfully crafted work of art. Solway indeed dismisses a “democratic” sense of poetry by suggesting that not everyone is qualified to write poetry and to bear the name “poet.” The mastery of form, as well as the ability to effectively

¹¹⁴ James Merrill (American poet, 1926-1995), Philip Larkin (British poet, 1922-1985), Seamus Heaney (Irish poet, 1939-), Geoffrey Hill (British poet, 1932-) are renowned twentieth-century poets that David Solway, Carmine Starnino and Eric Ormsby have spoken of in admiring terms (Solway in the quote cited above; Starnino, when speaking, interestingly of the relationship between poetry and language, to the “fraternal pact between idiom and perception” refers to Heaney’s concept of “total adequacy” (Starnino 2004, 161); Ormsby has called Geoffrey Hill “the finest poet now writing in the English language” (Ormsby, *Facsimiles*, 99).

break form when appropriate, is a skill acquired as a result of intensive labour, thus allowing him to speak of a “good poem,” “a genuine poem,” “a finished poem,” (83) and of the “*true* poets of the past” (82, italics in the original). The assumption that free-verse leads to Truth is therefore, for Solway, a non sequitur: “it is only in virtue of such formal elaboration that the presumably nonuniform may generate meaning and pleasure in the first place. In genuine poetry, the spontaneous is always an *effect*, not a condition of authenticity. The natural is a function of artifice and what we read as improvisation is carefully worked into the fabric of the poem” (83). His contempt of contemporary poets (though none are named in this particular essay, Solway refers to “*language poetry*” (80, italics in the original) and deconstructionism – or of those, such as William Carlos Williams, e. e. cummings, the Beats, etc., of the recent past – and admiration for the “masters” (Solway names Dante Alighieri, John Milton, William Butler Yeats, Alexander Alexandrovich Blok, Federico Garcia Lorca, Eugenio Montale, Yehuda Amichai and Czeslaw Milosz¹¹⁵, poets who, in his consideration “were all engaged in *important projects*” [82, italics in the original]) contribute to the creation of a persona: as a poet, Solway represents himself as a member of the *vieille garde* who claims as his canon – the canon he both acknowledges and aspires to – those consecrated poets of the English- and foreign-language traditions.

In essence, Eric Ormsby combines Solway’s initial discussion of language and form and states that the latter is the only way, according to him, that a poet can juxtapose skill and perception and replicate patterns, repetitions and designs found in Man and Nature: “Form is

¹¹⁵ Of these renowned literary figures, Solway says they are “*true* poets of the past [who] were moved by the grandeur of their themes and the seriousness of their labour.” (Solway 2003, 82, italics in the original)

the result of the aural replication of reality; the discovery of pattern in experience; the resurrection of a past moment in an indissoluble shape; the conjunction of formal skill and disciplined perception into a coherent unity" (*Facsimiles* 27). Here Ormsby argues in favour of poems that are consciously structured in such a way that they reproduce the *melody* of a lived experience, making it at once moving and familiar, using all of the poetic tools (syntax, figures of speech, rhyme, stresses, etc.) the poet possesses in order to create "speech reified, speech made as real, as concrete, as dense with implication as things are themselves, while at the same time remaining crystalline in transparency" (27). It is according to these principles that he will laud David Solway's *Bedrock* but remain critical of Roo Borson's collection of verse entitled *Water Memory* (1996).

In "The Magic of Happenstance," a review of Roo Borson's latest poetry collection, Ormsby shows himself to be a tactful critic, opening with the poet's strengths: "A characteristic Borson poem is at once bright but diffuse. The voice, oddly subliminal, comes from that fleeting sphere where reverie just breaks the surface before vanishing. Perhaps Roo Borson's most engaging quality as a poet is this attention, this fidelity, to her inner voice" (*Facsimiles* 123). He will then show, however, that the "uncommon stasis" (123) that characterizes Borson's verse is, in fact, the result of a lack of attention paid to language and form. While acknowledging, as shown above, Borson's ability to remain faithful to the difficult language of fleeting thoughts, he also notes that the poetry tends to suffer from a "chirpy twittering" that "often sinks into sheer garrulity" (125) and that her prose poems in particular encourage "Borson's chatty side – a large side, unfortunately" (125). The randomness of experience would be better served, according to the critic, by a more structured and patterned organization; the jubilant outlook of

the poet would not be condemned to “chirpy twittering” if she selected metaphors that would give her work coherence rather than distract and confuse her readers:

All too often, we feel that one line follows another, not because it must, but simply because it occurred to the poet that way. At such moments we wish the poet would resist her own impulses more, would oppose form and pattern to happenstance, would not merely succumb to the inconsequential pulses of her own indiscriminate inspiration, but would *shape* and *order* a poem. (127, italics in the original)

However, in his discussions of poems within the collection that actually succeed in captivating the reader, Ormsby highlights the fact that “the poet’s language has collided with the impenetrable surface of a world and has rebounded with new resilience and vividness” (128), demonstrating how an effective use of language can result in a sensory experience, can make the text rise from the page and “[interest] the mouth and ear” (128): the words, the sounds and the structure indeed work together to create a sum that is greater than its parts, as Eliot’s “objective correlative” prescribes, to give rise to an emotion that was precisely calculated by the poet. And although the “objective correlative” is not a common denominator in the discourse held by all of the Jubilate Circle poets, its principles are always echoed and enthusiastically adhered to by all.

This, as well as Ormsby’s appreciation of the formal qualities of poems, will justify his praise of David Solway’s *Bedrock* (1993). Although it has been stated earlier that the inclusion of this essay, first published in Carmine Starnino’s *David Solway. Essays on His Works* (2001), could be read as a manifestation of the support given to members of the Jubilate Circle by other members, the review is nonetheless one that offers insightful and illuminating

interpretations of the poems in the collection. It also represents an act of enunciation of Ormsby's (and indeed, of the Jubilate poets') discourse. In this review, Ormsby will break down some of Solway's poems for the reader, pointing out their metrical qualities (such as the alternating iambs and trochees in the quatrains of the title poem [104]) and highlighting the rhythmical and phonetic leitmotifs in each of the book's sections. He quotes the poems extensively in order to allow the reader to grasp features of English versification, features he masters just as well as Solway does (as in "Solway introduces a sneaky anapest capped by a trochee before he glides, like some prosodic surfer, into the tipsy dactyl and spondee of 'flutter of wings'" [105]). Ormsby's discourse on poetry, language and form emerges through such interventions. According to him, poetry is not a thing of whims, a string of words or images placed in stanzaic form, but is rather a carefully planned enunciation that takes into account stressed and unstressed syllables, rhymes and patterns in such a way that the meaning of the poem transcends not only through its words but also through its sounds. It is not enough to write formal poetry merely for form's sake; rather, a poet's true ability to write formal poetry is almost innate, instinctual:

Poetic meters are the measures of the imagination and become instinctual only after long discipline; they are the pulse beats of the poem; they quicken or lag as the tone of each stanza alters. This is not simply a matter of skill. [...] The various elements of skill – metre, rhyme, stanzaic shape, metaphor – work together here not to mute the 'madness of the Muses,' but to render it fluently communicable. (106)

Here the discourse aligns with that of David Solway in a sense, for Ormsby claims that a competent poet must be familiar with the forms that exist so that he can use them at will, and he must possess an inner ear that will allow him to recognize not only which form is

appropriate for which poem but also, as he underscores in his discussion of Solway's poem, how to modify the form by varying its stresses at appropriate moments ("a sneaky anapest capped by a trochee") in order to create a desired effect that is not independent from the words in the poem but that rather supports them and enhances their meaning. This is exactly what he prescribes for Roo Borson's poetry when he speaks of shaping and ordering a poem. It is also how he ties in Eliot's concept of the "objective correlative" within his own discussions of poetry. A poet must indeed combine many strategies in order to create an effective poem: appropriate and resonating language, a mastery of forms and an almost instinctive ability to modify such forms, or even to invent new forms, so as to better serve the poem. All of this makes the art of writing poetry a very difficult one to master, one that requires both erudition and instinct. And this, though never stated directly by Ormsby (although it was made explicit by Solway and will later be repeated, as we will soon see, by Starnino), makes up the basis of the Jubilate Circle itself, a very exclusive group in which only those rare individuals with such a combination of talents are admitted. Finally, Eric Ormsby's discourse on poetry is also enunciated within the essays on translation contained in *Facsimiles of Time*, as a backdrop to his discussion of the translations and of their original works. Consider the following examples: of Borges' essays, Ormsby states that "the sentences seem so replete with thought and feeling in equal measure that they brim to the very edge of utterance" (165); of Jonathan Galassi's translations of Eugenio Montale's poetry, Ormsby humorously states that "Galassi's dragomantic halo slips only when he fails to renounce the blandishments of some opportunistic rhyme that offers itself, like a floozie at a truckstop, purely in passing" (175)¹¹⁶; finally, when

¹¹⁶ Although this passage discusses the translation of a poem rather than the original version, the commentary on

discussing the difficulties inherent to translating a poet such as Umberto Saba, Ormsby laments that “[w]e live in an age when most of our poets, to judge from their productions, disdain melody. For this reason, if nothing else, Saba’s ideal translator would perhaps be a lyricist” (188). The praise and/or criticism he gives to translators largely rest on his own perception of the art of writing skilful and effective poetry.

Michael Harris has been far less vocal about his poetic aesthetic, his views on Canadian poetry and on his perception of poetic language. Nonetheless, in his interview with David Solway published in *Books in Canada*, his friend and acolyte steers the questions in such a way that a discourse – one that is indeed perfectly aligned with the Jubilate Circle’s discourse on poetry – does in fact emerge. Because such instances of enunciation on Michael Harris’s part are so rare, his answer to David Solway’s prompt about having passed the Signal Editions torch to Carmine Starnino and having taken on “a kind of emeritus role as an informal literary ambassador to other countries” is worth quoting in full:

Canadian poetry needs to be exposed to the rigours of the international marketplace. As in any other enterprise, the highest levels of competition produce the most excellent results. We should be vying with Faber, Cape, Farrar Strauss, Norton – the best poetry presses in the English-speaking world – to produce books from poets of international interest, whether these poets come from Hong Kong, Melbourne or anywhere in this country. Funding agencies like Canada Council have done much to promote the creation of poetry in this country. I liken the effort to paying the kids’ way through school. At a

the use of language and prosody remains relevant, for Ormsby notes that a poor command of these two important features of poetry can lead to an inadequate translation that does not render the complexity of the original poem.

certain point, one has to move into the 'real' world – and compete at that level without the net, the many nets, of internecine reviewing, “agenda-d” hiring in the Academy, nationalistically-oriented subsidization. Any democracy of funding overlooks the fact that a certain city might not have produced a decent poet in decades – but the bucks still roll in, the books see the light of print, the poets get their grants, the University hires the Creative Writers and their students form the Editorial Boards. How to judge whether any city has produced a poet? Check the anthologies fifty years from now. (Solway 2001, “A Brilliant Career”)

Here Michael Harris blames funding agencies such as Canada Council (a funding agency without which, it should be said, Signal Editions could not exist) for subsidizing presses along nationalistic standards – that is, presses must publish a certain number of Canadian poets each year – or other local funding agencies requiring that the press publish a minimum of local poets. Such a system does in fact allow presses to exist in an era where the market is dominated by corporations and multinational publishing enterprises, a fact that Harris readily acknowledges, but it also cripples small presses by limiting their sources of poets to the local, thus losing the opportunity of choosing quality over geography. Significantly, Harris also points a finger at the posse of “cousinly critics,” to quote from the book jacket of Solway’s *Director’s Cut*, as, ironically, a network of self-supporting critics who tend to stifle high quality poetic output rather than encourage it. Notwithstanding the fact that he himself is indeed part of such a network, as this dissertation has striven to show, Harris accuses the Creative Writing departments of various Canadian universities of a certain incestuousness that leads, in his opinion, to the proliferation of mediocre poetry. Nevertheless, one can perceive in Harris’s

discourse the same cosmopolitan stance adopted by his fellow Jubilate poets, one that is not provoked by the presence of Canadian themes in poetry but rather by the limitations imposed by Canadian funding agencies, a discourse he is well-positioned to hold, having edited Canadian poetry for nearly twenty years, as the interview underscores.

Carmine Starnino holds a very similar discourse, elements of which can be gleaned from the introductory essay in *A Lover's Quarrel* as well as in some of the reviews contained in the collection and in the introductory essay to the anthology entitled *The New Canon*, which he edited and published with his own Signal Editions in 2005. Here too the discourse revolves around the now-familiar themes of drawing upon a poetic tradition established by masters (as opposed to drawing inspiration from the aesthetic of the members of the Canadian canon), of seeing the artifice of prosody as a way to condense and control imagery, emotion and meaning and of viewing the ability to create such artifice, that is, to write in form, as both a skill acquired from a life-time of study and, in a somewhat contradictory manner, as something innate, an "ear" for the musicality of the English-language that very few individuals possess. For him, authentic poetry is one that displays "*aesthetic accomplishment*" (*A Lover's Quarrel* 45, italics in the original) and "successful poems" are indeed those that "don't embrace feelings, they embrace the conditions of artifice that permit the expression of those feelings" (45). Such enabling artifice, according to Starnino, is predicated upon a model that has been passed down from a long poetic tradition, and that the failure to recognize, struggle with, assimilate and build upon this tradition results in unoriginal (because uninformed) poetry: "the competitive reality of originality ensures that circumstances are never propitious for the production of

poetry: aspiration will always resent, and fruitfully so, the intimidating presence of predecessors" (60).

Like Solway, Starnino complains that poets who, today, do not eschew the masters of English-language poetry but rather look to the past for models of form, are now "traditionalists [perceived as] hidebound" (*The New Canon* 28) – as opposed to postmodernists who are touted as being "farsighted" (*The New Canon* 28) – and that "[m]any of us believe, for no other reason than because the avant-garde has told us, that the traditional forms are dead and that their continued use is reactionary" (28). Those identified by Solway as the writers of free-verse, or contemporary poets, are given the name "avant-garde" by Carmine Starnino and are looked upon with great contempt. In his introduction to his anthology *The New Canon*, these practitioners of "firebrand" Canadian poetry have taken over the existing canon: "Postmodernist. Experimental. Avant-Garde. Call it what you will, our poetry is now a zoo of rampant esotericisms" (*The New Canon* 27). Indeed, Starnino attacks both Canada's contemporary poets for writing bad poetry and Canada's critics for failing to recognize it as such and for rewarding it instead with some of the country's most coveted awards in this field. For example, after showing that Roberta Reese's poem "Hoar Frost," awarded the 1998 Saturday Night/CBC Literary Competition for Poetry, represents a "relentless advance into traditionlessness" (*A Lover's Quarrel* 161), Starnino's discourse becomes mordant, attempting to provoke in the reader a feeling of shame at somehow indirectly participating in Canada's misguided canon-making, using pathos and direct address to make his argument an even more forceful one:

Amazing isn't it? How charlatans who show no delight in words – who, in fact, possess verbal gifts so feeble that any decision to *articulate* an idea, much less combine mimetic power with the power of composition, strains their meagre resources, and who, to compensate, sneak into unabashed cliché and political claptrap – can be so enthusiastically laured. (163, italics in the original)

Beyond his aggressive lexical choices (“charlatans,” “gifts so feeble,” “meagre resources,” “claptrap”), Starnino attacks those poets being rewarded by the country’s literary juries – hence the poets occupying a central position in the literary field – by claiming they are not only incompetent to write poetry, they are incompetent at a purely communicative level, unable to even articulate an idea. He even goes as far as identifying his literary adversaries by name – Roberta Reese, but also Mary di Michele, Patrick Friesen, Dionne Brand, Anne Carson, Robert Hilles and Erin Mouré – and opposes them to poets who possess the “unnameable genius” of true poets: unsurprisingly, Eric Ormsby, David Solway and Michael Harris (171). This corresponds to both David Solway’s and Eric Ormsby’s elitist discourse of poetry, a discourse that states that writing poetry is in fact an art that is accessible only to a happy few. Starnino wholeheartedly adopts this position as well. When reviewing a new prosody handbook edited by Susan Ioannou, *A Magical Clockwork*, Starnino, echoing a famous line spoken by actor Jack Nicholson in the popular 1992 Hollywood movie *A Few Good Men*, cries out: “Reader, can you handle the truth? You probably can’t write poetry, few people can” (103). He justifies this claim by stating that he believes that the ability to write poetry is a gift that is nothing short of divine:

But while any of the art’s gratifying aspects can be duplicated (the rhyme-buttressed phrase, the momentary chime of alliteration, the compact fitting together of a stanza, the swing and pivot of a well-turned line) the ‘poetry’ of poetry – that divine touch that

electrifies language with its sistine-spark – is something you just can't teach. Maybe not quite *poeta nascitur*, but a rare gift nonetheless. (103)

This discourse is reiterated in the essay "A Lover's Quarrel" when Starnino challenges critics to recognize this fact instead of gratuitously praising a poetry that is unsubstantiated by craft and supported instead by a concern for national identity:

There's no reason why one shouldn't be able to write great poetry, except that great poetry is hard to write. Poets talented enough to get some substance, some real matter into their lines are exceedingly rare, and any speculation that ignores this truth – that would rather see the early voices as unstable exfoliations of our cultural self, or the stalled surfacings of our national identity – is worthless. (62)

The ability to master form is, according to Starnino, the ability to give one's poetry the necessary resistance, structure and musicality. The latter element is what allows, in Starnino's view, both poets and critics to define excellence in poetry. In an essay on the poetry of Michael Harris published in *Language Acts: Anglo-Québec Poetry, 1976 to the 21st Century* edited by Jason Camlot and Todd Swift, Starnino states that

music is about good line-making; about diction and syntax irreducibly fused, and the sound-signature enjambed into place. Music thus bodies forth from a poem's form, and form (or a decent definition of it, at least) is the structure that emerges when every line – run-on or end-stopped, short or long, dropped on a pile or stacked inside a stanza – is made to reciprocally amplify what surrounds it. (236, italics in the original)

Thus Carmine Starnino claims that a good poet not only masters old forms but, because he possesses the ability to write "with the ear" (237), can also create new forms by marrying sound with content.

The Jubilate discourse therefore comes full circle with its youngest member. Ironically, Starnino's introduction to *The New Canon*, as the previous chapter has shown, was the cause for a somewhat heated argument during a dinner at a Montreal Greek restaurant and during which the Jubilate poets strongly expressed their differing views (see the excerpt of an email from Michael Harris to David Solway quoted in Chapter 2). Nevertheless, the three Jubilate poets who have been most active in not only enunciating a discourse through their own collections but who have published their reviews and essays in numerous Canadian and international publications have held what appears to be a coherent discourse, one by which they justify their own (and their peers') aesthetic and claim their rightful place not within the Canadian canon, which they systematically reject as consisting mostly of mediocre, poorly-crafted poetry written in the language of the common man, but within the larger English-language canon, alongside those they claim to be the true fathers of poetry written in English. In order to do so, they have vigorously defended form and prosody and advocated a poetry that, in a modern interpretation of Eliot's "objective correlative," combines language, structure and imagery in order to *aurally* communicate the poem's meaning, allowing the reader to rediscover the world being represented in the poem with his/her ears, eyes and intellect. It is worth noting the extent to which the Jubilate Circle discourse on the importance of tradition, on the rejection of a "Canadian" aesthetic also draws heavily on T.S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," whose main argument, that no poet can write a poetry that is entirely dissociated from that of his predecessors, seems to have been repeated almost verbatim by the Jubilate poets:

Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, [...] [which] involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. [...] No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. (408)

The Jubilate poets, like Eliot before them, uphold the idea that no poet can truly break with the poetic traditions of the past, not only in his own country but throughout the history of literature written in his language. Writing in metrical form and observing the rules of prosody is a practice they justify by showcasing how form can be made new and meaningful to contemporary readers by “marrying” it (hence the title *Modern Marriage* given to Solway’s 1987 collection of sonnets) to themes and to a poetic language that build upon, rather than destroy, the models provided by their predecessors. This is why Starnino, in his introduction to the anthology *The New Canon*, can state that there is, in fact, no real difference between “traditionalism” and “experimentalism,” for those poets writing in what appears to be traditional form are indeed experimenting with the medium in order to explore new modes of meaning. The following chapter will seek to discover whether this aesthetic indeed characterizes the Jubilate poets’ own poetry, published with various Canadian presses over the years.

Chapter 4: Reading the Jubilate Circle: An Analysis of the Poetry

The Jubilate Circle's professed aesthetic consists mainly of a heightened poetic language, of the rejection of any attempt to create specifically Canadian content and of an endorsement of formal poetry. A comparison of the Jubilate discourse and of its members' poetry, created over the past four decades, will make up the final chapter of this study and will shed some light on the consistencies as well as on the discrepancies that may exist between these two aspects of the Jubilate Circle's activities. Ideally, it would be pertinent to study only the poetic output published by Signal Editions, for, as has been noted in the Introduction, this small poetry series was in fact David Solway's, Michael Harris's, Carmine Starnino's and Eric Ormsby's first and main rallying point. However, it will be necessary to widen the corpus of poetry under study for a number of reasons. Firstly, Michael Harris's *Grace*, published in 1977 by New Delta, has been heralded by his fellow Jubilate poets as his crowning (albeit one of his earliest) productions and contains many poems that have since been quoted by Solway and Starnino as examples of great poetry. Secondly, both Carmine Starnino and Eric Ormsby have in fact published only one title with Signal Editions but have had fairly fruitful careers with other presses, and to restrict the corpus to their only Signal title would be to forego some of their most representative poetry. Therefore, in order to glean representative samples of these four poets' verse, the following titles will be drawn upon: for Michael Harris, *Grace* (New Delta, 1977), *New and Selected Poems* (Signal, 1992) and *Circus* (Signal, 2010); for David Solway, *Bedrock* (Signal, 1993), *Chess Pieces* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), *Saracen Island. The Poetry of Andreas Karavis* (Signal, 2000); for Carmine Starnino, *The New World* (Signal, 1997), *Credo* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), *With English Subtitles* (Gaspereau, 2004), *This Way Out* (Gaspereau, 2009); finally, for Eric Ormsby, *Coastlines* (ECW, 1992), *For a Modest*

God (Grove Press, 1997) and *Araby* (Signal, 2001), all collections republished in whole or in part in a compilation of selected poems entitled *Time's Covenant* (Biblioasis, 2007). The poems selected for study here have been chosen because they represent both the poetics enunciated by the Jubilate poets and, at times, also bring to light some contradictions that seem to exist between the poetics and the poetry. The poems indeed provide a fair and representative sample of these poets' works and allow us to perceive notable influences (reciprocal amongst the Jubilate Circle poets, but also the influences of masters and of other contemporary poets).

"Identity," David Solway claimed in his essay entitled "Flight from Canada," "is solidly founded in difference, in the fact that each poet can work up the materials of place and language into that signature alloy we call individual style. The saving paradox is that the Canadian poet is *ideally* Canadian only inasmuch as he or she is distinctively unlike any other Canadian poet" (*Director's Cut* 30, italics in the original). The true paradox, however, lies in the fact that Solway himself belongs to a coterie of poets, a group he has elsewhere dubbed a "party of excellence" (*Director's Cut* 64), whose poetry production follows such similar lines that individual voices are sometimes very difficult to distinguish. In comparing the poetry of David Solway, Michael Harris, Carmine Starnino and Eric Ormsby, one better understands Harold Rhenisch's observation that the small group of Montreal poets seems to advocate a "renewed classicism": "[...] It has only been a year since I have discovered the critical stance embodied by (among others) [Carmine] Starnino. There's quite a movement afoot, it seems, especially in Montreal, as far as I can tell, towards a renewed classicism and an effort to sort out the Canadian canon" (Ormsby Papers, 2001). Although they do occasionally write in free verse, these poets have become renowned, as has been shown, for claims in favour of form and

prosody as well as for poems that range from the accentual (a form of meter in which accents, not syllables, are counted in each line) to fixed forms such as the sonnet, however the poets may choose to vary their forms. Their admiration of Yeats, Heaney, Frost, Graves, Hughes and Wilbur, professed in a variety of essays and interviews by nearly all four poets, is apparent in the poetry itself, either through the use of dedications or epigraphs or through a body of poetry largely inspired by these masters (see Keith, "A Prosodic Itch"). The third entry under "classicism" in Merriam-Webster's *Encyclopedia of Literature* informs us that the term refers to an "adherence to or practice of the virtues thought to be [...] universally and enduringly valid (such as formal elegance and correctness, simplicity, dignity, restraint, order, proportion)". Although the "classicist" label was attributed by an external commentator on these poets' publications of both poetry and prose, it nonetheless represents an effective strategy for characterizing their claims to belong to the canon of global English-language poetry; one definition of a literary canon is, after all, those works that are in fact considered "universally and enduringly valid," that is, "sanctioned or accepted" (Merriam-Webster's *Encyclopedia of Literature*).

For all of their claims to their own distinctive voices and individuality of style, Harris, Starnino, Solway and Ormsby have produced a body of poetry that is both thematically and stylistically uniform. All four poets delve in the keen observation of the quotidian, of the natural environment that surrounds them (be it Canadian, Greek, American or Middle Eastern landscapes), and all four now and again indulge in "stylistic pyrotechnics and the flaunting of a rarefied vocabulary" (Donnelly H5). The attention they give to diction, that is, the use of a scholarly vocabulary as well as of alliteration, assonance, consonance and rhyme, is an

overarching characteristic of their poetry. However, it must be noted that each poet has also at times written some verse that in fact seems to contradict the group's discourse.

David Solway's exploration of the possibilities that language opens up in the realm of poetry begins early in his career, and the collections *Selected Poems* (Signal Editions 1982) and *Stones in Water*, published in 1983 by Mosaic Press, provide a few early examples of what will come to be the poet's signature style, as well as of his preoccupations with form and poetic language. A very early sonnet appearing in *Selected Poems*, entitled, significantly, "For Robert Graves," combines the use of form and of heightened language to express lust, carnal desire and the sheer enjoyment of a woman's body:

"For Robert Graves"

Is there no pardon, dispensation or decree
but to surrender to the one who bridles me –
to one woman cold and myriad as the stars,
to one woman in all her countless avatars
whose shining body is diffracted to perplex
and to endorse the sweet convulsions of our sex,
who brought to tossing Plato surreptitious dreams,
dunked that skimming Ulysses and outschemed his schemes,
and drove St. Augustine to crone Religion's bed,
to hagiolatry and the luster of the dead,
who preaches the catholicity of desire
and whose smile is kindling to a world on fire?
Lord help me, Lord help me, as I plunge and rise
between the ravenous Symplegades of her thighs.

(Selected Poems 62)

By this point in his career, as W.J. Keith notes in “A Prosodic Itch: Notes on David Solway’s Development as a Poet” (39-68), David Solway had rejected his teacher Louis Dudek’s poetics and had managed to sidestep the looming shadow of the formidable figure that was by then Leonard Cohen (both Solway and Cohen had studied under Louis Dudek at McGill university and had published their first volume of poetry with Dudek’s small press, *The McGill Poetry Series*) (42). Rather, in the mid-1970s Solway began to embrace William Butler Yeats as a “prime mentor” (43)¹¹⁷ and to identify with other twentieth century “Romantics” such as Robert Graves, as the title of the above poem indicates. Of these two poets, Solway would retain the notion of “poetic discipline,” or, in other words, form and consequently, as Keith notes, “this return to traditional practice also includ[ed] a heightened respect for the discipline exerted by rhyme” (46). The sonnet will become a form of predilection for Solway, as he informs Sonja Skarstedt in an interview (Starnino, *David Solway: Essays* 18). It is in fact an occasion for Solway to explore the apparent contrast between “high language” (*katharevousa*) and the “low,” or “common” language or subject matter (*dhimotiki*) (Starnino, *David Solway: Essays* 19; Solway, *An Andreas Karavis Companion* 59).¹¹⁸ According to Solway, the interest in sonnets such as the one above and, more specifically, those included in the collection *Modern Marriage* published in 1987 by Signal Editions, is the “triangular relationship” that exists between “the *artist*, the

¹¹⁷ W.J. Keith notes that it was Yeats’ later period especially, characterized by “colloquial tone and free movement of rhymed or half-rhymed short lines,” as in his poem “Under Ben Bulben” (1939) that particularly influenced Solway in the late 1970s with the publication, in 1977, of *The Road to Arginos*. (W. J. Keith, “A Prosodic Itch,” in Carmine Starnino (ed.) *David Solway, Essays on His Works* (Toronto: Guernica), 45. More significantly, however, Solway turns to Yeats, according to Keith, “as an advocate of ‘discipline’” (44).

¹¹⁸ It should be noted that this will remain one of Solway’s main poetic concerns up until the turn of the twenty-first century, as the previous examination of the Andreas Karavis affair has underscored.

poet and the *individual*. [...] Therefore, for the poet the problem is: how to speak a high, ancestral, Longinian language, a sublime language – in his poems, in his own imagination, or in the world itself – and at the same time, how to earn a living, how to bring up children, how to walk the dog [...]” (19-20)¹¹⁹. In light of the poem quoted above, one could add to this list of quotidian, carnal realities “how to make love to a woman.” As the poet notes, the collection *Modern Marriage* will expand on the ideas already brought forward a decade before in *The Road to Arginos* (New Delta 1977), in that “in every poem there is a reference, almost obligatory, to some dimension that we recognize as high or exalted, and one that we recognize as “low” or common” (20). In the poem quoted above, contrasts exist between the references to elements of classical studies (philosophers and thinkers of Antiquity, references to their works), the form used (the “noble” form that is the sonnet) and the subject matter, that of coitus and sexual pleasure.

However, Solway will at times stray from this poetics, even though its elements will remain throughout his *oeuvre* as the defining principles. As noted by Eric Ormsby in his review of the later collection *Bedrock* (which reproduces many of the poems contained in his earlier collection *Stones in Water*), the 1983 collection opens with a “Prologue,” in which Solway essentially provides the recipe for a good poem:

begin with sounds,
with stubborn, ample, undiminishing sounds,
with locusts, with gulls,

¹¹⁹ The adjective “Longinian” refers to Longinus, 1st century scholar whose manuscript, *On the Sublime* was first published in 1554. In it, Longinus suggests that sublimity in literature is the greatness of the author, his greatness of spirit, that is transmitted in writing. To acquire such greatness, Longinus suggested that writers follow models of great literature (citing Homer and Plato, among others). *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Longinus”.

with the wasps in the rafters,
the cats in the fishbones
[...]
begin
with anything that comes to the ear,
begin
with anything

to work into a difficult sublimity at last
a mountain speech
a hard extravagance
of love.
(*Bedrock* 9-10)

Solway thus introduces his collection, in which he commits to verse his recollection of Greece, particularly of his time spent on the island of Alonissos, by demonstrating to his readers the way the poems take shape in his mind, the way sounds translate into music in order to render as faithfully as possible the physical, natural and material reality of Alonissos.¹²⁰ It is interesting to note, however, that the opening poem does not, in fact, adhere to any kind of structural pattern, although anaphora, or the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of a line, is nonetheless present. In its entirety, the stanzas vary in length from couplets to septets (seven-

¹²⁰ Indeed, the collection describes the quotidian of this and other Greek Islands, from its physical features ("to the coastline rimmed with last year's refuse / nails, glass, rusted tins of aerosol, / a discarded undershirt, a goat-bone / and the sea, slippery with jellyfish [...] ["Blues", 34) to the gestures posed by its inhabitants and visitors, from "sipping ouzo" ["Nausikaä in Amorgos" 11] to "Cat Killing" ["[...] to sink from the side of a fishing boat / I watched the brown sack bulge and flatten / on the sea bottom till I could not tell / the movement of the sea / from the movement of the sack. / Cats take a long time drowning." [26]).

line stanzas); there is no rhyme pattern, and very few internal rhymes can be identified, although anaphora is frequently used. Lines in which mountain goats are said to be “leaping into adages” or that “regattas of islands” can be detected through a hazy sky nonetheless correspond to Solway’s professed desire to create metaphors that stun and move the reader, and his description of a village “leaning / from its eyrie” is certainly an appropriate illustration of his penchant for a more erudite vocabulary. As Eric Ormsby notes, *Bedrock* is not necessarily a formally coherent collection and contains “free verse and blank verse; there are sonnets, quatrains (rhymed and unrhymed), and couplets; prose poems appear as does some very deft light verse; [...] Solway occasionally disguises, half camouflages, his formal dexterity in order to articulate his theme.” (Starnino, *David Solway: Essays* 91). As noted previously, what can be seen as an inconsistency is heralded by Solway’s close friend as a display of the poet’s skill and versatility. Nonetheless, one could reasonably recognize in its use of imagism echoes of poets such as William Carlos Williams, or even of Louis Dudek, an avid Williams (and Ezra Pound) disciple in this apparently Imagist poem, a somewhat astonishing fact given Solway’s very vociferous rejection of the poetry that these poets have produced and later inspired.¹²¹ Moreover, the “Prologue” quoted above indeed marks a sharp contrast with another poem bearing the same title, published much earlier in *The Road to Arginos*, in which Solway declares the following:

[...]

I count each syllable and stress

¹²¹ Imagism was a twentieth-century literary movement launched by Ezra Pound in 1912, who championed common speech, exact expression, an economy of language and effective metaphors. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “the Imagists wrote succinct verse of dry clarity and hard outline in which exact visual image made a total poetic statement”. (“Imagist.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Online.)

not from phonetic avarice
but because it keeps me honest
or at least not too dishonest.

(9)

Despite this apparent contradiction between the poetry and the discourse the poems in *Bedrock* do generally correspond to the poetics expressed in Solway's essays and interviews (all published, it must be noted, *after* the publication of *Bedrock*), this poetics is not applied consistently, as the opening poem demonstrates.

However, several of the poems that follow provide examples of Solway's linguistic and formal explorations. The poem entitled "Beach Snake" uses sibilance (that is, the repetition of the vowel "s") as well as internal rhymes to render the slithering of the snake on the dry and dusty Greek soil: "The snake sides at the base of the cliff, convulsing / its slow subsonic length along the sand". The alliteration is repeated throughout the poem, quite effectively in the fourth stanza, wherein the poet reflects on the symbolism of the snake: "We have our explanatory fictions for the snake: / a live evil, the intelligence of malice, / eye, fang and tongue to pierce complacency; / or the clear abstraction of single-mindedness, / or simply mindless singleness of will". In this stanza Solway juxtaposes the alliteration with palindromes ("live evil"), inversions and oppositions ("single-mindedness," "mindless singleness") that illustrate the snake's biblical symbolism of a two-faced creature. With such strategies, the poet effectively supports his message with his use of form and of language: it is insufficient to merely describe a snake, the reader must instead *hear* and *perceive* the snake as the poet himself is perceiving it, as well as be sensitive to an underlying philosophical reflection. In his interview

with Carmine Starnino, published in Starnino's collection of essays on the works of David Solway, Solway develops this reflection: "the language we [poets] deploy in order to deal with our themes is itself an aspect of that theme. And the lesser poets have forgotten that" (154). In itself, such imitative harmony is not necessarily original; Solway's originality (as well as that of the other Jubilate poets) lies in the fact that *language*, and not theme, was the underlying impetus for writing the poem: "[...] the good poets are those who know, either consciously or unconsciously, that the language that they are using [...] is also and effectively a major part of the subject itself" (Starnino 2001, 154). In his poetry as well as in his criticism, Solway states, having successfully exploited the resources of language is its own reward: "there's the joy of having turned a good phrase, the exhilaration of having crafted a good sentence" (155).

Elsewhere in *Bedrock*, Solway pursues his exploration of language and pushes it further, juxtaposing rare or unexpected words with the same kind of aural effects that one finds in the poem "Beach Snake," for example. In the poem entitled "Night," the first two stanzas use language to both create sounds and effective metaphors and are exemplary of T.S. Eliot's notion of the objective correlative:

"Night"

In the trees the junta-wind is
stirring revolutions, and the
bluffs pitch their Beauforts at the sea;
the bats are tumbling from their ledge

while, supercilious in air,
a who's who of owls in their night-

time finery – monocles, cravats –

just dolly by like movie ghosts.

[...]

The language in this poem is used very consciously to create aural effects and metaphors that will allow the readers to keenly perceive with their mind's eye the night wind rustling in the trees, the quiet gusts being compared to revolutions being prepared in the shadows by the junta (the "Beaufort," a scale used to measure the velocity of the wind, not only reinforces the windy image, it's repeated "f," along with that used in the word "bluff," aurally replicates it). The alliteration, in the fourth line, of the consonants "b" and "l" indeed echoes the muted flap of the bats' wings, while the overpowering "s" sound in the first line of the second stanza recalls the ruffling feathers of the owl. The sixth line combines a commonly-used expression, "who's who," with an image of an elite group of owls, effectively recalling both the owl's calling and conjuring images of the stately bird. Thus, Solway's use of language is not pedantic, as some critics might have accused his prose to be, but rather carefully mapped out on the page in such a way that no word is randomly placed and that the structural constraints imposed on the poem actually render it all the more powerful, even if its subject is something as common as the description of the night time landscape.

However, in the collection penned under a heteronym, *Saracen Island. The Poetry of Andreas Karavis*, David Solway explores a different voice, as Patricia Godbout had noted ("Pseudonymes, Traductionymes et Pseudo-Traducteurs" 2004), one that is not so closely

associated with the poetic discourse he has become renowned for in his various publications.¹²²

In *Saracen Island* we encounter verse that stands in stark contrast to some of the other Greece-inspired verse found in the earlier collection *Bedrock*. A comparison of the poems “Shell Diving” (*Bedrock* 46) and “The Village” (*Saracen* 34) illustrates this point:

“Shell Diving”

Their distance leads you by the nose,
as down through echelons of cold
you spiral in on their repose –
these Royal Purples in their fold.

there, as at China depths, the shells
are bits of magic in your hands,
like eggs of Paradise or the bells
of Lilliput. They wait in bands

of reefs, protected not by rock
but by pressures, whose currents
expand, contract, and almost lock
you in. Such forty-foot events

do not conclude in heart attack
alone. These sea-fetched ampersands
will keep their sub-lives whole and back
or pulver in the diver’s hands.

¹²² At the time *Saracen Island* was published, Solway’s only published collection of essays was *Random Walks*. *Director’s Cut* would come three years later.

“Shell Diving” is an example of set form and consists of four quatrains written in iambic tetrameter, that is, a line consisting of four iambs (pairs of syllables following an “unstressed/stressed” pattern), written in an alternating rhyme pattern. The poet, in order to keep true to the form, uses sometimes surprising enjambments (“They wait in bands / of reefs”), and produces imaginative metaphors, such as that comparing the shells of the deep sea to “sea-fetched ampersands.” The poem has a clear beginning and an equally clear conclusion (made all the more obvious by the verb “to conclude” in the final stanza!) and espouses the classicist style of poets such as William Butler Yeats and, later, Richard Wilbur. “The Village,” published seven years later in *Saracen Island. The Poetry of Andreas Karavis*, is far more cryptic and imagistic:

“The Village”

The village
turns its back to the world.

Along a central axis
the houses face each other,

fuse
in their pitch of silence,

and create
the perfect stone of introspection.

The streets are linked

by white arcades.

And in the evenings,
in the great nave of time,

O the sun

lights the mountain
like a candle.

The Karavis poem is sparse in its composition; it eschews rhyme, though some alliterations and assonances can be distinguished (“lights the mountain / like a candle;” “evenings / great nave of time). It is mostly written in couplets, though they are not constant in line length and the single-line stanza, “O the sun,” comes to break the pattern. The simile in which the sun (seemingly majestic, for it sets “in the great nave of time” and is summoned with the old-fashioned address “O”) “lights the mountain / like a candle” is predictable and wholly unsurprising, almost naïve. Such simplistic comparisons serve in part to reinforce Solway’s literary hoax, especially when they are set in stark contrast (as avid Solway readers might do) to the line in the previous poem in which the diver is described as going “down through echelons of cold.” Solway addresses these elements in his introduction to Karavis’s verse, attempting to enlighten our reading of the Karavis poems and direct our attention to elements that *seem* to contradict the typical Solway discourse, claiming that they in fact do no such thing:

[Karavis’s poetry] is a poetry that is on the one hand deceptively simple and profoundly resourceful in its hardscrabble farming of the lexical soil, raising words and images that resonate with connotations despite their apparent economy of means; and on the

other, it is a poetry laminated with a complexity of shifting surfaces originating from its unfettered verbal play and an inherent sense of mythopoeic yet tropical implication. (*Saracen Island* 17)¹²³

As has been suggested, the statement that the poetry “resonates with connotations” despite its “economy of means” is debatable, and one can reasonably wonder why Solway, in his criticism of other contemporary Canadian poets, does not applaud an apparently similar economy of means in their poetry but rather chastises them for being overly simplistic and wholly unimaginative, whereas the Karavis poems are elsewhere described by Solway as “mainly short lyrics distinguished by a clarity of vision and austerity of style and technique” (*Saracen Island* 18). This again reinforces the hoax, as does the evocation of a “mythopoeic yet tropical implication.” As has been noted in the second chapter of this study, however, publishing under a heteronym has in fact been a strategy employed by Solway that gives him the liberty to stray from his own discourse and to explore different poetic voices and styles, allowing the “David Solway” persona to stay true to the original discourse. Nonetheless, even in the heteronymous publications the discourse remains: the collection’s introduction, penned in Solway’s own name, does in fact repeat his now well-known discourse on poetry and inform readers that though they are reading Karavis, the voice of Solway is never far behind and that the two should always be read *in contrast*. Hence, it could be argued that Solway is using Karavis’s sparse and simple style to highlight his own more formal, musical and lexically heightened style. It is in fact a strategy that Solway would employ several more times, writing under the heteronyms of men and women from different countries, and even of different

¹²³ It is important to keep in mind that at the time of writing Solway is still trying to convince readers that he and Karavis are two distinct individuals.

centuries, producing poetry that could well be read as exercises in the exploration of different voices. Doing so could be an effective means of proving to the community of poets and readers of poetry that the poet is indeed skilled and well-read, manifesting his solid grasp of different poetic traditions by writing in a variety of voices and styles. Such poetry could be seen as a supporting illustration of the poet's claim that to write poetry is a skill and an art possessed only by a happy few, one that requires mastery and erudition.

David Solway's fellow Jubilate Poets take on the same challenges in their poetry, though they have not pushed the experiment as far as Solway has: they have generally not explored different voices, have not used heteronyms and their poetic output is fairly consistent in terms of style, form, language and theme. The poems "Deacon Moth," (*Grace*), by Michael Harris, and "Horseshoe Crab," by Eric Ormsby, (*Coastlines*), exemplify the attention to detail and the intensity of observation noted above, as well as the use of diction as a stylistic device. The poems are both narratives that bring to human scale two very small creatures, insects and a horseshoe crab, describing their behaviour and appearance with anthropomorphizing similes and metaphors. Published in 1977 and 1992 respectively, "Deacon Moth" and "Horseshoe Crab" are not only thematically similar, but represent an exercise in linguistic and prosodic skill, as the poets try to render both the insects' and the crustacean's movements through aural mimicry and reflect upon the place such minuscule creatures can occupy in such a vast universe. The two poems are not written in any identifiable set form, yet cannot be said to be written in free-verse either. The choices of metrical feet in each poem reveal an effort on behalf of the poets to aurally replicate the idea being represented. For example, the insects in Harris's poem, which is divided between the depiction of a spider's patient luring of a new victim into

its web and the moth's frantic realization that it cannot escape, are projected in the sounds created by alliterations and assonances and by the movements of the words on the page.

"The Deacon Moth"

The light's banged
its bell: the spider's pulled back
like a fist in his corner.

The Deacon's at the wall, skittish
as a feather-duster. Slow as a rag-picker,
panic takes the colour from his wings.

Still the spider sticks
to its corner, heedless of the flurry,
the motoring worry of worn-thin wings.

Here, he says, Look: I have nothing
up my sleeves. And moves his magician's cloth
closer. But the Deacon discovers

that light itself is trembling, and
it flutters and tugs, and the whole
world is ending where it

hung from a thread.

(Grace 37)

Stanzas devoted to the spider are slow, sluggish, and menacing. The phrases are short, heavy on hard consonantal sounds (“b”, “k”, “p”) that appear to mimic not only the clanging of the bell announcing the beginning of a combat, but the heavy, menacing percussives that seem to signal that a predator is closing in on its prey. The use of spondees (a metrical foot consisting of two consecutive stressed syllables) projects the weightiness, the slowness and the deliberate movements of the spider (“light’s banged”; “pulled back”). The stanzas depicting the moth, however, seem to recall the insect’s frantic attempts at escape in their longer phrases, punctuated by several commas (reflecting the moth’s struggle to free itself and its frequent pauses, as though gathering its strength). This pattern will be reproduced throughout the short poem, wherein the reader feels like a pulse the slow and purposeful advancement of a predator towards its prey and the panicked attempt to escape resulting in failure, as the poem’s rhythm grinds to a terrifying halt, with a single line closing a poem made up of five tercets. In the third stanza, the alliteration of the “w” consonant, used to describe the moth’s fluttering wings, echoes the whirring sound of a motor; the phrase “the motoring worry of worn-thin wings” thus becomes particularly effective. As Carmine Starnino notes in his reading of Harris’s “Barn Swallow” (Camlot, Swift 240-241), Harris’s language mimicks the slow effacing of nature into a state of hibernation, one that resembles death but that is, with the quickening of the language, “abrupt and fast-moving, adapting [...] to the conditions of avian life” (241). The collection is a search for grace, as the poet clearly states in the poem bearing the same name (“I am tired of thinking of grace, and how to get it” [17]). It is a reflection on the contrast between human mortality, surely inspired by the death of his brother Jeffrey, to whom the poem entitled

“Spring” is dedicated (“[...] Where does time go, Jeffrey? / Nothing’s dead but you. Not the wintering daisy / at seed in the meadow, the grace of summer fields” [18]).¹²⁴ The first half of the collection, dedicated to the beings, large and small, that populate Harris’s wintry farmland in the North Hatley area, is a sequence celebrating the resilience of nature, the grace of resuscitation that is springtime, and the impossibility for humans to achieve such grace.

Eric Ormsby will employ very similar onomatopoeic strategies¹²⁵ in “The Horseshoe Crab.” In the following lines, “She follows the immemorial furrows / Along the tidal floor of the bay,” the repetition of the “f” sound evokes the small insect softly scurrying across the sand, while the repeated “k” sound in the final stanza, describing the crab’s carapace, invokes the hardness of its shell, and the potential prickly sting when it comes into contact with the skin:

The silt-dulled sheen of her carapace
Fits the hand despite thorny protrusions
Of chitin and that lacerating ice-pick
Of tail.

(Time’s Covenant 99)

In this case, it is with a surprisingly effective metaphor that he describes the deliberate movements of the crab’s legs: “Her pale, segmented legs beckon and gleam.” The mind’s eye leaps from the crab to the image of a beckoning finger, a gesture that can be inviting, seductive,

¹²⁴ Jeffrey Harris’s death is also the object of the prize-winning poem entitled “Turning Out the Light” (winner of the CBC Literary Competition of 1985), published in Harris’s *New and Selected Poems*.

¹²⁵ Ormsby’s use of onomatopoeia throughout his poetry was also the object of a study by Todd Hearon.

or, conversely, menacing. Such strategies encourage the reader to imagine the sounds and sensations being evoked. Poetry becomes more than an intellectual exercise, it appeals to the senses as it exploits all the available resources of language in order to render meaning. Ormsby's obsession with *le mot juste* is evident in this poem, although here he does not resort to exercises in lexical treasure-hunting that will send his readers scrambling to their dictionaries (as he might do in a description of the Nova Scotia landscape as "Tough decumbencies of spurge" [*Time's Covenant* 90] or in that of flamingos as adopting "gawky, rank, hierophantic posturings" [*Time's Covenant* 106]). The poet as intellectual, as word-smith, as guardian and worshipper of the language is the "posturing" that Ormsby is hierophantically claiming.

This claim will be implicitly stated within a poem: much in the same way David Solway committed his own *ars poetica* to verse in the poem entitled "Prologue," Ormsby will open his 1997 collection entitled *Araby* with the following poem:

"Jaham's Poetic Manifesto"

"To make the ear

of the *khinzîr*

(that grotty pig!)

lustrous

as the Pleiades..."

Jaham pondered this and said:

Rather, to make the ears

of the Pleiades

pig-like, that is, porous, gristle-

webbed, conical, tendril-

attuned to the earth.

(Time's Covenant 141)

That one of the two main characters depicted in *Araby* is a poet is significant; that the collection opens with a piece explicitly titled "Poetic Manifesto" is even more so. Ormsby speaks to his readers through Jaham and informs them that his poems, far from wishing to appear polished, are only successful insofar as their roughened finish resembles as closely as possible that of the world being depicted. However, such roughness, when it is called for, is best created through the artifice of form, of an attention paid to language, and especially of the contrast between structure and content. For example, to speak of a vulture feasting on the corpse of a dead animal in verse is, in itself, a challenge: the poet must avoid being overly descriptive, must seek balance between symbolism and sheer gore, must depict the scavenger simultaneously in its wild, animal majesty and in the horror of its means of survival. The poet takes on this challenge by contrasting the horror (and the humour) of the subject with the old dignity and respectability of metrical form. Moreover, contrasting lexical choices and registers of language will effectively play out this strange binary and leave the reader with a new appreciation for an animal which, it must be said, is not often looked upon favourably:

“The Egyptian Vulture”

The Egyptian Vulture is the least
discriminating of the scavengers.

He sucks up eyeball juice of wildebeest
as though it were iced Bollinger.

He spreads a paté of rotted gnu
on a barfed-up bed of jungle turkey comb.

Raw rectum of gazelle is *cordon bleu*
yet how piously he dines, with plumed aplomb!

[...] (*Time's Covenant* 155)

The quatrains and the alternating rhyme scheme have the sing-song quality of a nursery rhyme, that is, poems meant to entertain and even, to some extent, edify children, stimulate their senses by using musicality to develop memory. This is therefore a rhythm associated with the wholesome, inoffensive quality of a child's first poems. And yet, the juxtaposition of phrases such as “least discriminating” and “eyeball juice,” “paté” and “barfed-up,” “raw rectum” and “piously,” “plumed aplomb” is both hilarious and astonishing in its artfulness. The Vulture, through Ormsby's careful choice of form, has retained some of its dignity, although, as the following lines humorously illustrate, its means of subsistence is anything but dignified: “Would you really call him *indiscriminate*? / True, his topknot is fouled with shit and bile / (unavoidable

when you work your snout in straight / up the flyblown butt of some long-dead crocodile [...]". By anthropomorphizing the subject, Ormsby not only brings a touch of humour to an otherwise grotesque image, he elevates the vulture's status with words such as "dine," "paté," and "cordon bleu". In doing so, he seems to narrow the gap that divides humans from scavenging animals, creating a rapprochement that could also be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to that of the poet and the common man, without committing the crime of forsaking the heightened poetic language of which the Jubilate poets are so fond.

One can also find in Michael Harris' poetry collections examples of verse that do not quite correspond to the Jubilate aesthetic. In his latest collection entitled *Circus*, Michael Harris relates, in a series of poems dedicated to members of the circus, their public lives, that is, their performances, juxtaposed with their inner lives. The predominance of scatology in this collection, as the first stanza of the poem entitled "Derelict" clearly demonstrates, contradicts the Jubilate's call for a heightened poetic language, although, as the examples given in this chapter have shown and will continue to show, all four poets do in fact employ scatology in their poetry: "Piss puddles under the bench. / Pieces of shit stick like burrs to the hem / of her skirt. More shit lies lumped at her feet, / as if she were a torn bag of rotten fruit / leaking her innards – but even this is tolerable" (*Circus* 31). This poem is nonetheless divided into stanzas, varying in length from tercets to sestets, and a number of internal rhymes can be identified. Hence, somewhat like Ormsby in the poem "Egyptian Vulture," the disgraceful subject of the poem is nonetheless rendered with a melodious dignity. Another poem, "The Dog Trainer," is not necessarily related to the circus yet espouses a similar style and lexicon: scatology is once

again present, the poem is a narrative, a description of a Chihuahua, is not written in any defined form, and the level of language is as close to everyday speech as it is possible to get:

“The Dog Trainer”

Young Oliver, here, is a Chihuahua.

My companion acquired this dog.

I was in Iceland at the time, gone

for two weeks. By the time I returned,

young Oliver had pissed in every

room of the house, shitting, for good

measure, in two of them. Without

going into unnecessary detail, I state

for the record that Oliver has

established territoriality in at least

three more rooms than I have,

and probably sleeps the more securely for it.

[...] (*Circus* 19)

Although the collection equally contains examples of poems written according to a readily identifiable form, including one villanelle (a popular form in the nineteenth century), poems such as “The Dog Trainer” does in fact represent all of the characteristics poet-critics Solway and Starnino have previously reproached in the poetry of Al Purdy: poetry imitating

common (if not colloquial, in this case) speech, the absence of set form, of musicality or of any strategic use of prosody by which the poet draws up the language and poetic devices such as metaphors, alliteration or accents to support that which is being expressed within the poem itself. However, it sets into versified form a very prosaic content in which elements of rivalry are enunciated (“Oliver has / established territoriality in at least / three more rooms than I have”). In light of this study’s discussion of the Jubilate Poets as a group addressing another (that is, the other poets of the Canadian canon), it is interesting to note that language and prosody are, in fact, the elements that distinguish the Jubilate poets and nourish the rivalry they claim to uphold with some of Canada’s major poets. Finally “The Dog Trainer” is undeniably humorously entertaining, but does not in any way contain the startling images and sounds contained in his earlier collection *Grace*, in which, for example, the poet describes farm rats in October as rodents “whose eyes are the black-bulbed ends / of steel pins driving hunger through their brains. / The cold is a trap that is sure of its aim” (*Grace* 19).

Finally, Carmine Starnino will also frequently embark on the search for the precise word, the precise form, that will not only powerfully evoke the sounds and sights suggested by the poem itself but that is startlingly accurate, as though he were displaying to his readers the full range of his impressive personal lexicon. Moreover, the poet is not afraid of neologisms, of manipulating the English language and pushing it to its limits. In describing the process of making homemade preserves, the poet notes how “Sugar goes soggy / from sunlight’s glassed-in excitation, / conjugates into something spumescent, / weather-churned, barely-seeable-into”

(“Homemade,” *With English Subtitles* 46).¹²⁶ For Starnino, the adjectives “foamy” or “frothy” could not conjure, the way “spumescent” does, the silent hissing of the chemical reactions slowly taking place inside the glass jar, turning sugar and fruit into preserves; “barely-seeable-into” brings to mind a child’s innocent wonder in observing the darkening opacity of the jar’s contents, as well as the *effort* of the act of looking, of trying to discern (which could be read as a metaphor for the effort required to read a poem). Similarly, in his collection entitled *Credo*, a series of poems grouped under the title “Cornage” explore Old English, recovering long-forgotten Anglo-Saxon words (a departure from his traditionally Italian-inflected verse and childlike recollections of members of his family and of their Old Country traditions and stories): “Waes hail, dear reader! They call this sillyebubbe” (54). “Cornage” reads like a lesson given from master to pupil on the origin of words, on their usages in medieval times and on their potential valence in a poem: “*Horshwoil*, steeped in the tidal / shhh of its own pronunciation, is, for some, / inescapably brinked on the drop-off and plunge / of the unsayable” (48). The poet reflects upon his role, as a poet, to discover and bring new life to words unknown to his reading public, and does not hide his ambition to achieve a sort of authority in matters linguistic and poetic: “Words I’d like to get into a poem: eagle-stone, ezel, / cornage, buckram, scrynne, waes hail, sillyebubbe.” (51).

The young poet will also explore the potential of early modern forms, such as the sonnet for example, for creating poems that are entirely modern in content, surprising, humorous. One

¹²⁶ Interestingly, the noun “spume,” used for “froth”, comes up twice in Solway’s collection entitled *Bedrock* (“The Nausikaä’s dreaming in / the marble; what stirs the neutrals / of that stone fidelity or / breaks the surface of her sleeping – / as if the spume could make her flinch [...]” [“Nausikaä in Amorgos” 14]; “And now the mechanism’s wholly / dolphin, springing toward its prey / of spume and beaded sunlight [...]” [“Windsurfing” 20]). One might perhaps read into Starnino’s surprising use of the word a reference to or an influence of his mentor’s poetry.

can perhaps read in his “Worst-Case Scenario Poems,”¹²⁷ a series of sonnets published in *With English Subtitles*, a carefully executed demonstration of his theory, often enunciated in his essays and reviews, that forms such as the sonnet are *not*, in fact, outdated, but rather that they can still be effective vehicles for compacting modern English in such a way that the effect is indeed fresh and surprising. In the following example, Starnino counsels his reader on surviving the ordeal of finding oneself in a car poised dangerously over the edge of a cliff:

The thing to avoid is a front-row view
of your car taking a rude, impromptu
header into the stones below. So, nice
and slow, ease away from the wheel,

and retreat to the rear, know each new second
the car’s braked bulk pauses, fidgety,
on that rock lip, is one less second
to steal. What you want is to open, gently,

A back door and quickly step out, hoping
to heaven you don’t hear the awful
creak of your hood nosing down, or look up

¹²⁷ Quite possibly inspired by *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook* by Joshua Piven (Chronicle Books, 1999), which enjoyed great success on the book market at the time of its publication.

at a sky ducking under the suddenly

steeping ledge of your trunk, or feel that free-

fall panic, knowing you're fucked.

(*With English Subtitles* 15)

This example does not strictly reproduce the structural requirements for a Petrarchan sonnet, which consists of two initial quatrains with an “a-b-b-a” rhyming scheme followed by a sestet, representing a “turn” or “release”, with a “c-d-c, d-c-d” rhyming scheme (Fussell 115). Nor does it exactly reproduce the model of the Shakespearean sonnet, consisting of three quatrains with an alternating rhyme pattern followed by a rhyming couplet (Fussell 121). However, Starnino combines the effects of these two types of sonnets: as in the Petrarchan sonnet, he introduces the subject in the first quatrain (note that Starnino’s sonnet is not, however, divided into stanzas), develops or complicates it in the following lines, and offers a “release,” or conclusion (“you’re fucked”) towards the end. However, in the mode of the Shakespearean sonnet, this release is not offered in a final sestet but is rather tightly packed within a final couplet. Starnino instead manipulates the sonnet, varies its form, in order to suit his needs. This is not proof that Starnino has ineptly constructed his sonnet. Rather, as Fussell notes, forms are only truly effective when the poet instinctively knows how to vary the form to provoke a sense of surprise, wonder or delight in the reader: “departures from metrical norms powerfully reinforce emotional effects” (12). Thus Starnino effectively carries out his own call to “slyly [undermine] English tradition by furnishing it with a distorted reflection rather than an easy confirmation” (*A Lover’s Quarrel* 86).

Yet Starnino's poetry contains as many examples that contradict his discourse, that do not adhere to any predefined form and that do not appear to draw upon the English language in a surprising or particularly meaningful way. Rather, some of his poetry reflects on family, childhood and, in his latest collection, *This Way Out* (2009), on the lives of the members of the working class, sometimes with great simplicity.

"At the Bedside"

She probably couldn't see anything, the doctor later
told us, but for weeks I remembered your face break open
with fear, and wondered what you glimpsed in that
last moment, staring hard into the darkness that roosted
behind our heads – called out of sleep into some childhood dream
of death, that story you once told of being startled awake,
and how, for a brief moment, lying in the dimness
beside your sister, you were scared, having felt something
enormous brush near, sweeping down from the air,
until, reassured by Maria's breathing, you closed your eyes,
drowsy, and settled your head back upon the pillow.

(The New World 36)

The poem relates a relative's death in a single sentence, an eleven-line stanza with no identifiable rhyming scheme. The poet recalls this moment in the first person and uses direct address to speak to "you," the deceased, in a language that is unadorned and quite common.

The tone is intimate and honest, and it is perhaps for this reason that the poet chose to forego any set form, for the poem was meant to reproduce common speech, to express what would have been uttered to the “you” of the poem if the poet had only had the opportunity. In doing so, Starnino effectively contradicts the aspect of the Jubilate discourse that claims that poetry has, in fact, nothing to do with common speech, and that prose divided into stanzas through the use of enjambments is not sufficient to make a poem. On the other hand, this aspect of language being used in a poem dealing with death, a death that is likened to a state of sleep, could be a strategy of denial, a refusal to let the relative achieve that elevated state of an afterlife. Addressing the deceased in the speech of the common man also means addressing her in the speech of the living rather than in the more heightened speech destined for the eulogy of a loved one.

In this same collection, Starnino combines the poetics professed in the discourse he has upheld in various published sources and poems that seem, at first glance, to contradict this discourse. However, a closer reading in fact reveals that Starnino, like Solway before him, might be “trying on” different styles, different voices, only to better communicate to his readers his reflections on the art of writing poetry. The poem “Doge’s Dungeon,” for example, exploits the style of the Flarfists, an avant-garde poetry movement of the late twentieth century whose aesthetic is dedicated to the exploration of the inappropriate (Fischer, “Can Flarf Ever Be Taken Seriously?”) to examine how language, especially the written word, even at its most distorted, is the medium by excellence through which individuals record and share their experiences, emotions and desires:

“Doge’s Dungeon”

Cave art by psychotics or Tourette’s syndrome blog.

Now and then a wish – big tits, open maw – rises heartbreakingly out of all that scrawl.

Scribal eye candy

but deranged: itchy arabesques, squirming cursive.

The founding Flarfists, late into the night, hitting send.

No white space left unsmutted, stone sets up a streaming feed

of goodbyes, first thought, last thought, final tries

at slapping oblivion’s slate with harm. Twelfth-century taggers

penned to the same spot, chain gang signmaking, a school of jot,

or an open-source attach on writer’s block: *le mot juste*

etched, x-ed, re-etched until it became the Codex Sinaiticus

of crackpot talk, ravings.com, the hive mind in cubicles

clacking away in flame wars with fate. omg. plz hlp me. i dun wnt

2 die hre – hex and hiss and ubi sunt spam scripts

of those who tried to lockpick these fume-brown walls (:~o).

Matchstick men, cornered, text-messaging their terror.

(This Way Out 35)

Although the poem appears to be a complete departure from Starnino's signature style – one that blends humour and erudition, childlike innocence and formal structure – it is in fact yet another experiment with voice, one that, unlike Solway's experiments, is not signed by a pseudonym or heteronym. The poet seems to be reaching out to these avant-garde young poets, individuals whom he may have criticized in his role as a poetry critic but in whom he sees a common objective: the desire to overcome writer's block and to find *le mot juste*, whatever utterance will adequately express the poet's feeling of terror, confusion or rebellion. There is beauty, the poet seems to say, in utterances that are sincere, be they written in grammatically correct English or in the modern idiom of electronic communications and of emoticons. Nonetheless, Starnino's voice (one could argue the Jubilate voice) does shine through, in phrases as "itchy arabesque, squirming cursive" or "final tries / slapping oblivion's slate with harm", as does his abundant use of assonance and alliteration. Whatever the voice, whatever the poetics, Starnino seems to be saying, every poet's underlying objective remains the same: to escape oblivion and to commit to writing, the most permanent form of expression, the experience of a life lived, the achievement of a form of "grace".

The final aspect of the Jubilate discourse which at first glance appears to clash with the poetry these four poets have produced is their repeated condemnation of "Canadian content" in poetry, their accusation that poets misguidedly "trawl the country for content: its history, its values, its geography, its seasons, its people" (*A Lover's Quarrel* 41). David Solway hyperbolically suggests that Canadian poets must flee Canada if they wish to write poetry that is sincere and free of the pernicious "quest for ancestors" (*Director's Cut* 26); Carmine Starnino has claimed that too much Canadian poetry is in fact an example of an ingrained colonialism.

Eric Ormsby, on the other hand, has never gone as far as denouncing Canadian *content*, but has rather reproached those Canadian poets occupying central positions in the canon (as one can conclude from their ubiquitous presence in a number of anthologies of Canadian poetry) of writing in dull, muted tones. Interestingly, however, most of the Jubilate poets have produced poetry that is specifically, identifiably Canadian in content (be it through the naming of geographical locations or of Canadian individuals). Nonetheless, as we shall see, even this aspect of their poetry does not stray too far from their original discourse, for all four combine this “Canadian content” with poetic language and form so that the poems goes beyond the merely descriptive.

David Solway’s poetry could be said to be the least Canadian in its *content*, that is, in its descriptions or naming of specific Canadian locales. In fact, many of his collections focus entirely on describing the landscape, the quotidian activities, the people and even the food and drink, the fauna and flora of the various Greek isles on which he has sojourned. Moreover, his repeated use of heteronyms, by which he dons the identity of Greek, Turkish, Dominican poets, and even of a thirteenth-century English scholar, allows him to shed, if only temporarily, his own identity as Canadian poet. Nonetheless, there remains, in collections such as *Bedrock*, or even in an earlier collection, *Modern Marriage* (Signal Editions, 1987), which consists of sonnets written as postcards to an estranged wife from two different locales – Greece and the woods of Pinnacle Mountain, in Quebec’s Eastern Townships – a conscious desire to describe landscape in all its minutia. Eric Ormsby and Michael Harris will do the same, sometimes even naming the locale (like Ormsby does in the poems entitled “Nova Scotia” and “Halifax”). The poems by all three poets, however, are similar in style as well as in theme; hence, geography matters very

little, for what unites these poets' landscape poems is their use of language to render their environments. This goes against the general thrust of landscape as trope in Canadian poetry, or what Edward Blodgett has called an Adamic desire to claim the landscape: "Les grands poètes anglophones actuels, tels Al Purdy, Robert Kroetsch et Margaret Atwood, prolongent un aspect du groupe de McGill et considèrent la poésie comme l'acte de faire une carte du pays, projet adamique, pour ainsi dire" (Blodgett 119). The Jubilate Poets, for their part, apparently turn this project on its head and use the country, or landscape (for it is not solely, as has been shown, a Canadian landscape) in order to celebrate the English language. A comparison of three excerpts will suffice to illustrate:

"April"

Now the trees are creaking weary with
the weight of spring. Bit-by-bit the robin
resumes her contralto; the winter-crow is sulking
in his feathers. With the crow I was the sole
intelligence of winter. The snows themselves
circled around us, whispering small messages.
Now the whole earth opens underneath us,
the thousand faces of it lecherous with mud.
[...] (Michael Harris, *Grace* 24)

“Paxos”

There is no spot without its tree on Paxos.

Though it is morning, lemons and oranges light the dusk

and the high-branched pines, like green pagodas,

hang their clusters of small bulbs about the pathways.

No corner without its green. The eucalyptus

sifts a medicinal shade, swinging its censers

and filling the groves with its pungent mists;

there is leaf-smoke in the air, light is a pollen

of motes, and the sun drifts in the lilac sprays.

[...] (David Solway, *Bedrock* 35)

“Halifax”

Everyone enfolds a city so

Cordoned from the ordinary, pinnacled

And musketed, with steeples

Sleek in their stickling rectitude;

Remote and rainy, on its point of sea,

With pomp of foghorns pulsing from the buoys.

Such inward cities have the radiant
Tedium of childhood. There
The salt-scathed asphalt shone and the prim
Crimson of the bandstand, in
The Public Gardens, echoed
November's roses. There the decorous
Chrysanthemums inaugurated
Avenues of rain.
[...] (Eric Ormsby, *Time's Covenant* 82)

Obviously, David Solway's poem in this selection does not describe a Canadian landscape at all, but rather a locale. Nonetheless, it was chosen as an example of a landscape poem that uses, just like Michael Harris and Eric Ormsby do in their poems, landscape as a pretext to display lexical panache as well as the poets' ability to observe and to *feel*, in excruciating detail, the environment with which their words exist in a symbiotic relationship.¹²⁸ In such poems, one finds examples of the poetic language so frequently called for by the Jubilate poets: the phrase "trees creaking weary" literally echoes the sound of creaking branches, while "light is a pollen of motes" employs a rarely heard noun ("motes") to describe as accurately as possible the grainy, dusty quality of bright light shining through leafy trees. The phrase "pomp of foghorns pulsing from the buoys" imitates, much in the way Harris's creaking branches do, the sound

¹²⁸ This aspect of their poetry is also reminiscent of A.J.M. Smith's verse.

being conjured through its repetition of the consonant “p” and the predominance of the vowel “o”. That a Canadian landscape is – or is pointedly *not* – being described is irrelevant. It is for this reason that on various occasions the Jubilate poets have referred to E.J. Pratt, that most Canadian of poets, as one of the country’s most outstanding poetic voices: they admire Pratt’s verse not for its content, but for its sounds and structure. The Jubilate poets’ poems do not seek to promote a national identity, but are rather a display of workmanship. That the poets may feel inspired by their environment or a sense of belonging to a particular place – be it their home or abroad – is not a reaction against colonialism, as Starnino sees in other examples of Canadian verse; rather, they all follow David Solway’s call to “write well about anything and everything” (*Director’s Cut* 27).

Carmine Starnino answers this call, but unlike his fellow Jubilate poets, his poetry is more urban, more personal, centered in Montreal and the individuals with whom he shares his life. In his latest collection especially, references to Montreal are explicit, though they tend to form a backdrop for the poem’s narrative rather than the subject of the poem itself. Nonetheless, the eponymous poem consists of an affectionate yet critical glance at the poet’s hometown:

“This Way Out”

Corkscrew staircases, triplexes, satellite
dishes. Such riches as oranges – buck-fifty
a pound – piled on slats, under awnings,
and south of rue Ogilvy’s stretch

of family-run sweet-shops and delis:

Pêcherie Mairmais, where, head to tail,

cod cool on crushed ice. A good price.

It suits me down to the ground, this place

of sodium-lit nowhere-ness between

Jean-Talon and St. Roch. Its eighteen-

nineteenths of a toehold on the world.

Flattops beside flattops, planted

in acres of concrete – ungentrified

Eden at the brink of the sticks: Parc Ex,

God said, and up sprang sidestreets of shoebox

flats (plus rats), chain-link fences, plain-

penny bricks, and paint-splashed garages.

After that, rust-odoured alleys

where balding towels and pink panties

drip dry together like arranged marriages.

[...] (Starnino, *This Way Out* 18-21)

This poem specifically identifies Montreal and its neighbourhoods: Little Italy, Parc Extension. Streets are identified by name, as are a number of businesses and shops well-known to the residents of these neighbourhood's: *Marché SPG* (20), the *Dollarama* (20), *Steve's* (20). The poem depicts working-class, multicultural neighbourhoods, at first with affection ("it suits me down to the ground") then with a more cynical, critical view. He notes that the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods live isolated from one another despite the fact that they are "close-quartered" (21): "[...] We are counted / one by one into this dead end, / where the bandwidth's slow and we speak / not speech but yeses and nos that add up / to a scoop of that, a pound of this. What bliss." (21). Because the poem is written in the first person, readers are unsure whether there is irony in the words "what bliss" or if the poet truly appreciates living anonymously in this Montreal burg, in which he has lived as an adult. Nonetheless, the poem ties in with the others in the collection, wherein the poet depicts the quotidian aspects of urban life (noisy neighbours, workers gathered at a local tavern, shopping in a flea-market, the work of a butcher) and reflects on issues related to class mobility. The book's second section consists of sonnet post-cards destined to friends in Montreal, many of whom are Jubilate Poets, in which the poet shares his impressions of a trip to Italy with "Jen" (Starnino's wife, though few readers are likely to know this).¹²⁹ Like Solway, Ormsby and Harris before him, Starnino uses locale as a Muse; and although, in the third section of the collection, the poems speak of love, of breaking up, of depression and of healing, their titles refer to specific Montreal locations, or, at times, to other regions of Quebec, such as the Eastern Townships: "Weeping Willow, Parc Angrignon;" "Abandoned Fence Post, North Hatley;" "Roadkill, Unidentified, Hwy 401;" "Ball

¹²⁹ It should be noted, however, that the theme of Montreal in contemporary poetry is not new. In this regard, see the literary journal *Ellipse*, issue 56.

Floating, Lachine Canal;" "Perfume, Metro, Green Line;" "Puddle, Corner Jean-Talon and Outremont;" Car Alarm, St. Viateur;" "Loud TV from Next Door, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce;" "For Sale Sign, Wilson Street, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce;" "Hairline Wall Crack, Study, Par Ex Flat."

Starnino's poetry is explicitly Montreal poetry in its setting, its references, yet its subjects – love, heartbreak, social justice, urban life – are enduringly universal. The stanza lines are always tightly formed, and even the prose poems included in the collection place a strong emphasis on alliteration which recreates, in "Ducks Asleep on Grass" for example, the softness and stillness of the image portrayed and the sudden awakening of the birds: "Speckled berry-brown like soaked corks or bricks you heat to chase the chill from bed. But also: ticking bombs, brain-boxes dreaming bird barks, heartbeats like clocks set ten minutes ahead" (56). Hence, in spite of the ubiquitous presence of Montreal in Starnino's collection, the young poet does not, in fact, promote a nationalist aesthetic but remains true to his discourse, in which he calls upon poets to exploit every available resource the English language has to offer.

Although the Jubilate Circle's abundant corpus of poetry is generally stylistically, and even, to some extent, thematically uniform and usually supports the main aspects of the Jubilate discourse identified in the previous chapter, contradictions and departures from the discourse do exist. These are sometimes justified by the poets as "explorations of voice" or as examples of "poetic versatility," yet they nonetheless bring the attentive reader to interpret the discourse with a certain grain of salt. The poets appear to be playing with the readers, seemingly contradicting themselves, although upon closer reading it becomes apparent that

such contradictions are in fact rare and that the poets rather seem to be demonstrating that which poetry *ought* to do, that is, unite language, form and content to create a synergetic whole, a poem whose sum is greater than its parts and whose every word, every accent is carefully calculated to achieve a desired effect. However, the apparent contradictions allow the reader to come to a somewhat different conclusion: the discourse, very coherent among the Jubilate poets, could in fact serve not to enlighten our understanding and enhance our appreciation of their poetry, but rather to ensure a certain position within the literary field, to create associations with poets holding central, “canonized” positions in the field of global – not Canadian – English-language poetry in an effort to secure their own posterity and their positions in Canada’s future literary history. Such is one of the functions of a network, and the Jubilate poets have clearly made use of this social aspect of literary production as a tool to help them in the Bourdieusian “struggle” among the agents of a literary field. Hence the Jubilate “project,” if one could be said to exist, comes full circle both in the poetry and in the discourse these Anglo-Montrealers have produced over the course of the past four decades. Although the group and its name were initially conceived of as a joke, the joke has in fact become reality, and the members of the Jubilate Circle have indeed produced a body of work, both prose and verse, that justifies the term “literary circle.”

Conclusion

Poetry, just like the novel or the short story, is a dynamic literary genre, in constant evolution on both the formal and linguistic fronts. One of the very first literary genres claimed by Canadian men of letters in the nineteenth century, Canadian poetry in both French and English has been characterized by the presence of groups of individuals who have, at some point in history, banded together and subsequently revolutionized the field, eventually occupying a central position as they gained economic and/or symbolic capital. Literary historiography's role is to document these groups, *cénacles* and literary schools, often associated, in the nineteenth and twentieth century with a publication such as a little magazine or with a publishing company, and to evaluate their impact on the country's literary development. At the turn of the twenty-first century, however, with the decline of little magazines and other literary publications and the rise of regional publishing, it has become increasingly difficult to identify groups or literary schools revolving around a publication or a series. Moreover, in this era of electronic communication, geographical distance no longer represents a considerable obstacle to the creation of literary alliances across borders, and thus regional poetry schools have since seemed to become a thing of the past, for some people at least. Cynthia Messenger even goes as far as predicting that at the end of the twentieth century, "a relatively cohesive poetic movement, such as the West Coast TISH school of the 1960s, is unlikely to emerge" (941).

However, aesthetic, formal and ideological oppositions still exist within the literary field of Canadian poetry, and "double-agents" such as the editor-poet or the poet-critic are just as

present as they were in A.J.M. Smith's and John Sutherland's time. The case of the Jubilate Circle, a group of poets who have banded together largely as a result of their association with the Montreal poetry series Signal Editions, is a prime example that seems to disprove Messenger's predictions. Indeed, Anglo-Quebec poets Michael Harris, David Solway, Carmine Starnino and Eric Ormsby are among those that have adopted and promoted Signal Editions' poetics. Two among them (Harris and Starnino) have directed the series; three of the four (Solway, Starnino and Ormsby) are poet-critics. All have published with Signal Editions, although only Michael Harris has done so exclusively since the founding of the series. Signs that a new literary circle made up of these four Signal poets began to appear in the late nineteen-nineties, although some members (David Solway and Michael Harris) by then already enjoyed a friendship that had begun two decades earlier. The clues pointed to the existence of a socio-literary phenomenon of possible interest not only to scholars of Canadian literature but to those of Canadian book history as well.

This dissertation has hypothesized that the Jubilate Circle, the fictional literary association initially thought up as a joke by David Solway and Carmine Starnino, in fact became a reality: a literary circle consisting of Anglo-Montreal poets sharing a common poetic vision and ideology did, in fact, exist. Although the four poets have dispersed geographically and professionally, with Eric Ormsby working out of London, England, Carmine Starnino now editor at *Reader's Digest* and David Solway working for right-wing political on-line magazines, some signs of the network can still sometimes be perceived: an example would be a blurb by Eric Ormsby published on the book jacket of Michael Harris's latest volume, *Circus* (2010). The Signal Editions series represented for the members of this literary circle what Michel Trebitsche

has coined a *lieu de sociabilité littéraire*, an anchoring point that allowed the Jubilate poets to meet, share ideas, and to forge the friendships that would come to have such an important impact on their respective literary careers. This study has also established that these four poets have held a common discourse and have pooled their resources, that is, their social and cultural capital, in order to provide professional support for one another and to more effectively claim their position as marginal poets – that is, remaining outside the canon – in the Canadian field of poetry and as central poets in the field of English-language poetry in general. An examination of their discourse has revealed that these poets favour a return to formalism and generally disdain experimental poetry or that espousing common or colloquial speech, and are critical of poetry that foregrounds nationalism or verse that presents political or social undertones. It could be posited that holding such a discourse serves a veiled purpose: it may help secure a place for the Jubilate poets in the Canadian poetry canon by providing the poetics by which their poetry should be read. Finally, a close reading of sample poems penned by Michael Harris, David Solway, Carmine Starnino and Eric Ormsby has revealed that their production has generally stayed true to their discourse (or vice versa), although there are a few notable exceptions wherein the poets indeed seem to contradict themselves. Nonetheless, the poets justify these divergences by claiming that their foremost concern when writing poetry is language, that is, an exploration of all the resources that the English-language holds for poets and of all that form and structural restrictions imposed on a poem can in fact accomplish.

Within the broader context of Canadian literature, however, this study of literary networks reveals the potential that examining Québécois and Canadian literature as two overlapping fields, rather than as two opposing fields, can hold for scholars of Comparative

Canadian literature. Indeed, elements of the network (correspondence, partnerships, the presence of Anglo-Quebec and Québécois poets on common literary juries for example) shows that although there may be a geographical gap between Canadian and Québécois writers and poets, just as there may (or, as is often the case, may not) be a linguistic and cultural barrier between the Anglo-Québécois and the Québécois writers and poets, literary networks can effectively bridge these gaps and reveal fruitful collaborations, enlivened discussions and bitter rivalries between members of different networks or fields. It is the presence of these agents that bridge more than one field, more than one network, that allows us to conclude that the time may have come to redefine the boundaries of our fields of study: the porous, overlapping fields, in which certain agents act as bridges between two groups normally set in opposition to one another, are the sites in which the literature of all fields grow and evolve, share influences and acquire new, different forms of symbolic capital. The Jubilate Circle has been the site of a number of such trans-field exchanges: David Solway collaborated with Judith-Louise Thibault, a fellow teacher at John Abbott College, to help her edit the anthology entitled *Le Groupe des huit: huit poètes anglo-québécois*; a long-standing collaboration between Simon Dardick, owner and publisher of Véhicule Press, to which the Signal Editions poetry series belongs, and Paul Bélanger, publisher of Les Éditions du Noroît, helped to secure publication of this anthology that includes original versions and French translations of poems by Stephanie Bolster, Michael Harris, Eric Ormsby, Robyn Sarah, Norm Sibum, David Solway and Peter Van Toorn. Correspondence in David Solway's archives discloses other types of trans-field relations, this time taking the form of friendships, friendships which reveal themselves through literary dedications, or, to use Genette's terms, in the paratext: "Dear Robert," writes Solway to

Québécois poet and friend Robert Melançon (who, significantly, has published much of his poetry with Les Éditions du Noroît),

I was very touched by your letter and dedication, which made me yearn for the vieux bon temps (the necessary cliché), when one or the other of us would just drop by for a little smoke and drink and talk, the three politically incorrect virtues. Since then we've adopted an epistolary mode which is almost funny given the fact that we're practically neighbours. The latest innovation is to communicate by dedication, which is also kind of hilarious. I look forward to the resumption of normal relations. [...] Your friend, David Solway. (David Solway Papers, February 24, 1994)

Such examples of collaborations, friendships and mutual influences abound, not only in the case of the Jubilate Circle but in the sphere Anglo-Quebec literature generally. These writers and poets, whose body of literature and, at times, whose identity, as Linda Leith herself has pointed out in *Writing in the Time of Nationalism* (Signature 2010), can only really be identified by what it is *not*, are constantly traveling back and forth between two fields, two canons, two languages, and innumerable networks. Academic interest in these literary figures, somewhat hard to place on the "maps" of Canadian and Québécois literatures, is growing. Following Gilles Marcotte's provocative claim that "il n'existe évidemment pas telle chose qu'une littérature anglo-québécoise » (Marcotte 6), a number of researchers have combined their efforts to form the *Équipe de recherche interuniversitaire sur la littérature anglo-québécoise* and to dedicate themselves to the particularities of this sub-group of both Canadian and Québécois literatures. These researchers have created a new lexicon that expresses both the distance and proximity, the difference and sameness that characterize this grey area in Canadian literature: they speak of new "zones de contact" (Leclerc, Simon), of "conflict in contiguity" (Moyes) and of

“conflictual loyalties” (Harel); even writers and journalists commenting upon this particular literary field have contributed to the new lexicon, speaking of “barbarophones” (Majzels) and of the invention of a “nouvelle minorité” (Legault).

It seems enlightening, in this context, that the true nature of this literary circle is equally hard to define, given that its name and *raison d’être* were conceived of originally as a joke, one that has eventually become reality, and that its members are fond of perpetuating hoaxes, of playing with the notions of voice and identity and that, above all, they systematically reject national affiliation of any kind, preferring instead to be judged on the quality of their poetry rather than on their country (or province) of origin. And yet, as though they wished to muddy the waters, they will simultaneously claim that belonging to this grey zone in Canada and Québec’s literary maps has proven fruitful over the course of their careers: Carmine Starnino comments on being a Montrealer and states that

[e]ver since A.J.M. Smith and F.R. Scott led the Modernist intervention in the 1920s, a large subset of Montreal poets have felt themselves distinctly separate, and have shifted their sense of that separateness into idiosyncratic textures of language and feeling. The result has been an identity without Canadian precedent; an identity, in fact, at war with any such cultural denominator. (Starnino, “Michael Harris’s Boo-Jwah Appalachiana” 232)

Likewise, David Solway claims that “English Montreal [...] is in many respects a small and lonely city [...]. Besieged by two generations of neglect, it has thus forced its writers in upon themselves in a kind of literary quarantine. This state of affairs [...] has compelled a number of the poets to shape their own distinctive and indelible styles [...]” (*Director’s Cut* 62). Both of these claims are predicated upon the very essence of a network, although at first glance they

seem to do the very opposite. Solway and Starnino both note that their voices, styles and outlooks are forged not only by the people that surround them, but also *in opposition to* those individuals not admitted to the network: the circle thus becomes useful to put forward what it advocates but also what it vehemently opposes. David Solway appears to claim that the “literary quarantine” is imposed from the outside upon Anglo-Quebec writers, but later in the same article states that there exists “a party of excellence associated with Signal Editions and the Jubilate Circle,” a group that effectively “[turns] the condition of exile [...] to advantage” [64]. Paradoxically, as this study has noted, despite the Jubilate poets’ repeated claims that the last thing they seek to do is “to belong,” their discourse and poetry reveal quite the opposite, that is, the importance of belonging *to the network* and the force with which they claim this network and simultaneously reject others.

Ultimately, this is the inherent nature of the literary field (or of any other type of field): Pierre Bourdieu explains that fields are characterized by their agents’ constant struggle to claim a central (or sometimes, ironically, peripheral) position within the field, for with a central position comes economic capital and, generally, posterity, while the peripheral positions hold a greater potential for symbolic capital. In this respect, the creation of a literary network that, in the case of the Jubilate Circle, openly rejects one imagined canon and claims its members’ rightful position in another is an example of just such a struggle and is, as Carmine Starnino’s poetry anthology entitled *The New Canon: An Anthology of Canadian Poetry* clearly demonstrates, an exercise in canon-making. In his introduction to his anthology, Starnino suggests that the poets he has chosen remain marginal because of their aesthetic and formal choices. However, John Guillory’s and Robert Lecker’s studies on canon formation both suggest

that the underlying principle behind any attempt to create or claim a canon is a conservative-minded desire to maintain the status quo (see Guillory 19; Lecker 117). In this light, the title chosen by Carmine Starnino for his anthology is puzzling: on one hand, the adjective “new” speaks of an emerging canon, one that is currently being written by innovative contemporary poets; on the other, canons are generally opposed to innovations. Is Starnino positing himself and the poets he is anthologizing as the new creative voices in Canadian poetry, or, as his discourse might indicate, is he rather being critical of Canada’s more experimental poets and touting instead those who uphold tradition? It seems that Starnino’s project, here, is to impose within the field of Canadian literature a canon of poetry whose aesthetic is far from new but that, when properly treated with the imagination and skill of contemporary poets (particularly by those of his circle), becomes renewed and relevant once more.

In Starnino’s (and indeed, in the Jubilate poets’) rhetoric, “great” poets hail tradition as the foundation of their poetry, upon which they will build innovative structures that will make them neither copycats of their old masters nor members of the avant-garde. They thus appear to be suffering from “anxiety of influence,” a concept brought forward by Harold Bloom suggesting that these poets not only hope to imitate their masters, but to surpass them. Seen from this angle, it makes perfect sense that the long introductory essay on the nefariousness of nationalism in Canadian poetry that opens Starnino’s prose collection *A Lover’s Quarrel* was in fact prompted by the exclusion of any Canadian poet from the 1998 anthology *World Poetry: An Anthology of Verse from Antiquity to Our Time* (*A Lover’s Quarrel* 33). This fact suggests, in Starnino’s eyes, that the Canadian canon is not one that is recognized on the world stage; therefore, the Jubilate poets’ repudiation of this canon is a strategy that ensures them that they

might stand a better chance of being recognized beyond Canada's borders, and by doing so, gives them a chance at a certain form of posterity. It is ultimately this posterity that is the end-goal of these "agents'" constant struggles.

This study's title, "Rare poems ask rare friends," was inspired by a line of poetry written by Ben Jonson, the seventeenth-century English dramatist and poet. According to Stanley Fish, Ben Jonson addressed his readers through his poems and, by doing so, simultaneously proclaimed his belonging to a given circle, or network, and welcomed into this network those individuals who possessed the necessary skills (cultural and social capital) to successfully interpret Jonson's works:

Poetry that so withholds itself and closes its face to anything outside its circle puts pressure on those who read it to demonstrate, in the very act of reading, that they are already in. Rather than acting as an exhortation to virtuous activity (in a manner consistent with the didacticism of many centuries) these poems provide their readers, who are also their addressees, with an occasion for recognizing that whatever informs these poems – and it is never, can never, be specified – informs them too. At the same time that they restrict access to the community, the poems also, and by the same act, *generate* the community. (Fish 40)

Jonson's strategy is one that is reproduced, more than three hundred years later, by the poets of the Jubilate Circle, who not only claim their belonging to an initially fictional exclusive network through their discourse and poetry but generate that very network by doing so. The individual voice becomes collective and the poet, by channelling his network, addresses a small group in order to one day justify his inclusion in a larger group, a canon of "enduringly valid"

works. For if his group consists of individuals endowed with the necessary cultural capital to confer upon him some form of institutionally sanctioned recognition, such recognition will at once reflect upon the group as a whole and allow the poet to absorb, in turn, some of this cultural capital. Such is the *raison d'être* and the essential functioning of a network, or more precisely of a literary circle, a concept acknowledged by one of the Jubilate Circle's most prominent influences, Robert Graves: "A poet's public consists of those who happen to be close enough to him, in education and environment and imaginative vision, to be able to catch both the overtones and the undertones of his poetic statements" (Graves, qtd in Geddes 560). The Jubilate Circle therefore came into existence as a result of this tightly-knit association of "authors-readers," individuals who bonded together "in a reciprocal and mutually defining relationship" (Fish 32) and posited themselves, through the creation of literary personae, as the gate-keepers of an enduring literary tradition. What better proof, asks Ben Jonson, could the poets have of their rightful belonging to the grander canon of global English-language poetry than the praise of the very individuals in whom they recognize the authority to grant such a position? The last lines of Jonson's poem "In Authorem," express it succinctly:

So with this Authors Readers will it thrive:
Which is being eyed directly, I divine,
His proofe their praise, will meet, as in this line.

The Jubilate Circle is indeed founded on this very principle, that the praise of each poet's peers is in fact proof of his success and of his worth as a poet, and that such praise and such poetry will indeed "meet" within their respective bodies of prose and poetry. The circle is indeed a

complete and fairly hermetic one, and its existence has formed a significant chapter in Canada's (and indeed, Anglo-Quebec's) literary history.

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