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Abstract

For several years it seemed as if Marshall McLuhan had come and gone leaving little trace of his influence on Canadian thinking. Now three new books,* two by ex-students of his at the University of Toronto (Powe and Smyth), engage with his ideas to address the same problem – a postliterate world and its implications for writing, reading and thinking. Fawcett and Smyth carry the inquiry one step further, to consider our potential for the destruction of our environment and ourselves, and our potential for creative social change. Powe writes as an uncritical disciple of McLuhan, Fawcett and Smyth as critics, but each writer poses these questions, as put by Powe: 'What happens to thinking, resistance, and dissent when the ground becomes wordless, electric and musical?' (15). In other words, what are the implications of McLuhan's Global Village for the role of the intellectual in contemporary Canada? Each poses this question according to his or her personal concerns. Smyth and Fawcett both ask why people put up with the way things are, suggest that they do because they cannot imagine alternatives, and therefore make it their job to imagine alternatives. Powe, in contrast, appears to be asking how the traditional intellectual (himself) can maintain his authority when the new organisation of his society no longer needs him to legitimate it. His response to this differently formulated dilemma is to re-assert his authority through plugging into a self-defined tradition of maverick authority. Each of these positions comments on the options available to the Canadian writer in response to the intensified marginalisation of a colonised position.

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For several years it seemed as if Marshall McLuhan had come and gone leaving little trace of his influence on Canadian thinking. Now three new books,* two by ex-students of his at the University of Toronto (Powe and Smyth), engage with his ideas to address the same problem — a post-literate world and its implications for writing, reading and thinking. Fawcett and Smyth carry the inquiry one step further, to consider our potential for the destruction of our environment and ourselves, and our potential for creative social change. Powe writes as an uncritical disciple of McLuhan, Fawcett and Smyth as critics, but each writer poses these questions, as put by Powe: 'What happens to thinking, resistance, and dissent when the ground becomes wordless, electric and musical?' (15). In other words, what are the implications of McLuhan's Global Village for the role of the intellectual in contemporary Canada? Each poses this question according to his or her personal concerns. Smyth and Fawcett both ask why people put up with the way things are, suggest that they do because they cannot imagine alternatives, and therefore make it their job to imagine alternatives. Powe, in contrast, appears to be asking how the traditional intellectual (himself) can maintain his authority when the new organisation of his society no longer needs him to legitimate it. His response to this differently formulated dilemma is to re-assert his authority through plugging into a self-defined tradition of maverick authority. Each of these positions comments on the options available to the Canadian writer in response to the intensified marginalisation of a colonised position.

The metaphors they employ to characterise the blight of the Global Village as new Imperium are revealing. Smyth turns to the Bible for her

*) Brian Fawcett, *Cambodia: A book for people who find television too slow* (Vancouver: Talon, 1986).

Donna E. Smyth, *Subversive Elements* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986).

B.W. Powe, *The Solitary Outlaw* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1987).

metaphoric statement of the dilemma: 'In the Valley of the Shadow, imagination is struck dumb' (17); Powe and Fawcett to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Fawcett writes: 'This is a story about memory and imagination, and about the reorganizations of human intelligence that are about to leave us all in a new — or a very ancient — kind of darkness' (11). In response to McLuhan's statement in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* that 'The Twentieth century encounter between alphabetic and electronic faces of culture confers on the printed word a crucial role in staying the return to «the Africa within»', Powe asserts that «The Africa within» is the heart of darkness. This is, McLuhan knew, a central metaphor in the modern journey to the dark side of human nature' (178). Fawcett takes great pains to reject such a reading of the metaphor, seeing it as apolitical and reactionary, drawing our attention instead to the economic practices such language legitimates. In social vision and political stance, Fawcett is closer to Smyth, yet his metaphors — despite his avowed intentions — often align him uncomfortably with Powe.

Nowhere is this more disturbing than in the gunslinger role the two male writers endorse for the contemporary intellectual. For Powe, writer and reader are alike 'solitary outlaws'; for Fawcett, the intellectual is a 'hostile in the Global Village' (13). Both believe that the individual is under attack by a reorganization of human intelligence that plays to the lowest common denominator in the North American crowd by encouraging ignorance. To reassert that undermined individuality each turns to the archetypal American metaphor of the violent man alone, waging warfare against a powerful system of authority. Each romanticises his writer's role as 'insurgent' and 'guerrilla' (Fawcett, 61); the 'solitary outlaw' who practices 'intellectual terrorism' (Powe, 89), while remaining true to his eighteenth century ideals, particularly a belief in Truth, as accessible to the violent interrogation of human reason.

The aggressive, self-consciously *macho* stance of these writers does much to undermine their message. While ostensibly challenging authority, they claim it for themselves as arrogant authors of their texts. Powe seems untroubled by this contradiction: his outlaw rejects the law but embraces, indeed insists on, authority; an authority he has earned through mastery of the word. The adversaries he sets himself are mostly straw men anyhow. Fawcett seeks a more radical break: 'I don't trust any authority.... Yet to be an author involves exerting authority over one's subject matter. How do I write without falling into the enemy camp?' (14). Clearly different 'enemies' are being confronted here. Powe's enemies don't write: they are the masses who watch TV. Fawcett's enemies include people like Powe, writers who appear to be

attacking the same things — dehumanising consumerism — but who in fact work to deflect our attention away from the real sources of such threats. Yet Fawcett himself cannot fully evade the problem he poses so clearly. When he writes, his macho stance does tend to ally him with the enemy camp. For Smyth, that enemy camp, ‘an amalgam of the nuclear industry ... and various levels of government and military’ is finally traceable to ‘thrust/penetration/power/Male power’ (169), precisely the ‘potency’ Powe and Fawcett do not wish to surrender.

There are no women in Powe’s book and the few who appear in Fawcett’s are treated with scorn. The models both these men set themselves are exclusively male, and in the tradition of ‘healthy aggression’ (Powe, 98) that Powe so much admires in Trudeau. Although Powe rejects ‘nineteenth-century views of the Heroic Author’ as ‘anachronisms’ (188), he presents us with five heroic men (and implicitly himself in their tradition) ‘who have refused to be impotent when faced with the decline of the word’ (16). That their assertions of ‘potency’ have so often involved denigrating others, irresponsible statements and authoritarianism does occasionally bother Powe but he willingly becomes their apologist because he believes the only alternatives to their totalitarian individualism are mass consumerism or — most terrible of all — communism.

Fawcett knows that the inability to imagine other alternatives is our greatest danger. He wants to open up the discourse to allow more alternatives but has trouble suggesting what they might be or how they might operate. Like Powe, he finds it easier to slide into what Edward Said has termed ‘the politics of blame’, employing what Abdul JanMohamed has termed a ‘manichean allegory’ characteristic of the colonialist discourse of which *Heart of Darkness* is a prime example.¹ JanMohamed points out that

The dominant model of power- and interest-relations in all colonial societies is the manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native. This axis in turn provides the central feature of the colonialist cognitive framework and colonialist literary representation: the manichean allegory — a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object. The power relations underlying this model set in motion such strong currents that even a writer who is reluctant to acknowledge it and who may indeed be highly critical of imperialist exploitation is drawn into its vortex. (63)

Smyth recognises this trap for what it is, a mask for domination:

The world split in half like a rotten apple. Us and Them. Black and White. Left and Right. The old rhetoric and the old morality which has led us to the brink. Paranoia carefully fostered by the State and maintained by the multinationals who are transnationals whose very existence shows how skin-deep the ideological game is. (84)

Post-colonial and Marxist critics have been pointing out how such an ideology operates to oppress the colonised and the working classes for some time now, but Fawcett's ambivalence (at times he recognises the danger of such metaphors; at times he succumbs to them) shows how powerful they still are at co-opting even the best-intentioned writers. Significantly, both Powe and Fawcett identify with V.S. Naipaul, the writer most often seen by post-colonial writers, including Said and JanMohamed, as having won his reputation on the basis of having sold out his own people to flatter imperialist prejudices by continuing to work this manichean vein. Like Naipaul, they present themselves as solitary individuals combatting mass ignorance. Like Naipaul, they denigrate their own culture (Fawcett regretfully, Powe automatically) as a way of asserting their right to belong to the 'universal' world of the coloniser's culture.

In contrast, Smyth describes the process of forming a citizen's coalition to fight bureaucracy and the big corporations that threaten to destroy her community. Her message is that the individual cannot fight alone. We need other people, and the support is there, if we can learn how to mobilize it and work together. The difference between her accounts of the dynamics inside a citizens' group and her analysis of the co-opted groups created to frustrate change as opposed to Fawcett's in 'A Small Committee' clearly illustrate his fundamentally elitist impatience with other people, especially women, as opposed to her own attempt to bring people together to create community. She contrasts the false community of the Global Village, as epitomised in the shopping centre, against the surviving Nova Scotian communities of people who work and know the land and the new utopian efforts of back-to-the-landers. It would be a mistake simply to categorise Powe and Fawcett's dedication to separation and Smyth's to affiliation as gender-determined. What is at stake is a strategy for working toward social change and a debate about the political role of fiction. The contrast between the locally rooted dynamics of the action in Smyth's documentary story and the highly romanticised cosmopolitanism of her love story implicitly criticises the ways in which fiction has allowed itself to be 'universalised', that is divorced from the realities of everyday life and the specifics of time and place. But both parallel stories share a concern with love, that is with positive human relations, and with how they may best be encouraged and achieved. In contrast,

Fawcett's obsession with his role as a 'hostile' stresses the writer's adversarial rather than his enabling role as an envisions of social change. And his failure to radically question his inherited assumptions about gender undermines his effectiveness even in this role. His hostility is often misdirected.

Powe is the more obviously elitist and reactionary in his sympathies. His two 'exemplary images of the last literates' (66) are two self-acknowledged fascists: Wyndham Lewis and Pound, for whom he unconvincingly plays the apologist. But his section on Trudeau, Liberal Prime Minister of Canada for most of the period from 1968 to 1984, is most revealing of his method. Trudeau, he tells us 'would not try to give rigid theoretical consistency to his thinking. That would lead to the logical result of dialectics: totalitarianism' (90). Such sweeping leaps of illogic are typical of Powe's method throughout this strange book. Thus warned not to expect consistency, the reader will not be too surprised to discover Powe praising Trudeau because 'He had values, but he was prepared to be unprincipled' (95) and quoting admiringly to prove his point the notorious exchange after the War Measures Act:

Journalist: 'How far will you go?'

Trudeau: 'Just watch me.'

What a man! What a model for the kind of 'dissent' that Powe admires! For Powe tells us that 'Trudeau was a born outsider.... His background encouraged him: strong mother, absent father, wealthy family, private-school education, Jesuit training' (96-7). Powe's ideological games are here at their most blatant. Does he expect us to believe through the mere audacity of his assertions that a millionaire Prime Minister is the archetypal outsider in our society? Indeed he does, and judging from the reviews so far, no one is calling his bluff. Ideological domination often works in just this way, with the men who hold the concrete power insisting their women somehow control them in less concrete ways. It is always an advantage to claim the underdog position, however ludicrous such a claiming may appear to an objective examination.

His other model 'outsiders' are equally establishment figures whose names are well-known throughout the Western world and whose achievements have been amply rewarded with acclaim in their own time: Lewis, Gould, Canetti, McLuhan. Powe presents himself as their apologist and disciple. For Canadian literature, he feels, predictably, nothing but scorn. 'It is my pet conceit, though, that prose in Canada is sadly undistinguished' (148), he mourns. And at greater length, of Canadian writers he asserts that

few challenge the political-social milieu we live in. Most have trouble believing that a social reality is there. The average novelist-poet-critic (each vocation distinct from the other; you must accept your box in the Great White North) stumbling in from the nineteenth-century bush, taught to detest North American society, having received the blessings of the Two Essential Grants (George and the Canada Council), after ripping out in record time (ten years) yet another work on the True Themes (bestiality and the Small Town) — well, you wouldn't expect those who claim that they don't do research to see that electric politics determine most of our social-cultural environment. The result: the habitual intellectual stance is remote from the scene's dynamics. (113)

It is hard to tell whether this kind of writing is being offered as yet another example of how undistinguished the Canadian prose style can be or as an example of the solitary outlaw's attack on the totalitarian logic of traditional grammar. It is certain that in making many of these assertions Powe is on shaky, and unresearched, ground. Yet this is the kind of privilege he claims as someone above the laws that constrain the rest of us. Has he not heard of the achievements in poetry, fiction and non-fiction prose of writers such as Atwood, Bowering, Klein, Kroetsch and Mandel? The irony is that Powe's book itself fails to challenge its own milieu, fails indeed to give any concrete sense of what that milieu is like or how it feels to live and try to think and write in Toronto today.

Powe fails because he has no analysis to offer beyond a vague distaste for contemporary popular culture and a knee-jerk disdain for his readers. We readers have, he tells us disarmingly, 'the approximate concentration span of a gnat' (149). Instead of analysis he offers intuition. A good example of his method is an early attempt to yoke two disparate ideas together:

'GO AHEAD...CANCEL, a word-processor tells its user. And at the touch of a key: oblivion.

In a flash of analogy, we see how Lewis's work was cancelled by the depersonalizing forces he confronted. (27)

Such flashes of analogy are fundamentally false, as a moment's reflection makes clear. The word processor only responds to commands, it does not initiate them. There must be a person at the controls of a word processor, usually the writer of those words, to initiate a command to cancel, and now there is also usually an undo button to retrieve what has been cancelled if the writer has second thoughts. The word processor, as symbol of depersonalizing forces, cannot be blamed for the metaphorical cancelling of Lewis's words. People are always behind the 'depersonalizing forces' in our society. Things don't just happen, as Powe implies;

they happen for reasons, usually reasons to do with power and how it is to be got, wielded and maintained. Powe's obsession with individuals cannot deal with these questions of power. It is here that Smyth's and Fawcett's analyses, however faulty in their own ways, can take us further toward understanding what is really at stake in these three texts.

For what Powe took to be inexplicable and puzzling contradictions — Lewis' equal attraction to Hitler's fascism and American democracy, the U.S. support of dictatorships abroad, or Trudeau's flamboyant individualism and his dictatorial authoritarianism — Smyth and Fawcett see as fundamental contradictions built into the systems that control us. Smyth explains:

This is a post-materialist consumer culture whereby individuals are conditioned to accept and function within the limits of a concealed paradox: 1) she/he is encouraged to believe the individual is of more importance than the community because then the individual will buy more 2) at the same time, true individuality is being swamped by the cultural homogeneity of consumerism. (178)

This concealed paradox hides darker ones: the complicity between our consumer economy, our governments and the armaments industry. Smyth addresses these through one group's efforts to stop uranium mining in Nova Scotia, efforts that gradually reveal 'a ruthless world of power connections that reached into the highest levels of the federal government and spread out tentacles into the farthest corners of the world' (120). Fawcett traces their interlinking through 'Cambodia', his image for the marriage of imperialism and capitalism: 'bureaucratic authority has a most unexpected twin: genocide' (12); 'Cambodia is the subtext of the Global Village' and 'the Global Village has had its purest apotheosis yet in Cambodia' (54); 'franchise capitalism shouldn't be such a surprise ... it is the logical result of the coupling of monopoly capitalism and bourgeois ideology' (58).

It is in trying to make these contradictions concrete for their readers that Fawcett and Smyth introduce their most interesting innovations and produce their greatest disappointments. Both texts offer parallel narratives. Fawcett divides his page across the middle, with a series of fictional stories set in contemporary Canada along the top and an articulated subtext of analytic commentary along the bottom. Smyth begins with autobiographical documentary about the anti-nuclear struggle in Nova Scotia but continually interrupts it with a romantic love story dealing with some famous and some fictional characters set in Europe in the first years of the twentieth century. The dual texts remind us of the connections linking even apparently disparate material and tying us all to each

other. They remind us of how narrative arranges reality to create a 'reality effect' so that certain things seem real and natural to us and others don't. By reminding us of the artificiality of such realism, they remind us also that reality — our perceptions and our expectations of it — can be changed. These dual texts represent Fawcett's and Smyth's efforts to bring fiction that engages with reality back to their own people, people much so-called serious fiction seems deliberately not to address. Smyth puts it most clearly:

As a working class, Canadian woman, it still amazes me how thoroughly I have internalized the lesson that Art belongs to Them. When I face my writing, I have to strip myself to the bone: cut through layers of education and learned responses to discover what I think and feel. Yet no individual can situate herself outside cultural history.... What I have to do, what we dispossessed have to do, is to take possession of what is rightfully ours: beauty, grace, and the power of articulation. (107)

The shift from 'I' to 'we' — the movement Powe and Fawcett are less willing to initiate — shows the necessary shift from individual perception of the problem to collective action toward addressing it. Born in B.C. and living in Nova Scotia, Smyth writes knowing what it is to be marginalized and educated not to trust the authority of your own experience. But she knows too that it is not enough to bemoan your powerlessness. Collectively, the power is yours if you can organise to wield it.

Fawcett writes against a similar imposition of the Imperium's view of reality on the regional experience: 'When you live in the same place the details of it pile up and you start seeing what's really there instead of what you're told is there and important' (195). Yet most of his book is devoted to demonstrating the falseness of such a hopeful proposition, showing us instead how easy it is to blind oneself to one's immediate reality in order to lose oneself in manufactured dreams. 'The Huxley Satellite Dish' dramatizes the bitter irony of how the people of Huxley, B.C. came to live imaginatively in Detroit, cut off by the power of T.V. from the dynamics of their own place to imitate those of an alien culture.

What Fawcett omits is the process that enables a subject to change his or her beliefs about what is, what can be and what should be. Elsewhere, he locates this process in the colonial experience:

From childhood on, I took it for granted that the imaginary world beyond my native environment was something that would have to be *understood*. It was a challenge rather than merely a given. It was mine by heritage, and yet it was not mine, because I could not experience it uncritically. The civil experience I received was similarly disjunctive. (153)

But he fails to develop these insights, either to explain why similar experiences made V.S. Naipaul decide to identify with England and himself to return to Western Canada, or to develop an analysis that could explain why Powe, growing up in Toronto, did not experience the same disjunctions that Fawcett did, a decade or so earlier, in Prince George.

The same liberal humanism that blinds Powe interferes with the clarity of Fawcett's vision. Both men are interested in celebrating individual consciousness for itself rather than in understanding how it is created and maintained. Neither has a sophisticated analysis of ideological interpellations, the complex process whereby individuals accept or resist the roles, the goals and the definition of reality that their society assigns them and itself. Instead, both rely on instinct, experience and 'commonsense' observation, failing to see that these themselves have already been constructed for us. The strength of Smyth's book is that it does address these issues directly, showing how people can be co-opted, side-tracked and burnt out as well as how they can support one another to resist these negative interpellations.

Whereas Powe expresses nostalgia for eighteenth-century values and sees a return to them as our only solution, Fawcett is willing to 'Let the old ways die' and adapt his writing to survive within the 'new Imperium' of the Global Village (61). Fawcett knows that working people and colonials would have no voice in Powe's ideal world and theirs is the class with which he identifies. He and Smyth are on common ground here. Whereas Powe hates and fears the masses for being so stupid and so potentially powerful, Fawcett mourns the diminishment and humiliation of 'his' people (170). But this identification comes through only intermittently in the stories that form the upper part of his double text, where the presentation of their diminishment seems uppermost. In contrast, Smyth's activists learn that there is community support for their adversarial stand, despite establishment efforts to divide them from their allies.

Powe and Fawcett share the same metaphors, metaphors inherited from the discourse of Imperialism. They support the logic of Powe's ideological affiliations; they undermine Fawcett's. For each, our modern society is a new heart of darkness where the 'barbarians are in control' (Fawcett, 200). Canadians, living in a marginalised society, are in a privileged position to see what is happening and to throw up guerrilla warriors to rail against the unthinking condition of post-literacy. The solutions Fawcett's subtext offers to the discourse of the Global Village that so effectively hides 'the connection between economic and political power' (199) are 'education and constitutional nationalism' (199). This is

not good enough. Fawcett has already shown how inadequate his own education was, yet fails to specify education for whom, how it is to be conducted and in whose interests. The post-colonial history he traces demonstrates that he realizes, with Partha Chatterjee, that 'Nowhere in the world has nationalism qua nationalism challenged the legitimacy of the marriage between Reason and capital'² yet this is what Fawcett's text seems to want to attempt, at its most ambitious. Why then such a weak agenda finally for action? Could it be that in British Columbia right now, where education and national sovereignty are so much under attack from the new Right, that the manichean discourse again suggests that what the Right attacks the Left must defend? Despite his fictional Lowry's injunction to locate himself 'in the interzones' (165), they seem to have disappeared from Fawcett's world.

The story with which he ends is even bleaker. 'The Fat Family Goes to the World's Fair' brings Expo 86 and Cambodia imaginatively together, the realities of B.C.'s economy, unemployment in the Interior and Disneyland on the coast, with the world of the 'fat family', U.S. tourists more interested in their Cabbage Patch Dolls than the rest of the world: the 'Dictatorship of the Entrepreneurs' (198) rather than the dictatorship of the proletariat. But their collision is a non-event and the story ends in suicide and paranoia. This is the emotional message of Fawcett's book: bitterness, despair and frustrated anger that find all avenues for writing one's way out of an impasse blocked by the superior forces of a mindless but cunning enemy, intent on crushing all forces for creative social change.

If Powe's book seems ultimately complacent in that he knows himself to be one of the Elect, writing confidently to them, all of them enjoying the fiction of seeing themselves as Outlaws, much as the French Court once enjoyed playing at being shepherds and shepherdesses, Fawcett's is the more powerful in its inability to find a way of connecting to the audience he wishes to reach. But because Fawcett's is by far the more interesting book, its inability to move beyond the polarities so often identified with B.C. thinking, is the more disappointing. The imagery of guerrilla writer versus Fat Family as consumer/barbarian continues the false identification of antagonists that the Global Village encourages. Fawcett's book is a brilliant attempt to make the invisible sub-texts behind the workings of our society visible and to bring 'story' and 'analysis' together, but he doesn't push his writing far enough in its quest for a new language of metaphor to replace the ideologically loaded conventions that he has inherited and he doesn't take his analysis far enough to attack the true sources of power, that ultimately determine dis-

course, in our society. I am reminded too often while reading *Cambodia* of Smyth's comments on 'radicals': 'it was always frustrating to see how consistently the «radicals» personalized the issue and how impotent they were when it came to actually making the companies squirm. They reserved much of their self-righteousness for those in the citizen groups who did not agree with their tactics or strategy' (233). Fawcett fights continuously against personalizing the issue yet seldom with success. When 'you', the character in 'Universal Chicken', concludes that 'The villain is Wraparound North America' (59), nothing in the story contradicts this conclusion, even though 'Wraparound North America' is merely the effect achieved by the real villains, the capitalists who profit from it. These are identified in the subtext, but Fawcett's emotional spleen is vented against the symptoms, the well-meaning liberals and even the victims in his stories. It seems he wants no allies.

If *Cambodia* is marred by its bitterness, *Subversive Elements* can be a bit too precious and touchy-feely environmentalist at times, but its hard-headed honesty and its wisdom about how people feel make it worth returning to. It represents an effort to reclaim what is rightfully ours by re-shaping fiction to document what is and imagine what might be. Smyth openly articulates what Fawcett implies and Powe fears:

In our personal lives there is nowhere left to run where we can be free of politics.
The logical conclusion is: if we are to be free, we must change the fundamental nature of this political process.

These three writers disprove Powe's assertion that Canadian intellectuals are not addressing the reality around them. On the contrary, they are becoming more alert to Canada's neo-colonial status within an Empire that is replacing military control with the technological control that McLuhan associated with the Global Village, and they are considering the implications of this shift for our daily lives as well as for the fictions and narratives we need to help us make sense of them. Each of them is openly an advocate: Powe ostensibly for a return to an impossible past but actually for maintaining the status quo; Fawcett and Smyth, for a future where there could be a more equitable distribution of wealth and power in a more humane world. Powe and Smyth are still looking primarily to European and American models for their thinking; only Fawcett is venturing further afield to consider what other post-colonial intellectuals have done with similar material.

Powe has chosen to follow Canetti in working with the aphorism. It is, he writes, 'an arresting guide, it allows the reader to breathe between the

lines' (181). It also works well for an atomised culture where connections, such as those between actor and effect, are deliberately obscured. In contrast, Fawcett and Smyth are committed to tracing those lines of connection and showing how they operate. Consequently, they remain faithful to narrative, but to the kind of narrative that can reveal rather than conceal the kinds of connections they wish to highlight. Their forms suggest an agreement with Bertolt Brecht's statement in *Life of Galileo*, that 'If there are obstacles the shortest line between two points may well be a crooked line'. The crooked lines of their interlocking narratives express their commitment to a belief that the narrative line may lead us out of the maze of the Global Village into a space where we can claim our own place.

Together, these three writers show us where Canada is today, still caught between the complacent colonial mentality of Powe, the angry yet proud self-assertiveness of the region in Fawcett, and the reluctant cosmopolitanism of Smyth, who had fled the centres to be at the margins only to discover that escape was impossible. In the use they make of McLuhan, they are continuing the perennial Canadian debate about the relation of individual to community. Like the majority of Canadian writers, Smyth and Fawcett value the local community and believe that the individual can only find true selfhood within it. The writer articulates the community's sense of self, its needs and values, and helps it in its questioning and searching for better ways of doing things together. Powe's is a minority view, always present in Canada but never dominant here as it has been in the U.S. For him, as for Thoreau, writers 'will have the job of staying out of tune' (188); the individual will make himself by standing against his community, a 'solitary outlaw' rather than Shelley's 'legislator for mankind'.

All three Canadians write out of a profound sense of crisis, out of knowing that their familiar worlds are under attack. Compounding the threat that everyone now feels from the nuclear arms buildup is the threat of cultural annihilation. Powe expresses this perennial Canadian fear in terms of a threat to the Western culture of the book, but for Fawcett and Smyth it is more than that. It is not the book itself they care so much about but the function it has served in our society — the need of any sovereign people to tell their own stories and to share in the making and remaking of their views of their place. It is no accident that three such books should have appeared in Canada at a time when our federal government seems more committed than ever to selling out this view of our culture.

NOTES

1. Edward W. Said, 'Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial World', *Salmagundi*, 70-1 (Spring-Summer 1986), 44-64, and Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (Autumn 1985), 59-87.
2. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed for the United Nations University, 1986), p. 168.

GERRY TURCOTTE

'Perfecting the Monologue of Silence': An Interview with Louis Nowra¹

Louis, for the benefit of those who may not know your work, I wonder if you could discuss how you started writing, and whether playwrighting was always your major interest?

I never wanted to be a playwright. My career as a playwright started quite by accident. During my university days I belonged to a street theatre group that performed plays against the Vietnam War. As I was the only person who could type I found that I was not typing out my fellow performers' efforts but writing my own. When I left university I sent one of the revised scripts to La Mama Theatre, Melbourne. It was 1973 and standards were different from now. My terrible script was accepted. Sitting in the opening night audience I realized I had written the worst play seen by a paying audience for some time. I didn't want to die with that on my conscience, so I decided to write another one. There, in a nutshell, is the kernel of my decision to become a playwright.