

HER CONSTELLATED MIND: JAY
MACPHERSON'S MODERNISM AND
THE MYTHOPOEIC TURN

MELISSA A. DALGLEISH

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ABSTRACT

Mythopoeic verse—which relies on biblical and Classical myth, and often works to create moments of heightened apocalyptic vision and revelation—was the dominant poetic mode in Canada from the late 1940s well into the 1960s, although its recognition as such is increasingly rare. The work of poet and scholar Jay Macpherson, who was once understood to be a driving force behind the mythopoeic turn, is likewise largely neglected, despite her 1957 collection *The Boatman* having long been recognized as the defining work of midcentury poetics in Canada. Given its rise alongside the work of archetypal theorist Northrop Frye, Canadian mythopoeic modernist verse is often falsely characterized as the work of the “Frye School,” but its true origins remain little understood. Given Macpherson’s long personal and professional relationship with Frye, understanding the highly individual development of her poetic career and distinctive brand of mythic poetics serves as a compelling case study of the varied personal, social, and historical factors leading to the establishment of a midcentury mythopoeic culture of letters in Canada.

Employing a microhistorical method, which focuses closely on a single person at the margins of major trends or events in order to better understand those trends and events, and reframing literary influence as the creation of an identifiable culture of letters by likeminded writers, this dissertation traces the development of Jay Macpherson’s modernist mythopoetics over the first twenty or so years of her career. What it reveals is that Macpherson’s mythopoeic modernism, in its deployment of myth and archetype to create connections across national, temporal, and communicative barriers, emerged out of the ashes of the Second World War and the failed search for *integritas* that silenced the poets of the Montreal forties. From her earliest years, Macpherson sought out and supported other speakers of her mythic poetic language from across Canada and in Europe, and with them created an identifiable culture of letters of those who likewise believed in the communicative power of archetypal stories and in the transformative power of artistic vision. In doing so, this dissertation resituates Macpherson as a driving force behind the mythopoeic turn, places Frye within but not as the originator of this culture of letters, and invites a further exploration of the relationship between literary community, post-war culture, and poetic praxis in Canada at midcentury.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Hasel Dalglish and to Jay Macpherson.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACP: Alan Crawley Papers, Queen's University Archives, Queen's University, Kingston, ON

APP: Al Purdy Papers, University of Saskatchewan Archives, Saskatoon, SK

GJP: George Johnston Papers, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON

JMP: Jay Macpherson Papers, Victoria College Special Collections, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON

OUPP: Oxford University Press Papers, Oxford University Press Canada, Don Mills, ON

PKPP: P.K. Page Papers, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON

RGP: Robert Graves Papers, St. John's College, Oxford University, Oxford, UK

Introduction

Her Constellated Mind: Jay Macpherson's Modernism and the Canadian Mythopoeic Turn

*When first
He knew himself to body's darkness cursed,
Man dared to think to find
In heaven the order of his constellated mind.*
—Jay Macpherson, “Ideas of Order” (1950)

What is commonly called literary history is actually a record of choices.
—Louise Bernikow, *The World Split Open* (1974)

The soundest ground is occupied by writers who...are just artistic enough to give their record of life both its pattern and its freedom.
—Jay Macpherson, “Autobiography” (1965)



Figure 1: Macpherson's emblem drawing of Ursa Major and Minor. (Source: *Poems Twice Told*).

Given her first name, it should not surprise us that Jay Macpherson often wrote herself into her poems as a bird. She sometimes appears as a jay or nightingale, a sister to Philomela,¹ but she also on occasion appears as a rather more mythic bird, the phoenix. In her phoenix poems, some aspect of Macpherson's poetic self repeatedly dies and is reborn “phoenixed and identical” (Macpherson, “Suitable” PKPP Box 55 File 2), transformed by this resurrection and yet to the inattentive outside observer largely the same. Macpherson had already been mostly forgotten by Canadian literary history when she died in March 2012, and those few of us who still read and write about her work continue to wait for her work's phoenixed return to a more central position within the history of

¹ Macpherson's adoption of bird symbolism when writing herself into her verse is more fraught than it might appear on the surface, given that she did not adopt the name Jay until she moved to Canada in the early 1940s. She was born Jean Macpherson, and only began using the name Jay when she came to stay with a Canadian foster family who already had a daughter named Jean and requested that she choose another name to avoid confusion.

Canadian modernism. Instead, Tanis MacDonald opens a recent remembrance of Macpherson by noting that “I think about Jay Macpherson a lot: mostly because right now I’ll bet you are thinking ‘who?’” (“Jay”). As MacDonald’s comment suggests, those few who continue to write about Macpherson—MacDonald, Amanda Jernigan, Evan Jones, Miriam Nichols, me—seem to be waiting in vain, even as we work to rescue Macpherson’s poetic reputation from the ashes through our work in the academic and poetic spheres in which she also moved.

It was not always so. In the Canada of the 1950s and 1960s, to be at all interested in poetry and not know who Jay Macpherson was would have been nearly unthinkable, for she was everywhere: her 1957 collection *The Boatman* sold out multiple print runs; she appeared in the pages of *Time*, *Poetry*, *Chatelaine*, and in newspaper society columns; she won nearly every major poetry prize on offer in Canada (and some in the United States); she was one of the only distributors of certain hard-to-find small press publications; she published her own chapbook series at a time when poetry publishers were scarce; and she was widely hailed as the best and most promising poet Canada had yet produced. Alongside the growth of Macpherson’s reputation at mid-century came a growing recognition amongst critics and readers that her brand of mythopoeic modernist verse—encyclopaedic, often impersonal but intensely concerned with connection-making between reader and text, set within the framework of biblical and Classical mythology, and interested in a kind of expanded vision connected to the biblical apocalypse in the Book of Revelation—had become the dominant poetic mode in Canada, echoes of which would resound in the 1970s and well beyond.

Despite her former prominence, in the nearly half-century since the publication of *The Boatman* Macpherson has largely disappeared from the Canadian literary consciousness, as has the recognition of the former dominance of her brand of mythopoeic verse. This dissertation is an attempt not only to discover why Macpherson went from phoenix to ashes, but also to understand how and why Macpherson originally became, seventy years ago, the writer at the centre of Canadian poetic modernism and the best representative and major driving force behind its mythopoeic turn. Moreover, this is an attempt to understand what the mythopoeic turn, and Macpherson’s place within it, says not only about our literature, but also about Canadian culture after the Second World War, and about the space it made—or did not make—for women writers, publishers, and scholars. But at its core, this project stakes the claim that Macpherson deserves one more phoenixed rebirth: as writer central to the history of Canadian modernism.

Focusing on the “Frye School”

I had not originally planned on this being a single-author study, and understanding its transformation into one can help illuminate not only the reasons such a study is necessary in itself, but also its utility as a way to ask and answer the same critical questions as a broader, multi-author one. Originally, this was to have been an examination of a group of Canadian mythopoeic modernist writers (Anne Wilkinson, James Reaney, Eli Mandel, Jay Macpherson, D.G. Jones, Margaret Atwood, and Northrop Frye) and the roles they played in creating the mythopoeic poetic and critical movement that dominated Canada for more than twenty years after World War II. As I wrote in the conclusion to the earlier study of Anne Wilkinson out of which the impetus for this larger project emerged, “While Wilkinson is the least well-known member of the Toronto mythopoeic group and Frye is the best known, there were at least five other major members of the group who contributed to the development of its culture of letters” (Dalglish, “Revealing” 88) and they have never received substantial scholarly attention. “In order to understand what prompted the emergence of [what Frye has called] the third mythopoeic age in Canada,” I noted, “and during the time period that it did, I still need to ask and answer a number of questions” (88), including that of how the mythopoeic turn was influenced by the social, cultural, religious, literary, academic, and personal factors surrounding these poets and, crucially, how and why the poets often called the “Frye School” rose to prominence at the same time as Northrop Frye’s likewise mythic theories overtook the critical world.

The gap in Canadian literary history I allude to above made the necessity of undertaking this project apparent. My earlier study of Wilkinson is part of a broad resurgence of interest in Canadian modernism—especially that written by women—that has taken place in recent years. This renewed interest in Canadian modernism has produced publications and projects including Di Brandt’s and Barbara Godard’s *Wider Boundaries of Daring: The Modernist Impulse in Canadian Women’s Poetry*, Dean Irvine’s *Editing Modernity: Women and Little-Magazine Cultures in Canada, 1916-1956*, the expansive *The Collected Works of P.K. Page* project, Ruth Panofsky’s *The Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington*, Sandra Djwa’s *Journey with No Maps: A Life of P.K. Page*, and the creation of the Editing Modernism in Canada project. Yet despite this renewed interest in the work of the period, and despite the fact that modernism in Canada persisted well into the 1950s and even the 1960s, Canadian literary historians have generally paid scant attention to post-war modernism and the writers most prolific during that period. Toronto-based cultural production also tends to be ignored in favour of examining the arts scene in Montreal during its heyday in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. This failure to attend to the

work of the mythopoeic modernists has much to do with the fact that the study of modern Canadian poetry is dominated by the scholarly descendants of Louis Dudek who have studied or worked with him at McGill, as they tend to focus on the Montreal-based community to which he belonged.² It also has much to do with the fact that on the infrequent occasions Canadian critics acknowledge the mythopoeic modernist poets, of whom Macpherson was arguably the best and most highly regarded during the 20th century, they very frequently lump these poets together under the “Frye School” label, one that suggests the richness of their experimentation has been read, at least in part, as the derivative conversion of Frye’s likewise-mythic theories into poetry. Given this confluence of factors, it is little wonder that mythopoeic modernism in Canada is little studied, and even less understood. The original multi-author study out of which this project emerged was intended to fill that significant critical and literary historical gap, to illuminate the extent to which Frye was indeed responsible for the mythopoeic turn, and to help us understand what the mythopoeic turn could tell us about post-war literature and culture in Canada.

Jay Macpherson’s Modernism and the Mythopoeic Turn

When I embarked upon the broad study of mythopoeic modernism in Canada I hoped would help answer these questions, I began with the chapter on Jay Macpherson. I did so because she had the greatest potential to undermine what was and continues to be one of my central hypotheses: that Frye, rather than being, as many critics suggest, the originator of the Canadian modernist mythopoeic movement, was a part of it, his work shaped by the same sociocultural and historical forces that led to Macpherson’s own mythopoetics. Reading Macpherson’s best-known modernist-era poems—“The Third Eye,” “The Anagoric Man,” “The Fisherman,” the Ark poems—and the very little scholarship that had been written about her mid-century collection *The Boatman* made me anxious about the validity of that argument. When read through the lens of Frye’s supposed influence, what was her “The Third Eye”—which “saw through order like a glass / To concentrate, refine and rarify / And make a Cosmos of a miscellany” (*Poems* 13)—other than, as Reaney argues in his essay of the same name, a poetic expression of Frye’s notion of apocalyptic vision, the all-

² As a critic and as an academic, Louis Dudek has undeniably shaped the course of criticism of Canadian modernism. Dudek’s students at McGill and their students—Brian Trehearne, Wynne Francis, Ken Norris, Michael Gnarowski, and Dean Irvine—have written nearly every major critical consideration of modern Canadian poetry, and they generally share his focus on Montreal-based poetry and on the poets of whom Dudek approved. Unsurprisingly, the Ontario-based poetics I consider here have not received significant attention from these writers; Irvine’s work on Anne Wilkinson (*Heresies*, “Poetics of the Elemental Imagination”) and Toronto-based little magazines (in *Editing Modernity*) is an exception.

encompassing sight that helped him order all of literature within his theoretical system? And “The Anagogic Man” read to me, as it has to many, as a knowing and affectionate portrait of the theorist, his theory, and his anagogic vision, one that has long been used to suggest that Frye and Macpherson had a personal relationship that deepened his influence on her:

Noah walks with head bent down;
For between his nape and crown
He carries, balancing with care,
A golden bubble round and rare.

Its gently shimmering sides surround
All us and our worlds, and bound
Art and life, and wit and sense,
Innocence and experience. (42)

As I pursued this early research, it became increasingly difficult to shake the suspicion I absorbed from critics like Kildare Dobbs, Russell Brown, Sandra Djwa, and even James Reaney that Macpherson’s mythopoetics had developed in response to her graduate studies under Frye’s supervision, during which, it appeared, she wrote the bulk of her published oeuvre.³ What I knew of Macpherson made this argument seem reasonable: she had been close to Frye professionally and personally (they studied and worked together for more than forty years, beginning in 1953), published her first major work the same year that *Anatomy of Criticism* appeared, and dedicated to him most of her published work. And unlike Atwood and Mandel,⁴ Macpherson never openly denounced the critics who claimed that she got her mythopoeic tendencies from Frye; the closest we get is Lorraine Weir’s claim that “Macpherson has been reluctant to associate herself with any one school or critical or political approach, preferring to set out her own, very individual course, one in which solitude has its place” (*Jay* 3). Macpherson’s well-known reluctance to speak publicly about her life and work, or to allow access to her very limited archives in Ottawa, meant that there was little archival or biographical evidence to support an argument for her independent development as a mythopoeic writer, or upon which to build a crucial part of my broader argument about the multiple and diverse routes that the mythopoeic turn took on its path to prominence. This early research into Macpherson and her works seemed to weaken my argument that she and the other mythopoeic

³ See Dobbs’ review of *The Boatman*, Brown’s “The Northrop Frye Effect”, Djwa’s “Forays in the Bush Garden: Frye and Canadian Poetry,” and Reaney’s “The Third Eye: Jay Macpherson’s *The Boatman*.”

⁴ See Atwood’s “Northrop Frye Observed” and Mandel’s introduction to the *Contexts of Canadian Criticism* for their refutations of Frye’s influence and the other ways they suggest we understand the development of the mythopoeic turn.

modernist poets were responding not just to Frye, but—in the desire for order, for structure, for stories that transcended national, cultural, and historical boundaries that their poems expressed—to the fragmentation and dislocation of the post-war world and the challenges of modernity.

But as I searched for more insight into Macpherson's poetic development through out the 1940s and 1950s, it became clear that the insinuation by critics that Macpherson's mythopoetics could be explained as Frygian mimicry was both false and a fairly recent development. When I read Macpherson's early *Contemporary Verse* publications (the first of which came out in the late 1940s, when she was just seventeen) and first collection *Nineteen Poems* (which Robert Graves published in 1952, before she met Frye) I grew to understand that her visionary mythic perspective was not imbibed as a graduate student but bred in the bone and present from her earliest days as a writer. Preliminary research in the Alan Crawley, James Reaney, and P.K. Page fonds revealed much more: that Macpherson had belonged to an international community of myth poetics that included Robert Graves, that the poems most often used as evidence of Frye's influence on her were mostly written years before they met, that her early writing demonstrated a sophistication of thinking that made it seem likely that Frye took some of his ideas from her, and that her current peripheral status in Canadian modernism belies her centrality to the mythopoeic turn and her importance to how Canadian poetry developed in the 1960s and beyond.

Unsurprisingly, what was supposed to be a short chapter in a multi-author project kept exceeding its bounds. After spending considerable time studying Macpherson and her work, it began to seem that this larger project would not be necessary, as using a focused literary historical look at her poetic development as a case study could effectively illuminate the complex social and cultural factors that led to the emergence of the broader mythopoeic movement. Indeed, it seemed that such a case study-approach could strengthen my argument, for by proving that the poet closest to Frye and most often accused of being excessively influenced by him independently developed as a mythographer, it would become clear that Frye could not then be largely responsible for the mythopoeic tendencies of those writers even less closely connected to him. At the same time, it was becoming clear that pursuing this focused project was probably impossible. Macpherson was notoriously private, and had done everything she could to ensure that researchers could not use her papers as what she called "thesis fodder" (RGP Box J File Macpherson), tactics that included periodic burnings and, in the case of her correspondence with and writings about Frye that would otherwise have been deposited in his fonds after his death, requesting their return to her and subsequent restriction. There was no phoenix to rise from those ashes. Speaking with the scholar

Daniel Bratton, who was researching Macpherson's friend and former *Poetry* editor Daryl Hine, only confirmed my suspicion that securing her cooperation would prove difficult: when Bratton had asked to see Macpherson's correspondence with the poet and professor George Johnston, which is housed at Library and Archives Canada, Macpherson threatened to get on a bus to Ottawa and physically bar him from entering the archives (Bratton). I decided against reaching out, and it turned out that Macpherson was too ill to entertain my inquiries. She passed away not long thereafter, and I moved on to the Reaney and Mandel archives in preparation for continuing the broader project I had originally proposed.

Macpherson's death in March 2012 reverberated throughout her immediate community, but went largely unremarked beyond it. Her family, friends, and colleagues mourned her, and some among them, like Margaret Atwood ("My Tribute to Jay Macpherson"), Russell Brown ("Sad News—Jean Jay Macpherson"), Eleanor Cook ("Jay Macpherson"), and Daryl Hine ("Daryl Hine Remembers Jay Macpherson"), published public statements about her contributions to Canadian letters and the Canadian literary community. An obituary article about her was published that fall in *The Globe and Mail*, but I later learned from its author that it had only come about because Atwood had encouraged the *Globe* to remember her friend. This was a far cry from the 1950s, when the *Globe*, among other Canadian newspapers, breathlessly covered Macpherson's every public engagement. Those public remembrances of Macpherson, however few, contained new clues about her life and poetic development that illuminated her role in the mythopoeic modernist movement at the same time they suggested there was still much to learn. Unexpectedly, the opportunity to do so emerged. Diana Macpherson, Jay Macpherson's niece and executrix, worked with Atwood to collect and donate her aunt's papers to the special collections at Victoria College, where Macpherson studied and taught for more than fifty years. Her extensive fonds contain a miscellany of poems, letters, stories, drawings, photographs, clippings, and personal documents that I was given permission to fully explore. This project is the result of that exploration, and firmly rooted in the archival and textual evidence contained in Macpherson's fonds.

Canadian literary history seems to have largely forgotten that Macpherson's modernist poetry is funny, complex, richly allusive, satisfyingly patterned and ordered, often heartbreaking, rooted in what I call a "poetics of concern" for those she calls the world's poor children, and revealing of the ways that modernist poets used their art to envision and enact, however contingently, a perfected, coherent new world from the ashes left behind after the Second World War. What I will suggest for the first time is that rather than being ex-centric, Macpherson was at

the centre of this group of visionary artists, and that better understanding her work can reveal new links between the poetics of the Montreal forties and the Toronto fifties, between the book of miscellaneous modernist lyrics and the postmodernist long poem, between the mythic late modernism of Canada and of Europe, and between art and everyday life in Canada after the Second World War. Using this archival evidence available for the first time, and collecting the scattered evidence that existed but was largely ignored prior to Macpherson's death, this dissertation seeks to transform the miscellaneous textual record of Jay Macpherson's life and work into a coherent cosmos: the history of the first twenty years of her career as a writer, the same years that correspond to the emergence and then dominance of mythopoeic modernism in Canada.⁵

Macpherson Then and Now

It will be useful, before entering the main body of this project, to have a sense of the current state of studies about Jay Macpherson and her work, as well as an understanding of the reasons for her continued neglect as an individual writer and as emblematic of the larger mythopoeic modernist movement in Canada. As the recuperative nature of this project should have already made clear, Macpherson's absence from Canadian criticism and from the Canadian canon⁶ is obvious: I can count the number of essays on her work on two hands, and nearly every one of them begins with a lament for her neglect.⁷ As the survey of critical and popular responses to *The Boatman* in Chapter Three reveals, *The Boatman* was very widely reviewed upon its publication in 1957. It garnered little scholarly attention, though, and Reaney's "The Third Eye: Jay Macpherson's *The Boatman*" (1960) was the only essay on Macpherson's work for nearly twenty years. This essay has shaped studies of her work in problematic ways, as Reaney frames Macpherson's work in sometimes inaccurate and limited ways in his effort to strongly connect her brand of mythopoetics with his own, and with

⁵ For a fuller account of the genesis of this project, see my "How Jay Became a Phoenix" in *Partisan*.

⁶ While Macpherson's work is rarely the subject of scholarly research, it has been included in the two most recent anthologies of modern Canadian poetry, Todd Swift and Evan Jones's *Modern Canadian Poets* (2010) and Brian Trehearne's *Canadian Poetry: 1920-1960* (2010). However, Macpherson's inclusion in such anthologies has certainly not gone without question, especially in terms of her lasting influence. Questioning the choices made in Swift and Jones's anthology, Jacob McArthur Mooney wonders if "an argument be made that Ken Babstock, Karen Solie or Kevin Connolly are influenced more by John Glassco or Jay Macpherson than by Lee, Cohen or McKay" ("Anthology"), insinuating that due to their lack of influence, there cannot.

⁷ See Weir's review of *Spirit of Solitude* (1986), "Toward a Feminist Hermeneutics: Jay Macpherson's *Welcoming Disaster*" (1987), and *Jay Macpherson and Her Works* (1989); Keith's "Macpherson's *Welcoming Disaster: A Reconsideration*" (1995); Atwood's "Jay Macpherson: *Poems Twice Told*" (1982); and MacDonald's dissertation, essay "'Absence, Havoc': Gothic Mourning and Daughterly Duty in Jay Macpherson's *Welcoming Disaster*" (2009), and book *The Daughter's Way: Canadian Women's Paternal Elegies* (2012).

Frye's. He also ignores crucial parts of her poetics—her feminism, her playfulness, the roots of her goddess-based mythography in queer desire, her suspicion of pattern and order as false forms of vision—that are of little interest to him.⁸ No other critical considerations of Macpherson's work appeared until after the publication of *Welcoming Disaster* in 1974, and despite being some of the most widely read and positively reviewed Canadian poetry ever published, Macpherson's modernist poetry is woefully understudied. After the publication of *Welcoming Disaster*, Suniti Namjoshi, Lorraine Weir, W.J. Keith, Audrey Berner, and Margaret Atwood published scholarly analyses of Macpherson's work; after another considerable gap, essays by Tanis MacDonald, Amanda Jernigan, and Miriam Nichols have been published in the last decade. While some of these deal with both of Macpherson's major works—a project aided by Oxford University Press's publication of *Poems Twice Told* (1981), which includes both collections—*Welcoming Disaster* received more critical attention until fairly recently. The more recent scholarship, my own included, has emerged in response to the slowly increasing popularity of Canadian modernist studies, and to the specific push to recover the writing of female modernists.

Macpherson was very aware of her critical neglect, wryly noting in a letter to Beryl Graves in the 1980s that “I & my generation of writers were all institutions by the time we got to 35 or so ... [and] forgotten by 45” (RGP Box J Folder Macpherson), and she exaggerates only a little her claim that the Toronto mythopoetic poets had largely been forgotten by the 1970s. Atwood—Macpherson's student, but only eight years her junior and thus arguably of the same generation—is perhaps the sole exception to this rule. Despite the ever-increasing popularity of Canadian modernist studies, this forgetting of Macpherson's generation means that an extended study of Canadian mythopoetics has never been undertaken,⁹ and those other writers of her generation who

⁸ Reaney applies to *The Boatman* an interpretive system based on the redemptive power of art that, as Lorraine Weir notes, “the critic assumes he shares with the poet. This tacit claim is, however, both partially accurate and misleadingly incomplete though the aura exuded by the assumption of shared ‘inside’ knowledge ... belies its myopic perspective” (*Jay* 12). As this dissertation will reveal, Macpherson's belief in the redemptive power of art via apocalyptic vision and total identification was contingent at best, and Reaney ignores her playfulness, what Atwood calls her “bloody-mindedness” (“Jay” 411), and her feminism—among much else—in his desire to align his critical perspective with her poetic one.

⁹ While there are sustained studies of Canadian modernism in the 1920s (Brian Trehearne's *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists*), 1930s (Candida Rifkind's *Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada*), and the 1940s (Brian Trehearne's *The Montreal Forties: Modernist Poetry in Transition*), no full-length study of the 1950s—which would by necessity focus on the poets associated with the Frye School as the major representatives of that decade's mythopoetic character—has yet been undertaken. Trehearne's *The Montreal Forties* extends its analysis into the early 1950s, but focuses only on Montreal and does not specifically address the poets or poetics of the Toronto fifties, despite the very strong connections between these two groups of poets and their work on the basis of what Trehearne calls *integritas*. I explore these connections in detail in Chapter One. Nick Mount's forthcoming *Arrival: The Story of CanLit* looks as though it will,

have stayed in the critical consciousness—Atwood, Reaney, Mandel, and Jones foremost among them—tend to be known for their work in genres other than poetry. Others, like Anne Wilkinson, remain stubbornly at the margins of Canadian modernist studies despite repeated recuperative efforts on behalf of critics who believe, as I do, that their work still has much to teach us about poetry, gender, and cultural development in Canada. Wilkinson, while less well known than Macpherson during her life, has found champions after her death in scholars and editors like Joan Coldwell, Dean Irvine, and Ingrid Ruthig who have ensured the continued and new availability of her life-writing and poetry. Macpherson is unique among the Canadian modernist mythopoeists in having once been its most prominent figure and now its most obscure. A new edition of her work—the first since the early 1980s—will not be available until 2017 and she will be included in the Porcupine’s Quill Essential Poets series, despite its inclusion of volumes collecting work by a half dozen mythopoeists less acclaimed than she, only because I proposed to edit a new collection. Despite being hailed in by the CBC as “what we have been waiting for” (qtd. in Dudek, “Eye” 79) and by critics as the author of “the most exciting single book of verse of the decade” (Pacey, *Essays* 203), critics can now claim that “Macpherson is . . . a minor poet” (Keith, *Canadian* 128).¹⁰ Largely due to the efforts of Harold Bloom and *Poetry* magazine, she is arguably better known abroad than she is at home.¹¹

Macpherson’s relatively small body of published verse, some of which was limited in its distribution, is partially to blame for her present obscurity: it includes three published chapbooks (*Nineteen Poems*, *O Earth Return*, *A Dry Light & The Dark Air*); a handful of suites that were published in periodicals, privately circulated as chapbooks, or included as part of larger collections (*The Shepherd by Moonlight*, *The Mind That Ocean: A Book of Riddles/The Fisherman*, the Ark poems, *Pretty Ophelia!*); poetry in translation (*Half of Life*, lyrics by Friedrich Hölderlin); periodical publications in a range of Canadian and American literary magazines; and two major collections published nearly

despite addressing the Toronto poetry scene, start in the 1960s and coincide with the period of Macpherson’s poetic silence.

¹⁰ While I disagree with the characterization of Macpherson as a minor poet, and while the record of her involvement in the Canadian literary scene belies such claims, it is not one that the poet herself would contest. Later in life, Macpherson refused to be known as a poet—she considered herself solely an academic—and when she did recognize herself as such, she repeated Keith’s characterization: “I’ve always considered myself a minor poet, worked with minor themes, and have a great sympathy for other minor poets” (Grady 9).

¹¹ Macpherson is well known outside of Canada and is far more frequently taught at American universities than at home; Harold Bloom includes her as one of only two Canadian writers in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994), her poetry is included in the current *Norton Anthology of Poetry*, and *Poetry* [Chicago] was one of the few major publications to acknowledge her death (“RIP”). See also the Conclusion to this project for Eleanor Cook’s comments on the major American poets who were Macpherson’s admirers.

twenty years apart. So too to blame for Macpherson's obscurity is her long poetic silence after the release of *The Boatman*, especially as that silence coincided with the end of Canadian modernism and the attempts of many postmodernist poets to shake off their indebtedness to those who had come before them. bpNichol's "Letter re James Reaney" demonstrates the lengths to which he, as a postmodernist poet, had to go to defend his interest in the writers associated with Frye. Miriam Nichols also rightly suggests that Macpherson's traditionalism, particularly in terms of form—her preference for "short rhyming poems" and her seeming lack of "reflexivity [and] formal innovation"—is also a reason she has "remained at the edges of critical focus among interpreters of Canadian modernism" (325). But arguably, one of the biggest reasons for Macpherson's obscurity is her mystery: apart from those who knew her, the Canadian literary community knows very little about her development as a writer, beyond what it assumes, and those assumptions are very often both erroneous and detrimental to her literary reputation.

Some critics have addressed the interpretive implications of the mystery created in part by Macpherson's reluctance to grant interviews or publicly discuss her poetics and in part by her reluctance to let researchers explore the development of her poetics for themselves via her papers.¹² This reserve has certainly shaped how we understand Macpherson's work and her place within the development of Canadian literature, although in a very different way than it has for writers like Anne Carson who have developed an aura of mystery that attracts, rather than deflects, critical attention. George Woodcock argues that since Macpherson has been "private in evading a direct statement of her beliefs or an account of the experiences that conditioned them," ("Smith's" 106), she has created difficulties for critics who wish to consider "whether she has transformed her experience into a convincing and self-consistent imaginative construct" (108). In his opinion, it is "a hesitation over the latter kind of success, the triumphant fusing of imagination and experience, that has made many critics doubt the ultimate success" (108) of Macpherson's work and allow that doubt to justify their lack of attention to it. Despite the fact that we live in an era where the author, to paraphrase Barthes, is dead—in Macpherson's case both theoretically and literally—and reading a writer's work in relationship to her life is decidedly unfashionable, the relationship between Macpherson's occluded

¹² I will cite Macpherson's public discussions of her poetics and interviews on that subject and others throughout this dissertation; while Macpherson was certainly uncomfortable speaking openly about herself, she granted interviews to The Canadian Press, the CBC, and a number of other outlets after winning the Governor General's Award, and has spoken or written about her time in Ottawa and her relationship with P.K. Page, her time in Mallorca and her relationship with Robert Graves, her early life in England and Newfoundland, her friendship with Margaret Atwood, and her understanding of the relation between literature and myth, among much else.

biography and her critical neglect seems clear and warrants both attention and remedy. What little readers do know or assume about Macpherson's life and work—that she was close to Frye, that she relied heavily on biblical imagery and worked on a United Church hymnary, that she did not attend the presentation of her Governor General's Award—have led to a general understanding of her, and her work, as unoriginally Frygian, highly devotional, excessively private. These influential and pervasive misreadings of Macpherson's work—they have become canon to the point that they pervade those most basic of introductions to her life and work, encyclopaedia entries¹³—have provided critics with ample reason to favour the writing of other seemingly more open, more original, more experimental writers and allow her to remain at the margins of the Canadian canon. One of the primary aims of this project is to correct the historical record and the misreadings it has engendered in order to open space for new understandings of Macpherson, her work, and her role in shaping the Canadian literature of the post-war period and beyond.

“Her Atlantis is a Pink Cloud”: Gender and Macpherson's Neglect

It is important that we understand some of the reasons why Macpherson was reticent to speak openly about the relationship between her life and her work, and how those reasons are implicated in the neglect of her work and that of the broader mythopoeic modernist movement. We should not be surprised that her reticence, and how that reticence has impacted her literary reputation, are both highly gendered. As we will see in the early years of Macpherson's career, her reliance on impersonality, and later on the related mythic method, is in part a response to the gendered expectation that young women writers will produce emotional verse. Macpherson's privateness also has much to do with shielding from public view contentious or controversial personal relationships—her difficult relationship with her mother Dorothy, her queer desire for the German philosopher and anthropologist Margarete Wels-Schön, her strong dislike of Irving Layton and Louis Dudek, her fraught filial friendship with Daryl Hine, her personal relationship with Northrop Frye—that in the 1950s and even now would have opened her up to public criticism, if not worse.

Macpherson shielded the biographical contexts of her work from public view in part because of her awareness of the expectations of women's behaviour and writing in the 1940s and 1950s. But despite the fact that this shielding was an attempt to navigate and negate what Macpherson knew

¹³ See Jenny McAuley's "Jay Macpherson" in *Literature Online Bibliography* and Sherrill Grace's "Jay Macpherson" in *Canadian Writers Since 1960* as examples.

would be the gender-based judgment of her and her work, these attempts have ironically allowed highly gendered reasons for her neglect to take root and flourish. Sandra Martin's obituary in *The Globe and Mail* is a useful way into this discussion of the relationship between gender and reputation, exemplifying as it does some of the most widely held beliefs about Macpherson, her work, and her critical neglect. Attempting to account for Macpherson's obscurity, Martin argues that Macpherson has been forgotten because she "lacked personal ambition; her muse was elusive; she was not prolific; ... she was a ministering angel to waifs and strays, often to the detriment of her own work and health; ... [and] she was extremely self-effacing" (Martin, "Nurturing"). The highly gendered nature of this statement is plain, and so too should be the fact that Macpherson's being a woman shaped the ways in which she was received in the Canadian literary community—by both critics, scholars, and fellow writers—from her earliest days of her career to well after her death. Gender was a constant shaping force in modernism, as it was in the world during the modernist period during which Macpherson began her career, for as Bonnie Kime Scott notes, "modernism ... was unconsciously gendered masculine" (2). We might anticipate that Macpherson's seeming conformity to what Kime Scott calls the "additional unspoken norms" of modernism— "heterosexual, white, representative of 'high' culture and an academic middle class, [and] produced in the Northwestern quarter of the globe" (1)—might provide her with some protection from this gendering, which is even more strongly felt for openly queer, poor, non-Western, and non-white women. Macpherson's work is outwardly heterosexual, although as we will see in Chapter One and Two queer desire is a major shaping force of her work; she also had the additional protection of often being read as male by those readers who misgendered her on the basis of her name. Macpherson benefitted from numerous forms of privilege—privilege other writers of her generation, lost to the point that we do not even know their names to recover them, did not enjoy—but despite that privilege readers have dismissed her work, even as they seemingly praise it, as unintelligible, trivial, or unworthy of sustained attention at least in part because of her gender. Sandra Martin's obituary is an excellent example of this gendering, framing as it does Macpherson's life and work in highly feminized terms by foregrounding her supposed nurturing nature, reliance on male mentors, modesty, self-effacement, and lack of ambition. Martin additionally relegates to the background, particularly in framing her via the article's title solely as a mother figure, Macpherson's considerable professional accomplishments. All of this marks Martin's obituary as what is commonly known as a gender profile and it signals, as Christie Aschwanden suggests ("Finkbeiner"), that Macpherson's career as both poet and academic took place within fields that were and still are gendered masculine. This

gendering of Macpherson and her work as a writer, teacher, and scholar, and its concomitant denigration on the basis of her gender, is pervasive and a significant reason for her neglect.

One of the results of this gendering is that “though some of the aesthetic and political pronouncements of women writers ha[ve] been offered in public, they ha[ve] not circulated widely and [a]re rarely collected for academic recirculation” (Kime Scott 2), largely due to the fact that “the inscriptions of mothers and women, and more broadly of sexuality and gender, were not adequately decoded, if detected at all” (2) by their readers. In a reading that echoes Kime Scott, Weir argues of Macpherson’s critics that if “reading is a process of ‘sorting out the structures of signification’ in any text, then male readers who find themselves outside of and unfamiliar with the symbolic systems that constitute female experience in women’s writings will, necessarily, dismiss those systems as undecipherable, meaningless, or trivial” (“Toward” 60).¹⁴ While her attempts to avoid a private symbolism and work within a framework of widely understood mythic stories did sometime fail, the frequency with which the dismissal of her work as excessively difficult and unintelligible is quite out of proportion with the frequency of those failures. This has resulted in a “curious strategy of complimentary dismissal” (“Toward” 60) that can be traced throughout criticism of Macpherson’s work. This strategy sees critics praise Macpherson’s technique, dismiss her content and concerns as eccentric or indecipherable, and then paradoxically attempt to counter that eccentricity—or ex-centricity, à la Barbara Godard (“Ex-Centriques” 57) and Linda Hutcheon (*Canadian* 3)—by absorbing it into a cultural mainstream. That mainstream was at one time figured as religious, and has seen Macpherson—despite the fact that she was not, as it turned out, at all religious—placed within the tradition of devotional poets along with contemporaries like Margaret Avison. But as Weir argues, “in a case like Macpherson’s where a male influence can be identified, an interesting substitution takes place (of Northrop Frye for the Bible) so anxious are some readers to justify eccentricity by absorbing it into the ‘mainstream’” (“Toward” 60). Frye *is* the mainstream in Canada, and arguably in the world, from the late 1940s well into the 1970s and as he becomes increasingly so, critics increasingly make the argument that Macpherson’s eccentricity can be justified by substituting

¹⁴ While I cannot speak for Weir in how she defines “male readers” and “female experience in women’s writing,” we should remember here that, as Canadian Women in the Literary Arts (CWILA) critic-in-residence Lucas Crawford notes, “If we think that all masculinities, all femininities, all genders, or all members of any selfhood-species mean the same thing or have the same social impacts or cultural cachet, then we reassert a most basic form of sexism” (Crawford, “CWILA”). As Weir gestures toward in her article, we should be thinking through this gendering as the relationship between the work of writers who present as non-masculine and readers of any gender who have been socialized into a patriarchal culture.

Frye-the-Father for God-the-Father as the progenitor of her mythopoetics.¹⁵ The result of this complimentary dismissal—as simultaneously accomplished, eccentric, and excessively Frygian—has been that “male professors will find no reason to include such works in the canon of ‘major authors’” (“Toward” 60), and female critics and scholars who have been “socialized within a patriarchal culture and trained in the academic codes of a male-dominated profession ... have participated in this same process” (60). We can thus construct a compelling argument for Macpherson’s absence from the canon as a result both of her gender and of the related tendency to link Frye’s work to her own.

Like Joan Coldwell, who performs recuperative work similar to mine on behalf of Macpherson’s mythopoeic contemporary Anne Wilkinson, I attempt to recover Macpherson’s poetry because of a sense of public responsibility and ethical commitment to Macpherson as a woman writer, and to the generation of marginalized women writers of which she was part. As Coldwell argues, this “public responsibility ha[s] to do with the feminist enterprise of gynocriticism, bringing back to light and re-evaluating the work of women writers that has been obscured, marginalized, or lost” (“Walking” 3-4) to see what it can reveal about being a woman, a poet, and a member of the modern Canadian literary community from a perspective that would otherwise be lost or silenced. This is an especially necessary project in a contemporary literary climate where women publish as many books as their male counterparts but are significantly underrepresented in critical discourses about literature. As the organization Canadian Women in the Literary Arts (CWILA) notes in regard to their annual assessment of Canadian criticism published the year Macpherson died, “we discovered troubling statistics that revealed an undeniable gender bias in Canadian literature, one that overwhelmingly favoured male authors” (Jerome). The work I do in this project to recover a lost body of women’s writing is part of the same movement toward equality in Canadian literature that CWILA works toward and has begun to see success in achieving. But there is still much work to be done, for the gender bias that led to Macpherson’s marginalization in Canadian modernist studies continues into the present. My recuperative efforts are also spurred by a more personal desire, one that is rooted in an appreciation for Macpherson as an individual writer as well as one who is emblematic of the complex dynamics of power and privilege that shaped her career as a woman artist. This recuperative work is therefore also an attempt to preserve for critics

¹⁵ Less often, critics make this argument with Graves and Eliot substituted for scripture but with Frye still figured as a mediating filter (Bowering 40).

and readers the accomplished, original, funny, political, and beautiful body of work I found when I was able to move past my own early complimentary dismissal of Macpherson's work.

“Straight from the Horse's Mouth”: Macpherson and Frye

Given that their connection is a significant motivating force behind the reception of Macpherson's work and her continued critical neglect, it is necessary to understand the extent, nature, and development of criticism linking Macpherson to Frye. Weir's work on Macpherson and complimentary dismissal suggests that the extent to which Frye has been credited for her ideas has increased with time, which an assessment of the literary critical record proves to be true.

Macpherson began publishing poetry in 1947, her poetics are remarkably well developed even that early, and those few critics who engaged with it are willing to assess it on its own terms, but a decade later, when *The Boatman* and *Anatomy of Criticism* both appeared in the summer of 1957, critics began to suggest that those same poetic tendencies Macpherson had been exhibiting for a decade were the property of Frye. Norman Endicott's review of *The Boatman* is perhaps the earliest instance of this tendency to credit Frye for Macpherson's ideas and the general shape of her poetic praxis, and sets the stage for many decades of similar criticism. His piece was published in the Toronto-based literary magazine *The Tamarack Review* not long after the collection came out, and Macpherson hoped the magazine that had recently published *The Fisherman: A Book of Riddles*, a suite of poems that won her and the magazine the President's Medal for best poems published anywhere in Canada that year, would be kind to her book. Endicott's review was not, however, kind. While he was generally dismissive of *The Boatman* as unintelligible, and at the same time patronizingly complimentary of those formal and thematic aspects of which he could approve, the specific grounds on which Endicott dismissed the collection are significant:

The Boatman...suggests to me rather the disadvantage than the strength of being dominated a little too early, from criticism, by an idea of the poetic process and the meaning of mythological form. Traditionally the poetry of talented and sensitive younger poets has shown its bookish inspiration by echoing the phrases or idioms of admired predecessors. Miss Macpherson is quite often a child of Blake (and his interpreter hereabouts).... (84)

Not content to just call Macpherson a child of Blake's interpreter hereabouts—that is, Northrop Frye, as the Toronto-based author of *Fearful Symmetry*—and suggest that her poetry is overly preoccupied with reworking the ideas of both that book and *Anatomy of Criticism*, Endicott then immediately quoted “The Anagogic Man” (even then widely known to be about Frye) to make sure that his point hit home. Macpherson's images are odd and indecipherable, Endicott insinuated,

because they came second-hand via Frye's criticism. There is little wonder that Macpherson, who was frankly sceptical of aspects of Frye's theory, especially the systematizing tendencies that Endicott connected her with, was affronted by the review. This was not the only critical take with which Macpherson would take issue, for although Endicott was one of the first, he was certainly not the last to accuse Macpherson of being excessively influenced by Frye. Critics have been arguing that her mythopoeic poems are little more than the "converting [of] Frye's literary theory into poetry" (Brown, "Northrop" 283),¹⁶ that they "mirror [the] theories of Northrop Frye" (Barbour C7), and that she gets her myths and ideas "straight from the horse's mouth viz. Northrop Frye's" (Dobbs 88) for more than 60 years. Mervyn Nicholson, the editor of the Frye centenary issue of *English Studies in Canada* published in 2011, later dedicated the issue to "to the memory of Jay Macpherson" (1)—evidence of the fact that even after her death, Macpherson could not escape the constant impulse to connect her to Northrop Frye.

The attempt to justify and neutralize Macpherson's eccentric/ex-centric mythopoeic innovations and feminist poetics by absorbing them into a Frygian mainstream is one reason that this simplified explication of her verse has become a dominant one. It has inarguably become far more so for Macpherson than it has for other writers accused of being highly influenced by Frye, like Reaney, Mandel, or Atwood. A key reason the accusation of being excessively influenced by Frye has stuck to Macpherson more than it has to the others is the assumption that in addition to his significant influence as her professor, supervisor, and long-time colleague, he had an even more powerful one over her as her rumoured romantic partner. The issue of Macpherson and Frye's personal relationship is a fraught one, and while many members of the Canadian academic and literary communities have been aware that such a relationship or the rumour of it exists, it has never been openly discussed in work about either. The archival evidence suggests that although Frye was married (to Helen Kemp Frye from 1937-1986 and to Elizabeth Brown from 1988-1991), he and Macpherson were romantically involved in the 1950s and 1960s, during her Master's and doctoral degrees, and possibly for many years after once she joined the faculty at Victoria College, where Frye likewise worked. Many would now understand this relationship, which began when Frye was Macpherson's graduate supervisor, as the sexual harassment of a student by a professor in a significant position of power; while it has never openly been discussed as such, it has been publicly

¹⁶ Brown would appreciate if I noted here that he has since revised his position, and now believes that Macpherson had a significant and unacknowledged influence on *Anatomy of Criticism* and likely much of Frye's later work (Letter).

acknowledged that Frye felt and expressed sexual attraction to his students.¹⁷ However their relationship began, evidence suggests that their attraction was mutual. Poems of Macpherson's like "The Anagogic Man," the laments for a lost male muse in *Welcoming Disaster*, and the dedication of her major works to Frye have suggested to many that these assumptions about the nature of their relationship are valid. We can now substantiate those assumptions and rumours, for despite the restrictions she placed on them, Macpherson's fonds contain ample evidence that her relationship with Frye was personal and professional. Her papers include poems like "office darling," quoted below, and others that directly address their extramarital relationship. In "office darling," Macpherson acknowledges the steps she must take—unsuccessfully, it seems—to avoid becoming the subject of gossip in the Toronto university and literary communities, and hints at the emotional impact of their relationship:

let's see: tidy?
mustn't leave
pink on collar,
hairs on sleeve

apt to startle
colleague or wife:
I creep out, though
marked for life. (JMP Box 6 Folder 8)

Whatever the duration or extent of Macpherson and Frye's personal relationship, the assumption of its existence by the Canadian critical community has certainly not helped Macpherson's poetic reputation, and this may help to explain why charges of influence and unoriginality have been more detrimental to her than to any of the other mythopoeic poets. Certainly, the ways in which Macpherson and Frye's personal relationship have been represented in Canadian criticism have been unflattering. As an example, she appears in an essay by Ian Young as "Frye's disciple and rumoured paramour (there were whispers of a secret passage behind the bookshelves), the imperious Jay MacPherson. In her quarters, Dr. MacPherson presided over her own chilly poetry salon, dispensing literary formulae like castor oil" (13-14). We can see, even in this brief mention, the way that the link to Frye begins to darken Macpherson's reputation as both a writer and teacher. While critics are not often as open as Young in voicing their assumptions about Macpherson and Frye's personal

¹⁷ See, for example Graham Forst's review of Frye's diaries and Robert Denham's introduction to *Northrop Frye and Others*, in which he notes that "sex...is one of [Frye's] primary concerns" (10), although, as Frye's most frequent apologist, Denham suggests that Frye's interest in sex is purely academic.

relationship and how it has shaped her thought, the continual linking of the two suggests that the gossip Young records has had a wide reach.

Despite being traditionally seen, for highly gendered reasons, as outside the purview of literary criticism or as an unsuitable object of scholarly inquiry, such gossip requires our attention here. Although it can be read as mere anecdote or as frivolous speculation—gendered ways of describing and denigrating a feminized form of discourse—gossip is a “valuable and . . . subversive form of knowing/knowledge” (Cowan 82n4), particularly in cases like this one where information is limited as in this case it is by the restrictions Macpherson imposed on her archive. That this gossip has had the potential to significantly impact Macpherson’s reputation is unarguable: as Lorraine Code argues, “malicious gossip” like Young’s “is a powerful weapon of personal and political harm: it plants the seeds of destruction. It can make and unmake lives and reputations” (231). The lasting impact of such gossip on Macpherson—and it is always women who bear the brunt of gossip’s impact—is traceable into the present, and for that reason alone it necessitates attention. See, for example, the easy assumption that Macpherson’s achievements can be credited to the influence of male mentors that Martin states in her obituary: “It didn’t hurt that as a very young poet, she had already attracted the attention of three key mentors and literary scholars: George Johnston, Northrop Frye and Robert Graves” (“Nurturing”). Gossip is powerful: and this Macpherson, as Frye’s office darling, well understood. Gossip “manipulates and creates power structures within groups” (231), in this case a power structure where a woman poet, rumoured to be romantically involved with a man who is both her graduate supervisor and a world-famous public intellectual, is read as subordinate to and highly influenced by the male theorist with whom she was involved. It is important to note here that Frye’s reputation has been hurt not at all by the rumours that he was sexually attracted to and involved with his students; Graham Forst can casually note in a review of Frye’s diaries that he was known for being sexually attracted to his students (“Doldrum”). Gossip is also a “situated discourse . . . attuned to the location, the historical moment, and the circumstances that generated it” (Code 231), one that reveals the ways in which the gender politics and moral codes of the 1950s and beyond shaped Macpherson’s literary reputation, and the necessity of attending to why and how that happened. So although gossip “[t]raditionally . . . has had a bad name because of its common representation as a trivial part of women’s lives that contrasts with allegedly more serious male practices of ‘discussion’” (231), in ignoring it we lose the potentially valuable historical information it might contain, and potentially reinscribe the ways gendered discourses serve to occlude significant aspects of Canadian literary history, particularly those concerning women. We

also live in what Jia Tolentino hopes is “the end of the era of the important, inappropriate literary man” (“Is”), an era that has extended from long before Macpherson became involved with Frye until now, one in which Frye could be “the professor who ... dates a first-year grad student and manages to send her reputation, not his, into the mud. In terms of artistic value, this man is often phenomenal, the type that can define and support an institution” (“Is”), as Frye certainly did. Attending to gossip and the way it plays out in literary discourse writ large, even if that gossip is seventy years old, has much to tell us about contemporary issues of gender, power dynamics in the academy, and the sexual (and other kinds of exploitation) of female scholars that we can now identify as a pervasive reason that there are not more poet-scholars like Macpherson working from within the academy.

One challenge to the approach I am taking in this project would be to suggest that the long unwillingness to consider Macpherson’s modernist work independent of Frye should be countered by leaving him out of a study of her poetic development entirely. But doing so would leave a gap in the critical record where we should be attending to Frye’s role as a member of a broader mythopoeic modernist community, and would ignore Macpherson’s understanding of the role Frye played as one of her muses. If I were writing this dissertation even five years ago I may have chosen to leave out Macpherson’s personal relationship with Frye, for Canadian literary historians long chose to dismiss romantic relationships between writers, particularly those that involved marital infidelity, as legitimate literary historical contexts. In openly considering Frye’s and Macpherson’s relationship, I am responding to an increasing push in recent years for a consideration of the personal relationships between writers as significant literary contexts. Within the field of Canadian modernist studies, we can see this push in action when both Brian Trehearne (in “F.R. Scott: An Interpreted Life”) and Joan Coldwell (in “Walking the Tightrope with Anne Wilkinson”) question Sandra Djwa’s purposeful elision of F.R. Scott’s relationships with Anne Wilkinson, P.K. Page, and Phyllis Webb from *The Politics of the Imagination: A Life of F.R. Scott*. As Coldwell notes in an essay about her own biographical work on Wilkinson, this elision “seemed to me to distort the portrait of the man to ignore completely an activity that obviously took up a good deal of his time and energy, and to overlook contributions those women possibly made to *his* poetic development, to erase them from literary history” (“Walking” 7). Djwa responded to this criticism, and to changing expectations for literary biography, by openly addressing Scott’s and Page’s very long romantic relationship in *Journey with No Maps: A Life of P.K. Page*. In the preface, Djwa notes that while in the Scott biography she “alluded briefly to the ‘fellow poet’ he loved,” the critical landscape had since changed and “in the

intervening years ... expectations for biographical writing have deepened, and there has been a new understanding of the woman's quest" (*Journey* xiii) that takes into account significant relationships that are both personal and professional. Djwa openly explores the role Page's relationship with Scott played in her poetic development, and it significantly enhances our understanding of their work, of the literary communities in which they worked, and of how those communities shaped their writing and vice versa. Attending to the role that Macpherson's professional and romantic relationship with Frye and others played in her poetic development is necessary to understanding her life and work, and how that life and work has shaped Canadian modernism and its history. To ignore or disguise those relationships would compromise the integrity of this project, for considering personal contexts allows us, as Marianne Dever argues, to do the work of "divining what creative links might lie in those ... intimate partnerships" and of "understanding the role these personal attachments played in the professional domain to which these writers belong" ("Reading"). For many years, Macpherson and Frye were among each other's most trusted readers and together they fostered a mythopoeic culture as teachers and as writers at the University of Toronto. Such creative links invite—indeed demand—critical attention.

We must remember, too, that being strongly linked to Frye and subsequently marginalized within the history of Canadian literature, in ways and for reasons I explore below, is something that happened to many writers besides Macpherson. It also happened to most of the poets who we think of as belonging to the community of Toronto-based mythopoeic modernists. In consequence, the implications of the recuperative work I do here for one writer go beyond issues of gender, and beyond the neglect and reputation of a single poet. In working to rewrite the story of Macpherson's development as a writer and undo the dismissal of her mythopoeic modernism as ex-centric/eccentric or excessively Frygian, I am likewise working to enhance our understanding of Canadian culture at mid-century, and of the major poetic and intellectual currents that dominated that culture—currents that Macpherson had a significant, albeit largely unacknowledged, role in shaping.

"Norrie is the Sun": The Critical History of the "Frye School"

My choice to focus this study on one writer as emblematic of a larger culture of letters requires some attention here, especially given that—despite our rich tradition of literary biography, especially that

written about and by women¹⁸—a biographically-inflected single-author study is now a fairly unusual choice for a doctoral dissertation, at least in Canada. What Robert McGill calls “biographical desire”—the “widespread desire for intimacy with authors evident in contemporary literary culture as a whole” and “shared by scholars” (130)—is certainly a part of the reason that this became a single-author study. Unravelling the mystery of Macpherson’s development as a mythopoet has been a rewarding act of archival detective work, and the version of Macpherson that we can access via her texts and archives is a fascinating figure. But while Catherine Hobbs argues in her work on Canadian literary archives that “personal archives ... contain traces of the individual character of the record’s creator” and that “there are here glimpses of the inner soul as well as its outer manifestation in public activities” (“Character” 126), accessing this “inner soul”—if it exists in the archive at all—is not an impulse central to the archival work I perform here. The Macpherson represented in this study is the Macpherson we can access via her writing and archive, not the woman herself as she was in life. Moreover, as JoAnn McCaig (who performs similarly archive-grounded work on Alice Munro) puts it, this study of Macpherson is not only “a biography of the woman”—it is also “a study of the writer’s career as it unfolds within a particular place and time” (xiii). Fundamentally, this study is an experiment in seeing if microhistory is a suitable medium for literary history; microhistory, a term recently appropriated by Heather Murray from modes of European social historiography as a possible new direction for Canadian literary history, tends to use marginal figures as case studies for broader movements as I do here. It seems to be a suitable method.

. As an alternative to either traditional literary biography or influence-based studies of literary lineages, an archive-grounded microhistory has the potential to significantly change how we think about Macpherson’s work, the mythopoeic movement within which she worked, and the practice of Canadian literary history more generally. Current critical perspectives rarely attempt to place Macpherson’s work within its historical, cultural, social and geographical contexts, in part because of her reticence to provide those contexts. Too, the ahistoricizing and universalizing mythic lens through which Macpherson and her fellow mythopoets to varying degrees viewed the world in their work of the 1950s and beyond—a lens that allowed them to create a vision of a chaotic and fragmented universe unified and made orderly through myth—has been turned upon them by critics who use it to construct their own myth: a unified and orderly creation story that situates Northrop

¹⁸ We might think here of Sandra Djwa, Rosemary Sullivan, Elspeth Cameron, Irene Gammel, Charlotte Gray, Sandra Campbell, Maria Tippet, Paula Blanchard, Nathalie Cooke, Muriel Martin, Jean Barman, Christine Wiesenthal, Carol Shields, Mary Henley Rubio, and Christl Verduyn, among others.

Frye as the Prime Mover of the mythopoeic turn who created the poets of the Toronto fifties in his own image. This myth is so tidy, self-contained, and seemingly simple that few have seen beyond it and sought a more complex, contextual, and correct understanding of the evolution of the mythopoeic culture of letters. Rereading Macpherson's work within these wider contexts via a microhistorical examination of the first twenty or so years of her poetic career can shed new light not only on her own work, but also on the neglected—but once dominant—tradition of Canadian modernist mythopoetics.

The mythopoeic turn gathered momentum throughout the 1950s, but the publication of *The Boatman* in 1957 made very apparent to critics, scholars, and readers of Canadian literature that the country's modernism writ large was now markedly mythic, and increasingly so in the visionary, apocalyptic vein within which Macpherson, Reaney, and Wilkinson often wrote. It will be useful for us to briefly trace the evolution of the ways that critics understand and characterize Canadian mythopoeic modernism, for those characterizations and how they change over time can help us understand how the movement and its members found their current place—or relative lack thereof—in Canadian literary history. Despite its relatively minor status at present, the literary history of mythopoeic modernism in Canada is long and complex, and I trace it in full in the article “Frye Unschooled: Mythopoeic Modernism in Canada.” As I argue there, the prevailing understanding of Canadian modernist mythopoetics as the product of Frye's influence “reveals that the idea of [Frye's] influence is often attractive to critics not because it accurately reflects the relationship between Frye and the poets but because it holds some other appeal or serves some other critical function” (5). I also argue that other more nuanced understandings of the mythopoeic turn's development exist, and despite the fact that they are less dominant, they can suggest useful and more nuanced ways of understanding the turn's development and Frye's relationship to it. Here, it will be most useful to provide a general sense of how this history has had an impact on our understanding of Macpherson's mythopoeia as part of a larger movement, for how it justifies the recuperative work this project undertakes, and for what it suggests of how this dissertation might influence future studies of Canadian poetics.

What is remarkable about early assessments of mythopoeic modernism in Canada is the unusual consistency amongst critics: they all argued that mythopoeia was the dominant poetic mode in 1950s Canada, a mode that crossed the boundaries of religion, geography, and literary community. Frye was one of the first to identify, albeit seemingly accidentally, the dominance at mid-century of the poets behind the mythopoeic turn: in his contribution to *The Arts in Canada: A Stock-Taking at*

Mid-Century (1958), the poets he deems worthy of note—LePan, Watson, Wilkinson, Reaney, Macpherson, and Hine—are all determined mythographers. Milton Wilson’s “Recent Canadian Verse” (1959) was another of the first essays to argue for mythopoeia as the dominant poetic characteristic of the 1950s, and he associated the mythopoeic turn only tentatively with Frye. Wilson divides the poetry of the period into the “School of Pratt,” which relies on Christian and classical mythology, and the “School of Klein,” which relies on Judaic myth (202); he suggests the idea of a Frye School, but only as a possible alternative to the School of Pratt (202). Significantly, Wilson argues that although “it is important to distinguish such conscious and thoroughgoing mythologists as James Reaney, Jay Macpherson, Wilfred Watson and Anne Wilkinson from those whose myth-making seems less a matter of direct endeavour than a part of their everyday cultural inheritance” (202), he does not see the Toronto poets as a separate school. Rather, he argues, mythography is common to the majority of mid-century poets across Canada. Dudek makes essentially the same argument not long after, suggesting that in the majority of modern Canadian poets of the 1950s, “an intellectual disorder (not only in politics, but in morality and in religion) leads to a primitive mythological effort to organize chaos” (“Patterns” 414).¹⁹ Like Wilson and Dudek, Munro Beattie argues in his review of the poetry of the 1950s in the *Literary History of Canada* that a “zealous and indefatigable reader ... would be struck by an obsession with mythography” (329) which pervades the poetics of the decade. Mythopoeic modernism in Canada, these critics suggest, is pervasive in the 1950s but not in any remarkable way because of Frye. Although I will argue throughout this project that there was something distinctive about the visionary, apocalyptic mode in which the Toronto poets tended to work that set them apart as an identifiable literary community—and hence my reason for focusing on that specific one—these mid-century assessments of mythopoetics in Canada are far more representative of the actual state of its literature in the 1950s than present criticism, which tends to position the mythopoeia of the Toronto fifties as limited, eccentric, uninfluential, and divorced from much of the rest of Canadian poetics.

While the critics of the 1950s and early 1960s recognized that Canadian poetry at mid-century was generally mythopoeic in character, and that the mythopoeic turn was a response to the social and cultural conditions of the post-war and Cold War period in Canada, critics in subsequent years began to define the movement and its origins in increasingly narrow terms. The simultaneous

¹⁹ The same argument is commonly made about mythopoeic modernism outside of a Canadian context; see, for example, Joseph Frank’s similar argument on behalf of Anglo-American writers and artists in his three-part essay “Spatial Form in Modern Literature.”

publication of *The Boatman* and Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* in the summer of 1957, the concentration of mythopoeic poets in Toronto (and at the University of Toronto), and the commonalities between Frye's theory and their poetics—particularly the emphasis on order, cyclical structure, and an understanding of myth and metaphor identified with apocalyptic vision—led later critics to argue that Frye was more than a part of the mythopoeic turn: he was to their minds its shaping force, if not its originator. The specific criticism about Macpherson's work I discussed earlier, which likewise began at this point to credit Frye with a significant influence over her work, both contributes to and results from this broader trend in criticism about the Toronto fifties. As Desmond Pacey declares in "Literature of the Fifties," written in the early 1960s,

There seem to me, then, to be three main schools of contemporary Canadian poetry, and a few loose fish. The first and in many ways the most brilliant school is that of the mythopoeic poets, whose work draws much of its inspiration from the creative criticism of Professor Northrop Frye in Toronto and which has as its chief luminaries James Reaney and Jay Macpherson. (235)

Pacey's is now the commonly held opinion, and the majority of critics who address the mythopoeic turn and the writers behind it now "credit to varying degrees Frye's myth criticism and his teaching ... with the generation of a Toronto mythopoeic movement" (Irvine, "Modernisms" 888) and with the mythopoeic character of the Toronto poets' work. Francis Sparshott suggests that Frye "encouraged some poets (James Reaney, Jay Macpherson, Atwood again) to speak with a firmer voice by staking definite claims in what he helped them see as a total imaginative world" (95),²⁰ Rosemary Sullivan claims that "his theory of archetypal criticism has influenced the writing of many Canadian poets, particularly those who have been his students, including James Reaney, Margaret Atwood, Jay Macpherson, and Dennis Lee" ("Northrop" 79), George Bowering argues that Macpherson, LePan, Reaney, and Mandel "descend ... from T.S. Eliot and Robert Graves ... as those figures are reflected in the literary theory of Northrop Frye" ("Why" 40), and Donna Bennett identifies a tradition of visionary writing in Canada that is given critical expression by Frye's vision of the apocalyptic ("metaphor as pure and potentially total identification, without regard to plausibility or ordinary experience" [*Anatomy* 365]) that was "no doubt an influence on" writers including Macpherson, Reaney, and Atwood ("As" 818). Most other considerations of the links between Frye's theory and modern Canadian poetry—including those by Sandra Djwa ("Forays in

²⁰ After making this claim, Sparshott notes that Frye denies the existence of the Frye School, and that "[t]he issue is a very sensitive one," but maintains that "there is a school which, if it is not a Frye school of poetry, will do until a Frye school comes along" (103).

the Bush Garden: Frye and Canadian Poetry,” “The Where of Here: Margaret Atwood and a Canadian Tradition”), David Jackel (“Northrop Frye and the Continentalist Tradition”) and Milton Wilson (“Frye as Reviewer of Canadian Poetry”)—take the same critical position, one that is indeed now canonical. Influence has become the defining way critics understand and describe the relationship between Frye and Canadian modernist poetics, as evidenced by the fact that the volume that collects most considerations of their relationship is titled *Northrop Frye’s Canadian Literary Criticism and Its Influence* (2009). The fact that discussions of Canadian mythopoeic modernism now rarely occur beyond the aegis of Frye Studies likewise signals how totally the two have been identified in the critical consciousness.

Like Harold Bloom’s poets, I am anxious about influence—in this case about the ways in which relying on the influence of one thinker as an explanation for the emergence of a widespread literary movement leads to an over-simplistic understanding of that movement, and to a lack of interest among readers and critics in understanding the complex factors that have influenced the movement’s rise and character. It is easy, the missing history of the mythopoeic turn suggests, for such deceptively simple explanations to convince readers that there is little more to be learned. This is not to say that reading for influence automatically falls into this trap of falsely simplifying the work of the mythopoeic poets. Traditionally, mining for influence has “usually involved ... finding the ‘sources’ which lie embedded within literary texts ... as a contribution to the on-going understanding of the relations between individual poets and literary tradition” (Allen), and this register of the term is largely innocent. Indeed, in their heavy reliance on allusiveness and intertextuality, Macpherson and her fellow mythographers embrace this sense of influence in their displays of what Eliot calls “historical sense,” which “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 the whole of literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order” (“Tradition” 28). Influence and originality are likewise not mutually exclusive when we think of influence as source mining, for Macpherson and the other Toronto poets understand originality, like Frye did, as “a matter of returning to origins, of studying and imitating the great poets of the past” (Frye, *Bush* 136) and rearranging what they found, kaleidoscope-like, in brilliant and colourful new configurations.

But how those relations between poets and tradition are characterized becomes increasingly problematic as we consider the connotations that get attached to idea of influence. The non-literary meaning of influence—“the exercise of formal authority; ascendancy of a person or social group;

moral power over or with a person; ascendancy, sway, control, or authority” (*OED*)—is primarily the register in which influence is used when applied to Frye’s relationship to Canadian mythologists, and its use in this manner tends to remove all agency from the poets. Instead, this register of influence suggests that the mythologists are over-prone to a youthful malleability and have been unconsciously moulded into “zonked-out Trilbys ... all warbling Frye’s tune” (Atwood, “Northrop” 400) by his sway as a theorist and teacher. It is this same understanding of influence that lets Marshall McLuhan suggest that “Norrie is not struggling for his place in the sun. Norrie is the sun” (quoted in Kostelanetz 441) and in consequence the Toronto poets are pulled toward mythopoeia by Frye’s overpowering gravity. The pervasive reliance on this idea of influence has led to the reductive understanding of Frye as the only explanation needed for the mythopoeic turn, and his influence as the primary reason that the mythographers wrote as they did. What we need as a counter to this reductive reading is a way to understand the mythopoeic turn as the work of a group of writers, Macpherson foremost among them, who deliberately and thoughtfully worked to create a mythopoeic culture of letters because of a genuine interest in the poetics of myth and an attuned responsiveness to a particular historical and cultural moment that made mythography appealing. This dissertation is an attempt to provide that counter, using Macpherson as a case study for that more responsive and complex development of a mythopoeic poetic praxis.

The over-reliance on the idea of Frye’s influence to explain the emergence of mythopoeic modernism in Canada has led to the erasure from Canadian literary history of not just Jay Macpherson, but the entire movement she helped to create. As Nicholson notes, Frye’s theoretical “influence was virtually wiped out by [the] deconstruction/ poststructuralism” (2) which replaced his brand of structuralist theory and thought. In consequence, the continued alignment of mythopoeic poetry with Frye—and the additional tendency to characterize Mandel, Atwood, and Jones as the “Small Frye” in their work as thematic critics—has contributed to the work of the Toronto poets being likewise swept away. The marginalization of mythography is also at least in part precipitated by a reactionary anti-academic slant to criticism after the end of the mythopoeic turn by the Tish poets in Vancouver and Dudek in Montreal. Dudek, Bowering, and Frank Davey are proponents of verse that opposes the modernist centralization of power, ivory-tower distance from everyday life, and supposedly puritanical attitudes toward love and sex that they associate with academically inflected poetics. In what Keith calls the battle of “the mythic versus the human” (*Canadian* 110) and Pacey

the opposition between “literature about literature” and “literature about life” (“Literature” 245),²¹ they take the side of the latter. Dudek, Bowering, and Davey’s bias against this ivory-tower remove—a debate fundamentally about impersonality versus personation, and about the legitimacy of literature as a site of poetic inspiration rather than or in addition to life—is particularly present in their writing about the Toronto poets, whom they closely identify with the conservatism of the University of Toronto and a narrowness of approach and influence they tie to Frye’s structuralism. Bowering argues that the work of the Toronto poets “has not had any noticeable influence on younger Canadian poets” (40) because of their “bookish isolation” (48), university audience, and tendency to take “literary criticism as an important source” (40). The only way he can legitimately write about Reaney, he suggests, is by arguing that Reaney is better than “any Northrop Frye Poet” (40) and therefore no longer one. The effect of this bias is such that when bpNichol writes to Davey, a vocal critic of Frye,²² about Reaney, he feels the need to justify that he “get[s] a lot out of what Reaney does & [thinks that] he’s one of the poets everybody has to read” (128) despite his “much touted background as a Frygian scholar” (128). As Frye notes, Dudek criticizes his supposed advocacy as a critic of an “academic, erudite, repressed and Puritanical poetry, in contrast to another kind whose characteristics were undefined but which was assumed to be much more warm-hearted [and] spontaneous” (*Bush* viii). Dudek’s review of *The Boatman*, which I turn to in Chapter Three, demonstrates just how vociferous he can be in his criticism of supposedly Frygian poetics. Macpherson, whose poetics have been so closely aligned with Frye’s theories, and who spends the majority of her poetic career working with him at the University of Toronto, has been particularly vulnerable to being caught up in this effort to sweep Frye, and anything associated with him, aside. But for the same reason, recuperating her work has the potential to reveal new ways of reading the neglected poetics of the fifties as a whole. By exploring the ways in which Macpherson’s mythopoetics develop before her relationship with Frye begins, in conversation with a transnational mythopoeic tradition and in response to specific post-war social and cultural conditions, it becomes

²¹ Like all such battles which form the narrative of Canadian modernist studies—British versus American, native versus cosmopolitan, *First Statement* versus *Preview*—this opposition is largely mythical (although there are definite and discernible differences between the two) and the boundaries between the two poles are rather more fluid than not.

²² In “Surviving the Paraphrase,” Davey criticizes thematic criticism (the technique he argues characterizes much of Frye’s writing about Canadian literature, as well as the work of Small Frye including Jones and Atwood) as “at best extra-literary; at worst, anti-literary” (2) in its focus on “what literary works ‘say’ ... about Canada and Canadians” (3) at the expense of a focus on literature as literature. However, Davey does argue that an application of Frye’s techniques of archetypal criticism, of the type found in *Anatomy of Criticism*, would have a salutary effect on Canadian criticism (10). Davey’s division of Frye’s work into two distinct groups—Canadian criticism and major works of theory—is a common practice among critics (see Gorjup).

evident that the mythopoeic culture of letters emerges independent of Frye. This knowledge can then be applied to expanding our view of the mythopoeic development of the rest of the Toronto poets, and of the generally mythopoeic character of modernist poetry within and outside of Toronto.

Although the creation myth of Frye as the father of Canadian mythopoeic modernism is generally taken as fact, its acceptance is by no means universal and those who oppose it do so in ways that inform this study. Unsurprisingly, considering how the idea has distorted our understanding of their poetic evolution, the writers most strongly associated with the Frye School are often its most vocal critics. Atwood, who has often been accused of discipleship, flatly denies that Frye is the origin of her own mythopoeic tendencies (if anyone was, it was Macpherson), and questions why, if Frye “exerted some odd Svengali-like influence on young writers, taking their putty-like minds and running them through the Play-Doh machine of his ‘system’ until they came out moulded,” Canadian literature is not filled up with hundreds of Small Frye (“Northrop” 400). She has a point: during Frye’s many-decade tenure at the University of Toronto, only a very few writers exhibited an interest in mythography, and their concentration in the 1950s and 1960s suggests that mythopoeia—Frye’s included—emerged in response to a historically specific set of conditions. Atwood is also one of the few to argue specifically for Macpherson’s originality as a writer in her rejection of the Frye School, maintaining that

No one else writes like this. In fact, looking back, it seems that no one else ever did, and that all the fuss about a ‘mythopoeic school’ of poetry was simply misguided criticism. If ‘mythopoeic’ means that the poet lets on she knows about mythologies, the most unlikely among us would have to accept the label. (“Jay” 408)

Likewise, Mandel maintains that as a critic he wants to avoid “claiming [the mythopoeic poets] as Frye’s disciples” (“Introduction” 18). Rather, he argues, “It is difficult if not impossible to know to what extent a critic moves poets” and that alongside, rather than as a product of, “Frye’s contribution to the ‘Letters In Canada’ series ... a mythopoeic poetry of some power ... did develop” (18). But unlike her compatriots, Macpherson’s challenge to the Frye School label is one of subtle distancing rather than vocal opposition. As her strong desire for privacy should suggest, her relationship to the larger Canadian mythopoeic community has been rather a fraught one. She “has been reluctant to associate herself with any one school or critical or political approach, preferring to set out her own, very individual course, one in which solitude has its place” (*Jay* 3). Her assertion of her individuality is arguably in direct response to the over-association Canadian critics have made between her, Frye, and the other mythopoeic poets, especially considering the consequences for her

poetic (and indeed personal) reputation of that determined linking. One of the primary goals of this project is to trace the middle ground between these two positions—taking neither the Frye School proponents nor Macpherson at their word, but returning to the documents and texts that evidence the development of the mythopoeic culture of letters in order to write a new version of its history.

While the writers given the Frye School label often simply repudiate Frye's influence, those few critics who do attend to the poetry of the Toronto fifties go further and suggest some other ways we can more productively understand the emergence of Canadian modernist mythopoeia. Often they argue, as I do, for considering the greater social, cultural, historical, and aesthetic forces that encouraged the formation of a mythic culture of letters that included poets, playwrights, and critics. They also place mythopoeic modernism within the context of the long history of Canadian mythopoetics. Jones and Bennett both point out that the mythopoeic impulse is a thread that runs throughout Canadian literature, in both English and French, which begins as early as the 19th century (Jones "Myth, Frye, and Canadian Writers," Bennett "'As the last morning breaks in red': Frye's Apocalypse and the Visionary Tradition in Canadian Writing"). Both likewise argue that this impulse can be traced particularly in its visionary, apocalyptic form—the poetic attempt to create "a world of total metaphor, in which every thing is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body" (Frye, *Anatomy* 136), a world that is free from the non-identification Macpherson laments in her first published poem. As Jones reminds us, this conception of the visionary, apocalyptic imagination does not originate with the mythopoeic modernists. While it is a defining characteristic of the Toronto mythographers, it can be found in Canada and elsewhere both before and after the modernist period, as in the work of bpNichol, Robert Kroetsch, Gabrielle Roy, Sheila Watson, Irving Layton, Isabella Valancy Crawford, Anne Carson and Ernest Buckler, among many others. Marlene Goldman likewise identifies a number of Canadian novelists, whose work extends into the present, who also engage with this mythopoeic, visionary sense of the apocalyptic (*Rewriting* 3-28). Jones argues that "As Frye would say, he found it in the literature of the world" ("Myth" 9), as I would argue did the poet members of the mythopoeic movement. In this study, I begin to do the work of tracing the links between the specifically Canadian instantiation of visionary mythopoetics that defines the Toronto culture of letters, and the literature of the world in relation to which it shapes itself.

"A Record of Choices": Alternative Histories, Archival Histories

Literary histories, this one included, do not just spring into being. As Louise Bernikow reminds us in

this chapter's second epigraph, literary history is a record of the choices made by the creators of those histories, although we tend to forget that this is what they are when the narrative constructed out of those choices becomes dominant. But if the current limited history we have of the mythopoeic turn represents one set of choices, there must then be other choices to be made and another history to be revealed. These two histories—the narrowly focused and limited extant history of mythopoeic modernism in Canada and of Jay Macpherson's poetic development within that movement, and the more expansive and exploratory history I argue we need and pursue here—very much resemble the two forms of sight that Macpherson describes in "The Third Eye," a poem written in 1950, when Macpherson was just finishing her Classics degree at Carleton University, that has long been read as an articulation of the central philosophy of her poetics. As she writes,

Of three, eyes, I would still give two for one.
The third eye clouds: its light is nearly gone.
The two saw green, saw sky, saw people pass:
The third eye saw through order like a glass
To concentrate, refine and rarify
And make a Cosmos of miscellany.
Sight, world and all to save alive that one
Fading so fast! Ah love, its light is done. (*Poems* 13)

Reading this poem as a metaphor for the ways we see the past, collect evidence, and transform both vision and evidence into narrative can help us unpack how and why I have chosen to pursue a specific kind of choice-making and history-building here.

"The Third Eye" articulates Macpherson's experience of being in possession of a kind of all-encompassing and transformative apocalyptic vision, and compares that vision against the sight of her ordinary, everyday eyes. Those physical eyes see the world in simple, obvious terms: "The two saw green, saw sky, saw people pass" (13). I would argue that it is these eyes that critics have long used when they see the social and geographic proximity of Frye to Macpherson and the other Toronto mythopoeic poets and then, choosing the simplest, most obvious explanation, assume that their impulse to mythography must be derivative of his theories. Macpherson, however, reminds us that we are not limited to the vision of those eyes. "The Third Eye" originally emerged out of her experience of relying on the pattern- and order-making function of her constellated mind to transform a miscellany of quotes, sources, and ideas into coherent and structured school essays, but this same form of vision was also essential to her poetry and to the world-building she did within it. She called this vision the work of her third eye, which could see "through order like a glass / To concentrate, refine and rarify / And make a Cosmos of a miscellany" (13). This third eye can see the

relation between order and complexity, and rather than dismissing such complexity in favour of a false simplicity, or seeing only the individual and disconnected and not the multiple and interwoven, it has the power to concentrate and refine complexity, transforming it into an orderly system with a coherent narrative. It sees not a miscellany of stars, but a cosmos with recognizable, storied constellations, like the emblem drawing of the Big and Little Dippers that heads this introduction. Macpherson's third eye was the source of her art, as is mine. This literary history is my Cosmos, constructed out of the miscellany of facts, events, and written works that make up the knowable history of Jay Macpherson's modernism and the Canadian mythopoeic turn.

But although "The Third Eye" revels in the order-making potential of human vision, it simultaneously laments how prone that vision is to failure, and indeed to falsification: "The third eye clouds: its light is nearly gone. ... // Sight, world and all to save alive that one / Clouding so fast! Ah love, its light is done" (13). Although many critics have read "The Third Eye," the poem "Ideas of Order," and the unified structure of *The Boatman* as manifesto statements for Macpherson's unquestioning belief in the order and coherence of the universe and the world-making power of the visionary mind, she by no means unreservedly espoused either. Rather, her writing insists upon the recognition that order is simply a lens through which we see chaos, a filter and not a fact. Looking at the constellations in "Ideas of Order," this chapter's final epigraph, her speaker wonders if one should suppose that "God ranged his brilliant servants to disclose / An order in the sky / Of beasts and heroes to instruct men by" (*Nineteen*), if that order is inherent to the universe and placed there by God in order to comfort and guide us. How Macpherson titled the poem already signals her answer to that question: these are only ideas of order, the construction of the human mind and not of a godly hand. Inevitably, her final answer to this question of inherent order is

No: but when first
He knew himself to body's darkness cursed,
Man dared to think to find
In heaven the order of his constellated mind. (*Nineteen*)

Macpherson was intensely aware that any attempt to create order out of chaos through art—a Cosmos from a miscellany, a world of harmony and identification that can stand against the disunity and fragmentation of the post-war landscape—is not a reflection of order inherent to the world. Rather, it is a reflection of the pattern-seeking impulse, the gestaltism, of the "constellated mind." And as "The Third Eye" suggests, the vision of the mind—that third eye—can falter, fail, or falsify. While the work of the third eye is both necessary and inevitable, for the human mind is always in search of pattern, coherence, and narrative, we must remain aware of and acknowledge the fact that

this work has created the idea of order, not revealed an order inherent to our subject.

This project has constructed a narrative out of the first twenty years of Macpherson's life that is a useful framework within which to understand her poetic development and that of the communities to which she belonged, but that Cosmos has been constructed out of—not found in—the miscellany of facts, documents, and stories that make up this history. It is an interpretive act, just as prone to false vision and failure as any third eye. Acknowledging these moments of false vision and failure are crucial to writing better literary history, and I work to acknowledge wherever my third eye fails, or where the historical record fails me. We will see this most powerfully in Chapter Three, when Macpherson's poetic silence corresponds to major gaps in the archival record that have yet to be filled. This construction of this history relies heavily on reading correspondence, and as Marianne Dever reminds us, "when dealing with [historical] letters ... we are inevitably dealing with what we might call the 'fissured archive.' What survives ... will usually be a fraction of the total, and their survival will have been dependent, more often than not, on accident rather than design" ("Reading"). I would argue that the "fissured archive" describes far more than just letters, but rather describes the archive as a whole—for it is not a whole, whatever the pattern-making action of the third eye might make us believe, but rather a record of absences and losses that we attempt to bridge with the seeming wholeness of historical narrative. As Catherine Hobbs notes, quoting Dever, "archives are 'a net held taut over pockets of nothingness.' Documents are threads that we are left with; the air around them is innocuous and at the same time filled with possibilities for interpretation" ("Literary"). Making no claims to definitiveness or comprehensiveness, this history of Macpherson's poetic development between 1946 and 1964 is a record of those possibilities for interpretation, the "daedal thread[s]" (Macpherson, "Comforter" 15) I choose to follow through the labyrinth and weave together. Just as there are other choices to be made, there are other possibilities, other threads, and other histories. Some will eventually come to light as archival restrictions are lifted, or as others share or uncover the heretofore hidden evidence still lingering in basements, attics, and uncatalogued archival donations;²³ other parts of this history are lost forever, subject to some of Macpherson's periodic burnings, literal and metaphorical.

But while this pattern-making impulse can go too far if it disguises or fails to acknowledge these gaps and fissures, I am with Macpherson in believing that there is sound life-writing ground to

²³ Heather Spears, for example, still has decades of correspondence with Macpherson in her personal files, while Alan Crawley's descendants have boxes of his papers in the basement. Part of this project has been working to connect them with the archivists at Victoria College and Queen's University to facilitate their donation and preservation.

be found between chaos and pattern: as she argues in an essay about Canadian literary autobiography, “The soundest ground is occupied by writers who...are just artistic enough to give their record of life both its pattern and its freedom” (133). Applying Macpherson’s third-eyed vision to the Toronto fifties reveals there are other choices to be made, another history to be written of the miscellany of chaotic intersections between aesthetics, history, culture, and social interaction that underpin all literary endeavours. This history—of Macpherson’s constellated mind and its relation to the Canadian mythopoeic turn—is the narrative of those choices. Just as Macpherson found value in the act of imposing order on the world, even if that order is a construct and lasts only for as long as the constellated mind can make it so, so too is there value in telling a different story about the Toronto fifties than the one that has been told, in turning to the archive to attempt to uncover the roots and routes of the mythopoeic turn and Macpherson’s simultaneous development as a poet.

Beyond Influence: Cultures of Letters and Literary Microhistory

I have chosen to make use of Nick Mount’s and Heather Murray’s complementary literary historical methodologies and reading strategies in this project, ones that have enabled me to write a more accurate account of Jay Macpherson’s development from a British refugee newly arrived in Newfoundland to the foremost modern Canadian poet, and at the same time to rewrite a significant part of the literary history of the Toronto fifties. These methods allow me to trace, as Murray and Mount do in their own work, the development of literary community, and of recognizable literary characteristics shared by members of those communities, without resorting to the problematic idea of influence and its tendency to oversimplify the complex contexts that inform works created by a single writer or by a literary community. Rather, the models presented by both that I adopt here require us to consider a multiplicity of social, historical, and cultural contexts that together lead to the development of new ways of writing.

In his study of the community of Canadian writers that developed in New York in the nineteenth century, and the way that community reshaped what we think of as Canadian literature, Mount relies upon the work of historian Richard H. Brodhead and his idea of a “culture of letters” (Mount 14). As Mount explains, “Literature at the time of its production” is “the highly diverse product of a constantly changing set of different artistic communities. These communities are rarely devoted to a single literary genre or confined to a single literary mode”—as in the case of the Toronto mythographers, who variously write and produce mythic poetry, fiction, criticism, theory, drama, music, visual art, and children’s literature—“or even to a single artistic medium” (13). “Each

of these communities”—each a distinct culture of letters, which Murray calls an “elective community” (“Literary” 418)—“develops recognizable characteristics that help to promote it (the artistic equivalent of branding) and that allows others to join by successfully reproducing those characteristics” (Mount 14).

Unlike the model of influence that dominates the limited criticism of the Toronto fifties, one that ties influence to unconscious reception and submissive malleability and thus removes a great deal of agency from the author in terms of her approach to literary source material, Mount’s model argues that writers within a culture of letters share literary characteristics because they explicitly choose to do so. In the case of the Canadian mythopoeic modernists, as we will see is the case for Macpherson and Frye, the choice is less one of adopting shared literary characteristics than of forming a creative community with those who already share them. As Mount argues, the reproducible characteristics that allow us to identify a distinctive literary community as such reflect the existing shared interests in content and sensibility amongst the writers of that community. Later, as those characteristics become recognizable to broader audiences, their conscious reproduction allows new writers who share this sensibility to align themselves with a chosen literary community, and allow readers to identify writers as members of a distinct community. Significantly, the communities thus developed are not restricted just to writers within an immediate geographical and historical context: Macpherson, for example, frames her early mythopoeia in specific ways to align herself with earlier poets—Blake, Milton, and Eliot, among others—that she considers part of a transnational and transhistorical community of mythopoeic writers. Macpherson is certainly not the only of the Toronto mythopoeic writers to perform this move; indeed, the various ways in which the mythographers work to align themselves with a larger Anglo-American and European mythopoeic culture of letters is one of the defining characteristics that makes them recognizable as a culture of letters themselves. Woodcock intimates as much when he argues that Frye and the mythopoeists rise to prominence at the same time because of their shared inspiration by writers including Blake, Milton, and Frazer (“Diana’s” 196). Refiguring Macpherson’s mythopoeia as the product of a culture of letters, and as part of what engendered and shaped that culture, allows for an exploration of the complex interactions of people, culture, and poetics that created both her work and the community within which she wrote.

Thinking of the mythopoeic turn as the development of a culture of letters, rather than as the effect of Frye’s influence, also has the potential to allow for a renegotiation of the fraught relationship between literature and social interaction that characterizes criticism of fifties poetics,

and of English-Canadian modernism more generally. As Trehearne argues about the Montreal forties and the largely-fictional feud between the poets associated with the little magazines *Preview* and *First Statement*, the critical emphasis on “scene”—that is, on the often-contentious personal relationships that existed between the poets affiliated with these little magazines and the supposed influence those conflicts had on poetic theory and praxis—has distorted our understanding of what Canadian modernist poets actually said and wrote (*Montreal* 10). The same issue of scene has created similar distortions of our understanding of the poets and poetics of the 1950s, Macpherson foremost among them, as critics have arguably been more focused on the social and ideological proximity of Canadian mythopoeic poets to each other and to Northrop Frye than they have been on what these poets actually wrote and said. Still, the formation of an identifiable literary movement is predicated on the confluence of the literary and the social, and the concept of a culture of letters lets us read the sociality of literary development without getting caught up in scene. In Mount’s example of the importance of these social interactions to literary development, Canadian writers newly arrived in 19th century New York developed a distinctive culture of letters when they “formed their country’s first professional literary communities. At ... gathering places they shared setbacks and successes, read and discussed each other’s work, exchanged literary gossip, and argued new literary trends” (15). The development of this community was not about influence, or about antagonism, but about interaction and inspiration—as was, I argue, the genesis of the mythopoeic turn.

I attend closely to the relationship between social interaction and literary production because community and personal relationships are reflected in the shape of the texts that a culture of letters produces, and vice versa. As D.F. McKenzie argues in his work on the sociality of literature, “the book...is evidence” of social interaction that is “unrivalled in its complexity, its sharpness of focus, its ubiquity, and its capacity for successive reincarnations in response to changing human needs” (206). Macpherson shared this understanding of the sociality of literature, and an overwhelming proportion of her writing—poetic and critical—is about the desire for and creation of community: of readers, of likeminded thinkers, of others who could help her create a culture of letters to which she could contribute and belong. As we will see, her development as a mythopoeic writer is fundamentally guided by her belief that myth was shared symbolic and narrative vocabulary that could bring together diverse and divergent communities of readers. At the Canadian Writers Conference where she first identified the community of those she called “the mythologists,” Macpherson publicly remarked that “Anything that brings us home to our sense of our community

as a lively reacting organism, to be pleased or thwarted or argued with or transfigured, gives us something of which most of us [writers] stand in continuing need” (“Report” 138). Mount’s concept of a culture of letters allows us to explore the role that critics and poets alike play in creating the “lively reactive organism” that Macpherson transfigured as she helped to create what we think of as mythopoeic modernism in Canada.

Perhaps paradoxically, I work to broaden our understanding of the mythopoeic turn, and of Macpherson’s part in it, by erecting a narrow frame around it. This narrow frame is what Murray terms a microhistorical approach, one she begins to develop in *Come, Bright Improvement!: The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (2002). As she clarifies in the essay “Literary History as Microhistory” (2004), the term “microhistorical” has two separate but complementary meanings in its application to Canadian literary history. The first is microhistory as methodology, one that focuses on the micro rather than the macro, that tends toward the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and that “is rooted in the attempt to incorporate peripheral or marginal events, figures, and communities into the historical picture” (406). One classic example of a microhistorical treatments of an ex-centric figure is Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (1976; trans. 1980), which recovers the lost history of the heretic miller Menocchio whose personal cosmology put him at odds with the Spanish Inquisition; Ginzburg’s microhistory focuses on Menocchio as a way to explore broader issues of government, religion, and the creation of mindsets and belief systems in the 1500s. Another canonical example of the genre is Natalie Zemon Davis’s *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983), which tells the story of Arnaud du Tilh, who in the sixteenth century was tried and executed for impersonating a French peasant named Martin Guerre for three years; Davis’s history seeks to illuminate “Basque customs, migration, property and land sales, inheritance, women’s work, judicial practice” (Davis, “On” 573) and much else via the example of Martin Guerre, and to interrogate how we in the present construct coherent histories from the past. Macpherson is precisely the kind of exceptional, ex-centric subject to which microhistory is designed to attend, since she remains stubbornly at the periphery of Canadian modernist studies, as does mythopoeic modernism more generally, and yet can tell us much about the development of a culture of letters, about the options available to women as artists and scholars after the Second World War, about how Canada’s literary scene changed and grew as the Confederation centenary, the growth of Canadian nationalism, and the publication of the Massey Report led to new interest in and support for the arts in Canada.

The second register of the term microhistory is as a focus, as “restrictions of the scope or

size of examination” (Murray, “Literary” 406). While microhistory as a methodology does not necessarily require a microscopic focus, the two are highly complementary. This project functions in both registers of the term microhistory, selecting an ex-centric figure as its subject and restricting the scope of inquiry to approximately two decades of her career. As a method of literary historiography, the specific features of microhistory are difficult to pin down given that its application to a literary historical context is as yet untested. Even Ginzburg, perhaps microhistory’s most prominent practitioner, notes his difficulty in defining the genre within which he works: rather than purporting to be definitive, he characterizes his overview of the practice as simply “two or three things that [he] know[s] about it” (“Microhistory” 10). But despite this resistance to definition, microhistory’s general characteristics are relatively consistent: in addition to working on the margin and not in the centre, “it takes a single personage (usually), or event or circumstance (less usually), and relates this to networks of community, commodity, knowledge, and force, in ways that show both connection and exception” (Murray, “Literary” 408). A microhistorical approach focused on Macpherson allows us to read her as “a uniquely situated nodal point of social, political, economic, and ideational forces” (411), forces which shape not only her life and career, but the larger culture of letters in which she works. In this way, a microhistorical focus on the individual—in this case Macpherson—allows that individual to stand in for a larger community—that of the Canadian mythopoeic modernists—that is shaped by those same forces.

Importantly, microhistory’s particular focus sees the individual as significant even as she is ex-centric, since the major forces that shape history can be traced in the life of even the most marginal figures. Murray contends that “[i]n this way, and perhaps most radically, microhistory undermines the model of historical ‘centres’ and ‘margins’ in the first place” (411), for it has the ability to place even the most marginal figures at the centre. This rejection of centre and margin in favour of a networked approach to literary history, one that seeks to trace flows of ideas and reactions to historical events across borders, generations, and cultures, is especially significant for Canadian modernist studies in light of the imperatives of new modernist studies, the label applied to the expansion and diversification of modernist studies since 1999 (Mao and Walkowitz, “New”). It is only recently that modernist studies as practiced outside of Canada would have recognized mid-century mythopoeics as modernist at all, as the Modernist Studies Association only began officially acknowledging literature post-1950 as modernist in the last few years. The view that traditional modernist studies takes of non-canonical (i.e. non-Anglo-American and European) modernisms is similarly limited and reductive, and is one that should remind us strongly of critical perspectives on

the mythopoeic turn. As Susan Stanford Friedman notes, modernist studies have long assumed that aesthetic innovations are “first produced in the great culture capitals of Europe and the United States and then exported to...colonies and postcolonial nations ... where they exist in diluted and imitative form as ‘trickle down’ effects of European and Anglo-American innovative genius” (“Cultural” 38), just as Canadian mythopoetics have long been viewed as the trickle-down effect of Frye’s genius. Canadian critics are just as prone to repeating these narratives of belatedness and mimesis. Modernism is, after all, the period that time forgot in Robert Kroetsch’s contention that “Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian into Postmodern,” and his argument that “The country that invented ... Northrop Frye did so by not ever being modern” (1). As a result of these narratives, critics of Canadian post-war modernism tend to either ignore its intersections with transnational modernisms—as Trehearne notes, “the placement of Canadian writing against the backdrop of international modernism is very rare” (*Montreal* 9)—or to attempt to circumvent accusations of colonial derivativeness by imposing Frye as a mediating filter that is wholly Canadian and yet has international stature. Bowering and Brown perform this critical move when they argue that the Canadian mythographers “may be said to descend ... from T. S. Eliot and Robert Graves, especially ... as those figures are reflected in the literary theory of Northrop Frye” (Bowering 40) and that, in originating with Frye, “myth as both topic and technique... [emerges] well *after* the impact of the Joyce-Eliot infatuation with myth had run its course elsewhere” (Brown, “Northrop” 282). But as Macpherson’s example will show us via her direct connections to Robert Graves and T.S. Eliot, Canadian modernism is in unmediated contact with these international mythopoeic modernisms, and the microhistorical approach this dissertation takes reveals for the first time those interactions and their effects on Canadian literature.

Indeed, new modernist studies proposes an approach to the relationship between Canadian modernism and its international counterparts that is closely related to the approach taken by microhistory: in order to move beyond the narrowness of approach and centre-margins model that characterizes much of modernist scholarship, new modernist studies calls upon scholars to work toward “the development of transnational strategies for reading a global landscape of interlocking and mutually constitutive centers that are influenced by and that in turn influence others” (Friedman, “Cultural” 36).²⁴ This can be accomplished by “probing the networks, allegiances, and

²⁴ While this new focus and its rejection of a centre-margins model of modernist scholarship has been variously termed “global modernisms” (Cuddy-Keane, “Global Modernisms”), “geomodernisms” (Doyle and Winkiel, “Introduction: The

interactions among diverse peoples in the modernist period for evidence of collaboration, cooperation, and multidirectional flows” (Cuddy-Keane 558) rather than reading those flows as running in a single direction, trickling from Europe, Britain and America out to the rest of the world. Microhistorical literary historiography is, I argue, one such way in which to reveal these networks and flows, for it privileges an exploration of the multiple local and global connections, conjunctions, and networks that intersect at the nodal point of a specific individual or literary community. Likewise, microhistory rejects the centre-margin model that still beleaguers modernist studies, situating Canadian mythopoeic modernism as what Friedman calls a locational modernism (“Cultural” 36), a discrete yet “interlocking and mutually constitutive” centre that functions within such a global network of aesthetic, cultural, historical, and economic flows and which both receives and sends out these flows. A microhistorical approach to the early career of Jay Macpherson, as a case-study of the multidirectional flows of “social, political, economic, and ideational forces” (Murray, “Literary” 411) that result in the creation of a mythopoeic culture of letters, has the potential to radically transform not only our understanding of Macpherson’s work, and of Canadian mythopoeic modernism, but of the relationship between Canadian and transnational modernisms more generally.

When focused on larger communities of writers, microhistory allows for the situation of such elective communities as both individual and intersectional, working within both their local and transnational contexts and existing as phenomena both singular and exemplary. However, when focused on an individual as a nodal point of social and historical forces, as this study is, microhistory has the tendency to emphasize the singularity of the subject in its resemblance to literary biography. This project is unashamedly biographical in its leanings, an inevitable consequence of my belief that we cannot fully understand literature if we do not understand the people, and the lives of the people, that produced that literature. This is an unfashionable belief, to be sure, but one that is shared by numerous feminist scholars—Nancy K. Miller foremost among them²⁵—who, upon being confronted with Barthes’s contention that the author is dead and biography is irrelevant, proclaimed—as Trevor Ross puts it—that Barthes’s “antiessentialism, philosophically liberating

Global Horizons of Modernism.”), and “planetarity” (Friedman, “Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies”), I find the term “locational modernism,” suggested by Friedman in “Cultural Parataxis and Transnational Landscapes of Reading: Towards a Locational Modernist Studies,” the most useful for reconceiving the literary praxis of the Toronto fifties.

²⁵ See Miller’s “The Text’s Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions” in *Diacritics* 12.2 (1982): 48-53 and “Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing, and the Reader” in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*.

though it may be, cannot serve them in their efforts to liberate women writers from the veil of anonymity they have long been forced to wear” (qtd. in Wilson, “Situated” 1). But while a microhistorical focus on an individual does in practice resemble literary biography in its attempts to trace that person’s interactions with the various contexts and cultures that shape the self and the texts she produces, microhistory distinguishes itself from biography in significant ways. Biography, Murray notes, “traditionally postulates the subject as more free-standing or differentiated and ... as the prime-mover behind the texts he or she produces” (“Literary” 408), an approach which tends to elide, or at least deemphasize, the sociohistorical contexts and flows of ideas that microhistory privileges. In contrast, “while microhistory does *not* see the subject as purely symptomatic ... the goal is to understand a historically situated mentality” (408) and, as a method of literary historiography, the ways in which that mentality functions within a culture of letters and produces a set of texts in response to that culture and its historical situation. So while this study can be read a literary biography that narrates Macpherson’s early career, and reads the texts she produces as shaped by the history of those years, it does not position her as the arbiter, or even the controller, of the meanings of those texts. Rather, it treats both Macpherson and her texts as the evidence and the product of the social and cultural moment in which she works, as both individual and representative of the larger forces at work in shaping the Canadian modernism of the period. The readings of her work I produce here are often what we call “biographical,” but I make no claims for their being in any way definitive. Rather, I perform these readings as a challenge and a provocation, as an invitation to perform other new readings of Macpherson’s work in light of information we have not had before, new readings needed to correct old misreadings. How do we reread Macpherson’s use of biblical myth with the new knowledge that she was non-religious? How do we understand the relationship between her structure building in *The Boatman*, Frye’s structuralism, and the critical linking of the two given that she questions, if not repudiates, that structuralism as a form of false vision before, during, and after the collection’s publication? How do we understand the genesis of the mythopoeic turn when we understand that Macpherson’s theories of literature and myth were well established years before she met Frye or any other member of the mythopoeic modernist community? This project aims to find provisional answers to these questions and others like them in Macpherson’s biography, but even more so hopes to open new lines of questioning and exploration for others to follow.

The narrative aspect of this project is the final significant feature of microhistory. Along with its focus on an ex-centric figure in relationship to a network of social and sociohistorical contexts,

the third crucial feature that defines a microhistorical approach is that “it is narrative rather than reconstructive” and that “it stresses both ruptures and connections, narrating ... while resisting the temptation to ‘fill[] the gaps in the documentation to form a polished surface’” (408-9). This approach is the same one that I will describe below in my approach to using archival evidence—the narrative net-weaving that ties together the gaps and absences in the fissured archive, an act of story-telling that acknowledges those gaps and the ways in which it jumps and leaps over them rather than eliding their presence or attempting to fill them in. And as Murray notes, “this is a method suited to the writing of history on the margins, where documentation may be scant” (411) or the archive fissured, as Macpherson’s is, for it allows a narrative to take shape around what evidence does exist. This narrative is an idea of order that is a necessary corrective to the orderly, but false, story that is still being told about Jay Macpherson’s modernism and mythopoetics in Canada.

Far More than “Thesis Fodder”: Macpherson’s Archives

The nature of the documentary body that this project weaves together is two-fold: one is the literary and the other the personal. The literary material consists of Macpherson’s poems, writing on literature, and illustrations meant to accompany her texts, one of which heads each chapter of this dissertation. Many of her poems have never before been available to readers, and including them in this study thus complicates and deepens the extant understandings of her poetics and her development as a writer, a development that is coeval with the emergence of the mythopoeic culture of letters and metonymic of the diversity of paths that leads writers to join that community. The poems I consider in this dissertation include unpublished work written between the 1940s and 1960s that is only now accessible as part of Macpherson’s fonds, poems that first appeared in little magazines and were often republished in later chapbooks or collections, and poems published in collections that I reconsider in light of the original contexts in which they were written and published. As Irvine argues, “Few literary critics and historians read backward to discover the published origins of poems and their contexts in periodicals” (*Editing* 24) or earlier collections and “[e]ven fewer still consider the value of those texts published in periodicals but never collected by the author in book form” (24). Macpherson’s early periodical, chapbook, and uncollected poems have significant value, for “These kinds of ‘lost’ ... texts constitute the basis of an alternative history of Canadian literary culture” (24), one that is invisible to critics who construct a literary history, as Macpherson’s critics do, around the texts and contexts that are most easily available for study. Martin suggests that part of Macpherson’s obscurity is due to her small body of published work, but

Macpherson wrote and published far more than many have heretofore recognized, in part because a number of her publications were self-published or published by other members of the Canadian literary community who like her ran small independent chapbook presses. Significantly, this history also reveals that most of the poems central to arguments for Macpherson's Frygianism were written as much as a decade before *The Boatman*, and Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, were published. It also reveals that *The Boatman*, in its final form, represents a version of Macpherson's mythopoetics—the one that is most closely aligned with Frye's theories, especially those expressed in the *Anatomy*—that came into being late in her poetic development, existed only briefly, was renounced almost immediately, and yet has been used to characterize the whole of her poetics. Placing her work in its original contexts of publication and reader engagement invites quite different readings than the ones that currently exist, and a rather different understanding of Macpherson's development as a mythopoeic writer. In turning our attention to the origins of Macpherson's mid-century mythopoeic poems, and thereby situating her poetics in their immediate social and cultural contexts, we can also see for the first time historical events and literary communities that have had a strong impact on Macpherson's mythopoeia and on mid-century Canadian mythopoeic poetry but that have heretofore never been considered important to either.

The second body of documents this project relies upon consists of correspondence and other personal writing by, or sent to, Macpherson. This is an even more fissured archive than Macpherson's poems and writing on literature, for we must assume that much of Macpherson's correspondence, especially to lesser-known correspondents, has been lost or destroyed. I have sought some of that correspondence—her letters to Neufville Shaw, for example, and to Daryl Hine—and come up empty handed when they have been restricted, destroyed, or simply lost. Some of the other fissures in Macpherson's archive can also be easily identified, and a number of them exist because of Macpherson's desire for privacy. In a letter to Beryl Graves, Macpherson wrote that “Since I don't like past evidences of myself, periodic burnings might make more sense” than keeping but restricting material in an archive (RG Box J Folder Macpherson). Despite her discomfort with the idea, she saw the value in maintaining an archive despite disdaining the desire of academic archivists to keep her papers open “to provide thesis fodder” (RG Box J Folder Macpherson) for academics like me. I am very aware of the irony that this study is only possible because academic archivists, and Macpherson's family, did work to keep most of her papers open for study. But because Macpherson did engage in some “periodic burnings”—literal and metaphorical—little of her correspondence with Page remains, most of her correspondence with Robert and Beryl Graves

has been sealed, some Frye- and Hine-related material was likely pre-emptively destroyed, and the rest has been placed under restriction for the next fifty years. The richest source of personal material relating to Macpherson's work of the 1940s to 1960s is her correspondence with Alan Crawley, which began in the mid-1940s and continued until 1970, and with George Johnston, with whom she corresponded regularly from the early 1950s, when he joined the faculty at Carleton University, onward. This project relies heavily on both, as well as on Macpherson's correspondence with Dorothy Macpherson, P.K. Page, Grete Wels-Schön, Hans and Lore Jonas, Robert and Beryl Graves, Al Purdy, F.R. Scott, Irving Layton, William Toye, Ivon Owen, and others.

But even in cases like Macpherson's correspondence with Crawley and Johnston, where the body of archival material appears to be largely whole, the limits of the third eye—the fact that these are only “ideas of order” and completeness—still apply. As Dever suggests, in reading what we have of Macpherson's correspondence with her editors and friends as a whole, and in using these letters as the basis for a literary historical narrative, “we are imposing an alien continuity on the letters, forcing an orderly, seamless narrative from what were once scattered and discontinuous fragments” (“Reading”). Such “alien continuity,” which did not exist in the correspondence before our third eyes saw it there, shapes the meaning we make:

Placed in such a context, individual letters also take on new significances for, placed together, ‘the *correspondence* has a plot of which the *letters* themselves could not be aware, as the letters of a word cannot know the word they spell.’ In other words, from the artful interlacing of these individual letters emerge unexpected patterns of response and ironies of juxtaposition. (“Reading”; emphasis in the original)

Noting, indeed creating, these unexpected patterns of response and ironies of juxtaposition is unavoidable in a study like this, which explicitly seeks to make an orderly narrative from scattered archival, textual, paratextual, and historical fragments. This is not necessarily a negative consequence of creating such an alien continuity of the correspondence, unless creating those patterns and juxtapositions turns into distortion. Murray proposes a slightly different understanding of narrative in her work on microhistory, one that is distinct from reconstruction and can help us further think through what I have chosen to do with archival documents and the narratives I construct from them in this project. She suggests that narrative, at least in its microhistorical form, contains space to acknowledge the gaps between the threads, the spaces in the web, and does not attempt to elide or fill in the holes in the fissured archive (“Literary” 408-9). In practice, microhistory makes nearly impossible even the attempt to hide these holes, as its small scale and attention to detail makes the gaps far more visible than they would be in a more sweeping, large-scale history. The language I use

to frame archival evidence often seeks to call attention to the work of artful interlacing—or, as Hobbs might put it, net-weaving—I do when seeking new significances contained in the pages of Macpherson’s manuscripts and letters, and when attempting to transform into a narrative, but not to fully (and impossibly) reconstruct, the history of Macpherson’s modernism. Where necessary, I openly acknowledge the places that the archival record fails us entirely. In taking this approach I hope to avoid the false sense of completeness, and of inevitability, that pervades previous histories of the development of the mythopoeic turn, and of Macpherson’s personal brand of mythopoetics, the same sense of false order that has long misled us as readers and scholars of mythopoeic modernism in Canada. What I have worked to create instead is an open record of the choices I have made as a literary historian, a history that sits on the ground between pattern and freedom, that reveals its gaps and fissures as places for other readers and historians to enter, challenge, and expand.

In taking up Murray’s call to use microhistory in order to examine the lives of the marginal and ex-centric, I also take up the project of Macpherson’s final published collection, *Poems Twice Told*, a third time. These are poems thrice told, and retold in such a way that will claim, for Macpherson and for the other members of her mythopoeic culture of letters, their rightful place within the narrative of Canadian literary history: a phoenix, risen from the ashes.

Chapter One

St. John's, Ottawa, London: 1940-52

*The third eye saw through order like a glass
To concentrate, refine and rarify
And make a Cosmos of a miscellany.*
—Jay Macpherson, “The Third Eye” (1950)

*The flood was real, but only mine.
No good arms and no dear hour
Shall ever break the water's power.
I live under an Iron winter's sign.*
—Jay Macpherson, “Private Deluge” (1949)



Figure 2: Macpherson's lineographic crowned head emblem. (Source: *Poems Twice Told*.)

It is simple enough to trace the dividing line between the moment when a child is not yet born and the moment when she is. In one she is still in the dark comfort of the womb, the next she has “slid as slick as herring” (*Poems* 46) into the world of air. For a poet, that dividing line between the moment when she is not yet a writer and the moment when she becomes what we call a poet is rather less clear. How do we decide when a writer steps across the line between not-poet and poet, which is another kind of birth? Is it the first time her pen touches paper and she places words with intention, the way a mason settles stones? The first time she gains enough confidence, and enough of an editor's interest, to have a poem published? The first time she calls herself a poet? Or her first initiation into a community of like-minded writers, and the moment that someone else recognizes her as a poet? None, or any, or all, of these moments might mark out that point at which a writer's career begins.

In beginning the story of one poet's career, and of the communities and poetics that she shaped and was shaped by, the historian must choose one of these places to start. Although this narrative begins with her departure for Canada during World War II, a significant personal and historical context, I choose to mark the beginning of the history of Jay Macpherson's literary career from the moment when she and P.K. Page met and recognized each other as fellow poets, sometime in the spring of 1946. This was not only Macpherson's first introduction to a single fellow Canadian poet. It was also her introduction into, and her recognition by, the Canadian literary community of the mid-1940s, the writers whose own poetic practice would change and in some cases end in the years during which Macpherson's career and the shape of Canadian mythopoeic modernism began to coalesce. Page and Macpherson's meeting was also, in some ways, the beginning of the end for Page's era of modernist poetics in Canada, and the beginning of a new one. It was the beginning of the mythopoeic turn.

Memories of Ottawa

In July of 1940, nine-year-old Jay Macpherson was taken by her mother Dorothy from boarding school at St Francis de Sales at Tring and put on a ship bound for Canada. Unlike most of her fellow war guests, who travelled the Atlantic alone, Macpherson came to Canada with other members of her family: her mother Dorothy and her elder brother Andrew. “[T]ired of being a kept wife,” as Macpherson would put it in a personal interview with Jean O’Grady, “[Dorothy] snatched her children out of England, leaving her husband [James Ewan Macpherson] behind.” The three Macphersons sailed to Halifax that summer on the *SS Baltrover*, along with dozens of other young Londoners headed to Canada as war guests. In the colonies were the promise of a life far away from German bombs, and the promise of safety for the British children of war. The Blitz had not yet started when Jay Macpherson left England, but its threat overhung London; school had become a place of gas masks and air raid drills, back yards the home of bomb shelters. T.S. Eliot would choose to stay, look at the destruction wrought on the city he shared with the Macphersons, and write *Four Quartets*. The Macphersons instead chose to leave, and their timing was propitious: a German torpedo would sink the *SS City of Benares* just two months later, killing 77 children and putting an end to the British government's Children's Overseas Reception Board program, and the *SS Baltrover* would have its bow blown off during one of its next crossings.

The protection of a parent did not last long for Jay Macpherson. After landing in Halifax, all three Macphersons stayed with family friends in Newfoundland, with the intention that they would

remain there for some time. But as Sandra Martin writes in a characterization that is unsympathetic but not wholly inaccurate, “Dorothy [was] an ambitious careerist whose cold and ruthless maternal style emulated Joan Crawford’s in *Mommy Dearest*” (“When”), and she found her ambitions could not be met in little St. John’s. Finding the city uncongenial, Dorothy Macpherson decamped for Montreal with Andrew in tow, but without Jay; her nine-year-old daughter was evidently too much trouble to bring along and stayed behind in foster care. It was only then that she began to be called Jay, for she shared her legal name, Jean, with the daughter of her foster family and began going by her nickname to avoid confusion. She was known as Jay from then on.

Dorothy Macpherson was a complicated woman whose intelligence and ambition were often thwarted by the restrictions society placed on those of her sex. Understanding her reasons for leaving her daughter behind in Newfoundland may make her more sympathetic to us than she is to Martin, and can help us negotiate the complex feminism of Macpherson’s later work. Despite her intelligence and ambition, Dorothy Macpherson felt forced by social expectation and male desire to reject admission to college, give up a career in law after being sexually harassed by both her legal partners, and choose between marriage and a political career. Choosing marriage as the socially respectable and economically safe option, her ambitions were further restricted by her husband—who saw her place as in the home—to working as a volunteer with London arts organizations, including a stint as a coordinator of exhibits at the Royal Academy of Arts. Dorothy saw a new life in Canada as an opportunity to be something more than just a wife and mother, and upon arriving immediately set about connecting herself to the world of arts, culture, and politics she had been barred from fully joining in London. She became part of the Montreal *Preview* magazine group (alongside P.K. Page, Patrick Anderson, A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, A.M. Klein, and others), was appointed joint secretary of the Quebec branch of the Federation of Canadian Artists, and worked with the International Labour Organization. It does seem that Dorothy saw taking care of either of her children—not just her daughter—as an impediment to her career building, for she also placed Andrew in foster care when they reached Montreal. She found herself an apartment and deposited Andrew with the Reids, a Westmount family with a son of their own who had applied to house two children as war guests. “We were thrilled to have a new member of the family,” Fred Reid recalled years later, “but always wondered why Andrew’s sister had not come too, as we had lots of room” (qtd. in Martin, “When”). It now seems that Dorothy Macpherson’s desire to prioritize her career over her family for the first time in her life was the reason.

After leaving Montreal in June of 1944, Dorothy and Andrew Macpherson settled in Ottawa, where the three Canadian Macphersons were finally reunited a year later. (James Ewan Macpherson would stay in England for the rest of his life, and his daughter would not see him again until the early 1950s.) Jay Macpherson had spent five lonely years in Newfoundland, where she felt alienated from her biological family, her new Canadian foster family, her schoolmates, and her home country. But although her beloved London was too far to see from her foster home on Duckworth Street, which looked over the Atlantic, the miles of ocean between her and home were nothing to radio waves. “[T]he BBC radio news” became her “major link, if mainly symbolic, with home” (Macpherson, “Jay” 388). Her other link to home, and to her absent mother, was the poetry she heard read on the BBC or read to herself in the books her mother had left for her. Years later, Macpherson would recall a key moment from her time in St. John’s and how it shaped her love of poetry:

One day, I think a Sunday at midday, when the news was rather gloomy, it was followed by - I think - Michael Redgrave reading - definitely - *Lycidas*. I knew I had *Lycidas* in the *Oxford Book of English Verse* that my mother left with me, along with the Nonesuch *Donne*, when she left for Montreal; from then it became in effect my book of exile. It had England and the countryside in it, and it had all those enthralling names that one could spend time in the library looking up, or in my window-seat on the stairs looking over Duckworth Street turning over pages of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. (“Jay” 388)¹

Macpherson’s childhood in London had always had books at its centre, but the stories and poems she loved took on a new significance in her Newfoundland exile. Macpherson’s love of poetry, especially of Milton’s *Lycidas* and its echoes of Narcissus, was set and we will see her engagement with and deep knowledge of that text play out in her creative and critical writing of the next two decades.

It was the lonesome, scarred child who turned to Milton for consolation that Dorothy Macpherson recalled from Newfoundland in 1945, although she was now a teenager and old enough to join Andrew at Glebe Collegiate Institute for high school. Dorothy, with the encouragement of Group of Seven painter Arthur Lismer, had since begun working in the Displays department of the National Film Commission (later the National Film Board or NFB). It was not an easy reunion for any of them. Macpherson had to relearn how to live with a difficult and capricious mother, and it

¹ The *Oxford Book of English Verse* was an extraordinarily popular and influential anthology that included English poetry from 1250 onward. The original edition sold nearly 500,000 copies, and it was very often carried abroad by soldiers and by expatriates like Macpherson. She may have had the original 1900 edition, which included poems up to that year, or the later 1939 version, which went as far as 1918.

would not be until the last days of her life that she would be able to express her understanding of the way her mother's personality, ambition, and parenting had been shaped by the limitations placed on her as a woman. In the days before she died, Macpherson asked Jean O'Grady to record what she remembered of her mother's history, and Macpherson "emphasized that it was because of her mother's life that she had become sensitized to women's issues; she was 'an example of the way women were put down.'" But even if she was not able to acknowledge until later in life that her difficult relationship with her mother had much to do with Dorothy's struggles against the pervasive sexism that kept her ambition in check, Macpherson's understanding of the way that society held back her brilliant mother—who would, in time, be appointed to the Order of Canada for her work at the NFB—influenced her own feminist leanings much earlier. That understanding only went so far, though, in easing the teenage Macpherson's transition into her new life in Ottawa.

In addition to learning how to live with her family once more, Macpherson had to negotiate her relationship to a new city in a country she did not consider home. While many war guests returned to Britain after 1945, most of the Macphersons were now in Canada and Dorothy, at least, intended to stay there. Andrew proved to be very adaptable, and quickly settled into life in Canada; he would eventually choose a very Canadian career indeed, for he became an acclaimed Arctic wildlife biologist and explorer.² Macpherson, however, remained unsure about her new country and decided that she would stay in Canada for now, but likely not forever. Where her mother had chosen to settle was certainly a factor in her unhappiness: for an obsessive reader and budding writer, Ottawa was a disappointment. As Macpherson recalled years later, "Ottawa wasn't a very literary environment" ("Memories" 89) and of its few poets, the most active were mostly anti-modernist. It also did not help that the post-war "period of cold-war hysteria in Ottawa was extraordinarily bad for personal relations" (91)—it was understandably difficult to make friends when everyone was suspiciously watching out for either Communist or McCarthy-ist sensibilities. More mundane barriers also hindered Macpherson's search for community. She was uninterested in boys, fashion, or gossip and in possession of a maturity and interest in reading that sometimes made her an object of ridicule. As Macpherson wrote to her mother from Newfoundland, "all the kids laugh at me because I like poetry and hate Nancy Drews, and most of them couldn't distinguish between Donne and Whitman. I sometimes wish that I could enjoy the books they read, and know as little about

² For more on Andrew Hall Macpherson, and on his life with Dorothy while Macpherson was in Newfoundland, see Frank Miller's obituary in *Arctic*.

literature as they do” (JMP Box 2 Folder 2). She mourned that “There’s only one girl here” at Bishop Spencer “who agrees with me about good books, and she’s fearfully clever, and a year older and a grade ahead of me, and a Canadian” (JMP Box 2 Folder 2). Macpherson’s sense of unhomeliness was based on nationality as well as on personality; she still considered herself a Briton, and indeed would even after she became a Canadian citizen in 1950.³ With her British accent and sense that London was still home, it would be a long time before Macpherson felt at home in Canada, and it at home with her.⁴ This would prove problematic for her poetic productivity, as she was then and would remain a writer who required the inspiration and mirror that a community of likeminded writers provided.

At Glebe Collegiate Institute, the imposing red brick high school to which she transferred after moving to Ottawa, Macpherson at least found some likeminded friends through the school newspaper, “The Call to Order,” which she edited from 1945 onward. Macpherson also wrote for the paper under the pseudonym Frogden Splash. Glebe was inevitably not quite the literary community she had been hoping for: while some of her “Call to Order” contributions suggest that she appreciated now having an outlet and community for her writing, some of her Frogden poems are about her failure to find others who appreciated and wrote the kind of poetry she valued. They also reveal her quick temper and impatience with those who failed to take poetry seriously, especially the considered, formalist poetry she was writing even then. These feelings fuelled her witty takedown of one of her critics in “Criticism of Mr. Frogden Splash Whose Verse Appeared in the Last Issue,” and her ironically impassioned defense of dispassionate poetry in “The Defense of a Considered Poesie,” which we will read in some depth shortly. But her search for a community of even just one other person who took poetry, her kind of poetry, seriously would soon end.

In the spring of 1946, as Macpherson was finishing Grade 11, poet and painter P.K Page joined the staff of the National Film Commission as a scriptwriter in the Films division at 196 Sparks Street, in the next building over from her friend Dorothy Macpherson. Like Jay Macpherson, Page was not entirely thrilled to be there. Ottawa was not totally devoid of a poetry scene—Anne Marriott and Kay Smith also worked at the Commission with Page and Dorothy Macpherson, and there were other writers in the city—but the driving energy of the vibrant little magazine

³ Even on her PhD application to McGill, where she applied to do an M.A. but instead chose to do a library degree, Macpherson listed her nationality as English before striking it through and replacing it with Canadian.

⁴ Few samples of Macpherson’s voice and accent have been preserved, but she can be heard on the Folkways Record *Six Toronto Poets*, which she produced in 1957; it also features readings by W.W. E. Ross, Anne Wilkinson, Raymond Souster, Margaret Avison, and James Reaney.

communities of Montreal and Victoria of which Page had very recently been a part was absent from the nation's capital. People in Ottawa seemed mostly focused on politics and advancing up the ranks of government. Nevertheless, the old ties between members of the Montreal little magazine communities held even there: Dorothy Macpherson and Page had attended *Preview* meetings together in Montreal, and the Page family was friends with Jay Macpherson's Newfoundland foster family.

Not long after Page's arrival in Ottawa, Dorothy introduced Page to her daughter. Given her difficulty in finding others who appreciated her kind of verse, or verse at all, making the acquaintance of a poet as widely read, well-connected, and sympathetic as Page must have seemed a godsend to the community-hungry Macpherson. It is easy to forget, more than seventy years later, just how improbable it was that an aspiring fifteen-year old poet would just happen to make friends with the poet who was, even then, considered by many Canada's foremost female modernist. It was not as if modernist poets were thick on the ground in 1946, anywhere in Canada, nor is it easy to imagine many of Canada's other modernist poets taking on the task of mentoring a teenage writer. Macpherson considered herself lucky that at precisely the moment when she most needed encouragement as a writer—receiving very little at home, other than pressure from her mother to contribute to the family finances by selling poems—Page came into her life, looking to do what she could to make up for the loss of the literary community she had left behind in Montreal and on the West Coast.

"Over... supper" in Page's "high-ceilinged ground-floor apartment in an old house on Daly Avenue," Page and Macpherson talked of "books and writing and the literary life in Canada" (Macpherson, "Memories" 89). Despite being fifteen years Page's junior, Macpherson easily held her own in their discussions, and Page soon took to referring to Macpherson admiringly as her "young friend who had read everything" (ACP Box 1 File 20). As much as she appreciated it, this admiration sometimes had the unfortunate effect of exacerbating Macpherson's insecurity and feelings of distance from others; in her short story "The Defeat," a lightly fictionalized account of her own teenage experience, Macpherson wrote that "Even among her mother's clever friends she had passed for well-read" but felt she had "to force people to accept her for the sake of a superficial erudition" (JMP Box 2 File 19). This is one of the main reasons Macpherson, when she moved to Montreal in the early 1950s, would avoid the acquaintance of Phyllis Webb as another of her mother's *Preview* friends. Despite Macpherson's feelings, it is clear that Page liked and accepted her without feeling forced to, and that Macpherson's erudition was anything but superficial. It was no wonder that she had a difficult time finding friends as voracious and wide-ranging in their reading,

for barely out of middle school she had already devoured the works of the great English, American, French, and German poets, psychologists, and theorists, as well as immense amounts of mythology and folklore.⁵ Her tastes were largely traditional, perhaps because her main source of poetry in Newfoundland was the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, and this goes some way toward explaining her long attachment to rhyme and regular metre even as more experimental forms of verse became dominant. Macpherson also called herself a “fanatic Blakean” (JMP Box 1 File 8) as a child and teenager, a devotion that predated the resurgence of Blake’s popularity with the 1947 publication of Frye’s *Fearful Symmetry*. Her love was inspired, at least in part, by the fact that Blake spent considerable time in her childhood neighbourhood of Hampstead and the tree in which he had seen his vision of angels was not far from where she lived. Their shared neighbourhood appears as one of the “Invocations” in *Welcoming Disaster*, “Hampstead Ponds”:

Pools where I fished with jamjars for minnows, mysterious
 Waters, linked underground, unsearchable source:
 Home where I come from, well that all flow from, than memory
 Deeper, the dreamland sluice that restores our friends:
 Distant, sealed with stone, but murmuring always:
 If I forget thee, O secret fountain, forget not me. (*Poems* 63)

Macpherson’s longing for the place she would always in some way consider home, and sense of connection with Hampstead, is palpable even after she had lived in Canada for decades; it is little wonder that this connection shaped her reading and writing as a young woman.

While the breadth of Macpherson’s reading was unusual for someone so young—she would not turn fifteen until June—so too were her rigorous judgments about what she had read. A typical complaint to her mother was that “a great deal of Shakespeare’s work, in my opinion, is utter rot ... if he had not published some of his work and destroyed the second-rate stuff, he would have been far greater” (JMP Box 1 Folder 24). Macpherson felt herself fortunate to be born into a literary family, for despite neither originally being from London (Dorothy was Welsh, James Scottish, and both had spent considerable time in India during James’s military career) the Macphersons were well connected in British literary circles and devoted readers. Their daughter clearly benefited from their encouragement to read widely and to form opinions; as she once exclaimed to her friend and muse

⁵ Macpherson recorded having read Dylan Thomas, Shakespeare, St. Augustine, John Donne, John Keats, William Wordsworth, John Milton, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Dorothy Parker, Ogden Nash, Friedrich Hölderlin, Charles Baudelaire, Rainer Maria Rilke (and she translated the latter three), Gerard Manley Hopkins, Sidney Keyes, Cecil Day-Lewis, Edmund Spenser, archetypal theory and anthropology (Frazer, Graves, Campbell, Jung), Freudian psychology, gnostic philosophy, Spanish and English ballads, and mythology of all kinds, among much else.

Grete Wels-Schön, “What a thing poetry is! I think I have been lapped in it almost from my birth, by some inconceivable luck!” (JMP Box 2 File 2). Page may have begun spending time with Macpherson simply to please her colleague—as Macpherson noted, “My mother in those days, never having much leisure for her children, was glad to see me spend time with P.K” (“Memories” 89)—or she may have instinctively recognized that Macpherson had the potential to be a real literary comrade. Either way, Page soon found that in Macpherson she had made a friend who cared as passionately for poetry as she did, and whose passion and talent extended to writing as well as to reading.

Macpherson and Page both lamented that new poetry from England, America, and Canada was hard to come by in Ottawa, and Page took to special ordering books from elsewhere, often to Macpherson’s benefit. Page gave Macpherson “some wonderful books, always asking me first what I most wanted, and ordering them from faraway places or bringing them back from trips” (“Memories” 90) to Montreal and Boston. Even if the volume in question was not intended as a gift for Macpherson, it sometimes ended up in her pocket anyway: when Page abandoned Dylan Thomas’s *Deaths and Entrances*, having ordered it from Jarvis’s bookstore as a Christmas present for someone else but “refusing to take it when it didn’t come till February” (“Memories” 89), Macpherson rescued it from where it languished on the shelf and “carried [it] for months in [her] blazer pocket ... [as a] treasurable book” (89). Along with finding in Page a conduit to the newest modernist poetry, Macpherson also found in her a link to the people and debates central to the Canadian poetry scene, especially the ones Page had recently left behind in Montreal and on the West Coast.

Macpherson might have been a relative newcomer to Canada, but she was already quite aware of the major contours of the late-forties poetry scene in her new country. For Macpherson, a “place with other writers to me always meant Montreal,” and she hoped that Page “was as glad to tell me about it as I was to listen” (89). It is hard to say if Page would have been happy to talk about Montreal, then the centre of modern poetry in Canada. She had moved to Ottawa primarily to distance herself from F.R. Scott, who was in love with her but committed to his marriage to the painter Marion Dale Scott, and to escape the tension that had arisen between her and some other members of the Montreal poetry scene, especially John Sutherland, Irving Layton, and Louis Dudek. The relationship between Page and John Sutherland, the editor of *First Statement* and then *Northern Review*, had been uneasy since the late 1930s, in part because of unreciprocated romantic feelings on Sutherland’s side and in part because Page became increasingly intolerant of his more outrageous

critical writings. Page said nothing to Sutherland about his overly critical review of the six poems by her that *Poetry* magazine published around the time that she and Macpherson met, but she publically protested and quit the *Northern Review* editorial board when he published a scathing review of Robert Finch's Governor General's Award winning collection the next year. The uneasiness and antagonism between Sutherland and Page extended to the other "career boys" (ACP Box 1 File 20), as Page called Dudek and Layton, who worked with Sutherland on *First Statement* and Contact Press. While the tensions and antagonisms between the members of the editorial boards of *First Statement* and *Preview* have been much exaggerated, a number of the swipes each magazine took at the other were more about Page, and the brand of Canadian modernism she stood for, than they were about the magazines more generally.⁶ Despite not yet knowing these writers personally, in their talks about "the literary life in Canada" Macpherson soon picked up on the personal and aesthetic differences that marked the work and circle of the *First Statement* poets as distinct from Page's, and the opinions she formed of them and their work in conversation with Page coloured her relationship to the Montreal poetry community for much of her career.⁷ Most importantly, in sharing stories about the Montreal poetry scene and in connecting Macpherson with some of her Montreal friends, Page educated Macpherson in the identifiable characteristics of Canadian modernism's elective communities and assisted her in aligning herself with the elective community of what we might call "cosmopolitan" modernists to which she also belonged.

Much critical ink has been spilled about this idea of "cosmopolitan" modernism, its counterpart (often called "native"), and the supposed antagonisms between the poets to whom these

⁶ In "Canadian Poetry 1942," Page wrote of *First Statement* patronizingly as a magazine published by "young people" (Sutherland and Dudek were both a few years younger than she, career *boys*, unlike the much older Scott), which has a "wide-eyed uncertain policy of inclusion" ("Canadian" 8), while Dudek and Sutherland criticized what they saw as Page's (and *Preview's*) upper-class distance from everyday lives and struggles. What Dudek thought was wrong with Page's poetry, and with *Preview*, was "(1) a clever aptitude for exploiting the unreal universe of language; (2) a pedantic absorption in the second-hand universe of books, literature and erudition; and (3) a falsified devotion to a special universe of ideas, chiefly sociological and political ideas. It is likely to show the influence of 'upper class', high-cultured, intellectual spirit. Its writers may not be aristocrats, but they have learned the separateness, subtlety, and love-of-culture of the aristocracy. They are simply not plebian enough" (Dudek, "Geography" 2-3). Dudek's arguments about Page's poetry sound very much like the arguments that critics (including Dudek himself) would later make about Macpherson's mythopoeia and Canadian mythopoetics in general. A key example is Desmond Pacey's argument in "Literature of the Fifties" that the mythopoeists are writing literature about literature, rather than literature about life.

⁷ It has even been suggested that Page's slightly south-of-England accent, and its potential evocation of cosmopolitanism and colonial elitism, may have exacerbated their mutual antagonism; this would have been an even bigger issue for Macpherson, as her accent was much stronger than Page's. As Trehearne notes, Djwa "suggests that the British intonations of Anderson, Page and Scott would have been significant and aggravating to the east-enders Layton and Dudek (private communication) ... [and] such signifiers of social hierarchy would have exacerbated possible class tension between the two literary groups" ("Critical" n.9).

labels have been attached. In the more than 70 years since A.J.M. Smith first divided Canadian modernist poetry into opposing “native” and “cosmopolitan” streams, labels and positions which critics gradually attached to the *First Statement* and *Preview* poetic communities respectively,⁸ it has become increasingly obvious that the native-cosmopolitan division is false and arbitrary and that the antagonisms among the Montreal poets have been highly exaggerated. Smith argues that the native poets “have concentrated on what is individual and unique in Canadian life” by attempting “to describe and interpret whatever is essentially and distinctively Canadian” (“Introduction” 5), while the cosmopolitans have concentrated on what Canadian life “has in common with life everywhere,” making “from the very beginning ... a heroic effort to transcend colonialism by entering into the universal, civilizing culture of ideas” (5). While Smith’s placement of Canadian poets on one side or another of this binary opposition between nationalist and internationalist poetics does not hold up particularly well, it remains true that the core characteristics of Page’s poetry, and to a varying degree that of a number of her Montreal friends, were distinct from Layton’s and Dudek’s poetics of the period in ways that made their approaches to poetry, and to the world, both identifiable and somewhat incompatible. Page’s poetry, and Macpherson’s as a poet whose shared poetic sensibilities made her a member of the same elective community, reflected an interest in experimenting with various modes of impersonality, the use of vivid and sometimes oblique images, a wide ranging allusiveness, the desire to create a poetics that spoke beyond the self and the individual’s immediate experience, and a concern for the lived experience of women. They were, as Smith argues, very engaged with the “universal ... culture of ideas” and commonalities between cultures that could be both found in and nurtured by myth and impersonality. Smith, Anderson, and Wilkinson, among others, also shared many of these characteristics. And although she had largely abandoned the practice by 1946, Page was, like Macpherson, a highly mythopoeic writer in her youth, particularly in her pseudonymous novel *The Sun and the Moon* (1944), which retells the myth of Daphne in order to explore the relationship between gender and art.⁹

While Dudek’s and Layton’s work and approaches to poetry were often more similar to Page’s and Macpherson’s than they were different—Dudek, in particular, as another devotee of Eliot and an often mythopoeic writer, produced work that shares much with theirs—Layton and Dudek

⁸ For a useful overview of these issues and a thorough debunking of the native-cosmopolitan opposition, see Trehearne’s “Critical Episodes in Montreal Poetry of the 1940s.”

⁹ Page published the novel as Judith Cape in 1944; the 1939 poem “Reflection” is another excellent example of Page’s mythopoeic poetry. For a useful examination of Page’s early mythopoeia, see Diana Relke’s “Tracing a Terrestrial Vision in the Early Work of P.K. Page.”

also tended to emphasize an individual perspective, the use of personation and images of the everyday, a clearly masculine perspective on women and sex, and a careerist approach to publication and self-promotion that Macpherson and Page often found distasteful. Before she met Page, Macpherson already knew what Canadian modernist poetry she did and did not like. But in learning through her talks with Page about the poetics, politics, and people that defined the Canadian poetry scene, Macpherson began to decide how she wanted to align and ally herself—through the friends she made, and the way she wrote—within that community as she moved towards entering it as a fellow poet. As we will see in Chapter Two, these early talks with Page about the poets of the Montreal forties will have a significant impact on what Macpherson writes—and does not write—when she moves to Montreal herself and is faced with either joining Layton and Dudek’s poetic community or doing without a local literary community entirely.

While Macpherson wrote poetry frequently, if irregularly, during the years she and Page were closest, she recalled later that “I don’t think I often showed her poems till they were in print” (“Memories” 90). Page did not have a direct hand in shaping Macpherson’s work, but rather helped Macpherson recognize that their natural inclinations as poets lined up nicely and that their work shared identifiable characteristics that marked them both out as members of the same elective community of, for lack of a better term, cosmopolitan Canadian modernists. This recognition was a turning point for Macpherson, who up until that point had yet to encounter anyone who seriously supported her writing, never mind someone who shared a similar poetics. Others, including their soon-to-be mutual friend A.J.M. Smith, recognized the poetic affiliations that Macpherson and Page shared. In Smith’s estimation, Page and Macpherson were “*semblables* ... poetic kin: those with whom [Smith also] empathetically recognized common features that have their importance in a consideration of the history of Canadian poetry” (Woodcock, “Smith’s” 96). Foremost among these features was the belief that “the forms and contents of poetry were equal and coterminous” (99) (what Trehearne calls Page’s *integritas* (*Montreal* 68), and Macpherson would call the apocalyptic), an awareness “with equal intensity of the general and the particular, which, of course, puts them in the grand macrocosmic-microcosmic tradition embraced by Yeats and Blake” (Woodcock, “Smith’s” 99), and a tendency to “turn their images into symbols” (100). But despite the obvious confluences between their work that Woodcock points out and that Smith also recognized, in general Canadian literary history has failed to notice that Page and Macpherson belonged to the same elective community, mostly because their friendship has only become common knowledge since the recent publication of Sandra Djwa’s biography of Page (*Journey* 112) and because the study of Canadian

modernism rarely looks to make connections across the boundaries between decades and generations. While Macpherson had brought her mythopoeic, formalist, impersonal tendencies with her from London, the seeds of the brand of mythopoeic modernism she would soon become known for, and of the broader mythopoeic turn, had already been planted in Canada by Page, Smith, Wilkinson, Anderson, and others.

Along with the shared characteristics Woodcock identifies, Macpherson and Page were both extremely interested in the work of T.S. Eliot—particularly his theories of the objective correlative, impersonality, and the mythic method—and their experimentation with all three fundamentally shaped their poetics of the 1940s and early 1950s and gave rise to some of the defining characteristics of their brand of Canadian modernism. While Page bought books for Macpherson, Macpherson made books for Page in return, and many of those she made were editions of Eliot's work. The typewritten and hand-bound edition of *Four Quartets* (1943) that Macpherson made for Page and has been preserved in Page's papers at Library and Archives Canada is among the earliest evidence of Macpherson's long interest in bookmaking, one that would culminate in the creation of her own small press in the 1950s, Emblem Books, that published volumes Cameron Anstee praises as "surely among the most beautiful produced in Canada in the 20th century" ("Emblem").¹⁰ Despite his eventual importance to her poetic understanding and practice, Page was not introduced to Eliot's work until about the time that she first met Dorothy Macpherson in 1942. While Page regretted coming to Eliot so late—"I should have brought my Eliot to breakfast... / I should have swallowed Wasteland with my porridge / and Mr. Sweeney with my egg and bacon" (qtd. in Irvine, *Editing* 137)—Macpherson's interest in, and extensive reading of, Eliot started very early. This was extraordinarily useful upon her arrival in Canada, since a familiarity with Eliot was necessary for Macpherson to mark herself out as belonging to the elective community of Canadian cosmopolitan poets, given that the practice of impersonality was one of the key identifiable characteristics of that culture of letters.¹¹

Macpherson's interest in Eliot's theory and poetry was intense, particularly in the elements of his work that spoke to her experience of being a child of war and that helped her negotiate the relationship between author and reader, words and their impact. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943)

¹⁰ Macpherson also produced for Page handmade copies of Charles Williams's *The Last Voyage*, Eliot's *Gerontion* and *Animula*, and Henry Reed's *Chrysothemis* and *Antigone* (PKPP Box 55 File 1).

¹¹ These poets include A.J.M. Smith, Patrick Anderson, and F.R. Scott, as well as a number of the other Montreal modernists who experimented with an impersonal poetics. Both Trehearne and Irvine explore this aspect of their poetic at length in a number of their books and articles.

resonated with the parts of Macpherson that still considered London home, for it is, in many ways, a meditation on the damage to the city—and the neighbourhood, Hampstead—Macpherson was forced to leave behind in coming to Canada. As Eliot writes of the bombed-out city in “Little Gidding,”

Water and fire succeed
The town, the pasture and the weed.
Water and fire deride
The sacrifice that we denied.
Water and fire shall rot
The marred foundations we forgot,
Of sanctuary and choir. (53)

Despite her geographical distance from the war and its ravages of her hometown, Eliot provided Macpherson with a way to experience, through the mediating lens of poetry, its aftermath: the bombed out churches, the burnt and flooded towns, the lack of sanctuary to be found just about anywhere. Macpherson’s love of his poetry was matched by her interpretive ability, and her annotated versions of *Four Quartets* and *Ash Wednesday* (1930) are rumoured to have made their way to, and impressed, Eliot himself.¹²

As an adult Macpherson believed that “poems don’t come from anything deliberate like ‘alluding’” (“Jay” 388), but her earliest poetry is nonetheless full of deliberate allusion. Being able to identify that allusion can be crucial to reading it effectively, and that allusion was not infrequently to Eliot. A perfect example is the “mouse in the wainscot” that has often confused readers of “Ordinary People in the Last Days,” written at about the time she met Page. The story of a young man who believes that he is the only person left behind at the end of days, the poem’s concluding stanza lists the signs of the impending rapture of each of his family members—being taken up to heaven, prophesying, consorting with unicorns, doves,¹³ and white bulls—but to the speaker’s dismay, nothing so startling happens to him. Instead, “a mouse ran away in [his] wainscot” (*Boatman*

¹² Crawley’s daughter-in-law Lois wrote to Macpherson that “The question of your notes came up last summer when Alan and I were thumbing away at Eliot. A. said you had done some notes on *The Wasteland* which Eliot Himself [sic] had praised very highly and the idea was, I think, that I read *your* notes and then startle the professors (Manitoba U.) with *my* brilliance” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Crawley asked Macpherson for copies of these commentaries, to which she replied that “As for Eliot, shall do my best. I may be able to dig up my annotations to *Four Quartets* in Ottawa—did a set for *Ash Wednesday* too, when I was around fifteen, but made them for someone else & idiotically didn’t keep a copy shall send anything I can find” (JMP Box 1 File 8). That someone else was likely Grete Wels-Schön; as Macpherson wrote to her in an undated letter (written somewhere around 1947), “that reminds me: I’m going to send you ‘Four Quartets’ soon, as thoroughly annotated as I can manage – great fun, I love such sterile jobs” (JMP Box 2 File 2).

¹³ Macpherson’s dove descending—“The dove descended on my brother” (*Boatman* 4)—also appears in *Four Quartets*.

5), and he misses the sign of his own impending rapture. Instead, he continues to beg God to “send me a sign of thy coming / Or let me die” (4). Given the poem’s central meditation on how even the most extraordinary of events—the biblical end of days, the Second World War—can be heralded by happenings that are totally ordinary and completely missable, Macpherson purposefully coded the sign of the apocalypse she borrowed from Eliot. Surveying the destruction of London left behind at the end of the Second World War, Eliot’s speaker sees that

Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended
Dust inbreathed was a house –
The walls, the wainscot and the mouse
The death of hope and despair
This is the death of air. (*Four* 51)

It is this mouse in the wainscot, the sign of the apocalypse her speaker misses, that Macpherson adopts for her own symbolism in “Ordinary People in the Last Days,” the poem that will garner so much attention from the Canadian poetic community when it opens her first substantial publication of poems in *Contemporary Verse*.

But as much as Eliot’s poetry was a touchstone for Macpherson as she navigated the beginnings of her literary career far from the city she had once shared with him, she was arguably more interested in Eliot’s poetic theory and in how the techniques and approaches he set out in his major essays could help her and Page, who was engaged in much the same project, both achieve their poetic goals. When they first met, both women were grappling with the idea and the practice of impersonality, perhaps Eliot’s most famous theory, and the negotiation between impersonality and personation arguably defines much of the work Macpherson and Page produce during their long careers. Indeed, grappling with impersonality shapes much of Canadian modernism.¹⁴ In some ways, Page’s move from Montreal to Victoria and then to Ottawa was a retreat from what would become an increasingly strong emphasis on emotion, personation, and personality—and unsurprisingly on strongly masculine personalities—that was beginning to dominate the Montreal poetry scene.¹⁵ But Page took Eliot’s position, which he first articulated in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” that the foregrounding of subjectivity, particularly in the spontaneous outpouring of emotion, runs

¹⁴ See Trehearne’s *The Montreal Forties* (1999), Irvine’s “The Two Giovannis: P.K. Page’s Two Modernisms” (2004), and Essert’s “Impersonal Animals: Theory and Poetic Practice in P.K. Page and T.S. Eliot” (2012).

¹⁵ A key subject of Trehearne’s *The Montreal Forties* is the shift Dudek and Layton both make, to varying degrees, toward an intense and masculinist subjectivity in their work and in their public personae in the years after Page’s departure from Montreal.

counter to the purpose of poetry. Rather, Eliot claims, good poetry requires the constant suppression of the individual personality in favour of transforming the self into a conduit for emotion and experience that has a broader resonance, transforming the language of particular experience into a poetics of supposedly universal communication: “What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (“Tradition” 30) that makes room in the poem for someone other than the self. Eliot’s poetics of impersonality is fundamentally about a centripetal focus outward, toward the reader, rather than a centrifugal focus inward, toward the self.

It is easy to imagine Page and Macpherson complaining to each other about the “tyranny of subjectivity” (Page, *Filled* 41), the limited and inward-looking perception and communication of subjectivity that neither sees nor reaches beyond the self, and both pinning their dislike of confessional poetry on “having been brought up on Eliot’s ‘objective correlative’ which can, after all, enlarge the boundaries of the poem” (Page, “That’s” 63). Their poetry suggests that both women felt much like Canadian critic Henry Wells, who defined impersonality as “poetic language that all [the poet’s] readers might value in common” and “an unselfishness that stresses the poet’s duty to communicate as simply as possible with his audience” (qtd. in Trehearne *Montreal* 72). Macpherson was particularly concerned with lapsing into a private symbolism that would make her poems unintelligible and obscure to anyone but herself. Impersonality was a way to reach beyond the boundaries of the self, to communicate more than just one’s inner experience, to escape “the general mess of imprecision of feeling, / Undisciplined squads of emotion” (Eliot, *Four* 181). It was also, at least for Macpherson, a measure of precision and poetic quality. In “The Defense of a *Considered* Poesie,” Macpherson’s alter-ego Frogden Splash responds to “an English Master who asserts that all great poetry was written in a state of ‘high emotion’” (JMP Box 5 Folder 3) by defending a considered poetic as a qualitatively superior one:

Do you think Wordsworth’s definition of poetry as emotion recollected in tranquility
Was merely the blathering of an old man’s senility?
Do you really think that poetic frenzy is the sine qua non
Without which all poetic writing is as futile as “Don John”?
Do you remember that Coleridge was in a laudanum stupor when he wrote “Kublai Khan”,
That poem which should for all time effectively justify poets’ ways to man.
Do you remember that Milton wrote “Lycidas” about someone he disliked?
Yet that poem has for two hundred years and fifty had the guns of Milton’s critics spiked!
Christopher Smart wrote in frenzy, but his work is almost forgotten.
But Tennyson, who calmly polished each line until it shone

Will be remembered when you and I are rotten.
 Surely when poetic quality is measured by the emotion the writer can show
 Then will the doors be shut in the streets and all the daughters of music shall be brought low.
 I really do think that when you formed your theory you were mistaken—
 But at least said theory provides a refutation for the people who think Shakespeare's plays
 were written by Bacon.
 F.S.

P.S. If I had not been in a high state of emotion when I wrote this, my lines would have been neater
 And I should not have abandoned metre. (JMP Box 5 Folder 3)

Perhaps ironically, Macpherson's impassioned defense of a considered poetics is neither impersonal—despite using a pseudonym, Macpherson writes in the first person and clearly as herself—nor terribly considered, given its varying line lengths, metres, and irregular rhyme scheme. While highlighting the fact that Macpherson has failed to meet the standard of considered poesis she advocates for in the body of the poem, its cheeky postscript also reveals one of Macpherson's reasons for her lifelong devotion to metre: the ability of formal constraint to force the writer, and the reader, to approach the poem at a certain emotional remove, to make consideration a necessity. Indeed, as we will see in the coming years, Macpherson would remain one of the few Canadian modernists who maintained a strict adherence to formal structures of metre and rhyme in an era when free verse reigned supreme, in large part because of her belief in the power of formal constraint to help her project of transmuting and making more than individual the personal emotional experiences that were the impetus behind much of her writing.

Despite its formal flaws and clear expression of personal emotion—it is, after all, juvenilia—"The Defense of a *Considered Poesie*" does still illuminate some of the reasons Macpherson was committed from the beginning to a considered, impersonal poetics: as a way out of a poetics of pure emotion, and as a way to attain a measure of quality via restraint and consideration that highly subjective and emotional verse could not. Macpherson shared this commitment and belief with Eliot, who argued that "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material" ("Tradition" 31). Macpherson sought, in the considered poetics that Eliot theorized and that she argued Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson, and Milton practiced, a way to create a little critical distance from emotion through metaphor and its near relation, myth. While Macpherson suggests that a considered, detached poetics is a measure of quality, she also saw

impersonality as a way, as Frye put it in reviewing her work, to “release ... emotion by detaching it from direct experience and containing it within the convention” (Frye, *Bush* 56) of metaphor, myth or “conventional theme” (56). Eliot was likewise convinced that “the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is finding an ‘objective correlative’” (“Hamlet” 58)—a metaphorical object, phrase, situation or chain of events which could be relied upon to create a correlation in the mind of the reader between the words on the page and the emotion the writer wanted to express. The simultaneous evocative and distancing function of the objective correlative made it an ideal tool to deploy in the quest for a functional and communicative impersonality.

The potential ability of the objective correlative to evoke emotion, without *being* emotional, was a major attraction for Page and Macpherson, especially as women. For one, it allowed them to speak beyond themselves, to articulate an emotional experience that was more than individual, more than personal. As Page put it, “[f]or your own experience to be valuable, you have to find an objective correlative for that experience, and by so doing, you can get yourself into larger realms than you would if you [continued] telling your own experience through your poetry” (qtd. in Djwa, “P.K.” 19), a belief that Macpherson shared. Perhaps the best example of this use of impersonality in Page’s poetry is “The Stenographers,” which transforms her experience of working in an office during the Second World War into an exploration, bordering on indictment, of the way that the treatment of women workers in modern offices—the overwork, the lack of meaningful work, the constant surveillance by the male gaze—drove “the pin men of madness in marathon trim / [to] race round the track of the stadium pupil” (*Hidden* 103) in their eyes.

Another attraction of impersonality was how it allowed both women to escape the trap of being deemed sentimental, a label that was anathema for modernist poets, particularly women. As Nick Mount puts it, “if, in Eliot’s day” (and for as long as Eliot’s ideas held sway) “you were interested in becoming a modern poet” and recognizable to others as part of the elective community of modernists, “you should have known better than to write poems,” like Wordsworth in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” “about how happy daffodils made you feel” (*When* 14). For Eliot, “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (“Tradition” 33). The avoidance of overt emotional display was especially important for female modernist poets, who were expected by others to be emotional and to write sentimental verse simply due to their sex. As Suzanne Clark puts it, “From the point of view of literary modernism, sentimentality was both a past to be outgrown and a present tendency to be despised. The gendered character of this condemnation seemed natural:

Women writers were entangled in sensibility, were romantic and sentimental by nature” (2). Even despite her best efforts to avoid the trap of sentimentality, Macpherson was caught in a double bind and criticized for failing to live up to this expectation. Dudek’s review of *The Boatman* is a perfect example of the gendered reactions Macpherson got when she thwarted this expectation. Dudek argues that “where the poetry of the young” (and, he insinuates, female) “is often an outpouring of the [sic] sensuous striving and idealism, Miss Macpherson’s is a witty self-rationalizing of celibacy, asceticism, and high-spinsterhood” (“Eye” 81-2): damned as sentimental if she is anything but impersonal, damned as frigid and asexual if she is. Even with more sympathetic critics like Alan Crawley, Macpherson (and even Page) had to walk a fine line between subjectivity and impersonality, between sentimentality and emotional remove, as Crawley abhorred sentimentality but also disliked highly impersonal poetry. Irvine has suggested that Page’s shift toward a less impersonal poetry in the late 1940s, particularly after the publication of *As Ten as Twenty* the same year she and Macpherson first became friends, may have been due in part to Crawley’s encouragement to move beyond a strict impersonality (Irvine, *Editing* 167-8). During the same period, and with Crawley as one of her most trusted readers, Macpherson likewise worked to moderate between direct expression of emotion and its catalytic transformation into something evocative but impersonal.

Given how intense Macpherson’s emotional world was as a teenager—her letters to Page are joyous, tortured, angry, elated, or filled with shame, but rarely concerned with the quotidian or commonplace—she needed multiple strategies, including impersonality, humour, mythopoetics, rhyme, and highly-structured form, in order to tame and order that emotion as it made its way onto the page. In addition to impersonality, humour was another key technique of Macpherson’s, for it allowed her to write about serious subjects while simultaneously diffusing any emotional tension. So were rhyme and metre, the precision and artificiality of both allowing her create some distance from the spontaneity and immediacy of the emotional outburst. But transforming the materials of history and everyday life through myth and metaphor into something with a useful amount of emotional and subjective distance was perhaps her most important poetic strategy, and she would continue to refine this technique as her career progressed. As Frye suggests in his review of *The Boatman*—which contains poems composed as early as 1946, Macpherson’s first year in Ottawa—she developed the ability to transform a poem that “might seem at first glance to be only an allusive literary exercise” into “a kind of reservoir of feeling in which one’s literary and personal associations mingle and are held in the kind of variable emotional contemplation that it is one of the primary functions of poetry to provide” (*Bush* 57). From the beginning, Macpherson found ways to create poems that contained

emotion, allowed its evocation and contemplation, but did not directly express it. No happy daffodils for her, no matter how much they might be expected of a teenage girl.

Macpherson destroyed most of the poems she wrote during her first years in Ottawa, the years when she was making friends with Page and finishing up high school at Glebe Collegiate. But we can see her early experiments with personation, form, rhyme, and metre at work in the poems she did decide to keep, which she carefully transcribed in a small, red-covered notebook. Among those early poems, “Objective Correlative: Poor Child”¹⁶ is the most obvious example of her work to harness the potential of impersonality to make poetry more than just the expression of personal experience or emotion. As she wrote to Page while she was working on “Poor Child,” “I’m having a lovely time struggling with objective correlatives & things ... Fearful difficulty with last line of my latest, tempted to give up rhyme altogether, in favour of very blank verse. Such fun!” (PKPP Box 55 Folder 2). Eliot suggests that the self-sacrificial extinction of personality required of writing impersonal verse is hard work, and Macpherson certainly found it so, for she had to constantly struggle to make her early verse about something other than herself: “all my verse is dripping with” images of her pet concerns “even when I take great pains to talk about something that doesn’t affect me” (PKPP Box 55 Folder 2). In “Poor Child,” Macpherson struggled to make objective and universally recognizable her feelings about the mistreatment of children and the corruption of innocence in everyone, herself included during her long abandonment in Newfoundland: she “used passionately to envy every younger child I saw, thinking it might have a chance I had not; through seeing small children abused and wrecked, though with good intentions, I come about at the last to pity the enwombed and undreamed, the damned unborn” (PKPP Box 55 Folder 2). “Poor Child” is the first example of what I call Macpherson’s poetics of concern, the profoundly ethical and outward-facing nature of that part of her poetics working to understand, and to change, how the world treated its most vulnerable members; it is this same impulse that will lead Macpherson to write political poetry in the later years of her life.

Written in the same year as Page’s “The Stenographers,” “Poor Child” transforms Macpherson’s experience of being taken from her home in London and left by her mother in Newfoundland, and of seeing other children similarly forgotten and abused, into a far-reaching

¹⁶ Although she would almost always maintain some level of impersonality in her verse, never again would Macpherson make such an obvious reference to Eliot’s theory as in the first part of the title; she crossed out “Objective Correlative” in the final version of the poem preserved in her red notebook, and the first half of the title never appeared again in the various collections in which Macpherson included it.

critique of the mistreatment of children and corruption of innocence in adults. The “Poor Child” figure of the poem is the objective correlative of this pity and anger, and the poor children of the poem become a symbol for neglected and mistreated children—and the child-self that remains within the adult—without requiring Macpherson to write about her own experiences. Everyone is to be pitied, the speaker suggests, for even the most vaunted of heroes—Achilles, Ulysses, Philoctetes—were poor children, and so are “you and you”:

Poor child the royal goosegirl combing
Her hair in the field; poor children too
Achilles sulking, Odysseus returned,
Philoctetes, Prufrock, and you and you.
Poor child, what have they done to you? (JMP Box 5 File 2)

Macpherson’s selection of exemplary poor children spans myth, folk tales, and modern poetry, and significantly, she encompasses the reader in that group of poor children through direct address. Macpherson believed that escapist literature, the desire for lost places like Eden and Xanadu, the Gnostic belief that this world is not our true home, and the general yearning for the simplicity and purity of life before birth were all symptoms of what she termed, in a letter to Grete Wels-Schön, “a regressive desire for pre-natal existence” inspired by a “difficult period in the life of man”—the two World Wars, the Cold War, the massive social and political changes that accompanied modernity—“which we have not yet passed” (JMP Box 2 File 2). In consequence, we poor children “yearn / To swing in dark or water, wanting / Not childhood’s flowers but absolute return” (JMP Box 5 File 2). Macpherson suggests that this difficult period has been a long one, that this longing is not just a modern one, by yoking together the poor child as objective correlative with Eliot’s mythic method, which she does by using the “royal goosegirl” from Grimm’s fairy tales, Ulysses, Prufrock, and Achilles as examples of the poor child archetype. Eliot’s mythic method involves “manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” for the purpose of “controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (Eliot, “Ulysses” 177). This method effectively does away with the bounds of time, bringing past and present together through this paralleling and giving them both the timeless quality of mythology. In using the mythic method, Macpherson wraps her readers into a wide community of adults who wish for the simplicity of childhood and the comfort of the womb (arguably all of us), and of children who struggle with feeling powerless, unloved, and alone. In combining impersonality, the metaphorical function of the objective correlative, and the play with time the mythic method allowed, Macpherson crafted a way out of the trap of sentimentality, and

found a way to make her poems far more than personal; by tapping into these primal desires, and common feelings, Macpherson makes “Objective Correlative: Poor Child” something closer to universal.

But even as Macpherson was finding her way into a poetics of mythic impersonality, Page was struggling with her own practice. The years of Page and Macpherson’s friendship marked a turning point for Page’s poetics, and for Canadian poetry more broadly. Despite Page’s commitment to impersonality in the early years of her career, she began to chafe against the confines of impersonality and of the Imagist image, what Trehearne calls the tendency toward “the simple accumulation of brief images without governing paradigms of voice, theme, or conceit” (*Montreal* 61). So too did some of her readers—Crawley believed that she had perhaps gone too far in her impersonality, noting in his review of the poems she contributed to the anthology *Unit of Five*, “In too many of [the poems] there is too strong an impression of cold analytical detachment unwarmed by sympathetic understanding, so that the people of who [sic] she writes are lifeless arid remembered only as the woman, the surgeon, they, them, he and she” (“Editor’s Note” [1945] 15). As Trehearne suggests, Page had come up against a fundamental barrier in her poetic progress—her Imagistic tendencies, combined with her impersonality, were hindering her ability to develop a poetics that privileged and expressed a wholeness of self and of other, not one of detachment and disintegration, and a corresponding holistic integration of form, theme, and content. Zailig Pollock and Emily Ballantyne have suggested that Page’s turn to painting instead of publishing in the mid-1950s was a necessary retreat that allowed her to develop a new poetics that could address these challenges (“Respect” 190).

Trehearne argues in *The Montreal Forties* that the poetic crisis Page faced in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the same one that Klein, Dudek, Layton, and Souster also faced, led these poets either to silence or to a heightened level of subjectivity and personation in their work. Despite his focus on the fact that these poets were searching for an apocalyptic *integritas*, Trehearne fails to identify that the emergence of mythopoeic modernism at precisely this same moment is a response to the same issues of impersonality and integration. Where Page struggled and went silent, Macpherson had already solved this problem for herself. From the beginning of her poetic experimentation as a teenager, at least in those poems that she did not destroy (as she wrote to Page in early 1948, “For the second time, I have torn up all the findable verse of Jay Macpherson: I had not expected or intended to begin ‘Phase the Third [fourth, really]; but here, apparently, goes” [PKPP Box 39 File 16]), she countered the potential disunity of impersonality, the threat of lapsing into unintelligible

personal symbolism, with a use of myth that relied upon the universality of archetype to make her symbolism potentially intelligible to any reader. The use of myth also allowed her to exceed the limitations of the short lyric form, for reference to myth allowed her to expand the boundaries of the poems and enter that larger word of archetype and canonical stories. Adopting the often-cyclical structure of mythology would also provide her, as we will see from her unpublished collection *Recognitions* onward, with a framework in which to unify the short lyrics that are her signature form. As Amanda Jernigan notes,

[I]t is perhaps precisely at the point that poets move away from the longer forms we associate with the epic, and toward the shorter, lyric modes, that myths in the sense of canonical stories, stories recognized within a culture by certain basic and recurring elements, become most useful to poets: because this kind of story can be referenced in a phrase, a word. (“Preface”¹⁵)

Macpherson finds myth useful for just this reason: the mythic reference and structure of her poems, and later her suites and cycles, mimicked the fully integrated and all-encompassing structure of mythology, allowing them the structural and thematic coherence that Page was seeking in her “desire for a new wholeness for modernist poetics – and its inversion, a fear of formal incoherence, a gift for striking images left insignificant and unimpactful” (Trehearne, *Montreal* 65). But as we will see in reading Macpherson’s later work, at the same time she understood that the unity and *integritas* she worked to construct out of her mythopoeic lyrics was often just an illusion, the idea of order rather than order itself. That *integritas* was also, Macpherson would grow to understand, a tendency toward system-building and the creation of totalizing structures that all too often (especially in the hands of men like Robert Graves and Northrop Frye) tended to exclude the poor children—especially women, people of colour, and the disenfranchised—for whom she often wrote. Her career, and Page’s too, would in many ways be defined by her work to find a balance between the two—order and chaos, *integritas* and the singular striking image, private symbolism and her public readership.

Starting Out: *Canadian Forum* and *Contemporary Verse*

Despite Page’s years of experience in editing little magazines and publishing her own poems, Macpherson did not often call upon her to read or critique unfinished work. Macpherson rarely showed Page poems before they were complete, and indeed rarely revised her work in any case: as she would explain in an interview given just after she won the Governor General’s Award, “My writing grows out of what I’m reading. Words go round in my head for a while, then I seem to get a tune—and a sense of what fits and what doesn’t. It sometimes goes on for a long time and

eventually I write it down” (JMP Box 6 Folder 5). Instead of editorial advice that would help Macpherson refine her poems, Page offered her knowledge of the editors of Canada’s little magazines, and advice about those with whom Macpherson might find favour, and those whom she might want to avoid. This advice, along with the connections Page helped her make with the little magazine editors in her network, played a major role in helping Macpherson establish herself within the Canadian poetic community as her writing career began.

Even given the proliferation of good writing and places to publish it during the war, Macpherson’s choices were still limited when she began to publish in 1947. Of the literary magazines, *Northern Review* (the joint offspring of *Preview* and *First Statement*) and *Contemporary Verse* were well established, and *The Fiddlehead* had recently come on the scene. But *Canadian Forum*, the venerable political periodical, published a limited amount of poetry and fiction, and *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, the much-maligned official organ of the Canadian Authors Association, was “not a place where the Canadian modernists could feel comfortable publishing their verse” (Whiteman) for much of its quarter-century run. As Macpherson put it, “Canadian Poetry Magazine is for the most part, thanks to its sponsor the Canadian Authors Association, a dreary collection of Binkser” —the saccharine and sentimental poetry produced by the heroine of Paul Hiebert’s satirical novel *Sarah Binks* (1947)—that is “lacking Sarah’s occasional divine felicity, but none of her artlessness” (“The Little Magazines of Canada,” JMP Box 5 File 19). It was not that members of the mid-century literary community were not trying to expand the number of publishing opportunities available, as Macpherson would also do in establishing Emblem Books. It was just that their efforts met with limited success. Paul Arthur and Catherine Harmon’s gorgeously and expensively produced *here and now* lasted for only three issues in 1947 and 1948, Ronald Hambleton’s *Reading* lasted for a few months during 1946, and Harold Horwood’s *Protocol* endured only a little longer. There were always popular magazines and newspapers, but the modernist aversion to publishing in large magazines, with all of their associations with unserious verse and crass commercialism, was strong enough to keep Macpherson focused on finding a home for her poems in literary publications. Facing strong pressure from her mother to contribute to the family finances by selling her work, Macpherson’s refusal to submit poems to publications that paid may also have been a form of teenage rebellion.

Of those few acceptable publishing venues, Page recommended Macpherson try her luck at submitting poems to “*Canadian Forum*, [and] later *Contemporary Verse*” (“Memories” 90). Why not *Northern Review*, given that Page was on its editorial board and its circulation far exceeded that of *Contemporary Verse*? It may have been because Sutherland helmed it, or possibly because the

magazine participated in what Irvine calls “Canadian modernism’s dominant masculinist discourses” (“Two” 25) to such an extent that it was an unattractive option to recommend to a 15-year old female writer. Page may have recommended *Canadian Forum* because she sensed that Frye, who was then the magazine’s editor, would find Macpherson’s poetic sensibilities to his taste. This proved to be true. She most certainly suggested to Macpherson that she send her poems to *Contemporary Verse* because she knew firsthand that Crawley delighted in mentoring and forging connections among many of Canada’s female modernist writers: Page herself, Anne Wilkinson, Dorothy Livesay, Anne Marriott, Floris McLaren, and Doris Ferne, among others. Page also knew that Macpherson would appreciate his self-taught understanding of what made good poetry, and that she would benefit from his willingness to be a tough critic. As Page wrote to Crawley in the early 1940s, “You’ve no idea what a stimulating thing it has been – this contact with you, even across so many miles. It is doubly good to get praise from someone who is unafraid to damn” (ACP Box 1 File 20). Whatever the reason for recommending it to Macpherson, Page’s loyalty belonged to *Contemporary Verse*, as Macpherson’s soon would: both would publish more of their work in Crawley’s magazine than in any other.

Macpherson took Page’s advice about where to send her work, and first submitted a poem to Frye at the *Forum*. Considering its Blakean and Gnostic frame of reference,¹⁷ it is unsurprising that he immediately accepted the verse, titled “Non-Identification.” It appeared in the April 1947 volume of *Canadian Forum* under the initials J.M., which is probably why it has never before been recognized as Macpherson’s first published work. In its ten lines, she condenses the major points of William Blake’s argument with John Locke about the relationship between the external world and human senses, the treatment of which would be a major subject of the first chapter of Frye’s *Fearful Symmetry*, published just a few months after her poem:

Turning from shadow to shadow, we find
 Nowhere the established revelation,
 Never can establish a connection
 Between eye and image, surface and hand.
 Contained by crying flesh and bone,
 Unenvying, we lack
 Water’s ignorance of pain,
 The self-sufficiency of stone,

¹⁷ As Macpherson stated in an interview with Ryan Miller, “she first became interested in the Gnostics when she was 16, having encountered H.L. Mansel’s book *Gnostic Heresies* (1875) while at Queen’s University. ‘[I] liked the mythology,’ she says, [and] made a typescript of a lot of it” (51). “Non-Identification” (and the fact that Macpherson never attended Queen’s) suggests that Macpherson’s encounter with *Gnostic Heresies* happened earlier than she recalled.

Fire's easy taut and slack;
And therefore shall be hurt again. (15)

"Non-Identification" also articulates the Gnostic cry against being trapped in a world that is alien to our innermost spirit, one with which we "never can establish a connection," and shows Macpherson's early interest in Gnostic philosophy, one which will later find an outlet in translating Hans Jonas's *The Gnostic Religion*.

As in Locke, the poem's speaker searches for access to an external world independent of human senses and human experience, for the Platonic Ideal that casts its shadow on the walls of the cave. In a move that Macpherson will return to in the future to help create a connection between her reader and her words, she includes the reader in her address—it is "we" who seek to establish a connection between our inner world and the world outside. But, Macpherson's speaker suggests, until we accept what Blake argues to be true—that there is no world beyond that of our senses, no deeper "connection / Between eye and image, surface and hand" beyond that which we can sense—we shall "be hurt again" by the inability to exceed the containment of "crying flesh and bone." Given the sophistication of Macpherson's thinking, her easy encapsulation of a complex debate, and her poetic proficiency, it is little wonder that Frye immediately accepted "Non-Identification" for publication.¹⁸ But despite her initial success with submitting her first poem to *Canadian Forum*, Macpherson would not publish in it again for many years, perhaps because she realized that she would have better chances submitting to a magazine that published only creative work, rather than the political writing that was the *Forum's* primary focus. Or perhaps it was because she had been taken under Alan Crawley's wing.

Macpherson had met Crawley briefly late in the fall of 1946 when Page "took [her] to a lecture he gave" ("Memories" 90)—the Ottawa stop of his popular cross-country "sayings" tour—at the grand Château Laurier hotel. Crawley spent nearly two hours giving "recitations of poems very current indeed" (90) by Anne Wilkinson, Anne Marriott, Miriam Waddington, James Reaney and others, readings that were "so flawlessly delivered that a listener might not realize that though he appeared to be reading, he was blind" (90). However, it was the publication of "Non-Identification" in April of 1947 that truly marked the beginning of Crawley and Macpherson's working relationship

¹⁸ The elemental aspects of this poem—her framing of the natural world as fire, water, and stone—also link her to Anne Wilkinson; for an examination of the relationship between Wilkinson's elemental poetics and Frye's mythopoeic theory, see my "Revealing Reciprocity: Anne Wilkinson, Northrop Frye, and Mythopoetics in Canada."

and friendship. The poem immediately caught his attention, possibly because Macpherson's meditation on the disconnect between eye and image spoke to his own experience: a viral illness he had contracted in the early 1930s left him blind and forced him to leave his career as a lawyer, and he turned to poetry as a wellspring of images that did not require eyes. It is undeniable that Crawley's vision loss influenced his aesthetic preferences; above all, he was attracted to "[r]hythmic experimentation and musicality," a key feature of Macpherson's poetics, "as well as the degree to which a poem might lend itself to synaesthesia" (Timmers 16) that transposed the verbal into the visual. Macpherson's early poetry, including that first poem that so captivated Crawley, contained all of this in spades.

In one of Crawley's conversations with Page he discovered that the mysterious "J.M." was Jay Macpherson and quickly dubbed her "the *Forum* child," a nickname inspired by the fact that "Non-Identification" was published when she was only fifteen. With Page's encouragement, Macpherson began writing to Crawley that spring and showing him some of her draft poems and translations. She was both thrilled and terrified at the attention, and to have a dispassionate and critical reader. As Page wrote to Crawley just after Macpherson had posted her first letter to Crawley, Macpherson "charged into my office the other day in a great state of intensity to tell me she had written to Alan. Knowing her, she has probably torn the letter up half a dozen times by now but she was wildly excited to find Alan was interested & undyingly grateful to me for having mentioned her" (ACP Box 1 File 20). The excitement was mutual. Writing to Anne Wilkinson a little while later, Crawley called Macpherson "rather an amazing and a bit frightening young woman" who "for some time has been sending me MSS. ... including some poems written in English, French and German" (qtd. in McCullagh 37). Crawley saw Macpherson's potential and believed that "if she is able to hold her balance and find something that she really wants to say and can say it she will do something worthwhile" (37). That day would come sooner than he may have imagined.

Macpherson's youth and the lack of encouragement from those closest to her, especially her mother, made her somewhat insecure about her poetic talents. In consequence, Crawley's early letters were very often exercises in encouraging and bolstering Macpherson's confidence as an emergent writer, and addressed the same lack of confidence that led her to publish "Non-Identification" anonymously. As he wrote in one of their earliest exchanges, with his trademark idiosyncratic syntax and punctuation due to his blindness,

I hope there have not been too many rejections but even if there have been a flock of them it is part of the game that you must [g]o through and one of these days, I am certain, the acceptance letters will flow into your mail box and you will be trying to catch up with them

... I am certain I shall have considerable exhilaration in keeping up with your work. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

This faith in her carried significant weight with Macpherson, especially given the number of extremely talented writers in Crawley's circle against whom she knew he was measuring her. Indeed, Crawley's encouragement was a crucial factor in her decision to keep writing, and to begin writing for print under her own name. As Macpherson would write to him after the appearance of her first suite of poems in the Fall 1948-Winter 1949 issue of *Contemporary Verse*, "With the writing, no one can much help another; but it is very cheering to know that even one's most deplorable compositions will be read with the friendly interest you always give them" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Indeed, Macpherson knew "very well that I, at least, should never have ventured into print last fall if it had not been for your continual encouragement, and I see now that that would have been a very great loss to me" (JMP Box 1 File 8).¹⁹ It would also have been a great loss to the world of Canadian poetry, which would soon come to count Jay Macpherson as among the foremost of the country's emergent modernists.

In his first letter, Crawley encouraged Macpherson to send him "any of your MSS ... for the magazine or for my eyes only" (JMP Box 1 File 8), but while he understood the lack of confidence that led her to publish "Non-Identification" as J.M., he intended to push her to publish in *Contemporary Verse* under her own name. Crawley's talent for identifying and nurturing new poets who then published work in *Contemporary Verse* was one that a number of his fellow editors coveted. As Sutherland wrote to him after reading Macpherson's first poems in the magazine, "I envy you your knack of catching all the promising younger poets before the rest of us know they exist" (qtd. in McCullagh 32). This envy stemmed not only from the fact that *Contemporary Verse* claimed the early loyalties of many—Page, Macpherson, James Reaney, Daryl Hine, Anne Wilkinson, Margaret Avison, Phyllis Webb, Elizabeth Brewster, and Marya Fiamengo among them—but also from the fact that the talent contained within its pages helped attract subscribers and ensure *Contemporary Verse*'s financial viability at a time when funds were scarce and good poetry scarcer. The challenges of keeping a little magazine afloat had not ended with the war. The settlement of Canadian life back into stability and a certain mediocrity left those older poets who found the war energizing instead

¹⁹ Macpherson's encouragement was likewise important to Crawley, particularly during a time when he needed encouragement to continue with the difficult task of gathering enough good writing to keep the magazine going despite "a good deal of trouble getting contributors" and "no very great stars in the poet galaxy" (JMP Box 1 File 8).

feeling enervated and at a loss for words. A number of the poets and publishers who had begun their careers before or during the war—Catherine Harmon and Paul Arthur, A.M. Klein, Page, Waddington—would largely exit the scene, and Macpherson’s first poems in *Contemporary Verse* would be one of the first signs that a new poetics, written by a new generation of poets—those Dudek would call “les jeunes” (“Où” 142)—was on the horizon.

In the early days of their correspondence, Macpherson sent Crawley a few translations of Baudelaire and Hölderlin, and the now-lost poem “Suicide by Drowning” (accompanied by an appropriately teenage query about the healthiness of her more morbid interests). But after sending that single original composition, and despite her excitement at having found an editor, it took Macpherson nearly a year to send Crawley more work. She had simply, as she had before and would again, lost her inspiration. After graduating from Glebe Collegiate, Macpherson decided to stay in Ottawa and do a B.A. in Classics at Carleton College, which had just begun transforming itself from a night school into a university proper. Despite focusing on a subject she loved, Macpherson found little in her university studies to inspire her writing, and worried that bad teaching methods would ruin her love of—and talent for working with—myth and language. When she did finally have work to send Crawley in 1948, much of it was written with, for, and about someone else. That someone was Grete Wels-Schön, Macpherson’s first real Muse.

Macpherson’s Goddess: Grete Wels-Schön

Macpherson always considered herself a Muse poet, a writer who required that specific form of inspiration to be productive, and it was not until she met her first real Muse that her writing flourished. Page could not fill this role for her, in part because Macpherson always considered Page her mother’s friend first and harboured a deep-seated fear that she only wanted to spend time with her as a sort of erudite prodigy or curiosity. It may also have been because Page had largely abandoned her overtly mythopoeic practice after the publication of *The Sun and the Moon* in 1944, and Macpherson’s Muse would always be strongly connected to her beloved myths. Macpherson’s “The Rymer,” written in the mid-1950s,²⁰ suggests as much in the way that it connects her poetic powers to Persephone and her otherworldly charms:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Want to know where I’ve been?

²⁰ As with many of the *O Earth Return* and *The Plowman in Darkness Poems*, there are two versions of “The Rymer,” one in each of the suites. The version of “The Rymer” quoted above is from *The Plowman in Darkness*.

Under the frost-hard
Ground with Hell's Queen,
Whom there I embraced
In the dark as she lay,
With worms defaced,
Her lips gnawed away
-- What's that? Well, maybe
Not everybody's dame,
But a sharp baby
All the same. (*Poems* 18)

Certainly another “sharp baby,” Margarete Wels-Schön was an ideal mythic Muse, for she was an amateur anthropologist, archetypal theorist, and translator, among much else. First as a way for Dorothy Macpherson to keep her daughter supervised while she went on holiday in the summer of 1948, and later as a way for Macpherson to save money for university while spending time with people she had grown to love, Macpherson spent the summers of 1948 and 1949 working as a farmhand, general dogsbody, and research assistant on the farm near the town of Ste. Augustin, Quebec where the three Schöns—Grete, her husband Robert, and son Christopher—lived.

Wels-Schön was, like Macpherson, an avid reader of literature, myth, and folklore and her home was filled with works of poetry and myth in which Macpherson delighted. As Wels-Schön wrote in her letter of introduction to Macpherson and her mother, “There is Rilke and Holderlin in the house and Jay might be interested in my privat[e] hobby, writing about Greek mythology” (JMP Box 2 File 2) and local folk-tales. German by birth, and seemingly accustomed to living in more cosmopolitan centres and amongst the creative class, Wels-Schön welcomed having another mythopoeic thinker in the house. As she would later write to Robert Graves, “I ... am an outsider in the Canadian backwoods, 53 years of age and kept alive by Mythology” (RGP Box J File Macpherson). Macpherson and Wels-Schön recognized and valued each other as members of the same mythopoeic elective community, the world in which they were really at home, and as speakers of the same myth-inflected language. In Macpherson's laments to Crawley about a lack of poetic community, it is Wels-Schön he means when he tells her that she is lucky to know even one speaker of her mythopoeic language.

Although we might wish it otherwise given her overwhelming importance to Macpherson, Wels-Schön remains somewhat of a mystery. There is little information to be found about her outside of Macpherson's letters and short fiction, Wels-Schön's three known published works—*Portrait of Yahweh as a Young God: How to Get Along with a God You Don't Necessarily Like But Can't Help*

Loving, an article in the journal *Psyche* entitled “Von der Mutter der Pallas Athene” (“On the Mother of Pallas Athene”), and a translation of Karl Jaspers’ *Philosophy is for Everyman; a Short Course in Philosophical Thinking*²¹—and a few mentions in the diaries of Robert Graves, with whom she would begin a relationship in the early 1950s. The portrait we get of her in Macpherson’s letters to Page and Crawley is of an extremely passionate, decisive, and intelligent woman with an intense interest in the kind of archetypal connection-making across cultures and times that characterized the work of Graves, Frazer, and Jung. For Wels-Schön, as for Graves, the key archetype and energy that underpinned and interwove all religions and cultures was that of the Goddess, the fundamental female life force that gave birth not only to Creation, but also to art. For Wels-Schön, the Goddess was, in the form of Medusa, the mother of poetry: “Poetry & images fixed, crystallized or petrified into written and readable language. Who’s [sic] eye is able to give contour, i.e. to coagulate, to crystallize or petrify? Medusa’s. ... [P]oetic vision [is] the eye of Medusa” (JMP Box 2 File 2). Medusa was also the Muse, and the energy that underpinned all creative activity from nature to highest art. Given that the canonical mythopoeic and archetypal texts Macpherson was most familiar with argued for the primacy of man—Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, much of Jung—this gynocentric philosophy seems to have spoken to Macpherson in a way that the others did not. Wels-Schön’s goddess became her goddess, and Wels-Schön became that goddess’s earthly exemplar.

During her two summers in Ste. Augustin, Macpherson helped with the farm chores, read and wrote, practiced speaking and translating German, and was drafted as Wels-Schön’s research assistant for her books on Greek mythology and local folklore (seemingly never published). Given Wels-Schön’s commitment to what Macpherson called “goddessism” (JMP Box 1 File 8)²² and to archetypal theories of mythology, they would likely have resembled the key goddessist mythopoeic work of the time, Graves’s *The White Goddess* (published during Macpherson’s first summer in Ste. Augustin), or a matriarchal version of Campbell or Frazer. In addition to assisting Wels-Schön with her research and writing, Macpherson also wrote prolifically during (and between) these visits, and soon looked to Wels-Schön as a trusted critic. As she wrote to Page, Wels-Schön “takes my verse

²¹ Wels-Schön co-translated this work with R.F.C. Hull, the famed translator of *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*.

²² I use the terms “goddessism” and “goddessist” (new coinages based on Macpherson’s description of her work of the late 1940s and early 1950s to Alan Crawley as “goddessism”) to distinguish Macpherson’s goddess-inspired, matrilineal mythopoeia from her more biblical and Classical mythopoeics and later from her apocalyptic mode (acknowledging, however, that much of her work contains all three elements). These terms will become particularly useful in Chapter Two, when we move to an exploration of the relationship between Macpherson’s poetics and Robert Graves’s theory and poetry about the White Goddess.

much more seriously than my anthropology, to my considerable disappointment.... She is a very patient & a very good critic: continually says I must be patient, must learn to sit & wait instead of forcing. Forever unlike Mamma!” (PKPP Box 55 File 2). Perhaps because she was wholly removed from Dorothy in a way that Page was not,²³ Macpherson trusted Wels-Schön to an extent that she had not trusted Page: “I regard her as infallible: it really is idolatry” (PKPP Box 55 File 2). She had found an idol, a goddess, a Muse.

Macpherson’s idolatry was consuming, and more than intellectual. It was love, a potent mixture of *caritas* and *eros* that fuelled her writing for nearly five years. Macpherson’s unpublished short story “The Defeat” is a very lightly fictionalized account of her first summer in Ste. Augustin, told from the perspective of a character named Janny. As Janny writes to Mme. Labelle (whose name translates, like Frau Wels-Schön, as “Mrs. Beautiful”), “Since I wouldn’t love my mother or God or any boy, it seems to have been decreed that I should love you as if you were all three” (JMP Box 2 File 2). Macpherson’s first summer in Ste. Augustin was, as she wrote to Page, “strange and wonderful ... I was even kissed at intervals (don’t laugh, it’s jolly serious)! though that was put an end to, I think because she found me reacting regression-into-infantility-ishly” (PKPP Box 55 File 2). Macpherson’s characterization of her response to Wels-Schön’s affection as infantile regression coded her attraction in Freudian terms, as a regressive attachment to a mother figure that blurred the lines between filial and romantic love.²⁴ At least in part because of the stigma attached to same-sex attraction in the 1950s, Macpherson was wary about publishing some of the poems she composed during her relationship with Wels-Schön, worried that “my verse is what Mama calls ‘open to misconstruction’: i.e. I love a woman and someone might notice that I do” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Macpherson found the feelings her poetry threatened to reveal frightening as well as creatively productive; as she confided to Page, “I found myself in mortal terror of [Wels-Schön], ice at my tummy; I think I have never been so afraid” (PKPP Box 55 File 2). In a move that suggests Wels-

²³ Macpherson suggests as much in “The Defeat,” when she writes that “Even among her mother’s clever friends she had passed for well-read; here, without envy or annoyance, which surprised her, she saw that even in her own darling subjects she had read but did not know. To the strange experience of being with people who so far surpassed her even in book-learning, let alone knowledge, she adjusted quite well, after a few almost automatic attempts to assert herself, made before she saw that in this place at least she did not have to force people to accept her for the sake of a superficial erudition” (JMP Box 2 File 2).

²⁴ This is the explanation Freud gives for the sole case of female queer desire he studies in any detail, noting that “The analysis revealed beyond all shadow of doubt that the lady-love was a substitute for—her mother” (156). Like Macpherson, Freud’s anonymous subject is a young woman in love with an older one: “A beautiful and clever girl of eighteen, belonging to a family of good standing, had aroused displeasure and concern in her parents by the devoted adoration with which she pursued a certain ‘society lady’ who was about ten years older than herself” (147).

Schön understood, if not encouraged, Macpherson's attraction, "last year she gave me Sappho to read, this year she strokes my hair & leads me through these terrors" (PKPP Box 55 File 2). It must have been difficult for Wels-Schön to negotiate her relationship with the much younger Macpherson, but it is clear that their affection was reciprocal, if not reciprocally sexual. The Mme. Labelle character in "The Defeat" both understands and accepts Macpherson's love, and as Wels-Schön wrote to Macpherson after her second summer at the farm, "I think often and willingly of you. You've left so much here of yours. And not just objects" (JMP Box 2 File 2). Wels-Schön also recognized that their mutual affection had much to do with their both belonging to the elective community of mythographers: "Your letters to me have become a need. They are colorful and surprising, and there is so much in them from that world in which I am 'really' home" (JMP Box 2 File 2).

Macpherson attributed to Wels-Schön's emotional volatility the drive behind her own creative output of this late-1940s period, a powerful engine given that Wels-Schön's passionate temperament and difficult marriage made for an often-tempestuous emotional climate at the farm. The dedication penned inside the red notebook in which Macpherson transcribed the final versions of her first *Contemporary Verse* poems is telling: "These were written by J.M. For G.S., and no-one else has any concern with them" (JMP Box 5 File 3). In a letter to Crawley written in the early 1950s, she called her poetry of the late 1940s and early 1950s "true-to-Grete ... there's no possible doubt" (JMP Box 1 File 8), and she inscribed not her own name, but Wels-Schön's, on the front paper of each of the four notebooks in which this poetry is transcribed. Reflecting back on this period in a letter to Crawley, Macpherson wrote that she believed that "all the poems of mine" from this period "were definitely goddess-inspired, ... not because I had any particular theory of Muses or inspiration, but because Grete is what Grete is[.] I did identify her with the source of what I wrote, at any rate" (JMP Box 1 File 8). As Macpherson's own personal goddess, Wels-Schön became the central figure of her emergent goddessist mythopoetics.

The rootedness of Macpherson's early poems in her day-to-day experiences of being with Wels-Schön on the farm in Ste. Augustin undermines the validity of Desmond Pacey's accusations that Macpherson's brand of mythopoeic modernism "too often degenerates into artificiality, into being literature about literature rather than literature about life" ("Literature" 245). Despite her commitment to reframing personal experience in what she believed were universalizing mythological terms, Macpherson was also very aware of the danger of divorcing her work from lived experience. She consciously chose to refuse this total distancing of her work from lived experience, although

Pacey's criticism suggests that she was not entirely successful. Looking back in the early 1950s on her poetry of the mid- to late-1940s, Macpherson recognized that, as she wrote to Crawley, "I for a while almost identified myself with the position of aestheticism & 'pure poetry', in despair at finding poetry so real and complete and the 'real' world so disordered" (JMP Box 1 File 8). This was the same disorder that she attempted to order through the all-encompassing and pattern-making vision of her third eye, and the same disorder that Dudek identifies as the impetus behind "a primitive mythological effort" by Canadian writers "to organize chaos" ("Patterns" 414). However, Macpherson "never went all that way" into aestheticism and pure poetry, "mainly because of my awful and terrified concern with Grete and fear for her life and of her self-destructiveness" (JMP Box 1 File 8). She believed that this fear

was for the last four years the main thing behind my poems ... 'the race-against heaven'; and an irrational conviction that if I could get down of her what mattered, both negative and positive, I could give her life a kind of extension ... 'What of her matters' is her transcendent part if there are such things: this immortality or extension. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

The result of this race against heaven and attempt to preserve Wels-Schön in verse was a body of poems that attempted to capture Wels-Schön as one incarnation of the Goddess, in all of her many guises. These poems, written over the span of the same four years in which Macpherson published exclusively in *Contemporary Verse*, are collected in four notebooks of handwritten poems and accompanied by three volumes of "Types and Prototypes: An Iconography for Grete," a series of archetypes and icons cut and pasted from books and magazines that may have been intended as support or inspiration for Wels-Schön's mythological theorizing.²⁵ Many of Macpherson's goddess poems were published in *Contemporary Verse* and in her first book-length collection, *Nineteen Poems*, and have never been read within the context of their first place and time of publication; in consequence, attention has never been paid to how their meaning changes when they later become integral parts of *The Boatman*. While a number of her poems appear in those two places, very many of her other "Grete" poems remained unpublished, likely because, as Macpherson suggested to Crawley, she was concerned about publically revealing her same-sex desire for her Muse. Taken together, the published and unpublished poems have much to reveal about Macpherson's adoption

²⁵ The icons are divided into three volumes, each with multiple sections. They include: Volume I: Organization, Elements, Settings, Interiors, Life on Earth, Romance, Underworld, Journeys, Hindrances, Encounters, States, Heart's Desire, Pairs, Centres, Reconciliation; Volume II: Man, Male Genius, Hero, Contest, Labours, Hero's End, Return; Volume III: Woman, Kore, Teleia, Anassa, the Transfigured She, Anachronia. Copies of all three are found in JMP Box 4 File 8 (Volume I), Box 5 File 1 (Volume II), and Box 5 File 2 (Volume III).

of a goddessist mythopoetics, a practice that would have a significant impact on her relationship to international mythopoeic modernist communities, on the contours of a personal mythology that would remain relatively consistent well into the 1970s with the publication of *Welcoming Disaster*,²⁶ and on the means by which she would choose to negotiate issues of gender in her poetry.

Macpherson acknowledges this key preservationist impetus behind her creative drive in her verse, as in “Perdurability,” where she writes Wels-Schön as the Goddess, immortal and terrible. By transforming Wels-Schön via poetry into an immortal, Macpherson attempts to transcend her friend’s true mortality, to freeze in time the garden in which Grete-as-goddess is wandering:

The fountain froze and held its height,
The cold rock blazed with inward light.
Time gaped and halted in mid-bite,
Earth paused upon her deathward flight. (JMP Box 5 File 2)²⁷

She uses here the same fountain image that she will later use in “Hampstead Ponds,” one that likewise links the fountain to a desire to stop or go back in time. However, the speaker’s ability to stop time and prolong her beloved’s life is limited by the power and heat of the Goddess’s blood, which craves movement and release. But in the instant before the poem-as-spell fails, “Before her pent blood stirred to flow / And I to loose my breath and go,” the speaker is “The instant granted yet to show” her goddess transformed. Even if the goddess cannot be held in a single moment or image for eternity, there is the suggestion that she may have achieved an immortality of another form, the constant death and rebirth of “The Phoenix blazing in the perfect snow.” Macpherson consoles herself by imagining that even if Wels-Schön does die, she will be reborn, phoenix-like, every time a reader encounters her in verse.

As befitting her already-established reliance on a mythopoeic frame of reference, Macpherson also transmuted her most emotionally and personally significant experiences on the farm into ones of mythological proportions. The title of the poem “Private Deluge” immediately sets up this juxtaposition and integration of the personal and private with the universal and

²⁶ While Macpherson most often uses Greek and Roman goddess figures in her poetry of the late 1940s and early 1950s, one of the central figures of *Welcoming Disaster* is still a goddess, this time the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar.

²⁷ As Len Early noted in a comment on an earlier version of this chapter, “Perdurability” brings to mind the cadences, rhyming, and vision of Isabella Valancy Crawford’s “Gisli: the Chieftain.” Macpherson would possibly have read Crawford by the time she wrote the poem, but we might also read this similarity as a result of their belonging to the larger (and older) elective community of mythopoeic Canadian modernists that gave rise to its particularly modern instantiation in the work of Macpherson and her friends; the arguments D.G. Jones (“Myth, Frye, and Canadian Writers”) and Donna Bennett (““As the last morning breaks in red”: Frye’s Apocalypse and the Visionary Tradition in Canadian Writing”) make for the long history of visionary mythopoeic literature in Canada supports this idea.

collective—a Noah’s flood for one, and the first in what will be a long line of poems about the Ark that will culminate in “The Boatman” suite in the collection of the same name. Macpherson’s speaker describes the disorientation and pain she experiences after being removed from her own personal paradise and thrown back into the mundane, and often destructive, fallen world. “Private Deluge” does so in terms that link the poem strongly to Macpherson’s account of the tumultuous end of her first summer with the Wels-Schöns, when Macpherson, afraid to ask for a photograph of Grete, stole one and then in shame cut off all contact with the family. After posting the letter in which she returns the photo, having succumbed to her mother’s jealous pressure to cut ties with Wels-Schön, Jay/Janny thinks to herself,

At seventeen this couldn’t be an end, she thought, but without belief. It seemed to her that all the battles had been fought, that everything had happened. Now the numbness was gone, now she was thoroughly awake; and she saw herself tricked and defeated and mastered, world without end. (JMP Box 2 File 2)

Separated from Mme. Labelle, and in her own personal hell, Janny has given up hope that she can escape from the suffocating and loveless world of her home and of Ottawa. This is her defeat, and she feels trapped in the post-Noachian, Ark-less world that becomes the frame for “Private Deluge.”

Despite Macpherson’s earlier railing against poetry that is simply the outpouring of emotion without consideration, “Private Deluge” reads at first glance as anything but impersonal, as a deluge of private feeling and symbolism. It reads especially so when placed alongside much of the other impersonal Canadian modernist poetry of the time. As Trehearne argues, for Eliot “the ‘personality’ extinguished in the objectivity of great art involved, variously, ‘the theological soul... the philosophical subject, psychological consciousness, legal individual, or grammatical first person,’” but Canadian poets of the 1940s and earlier, Page included, “tended only to identify the last of these for suppression, perhaps convinced that its absence would guarantee the elimination of all other subjectivisms” (*Montreal* 71). In a departure from this practice, and in a return to Eliot’s more expansive sense of impersonality, Macpherson writes “Private Deluge” in the first person. In a different move from Page and her colleagues, she retains the first person but instead uses the universalizing, distancing effect of mythopoetics to enact her impersonalist, universalist poetic—a technique she will adopt for much of her writing. Her speaker recalls a mythical golden age that has ended, one where “I lived entombed / In pleasure like a bee that lies entombed / In amber” (JMP Box 5 File 2). Her garden, which hints at Eden but is rather a mythic wonderland glittering with “golden apples from the trees / Of the unserpented Hesperides,” is not only one of physical

pleasure—it is also a place of emotional and psychological peace and acceptance where “I could never be alone / But every object turned about to see, / And with familiar looks regarded me.” This oneness with nature is, and will even more strongly become, a hallmark of Canadian visionary writing in Toronto and across the country. But this vision of bliss cannot last, and as in “Perdurability,” the fountain—which Macpherson likely takes from Milton’s version of Eden in his *Paradise Lost* and also adopts as a symbol of her own lost paradise, Hampstead Heath—is the symbol of time and change that cannot be held back: “The fountains of an unsuspected deep / Broke up one night as I lay safe asleep.” Like Alice through the looking glass, or her own “Eve in Reflection,” Macpherson’s speaker looks through the water and “The people I had loved I saw pursue / Their sweet anterior life that once I knew,” a life from which she is now barred by her private flood. From her paradise, she is “tempest-hurled / Into a chaos I must make a world.” Macpherson is Noah with an ark of one—herself—and she doubts her ability to “make a cosmos of a miscellany” (“Third,” *Poems* 13) after this level of destruction:

The flood was real, but only mine.
 No good arms and no dear hour
 Shall ever break the water’s power.
 I live under an Iron winter’s sign. (JMP Box 5 File 2)

God’s promise to Noah—“And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: / And I will remember my covenant, which *is* between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Gen. 9 15-16)—seemingly does not apply to Macpherson’s speaker, and her personal ark is overturned. She has moved from the idyllic, summer world of Classical myth, the world represented by Wels-Schön, back into the fallen, drowned world of Christian myth, the cold world of parochial Ottawa and her iron-willed mother. She is a “poor child” once again. Macpherson’s switch from past tense to present in the final line—“I live under an Iron winter’s sign”—reveals her speaker’s fear and despair that the iron winter, the opposite of the summer garden, will be her permanent present, with pleasure and belonging forever in the past. This would not prove to be true in the real world—Macpherson would return to Ste. Augustin the next summer and her relationship with her mother would eventually deepen and warm somewhat—but the fear was real, as it is for all of us who in a moment of despair fear that moment will last forever. Despite her fear, or perhaps because of it, Macpherson turned to the universalizing function of biblical and Classical mythology to transmute what could have been a very private deluge of personal symbolism, intelligible only to her, into a

poem that evoked and encapsulated the feelings her readers all share, at some point in their lives, of loss, alienation, and despair at being separated from those they love. At seventeen, she had found her poetic voice.

After the Flood

After the end of that first summer with the Schöns, Macpherson found herself changed in more ways than those she describes in “Private Deluge.” The last year, one shaped by her transformative love for Wels-Schön and her development as a writer, had seen her child self die and adult self emerge, phoenix-like, from the ashes of that younger woman. As Macpherson writes in “Suitable Inscription: for P.K.,” a poem written in November of 1948 and copied on the back of a photograph of herself she gifted to Page,

September, nineteen forty-seven
All good children go to Heaven.
November of another year
Finds this child no longer here,
Gone to Limbo; and in its place
A this year’s child and a last year’s face—
Last year’s child ephemeral
Phoenixed and identical.
Not the eye that sees but that I see
Changed—don’t mistake my face for me! (PKPP Box 55 File 2)

Already identified with the blue jay because of her name, Macpherson also began to identify herself with the phoenix, the bird she also associated with Wels-Schön. The small death of cutting herself off from Wels-Schön was accompanied by a rebirth when they reconnected, one Macpherson framed in terms that symbolically connected her to her Muse. The new Macpherson, “phoenixed and identical,” was transformed physically, emotionally, and creatively by her relationship with Wels-Schön and the role it played in her personal and poetic maturation. Reconnected with her Muse, she began to write prolifically, rather than sporadically, and spent most of her time composing original work instead of translating or annotating the work of others. And she once again began to send Crawley poems for publication.

Although Macpherson was finally ready to publish something to follow up “Non-Identification,” much of the work she sent to Crawley in the late 1940s never found its way into print. While she began mailing him poems in 1947, her first work did not appear in *Contemporary Verse* until 1949, and Crawley rejected many of her early poems because they did not meet his editorial standards, or simply because he believed Macpherson could do better. As an editor,

Crawley exerted a not insignificant influence over the final shape of the poems that writers sent him for review and publication—although over Macpherson less than most—in part because his approval meant the difference between getting published and not, and in part because Macpherson and the others poets Crawley mentored most closely trusted his editorial opinions. His poetic tastes informed not only his criticism of Macpherson’s poems, his decisions about which to accept or reject, and his choices about how to group them. They also shaped the character of *Contemporary Verse*, and of the elective community that sprang up around it, especially after 1945. After the merger of *Preview* and *First Statement* into *Northern Review* and the dispersal of the Montreal poetic community that had formed there in the early 1940s, Crawley and *Contemporary Verse* became the centre of Canadian literary community not just for Page and Macpherson, but also for Livesay, Marriott, and Waddington, among others. *Contemporary Verse* would also become the first place that readers and critics would see the mythopoeic turn taking shape, years before the community behind the movement would come together in Ontario.

Modelled on Harriet Monroe’s *Poetry*, *Contemporary Verse* had no definitive mandate other than “to entice and stimulate the writing and reading of poetry and to provide means for its publication free from politics, prejudices and placations, and to keep open its pages to poetry that is sincere in thought and expression and contemporary in theme and treatment and technique” (Crawley, “Editor’s Note” [1942] 3).²⁸ Although *Contemporary Verse* was founded by a collective that included Livesay, Ferne, McLaren, and Marriott along with Crawley, the group agreed that the magazine would run most smoothly if decisions about content were left solely up to Crawley.²⁹ It was primarily Crawley’s aesthetic preferences that would determine what appeared in the pages of *Contemporary Verse*, despite his protests that “I have never pretended to be a critic in a professional state at all. I’ve just simply said what I liked about poetry, the poems that I liked” (qtd. in McCullagh xiv). Although the poems he liked were diverse, it is possible to tease out the core of what Crawley was looking for in the poems he chose for publication: strong visual imagery and musical rhythm, a lack of sentimentality, and no abstraction or excessive impersonality. As McCullagh notes, what Crawley

could not abide was sentimentalism, loose or imprecise use of words, obscure metaphors, flat statement, useless adjectives. Indeed he sounded like Pound when he said (*a propos* of

²⁸ This apolitical non-manifesto was much to the chagrin of editors like Dudek, who criticized *Contemporary Verse* for not being “a fighting magazine with a policy” (“Role” 208).

²⁹ Albeit with the aid of his wife Joan, and often his son David, to read him poems, which he would usually then transcribe into Braille. Their role in the production of *Contemporary Verse* remains largely unexplored.

keeping abreast of the ideas and forms of the times): ‘A poem isn’t a picture. It’s a statement of an idea....Don’t think that a description is a poem. And don’t walk around your subject. Make your language like your speech. Be brief, clear-cut. Above all, cut out those descriptive adjectives.’ (xv)

Crawley also expressed an “editorial preference for war themes and imagery” (Irvine, “Little” 214) like those found, albeit obliquely, in poems of Macpherson’s like “Ordinary People in the Last Days.” A defining element of his aesthetic was his dislike for strict impersonality, and his preference for verse that “flowers out of experience, out of personality, into the immutable and absolute” (“Editor’s Note” [1946] 18). He had little patience for the impersonal in Page’s work, and as I noted earlier, Page’s move away from impersonality in the later years of her friendship with Macpherson has been credited at least in part to Crawley’s editorial preferences. Macpherson certainly also had to negotiate with Crawley her own commitment to impersonality and the subsuming of the individual within the universal and archetypal, albeit one imbued with her different understanding of the role and practice of impersonality based on her poetic tendencies, her choice of models, and her gender. Crawley better understood the challenges of being a female poet in Canada at mid-century than most: he called himself an “unconscious feminist” (JMP Box 1 File 8), worked hard to nurture the careers of women, and exhibited a strong preference for poetry written by women, which made up a significant proportion of the verse published in *Contemporary Verse*, a sharp contrast to most other publications of the time. As Irvine notes, Crawley’s personal correspondence, including editorial advice and recommendations for revision, inspired an entire generation of Canadian poets, especially women poets, to publish their poetry either in *Contemporary Verse* or in other little magazines” (Irvine, *Editing* 87).³⁰ Repelled by the masculinism of the other notable editors of the day, their sexism mixed with what she would come to recognize as a significant amount of homophobia, Macpherson looked to Crawley for editorial advice and literary mentorship that would not interfere with her attempts to work out a poetics that balanced her desire to cultivate a poetics of

³⁰ As Irvine notes, “around the mid-point of the magazine’s run, Crawley takes stock of the number of men and women poets represented not only in *Contemporary Verse* but also in the recent anthologies *Unit of Five* (1944) and *Other Canadians* (1947); he notes that in each case the men far outnumber the women and finds himself surprised to discover that ‘in twenty two numbers of *Contemporary Verse* covering a period of more than six years forty men have contributed considerably more poems than the women writers whose number is thirty’ (‘Notes’ 20). If Crawley’s initial ‘unconscious’ feminism facilitated the emergence of a respectable proportion of women poets, his statistical reflection on the magazine’s contents bespeaks a gender consciousness that makes plain his advocacy of an increased representation of women at a time when Canada’s modernist literary culture sustained its dominant masculinist character” (*Editing* 87-88).

impersonality via myth and to write verse that spoke (albeit in coded terms) to being a queer woman in mid-century Canada.

The first two poems from this period that Macpherson sent to Crawley are evidence of her work to balance these desires and find a consistent voice, for they swing wildly between simplicity and complexity, lightness and seriousness. They are undeniably juvenilia, but still contain the seeds of what we will come to recognize as her most important adult writing. Perhaps predictably, considering his love of personation and music, Crawley immediately approved of “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik: A Recorder in the Bath,” and wrote back to say that “it has freshness and wit and cleverness and I am delighted to have it for C.V.” (JMP Box 1 File 8). In it, the speaker is “islanded and lapped about / With chilling water, keeping Time with swishing toes” (JMP Box 1 File 8) while she plays her recorder in the bathtub. Foreshadowing the full development of Macpherson’s characteristic ability to transform quotidian moments into wondrous ones, as the poem’s speaker plays her instrument,

The notes came straggling through
My pipe, when I blew,
But struck the sides of the bath, and resounded
So that my ears were crowded
With halleluja’ing sound
Triumphing all around. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Human playing returns angelic music, “halleluja’ing sound” that—like the mouse in “Ordinary People in the Last Days”—heralds the end of days: as the witnesses of the apocalypse in the Book of Revelation recall, “And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (*King James Bible*, Rev. 19.6). In Macpherson’s world, the ordinary contains the potential for the wondrous, and the numinous lies just beneath the surface of the quotidian—it only awaits someone with her third eye to be able to see it. Revealing this hidden world to those who would not normally be able to see it is, as much of Macpherson’s writing suggests, the ultimate goal of the writer.

The other poem Macpherson sent to Crawley at the same time, “Pattern,” is among her first attempts (alongside “Non-Identification”) at developing her theory of the relationship between pattern, order, and time. She would further develop these ideas in “Ideas of Order,” “The Third Eye,” and the fundamental order of *The Boatman* as a collection, all of which were rooted in what would come to be known as apocalyptic totality and atemporality: what Macpherson understood as

the all encompassing apocalyptic circle of enhanced vision that could contain and order everything and every time. Macpherson saw this timeless totality in the patterns of the natural world: “Pattern is now or never. ... // Pattern is never and now” (JMP Box 5 File 5). Crawley rejected the poem for being “too heavy and too complicated to allow the technical agility to bring it off successfully” (JMP Box 1 File 8), and not unfairly. It is riddled with forced language (“marvellous squorl,” “winter-racks,” “gnarls,” “forever vortex”) and shifts somewhat oddly between the very serious contemplation of a frozen tree and the equally serious contemplation of a cup of cocoa. It did, however, win her Carleton’s Lillian I. Found Poetry Award for best lyric. But the poem’s real value lies in its evidencing of Macpherson’s exploration of the potential of pattern and order to transcend the specifics of time—pattern is never, and it is also now—and to connect the past, present, and future into a unified whole that allows for a heightened level of insight and knowledge.

In his note to Macpherson about these poems, Crawley reiterates that he “would like to have three or four of yours, for the number of *Contemporary Verse* which will be made up next month” (JMP Box 1 File 8), which he was planning to publish in the winter of 1949. He was still awaiting, however, the perfect grouping of poems that would satisfy him. Crawley’s tendency to seek and create pattern and order by publishing poems in groupings of his choosing—holding back some, rejecting others, and refusing to publish any until he had a selection he liked—was an aspect of his editorial practice that has rarely been recognized. His suite-building impulse has obvious connections to Macpherson’s own interest in pattern, and to what would become her characteristic tendency to understand poems not as single lyrics, but as interlocking parts of larger pairs, groupings, suites, and entire collections. Many of the poems she sent Crawley would be regrouped and reordered within the context of a number of subsequent publications, first within her earliest unpublished collection (entitled *Recognitions*), and later within *Nineteen Poems*, the chapbooks she writes for submission to the University of Toronto E.J. Pratt Prize, and *The Boatman*. Indeed, some poems like “Poor Child” and “Ordinary People in the Last Days” appear in five or six different places, from manuscript to magazine to published collection, and Macpherson (like Crawley, in collecting and selecting groups of poems) relied upon the relationship between the poem and its place within the structure of its place of publication to shift and enhance its meaning.

Given the quality and amount of work that she was sending him, Crawley was ready to introduce Macpherson to the poetic community with a robust suite of poems in the Spring 1949 issue. By the time that Crawley was satisfied with the poems Macpherson had sent him, he had collected six to make a suite: “Ordinary People in the Last Days,” “Objective Correlative: Poor

Child,” “Concert,” “A Sentimental Journey,” “Seasons,” and “Seascape.”³¹ The suite was dedicated “To D.” (a coded reference to Wels-Schön), and the poems were, to Macpherson’s mind, more important as a tribute to her first real Muse than they were as her first major publication. As she wrote to Crawley, it was partly her love for Wels-Schön that “makes my feelings about what CV has done for me” in publishing the poems “so personal: my verses were written really for her and no-one else, and it was only because I hadn’t the guts to type them out and send them to her that I wanted them printed” (JMP Box 1 File 8). She hounded Crawley, Livesay and Ferne about the inclusion of the dedication, leaving Crawley to have nightmares that he had accidentally omitted it and had to face her wrath. But Crawley had a valuable perspective on Macpherson and Wels-Schön’s relationship that Macpherson lacked. While she bemoaned the fact that her Muse was the only one who spoke her mythopoeic language, Crawley, who had for years been reading poems and theory by Page, Wilkinson, Reaney, and Frye that was squarely in the same mythopoeic camp, reminded Macpherson that Wels-Schön was not as singular as she seemed. As he chided Macpherson, she was not as alone in her mythopoeic fluency as she thought. While Macpherson might not have been able to see it, the publication of her first *Contemporary Verse* suite was a signal to the Canadian poetry community that her mythopoeic language was becoming the language of the day, for its publication heralded the coming dominance of mythopoeic modernism in Canada.

Crawley chose to open the suite with “Ordinary People in the Last Days,” which is arguably the strongest poem in the group. From the first, Macpherson’s readers were introduced to what they would come to recognize as the key features of her poetic practice—the clever updating of biblical myth and juxtaposition of the ancient and modern, an abiding interest in the apocalyptic, a wry and pointed sense of humour that made tragedy simultaneously funny and touching, a deft hand with rhythm, and the ability to sketch a sympathetic character in very few lines. It is easy to feel sorry for the speaker of “Ordinary People,” who believes that everyone but him has been touched by the extraordinary because he does not realize that Eliot’s mouse in the wainscot is a sign of the last days, a herald of something extraordinary on the way that he misses entirely. It is hard not to compare the speaker of “Objective Correlative” with Macpherson herself: a young person clearly destined for great things, but in her anxiety unable to recognize that they were landing in her lap.

Even though she titled the second poem of the suite “A Sentimental Journey,” Macpherson

³¹ Crawley had originally intended to include “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik,” but eventually rejected it in favour of some of the others.

had not given up her wariness of sentimentality, particularly given how the accusation of it could be wielded against women writers and how it underpinned the emotional verse she derided in “Defense of a *Considered Poesie*.” “A Sentimental Journey” instead winks at the expectation of sentimentality that both the title and Macpherson’s gender set up, doing so by replacing sentiment (the expression of personal emotion) with her brand of mythopoeia (using myth to create an objective correlative that evokes, rather than expresses, emotion). The poem opens with the speaker addressing the Jason of Classical mythology, a man who is nominally “Prophecy-driven over the wine-dark³² seas” in search of “A yellowed wormy fleece,” but who is really “flee[ing] yourself, with yourself at your heels.” Like Jason, the speaker herself both seeks and flees, and what she seeks is just as mythical as the fleece and “something I didn’t expect to find”: the ability to perfectly replicate a past experience in the present moment. Despite her belief in the cyclical repetitions of archetype and myth across time, Macpherson understood that those stories, and the experiences they reflected and invoked, never happened the same way twice: “Place and time intersect for ever, / But twice the same way never.” This was, fundamentally, what made her mythic method work: in her recall of generations of mythic counterparts and their stories, stories she always situated in the present through direct reference to her readers or through her choice of vocabulary, Macpherson demonstrated the ways that contemporary experience is particular to its moment in history while also being one in a long line of repeated variations on the same archetypal story. Like Jason, we have all sought something seemingly impossible to find. At the same time, Macpherson’s use of the mythic method in “Sentimental Journey” is intensely evocative, using the story of Jason as an objective correlative for the crushing disappointment of the failed quest, and for the ways in which many chase whatever it is they call treasure (the golden fleece, wealth, power, love, the return to an idealized but always elusive past) as a way to disguise the fact that they are really running from, not toward, something—a something that is often themselves.

The other poems in Macpherson’s first *Contemporary Verse* suite—“Concert,” “Seasons,” and “Seascape”—likewise rely upon the juxtaposition of the quotidian and the mythical, the ordinary and the wondrous, the chaotic and the patterned, to remove present events from their specific temporal context and insert them into the non-time of myth and archetype. This, more than anything else, is what ties the six poems together into a coherent whole. As Joseph Frank argues in “Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Three Parts,” we might read Macpherson’s consistent emphasis on

³² “Wine-dark sea” is a direct quote from Homer’s *The Odyssey* (1.185).

the formal, mythical elements of poetry, as opposed to the naturalistic, quotidian ones, as a very natural response on her part to her early life as a child of war, and a child of the modern age. As Frank argues, the dominant modernist method of dealing with the chaos of the wartime world was the “juxtaposition of past and present,” like through the application of Eliot’s mythical method, which created “a continuum in which distinctions between past and present are obliterated” (“Spatial” [Part III] 653). The “actions and events of a particular time” become “merely...the bodying forth of eternal prototypes...[that] are created by transmuting the time-world of history into the timeless world of myth” (653). Myth provided Macpherson, and the modernist writers that Frank studied, with a way to distance themselves from the difficult realities of the present, to create structure and order out of the connections between the chaotic present and the mythic past. In essence, we might argue, Macpherson was part of a wider elective community that included, Frank’s essay suggests, writers including Joyce, Mallarmé, Pound, Eliot, Faulkner, Woolf, Dos Passos, and Barnes who were all invested in using a form of apocalyptic vision “To concentrate, refine and rarify / And make a Cosmos of a miscellany” (*Poems* 13). As Dudek notes, Macpherson was only one of many Canadian writers to do so: in the majority of post-war Canadian poets, and in Canadian society after the Second World War more generally, “an intellectual disorder (not only in politics, but in morality and in religion) leads to a primitive mythological effort to organize chaos” (“Patterns” 414). The publication of Macpherson’s first *Contemporary Verse* poems was a sign of just how widespread this “intellectual disorder,” or rather intellectual quest for the ultimate order, would soon become.

Few have recognized what a significant moment for Canadian poetry the publication of Macpherson’s first *Contemporary Verse* suite was, especially alongside one of Wilkinson’s most important mythopoeic poems (“A Poet’s-Eye View”) and right after a grouping of Reaney’s poems in Issue 26. It marked the moment at which the mythopoeic turn began to gather sustained momentum, the tipping point at which the direction Canadian poetry would take into the 1950s was decided. *Contemporary Verse* historian Joan McCullagh is one of the only scholars to identify the beginning of the mythopoeic turn in the mid-to-late 1940s, and to identify *Contemporary Verse* as the first place that Canadian mythopoeic modernist poetics appeared as something distinct from the poetics of the Montreal forties that Page had been so instrumental in creating. As McCullagh puts it, “Allusive, symbolic, mythological; the multileveled richness of Anne Wilkinson’s, Jay Macpherson’s, and James Reaney’s poetry signalled a new departure for *Contemporary Verse* and for Canadian poetry” (38). Poems written by other members of the mythopoeic culture of letters had appeared in *Contemporary Verse* before (both Reaney and Wilkinson first appeared in the July 1946 issue), but

Macpherson's six hit its pages, and the Canadian modernist literary community, in a way that those works had not.

Macpherson was busy with school and preparing for her second summer in Ste. Augustin when Issue 27 came out, and given the isolation of Ottawa from the major currents of the Canadian poetic scene, she had little way to know what impact her poems were having. She was, to put it rightly, a sensation. Livesay wrote Crawley to say that the "CV spring number was a grand surprise. What a fine haul you made with the poems by Jay Macpherson. Who is he?" (qtd. in McCullagh 38); little did Livesay know that the young woman she mistook for a man would, a few years in the future, become her publisher. Wilkinson, busy with her own writing (she was in the middle of putting together *The Hangman Ties the Holly*) hurried off a note: "C.V. arrived this morning. On a rapid first reading I find the poems by Jay Macpherson remarkably exciting—particularly the first—but more about C.V. after a careful reading" (38). Given the resonances between Wilkinson's poems and the folkloric, apocalyptic, deliciously funny character of Macpherson's verse, especially "Ordinary People in the Last Days," this note marks one of the signal moments during which members of what would become the Toronto mythopoeic community began to recognize each other and the shared form and content—the reproducible characteristics—that would mark them out as an elective community. Ira Dilworth, then head of the CBC International Service and a major player in the Canadian literary scene, sent high praise: "My copy of Contemporary Verse has just come...The poems of Jay Macpherson are most interesting. If Contemporary Verse published nothing else than these I should be quite satisfied with my subscription" (38).

The publication of Issue 27 was important not only for Macpherson, who took great heart from the praise that Crawley passed along to her, but also for *Contemporary Verse* itself. Crawley had long been struggling with the demands of finding enough good writing to fill the magazine's pages and of nurturing new writers, and here his two-year investment in Macpherson and her work had paid off. As he wrote to her not long after the issue came out, "I have not had before so many references to any contributor's work in so short a time since publication and I feel very pleased and proud and rather possessive" (JMP Box 1 File 8). After Issue 27 was released, Macpherson struck up enough courage to finally show the poems to Wels-Schön, and the Muse who had inspired them also approved: "to say [...] that I am pleased with your dedication would be an understatement. Both, the poems and the dedication came as a great surprise to me. Although I knew that you are darned gifted" (JMP Box 2 File 2). By the end of the summer, the issue had nearly sold out, and Crawley wrote to tell Macpherson that "No. 27 will be a collector's piece, already we have few of it left for

complete files” (JMP Box 1 File 8). The rest of the editorial board agreed with Crawley about the quality and significance of the poems, and in 1949 awarded Macpherson the *Contemporary Verse* prize for best first publication in the magazine.

No Longer the *Außenseiterin*

After the publication of Issue 27, life went on, but with some significant differences. Macpherson did not feel quite the *Außenseiterin*, the outsider, she once had. She continued to spend time with Wels-Schön, to take classes, to write essays, and to compose poems. She regularly shared her writing with her friends and mentors, as well as with her fellow members of the Carleton Poetry Circle, and her notebooks continued to fill. Her working relationship with Crawley had also shifted after the success of her first poems. He did not provide her with much in the way of feedback on those early verses, other than to approve or reject, but after their publication he wrote to her a warning that now they had gained each other’s trust, he intended to be far more critical and involved as an editor going forward (JMP Box 1 File 8). Crawley’s understanding of his role as a critic was not one that would seem to permit him excessive amounts of editorial control: as he understood it, “If anyone asked me anything about it (over some years there were quite a number) I just tried to help them make the poems more acceptable, to stick to what they actually wanted to say” (qtd. in McCullagh xiv), to help the poet more effectively accomplish her poetic goals, rather than impose his own. But whatever Crawley’s understanding of his editorial practice and authority, the fact remained that the power to publish or not publish was in his hands, and his interventions significantly shaped the work of the writers he edited. He tried—although in the end he failed—to shape Macpherson’s work to his tastes.

The evolution of “Autumn Garden” illustrates how Crawley and Macpherson worked together as writer and editor, and illuminates the early development of her understanding of the relationship between author and editor and the social nature of literary production. As Macpherson wrote in her poetry journal, the inspiration for the poem came on the farm, “one day not autumn at all from [a] window – Außenseiterin [the outsider] image – one rainy day – fusion, at least in my mind, at least as much ‘real experiences’ as components” (JMP Box 5 File 2). Macpherson recorded a copy of the first draft immediately below her annotations, and sent another to Crawley:

In the beginning was the dark. The leaves
Lay brown too early on the greedy ground.
The rain cried round the garden, and the elm

Gasped with the pain of dumbness and the wind.
I watched you walk across the autumn lawn
And shivered for the fading dark-deathed flowers
Until the sun came out and held you still
On the green grass, and choked me with delight.

And then the dark came back, and back came time,
And back my breath and the destroying powers.
Let me defy the dark, deny the dark,
Hold back the sun for you! no, but record
The living image, nothing lasts but this.
The dark devours her children. Let me then,
Be not to rob the dark, restate the light
That caught you shining in the autumn garden
Immortal and immune beyond my praise.

J.M. for D. (JMP Box 5 File 2)

While the poem is written in the first person, neither the speaker nor her object are much more than stock figures here—they are the classic archetypes of the lover-observer, desperate to “record / The living image” and immortalize her love in verse, and the love-object always threatening to be destroyed by death, time, and the dark that “devours her children.” Possibly for this reason, Crawley liked only parts of the poem, and offered strongly worded advice on tone and word choice. As McCullagh notes he often did (xv), Crawley sounded Poundian in his exhortation to do something new, rather than rely on language and images that were seeming a bit time-worn:

It is not only in contemporary poetry, it has always been that there must be something fresh vivid striking in form image or expression to make a poem stand out. In this compare with some of the unusual phrases and images in your CV poems and you will feel dissatisfied. Will you try it again? (JMP Box 1 File 8)

He also noted that the poem “is well held in key and treatment but unfortunately this brings a slight tendency to a monotone,” and criticized her choice of the phrases “on the green grass,” “greedy ground,” and “beyond my praise” as overused, weak and predictable (JMP Box 1 File 8). Crawley was rarely as detailed or as harsh in his criticism directed to other poets as he was to Macpherson here, and he had his reasons for being so: “Do believe that I would not write this way to many persons, PK, Anne Wilkinson, James Reaney, and JM surely, and Floris McLaren. All of them can take it and from it what is good for them” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Macpherson had become a member of the inner circle of friends and authors on whom Crawley focused his attention as an editor and mentor, a group of poets who all shared, to a certain extent, Macpherson’s core poetic tendencies.

Macpherson replied to Crawley's criticism with a letter and a reworked version of "Autumn Garden." She wrote back to ask "Is green grass objectionable? Dear reader had every reason to expect it to be brown, after the foregoing. Sorry for the last line, then: I hadn't realized it was so obvious ... Well then, continue to discipline me, please" (JMP Box 1 File 8). But Macpherson's concession to Crawley's editorial discipline was never complete. While she claimed that Crawley "must still be my conscience in such things, because my critical faculties, which are pretty healthy, abdicate entirely in front of my own writing, and I like and dislike things for all manner of impossible reasons," she questioned his assessment of her choices and attempted to explain what he perceived as deficits: "[C]erebration can't replace inspiration (e.g. the Unicorn)" (JMP Box 1 File 8), which was her working title for "Ordinary People in the Last Days." Most of that poem was Muse-born, composed in Macpherson's usual way: the idea for and tune of the poem would roll around in her head for some time, and it would emerge fully formed onto paper. But in contrast, "the last verse but one was thought up to fill the obvious gap, and was a hell of a job: took five or six times as much energy as the whole rest, and then wasn't satisfactory" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Crawley seemed already to have sensed the difference in quality between those poems of Macpherson's that were Muse-born and those that were intellectual exercises—"Ordinary People in the Last Days" was the crown jewel of her Issue 27 suite, but he never did accept "Autumn Garden" for publication, even after Macpherson reworked it.

Macpherson was not happy with the poem either. Her notes accompanying the next revision despair that she "Took out everything Crawley disliked, and still couldn't put it together again. But I hated to scrap it" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Crawley's response to the revised version was that "Autumn Garden still does not please" (ACP Box 1 File 39), and Macpherson's final estimate was that "Autumn Garden" was "Not finished—by half. Worse: blast Crawley. *Don't alter to please.* Fatal" (JMP Box 5 File 2). And she did not, for Crawley or for anyone else—while she would, at certain points, let editors have control over the selection and arrangement of her poems, there is no evidence that she ever revised her work in response to an editor's comments again. While Crawley continued to shape what we think of as Macpherson's published oeuvre by rejecting many poems for publication, they never repeated the process of consultation and revision that they worked through on "Autumn Garden." Macpherson did not often show her other mentors poems until they were already in print, possibly to avoid having to consult and "alter to please," and she learned from the experience of reworking "Autumn Garden" that pleasing herself was more important than pleasing her mentors and editors, however important their editorial and personal support. This early

experience would inform not only her later work with editors like Robert Graves, Ivon Owen, and Bill Toye—it would also be a key impetus behind founding her own poetry presses, Emblem Books in the 1950s and Saanes Press in the 1970s, and publishing her own work.

What Crawley did eventually accept was what Macpherson called her resolution to “Autumn Garden,” a pair of poems titled “The Comforter” and “The Comforted” that were published in the Fall-Winter 1950 issue of *Contemporary Verse*. Macpherson spent more than ten months working on “Autumn Garden” and then transforming it into “The Comforter,” and wrote almost nothing else during that period; the rest of her writing energy seemed to have been spent on her course essays and the translations she had begun working on for the Gnostic philosopher Hans Jonas, who (along with poet and professor George Johnston, who would become one of Macpherson’s close friends) had joined the Carleton faculty Macpherson’s final fall there.³³ The pairing of “The Comforter” and “The Comforted” represents one of Macpherson’s first real moves toward creating a coherent internal structure not just within a single poem but among multiple poems, an early stage in her progress toward her trademark suite- and collection-building.

Like “Autumn Garden” and “Private Deluge,” “The Comforter” is concerned with the world before and after an apocalyptic event—universal or personal—and what happens to the survivors, if one could call them that, who are witnesses to the aftermath. In the poem, four birds—the phoenix, the halcyon, the dove, and the blue jay—make moves that herald the coming apocalyptic rebirth of the world: the phoenix dies and is reborn, the halcyon wakes and then sleeps again, the dove descends to earth and then ascends back to heaven as she does in “Ordinary People in the Last Days,” and the jay, never named but implicitly the poet herself, falls “in a crowd of broken images” (Macpherson, “Comforter” 15) but unlike the others does not rise.³⁴ Along with the four birds, there is another winged creature who likewise falls, and with “Lucifer falling from the courts of grace” (15), the heretofore-angelic world splits into the realms of the fallen and the redeemed. When the dove, her “mother’s bird” (15) and her Father’s (for the dove is also God’s

³³ As Macpherson recalled in an interview with Ryan Miller, “When Hans Jonas came to Carleton [University in 1950] at the beginning of my last [undergraduate] year there, known for his work on Gnosticism, I took all of his courses – Bacon to Kant, Philosophy of Religion, and I think also Ancient Philosophy” (51) and began to assist with his research; since “he was more comfortable walking up and down dictating lectures onto the typewriter than sitting down and typing himself . . . I was promoted to amanuensis” (51). Jonas dictated both *The Gnostic Religion* (1958) and *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (1966) to Macpherson, and because he was often more comfortable dictating in German than English, Macpherson also translated portions of those texts.

³⁴ Macpherson is alluding here to Eliot’s “A heap of broken images” (*The Waste Land* 1.22) and Day Lewis’s “Broken Images” chapter in *The Poetic Image*.

bird, although given that Macpherson was forbidden to read the Bible by her mother, we might assume that this symbolism comes via Eliot) removes itself from the speaker in disgust or disinterest, the speaker becomes a second Lucifer, fallen “in a crowd of broken images” (15) and trapped in a perpetual twilight “where there comes / No darkness and no light” (15). Perhaps unexpectedly, Lucifer is her comforter, a fellow refugee exiled from the *integritas* of the prelapsarian world and thrust into a broken world of alienation and sin.

In the companion piece, “The Comforted” (later retitled “The Thread”), Macpherson moves into the world of Classical mythology, and into the story of Theseus and the maze, at the centre of which the Minotaur lives. Where “The Comforter” tells the story of the fall from sunlit grace to the perpetual twilight of everyday in the fallen world, “The Comforted” uses a combined Penelope/Theseus figure as an objective correlative for the monotony and frustration of being trapped in that fallen world from birth until death, and for the unwillingness or inability to find ways move beyond it, instead “ravelling and unravelling her loomwork ... [as] a stall tactic—or at least a distraction” (Jernigan, “Rymer” 95). As the speaker recounts,

Each night I do retrace
My heavy steps and am compelled to pass
To earlier places, but take up agen [sic]
The journey’s turning skein. (“Comforted” 15)

The thread provided by Ariadne to allow Theseus to enter and then exit the maze is transformed here into “The thread night’s daughters spin,” the “shining line” spun by the Fates that “Runs from birth’s dark to death’s” (15). In between the “two begin[nings]” of birth and death is the labyrinth that is life, and “The snipping Fate attends its end and mine” (15). Unlike Theseus, the speaker journeys in and out of the maze over and over again, venturing every night toward the devouring centre of the maze inhabited by the minotaur, and then safely tracing her way out again.

Inevitably, the mother appears again as a central figure in “The Comforted,” and here “gave to lead / My blind steps through the maze a daedal thread” (15), providing a guide—that can also be used, like rope, to bind—for how to safely traverse the dangerous maze that is life. As in her other goddess poems, Macpherson blurs the identities of real women and mythic goddesses, and the mother here is Ariadne, “Who slept, who wept on Naxos” (15), abandoned there by Theseus. Even at this remove, seemingly relegated to an ineffectual distance, Ariadne exerts her control. She “long has worn / A constellated crown” (15), the Corona Borealis that she gives to Theseus to light his way out of the labyrinth. Her constellated crown, like the constellated mind of “Ideas of Order,” is a

symbol of the tendency of the human mind to superimpose a false sense of order—the idea of order, rather than order itself—over a chaotic universe. The speaker, we might infer, is both grateful for the guide her mother has provided her in and out of the maze, and yet frustrated by the single path it forces her to trace despite the huge number of possible routes within the maze. It would be one thing if at the centre of the maze was a creature who could be conquered, as there is for Theseus, but this monster can only be calmed for a time, never killed outright. Rather than the Minotaur, at the centre of this maze is “the devouring womb,” the darkness in which life begins and ends. The “ceaseless to and from” of walking the maze “hushes the cry of the devouring womb” (15) and it is comforted (and is “the comforted”) by the knowledge that in the end it will receive its reward—the life on the other end of the string. Until that day comes, the speaker “wind[s] up the journey I have come / And follow[s] it back home” (15), doomed to repeat her ceaseless walk, one circumscribed by the path laid out by her mother, until that final day comes. As in “Private Deluge,” Macpherson’s speaker seems resigned to, or at least afraid of, the possibility of never escaping the circumscribed bounds of her current life and finding, or returning to, a life that is both more frightening and more free.

“The Comforter” and “The Comforted” were Macpherson’s first experiment with paired poems, and they inspired her to take the idea farther. With them, she had experimented with the expansion of meaning and firming of structure that were possible when she wrote two sides of same story, expanding the bounds of a single poem by requiring it to be read alongside, and in light of, its partner. Crawley’s tendency to group poems into suites may have inspired her to think about moving in that direction while furthering her experiments with paired verses. We know where she is headed—gathering the suites of poems she had composed over the decade before, some of which (like *O Earth Return* and *The Plowman in Darkness*) contain paired poems, one serious and one satirical. While she would not take the idea she had begun exploring with “The Comforter” and “The Comforted” to its fullest extent until she was inspired by *Fiddlehead* editor Fred Cogswell to compose satirical counterpoints to the poems in *O Earth Return*, she began taking steps in that direction with her unpublished first collection, *Recognitions*.

Ideas of Order: *Recognitions* and After

While finishing up her Classics degree at Carleton, from which she graduated in May of 1951, Macpherson decided to do another year of undergraduate coursework, this time in literature. She knew that she wanted a job that would allow her to spend her days with books, but was not sure if it

was better to take an unchallenging one that would give her the time and mental energy to write, or to find a job that would fully engross and immerse her in a literary pursuit. Despite his seeming lack of involvement in her life since his wife and children had moved to Canada a decade earlier, Macpherson's father took it upon himself to decree that the only appropriate job for his literary daughter was librarian, an occupation Macpherson did not particularly relish; she thought she might rather go to graduate school. Spending a year auditing courses in the honours program at University College London would give her time in the city she still in some ways considered home: a year to spend studying what she loved, a chance to reconnect with her father, and more time to decide what career she wanted. A place with other writers was still for Macpherson Montreal, and to hedge her bets she applied to both the MA in English and BLS programs at McGill University.

She also booked herself a ticket to London for the beginning of July. The thought of returning to the home of Blake, Milton, and Eliot seemed to inspire her even before she left. She began to fill a new notebook with poems, and as she did, an idea gradually emerged for a fully-fledged collection, one that would allow her to tackle two related problems and interests: the issue of the image, which was already a central concern in much of her recent writing, and her desire to progress from writing paired poems that spoke to each other to writing larger groups of poems that had their own internal relationship and structure. She would come to call this project *Recognitions*, and in it we can see the core elements of Macpherson's distinctive poetic characteristics—those reproducible characteristics that will eventually allow others of the mythopoeic modernist community to align themselves with her—take shape.

In a letter to Crawley written the summer of 1951, sent just after she arrived in London, Macpherson wrote that she had “tried a few bits & pieces” of writing over the spring and summer, “but they are all obviously parts of something larger whose outline is not yet clear—I hope I don't lose it” (JMP Box 1 File 8). As Macpherson explained it, the poems belonged “to a projected family of naturals and unnaturals,” a “magnum opus, which is a series of recognitions—if I ever get it all sorted out” (JMP Box 1 File 8). It was also an attempt “to tackle problems of images, which seem to be entirely crucial both for poetry & outside it” (JMP Box 1 File 8). This issue of the image was one that had long preoccupied her—it appears in her very first publication in the tension between “eye and image” in “Non-Identification,” and in Cecil Day Lewis's *The Poetic Image* (1947), which Macpherson had read around the same time as the appearance of her first *Canadian Forum* publication and that much impressed her with its “enchanted bits” (JMP Box 2 Folder 2). Day Lewis's vision is one of the re-integration of the fragmented post-war world through art, a vision

that Macpherson shared. Her version would eventually come to be identified with Frye's labeling of it as the apocalyptic in *Anatomy of Criticism*, but Day Lewis and others (Joseph Frank in his three essays on spatial form in modern literature, for example) anticipated Frye,³⁵ as did Macpherson in many ways. As Day Lewis notes in an argument about image and metaphor,

[E]very image recreates not merely an object but an object in the context of an experience, and thus an object as part of a relationship. Relationship being in the very nature of metaphor, if we believe that the universe is a body wherein all men and things are "members one of another," we must allow metaphor to give "a partial intuition of the whole world." Every poetic image, I would affirm, by clearly revealing a tiny portion of this body, suggests its infinite extension. (29)

This idea of "the whole of life as forming one living body, Christ or Here Comes Everybody or whoever else" (ACP Box 1 File 18), as Macpherson puts it, appears throughout Canadian mythopoeic modernism as Macpherson's anagogic man, Douglas LePan's Silenus, A.M. Klein's drowned poet, Anne Wilkinson's live one, and Reaney's geese. What makes their poetry fundamentally different from the classical, Day Lewis's argument suggests, is that "the classical...thought of [poetry] as making horrible things pleasing," whereas "the modern...sees in [poetry] the acceptance of the horrible as part of a pattern" (33). His next sentence may have bolstered Macpherson's resolution to attempt a collection that integrated the horrible and the pleasing (or, as she terms it, the unnatural and the natural): "The poet's task ... is to recognize pattern wherever he sees it, and to build his perceptions into a poetic form which by its urgency and coherence will persuade us of their truth" (36). In turning image into pattern, at least in part by grouping multiple images of naturals and unnaturals together into a collection with its own internal structure and coherence, Macpherson sought to turn image into metaphor, to move beyond the singular image to an apocalyptic, totalizing structure that could give an "intuition of the whole world," that could allow the poet a more expansive and all-encompassing vision than the static snapshots that the single image permitted. We might read this drive for coherence and all-encompassing vision as a direct response to the alienation and fragmentation of the war-torn world that Macpherson escaped as a child, as an attempt to use art to bridge the gaps between people and countries that global warfare engendered, to piece back together the broken bodies, buildings, and images that were its ultimate result.

³⁵ In his glossary to *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye defines apocalyptic as "The thematic term corresponding to 'myth' in fictional literature; metaphor as pure and potentially total identification, without regard to plausibility or ordinary experience" (365). Both metaphor and all-containing apocalyptic vision are based on the idea of total identification—a equals b—which Macpherson tends to figure as being inside the body of the Ark, the Leviathan, or the anagogic man.

In addition to this larger project of coherence and community making, the image was also central to Macpherson's project of capturing the essence of Wels-Schön, what she and Day Lewis called the "living image," in verse. It was likewise at the core of the poems that had come out of that project: those that sought to capture one of Grete's many images, and those (like "Perdurability," "Private Deluge," and "The Comforter") that addressed the issue of the image and its limitations directly. Macpherson would have been aware, through her conversations with Page, that this issue of the image—albeit in a slightly different form—was plaguing the generation of Canadian modernists before her who had been raised on Imagism, and that it profoundly impacted their work of the late forties and early fifties. Their search, and general failure to find, a way to move beyond the singular, isolated Imagist image—Pound's "petals on a wet black bough" (12)—and build poetic structures that were larger and more integrated, but not a return to E.J. Pratt's long poems, is arguably the defining challenge that brought an end to what we think of as the modernism of the Canadian forties. At the beginning of the fifties, when Macpherson began work on *Recognitions*, Page was so struggling with the issue of the image, and how to move beyond a proliferation of disconnected images to something interconnected and extended, that she laboured to complete *The Metal and the Flower* (1954) and took a long hiatus from publishing her poetry after its release. Macpherson was not alone in wanting to work out what the image was, how it functioned in poetry and in life, and how to shape it purposefully in a way that would let her build the larger, visionary structures her paired poems had begun to hint at.

What Macpherson meant by naturals and unnaturals, by recognitions, and by the image can be teased out by looking at the poems that eventually made up the core of the unpublished collection, and by reading her letters to Wels-Schön and Crawley about the process of composing the collection. Before the three new *Recognitions* poems she sent to Crawley in the spring of 1951, Macpherson wrote a poem simply titled "The Image" (JMP Box 5 File 2), one that suggests much about the problems of images that she was attempting to tackle. In it, the speaker quotes a fisher whose net has captured the beauty of the moon-goddess Selene, the original "white goddess" and centre of ancient Greek matriarchal society. In a reversal of the myth of Selene and Endymion, where Selene puts her lover into an eternal sleep in a cave in order to preserve his beauty, the fisher's net is "Spread to draw [Selene's] beauty down / To caverns where no gleam is lost, / Unwaxing to live ever." But the fisher's quest is hampered by the fact that she herself is also a fish, and she and her prey are at a standstill, each trapped by the other and her unwillingness to yield, to let the other leave or die or move on: "I swear / I will call my meshes home / When you take your

shining hooks / From my sore mouth, Selene.”³⁶ The final lines of the poem attempt to capture the writer’s disillusionment with the inability of either love or poetry to fully comprehend and capture that which is its object—the image, the subject of that image—without at the same time killing it, freezing it in time and space but draining it of the force that impermanence and life provide: “Love, forgive the murderous eye / That blunts its need on images. / That blunts its need on images.”

Macpherson spent most of the period between the summer of 1948 and the winter of 1950 writing poems that attempted to preserve Wels-Schön forever in poetry, to capture her fleeting image in lasting words, but we might read “The Image” as her recognition that to do so was futile, and that to capture the image of a person or thing in the mind, or in poetry, is to do so at the expense of growth, change, life. It is like preserving a butterfly with chloroform and a pin—the image is preserved, but it becomes unnatural since the living thing that the image stands in for is dead.

After “The Image,” Macpherson composed two poems which she saw as crucial to the “naturals” half of *Recognitions*, “The Natural Mother” and “The Fountain,” both of which attempted to work through the issue of the image and the way beyond it into something less static, something with more *integritas*, complexity, and wholeness. Macpherson did not love “The Natural Mother”—as she wrote to Crawley, she found it too obvious, the “problem much too easily disposed of” (JMP Box 1 File 8)—but it tells us much about Macpherson’s take on the problem of images, and perhaps more interestingly, about the gendered aspects of image-making. Macpherson wrote to Wels-Schön very early in 1950 a letter that illuminates how her understanding of the image came out of writing “Autumn Garden.” Writing in German, she explained:

I didn’t create a poem before the idea, but put the idea in a poem – really stupid, but it was all idea, not poem, and I wanted, as always, to do it right away. It was written against darkness, but it was a kind of reconciliation. That everything is mortal, but “the living image” could possibly survive, if one knew how to write it down. That one couldn’t hold back the sun, but write down what the sun illuminated.³⁷ (JMP Box 2 File 2)

Wels-Schön found these ideas “very stimulating” and “very close to the point” (JMP Box 2 File 2), and wrote back with her own theory about the nature of images: “Poetry & images fixed, crystallized or petrified into written and readable language. Who’s [sic] eye is able to give contour, i.e. to

³⁶ This doubled identity as fish and fisherman will also be crucial to Macpherson’s “The Boatman,” and to the collection that takes its name.

³⁷ As Macpherson originally wrote in German, “Ich hatte nicht von der Idee ein Gedicht gemacht, aber die Idee in Ein Gedicht gestellt—sehr dumm, aber es war lauter Idee, kein Gedicht, und ich wollte es wie gewöhnlich gleich tun. Es war-- gegen Dunkelheit geschrieben, war aber ein Art versöhnung. Daß alles sterblich sei, aber, “the living image” vielleicht überleben könne wenn man es schreiben wisse. Daß man die Sonne nicht zurückhalten könne, sondern wohl was sie beleuchtet nieder geschrieben” (JMP Box 2 folder 2). Translation by Dominik Krill.

coagulate, to crystallize or petrify? Medusas [sic]" (JMP Box 2 File 2). While the common conception of Medusa is of a hideous hag with serpentine hair, Wels-Schön's research showed that "Tradition can't deny, that she was beautiful" (JMP Box 2 File 2), and it seemed to her that this transformation from beauty to beast revealed something about the nature of the image. Wels-Schön suggested to Macpherson that "it was Athena, who made her ugly beyond recognition. Medusa was the vision of old, Athena had but the eye of intellect, that can't penetrate. She can't bear the power and the glory of Medusa's beauty and sees her through the eye of hatred" (JMP Box 2 File 2). The reason "Athena hated her so much," Wels-Schön argued, was "because – as rationalizing intellect incorporate (being a mere rationalization herself) – she was completely void of poetic vision, i.e. the eye of Medusa" (JMP Box 2 File 2). Medusa's original role as the creator of images, and thus of poetry, has been disguised—as has her beauty—by Athena's jealousy, and her corresponding attempts to discount poetic vision and the goddess to whom it properly belonged.

This tension between Athena and Medusa is also figured, when we look closely at Wels-Schön's letter, as one between masculine and feminine, patriarchal and matriarchal mythologies. Wels-Schön contrasts the "eye of intellect," associated with Athena (a goddess Macpherson tried to fit into a never-completed poem called "The Unnatural Child") and her association with stereotypically masculine traits—she is warlike, physically imposing, rationalizing—against the "eye of Medusa," the female model of poetic vision that Athena hates because she lacks. This recuperation of the female and the feminine in literature and mythology is typical of Wels-Schön's brand of mythopoeia, as in her article "Von der Mutter der Pallas Athene," where she works to recuperate the goddess Metis as the mother of Pallas Athene against the prevailing myth of Athene as the "autogenous...birth of Zeus" (627; my translation). Others also take up this project of claiming the creative power of women as mothers and as artists: as Anne Wilkinson puts it in "Lens," "the poet's eye is crystal / Polished to accept the negative" but it is also "veiled in milk" (*Heresies* 82), the same milk that feeds her children. The image-creating poetic eye that Wilkinson figures as a camera lens, Wels-Schön as the eye of the gorgon, and Macpherson as a mother, is crucially a woman's eye. The model of poetic creativity that all three work to construct gives creative woman power not just over human life, but over art—a very different model than the masculinist ones that Macpherson had encountered before and would after, ones that assumed the poet as male by default.

In "The Natural Mother," one of the first poems in which she makes plain this recognition that poetic creation can, and perhaps should for women artists, be gendered female, Macpherson

figures the image-creating poetic eye as a wife and mother, one made pregnant by the light and bearing, each time that light shifts, a new image:

How lovely is this moment, and how dear!
How swiftly glanced and gone!
The light shifts; and his constant bride in me
Bears him another son. (JMP Box 5 File 2)

But while the eye is seemingly the natural mother of the poem's title—"The eye rejoices in her images, / and for her none compares / With this, her latest darling" (JMP Box 5 File 2)—the poem's speaker does not share in this maternal joy: "I feel / The blind heart driving tears" (JMP Box 5 File 2). What the eye captures—the fleeting, latest image, static and soon to be replaced—the heart of the poet is blind to. As Macpherson writes in another poem from this period, "The Chorus," "O cherry hearted, fear the birds! / O image, fear the changing light!" (JMP Box 5 File 2). The image is impermanent and vulnerable, ripe for the plucking, eventually rotten at the core. In "The Natural Mother," Macpherson does not deny woman's creative power, but nor does she suggest that poetry can only be understood as a procreative function. Rather, the poem suggests that she is seeking to create with the power of her third eye a different kind of life than the image, something bigger and fuller, something more than just a snapshot that cannot capture what the heart sees.

In her companion poem "The Fountain" (which she considered titling "The Natural Child" in order to emphasize the pairing), Macpherson begins to work out her vision of a different kind of creative power, one still gynocentric, that can create more than static and hollow images. Macpherson wrote to Wels-Schön in the spring of 1951, when she was writing the poem, that it was inspired by a "lively sense of [the fountain] having been seen at some time," but that the poem and the image of the fountain that inspired it took "about 2 days [to] grow from a dim shape to a clear image, which appears not as a concoction but as a record" (JMP Box 2 File 2). This is a rather different process from "The Natural Mother," which Macpherson criticized for being an idea put into a poem—not a poem that emerged out of an idea—and that in her impatience she gave no time to develop organically. Unlike the images in "The Natural Mother," which are clearly visual, and which the poem works to capture and translate into language, when it came time to write "The Fountain" Macpherson could not "remember having the whole image complete in my mind until poem finished [sic] – not even then – but *I have seen* true" (JMP Box 2 File 2; emphasis in original). This is no Polaroid picture capturing only an instant, but rather a long developed vision that sees true. Crucially, "The Fountain" proposes what we might call a more apocalyptic approach to image

making, in the mind and in the art that mind creates. Masculine and feminine are integrated here: the fountain, which Macpherson envisions as a geyser or natural spring, is at once both “mother source” and “father force” (JMP Box 5 File 2). So too are change and continuity, for the spring is ever gushing forth but is always replenished and never diminished: “still the uncreated spring / gives without diminishing” (JMP Box 5 File 2). For Macpherson’s speaker, the fountain is the “ageless deathless child of holy marriage” (JMP Box 5 File 2) between opposing forces, immortal but—unlike the versions of immortality in “Private Deluge” and “Perdurability”—not made eternal by being frozen in a changeless state. Rather, the fountain “soars and flowers and falls,” and so represents a form of apocalyptic vision that can encompass, in the mind and in verse, complexity and change rather than only the static, singular image. By turning the image-making function over to the mobile, expansive mind—which is Macpherson’s third eye—rather than leaving it to Medusa’s immobilizing eye, Macpherson allows for a form of apocalyptic vision that can encompass the true nature of the fountain, and the fountain as representative of a world that is wholly integrated, the “natural child.”

Reading Macpherson’s *Recognitions* poems are a key way to examine and understand her concerns about and evolving understanding of the image and apocalyptic vision. It seems that writing those poems—of which “The Natural Mother” and “The Fountain” were the first—was likewise how she worked through her own understanding of the relationship between image and vision. The culmination of this exploration was “The Recognition,” which she called the core of her new collection. A poem in three parts, each section of “The Recognition” speaks to a doubled form of recognizing—the first a re-perception or re-identification of that which has until now been veiled by images; the second a recognition that there is a sight beyond seeing that the image-making eye prevents, a re-cognition that poetic vision is far more than ocular. In Part I, Macpherson’s speaker commands herself to lay aside her images of the person to whom she speaks—all of those icons, archetypes, and objective correlatives that stand between herself and the one she loves—in order to be able to speak directly to her beloved. Her beloved must, at the same time, lay down her own veils and masks of images to both be seen and to hear:

Let me for once
Cast my boned desert woman
The harrowed hero-child she mothers
The wailing prophetess
The man who walks my street in hobnailed boots
The inner animal
The murderess in the eye

And antichrist on my left hand
And speak to you divested of images.

Then must you lay down
Your more-than-moon; your drawing seas
Your mask, your dance, your mana
All weathers in your hand
Your wrath, your dove, your antique cruelty
Your Queen of Heaven
And so divested of images hear my voice. (JMP Box 5 File 2)

In Part II, Macpherson's speaker cries out to an apostrophized figure that is whatever the image is not—the secret, hidden life of the world, and of the people around her, that she cannot access through their masks and veils of images or through her own:

O strange to me, O hidden, O secret life,
How shall I speak to you? My love is spent
In raising forms. When all my words must cry
Through the thrawn lips of masks, when still and ever
My teeming eye gives birth to images,
To vision never, and the veils of sight
Muffle my mouth, how to speak, O secret life? (JMP Box 5 File 2)

We might read Macpherson's goddess poems, her iconographies for Grete, as love spent in "raising forms" and creating images, rather than in fulfilling what she seemed to see as her ultimate purpose in writing her goddessist verse: capturing the secret life of Wels-Schön, not just her image or her various guises, so that Wels-Schön's absolute essence could live on in Macpherson's writing. In Part II, her speaker voices her recognition that the image cannot stand in for the thing in any satisfactory way, that it in fact veils the thing itself, and that her attempts to truly recognize the other fail for just that reason. Plato's shadows on the cave wall have stood in for the Ideal, but now the seer recognizes the shadows for what they are and seeks the world beyond. Macpherson wants vision and not just images, the sight of the third eye and not that of the physical two.

In Part III, Macpherson imagines what might come next, how one might move beyond the cave full of shadowy images into the world of light. Here, she suggests that to see true is to be reborn, to enter the dark passage from the womb and enter into the light of the world—a very different vision of birth than that of "The Natural Mother":

Then I was in dread
To throw myself beyond your imaged hand;
But trembling cast, and trembling fell away.
That passage darkness where I turned alone

Gaped and engulfed and rocked me home like death
To leave my sight to fill with night and founder,
My love to gutter out in endless loss.
Now at last gasp—one last twist—and the light.

The newborn soul cries Mamma. Dimly sees
Through gummy eyes, then dawning face to face
Gropes, grasps, and gathers strength. And finds the word:
O Thou! (JMP Box 5 File 2)

To throw oneself beyond the image is to risk a total loss of vision—for what if writing images is all that we are capable of?—for the chance of reaching the world of light and true vision, one that lets the writer and her subject see each other “face to face.”

In the letter in which she sent “The Recognition” to Crawley in early September 1951, just before she started classes at UCL, Macpherson wrote to him that “What follows is the core of *Recognitions*, as far as I have been able to get it. Not satisfied: the double set of images isn’t properly dealt with: best I can do so far. ... I am fascinated & absorbed by the various problems of images, but can’t seem really to get to grips” (JMP Box 1 File 8). In the grey notebook in which she originally transcribed *Recognitions*, Macpherson includes the note “damned thing keeps stopping” (JMP Box 5 File 2). Most of the poems recorded in her notebook after “The Recognition” are reworkings of earlier image poems, and the dates suggest that there are months during her time in London where she does not write at all. As she complained to Crawley that fall, as an auditor “I’m not allowed either essays or exams here, and have fewer subjects than the usual, so am not really expecting any [new poems], unless I get a part-time job as well which Father probably wouldn’t allow” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Having relied for so long on the dual pressures of her busy school schedule and her desire to capture Wels-Schön’s image to inspire her verse, Macpherson found that leisure and the need to divest herself of images led to writer’s block: “Don’t know why I can’t write when I have the leisure—most annoying” (JMP Box 1 File 8).

Progress on *Recognitions* stopped, and Macpherson never found a way to make her first planned collection take its final shape, although a hint of it would resurface many years later as the title of a section in *Welcoming Disaster*. But despite being a failed experiment, *Recognitions* laid the groundwork for Macpherson’s poetic working method going forward. She would never again, at least until after the publication of *Welcoming Disaster* and her almost wholesale retreat from poetry, write individual lyrics that did not have a place in a larger ordering and connection-making structure. She may not have dealt with the issue of individual images through writing *Recognitions*, but she did

find a way beyond the limitation of the image that so hindered Page. She had worked out, through the process of writing the *Recognitions* poems and working, albeit unsuccessfully, to combine multiple lyrics into a larger structure, what it was that she was seeking to move beyond. She wanted vision, not just sight: the all-encompassing vision of the apocalyptic, anagogic third eye, and the encyclopaedic structure—paired or grouped poems with their own internal structure and relationship—that form of vision engendered. Despite her claims to Crawley that she could not write for lack of inspiration, Macpherson began working on new poems once she decided to set *Recognitions* aside, including two that would eventually define for many what was at the core of her poetic and its apocalyptic vision: “Ideas of Order” and “The Third Eye.”

On the inside of my left wrist I have tattooed the emblem that heads the introduction to this dissertation, one that Macpherson drew herself in black ink. It represents the Big and Little Dippers, Ursa Major and Minor, the Bears. That symbol, and the poem of Macpherson’s to which it is most closely connected—“Ideas of Order,” which she began writing in the winter of 1950—is fundamental to understanding not only Macpherson’s developing poetics, but also her conception of the world and the roots of her creative practice in the post-war period. The emblem is Macpherson’s symbol of *integritas*, of apocalyptic wholeness, totality, order, and vision. It is also a reminder that order is only an idea and the recognition that the human mind is built to seek and to find order and pattern in a world that is born out of chaos. In “Ideas of Order,” Macpherson asks us as her readers to participate in a thought experiment along with her:

Now lift your eyes
To see the nightly patterned skies.
How did they all come there,
The Hunter & his Dog, the Virgin & the Bear?

Shall we suppose
God ranged his brilliant servants to disclose
An order in the sky
Of beasts & heroes to instruct men by? (JMP Box 5 File 2)

How we answer this question is a litmus test for how we perceive the world. If we answer yes, then we believe that our path through the world, and the world itself, has been designed by a higher power, a divine watchmaker building order and pattern for us to move within. If we answer no, then we are with Macpherson, who believes that

No: but when first
He knew himself to body’s darkness cursed
Man dared to think to find

In heaven the order of his constellated mind. (JMP Box 5 File 2)

There is no higher power here beyond the human mind and its power to create order out of chaos. We might think of Blake, for whom God is what we call human creativity: “The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is God himself” (*Laocoön* 1.41). We might also think of Wallace Stevens and his “The Idea of Order at Key West,” to which Macpherson is certainly speaking in this poem. Like “Ideas of Order,” “Non-Identification,” and Macpherson’s poems about the problem of the image, “The Idea of Order at Key West” is fundamentally about the dissonance between reality and perception. For Macpherson, the stories we tell about the constellations—the Dippers, the Hunter, the Virgin, the Bear—are simply the product of the human mind’s tendency to seek and construct order out of chaos, to find a pattern in something, like the arrangement of stars in the sky, that is fundamentally patternless. This is the reason that the same stars can be seen as the Big Dipper, Ursa Major, the Wagon, or the Plough, and many different stories can be told about their creation and meaning. This order-making impulse is the fundamental one behind mythology, religion, and art—the creation of stories to explain things that are otherwise beyond explanation, the assignment of meaning and narrative coherence to events that are otherwise meaningless. Stevens’s speaker watches a woman singing on the beach and observes that

And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made. (“Idea”)

Stevens’s singer makes the world as she sings it, and she—like everyone—lives in an individual world of her own creation, a world unique to her.

Like Stevens, Macpherson recognizes that we each make the world—our own worlds—through the stories we tell, and those stories become poetry, song, literature, mythology, even science, which is fundamentally a series of stories about what happens inside beakers and bodies. It is “The maker’s rage to order words of the sea,” but “The water never formed to mind or voice” (Stevens, “Idea”): we sing (and tell) what we see, but we see pattern and stories that do not exist in reality, a shape to the world that never forms itself in response to our thoughts and words. The universe is not orderly, but in Macpherson’s words we “think to find” that order, literally thinking it into being so that the external world matches the order of our constellated minds. As Frye will put it

in an essay published in 1954, and in terms that we might suspect he takes from (or at least shares with) the Narcissus-obsessed Macpherson, “when reason in the mind discovers rational order in the universe outside it, this discovery is largely a matter of falling in love with its own reflection, like Narcissus (Frye, “Myth as Information” 229). Macpherson’s speaker well understands that this pattern and order are ideas rather than realities, ones created in the “constellated mind” of humankind, while at the same time recognizing how fundamental and inescapable this pattern-making impulse is. As both Frank and Dudek argue, this impulse is particularly connected to the disorder and chaos of both war and modernity, the time during which Macpherson came of age as both a woman and a poet. The constellated mind of “Ideas of Order” is also the “golden bubble / round and rare” (*Shepherd*) of her poem “The Anagogic Man,” the anagogic, apocalyptic mind that can contain and order the universe in its totality. It is also Macpherson’s mind.

Macpherson thought of her poem “The Third Eye” as partner to “Ideas of Order,” and it is certainly the better known of the two. Indeed, James Reaney’s “The Third Eye: Jay Macpherson’s *The Boatman*” was for many years the only scholarly work on Macpherson’s poetry, and it argues for “The Third Eye” as the poem that defines Macpherson’s approach to verse. But in 1951, Macpherson thought of her third eye primarily as that which, as she wrote to Crawley, “used to compose my essays for me” (JMP Box 1 File 8) by helping her connect and order the various texts and scholarly sources she needed to craft her arguments. Still, her third eye—her anagogic, constellated mind—possessed the totalizing, order-making vision that could take the disparate sources and ideas she had come up with and turn them into a coherent narrative and argument, the same third eye that allows me to gather together all of the archival, historical, and literary sources that make up the record of Macpherson’s career and life and bring them together as a coherent microhistorical narrative. Her third eye was then, and would continue to be, much more than the thing that helped her write essays; it is the visionary mind that can see and capture the living image, the totality of the image and, as Day Lewis would argue, its relationship to the world and thus the entirety of the world itself. As she writes in the original version of “The Third Eye,”

Of three eyes, I would still give two for one.
The third eye clouds: its light is nearly gone.
The two saw green, saw sky, saw people pass:
The third saw through order like a glass
To concentrate, refine, and rarify
And make a Kosmos of miscellany.
Sight, world and all to save alive that one
Clouding so fast! Ah love, its light is done. (JMP Box 5 File 2)

The unreliable vision of the third eye is distinct from the everyday vision of the physical eyes, the ones that see only green grass, the sky, people. The third eye not only sees order—it sees *through* order like sunlight passes through a magnifying glass, working to “concentrate, refine, and rarify” everything that it encompasses. The third eye takes the chaotic miscellany of the world and turns it instead into a patterned, perfectly ordered cosmology. Macpherson’s third eye is in possession of apocalyptic vision, the ability to encompass the entirety of the world within the single infinite body of the poet, the same vision Wilkinson speaks of in “A Poet’s-Eye View.”³⁸ While the vision of the third eye is just as fleeting as the idea of order, in writing “The Third Eye” Macpherson finally identified what she was looking for in working through the issue of images in *Recognitions*—a way of understanding the expansive vision that she was seeking, one that could capture the living image and not just the quickly captured, incomplete, unnatural images that had defined Imagism, the poetry of the forties in Canada, and even her own writing about Wels-Schön. “The Third Eye” was also a vision of what the lost structure of *Recognitions* might have been, had Macpherson been able to find it: a cosmos instead of a miscellany, a collection that was concentrated, refined, and ordered, its contents identified with their container as the structure of the collection mirrored the form of the poems themselves.

The difficulty of writing (and of abandoning) *Recognitions*, and her uncertainty about what should come after “Ideas of Order” and “The Third Eye”—what her new visionary poetics would look like—wore on Macpherson that winter. So too did her distance from Wels-Schön, Page, and Crawley, despite the fact that their community was just barely enough to stave off her sense of isolation and exclusion in Canada. Even though she was horribly lonely in London, she still wrote to Crawley that she was seriously considering returning there permanently: “Shall probably make my home in Europe in the end: Canada is too hard. Here I feel isolated and lonely, but ... have always found Canada an appalling desert” (JMP Box 1 File 8). But just as Page had rescued her from her despair at finding some semblance of literary community in 1946, Robert Graves came along to do the same as 1951 wound to a close.

Wels-Schön, who had struck up a long-distance correspondence with Graves a year earlier, had sent him the *Contemporary Verse* Issue 27 suite of Macpherson’s poems to take a look at, being very proud of her mythopoeic friend and protégée and wanting to show off her writing to one of

³⁸ Frye defines the apocalyptic as “a world of total metaphor, in which every thing is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body” (*Anatomy* 136) that is often figured as the body of the poet.

Europe's great mythopoeic writers. When he began corresponding with Macpherson in the summer of 1951, Graves was still riding the critical high of the publication of *The White Goddess: A History of Poetic Myth* (1948), which is still today an influential, albeit eccentric, work of mythopoeic criticism. Graves was more than approving of Macpherson's work, despite his anti-colonial biases. As he wrote to a friend, he had discovered "a new woman poet...I tried to find something wrong with her poems but could not; you know how grudging I am of praise, but these were the real thing, though from Canada. [She is said to be] brilliant at classics, hates Canada, is utterly lonely and also beautiful: what troubles lie ahead for that girl! I think of Laura" (qtd. in R.P. Graves, *Robert* 205). This Laura was, of course, Laura Riding, the British poet and publisher and Graves's long-time partner and muse. Graves, known for collecting around him women poets (Wels-Schön would later leave her husband for Graves), soon aimed at collecting Macpherson.

Graves wrote to Macpherson about her poems not long after he received them, a correspondence that thrilled her and gave her hope that her total remove from literary community was at an end. Along with his work to introduce her into a community of likeminded people in London—as Macpherson wrote to Crawley, "his good letters...transformed the miserable winter here for me: I should have been very unhappy without them, and felt myself quite out of touch with the world" (JMP Box 1 File 8)—Graves soon invited her to stay with him in Spain, nominally as a tutor for his children, and Macpherson eagerly accepted. It is hard to know if she was aware that Graves frequently issued this invitation to other potential young Muses, but if she did, she was too excited by the chance to enter his world of myth and poetry to care. She began desperately to try to put an end to her writer's block, for in her writing she saw her only chance to earn passage to Mallorca; she wrote to Crawley asking for his advice about ways to earn money writing, and about the ethics of selling poems, knowing very well that her parents would contribute nothing to the cause. Crawley had never objected to mixing money and art the way that Macpherson had, and urged her to sell her work. While she never did end up figuring out a way to capitalize on her writing, and though Graves "would willingly buy her a ticket...her extreme sensitivity and laudable independence ma[d]e her refuse" (R.P. Graves, *Robert* 205), she somehow cobbled together the funds for the fare and departed for Spain in early March of 1952. Little did she know what awaited her.

Chapter Two

Mallorca, Montreal, Toronto: 1952-56

*Late I knew your hands, late your face,
Late your lunar stillness, your iron grace...
Oh more than Goddess, let me go free!
Too late loved I thee.*

—Jay Macpherson, “Sero” (1952)

*There the lost girl gone under sea
Tends her undying grove, never raising her eyes
To where on the salt shell beach irrevocably
The mother of all living lies.*

—Jay Macpherson, “Eve in Reflection” (1954)

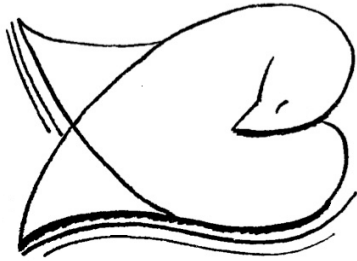


Figure 3: Macpherson's swan emblem. (Source: *O Earth Return*).

Literary history has tended to view the Canadian mythopoeic modernist turn as a something contained within the borders of Canada and as a shift that occurred largely because of Frye's influence on younger poets there. The mythopoeic turn also tends to get characterized as a belated and copycat reaction to the mythopoetics of modernist greats such as Eliot, H.D., and Joyce. As Macpherson's University of Toronto colleague Russell Brown once stated, “the prominence, in Canada, of myth as both topic and technique [happens] well after the impact of the Joyce-Eliot infatuation with myth had run its course elsewhere” (“Northrop” 282). But Brown and the other Canadian literary historians who have read the mythopoeic turn as isolated or belated¹ are quite wrong. Mythopoetics had not run their course elsewhere, not in 1947 when Macpherson started

¹ See also Bowering, who suggests that Canadian modernist mythopoetics are a belated response to Graves and Eliot as mediated by Frye, and that their lack of influence is due to the movement's “bookish isolation” (48). Davey (in “Surviving the Paraphrase”) and Dudek (in “Patterns of Recent Canadian Poetry” and “Lunchtime Reflections on Davey's Defence of the Black Mountain Fort”) likewise accuse Frye and the mythopoeic modernists of an academic isolation that has limited their influence.

publishing, and not in 1952 when she went to stay with Robert Graves in Mallorca. As Macpherson's relationships with Wels-Schön and Graves showed, Canadian writers like her who turned to myth as either topic or technique—Page, Wilkinson, Reaney, Watson, Atwood, Jones, Mandel, Le Pan, Johnston—were entering into an active international elective community of mythopoeic artists. Graves identified Macpherson as his kind of mythopoeist—someone possessed by the goddess as Muse—because her poetry contained those reproducible characteristics that marked her out as part of the active global culture of mythopoeic letters to which he also belonged. As Macpherson moved from Mallorca to Montreal, and then to Toronto, the Canadian contingent of that community would grow, and the mythopoeic turn would gain serious momentum. By the end of 1956, both Macpherson's body of writing and the Canadian mythopoeic community had grown exponentially and consolidated themselves into a recognizable Canadian iteration of this larger mythopoeic modernist movement. But Macpherson had to find her elective community outside of Canada before she would feel capable of, or interested in, building one in it.

The White Goddess of Canada: Macpherson in Mallorca

At some point before she departed for Spain, likely during the winter of 1951-52 during which she and Graves corresponded frequently, Macpherson read Graves's *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948) and a number of its reviews. As Macpherson explained the book and its central figure to Crawley,

The White Goddess is the original universal goddess for whom evidence can be found in all the mythologies of the world if you're a devoted enough believer in the matriarchate: she was displaced, so the story goes, by her son the thunder-god, our God the Father, who then began to take all the credit for the creation, paternity, the arts, etc., and reduced the One Goddess to innumerable little departmental people, properly subservient to his will (JMP Box 1 File 8)

In addition to being a new theory of matriarchal religious history and development, *The White Goddess* (the text) is also a fully-fledged theory of poetry, one in which "The Goddess is of course also the Three-fold Muse [Maiden, Bride, and Crone], hence her importance to Robert (who regards every woman as a more or less clear manifestation of the female divinity)" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Quite naturally, given his theories, "one of Robert's standards for judging a poet is his relation to, & awareness of, the Muse—or woman in general" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Graves was immediately interested in placing Macpherson in relation to the Goddess after reading the poems that Wels-Schön sent him. As he wrote to friends in February, "the spirit of the White Goddess is heavily

entrenched in her, poor child” (205). Almost as soon as he received the first set of her poems, Graves began insisting that she find a way to make the trip from London to Mallorca.

Graves’s white goddess, which he saw in Macpherson and in the poems that she and Wels-Schön sent him over that winter, was both beautiful and terrible—and rather unlike the twenty-year-old Jay Macpherson. In his description,

The Goddess is a lovely, slender woman with a hooked nose, deathly pale face, lips red as rowan-berries, startlingly blue eyes and long fair hair; she will suddenly transform herself into sow, mare, bitch, vixen, she-ass, weasel, serpent, owl, she-wolf, tigress, mermaid or loathsome hag. (*White* 24)

His Goddess was both Medusa and Athena, both the goddess of the summer garden and of the barren iron winter. She was also the source of all life, and of all art. It is little wonder that Macpherson felt powerfully drawn to Graves, and to his version of the goddess that she also, in Wels-Schön, worshipped. Not only did he speak her mythic language—he believed that she too was intimately connected to the wellspring of creativity the Goddess represented.

Macpherson was susceptible to the fascination of Graves’s sometimes outlandish theories, particularly given how flattering he made them to her sense of her person and talent, but even so the healthy skepticism about the worth of supposedly canonical writers she demonstrated in those letters about Shakespeare sent to her mother as a child had not left her. Although she did not pass judgment on Graves’s theories in her letters to Crawley, nor did she take them at face value and she was very aware that critical reception of the book could charitably be characterized as mixed. As she wrote to Crawley, “There was a review of it in Chicago Poetry about two years ago, which simply summarized the content and regarded that as sufficient ridicule... it is a very strange and rather hard book” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Outside of *Poetry*, *The White Goddess* and Graves were the subject of much, and quite varied, attention: Glyn Daniel, then Britain’s best-known archaeologist, “dubbed Graves’s theories ‘fantasies’ and his book ‘outrageous’” (qtd. in Graves, *White* xxvi), but the poet John Heath Stubbs called it a book with “an importance quite independent of any unlikely-seeming theories about Irish or other alphabets” (xxvi). Rather than dismissing outright Graves’s more outrageous statements, Macpherson believed that “Robert is always extreme,” because “he has to be, because he is asserting a real and important relation that is these days nearly forgotten, and what he has to say would have much less effective force if tempered with considerations of ‘on the other hand’” (JMP Box 1 File 8).

But even with this understanding tempering her opinions, she did not “agree with all he says: it all seems to me much too radical” (JMP Box 1 File 8). In particular she took issue with his means of deciding who was a “real” poet and who was not. As Macpherson explained it to Crawley, Graves argued that

The test of a poet’s vision, one might say, is the accuracy of his portrayal of the White Goddess and of the island over which she rules. The reason why the hairs stand on end, the eyes water, the throat is constricted, the skin crawls and a shiver runs down the spine when one reads or writes a true poem is that a true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living, the ancient power of fright and lust—the female spider or the queen-bee whose embrace is death. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Macpherson was “aware of the element shared in common by his poets”—their ability to portray the Goddess—“and am very much sympathetic,” even if she was not sure “that one can be so exclusive” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Just as critical opinion has turned sharply against Graves in the intervening years—one more recent article is titled “A Crazy Book: Robert Graves and the White Goddess” (Lindop 27)—Macpherson’s opinion would too; her review of Graves’s *The Greek Myths* (1955), which he was working on during her visit to Mallorca, demonstrates very little patience with his ideas. But at twenty, and in the thrall of Graves’s attention and the attractions of belonging to a mythopoeic community she had been longing to find, Macpherson was willing to take Graves’s theories almost as seriously as he did.

Later in her life, Macpherson asked Beryl Graves, Robert’s wife, to allow her to keep both sides of her correspondence with Graves and strict restrictions have been placed on that correspondence in her archive. In consequence, we do not know about what Graves and Macpherson wrote during the winter before they met. We do know that Wels-Schön sent him Macpherson’s first *Contemporary Verse* suite, and that Graves would also have seen the Goddess in early poems like “The Encounter” and “Autumn Garden,” as well as in some of the unpublished poems that Macpherson wrote in the months leading up to her trip to Mallorca that we can safely assume she shared with him. Macpherson’s goddess changed somewhat after her correspondence with Graves began, and instead of being a figure of wonder whose power was considerable but largely unthreatening—the figure “shining in the autumn garden” or “The Phoenix blazing in the perfect snow” (JMP Box 5 File 2)—her new vision of the goddess became more beautiful and more terrible. The goddess of her poem “In Time of Pestilence” is precisely Graves’s terrible vision of the White Goddess as creator and destroyer, the fate of the world in her hands. It becomes clear in the second stanza that Macpherson’s goddess *is* the world—the earth goddess Gaia, mother of Typhon

and “Mother of All Living” (JMP Box 5 File 2)—and the ills of the earth are also hers: “She is sick: and shall she heal? / Well she may: the world is foul” (JMP Box 5 File 2). Likewise, the goddess of “The Blighted Spring” is the White Goddess displaced by the patriarchal cults described in Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890), a book extremely important both to Graves and to many of the Canadian mythopoeic modernists:²

Over her dominion rests
A stagnant air that blasts but cannot blow.
Her orchards are devoured with pests,
The very suckers will not grow.
—Yet in her trees how green and hopeful nests
The industrious mistletoe! (*Nineteen*)

The world still belongs to the goddess here, but that world is dying; this is not the jewelled garden of the Hesperides. The only thing still “green and hopeful” is the mistletoe, one symbol of Frazer’s Kings of Nemi Wood and their related patriarchal cults, the members of which usurped the goddess’s power over the natural world. According to Frazer (and in a reading with which Graves was entirely sympathetic), after she was displaced it was the death and symbolic reincarnation of these kings—not the goddess’s fertility—that was thought to bring about the return of spring each year (*Golden*, chap. I, sec. 1, par. 5). In Macpherson’s “The North,” the goddess turns into a forbidding ice queen, and “All other winters shall break against hers, / Such fire is wedded to her frost. / She is harsh as the blizzard that scrapes and strains.” And in “She,”

She who is fickle sea
And indifferent sky
Is that true star men flee
These dangers by. (*Nineteen*)

This is neither the shining goddess of the autumn garden nor the beautiful Selene preserved as a object of contemplation. Macpherson’s goddess poems from that winter are outwardly Gravesian—her goddess is terrible, changeful, all-powerful, and largely lacking any of the more human features that connected her original goddess to Wels-Schön. But while at first glance they seem to be a reversion to the static image poems she was trying to move beyond, the concluding lines to “She” suggest that these goddess poems are doing something different than those old ones: “Thus I know

² For more on the relationship between Canadian mythopoeic modernism (especially Frye’s work) and Frazer, see George Woodcock’s “Diana’s Priest in the Bush Garden” (1974). Woodcock’s approach is closely aligned with John Vickery’s more general one in *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough* (1973).

this of you: / You will be labyrinth, and clue.”³ The goddess is both the maze—which for Macpherson is the complicated labyrinth that is life—and the thread (or “clew”) to follow to get out of it. She is thus a figure of apocalyptic totality: the “Mother of All Living” within whose body the maze-wandering that is life plays out, and the way through that labyrinth.

Through the process of writing *Recognitions*, Macpherson had come to recognize that she was seeking a way beyond the creation of images, a practice she strongly connected with allowing simplified and static icons to stand in for the complexity and change that characterized the “real.” More importantly, she no longer wanted to allow the inadequate image to stand in for, and block access to, the all-encompassing totality of apocalyptic, third-eyed, vision. She disliked the new poem “When Her Grief” precisely because it was a reversion to the static image poems she was trying to move beyond. But the poems she wrote during her winter in London functioned primarily as a hybrid of her old goddessist poetics and her new apocalyptic, visionary one. The idea of the encyclopaedic is useful here, one that relates very closely to what Treharne calls *integritas*: “a concept of wholeness that would not struggle against multiplicity and particularity, but rather be in some way identifiable with the things contained—images, concepts, and so on—as is the water bead’s surface tension with the water itself” (*Montreal* 67). One of the elements of apocalyptic vision is its ability to contain everything it sees, much as the covers of an encyclopaedia could potentially contain all of knowledge.⁴ This all-encompassing vision in which the container becomes identified with its contents—for this vision contains not only that which is seen, but also the seer herself—is often referred to as encyclopaedic.⁵ So too are works, as Macpherson’s increasingly are, that attempt to encompass the entirety of something by collecting all of its aspects together within “a concept of wholeness” that is related to its contents. As both labyrinth and clue in “She,” as both hoard and key in “Lull Me Beyond Thee,” and as the multivariate goddess represented in her many forms across

³ In later versions of the poem, Macpherson makes more explicit the double meaning of “clue” by reverting to the archaic spelling of “clew,” which is defined as “A ball of thread, which in various mythological or legendary narratives (esp. that of Theseus in the Cretan Labyrinth) is mentioned as the means of ‘threading’ a way through a labyrinth or maze; hence, in many more or less figurative applications: that which guides through a maze, perplexity, difficulty, intricate investigation, etc.” (*OED*).

⁴ I argue in “Revealing Reciprocity: Anne Wilkinson, Northrop Frye, and Mythopoetics in Canada” that “As Frye states in *Anatomy of Criticism*, poetry moves from ritual to encyclopaedic and from there to apocalyptic: ‘we notice ... the tendency of ritual to become not only cyclical but encyclopaedic, as already noted. In its anagogic phase, then, poetry imitates human action as total ritual, and so imitates the action of an omnipotent human society that contains all of the powers of nature within itself’ (120). The encyclopaedic work, because it contains within a greater body discrete parts which are totally identified with it—each element of the encyclopaedic work makes up a part of the whole, but is also contained by it, just as each drop of water in a puddle make up that puddle but are also contained by its larger structure—is apocalyptic” (76).

⁵ Apocalyptic, or mythic, identification and metaphor are fundamentally the same; as Frye writes in “Myth as Information,” “The basic structure of myth is the metaphor, which is very similar in form to the equation, being a statement of identity of the ‘A is B’ type” (235).

her new goddess poems, Macpherson's goddess is a figure of apocalyptic, encyclopaedic totality, not just a static image. She can become anything, *is* everything—for she is the world—and yet is always still herself.

The apocalyptic, encyclopaedic element of Macpherson's poetic will become one of the most commented upon aspects of her work in the future, particularly because it is of major interest to Reaney and his essay "The Third Eye: Jay Macpherson's *The Boatman*" (1960) will be the only and most influential critical take on her work for many years. Even though Reaney's essay is about *The Boatman* and not *Nineteen Poems*, he addresses a number of Macpherson's goddess poems—"The Thread" (originally titled "The Comforted"), "In Time of Pestilence," "She," "True North," and "Blighted Spring"—since they become the core of *The Boatman*'s first section, "Poor Child." As I noted in the introduction, Reaney has been criticized by Weir and Atwood, among others, for the limited way he reads *The Boatman*, but his analysis of Macpherson's goddess poems—despite his having no sense of the original context in which they were written, nor of the conflict between the static image and the expansiveness of apocalyptic vision that drives them—is still illuminating. He argues that "the very process of becoming interested in metaphor evidently must lead to an interest in giant and mythical figures" (Reaney, "Third" 27) like Macpherson's goddess. And "Once you start saying 'my love is like a red, red rose,'" (or like a goddess, in Wels-Schön's case) "you might as well start saying that she is like a great many other beautiful things as well" (27). And if she really is a goddess, Reaney argues, "she is like everything, because a goddess isn't a goddess unless she can control both beautiful and ugly things, even things indifferent," and if she is like everything, "she *is* everything and contains everything she is like" (20). In writing apocalyptic goddesses who are encyclopaedic in their totality—they are everything, and contain everything they are like—Macpherson found a way to combine goddessism with her new apocalyptic poetics. In so doing, she also found a way to more closely align herself with Graves's brand of mythopoeic poetics, and thus to enter his elective community in Mallorca.

Macpherson's exploration of different experiences of apocalyptic vision took more forms than winter than just goddess poems. Two of these experiments emerged as "Cold Stone" and "The Sick Child," poems that have never received much critical attention. The former poem may remind us of Jung, since it recounts an act of total identification very like the one that eventually led him to believe in the interconnectedness of all life and in the "archaic psychic components which have entered the psyche without any direct line of tradition" (*Memories* 35). These psychic components make up Jung's collective unconscious, and result in the spontaneous repetition of myths and

archetypes across cultures, time, and space. In a trance-like state much like the one from which the speaker of “Cold Stone” is just emerging, Jung would sit on a rock in his garden and commune with it while meditating on the question “Am I the one who is sitting on the stone, or am I the stone on which *he* is sitting?” (*Memories* 20). In “Cold Stone,” Macpherson’s speaker is just “feel[ing] my self returned to me” after resting on a stone, and like Jung, she “Regards as yet not very far / The leap from shape to living form: / And where I rested, the stone is warm” (*Nineteen*). In writing about Wilkinson, who performed the same acts of total identification in her life and work, Irvine calls this understanding the poet’s “recognition of psyche in the material world, the imagination of matter” (Irvine, “Poetics” 77), the one-ness of human and non-human life. This projection is a form of total identification—the making indistinguishable the conscious mind and the unconscious world outside of it. This total identification is a concept central to Macpherson’s apocalyptic vision, and to Frye’s. In his words, acts of identification like Macpherson’s allow one to enter “a world of total metaphor, in which every thing is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body” (Frye, *Anatomy* 136). Given Macpherson’s uncertainties about how Jung’s thought would make its way into poetry, it is remarkable that the same transformative acts of identification he recounts in his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (which was not published until 1962) appear in her verse of the early 1950s, as well as in Page’s and Wilkinson’s even earlier writing. All four independently wrote about imaginative acts of total identification, of using their apocalyptic vision to break down the barriers between the self and the object so that the boundaries between the two become indistinguishable.⁶ Whatever the reason for this confluence of thought, “Cold Stone” functions not only as an entry into the apocalyptic world of total identification. It is also evidence that Macpherson may have been coming around to Jung’s belief that the same myths repeat across cultures because people share psychic components that are transmitted without direct tradition; her later poetry, research into the many forms of the sleeping shepherd, and textbook about myth suggest the same. Likewise, Macpherson’s and Jung’s shared thought demonstrates how widespread mythic thinking and writing was during this period and just how broad and diverse was the international mythopoeic community of which Macpherson was gradually becoming aware. As Frye

⁶ For more on this tradition of total identification in modernist mythopoeic poetry by Canadian women, see my paper “The Four Daphnes: Tracing a Mythopoeic Matrilineage in Canadian Modernist Poetry” (2013). As I suggest there, transformations into aspects of the natural world related to the Daphne myth—Wilkinson’s acts of mythic transformations in poems like “A Poet’s-Eye View” and “The Red and the Green,” Page’s very similar ones in “Reflection” and *The Sun and the Moon*, and even the transformations Atwood’s protagonist undergoes in *Surfacing*—are acts of total identification with the natural world very closely related to Macpherson’s visionary apocalypses.

argues, “It is hardly too much to say that the bulk of what is distinctive in twentieth-century thought, in the non-mathematical division, has been constructed around the word ‘myth’” (“Myth as Information” 228). Graves, Jung, Frye, and Macpherson all performed remarkably interconnected mythopoeic work during this period; it was also the era of Claude Levi-Strauss’s work on the consistency of social norms and stories across cultures, of Barthes’s development of his theories of modern myths, and of Joseph Campbell’s work to trace hero archetypes across the world’s stories. It was a good time to be an emergent mythopoeic modernist poet.

While some of the other apocalyptic poems in *Nineteen Poems*—“Ordinary People in the Last Days” and “The Third Eye”—have received significant critical attention as part of *The Boatman*, in which they also appear, “Sick Child” has never received the same notice. But despite its brevity, the poem is highly significant to Macpherson’s apocalyptic poetics: for the ways in which it reveals that there is fundamentally no distinguishing between the apocalyptic and the goddessist for Macpherson, for the ways in which it anticipates some of her most highly regarded later poems, and for its relationship to Macpherson’s “Poor Child” and her poetics of concern. In “Sick Child,” an omniscient speaker narrates a moment when the titular child is in bed and “watch[es] its mother / Come near to stroke its weary, vaguely marvelling head” (*Nineteen*). The poem’s perspective switches, and the speaker begin to observe not the child in bed, but her own internal sick child, whom she tries to ignore and who is the same poor child who lives in everyone. She anticipates what will happen if her “mother”—the all-encompassing multivariate goddess, the anagogic woman—comes near: “my eyes crack open under / The strain of the round world’s sudden crowding in, / And my head droops, being crammed so full with wonder” (*Nineteen*). This earlier mother-goddess is the complement to Macpherson’s father-god, the “The Anagogic Man” of *The Boatman*, whose mind, a “golden bubble round and rare,” contains “All us and our worlds” (*Poems* 42). The goddess’s mind does likewise, her approach bringing the “round world” she contains “crowding in.” But instead of the speaker just being able to see this anagogy in another, as she does in “The Anagogic Man,” her mother-goddess is capable of transmitting this wondrous world to her—the sick child’s head becomes the golden bubble crammed with wonder. But what does it mean?

The focus on Macpherson’s “The Anagogic Man” and the kind of apocalyptic vision it seems to privilege (male, “genius,” removed from the everyday world) has long elided the fact that Macpherson’s ultimate apocalyptic figure is for much of her writing life the goddess: she who contains all the “round world,” all its wonders and marvels. Certainly, the ways that Macpherson’s feminist poetics develops over time, and the intersections between her lived experience as a queer

woman and her poetry, have been little explored. After the publication of *The Boatman*, a number of critics will suggest that Macpherson's apocalyptic poetics depend on moments of anagogic knowledge and apocalyptic vision like those narrated in "Sick Child" to complete the cycle of destruction to total renewal, and thereby to enact fully her vision of a world united and renewed by being contained in the golden bubble of the visionary, anagogic mind.⁷ This is one of the crucial confluences that have been used to link Macpherson's work to Frye's. But "Sick Child," like "Ideas of Order," suggests that Macpherson's take on the renewing potential of apocalyptic vision—the containing and pattern-making vision of the third eye—is less straightforward than that. Rather than suggesting that the poor and sick children of the world are brought into the fold by being contained and totally identified within the golden bubble of the anagogic mind—that anagogic vision has the potential to effect real social change, as Frye seemingly believes it will⁸—"Sick Child" ends ambiguously. The speaker-child's head droops under the strain of containing this new vision, and the poem's title leaves unclear whether the sick child is the ordinary child or the anagogic one—she may be the latter, suggesting that the vision of the third eye has the power to harm as well as heal. Either way, in writing the apocalyptic goddess of "Sick Child," Macpherson had found a way to combine her commitment to vision over image with her desire to celebrate in verse the terrible and wonderful beauty and power of women—the same women whose emotional and mental climates, including her own, so shaped her life.

Macpherson put in the hours that winter writing (and trying to sell poems to pay for her passage to Spain), going to class, and trying to decide what she would do after she came home from Europe. Her application to the M.A. in English at McGill the previous spring had been accepted, but she was having a difficult time making up her mind to accept the offer of admission. It held the promise of being a poet-scholar, but her father's alternative—if she wanted to work at a university, he insisted, she would have to become a librarian—offered a chance to spend her days with books (even if her Muse deserted her for good) and to have the leisure time and mental energy to write (if it did not). Macpherson knew that her mother had always regretted her career choices—Dorothy's father had forbidden her to attend college, she had had to give up an offer to become a partner in a

⁷ See Reaney's "The Third Eye: Jay Macpherson's *The Boatman*" (26), Namjoshi's "In the Whale's Belly: Jay Macpherson's Poetry" (54) and Bennett's "As the Last Morning Breaks in Red: Frye's Apocalypse and the Visionary Tradition in Canadian Writing" (814).

⁸ This belief is articulated throughout Frye's work, although perhaps more explicitly in his work after *Anatomy of Criticism*, including *The Stubbish Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society* (1970) and *The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism* (1971).

law firm due to the sexual advances of both other partners, and she felt she had to choose marriage over political ambitions at the age of thirty⁹—and she wanted to make use of the opportunities her mother never had. But ultimately, the decision hung on whether or not Macpherson felt herself a truly gifted poet:

Jonas apparently regards me as *potentially* gifted, and that troubles me: either I have it or I have not: if I have, it's worth giving up everything else for & rotting in a library: if I haven't, it would be better to compromise with some semi-literary job which would be at least half satisfactory. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Her decision about which program to enter was dependent on whether or not she felt herself to have the potential to become a professional poet (and thus librarian by day) or just someone semi-literary (in which case scholarship would be the preferred career). She did not yet feel capable of making that decision, and so she applied to the McGill Bachelor of Library Science program and put off the decision for awhile longer.

In March, Macpherson stepped off the ferry from Barcelona to Mallorca and into the warm welcome of Robert Graves, his wife Beryl, their children, and other poet-scholars who were part of the Graves's ever shifting household, including the British poet Martin Seymour-Smith and his fiancée, classics scholar and translator Janet de Glanville. Macpherson immediately fell in love with Deyá, the Graves's village, which she described to Crawley as “a sea-&-mountain village full of old marvelous [sic] houses: the mountains are terraced a great way up with olives, & oranges & lemons & figs grow there too” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Despite never having met Graves or the others in person, and despite Graves's formidable reputation, Macpherson immediately felt at home: “No, [I] never [found Graves formidable] for a moment – long before we met he had taken me on as so to speak one of the clan, and I found him very warm, very open, full of jokes and songs and stories – very easy to be with” (Macpherson, “Immensely” 387).

Macpherson was the second of Graves's post-Laura Riding muses to come to Mallorca; the painter Judith Bledsoe had been there before her, and would be again after. Her total comfort with Graves reflects the fact that she seemed not to realize that he, as he had with Riding and Bledsoe, might have sexual designs on her or at the very least want her as a blank slate upon which to project the driving force of his poetry, the White Goddess as Muse. As Graves's letters to friends before her arrival suggest, this was precisely what he intended. Macpherson, however, was there for the inspiration, the community, and the ability to spend time with others who spoke not just a dialect of

⁹ See also the introduction to Chapter One.

her mythopoeic language, but what she believed was its purest form. Until she met Graves, she mourned the fact that “I still know only one person in Canada who talks entirely my language”—this was Wels-Schön—although “there are perhaps four people who speak related dialects, and I am very grateful for their presence” (JMP Box 1 File 8). She found more of what she was looking for—inspiration, community, and common language—in Mallorca, and not only with Robert Graves. Beryl Graves was “the one I at first found formidable: she had a very cool style, analytic where Robert was intuitive, and I much feared I might be found wanting” (“Immensely” 387). Despite knowing that her husband likely had designs on his new young protégée, Beryl refrained “from sitting in judgment” and “was enormously tolerant, and I soon became comfortable with her too” (4). However ironically, given what we know about their dysfunctional relationship and about Macpherson’s potential to be a destructive force in their marriage, Macpherson liked spending time with the Graves family because she saw them as one of the only exemplars of a happy marriage in her life: “I had good friends in Canada with whom I could talk about poetry and mythology and such, but I’d spent far too little time, ever, with people who were happily married, and Robert and Beryl were very much that” (3). Her own parents, who had lived in separate countries since 1940, were certainly not happily married, and nor were the Schöns, who would soon—and in part because of Robert Graves—divorce.

Macpherson’s days in Spain were a pleasant change from her London routines of rides on the Northern line from Hampstead to UCL, English lectures, BBC poetry programs, and meals with her father. She brought the German draft of Hans Jonas’s *The Gnostic Religion* with her to work on, and

I used to sit all day in the workroom, plugging away at [the] translation job, while Robert worked at the Penguin myth-book [*The Greek Myths*, 1955] with occasional consultations with Janet de Glanville, Beryl sat elsewhere over a translation from Spanish ... or working at Russian (I think that was then), while Martin Seymour-Smith, Jan’s other half, tutored the children. (3-4)

Afternoons and evenings were for fun: “about four o’clock, we used to go down to the cove to swim, usually just Robert and I” (JMP Box 1 File 8), and in the evenings the five adults would read, talk, or play charades. For the most part, Macpherson loved life in Deyá for being both simple and stimulating, but its fun was not always wholly innocent and jokes were sometimes at Macpherson’s expense. As she wrote to Crawley, “Robert I think took a peculiar ... pleasure in shocking me (my history includes a convent school, among other places, & I’ve never really outgrown it: it can be rather annoying, particularly as I blush easily)” (JMP Box 1 File 8). One of his favourite ways to

shock was to act “out ‘whore’” during charades “with such a horrible exaggerated faithfulness, and such revolting expressions that I was always forced to turn away & not look” (JMP Box 1 File 8), or to assign Macpherson vulgar words to act out. Macpherson seemingly anticipated this side of Graves: “The books of his I took most seriously repelled me always almost as much as attracted, because I found something about them ‘nasty’: went to Mallorca with a few reservations still, in spite of his good letters (which transformed the miserable winter here for me: I should have been very unhappy without them, and felt myself quite out of touch with the world)” (JMP Box 1 File 8). And yet despite Graves's ribald teasing, and his tendency to see her as a projection of his goddess rather than as herself, he also made Macpherson feel safe in a way that few people in her life ever had: “He is—I don’t know, perhaps reassuring is the word; he makes one feel perfectly safe, against anything the world can offer. He is quite devoid of tact, but has an intuitive empathy with people that prevents him from hurting them: and is extremely gentle” (JMP Box 1 File 8). And just as importantly, Graves was a fellow disciple of the mythopoeic arts.

Most of the poems that Macpherson wrote that year were composed during the winter over which she and Graves exchanged letters between London and Mallorca. Once she had actually arrived in Spain, she was too busy with translation and conversation to find much time for writing. But she did compose two poems toward the end of her stay, ones that seemingly needed harsher emotions than safety and acceptance for inspiration. Macpherson recognized that anger, upset, and pain were productive forces for her poetry, and her Mallorca trip, particularly after Wels-Schön's arrival, contained enough of all three to inspire her. The poem “Ill Wind,” written toward the end of her trip, suggests that the warmth of the Mallorcan sun also hid things that were colder and more sinister, not the least Laura Riding's surprise return, which turned the house upside down:

To reply, in face of a bad season,
Pestilential cold, malignity,
To the ill wind weeping on my shoulder:
“Child, what have I to do with thee?”

Is to deny the infant head
And the voice complaining tirelessly:
“Is there room for one only under your cloak,
Mother, may I creep inside and see?
Did you not know my wicked will
When you summoned me?” (*Nineteen*)

Macpherson's depiction of the ill wind of bad fortune and bad company as a whining child is deliciously creepy, and perfectly captures the tension inherent in desiring, yet despising, the

misfortune to which one has given birth. While Macpherson believed that “Ill Wind” was one of the best poems she had written in recent years, despite her worries that it tended toward private symbolism and obscurity, toward centripetal imagery rather than centrifugal,¹⁰ she did not feel the same about the other poem she wrote in Spain, “When Her Grief,” which likewise hinges on the image of ill fortune-as-child. Indeed, she thought it “one of the worst” despite the fact that it was “liked in certain quarters”—it was Hans Jonas’s favourite—“(probably because entirely static)” (JMP Box 1 File 8):

When her grief comes to her,
Crouches down at her knee, looks into her face,
She smiles and bends her head in welcome
Where she sits still-handed.

When they are disturbed,
She watches the opening door, sets her face,
Cruelly defends, as a child of her body,
Her Grief, against all kindly comers. (*Nineteen*)

What in particular inspired the poem, and its central figure of a bereaved woman who nurtures the anthropomorphized figure of Grief, is unclear, but as usual it was written for Wels-Schön.

Macpherson notes the use to which Wels-Schön put the poem as proof to Crawley that all her writing during this period was “true-to-Grete” (JMP Box 1 File 8):

I can illustrate that by something I shouldn’t know & you will please forget: she has gone away because of marital upsets & fearful pride & not being able to stick it any longer, as well as her health: before she left she sent one of the poems in my booklet, Grief, to her husband without comment as explanation. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Wels-Schön had left one Robert for another—her husband for Graves—and her protégée was less than approving. The illusion of the Graveses being a happily married couple was cracking before her eyes, and her goddess was in love with someone else.

¹⁰As Macpherson wrote to Crawley, “I suppose [“Ill Wind”] looks obscure, but no [sic] background of reading would help: the elements are as follows: the day Grete left Mallorca, when it turned suddenly bitterly cold and snow fell on the mountains; Martin who spent a night in all virtue in my bed, slightly drunk & making declarations by the yard (with his Jan asleep in the right-hand room & Grete in the left) (he then wrote me some verse & recovered), Robert’s little Juan in a wheedling mood putting down his head on his mother’s knee, Laura’s visitation (did I tell you? at Deya one night when I was alone there with the children: Good Friday, to be exact), “What have I to do with thee?” spoken to Christ by the demon called Legion at Gadarea, Laura’s cloak that Robert gave me, God the Father in Michaelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* with Eve and the children of the world to come under his mantle, Sidney Keyes’ ‘walking woman’, the belief that witches could raise the wind, vague recollection of an old poem of Robert’s about ‘bad time[.]’, confusion of two English ballads, one about the cold & the other called The Sick Tune—oh, all kinds of things. Does the explanation help at all? Is the poem anything either with it or without it? That one poem should be a test for obscurity, as of all those references in it only one is public & recognizable: but Robert liked it without knowing its history; would anyone else? And yet I think it’s bloody good, perhaps the best there” (JMP Box 1 File 8).

Both Macpherson's personal and poetic versions of goddess love seemed to be on the wane. One of the poems she wrote that winter, before heading to Spain, suggests that she believed her goddessism was coming to an end. The anti-image poems in *Recognitions* already had suggested as much, connecting as they did a lack of vision with the transmuting of the real Wels-Schön into the static, dead image of the goddess. The poem "Sero" makes clear that Macpherson was unwilling to adopt Graves's version of goddessism at the expense of the visionary mythopoetics she had begun to move toward—and as we will see in her later work, at the expense of the feminist goddessism she would begin working within with *O Earth Return*. The title of "Sero" is taken from Augustine's *Confessions*—"seroteamavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova" (10.27.38) translates as "late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient and new"—and Macpherson likewise laments that

Late I knew your hands, late your face,
Late your lunar stillness, your iron grace.
You watch the water: the swans are gone,
The cold lake lies like stone.
Oh more than Goddess, let me go free!
Too late loved I thee. (JMP Box 5 File 2)

We might read this "more than Goddess" as both Graves's White Goddess, and Macpherson's Grete-as-Goddess; Wels-Schön joined Macpherson in Mallorca in April, and she and Graves soon began a romantic relationship in earnest, after many months of correspondence. Macpherson recognized that she needed to move beyond the goddessism that had obsessed her for years in order to move her poetic development forward. Likewise, her realization that her love for Wels-Schön needed to change made her cry out for her freedom from her Muse's goddess-like thrall.

Graves's belief that only men could be proper poets, as only they could be properly Muse inspired, certainly also turned Macpherson off his specific version of goddessism. Macpherson was well aware of Graves's position—"he says women are not meant to be poets but occasionally are: most of them ruin it by writing as honorary men; Laura & one or two others—Sappho—were aware of themselves as Muse & wrote as such, & that's the proper way" (JMP Box 1 File 8)—but chafed against it, as when she once "remarked in a letter with some sharpness that I wasn't his sort of poet at all, but a crank, unable to fit either the male or female categories" (JMP Box 1 File 8). She was happy, for a time, to accept the label of *pais*, for (as Graves wrote to her), "Hera was worshipped somewhere as 'pais' (that means indiscriminately young girl or young boy—ambivalent stage), and you may be pais too, for the time being" (JMP Box 1 File 8). But that "ambivalent stage"—between countries, between genders, between childhood and adulthood—could not last. Macpherson was

ambivalent about belonging to an elective community that could only really accept her as a blank canvas for projected male poetic and sexual energy or as a child who was forbidden to become a fully-fledged woman. After years of writing for and about Grete-as-goddess, it was time to move forward, both personally and professionally. Both Graves and Wels-Schön seemed at first to understand that this was the case, although it would later prove to be otherwise: “my Muse has shifted & appears to have taken up residence inside me: which pleases me, Grete, & Robert” (JMP Box 1 File 8). But Macpherson also recognized that even though her goddessism was at an end, her move toward a new apocalyptic poetics, one inspired by herself rather than by an external Muse, did not make what she had written in the years before any less important or true. As she wrote to Crawley, “the changed state of affairs does not in any way affect the validity of what I wrote before[—]it is as true now as it was then” (JMP Box 1 File 8).

Macpherson returned to London at the end of April to go back to University College for summer term, and Graves accompanied her to the ferry docks where she caught the boat to Barcelona. Macpherson recalled her departure: “I’d climbed onto the bottom rung of a passenger barricade to hug him and kiss his cheek: he muttered, ‘I must give you something,’ and felt in his pockets and pressed a matchbook into my hand – that impulse was so like him!” (Macpherson, “Immensely” 388). Whatever challenges that trip to Mallorca presented—the need to develop a new poetic without knowing quite how, her recognition that she was still seeking an elective community that could accept her and her writing for what they were, her realization that Wels-Schön’s affections now belonged to Graves—it also held treasured memories of understanding and support. Macpherson would recall many years later that she “kept my matchbook with pebbles from Deyá for years and years” (388), and would soon have another souvenir. In addition to the matchbook, Graves had promised her an even bigger gift: he would publish her first collection of poems as a present for her twenty-first birthday in June, one of the rare publications, and the last, of his Seizin Press.

Back in London, Macpherson returned to auditing her classes and awaited the Graves’s upcoming annual visit to London in June. They would be staying in Church Row, just a few streets away from Well Walk, and she had already promised to be on hand to help Beryl, who was pregnant with Tomàs, with the other children while Graves did his annual rounds renewing his relationships with London’s writers and publishers. After they arrived she would also, on occasion, take Beryl’s place at the parties to which Graves was invited. She was disappointed, though, that she would be sailing back to Canada before the Graves family returned to Mallorca. Graves had asked her to stay

in Europe, offering her a permanent position as nanny, but “Much though she liked and respected Graves, she did not feel comfortable about his behaviour as a father” (Seymour 338)—and as a husband—and declined his offer. Even so, she was loath to leave behind the community and the poetry she had found in Europe, neither of which—however imperfect—she had any hope of replacing in Canada.

Macpherson had watched the development of the British poetry scene with interest during her time in London, and she hoped that the Canadian poetry scene would likewise improve during her year’s absence. In that, she was seemingly disappointed. She continued to receive every issue of *Contemporary Verse* at 24 Well Walk, and her mother mailed her the first issue of *Contact*, the new magazine edited by Souster (with help from Layton and Dudek) after it was printed in January. She was not impressed. As she wrote to Crawley in response to the magazine’s selection of poetry, and Dudek’s first essay,

if I may say so without offense, I think it’s pretty frightful: call that stuff poetry? And no young poets in Canada? what about [James] Reaney & [Colleen] Thibodeau? hope Mr. Dudek won’t let the vacuum rust his bright sword—oh dear, I wish I were a little more impressed. Was mildly amused by the Cold Coming, but think a little restraint would have improved it. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

While Wilkinson had recognized a new member of the mythopoeic elective community upon reading Macpherson’s first *Contemporary Verse* suite, Macpherson saw not the presence, but the absence, of other members of her community in the pages of *Contact*: Reaney and Thibodeau. Dudek, in his essay “Où Sont Les Jeunes?” (“Where are the Young?”), refused to admit that anyone had taken up the torch from the *Preview* and *First Statement* poets of the forties: “The poet has more to say and understand today than he has ever had at any other time in history. Why are the young poets at a loss for words?” (144). But Macpherson could see what was happening around her, which was activity by the mythopoeic, formalist poets that Dudek did not like, and therefore refused to acknowledge. Reaney had, after all, won the Governor General’s Award for *The Red Heart* in 1949, and Thibodeau had work in *Canadian Forum*, *Other Voices*, and *Fiddlehead*. Another of those newer mythopoeic writers that Dudek missed was Douglas LePan, and Macpherson wrote to Crawley in the same letter to ask if Crawley had seen “Douglas LePan’s *The Wounded Prince*? I think it’s one of the best books of Canadian poetry in the sense that it has the strangeness and reality of Canada in it: that is the only sense in which regional poetry matters” (JMP Box 1 File 8). In 1952, Dudek was still able to ignore the emergence of the mythopoeic turn and the writers behind it, but the next year, LePan’s *The Net and the Sword* would go on to win the Governor General’s Award for poetry, and

kick off a long run of that award being dominated by mythopoeic writers. But while Macpherson was intensely concerned about the state of Canadian literature, and about the development of mythopoeic modernism, her own relationship to it was complicated. As she continued to Crawley,

I'm not up to it [writing "Canadian" poetry]: Canada is too large and overwhelming, or too flat and tasteless—or both together—I can't myself use it as either background or material, but very much admire [LePan's] attempt. It is a challenge—the Canadian Scene—& all that, but I'm not the one to take it up: that's partly why I feel I'm not a Canadian poet in any real sense. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

But while Macpherson was not up to writing a Canadian book of poetry, she may have hoped her own forthcoming collection, despite not being particularly Canadian, would help to fill the so-called vacuum of young poets in her adopted country.

When Macpherson said goodbye to her father and the Graves family and boarded the ship back to Canada, she left her poems in Graves's hands, and in her absence he set to work compiling them into a slim chapbook for publication. In addition to a number of earlier poems, among those Graves was considering were the two new ones she had written while in Mallorca; she sent them to Crawley for *Contemporary Verse* consideration, along with a note about the promised book:

Robert & Beryl & Martin propose to select print me in Mallorca, as the last offspring of the Seizin Press: about a dozen poems, probably a hundred and fifty copies. Not for sale: some for friends, some for people Robert thinks should have them, & some for review (you get a 'friend' copy, of course: but should be pleased if you would notice it in CV): any other, anyone who likes can have by writing to me. Shall of course acknowledge any CV has printed. By the way, these remarks are confidential: I still don't believe that my poor children will find themselves in print, and don't want anything said (even to friends, for the most part) until the thing is done. (JMP Box 1 File 8).

Despite her fears, the thing did get done, although not quite in the way that Macpherson wanted. Graves seemingly was not aware of Macpherson's growing belief in the necessity of form and content being identical—the contents identified with their container, the structure of the poems mirrored by the structure of the collection. She may not have made this explicit, or Graves may have failed to recognize or act on it because it was an element of her apocalyptic mythopoetics that did not align with his goddessist ones. Graves was also seemingly unconcerned about including those poems that might reveal Macpherson's love for Wels-Schön for what it was. *Nineteen Poems*—a title Graves selected over Macpherson's objections that it was too generic—was published as a slim, beige-covered chapbook in August, when Macpherson was back in "Ottawa, to work for a month for my dear Prof. Jonas, who's struggling with a book" (JMP Box 1 File 8) that would eventually be published as *The Gnostic Religion*.

Nineteen Poems also appeared without the acknowledgements that Macpherson had promised Crawley; as she wrote in apology, “I’m very sorry my booklet *won’t* have an acknowledgement to CV: Robert wrote a very strong letter saying *NEVER ACKNOWLEDGE*” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Macpherson knew that Graves was against dedications for the way they disturbed the universality and ahistoricity of poems by tying “the book down to personalities or the contemporary world or some such” (ACP Box 1 File 18), but she “thought he might have let an acknowledgement slip by. And can’t make an issue of it, because he’s doing the whole thing & paying for it as well” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Graves likewise did not allow Macpherson any input into the poems included in the collection: “I’d really rather have had more of a finger in my own pie—should have liked to decide the order myself, and to call the collection after one of the pieces in it—but could not easily have afforded it: nor more easily deprived Robert of the pleasure” (ACP Box 1 File 18).

In consequence, the collection ended up being a fairly miscellaneous compilation of poems that Macpherson wrote between 1947 and the spring of 1952, with a heavy emphasis on those that Graves appears to have chosen because they reflected his ideas about the goddess as both subject and Muse. Macpherson wrote to Crawley almost immediately after *Nineteen Poems* had arrived, to get his opinion on the book and to vent her concern about how it turned out:

Alan, do you like the book? is it all right? I’m more than bothered about it: seriously upset, in fact. Partly all kinds of things have got in that never should have done: partly it should never have been printed at all, only there was no telling Robert so. I do have faith in Robert’s critical judgment, but think this time it was asleep: and put all together, the poems seem much worse than they do separate ... is it only a casebook? either I am a poet now or I am not now & never shall be. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Nineteen Poems began, as Macpherson’s first *Contemporary Verse* collection did, with the macabre humour and wistfulness of “Ordinary People in the Last Days” and the more serious melancholy of “Poor Child.” But it then began to show signs of Graves’s intervention into its contents and ordering: “The Comforted” appeared without its partner “The Comforter,” and the remainder of the collection was made up of an assortment of early and later goddess poems. But despite its miscellaneous contents, Macpherson’s misgivings about Graves’s critical judgment, and her doubts about her own talents, the collection is startlingly accomplished for a poet barely into her twenties. In response to her concerns, Crawley reassured her that she was wrong in her assessment of *Nineteen Poems*—that she was indeed a poet, and that the collection was more than good:

I need not tell you how highly I believe in your ability and talent and I do hope you are able or make it possible that you should get as much in every good way from your gifts and capabilities. What I hope to see from you in poetry is so exciting and splendid to think of

that I am very proud in having been able to read so many of your first writings when they were fresh from your creating. (ACP Box 1 File 39)

Now more as an encourager than an editor, Crawley was still essential to Macpherson's progress as a poet.

Nineteen Poems was intended to function as a sort of poetic calling card, an introduction of Macpherson and her poetry to the poetry community beyond Graves's and Crawley's circles, and in that it succeeded. Copies were distributed amongst select members of the Canadian, European, and American poetic communities, and despite the fact that it was only reviewed in two places, those reviews connected Macpherson with two writers who would become core members of the Canadian mythopoeic modernist community: Northrop Frye and James Reaney. Frye reviewed *Nineteen Poems* in his annual "Letters in Canada" poetry review for the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, stating that "[o]f the shorter books [published this year], the best, I think, is Jay Macpherson's *Nineteen Poems*" (Frye, *Bush* 19). Given that Frye was strongly committed to criticism that did not evaluate works of literature,¹¹ but rather worked to place them within the context of literature as a whole, his choice to praise *Nineteen Poems* as the best of the year signalled just how much he admired it. Frye went on to praise Macpherson's "tight resonant stanzas," "adroit use of classical mythology," and "fanciful humour" (19), and he also admired her ability to manipulate the rhythmic structure of her poems by "vary[ing] the length of the individual lines skillfully [sic] and subtly" (19). Frye's review, though short and fairly general, is evidence that he understood and appreciated Macpherson's ongoing poetic project at an early stage.

In his review for *Queen's Quarterly*, Reaney suggested that Macpherson was wrong to worry that the volume was only a casebook, a miscellaneous catch-all that was lacking structural integrity or internal coherence. The result of the movement from the individual lyric (which had characterized her earliest work) to the suite-building that Crawley privileged to that of which Macpherson was increasingly desirous—building larger and more coherent poetic structures—was evident to Reaney in *Nineteen Poems* despite Graves's interventions. Reaney recounted in his review that "[a]s I read Miss Macpherson's batch I did get the feeling that I was really reading a long poem, there was a

¹¹As Frye argues in *Anatomy of Criticism*, evaluative criticism tends to be a "superimposed critical attitude" (9) that tells the reader little about the work in question. A.C. Hamilton explains that for Frye "a literary work should be contemplated as a pattern of knowledge, an act that must be distinguished, at least initially, from any direct experience of the work, . . . [Thus] criticism begins when reading ends: no longer imaginatively subjected to a literary work, the critic tries to make sense out of it, not by going to some historical context or by commenting on the immediate experience of reading but by seeing its structure within literature and literature within culture" (27).

feeling of continuous pattern, ideas and phrases kept recurring” (Reaney, “Canadian Writing” 555). Reaney’s recognition is unsurprising, as his own poetry was moving in the same direction—in *A Suit of Nettles*, published the year after Macpherson’s exquisitely structured *The Boatman*, he would create a cyclic, apocalyptic structure out of Spenser’s eclogues. But instead of his review bringing two of the central members of the mythopoeic modernist community closer together, it almost killed their relationship before it had even started. Despite the fact that Reaney said precisely what she wanted to hear about the book’s structure, Macpherson was horrified by Reaney’s review:

Was very reluctant to let QQ review 19P three years after: read it today (Reaney): intolerable. Have a letter from Colleen Mar 53 (I sent them 19P June 52 on publication) too[,] saying I would doubtless hear someday from Jamie himself how very much he enjoyed it: I guess I’ve heard. To review a young writer’s old book at all is cruel: to pick on me for what Robert did is worse: to call it under the circumstances “privately printed” is insufferable -- & me “a dear sweet thing”: for me to let it upset me is the extreme of folly, but made that way. (GJP Box 6 File 1)

She was furious at being blamed for deficiencies in the collection that were actually Graves’s doing and wrote angrily to Reaney and Thibodeau; their relationship would not warm up properly until the Kingston conference in 1955. But despite her reaction, Mount’s principle of elective communities would suggest that Reaney (and Frye) approved of *Nineteen Poems* because they saw something of themselves in it, that they recognized another member of their emergent elective community. This would prove to be quite true, although that community would not cohere in a single location for some years yet.

Montreal and McGill

After spending the last part of the summer back in Ottawa working with Jonas and his wife Lore, Macpherson packed up her life and moved it into MacLennan Hall, a student residence at McGill, to start her BLS. The previous fall, she had put off the decision about whether or not to leave London for the M.A. for as long as she possibly could, for so long that the Dean of Graduate Studies eventually had to rescind her offer to the English program because she had missed all of the deadlines. He did, however, very kindly make sure that the BLS program was able to provide her a spot in their program the following year. The publication of *Nineteen Poems* had given her hope that she might be cut out for a career as a poet, for which a day-job as a librarian would leave her time and energy. Despite knowing a number of poet-scholars—Johnston, Smith, and Dudek, among others—she still had her concerns about it as a career; she also did not have any female role models for that career path. But it was seemingly less the poetry part of the equation than it was the scholarly part that concerned her: as she wrote to Crawley, “I can’t make a living by fantasy-spinning

(Don't mean by that poetry: psycho-analytical lit. crit. & matriarchal mythological theories, both of which, despite Grete & Robert, I half consider pernicious.)" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Macpherson balked at becoming a scholar if scholarship meant having to create psychoanalytic or mythopoeic theory, and thinking toward the future, this statement might partly explain why Macpherson did not—as Atwood, Mandel, Reaney, and Jones would—become part of the group of myth critics who emerged in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s. It was not that she wanted to become a librarian, but she felt as though her options were limited: "I don't want to be a librarian, but one must do something, as I am always being told: and the trouble with more agreeable work is that it drains off my capacity for writing verse" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Macpherson also mourned that she had "lost the third eye that used to compose my essays for me, and do very badly without it" (JMP Box 1 File 8). The pattern-making impulse that let her fill her notebooks with goddess poems had temporarily deserted her as she tried to figure out what would come next in her poetic development.

Macpherson warned Crawley when she arrived in Montreal that "probably you will get fewer letters, as I have to share a room & hate longhand" (JMP Box 1 File 8). What she did not seemingly anticipate was that he would also receive rather less poetry. A number of her poems of the last year had appeared in *Contemporary Verse*—"Metamorphosis" and "The Third Eye" in Issue 37, "Oracular Head" and "Ill Wind" in Issue 38—but Issue 38 would be her last. *Contemporary Verse* folded before Macpherson found a way to begin writing again in her new city. Crawley had long despaired at the difficulty of keeping *Contemporary Verse* going with all of the hard work and continual seeking out of new material that it entailed. As he had written to Macpherson over the summer,

All writing in Canada this year dreadfully dull and depressing, lifeless and grinding out old stuff or new work no value...CV in a pretty deplorable state at the moment, a better bank showing than ever before and with not enough MSS to make another issue. No one is writing PK, Reaney, Thibeaudeau, Avison doing no poetry or prose or hack work. I am very disheartened and think seriously that CV has no further work to do, certainly not for present. If a need comes again there will be someone and some magazine to fill it. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Crawley was not alone in his uncertainty about the future of Canadian poetry. Dudek's "Où Sont Les Jeunes?," while unfair to the newer poets, suggests that he was likewise uncertain about where Canadian poetry was headed in the early 1950s, and Robert Weaver also shared their concerns: "When Mr. Crawley feels uncertain of himself and of the function of his magazine at the present time, it seems to me that he is simply reflecting the uncertainties of Canadian poetry during a period of change" (qtd. in McCullagh 45). The mythopoeic turn had not yet gained enough momentum to compensate for the silence of the forties poets. This general uncertainty about the future of

Canadian poetry as the mythopoeic turn took shape infected Crawley, and seeing this, the poetry community did their best to reassure him. Despite their tendency sometimes to look down on *Contemporary Verse* as “not a fighting magazine with a policy” (Dudek “Role” 208), a contingent of the old guard Montreal poets telegraphed Crawley in the fall of 1952 to say that

Montreal poets meeting tonight are convinced survival *Contemporary Verse* essential to Canadian literature stop Your ten years prove value of little magazine encouraging new and established writers to publishing [sic] best work stop You must present the fifties as you have presented the forties (qtd. in McCullagh 46)

But all of this encouragement was not enough to convince Crawley to continue, and Issue 39, which would appear just before the Christmas of 1953, would be the magazine’s last. As Crawley wrote in his final editorial,

We have a strong belief that the work of a little magazine under the same editors’ direction declines in time from its peak of usefulness. In this conviction we close our files and write the abrupt and final statement that this is the last issue of CV. This is not a sudden decision nor a capricious one. It has been made after much consideration and is weighted with regret at the termination of eleven years of an absorbing and rewarding job. (1)

The closure of *Contemporary Verse* was widely mourned, and it left a significant hole in the Canadian little magazine landscape. But fortunately for Macpherson, one of Crawley’s favourite parts of his job as editor—nurturing and supporting the writers he published, especially women—would continue.

Macpherson’s reasons for not writing poetry after she arrived in Montreal were the same as those that had plagued her before she had met Wels-Schön. She found her classes both demanding of her time and stupefying, she was neither happy nor unhappy enough to be inspired, and she was wholly removed from the kind of congenial poetic community that she had enjoyed with Page, Wels-Schön, and Graves and found necessary to her poetic productivity. As she wrote to Crawley, “Wish I were not sending you merely prose. I’m living discontentedly but cheerfully: odd combination: I would much rather be properly unhappy & write. Library School anything but *conducive*: superficial existence” (JMP Box 1 File 8). In her worse moods, she blasted her program for being “so stupid: I had thought that sort of hard-work-no-company atmosphere conducive to work—has been in the past—but now seems only stupefying” (ACP Box 1 File 18). These practical and social considerations were compounded by the fact that Macpherson’s inspiration was in search of a new Muse, and a new—non-goddess—focus. When she first met Page, a place with other poets meant Montreal, but both she and the city had changed since then. Macpherson now knew that other poets of her stripe existed elsewhere in Canada and Europe, and the concentration of poets

once in Montreal no longer existed: Smith was now in Michigan, Page in Ottawa, Anderson in Malaysia, Dudek just back from nearly a decade in New York, Waddington focused on her social work, and Klein mostly silent. Those Montreal poets and editors who were still in the city and still active in the poetry scene—Layton, Dudek, and Phyllis Webb—were the detested career boys and their friends, with whom Macpherson would have no truck. Webb “made effort at the beginning of the year to get in touch with me by letter” (ACP Box 1 File 18) but Macpherson rebuffed her overtures, partly because “a) I tend to make a point of avoiding involvement with my Mother’s friends” (they had met during Dorothy’s time in Montreal) “and b) I could not be in contact with any of the young writers here without being forced to declare my views on Dudek, etc.” (ACP Box 1 File 18). She was unwilling to engage them as she might once have done, and did not want to create conflict. Rather, “my one wish is to live a quiet life here & not expose myself, so let off steam in Ottawa & letters” (JMP Box 1 File 8).

She largely kept her word. *Cerberus*, the joint collection published by Dudek, Souster, and Layton came out the month after she started at McGill; Macpherson had no kind words for it, but she kept them contained to her letters to Crawley:

Why they don’t simply print the thing on toilet-paper—I shan’t make any suggestions re the composition of the ink—I don’t see. Have I written to you about it before? don’t remember: but at this point I line myself up firmly with the aesthetes to declare that this sort of thing is not beautiful and has no connection with poetry: it is probably not even true. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Macpherson could have been writing about any number of poems in *Cerberus*, but Dudek’s “Poem for Spring” is a good example of the sexualized, gendered verse she took issue with: his invocation to spring calls for the “the pussy willow” to “put out” and for the “summer fruit [to] be a full scrotum / between the desired branches” (*Collected* 61). Graves and Macpherson had talked quite a lot about sexism in the British poetry community, discussions that seemed to sensitize her to the issue of gender in a Canadian context. She had “told Robert I had some poems, Pestilence & some others like it, rejected by Lehmann’s *New Soundings*” (JMP Box 1 File 8), a rejection that Graves blamed on her gender. This was seemingly an eye-opening consideration for Macpherson: “Quite simple, said he, if you’d made sure that all the third personal pronouns were masculine, he’d have taken them. I protested & spluttered that the world wasn’t like that: whereupon he smiled forgivingly” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Layton’s “Poetess,” published in *Cerberus*, was precisely the kind of

gendered, sexualized, highly masculinist poetry with which Macpherson had always taken issue, but now even more so because it revealed so clearly—taking as its subject Miriam Waddington,¹² with whom Macpherson would in later years become friends—how little respect Layton had for women writers like her:

Her talk is pert and entertains.
Why, then, hearing her
Do I have such an extraordinary picture
Of nipples and pimples? (*Cerberus* 60)

After reading *Cerberus*, Macpherson wrote to Crawley that she felt “very strongly after coming back here that certain groups & writers may feel a need to express their masculinity, for fear of being tarred with a different brush: but it’s a pity they took their method from their five-year-old sons” (JMP Box 1 File 8). It was a shame—and a detriment to her work—that these groups and writers happened to be the leading lights of the poetry scene in her new city.

The criticism and poetry contained in *Contact* and *Cerberus* also led Macpherson to think that Layton and Dudek liked her brand of poetry as little as she liked theirs. Referencing *Cerberus*, she wrote to Crawley of her belief that they would “have none of me – their prejudice against ‘university graduates, underdeveloped schoolmarms, metaphysical nature-poets’, etcetc [sic] no doubt takes care of me” (JMP Box 1 File 8). As Layton wrote in *Cerberus*,

Gentility, propriety, respectability—give the thing any name you will—is responsible for nine-tenths of the miserable, devitalized stuff that passes for poetry in this country; and for the infantile pruriency that is the stock response of the great majority of Canadians to the appeal of art. So powerful is the grip of gentility that even those poets who are in rebellion against it write a kind of well-dressed, empty, pseudo-mystical nature verse, or leftist poetry with a Methodist flavour. Unless we fold up this genteel tradition, a tradition called into existence by a graceless leisure class but preserved by clergymen, underdeveloped schoolmarms, university graduates, and right-thinking social workers, very little vigorous and original artistic work will ever be seen in Canada. Whitman’s “barbaric yawp” is wanted to send them finger-plugging their ears and scurrying for cover under their tea tables. (45-6)

Layton, as he had been doing since the days of *First Statement*, used this new publication as a chance to pit factions of writers against each other—in this case, the “career boys” against Macpherson and those poets with whom she aligned herself. The splitting of Canadian poetry into artificial and misleadingly labelled factions—genteel versus barbaric, cosmopolitan versus native, impersonal versus subjective—was not just bad for Macpherson’s poetic productivity. Despite admitting to

¹² Elspeth Cameron identifies Waddington as the subject of “Poetess” in *Irving Layton: A Portrait*.

“Being of a partisan nature myself” (ACP Box 1 File 18), Macpherson believed that this factionalism was also bad for Canadian literature generally, and at least partially responsible for the decline in Canadian verse that led inexorably to the end of *Contemporary Verse*:

Even if all the poets & good poetry-readers of the country were an agreed and unified group all honestly & helpfully criticizing & encouraging, there would perhaps be fewer emergencies: but modern poetry isn’t like that. It’s so horribly split up: and one is not always convinced that one’s own particular corner of it is worth defending & going on with. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

While the factions Macpherson was thinking of in 1952 were still mostly divided along the old native-cosmopolitan lines, their boundaries and memberships were shifting so that, by late the next year, Macpherson could write to Johnston—himself a mythopoeic writer—that he needed to better promote his writing because “Come on! We are after all a fair chunk of the opposition—if merely in the sense that there is another life in Canada than that recorded in *Contact* & most of Birney’s book” (GJP Box 5 File 31), the anthology *Twentieth Century Canadian Poetry*. By 1955, she, Reaney, and Mandel would be able to identify each other as a distinct group called “the mythologists” (JMP Box 1 File 8). But in 1952, far from Crawley, Page, Graves, Johnston, and Wels-Schön—those who represented her particular formalist, mythic, considered corner of the poetry world—Macpherson found writing, and community building, hard to go on with: “I in particular have painful moral qualms: and periods of drought & doubt like everyone else: if it weren’t for a very few letter-writers, and you the first and most honest & faithful of them, should hardly have had the face to keep it up so long” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Macpherson’s drought and doubt was strong that autumn, and in consequence she wrote nothing after her arrival in Montreal.

Instead of writing poetry, Macpherson spent the fall on her deadly dull class assignments and watching out for how *Nineteen Poems* was making its way in the world. Most of the copies did not even elicit a reply: “I’ve sent various copies around, but no-one troubles to acknowledge: I don’t know even whether they arrive. About ten left, that no-one seems to want” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Macpherson was particularly upset with Floris McLaren, believing that if anyone should be happy to receive a copy, it should be one of the editors of the magazine where she got her start. McLaren did finally respond, with generous praise:

I was pleased and touched to receive [*Nineteen Poems*] and very grateful ... the small collection has a great deal of authority and it is very good to have it so beautifully printed and to have the critical standing of Robert Graves behind it. Reading the poems again, with the added strength that they gain from being together, I felt as I had when I first saw the first group that came to CV that you have truly a very special talent. (JMP Box 1 File 21; ellipsis in original)

McLaren understood more than the poems. She also understood how gifted Macpherson was, and provided a necessary reminder of those gifts at a time when Macpherson doubted her talents. McLaren was unashamedly jealous of how easily poetry seemed to come to someone so young—"I think there is a great deal of envy in my feelings....you seem to have skipped all the beginners fumbling" (JMP Box 1 File 21)—and warned Macpherson not to "under-value what you have or let it be side-tracked" (JMP Box 1 File 21). Presciently, McLaren knew that "the other side of the coin" of Macpherson's talent "must be intellectual loneliness. The compensation is that few people who do in any degree meet your thought give you more than most people find in a lifetime of ordinary friendships" (JMP Box 1 File 21). That intellectual loneliness was a large part of what kept Macpherson from writing—Wels-Schön was not in nearby St. Augustin but in faraway Mallorca, Page was involved with Arthur Irwin (of whom Dorothy Macpherson vocally disapproved), and Crawley was on the other side of the country. Her closest poetic friend was George Johnston, and she saw him only on trips home to Ottawa. The hope was that *Nineteen Poems* would help her gain the attention of more of these people who "met her thought," and it took longer to do this than Macpherson had hoped: "I had been spluttering to G Johnston about wicked or thoughtless people who didn't realize that even a very little book was written in life's blood & who accordingly didn't acknowledge" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Notes of acknowledgement, much less honest appraisal or praise, were slow to arrive. Macpherson was induced to "read my pamphlet to the Bibliog. Centre, with the result that now they have indexed it & the Lib School staff is demanding copies" (ACP Box 1 File 18); it was also indexed in *Canadiana*, and as much as Macpherson was plagued with "embarrassment and ill-temper and a sort of fright" (ACP Box 1 File 18) at the attention, she was also pleased that *Nineteen Poems* now had an official record in the annals of Canadian literature.

New Goddesses and Fallen Women

Finally that winter, despite the stifling dullness of library school and the frustration of not having any company, Macpherson got a glimpse of an idea brewing for a new set of poems: "something else is stirring, but all gets sidetracked into appalling dreams: bloody waste, but what can I do?" (ACP Box 1 File 18). That "flicker of something during the winter" eventually turned into a piece of writing that "isn't a poem, but amused me" (ACP Box 1 File 18), and more importantly was the first step toward what would become *O Earth Return*. As she wrote to Crawley, "It's about the Magdalen,

or Mary of Egypt, or some such character (the latter wanted to go from Palestine to Egypt¹³ to do eternal penance for her sins in the desert, but couldn't afford the passage-money—so sold herself separately to every sailor on board a cargo-boat—may as well repent for a sheep as for a lamb, I guess)” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Macpherson may also have been thinking of herself, and her willingness to do nearly anything to earn the passage-money to Mallorca, when she was inspired by Mary of Egypt's story. She included the poem, titled “Love in Egypt,” with her letter:

Love, here are thorns, and here's a wilderness,
—And yet you visit me?
I have a cell, your rod—
No more to see.

A spring restores these sands,
Pouring its rocky basin full.
Love, will you drink from my hands
Or rather from my skull? (ACP Box 1 File 18)

The poem, written from the perspective of Mary of Egypt after she has begun her penance in the desert, emerged out of a library school assignment where Macpherson had to simulate being a researcher looking to answer a specific question—in this case, the origins of the Elizabethan proverb “They that die maids, lead apes in hell.” This research led her to explore stories about virginal and fallen women, including Mary of Egypt and the Magdalen. Given the taunts about schoolmarmish prudery by Dudek, and her growing interest in the relationship between gender, sexuality, and society, it was little wonder that this particular research question appealed to her. Completing the assignment meant “endless swotting about in folklore, ballad literature, etc. etc., and I'm feeling half my own breathing self again: real life never had half so much charm for me” (JMP Box 1 File 8). She was enamoured with research, and we might wonder if her newfound love made her regret choosing to do a BLS over an M.A.

It is easy to understand Macpherson's fascination with the topic, given her interest in both biblical mythology and the treatment of women in literature. After the Protestant split from Rome in 1534, celibacy—particularly the commitment amongst those in religious orders to remain celibate—became associated with the horrors of popery, and the invective against celibacy was gradually extended to all women who forewent the holy bonds of matrimony and died virgins. In her research, Macpherson had traced the proverb “as far back as a ballad cycle about the Magdalen originating as

¹³ Macpherson gets the story slightly wrong, as in the traditional Mary of Egypt story Mary is born in Egypt and travels to Palestine. For the purposes of inspiration, however, we might argue that the particulars are not especially important.

far as is known in Catalonia” (ACP Box 1 File 18), Mary Magdalene being a crucial example of a woman who had not died a maid yet still attained the highest levels of holiness. We can see the influence of the proverb’s origin in ballad in “Love in Egypt,” which adopts the short stanzas and abcb rhyme scheme of the ballad form, as does quite a lot of Macpherson’s verse.

There is no sense that in “Love in Egypt” Macpherson was interested in treating mythology as anything other than precisely that—mythology. Indeed, in her soon-to-be-written M.A. thesis, Macpherson explicitly warns readers not to conflate a poet’s use of biblical myth and poetry with his beliefs: “The poet’s treatment of such patterns may be expected to reflect his view of the relation of sacred and secular learning; however, it is not necessary to assume any such correlation between his literary practice and his formal beliefs” (“Milton” 5-6). Although she was referring to Milton, her caution applies equally to our reading (and in many cases misreading) of her use of biblical myth as evidence of her religious belief. Macpherson’s religious beliefs were, in fact, non-existent. The one book she was forbidden to read as a child was the Bible, and despite attending a convent school in Newfoundland, she was confirmed in her agnosticism by her early teens. This was still the case even when she began helping to edit the *Hymn Book* of the United and Anglican Churches of Canada in the 1960s, another act that has long been taken as evidence of the necessity to read her as a devotional poet. That this is a misreading—albeit a very common and longstanding one¹⁴—is undeniable: Macpherson was open about the fact that “I’m a hopeless agnostic,” and likewise openly admitted that she was interested in scripture and religious song solely for their “biblical poetry” and richness of mythological imagery, no more (ACP Box 1 File 18). In her new experiments in the early 1950s—for “Love in Egypt” was one of her first poems, since “Ordinary People in the Last Days,” to use biblical, rather than Classical, mythology—Macpherson treated the Bible not as a devotional text, but as one of a number of mythological source texts for her research into the prohibitions against female chastity. Her poems going forward would very often share with “Love in Egypt” an

¹⁴ The reading of Macpherson as a devotional poet is commonplace. *Jay Macpherson and Her Works*, the most extensive extant biographical and critical work on Macpherson, is representative. Lorraine Weir frames Macpherson’s writing and other work in specifically religious terms: she writes of Macpherson’s poetic career and academic life as a vocation (2), focuses extensively on her “liturgical work” (2), and suggests that for Macpherson, the relationship between self and reader is “ideally one of sacramental transformation and nourishment possible only within a community where the word is spoken, enacted, every day” (3). She also suggests, “for Macpherson from the beginning of her career until the writing of *Welcoming Disaster*, and for Eliot after the composition of ‘Ash Wednesday,’ the assertion of meaning through Christian humanism sustains the anagogic order and defines the place of nature” (4). The assumption that Macpherson’s writing is rooted in Christian humanist belief is both erroneous and widespread, and this is a crucial reason why an accurate historical and biographical study of Macpherson and her writing is necessary.

explicit focus on the ways that society treats women, and on biblical mythology instead of, or as a complement to, the Classical mythology that had dominated her early work.

That winter Macpherson decided that she would, in one thing only, engage with the despised Layton and Dudek—she would submit *Nineteen Poems* to the McGill Literary Award, which she assumed they would both be involved in adjudicating. As she laughingly wrote to Crawley,

McGill annual literary contest coming up. I've written nothing since last summer, but think I shall enter Nineteen Poems – for the rather whimsical reason that I was awarded twenty-five dollars a year here for verse over three years, and McGill's fifty would bring my average back up to what I was – there can't be many Canadian poets who've been so kindly treated! (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Entering the McGill contest was both about keeping up her record, and about the money: Macpherson's financial situation was precarious, her parents not willing to send her any more than the minimum support and her access to funds kept in trust for her in England complicated and limited. After losing her job waitressing at the faculty club because another woman wanted her job back, Macpherson—tired of babysitting, after years of doing so for neighbours, as well as for the Graves and Jonas families—resorted to applying for jobs as an artist's model. She was not hopeful, though, about her chances of supplementing her income via the McGill prize: “if Messrs Dudek and Layton have anything to do with the affair” (JMP Box 1 File 8), she believed that she “may as well go hang my lute on a willow tree, they'll have none of me—their prejudice against ‘university graduates, underdeveloped schoolmarms, metaphysical nature-poets’, etcetc”—a direct reference to Layton's *Cerberus* essay—“no doubt takes care of me” (JMP Box 1 File 8). She was additionally nervous about submitting the collection out of fear that it would reveal to the world that she loved Wels-Schön, but she proceeded anyway. Macpherson did not win— “Don't know who got the first prize: the second went to last year's winner, a young girl who writes children's stories” (ACP Box 1 File 18)—but her willingness to expose the collection to public notice suggests that she had gained enough critical distance from it, and from Wels-Schön, to move past her early protectiveness of both her verse and her feelings for her Muse.

Indeed, her relationship with Wels-Schön, and with Graves, had cooled considerably since her return from Spain. As she wrote to Crawley—seemingly in a rush to get it all on paper, in one long sentence—she

was provoked awhile ago into writing clearly to Grete or Robert, I'm not sure which, that I had simply ceased to believe in matriarchate, goddessism, etc., and felt myself much freer and happier since, with the result that Grete hasn't written to me since November (that must have pricked her: I hadn't meant to), and Robert has just written affectionately but firmly that

obviously ‘poetry was too demanding and embarrassing an experience’ for me and I’d given it up for reasons of cowardice, and I’d better give up verse and also Grete as well, since I could have nothing more to do with either any more – that was the gist of it. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Macpherson might have anticipated that this would happen: Martin Seymour-Smith had warned her that “Robert...only likes unsuccessful poets” (Seymour 337), and her determination to be both independent of him and successful as a poet (which *Nineteen Poems* promised she would do) seemingly threatened Graves. Despite her continued uncertainty over whether or not she would work to become a professional poet, Macpherson had enough belief in her own talent—and in her growing understanding that Robert’s goddessism was dangerous to her growth as a poet and a person—to be angered, rather than discouraged, by Graves’s response to her denunciation of goddessism. In reaction to his letter, Macpherson dashed off the poem “Goddesses,” which was “written in a bloody fury in Montreal when Robert wrote that both he & Grete had decided I had given up poetry for librarianship because I found his Goddesses too demanding” (GJP Box 5 File 31). As she wrote,

Tell the white lady goddesses I will be theirs,
Walk in white or scarlet as their rule declares,
Cut or bind my hair, recite with candid look
The genealogies from their holy book,

Embrace what ape or fiend they will, suffer what grief,
Suckle their familiars—and if I starve my child,
Let my good Lord not trouble to be mild,
Since all was done in perfect unbelief. (JMP Box 6 Folder 2)

Graves’s goddesses required her total obedience—an obedience to tradition that Macpherson reflects with her structured quatrains and ababccdc rhyme scheme—with potentially disastrous outcomes, for which Macpherson knew she would eventually have to pay the price if she remained in his elective community: her creativity would eventually be stifled by the strain of playing the *pais*, her voice warped by writing only as or of the Muse, the range of her interests and allusions narrowed by Graves’s own narrowness. For this to happen would be particularly disastrous since her obedience to the goddess was no longer supported by belief. She had decided that the price was too high to pay. And while her “perfect unbelief” in “white lady goddesses” also extended to any belief in the “good Lord,” Macpherson’s transition to Christian mythology at the end of the poem suggests that she had found in it a less dangerous, or at least less divisive, source of symbolism than Graves’s Classical myths.

That neither Graves nor Wels-Schön was able to recognize nor accept that there was something far more than just goddessism going on in Macpherson's work speaks to the closed-mindedness that characterized Graves's system-building. Once Macpherson got over her anger, she was able to articulate in prose her issues with *The White Goddess*, particularly the way that Graves allowed his beliefs about poetry, and the comprehensiveness of his system-building, to skew his perceptions of her as a poet. As she wrote to Crawley,

[I]t's all wrong: Robert's mental force shades into genius, and his genius into madness. His system is too inclusive. And I don't think it's right to let his poetry depend more and more on the system, as it does: his enormous sense of humour doesn't for once put him outside the world he's made for himself. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Macpherson was concerned not only for the potential distortions to her own work of being forced within the box created by *The White Goddess*, but also for its implications for Graves's own poetry. The mixed reception of his later work suggests that her concerns were not unfounded. Her issues with the over-inclusiveness of Graves's system will, when she comes to study with Frye, make her likewise suspicious of his totalizing system building. But it would be a few more years before Macpherson was willing to completely admit, as much popular opinion did then and certainly does now, that Graves's theories were indeed mad, and that his treatment of women in theory and in life could charitably be called problematic, especially women who were or wanted to be writers. Margaret Atwood, whom Macpherson introduced to Graves as an undergraduate, wrote about her reaction to his work when she was about the age Macpherson was when she first met Graves, and we can hear some of Macpherson's criticisms in her words:

I first ran into the priestesses of Art in Robert Graves's book, *The White Goddess*, in which it is maintained that women can't be real poets unless they take on the role of the Nightmare Life-in-Death Triple Goddess, and, as her priestesses, crush men underfoot like bugs and drink their blood like wine. I read this when I was nineteen or so, and it was not encouraging to a girl who had been runner-up in the Consumers' Gas Miss Homemaker Contest: drinking the blood of my paramours was not my idea of a fun-time Saturday-night date. Provincial of me, but there you are. Graves did shake me up, though, and cause me to wonder whether I was really cut out for the life of Art. (*Negotiating* 85-6)

Macpherson was of the same opinion—goddessism was no longer for her, in art or in life. As she would later write in her review of the book of myths that Graves and Janet de Glanville had been working on while Macpherson was in Mallorca—the Penguin volume *The Greek Myths* (1955)—she went so far as to say that “Like *The White Goddess* its progenitor, *The Greek Myths* in spite of the tremendous suggestiveness of many things in it is a crank book” (“Greek” 18). But as Graves's new

Muse, Wels-Schön was seemingly untroubled by his theories about women writers, and appeared to have aligned herself with his opinions on goddesses and on Macpherson's reasons for choosing library school. Wels-Schön wrote no response to Macpherson's letter herself, but let Graves speak for her, and Macpherson wrote to Crawley that "As for Grete, I shan't know till I see her – that's supposed to be in the summer, although Robert obscurely threatens God knows what" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Graves's supposedly goddess-inspired jealousy of a woman who could challenge him as a writer no longer made sense to Macpherson as it might once have: "Odd to think that one can provoke such jealousy – and that its pretext is a theory for which I would once have given my blood but which I now find merely irritating" (JMP Box 1 File 8). With the break with Graves, and perhaps with Grete, her goddessist phase was definitively over. It was time to go down the new path opened up by "Love in Egypt."

Blake Over Burgers: Meeting Frye

Macpherson's library school class was planning a field trip to visit the Toronto Reference Library just before Easter, and George Johnston was convinced that Macpherson needed to meet Northrop Frye, with whom he was friends, while she was in Toronto. Her research project for library school, along with her continuing inability to write, had made her begin to think seriously again about pursuing graduate school and giving up her idea of library by day and poetry by night. Crawley, who had seen a number of his poets successfully become poet-scholars, did not believe that becoming a professor necessitated giving up all time and energy to write poetry and he was strong in his encouragement that she seriously consider working to become a poet-scholar. He had written to her when she was vacillating about whether or not to accept the offer to the McGill M.A. that "You are a scholar and must bend all your ways towards making this your life work so that your writing in whatever branch you choose will be not only a worthwhile product but one in which you will have every available help and pleasure" (ACP Box 1 File 39). Johnston was likewise convinced that this career path would suit Macpherson. He also knew that Macpherson and Frye spoke the same language—it was he who brought *Nineteen Poems* to Frye's attention—and that she needed to meet the one person in Canada who would be the perfect graduate supervisor for her, and who might be able to fill the Muse-shaped hole left by Graves and Wels-Schön. For her part, Macpherson was not particularly interested in meeting Frye in person. As she wrote to Crawley, "I admired his book and all that, but feel most of the best of such people is in their books and that it's bound to be disappointing to meet them – but swallowed protests, as George was so set on it" (ACP Box 1 File

18). Johnston arranged a meeting, and Macpherson, resigned to the idea, thought that meeting Frye “should be interesting” if nothing else, especially given that she was “most interested in *Fearful Symmetry*” when it came out in 1947 “and having been a fanatic Blakeian” since long before then (JMP Box 1 File 8).

Macpherson and Frye arranged to meet at Murray’s Restaurant, the venerable diner in the bottom of the Park Plaza Hotel at the corner of Bloor Street and Avenue Road. The Park Plaza was a frequent haunt of University of Toronto faculty and students, who liked to eat at Murray’s and drink in the King Cole Room, the hotel’s basement beer parlour. Frye met her just after escaping a meeting, and it is easy to imagine the figure she would have encountered: flyaway hair, a heavy overcoat and spectacles, and an intense shyness that often came across as (and perhaps more often than not was) arrogance. Given that Macpherson was also prone to be in public what Rosemary Sullivan calls “skittishly shy” (*Red* 80), it is a wonder that she and Frye managed to start up a conversation. But their mutual shyness seemed not to be an impediment, and Macpherson “had precisely two hours of him, not counting one book & numerous articles” (JMP Box 1 File 8) of his she had read in the past. She came away with an impression of Frye as “a most odd creature” and “certainly as prickly as a porcupine” (JMP Box 1 File 8), an impression it would take him a long time to dispel. But he also convinced her that he was a “saintly man” (JMP Box 1 File 8) with his promise that if she would make up her mind to come to the University of Toronto for her M.A. in the fall, he would do a directed reading course on Blake just for her. As Macpherson wrote to Crawley, “he wasn’t going to give any grad. courses next year, having to go away [to Princeton] in the early spring, but has relented & offered to give me Blake entirely by myself” (JMP Box 1 File 8), an offer that greatly impressed her. Frye came away from their first meeting with an equally high opinion of Macpherson. As he wrote to Johnston,

I thought your Jay Macpherson was a completely charming youngster, and I was delighted to meet her. Only I feel a bit embarrassed about her wanting to study with me next year—I’ve told her I’m going to Princeton in February—it’s a new lectureship they’re inaugurating, and it’s quite a break for me....She says she’ll follow me to Princeton—but, dammit, that’s a men’s college. Rather ironic in view of her background [given that she attended an all-girls convent school in Newfoundland]. (Frye, *Northrop* 43)

Despite the fact that he had “decided not to give any graduate courses next year ‘as nobody here knows what I know’”—a statement that Macpherson believed to be “both like him and somehow fitting” (ACP Box 1 File 18) in its egotism—Frye had apparently decided by the end of their first

meeting that unlike the rest of his graduate students, Macpherson knew enough to be worth his time.

Macpherson had agreed to meet Frye mostly to please Johnston, and with very low expectations for what the outcome of their meeting might be. But her expectations were greatly exceeded, for in those two hours Macpherson became convinced that she had found another speaker of her mythic language, a new Muse to replace the lost inspiration of Wels- Schön and Graves. As she wrote to Crawley, she left Murray's "satisfied that [Frye] speaks my language, only knows it better than I do, and can answer a great many of my questions" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Moreover, she was "convinced that I've found what for the moment I most badly need" (ACP Box 1 File 18): someone who could help her get her third eye back, "get back to thinking in pictures again and try to recover my sense of pattern" (GJP Box 5 File 31) so that she would once again be able to write. Macpherson's personal theory of poetics distinguished between "Milton's sort of poet," who "of course can practice [sic], and my sort," who "can't" (GJP Box 5 File 31): as a Muse poet, Macpherson was either inspired to write and set down nearly perfect poems all at once, or she was unable to write at all, which was the case now and had been before she met Wels-Schön. It was the pattern-making function of her lost third eye—"Ah love, its light is done!" (*Poems* 13)—in concert with her immersion in a congenial poetic and intellectual community that fueled her poetic productivity. The close relationship Macpherson identified between her pattern-making, visionary, third eye and Frye's own interest in vision and structure was what, more than anything else, made her decide "at pretty well any price to go to Toronto next year—went down to see someone [in the English department] about it, and probably shall enter as a graduate in the fall & take two years doing first honours Eng. & then grad. courses, & a thesis" (JMP Box 1 File 8). She was willing to take a library job and come to Toronto without becoming a student, but Johnston insisted that she do the thing properly. Johnston used his connection with Norman Endicott, then in charge of admissions for the English program, to encourage the program to accept her. Endicott agreed, on the condition that she take enough undergraduate courses to make up for the fact that her own undergraduate training was not in English, but in Classics. Macpherson knew that "Something may yet happen to change my mind, but for the moment I feel well satisfied"—and more importantly "convinced that F[rye] can start me writing again if anyone can—and that is the main thing" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Having made the decision, Macpherson was both nervous and impatient to begin. But she decided that anxiety would not be helpful, and that she instead "shall fold my hands in my lap & say to my soul, Be still: such at least is my resolution" (JMP Box 1 File 8). Now it was just necessary

to convince her mother to help her pay for her degree and let her move to Toronto, and to convince her father that his daughter probably was not going to become a librarian.

Macpherson had plenty to keep her busy that spring and summer before leaving for Toronto. In addition to finishing up her library school assignments and exams, she spent a good deal of her time preparing for her new courses. She had decided that she would “work as hard as it [sic] mortally possible” (ACP Box 1 File 18) to prepare for graduate school in September, especially because she felt that her year of library school had tarnished her memory and critical faculties. In preparation, “George [Johnston] is teaching me Anglo-Saxon to make next year easier: I’m trying to get more familiar with the obscurer parts of Blake, too, so as not to waste Frye’s time” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Macpherson had originally wanted to begin taking Frye’s graduate seminars as early as the summer—the other half of her determination to work as hard as possible was her determination that “the only thing I will not do is wait” (ACP Box 1 File 18)—but she was committed to working for Hans Jonas, helping his wife Lore with the children and continuing her work on the translation of *The Gnostic Religion*. Too, given the breakup of her marriage, Wels-Schön had decided to stay in Spain instead of coming home, and Macpherson did not have the stomach for going through the rigmarole of getting another visa and travelling to Mallorca.¹⁵ Graves’s threats to keep her and Wels-Schön apart also still hung in the air and made staying away, safely in Canada, the best-seeming option. Macpherson took her preparations for grad school seriously, and by the end of the summer had already completed an essay on romantic elements in Gray and Blake and another on Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale “The Nightingale.”

In addition to bringing her into contact with Frye, that spring and summer also marked the beginning of Macpherson’s friendship with Daryl Hine, who at the time was still in high school. Hine had been publishing in *Contemporary Verse* since 1952, and Macpherson wrote to Crawley of her “interest in Daryl Hine: should like to see more” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Knowing that she would understand the experience of making one’s way as a young writer in Canada—Hine was the same age Macpherson had been when she made friends with Page and started corresponding with Crawley—Crawley put the two young poets in touch. As Crawley described Hine, “he is very earnest

¹⁵ In the notes to *Northrop Frye: Selected Letters*, Robert Denham claims that “Macpherson did follow Frye to Princeton, where she attended his lectures” (307). There is no evidence to corroborate this fact in Macpherson’s papers, Frye’s journals, or her correspondence with Crawley, Jonas, or Johnston. We would expect to find such evidence if she had gone, given that they were her most frequent correspondents during this period. The fact that Princeton was an all-male institution until 1969 (although female students did sometimes sit in on classes informally before that point) is further evidence against Macpherson having been there.

and determined to write but is just a little too anxious to do too many things, painting, music and writing” (ACP Box 1 File 39). After Macpherson’s death, Hine remembered that early acquaintance: “My first poems had appeared in a Canadian magazine, *Contemporary Verse*. Jay was in the UK and wrote to the editor asking that he introduce us. At that young age, I poured out my soul to her and she was sympathetic – for she had had a similar experience as a young woman practically orphaned in Newfoundland” (“Daryl” 14). As Hine was thinking of moving to Ottawa, Macpherson soon connected him with Johnston, and both poets took on the task of acting as Hine’s readers and mentors. “Jay arranged a working scholarship at Carleton College (now university) for me, but I ended up with a scholarship to McGill. Temperamentally we were very different” (14), Hine recalled, but their shared experience of being young poets in a big country with a dispersed literary community connected them across those differences. Macpherson would continue to mentor Hine for the next decade or so.

While marking the beginning of her relationships with Frye and Hine, that spring and summer also marked the end, at least for the present, of Macpherson’s friendship with Page. Dorothy Macpherson had distanced herself from Page because of, in her daughter’s estimation, “jealousy over me. Her willingness to let my brother and me find quasi-parents outside home turned in time to resentment” (“Memories” 90). Jay Macpherson and Page had agreed that “under the circumstances it seemed better not to meet” (90), although they still corresponded. But Jay’s “mother, who detested Communists and Mounties about equally, was among those who believed that Arthur Irwin’s mandate as Film Commissioner was to ‘clean up’ the Film Board on the promise of a diplomatic appointment” (90) and the announcement of Page’s engagement to Irwin did not go down well with her. Macpherson had no issue with Page’s choice, but admitted that she “was somewhat drawn into her [mother’s] view of it as a defection” (90) and in the face of Dorothy’s “emotional blackmail” (90) sided with her mother. Johnston took Macpherson to an art exhibition in June that the now-married Irwins were also attending, and Macpherson and Page met for the first time in many months; Page “was friendly and gracious, so briefly that it can have been no effort” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Macpherson was stung by Irwin’s inattention—“to him I’m the sort of small fry that one doesn’t even bother to throw back”—but less so by Page’s polite facade, since “the whole matter of PK has wounded me so deeply over a number of years that there’s only scar tissue left: insensitive stuff” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Whatever Dorothy Macpherson believed about what Arthur Irwin was willing to do to secure a diplomatic appointment abroad, he did secure one, and the Irwins departed for Australia just weeks after Page and Macpherson’s last meeting.

In the mid-1990s, Macpherson published the essay titled “Memories of Ottawa” I have quoted from above, one that recounted her friendship with Page and its end. Macpherson sent a note of explanation and apology for her younger self’s behaviour to Page just after the essay’s publication, one that included a mea culpa: “the editor of the magazine cut off a final sentence which said, in effect, that if anyone defected” from their friendship, “it was me” (PKPP Box 39 File 16). Macpherson concluded the letter with “Love—warm thanks for your then and now putting up with my emotional confusions, since I didn’t manage to say it in print” (PKPP Box 39 File 16). While “all that [wa]sn’t *quite* water under the bridge” (PKPP Box 39 File 16) after the letter, Macpherson and Page’s correspondence and friendship started back up again, and continued for the rest of their lives. But for the meantime, back in the early 1950s, Macpherson was prepared to put in the hands of one man the Muse-power that Page, Crawley, Graves, and Wels-Schön used to share amongst them: Northrop Frye.

Acta Victoriana

In early September 1953, Macpherson moved into an unsatisfactory attic bedroom in a rooming house at 27 Tranby Avenue in Toronto—it was too small to entertain and the house smelled—and began her M.A. Unlike when she started her BLS, she was extremely busy and highly engaged; her classes included Chaucer with Milton Wilson, 19th Century Thought with A.S.P. Woodhouse, Old English with Charles Dunn, Milton and Spenser with Frye and Millar MacLure, a number of Frye’s and Woodhouse’s undergraduate courses as an auditor, and the directed reading course on Blake’s prophetic works that Frye had promised when they first met that winter. But despite her punishing schedule, moving to Toronto and into her graduate studies was an easier transition for Macpherson than the difficulties of her previous moves suggested it might be. She was delighted by the freedom of living alone, gloried in being immersed entirely in literary study, and quickly found two jobs, one working for Canadian literature professor Robert McDougall, the other manning the desk at the Victoria College Library two nights a week. Macpherson was determined not to repeat her year of social isolation in Montreal. As she vowed to Johnston, “I *will* acquire friends here, and I *will* be in a position to offer them tea” (GJP Box 6 File 1; emphasis in original). Her social circle rapidly expanded, although not with many of her classmates. Since she had arrived in Canada, Macpherson had always felt herself somewhat separate from her peers, and far more comfortable with, and interested in, older friends with whom she had more in common. This distance manifested itself physically in her classes, at least in Frye’s perception. As he noted, “Jay is doing very well here,

attending all my lectures, which I find a little disturbing, and sitting as far as possible from the other students, which I find considerably more disturbing. But there's no doubt the poor youngster does have a problem trying to fit in where she can" (Frye, *Northrop* 44). Frye seemingly did not yet understand Macpherson's capacity to learn, her habit of completely immersing herself in whatever she found of interest, or the way that her experiences at school and elsewhere had conditioned her to look for friends not among her peers, but with those older than she. Indeed, Macpherson seemingly did not have any trouble fitting in other places. Her Toronto social circle had quickly grown to include Gloria and Norman Newton (writer friends of Hine's), Margaret Prang (a fellow boarder and graduate student in history), and David Hoeniger (a member of the Victoria College teaching staff who was finishing his Oxford doctorate), among others. Far from being always alone, Macpherson "enjoyed my freedom – entertain to all hours & cart down sherry bottles in the morning" (ACP Box 1 File 18) and regularly evicted the Newtons from her room at two o'clock in the morning. She and Hoeniger dated throughout that first fall and winter, their relationship ending amicably when he met his future wife Judith, a microbiologist at the university.

Macpherson and Frye were also slowly getting to know each other. She had explained to him some of her relationship with Graves, and "Graves, from what she tells me, tended to dramatize her as little girl and symbolic child, which presumably helped to give her all those Betty-Boop mannerisms, and yet her precocity removes her from her own age group" (Frye, *Northrop* 44). The simultaneously patronizing, sexualized, and admiring language Frye used to describe Macpherson suggests that his response to her was complicated, and not wholly academic. It also does not line up particularly closely with the recollections of her by others around the same time, like Jonas, who described her as

a young girl with black hair pulled back tightly in a bun. She wore a sort of monklike robe, but down below, where you could see her legs, she had on socks in two different colors and unmatched shoes. It was obvious that she put very little attention into her appearance, but she listened intently, and it soon turned out that she was an extraordinary person. She was a very gifted poet and....a master of the English language. (*Memoirs* 169)

Macpherson continually fell into the trap of being framed by the limited and static images of women available to the men who controlled the doors through which women writers and scholars had to enter. As Ethel Wilson put it, "These doors were opened to us, poets or writers of prose, by ... men, and if we would, and could, we passed through the doors into the open air of speech and communication" (34). Layton, Dudek, Graves, and now Frye seemingly had difficulty (one that Crawley, Johnston, and Jonas were less prone to) in seeing her as a flesh and blood person, a multi-

faceted one who was far more than a walking set of mother-virgin-whore archetypes. Macpherson herself well understood the power, and the problem, of viewing women as icons rather than individuals, for she had done the same with Wels-Schön in reducing her to images of the goddess. And too, she often cast her friends, and especially her Muses, as mythical creatures rather than people; she had already begun referring to Frye as one of her angels, with the explanation to Johnston that “When I came home from convent-school I complained to Mother that all the Catholic children had guardian angels and why hadn’t I? whereupon she said I could have if I liked; and I do” (GJP Box 5 File 31). The poetry she began writing that fall, after her long hiatus, was unsurprisingly inspired by her desire to explore the issue of the perception and treatment of women, especially by men and within the structures of power they created, as something other than icons, images, or angels.

When Macpherson decided to pursue her M.A., she hoped that this change in both focus and environment would chase away the writer’s block that had plagued her—with the exception of “Love in Egypt,” which she did not consider a proper poem, and “Goddesses,” which was as much a rant as it was verse—since she moved to Montreal. Slowly, her writer’s block did disappear. *Nineteen Poems* had begun doing the work she and Graves wanted it to—bringing attention to Macpherson and her work within the Canadian and international poetry communities—and “[Robert] Weaver wrote to me about the CBC” (ACP Box 1 File 18) asking for poems to include on the new radio program he was developing that would eventually become the acclaimed *Anthology*. But as “Sorely as I should like, for the first time in my life, to sell a poem”—for Weaver was offering fifty cents a line—“I doubt I’ve got anything. Except a sort of sputter about the Magdalen [“Love in Egypt”] ...and a sense of something coming up that won’t be hurried but makes me feel contented & broody” (ACP Box 1 File 18). The something that was coming up would prove to be a group of poems about women, like Mary of Egypt and the Magdalen, who were considered fallen within the context of Judeo-Christian mythology, “a kind of cycle of fallen women—Magdalen, Eve, Psyche, Persephone, that sort” (ACP Box 1 File 18) comprising a mix of figures from both biblical and Classical mythology. Using these fallen women as objective correlatives, Macpherson would explore the pains and the pleasures of being a woman in mid-century Canada using a mythical method that drew parallels between her experience and that of being a woman in first-century Israel, or ancient Greece.

Macpherson’s research into the Magdalen had shown her another way than goddessism to write about women and to work things out from a female point of view. We might read “Love in

Egypt” as one of her first post-Graves attempts to write *as* a woman, not as *pais* or the Muse or an honorary man. Although she did not have anything other than “Love in Egypt” for Weaver in December, by March Macpherson had “sixty lines at the outset—more like forty” (ACP Box 1 File 18), but they were as yet “not unified & much of it poor stuff—have been off writing for so long that what I do now is very uncertain and unassured” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Macpherson knew what it was that she wanted to write, but felt that she had neither the time nor the energy to make progress on it:

Have the outline of a cycle of fallen women in my mind, including a couple already written—one is Magdalen—but can’t possibly work it out in time. Have been thinking about it for months—in fact the most important item goes back nearly three years, & that’s Psyche*, whom I’ve wrestled with on & off ever since. But what with pressure of essays (a great deal drained off into an enormous essay on Spenser for the good MacLure, which left me exhausted: that immediately following on Fenix) & sheer keeping myself alive & never any music or relaxation, circumstances just aren’t propitious. (GJP Box 5 File 31).

But then the deadline to submit an original “group of related poems amounting to about a hundred lines” (ACP Box 1 File 18) for the E.J. Pratt Prize was announced. The prize was worth a hundred dollars, which meant the difference between being able to return to university the next fall or not, “Seeing that I am in serious doubts even as to how I can finance coming back next year” (ACP Box 1 File 18). The financial and time pressure of the Pratt Prize was what Macpherson needed to force her to bring her cycle of fallen women to fruition. What she sent to Crawley and to Johnston for their thoughts was a group of poems, some new and some the product of what she called “notebook scraping” (GJP Box 5 File 31) for poems written as early as 1948 that could potentially flesh out her submission.

Macpherson had chosen Frye as her graduate supervisor because she believed doing so would inspire her, and it had; but despite their obvious attractions, Macpherson remained frankly skeptical about Frye’s theories. As she wrote to Johnston after she had been studying with Frye for a couple of months, she “should like to say something slightly awkward. Like the rest of the world, I have my reservations about F[rye] and his systematizing, though they probably do not coincide with the general ones” (GJP Box 5 File 31). Despite her serious reservations about his systematizing tendencies—a skepticism rooted not only in her belief in the artificiality and instability of pattern and order, but in her experience of the negative effects of Graves’s system building and application to real life—Macpherson found her discussions with Frye about Blake, and Blake’s system of personal mythology, creatively productive. She by no means fully comprehended Frye’s system—both his systematic approach to Blake in *Fearful Symmetry*, and the new anatomy of criticism he was

working out as he prepared his lectures for Princeton¹⁶—and refused to work to fully understand it quite on purpose. She was, however, willing to use bits and pieces of his theories for her own creative ends as she composed and pulled together her Pratt Prize grouping. She claimed that “I don’t understand F’s & Blake’s system as it stands, but seem to have reshuffled bits of it” (GJP Box 5 File 31), believing that his system was useful to her as a creative prompt but not as something to adopt as her own: “The longer I can delay the process of working through whatever his system turns out to be (and I have a fair idea by now), the more I am likely to get out of it” (GJP Box 5 File 31). Even though Frye “serves my purpose admirably ... I have to get back to thinking in pictures again and try to recover my sense of pattern, & I’m getting what I wanted” (GJP Box 5 File 31).

Macpherson’s sense of pattern was helping her with her poetry, and helping her recognize that Frye’s system (and Blake’s, for the *Anatomy of Criticism* was strongly marked by Frye’s earlier work in *Fearful Symmetry*) was hopelessly masculinist. This might strike us as ironic, given Blake’s declaration that “I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans” (“Jerusalem” 10.20),¹⁷ for Frye has certainly been enslaved by Blake’s focus on Man as representative of all humanity, and all writers. Macpherson recognized that for her, the “[t]rouble is that most of this kind of thing hasn’t been worked out from the female point of view yet” (GJP Box 5 File 31), Macpherson wrote to Johnston, and she had identified that there was nowhere for her or her goddesses within Frye’s patterns, just as there was not within the academic and poetic communities to which she most wanted to belong. Frye was preparing the lectures for his upcoming visiting professorship at Princeton, and while Macpherson desperately wanted to continue her studies with him while he and Helen spent the spring in New Jersey, it was not possible for her to join them because of the expense, and because of her gender. Princeton was both tony and all-male, and Macpherson thought it a “Pity I’m not a nice clean-living young American male with a ‘well-rounded personality’ and pots of money — then I could sit at Frye’s feet at Princeton and let the rest of the world, certain parties excepted, go hang itself” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Although it was not as though, Macpherson noted, Princeton was any worse than the rest of the world: “I believe Pr[inceton], like world, for Men Only” (GJP Box 5 File 31).

¹⁶ Frye’s Princeton lectures are an early stage in the *Anatomy of Criticism* manuscript, published four years later. Frye’s thinking is captured in the *Anatomy of Criticism* notebooks (Volume 23 of the Collected Works of Northrop Frye), his diaries from 1942-55 (Volume 8), and the dozen or so previously published essays that make up over half of the content of *Anatomy*. The text of the Princeton lectures has been lost.

¹⁷ Credit goes to Len Early for pointing out this irony.

What Macpherson was beginning to recognize, through her work translating for Jonas, her classes with Frye, and her inability to study at Princeton, was that there was little space for women *qua* women, outside of their relationship to men, in the systems and texts she was working within: Blake's mythology, Gnosticism, much of Milton, all of Graves, much of the canon upon which Frye was basing his emergent anatomy, and North American higher education. As Macpherson wrote to Johnston while she was thinking through this dilemma, "As in Blake the consciousness of the world is male, and the female always represents the *object*" (GJP Box 5 File 31; emphasis in the original): she only exists in relationship to male attention and the male gaze. If women do manage to acquire a space of their own, it is only through being completely outside the bounds of these man-made systems: "The point about female time and female space is that they are *outside* man: that is what makes them female: they haven't been recognized as part of him, and therefore represent 'the other'" (GJP Box 5 File 31). Women writers had the choice either to write (and to be) women who were objects and others, fallen outside of the world created by men, or to write them as completely absorbed into and identified with that world of men and therefore no longer women. Macpherson recognized this same pattern in the translation of Gnostic myth she was doing for Jonas, particularly in the Sophia myth. As she explained the story to Johnston, "she was part of the Godhead but fell away through germinating a sort of self-consciousness, like Frye's Eve. She fell into matter, and through her fall the world was created. The whole history of everything that has happened since is her effort to find her way back" (GJP Box 5 File 31). Despite being creation itself, Sophia (and by extension Macpherson's other goddesses, all part of the Sophia's creation) was the ultimate other, for the goddess "is only a goddess as long as she is fallen: when she is taken back into the Godhead ... and 'identified', she stops being a separate 'identity'" (GJP Box 5 File 31). She becomes, once again, a part of man, just as Eve was when she was still Adam's rib. The only way for women to be women, to remain outside of the all-encompassing maleness that the Godhead represents, is to be fallen. Given its relevance and poetic potential, Macpherson decided to use the Sophia myth—one that in many ways parallels the story of Eve and the Fall—as the organizing story of her cycle of fallen women.

Macpherson identified the objectification and exclusion of the Sophia happening not only in literature, but in her own life as a woman writer. Graves, Layton, Dudek, the editors who had rejected her work because it was too female, and now to a certain extent Frye, tended to see her not as an equal, but as the outsider, the other, the object of pity or desire. But Macpherson also saw her writing as an opportunity to transform her goddesses, and herself, into something other than an

object, to create room for women as women in and of themselves. In doing so, she was also working to create a space for herself as a writer who was central—rather than adjunct to—the canon of writers that made up the system that Frye would call, when *Anatomy of Criticism* was complete, the “total order of words” (*Anatomy* 365). Macpherson’s new cycle of fallen women was her attempt to work through this contradiction—how could she give women an identity separate from men? If retaining their own identities required them to be fallen, she would let them fall, let them speak in their own voices within her cycle of fallen women. Macpherson’s first step toward creating this matrilineal mythology was collecting older poems, and forcing herself to write more—“Some I wrote this weekend by dint of remaining supine until cd. write something down” (GJP Box 5 File 31)—to make up the related group she needed for the Pratt Prize.

Macpherson started the cycle—thus called because it traces, at least partially, the cycle from innocence and identification to fall to redemption and reintegration—by reworking the myth of the mother of all fallen women, Eve. In Judeo-Christian mythology, her eating of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge is the origin of the division between humankind and the natural world, God and man, natural and unnatural, innocence and experience. Eve is also Sophia, whose name means knowledge, the thing that Eve sought when she ate the forbidden fruit. As she wrote her cycle of fallen women, Macpherson was also working on her M.A. thesis about Milton and the pastoral tradition, and as she wrote to Crawley, her thesis and the cycle began to become commentaries on one another (ACP Box 1 File 8). In Macpherson’s understanding of the pastoral, the bottom level of the fallen world is “a permanently blasted and infertile scene: it may be scorched by the sun, ravaged by war, or swamped by the sea, its gods are malevolent or have given it up for lost, and its central figure is characteristically a wanderer and exile” (Macpherson, “Milton” 4). In “Eve in Reflection,” “Painful and brief [is] the act” of eating the fruit, as is often that other act that creates fallen women. Her transgression leaves “Eve on the barren shore,” where she “Sees every cherished feature, plumed tree, bright grass, / Fresh spring, the beasts as placid as before / Beneath the inviolable glass” (GJP Box 6 File 2) of the water. Macpherson was much engrossed with Milton as she wrote her cycle, and she takes from him the suggestion that Eve’s Narcissus-like interest in her own reflection presages her fall. Eve, entranced by her own reflection, has to be tempted away toward “hee [sic] / Whose image thou art” (Milton, *Paradise* 4.471-72). Macpherson also takes from Milton the conflation of the fall and the flood, and the understanding that “The shore is the place of the conflict between land and sea, cosmos and chaos, that is one of the cruxes of myth” (Macpherson, “Milton” 132). In eating the apple, Eve causes chaos to return, the garden preserved

but only under water. Her other self, the one beneath the glass who still lives in the bright, safe garden, is the innocent girl she once was, an earlier self lost upon eating the apple. The Eve of experience is so totally divided from the Eve of innocence that the two have become completely separate people, one on the beach and one “swamped by the sea”:

There the lost girl gone under sea
Tends her undying grove, never raising her eyes
To where on the salt shell beach irrevocably
The mother of all living lies. (GJP Box 6 File 2)

What Eve actually longs after, in staring at her reflection, is not her own beauty but her soul, her unfallen double who is lost to her in a postlapsarian world. They are so separate, in fact, that the Eve of innocence, “the lost girl gone under sea,” does not even realize that her alternate exists, nor that there is another, fallen, world outside of the one she inhabits. The fallen woman is relegated forevermore to the status of the outsider, the other, the lost mother who is the origin of all life and of all pain.¹⁸ “The beloved face” of Eve’s lost girl, both her daughter and herself, “is rapt from sight, / Marred in a whelming tide of blood,” the blood of menstruation and of childbirth that in Christian mythology is the consequence of Eve’s crime of seeking to understand. As in Milton, Macpherson’s “Adam walks in the cold night / Wilderness, waste wood” (GJP Box 6 File 2), but her Eve is not with her husband. The fall has not only divided Eve from herself, and from the Garden—it has also divided man from woman, and woman becomes the eternal other at the bottom of the sea and periphery of both the world and the canon.

But in Macpherson’s hands, this division is a productive one: the only way that woman can move to the centre (at least within the Classical and biblical mythologies that are her source texts) is to be totally identified with man, and thus disappear entirely. Eve might be fallen, but she is at least herself, a woman separate and distinct. And she is not fallen for all time: as Macpherson suggests by naming this a cycle of fallen women, Eve’s drowning—as in the myths of the drowned gods that preoccupy much of classical mythology, Milton, and Frazer—is a necessary death that sets the stage for her rebirth, and the rebirth of the world along with her. Macpherson explicitly connects the drowning of Eve and the pastoral in “Drowned Eden,” again linking the flood and the womb as she did years before in “Poor Child.” Macpherson wrote about the cycle of death and rebirth in her thesis, and noted that the genre “is descended from the ritual laments for dying fertility-gods,”

¹⁸As God declares to Eve in Genesis 3:16, after she has eaten the forbidden fruit, “in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children,” and the Eve story is commonly understood as the origins of pain in childbirth in Judeo-Christian mythology.

where “the god,” or in this case goddess, “dies to make the earth fertile, and what is more he does so regularly every year” (129). Implicit in Eve’s fall, and in the fall of all Macpherson’s mythic women, is that she will rise again and the world will be born anew along with her. It is no coincidence that the wash of floodwaters mimics the fertile gush of amniotic fluid.

Like Eve, the cycle’s other fallen women are likewise suspended between the idyllic world of the pastoral, a landscape that is home to “the tree and water of life” that is in “perpetual spring” and “inhabited by the good” (3-4), and the fallen world of flood and blood. In “Sibylla,” Macpherson’s fallen woman is literally suspended: she is “hung between earth and sky, / Sways with the wind in her pendant grave” (GJP Box 6 File 2). Ovid tells us that Sibylla’s fall came when she exchanged with Apollo her virginity for eternal life, and she is doomed to wither away forevermore because she failed to also ask for eternal youth. Macpherson’s speaker condemns Apollo, the god who tricks her into this bargain and then disappears:

Where is your god, Sibylla? where is he
Who came in other days
To lay his bright head on your knee
And learn the secrets of Earth’s ways? (GJP Box 6 File 2)

Neither Sibylla nor her god answers. He has gotten what he wanted, and all that is left is “Silence: the bat-clogged cave / Lacks breath to sigh” (GJP Box 6 File 2). Sibylla swings in her pendant grave and, as she does, Macpherson condemns the world that condemns her to it simply because she asked of a man the wrong boon. Macpherson’s blending of biblical and classical myths of fallen women in order to interrogate them continues in “Andromeda,” about the goddess who is both herself and another version of Sophia/Eve: “She, torn howling from his side, / —See there the wound, how wide!” (GJP Box 6 File 2). Like drowned Eve, torn from Adam’s side, Andromeda in her fall is accompanied by a deluge, this time the waves that break over her as she waits to be eaten by the sea-monster Cetus for the sins of her mother, who boasted too highly of her beauty: “Amid the sea, engirt with brazen bands, / Towards the farther shore stretching her hands, / On a black rock now stands” (GJP Box 6 File 2). Andromeda waits for her saviour Perseus, but the saviour she gets is an ineffectual Adam transformed into Christ; when he makes no move to save her, she “At five wounds clamours where he lies asleep” (GJP Box 6 File 2). Rather than being rescued, Macpherson’s goddess is, like Eve and Sibylla, abandoned by her god as a fallen woman: “But of his love he takes no keep” (GJP Box 6 File 2). We can assume that Andromeda drowns or is devoured. Yet despite her fate, Macpherson’s rewriting of Andromeda’s story rescues her from becoming nothing more than the object of Perseus’s quest, the woman only in the plot to allow the protagonist’s heroism.

As Tanis MacDonald puts it, throughout *O Earth Return* Macpherson “casts doubt upon the efficacy of male-centred knowledge systems, suggesting instead” via her reworkings of the stories of mythic women “the need for a fully realized female literary subjectivity” (“Absence” 99). Macpherson warned Johnston that her creation of a fully realized literary subjectivity, and her treatment of the gender politics at play in the systems of biblical and classical myth, and of poetry and theory, within and against which she was working might be uneven because she was just working through the issues for the first time (GJP Box 5 File 31). This was true; her writing about gender up to this point had mostly been confined to her letters about the career boys and Graves. But Macpherson’s treatment of gender in her fallen women cycle is remarkably consistent, despite its newness as a topic for her, and despite the fact that she was pulling together disparate poems from across her previously published and newly composed works to make something that would fit the Pratt Prize criteria. The fallen women cycle is her first real step toward the unified, highly structured collections for which she will later become known. While she did not find a way to give woman a place in her poetic world that was separate from man and yet still within the redeemed world of the pastoral, she at least called her attention, and her readers’, to the bind her fallen women were in. Her efforts were also enough to please the Pratt Prize judges, for her fallen women took the prize. But even before that happened, Macpherson realized that they had more work yet to do.

Emblem Books: *Five Poems* and *O Earth Return*

During Macpherson’s first autumn in Toronto, Norman and Gloria Newton resolved that they, along with a reluctant Macpherson, would start a little magazine tentatively titled *The Roc’s Egg*. Macpherson was not enamoured of the plan: Norman Newton’s “two editorials so far ... have been so hopelessly negative that I have felt rather embarrassed (am perhaps coming around to F[rye]’s view that critically to blast one’s contemporaries is usually an expression of one’s own arrogance: it isn’t in Norman’s case, but may be in mine)” (GJP Box 5 File 31). Moreover, she confessed to Johnston, “I’m reluctant to do it, highly so—don’t want to be involved, don’t want to expose myself to anything of that kind” (GJP Box 5 File 31) that might involve her in the kinds of factionalism and public fighting that she abhorred in other parts of the Canadian literary world. She also had “a terrible desire to conserve my energies—mechanical work’s all right, but I don’t want to scatter myself to anything semi-creative” (GJP Box 5 File 31) and divert her energy away from her own poetry, especially as her fallen women continued to demand her attention.

For various reasons, mostly because Norman failed to find a job and thus earn the funds that would pay for the printing of the magazine, *The Roc’s Egg* never materialized. Even so, their

discussions made Macpherson realize that, like “Norman, frustrated by the lack of a poetic theatre in Canada & looking about for an outlet” (ACP Box 1 File 18), she did want to find a way to support the work of Canadian poetry by creating new outlets for its publication and promotion. As she would write to Al Purdy in the early 1960s, when she was publishing his volume in the series, “The Emblem Books got started out of an interest in the problems of Canadian poetry, not in poets or printers” (APP Box 22 File 55). Macpherson might not have been particularly interested in the issues beleaguering printers, but as Collett Tracey notes, they were certainly a problem for the production and promotion of Canadian poetry: “It should be remembered ... that the majority of early twentieth century publishing houses [in Canada] were branch plants of foreign publishers”—a situation that had not changed much by midcentury—“whose headquarters were, primarily, in Great Britain and the United States or, like Ryerson Press, were institutionally connected” (4). “Their primary objective was to sell books,” not to promote Canadian literature and culture, and “reflecting their colonial tradition, they imported employees” and texts “from their home countr[ies]” (5). Canadian publishers were somewhat more likely to publish Canadian content, but were wary of publishing poetry, for it

sold poorly in Canada, and publishers took on very little of it. Macmillan of Canada, for example, published only eight books of poetry between 1950 and 1960, of which three were by E.J. Pratt and one was the anthology *The Blasted Pine*. McClelland and Stewart limited its poetry list pretty much to the Indian File Series which Roy Daniells’ *Deeper into the Forest* inaugurated in 1958 and which ended ten years—and nine books—later ... Ryerson Press was the most active of the three largest publishers with respect to poetry, but Lorne Pierce was ever conscious of the balance sheet, the Ryerson Chapbook Series was beginning to slow down, and larger manuscripts were limited to one or two per year. (Whiteman, “Contact” 13)

Outside of the major publishing houses, small-press publishing, particularly of poetry, was expensive, labour intensive, and risky in the mid-1950s. First Statement Press folded after publishing Anne Wilkinson’s *Counterpoint to Sleep* in 1951, and Contact Press—of which Macpherson emphatically did not approve, given who was behind it—was one of the few other small presses around in the early 1950s. Macpherson saw room for an outlet for the kind of work she wanted to read, and to write. She also saw in publishing a way to keep herself connected to the world of poetry despite the attention that her studies demanded of her, and despite the difficulty of finding another publisher for her own work. As she wrote to Johnston, “If I ever get my cycle worked out, or anything like it, shall publish it at least in mimeograph—tired of not publishing anything, it is the only way of getting—& keeping—in touch with the only world that matters” (GJP Box 5 File 31).

Christmas was coming, and Macpherson decided that she would start small. She would create a collection of her poems, and another of Hine's, intended first as Christmas presents for family and friends and then for wider circulation: "Am pruning F[allen] Women savagely for publication: but at any rate to do them" (retitled as *O Earth Return*) "& five poems of Daryl's for Xmas" (GJP Box 5 File 31). Macpherson "had stencils commercially typed & run off on a Gestetner" printing press and "covers multilithed—my designs drawn by Laurence Hyde. Next time shall type own stencils — their spacing was foul" (ACP Box 1 File 18). Hyde, a colleague of her mother's at the NFB who made books in addition to films,¹⁹ was also hired to print the covers; they were delayed, and the books not complete until the new year. Hyde also misprinted them, much to Macpherson's chagrin: *O Earth Return* "was to be scarlet & that was vital: but it's so pretty I can't raise a fuss, darn [sic] him. —He made rather a muck of Daryl's, & printed it in *green* instead of blue: we may do that over" (GJP Box 6 File 4). We can see what the covers looked like in the end immediately below.

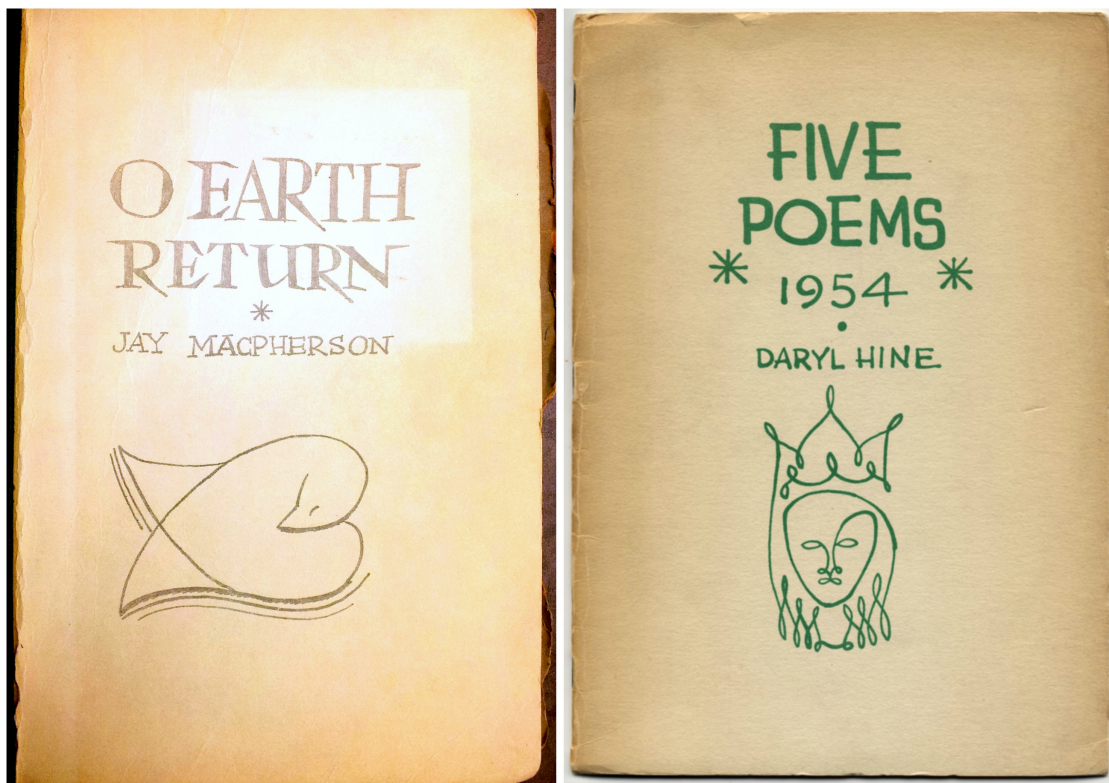


Figure 4: Covers of the first two Emblem Books. Hyde printed them in grey and green, rather than in the scarlet (for hers) and blue (for Hine's) Macpherson originally intended. Both collections are dated 1954 but were actually published in January 1955 due to delays in printing the covers. Both lineographic cover emblems are by Macpherson.

¹⁹Hyde started out at the NFB as a filmmaker, but during Arthur Irwin's tenure his leftist political leanings saw him forced into the promotions department, where he stayed for nearly two decades.

O Earth Return was very much the continuation of her fallen women cycle that Macpherson anticipated it would be. Its title, which Macpherson takes from the introduction to Blake's *Songs of Experience*, makes plainer the relationship between the redemption of her fallen women and redemption of the world that she had begun exploring. It should not surprise us, given Macpherson's long love of Blake, that she turns to him in order to frame her new suite of poems; not knowing this, but knowing that Frye is likewise a fanatical Blakean, some critics have pointed to this suite and its title poem as evidence of Frye's influence over Macpherson.²⁰ Blake the Bard calls the Earth to return and restore the innocence of the world:

O Earth, O Earth, return!
 Arise from out the dewy grass;
 Night is worn,
 And the morn
 Rises from out the slumberous mass. (143)

Despite calling for Earth to return—which is also the second coming and the post-apocalyptic renewal of the world—Macpherson's use of the poem calls into question whether this is a desirable event. So too does “Earth's Answer,” the second poem in *Songs of Experience*, in which Earth condemns the “Selfish father of men” whose “Cruel jealous selfish fear” has left her confined in “the darkness dread & drear” (144). In the final lines from the introduction, “The starry floor, / The wat'ry shore, / Is giv'n thee till the break of day” (143): woman is given the shore, which for Macpherson was the symbol of chaos and conflict, and it is hers only until the sun rises and man one more rules the day. Earth is “only a goddess as long as she is fallen: when she is taken back” (GJP Box 6 File 1), when she returns, she is identified and subsumed into man once more. Macpherson frames her cycle of fallen women within Blake's criticism of the way that transgressive women are shunned and punished by society, and leads her readers to question why Earth—or any of her fallen women—would want to return to the world of the selfish fathers who imprison them within convention, expectation, and the threat of being placed outside of society— especially when in her fall, terrible as it might be, she can at least live separate and whole.

The total identification with the world of men that would be Earth's return, should she choose or be allowed to make it, is the function of Macpherson's all-encompassing, apocalyptic third eye. It sees all, and identifies everything with everything else within the “golden bubble / round and rare” (*Poems* 13) of her mind. Perhaps surprisingly, given her determination to bring her gender to bear in her verse, Macpherson characterized that vision in herself as demonic, subconscious, and male: “It's a demon, you see. If I myself

²⁰ See my discussion of Norman Endicott's review of *The Boatman* in Chapter Three as a key example.

am sufficiently knocked out, my demon”—whom she calls “that gentleman”—“takes over” (GJP Box 5 File 31). It is he who does for her in writing poems and essays what this dissertation aims to do in writing literary history: bring a wide range of sources and ideas together within a containing structure to turn them into a coherent whole, make a cosmos of a miscellany. For Frye, this apocalyptic vision and total identification is unambiguously desirable: it imitates “the total dream of man” (*Anatomy* 119) of a perfected *integritas* that brings him into full communion with the entire world, and expresses “the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire” (119), which is that total identification. Weir argues that complete belief in this total dream of man is true “for both Frye and Macpherson” (*Jay* 5). But *O Earth Return* suggests something quite different: that Macpherson had serious reservations about the implications of apocalyptic vision, and its tendency toward total identification, for women both fictional and real.

Macpherson radically slashed her fallen women cycle when adapting it for chapbook publication, and *O Earth* contained only nine poems, six of which had already appeared in the Pratt Prize selection (“Eve in Reflection,” “Sibylla,” “Love in Egypt,” “The Marriage of Earth and Heaven,” “The Rymer,” and “The Day-Labourer”) and three new: “Eurynome,” “Sheba,” and “The Swan.” Her cycle was intended as a mirror in which fallen women could see themselves; it is full of doubles and reflections, and when she transposes it into *The Boatman*, she will begin calling it a speculum. *O Earth* is also an encyclopaedic catalogue of archetypal fallen women, but not, however, a catalogue of ways to attain that fallen state, for there really was just one: sexual transgression in the form of promiscuity or fornication or just plain old desire. In the world of *O Earth*, which was still the world in which Macpherson lived, to want to know another sexually (which was, after all, part of the knowledge Eve sought in eating the apple) and to act on that desire was how one became a fallen woman. She is cast out of the perfect pastoral garden and relegated to the fallen world that Macpherson most often figures as rock or the bottom of the sea. In addition to Eve, Eurynome is condemned to eternal torment because of sexual transgression with the phallic snake: “In the snake’s embrace mortal she lies, / Dies, but lives to renew her torment / Under her, rock, night on her eyes” (GJP Box 6 File 2). The Queen of Sheba, who lies with Solomon outside the bonds of marriage, is transformed from a golden girl into a burning bird who joins Eve at the bottom of the sea: “The bird sings burning and on her branch sinks down” (GJP Box 6 File 2). There is no room for female transgression in this world.

Crucially, in nearly every poem Macpherson leaves the apocalyptic cycle incomplete: her women fall, but are yet to return and complete the cycle from symbolic death to rebirth and re-identification. This is unsurprising, considering what Macpherson recognized would happen to women like Sophia when the cycle was complete; they would be re-identified with the world of man: the world of the canon, of the male-dominated poetry and academic communities, and of woman-as-object. The only poem into which

Macpherson writes the whole of the cycle is “The Swan,” and crucially, that bird (pun intended) is the only unfallen woman in *O Earth Return*. But she is unfallen only because she exists within Macpherson’s transgressive rewriting of the myth of Leda and the swan, part of a tradition of rewriting Leda by Canadian poets that suggests just how far the mythopoeic movement once reached.²¹ What if, Macpherson wonders, the swan had been the woman rather than her Olympian rapist? We might guess that Macpherson found the symbolism of the original myth all wrong, for the “White-habited, the mystic Swan” (GJP Box 6 File 2) should be a symbol of untainted purity, not a lecherous god out to seduce an unsuspecting Leda. In Macpherson’s telling, the swan is just that symbol of purity, for she is a nun: virginal, exalted, and protected from the world that threatens her fall by the walls of her cloister. It is only by remaining outside of the world that the swan is safe from sexual desire, hers or another’s, for Macpherson’s encyclopaedia of women makes it clear that women fall whether willing or raped. Despite being the eternal other, outside of the world, the swan is a complete world in and of herself, the apocalyptic circle embodied; Macpherson’s swan emblem, which begins both *O Earth* and this chapter, visually represents this. Her graceful neck, “The tower of ivory sways, / Gaze bends to mirrored gaze; / This perfect arc embraces all her days” (GJP Box 6 File 2). In her wholeness, her self un-breached by the penetration of the male gaze or male desire, she is “all that is and was and shall be,” an encyclopaedic container herself. Indeed, her wholeness is feathered onto her very skin, a “...garment may no man put by” (GJP Box 6 File 2) or tear asunder. This, Macpherson suggests, is an alternative to the narrative of return that Blake proposes. The cycle of fallen women sees a woman unite with a man through sex, separate and fall, return and be reunited but lose that hard won identity as a woman separate and whole. Instead, although perhaps unsatisfactorily, one could remain the swan—separate and pure, untouched but identified with a female world untainted by men. Whether or not Macpherson found this solution satisfactory it is hard to know, but we can reasonably assume that she did not. She was, after all, unhappy with the suggestions made by Layton and Dudek that this cloistered life was the one she had chosen for herself. But what we do know is that for a woman in the 1950s, it was among her only alternatives to being seen, and treated, as either an object of desire or its fallen byproduct.

Frank Davey has suggested that “Macpherson’s intention was to publish only these two brief works for private circulation by their authors” (“Emblem”), but Macpherson’s papers make clear that this was not the case. The completed volumes—100 each of *O Earth Return* and *Five Poems*—were priced at 50 cents apiece, and as soon as *O Earth* was printed and ready for distribution, Macpherson began to sell copies and

²¹ See also Wilkinson’s “Leda in Stratford, Ont.,” Mandel’s “Leda and the Swan,” Livesay’s “Leda Again,” John Thompson’s “William Butler Yeats Surfaces Somewhere in the Maritimes Complete With Myths, Or, Leda and the What?,” Robert Bringhurst’s “Leda and the Swan,” and MacEwen’s “Helen.”

to send out review copies to readers who she thought might give it a few column inches or who could help her get it into the hands of others who might appreciate and review it. She limited the number of copies she would allow to be circulated in Toronto, “as I feel badly again about embarrassing Frye” with her dedication (ACP Box 1 File 18), which read “to my teachers / especially Norrie” (*O Earth*). She did, however, do a reading of her poems at Annesley Hall, the women’s residence at Victoria College where she was working as a don, along with the poems of a number of the other mythopoeic and cosmopolitan modernists including LePan, Smith, Daniells, Johnston, Klein, and Reaney. Davey is again wrong when he writes that after publishing the first two Emblem Books, Macpherson was “still not interested in becoming a publisher” (“Emblem”). In fact, she wrote to Crawley almost immediately after their publication that she had begun “casting about for a couple more poets to print in the early summer: this game is too much fun to give up. Have hopes of Marya Fiamengo. Would dearly like to extract a manuscript from Margaret Avison, but she has a great aversion to publishing, particularly of an amateur kind” (ACP Box 1 File 18). She would not find the right author for her next Emblem Book, Dorothy Livesay, until the late summer when they would meet at the Kingston writer’s conference.

Given the volumes’ slimness and the newness of the Emblem Books series, it is not surprising that few reviews of either *O Earth* or *Five Poems* were forthcoming, especially outside of Canada.²² Macpherson wrote to Crawley that she had “tried some English papers, also some American highbrow reviews—an doubtful of these, though, as looking over their book sections I can only conclude that they review what has already attracted a good deal of public attention, with no space left for newcomers” (ACP Box 1 File 18). But those reviews that did appear were very positive, and poems from Macpherson’s volume were also read on CBC Radio in late February. Despite having refused to comment on *O Earth* at all prior to publication, Frye reviewed both Macpherson and Hine for his “Letters in Canada” series, writing that “Five Poems is a remarkable first volume, if one can call five poems a volume. Reading his long meditative lines is like watching heavy traffic at night: a brilliant series of phrases moves across a mysteriously dark background, the central driving force of the poem remaining elusive” (*Bush* 55). About Macpherson’s *O Earth Return*, he noted her interest in “using stanza forms, usually quatrains, with expertly varied timing, and with an interest in myth that classes her with the formal poets” (55). While Macpherson’s stanza forms and rhyme schemes are not terribly numerous—she does, as Frye notes, typically work within the frame of three or four quatrain poems, often with an abab or abcb rhyme scheme—her timing is indeed expertly varied. Think of “Eve in

²²Hine was reviewed by the *McGill Forge* and *Montreal Gazette* in addition to appearing in *Fiddlehead* and “Letters in Canada” alongside Macpherson.

Reflection,” the first line of which Macpherson breaks in the middle to suggest just how easily Eve fell (“Painful and brief the act. / Eve on the barren shore” [*Poems* 17]), or the riotous music of the lines “And a fiddler fiddling fine for folly’s children / To riot rings around the famous wedding / Of quean²³ Earth and her fancy-fellow heaven” (19) in “The Marriage of Earth and Heaven.” Frye predictably noted the title’s “Blakean influence,” but saw in the collection a closer relation to the “Elizabethan lyric, where ... the use of a mythical or conventional theme releases the emotion by detaching it from direct experience and containing it within the convention” (*Bush* 55-6). As Frye notes, “Thus a poem that might seem at first glance to be only an allusive literary exercise becomes a kind of reservoir of feeling in which one’s literary and personal associations mingle and are held in the kind of variable emotional contemplation that it is one of the primary functions of poetry to provide” (56). In this review Frye becomes one of the first readers to recognize Macpherson’s use of the mythic method as a way to heighten the effect of impersonality, to allow her to evoke emotion without expressing it by creating a space for emotional contemplation within her poems. The perceptiveness of Frye’s review certainly has little to do with having the inside story on Macpherson’s poems, for he studiously avoided commenting on her work; as he wrote to Johnston,

I should say that not commenting on poems is a deliberate policy of mine—unless I’m definitely asked to comment, which I do with great reluctance. The reason is that if it’s a serious poet, their proper context is the book he’s building up, and anything short of that book is to some extent quoted out of context. Once I’m sure of a large enough context, I can go ahead and say something; otherwise it’s extremely easy to make random and misleading comments, which is disastrous where my opinion has any weight ... I never comment on the poems Jay hands me, unless she teases, which now she seldom does. (Frye, *Northrop* 52)

The elements that *O Earth Return* shares with Frye’s major works—a Blakean frame of reference, an interest in the formal aspects of literature, the use of myth as a structuring element and symbolic language—are not, it turns out, the result of his direct influence, for he did not read or directly comment on Macpherson’s work in progress. Rather, I would argue, the shared reproducible characteristics of their work are the effect of their belonging to the same elective community, one they both joined because of their predisposition to using the same theoretical and conceptual vocabulary.

The other prominent review of *O Earth Return* was by the editor of *The Fiddlehead*, Fred Cogswell, who wrote in his little magazine that “In a lovely format, Miss Macpherson has published the lyrics which won her the E.J. Pratt Prize for poetry at the University of Toronto last year. Underneath their carefully

²³ Macpherson deliberately uses “quean” instead of “Queen” here, using the former’s archaic meaning of prostitute or hussy (*OED*) to reflect the carnivalesque reveling that would commence if Earth and Heaven ever did manage to meet and marry, thus uniting and renewing the universe.

wrought surface these poems possess an almost terrifying intensity” (17). His review goes off the rails in the next sentence, when he writes that “Each in its own way centres around the fulfillment which union with another being brings—an experience neither sensuous nor sensual but imaginatively grasped by its author with a passion of the mind akin to that of the two Emilys, Brontë and Dickinson” (17). Macpherson praised *Fiddlehead’s* generosity in promoting her new books—as she wrote to Crawley, Cogswell “has mailed us out notices” about the publication of the first two Emblem Books “with the Feb number & is reviewing us both in May” (ACP Box 1 File 18)—but found the review of “mine a trifle comical” due to the fact that Cogswell seemed to believe that the poems were “the result of a happy love-affair” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Macpherson found this misreading, especially given the nonexistent state of her current love life (her Muse-love for Frye not yet having turned into anything more and her relationship with David Hoeniger over), laughable. “Being in a high state of giggle over this,” Macpherson “settled down to concoct parodies of the Fallen Women as if they really were; & then decided to enter for this year’s Pratt competition, though this was perhaps unwise” (ACP Box 1 File 18). She began jokingly referring to this new suite of poems, what she called the shadow side of *O Earth Return* and a form of “distorted pastoral” (GJP Box 5 File 31), as the Cogswelliad. Her readers know them better as *The Plowman in Darkness*, a title she takes from the companion poem to Blake’s introduction to *Songs of Experience*, “Earth’s Answer.” In a series of rollicking quatrains, Macpherson parodies her own poems, and the stories that inspired them, so that her speakers celebrate their fallenness and status as independent women. Sibylla’s mirror image turns the tables on Apollo and she becomes the one who tricks him:

I took his gift and thwarted him,
 I listened to his vows, and
 Though looks are gone and eyes grow dim,
 I’ll live to be a thousand.

I’m mercifully rid of youth,
 No callers plague me ever:
 I’m virtuous, I tell the truth—
 And you can see I’m clever! (*Boatman* 21)

Sibylla’s snappy rebuttal of the narrative others have tried to impose on her is made snappier by Macpherson’s razor-sharp short lines and punchy rhymes. She remains, at least in her own estimation, unfallen, for she’s virtuous as well as clever. (Macpherson’s rhyming of “vows, and” and “thousand” is clever indeed, and we might read the final line of the poem as Macpherson congratulating herself as well as Sibylla on her cleverness). In “Eurynome,” instead of condemning her to the eternal torment of a life

underground with serpents as other mythographers have, Macpherson transforms Eurynome into an advice columnist dishing the dirt on the best boys:

Come all old maids that are squeamish
And afraid to make mistakes,
Don't clutter up your life with boyfriends:
The nicest girls marry snakes. (22)

In Macpherson's skillful hands, the same Mary of Egypt who inspired "Love in Egypt," and thus the entire original fallen women cycle, becomes "a lively lass / ...Hard up, but a good sport and kind" who was not ashamed to admit that she "...worked her way across / From Egypt to the Holy Land" (24). *O Earth Return* is about anything but a happy love affair and union with the other—quite the opposite, being mostly about love and sex as minefields for women, and about the disastrous consequences of total identification with men. If the world of *O Earth* is one in which women are punished unfairly for their supposed transgressions, *Plowman* is its carnivalesque opposite: a radically sex-positive world where neither transgression nor punishment exists, where women do not have to be fallen to be something other than the object of the male gaze or male desire. In writing *Plowman* as *O Earth*'s shadow side, Macpherson also took another giant step toward creating the unified, coherent poetic structures in which she was interested, for each chapbook needs the other as its shadow and mirror to be complete and whole.

Almost all of the Cogswelliad was made up of parodic partners for the poems of *O Earth Return*, but Macpherson included one crucial poem that had no counterpart: "The Ark." It was one of her first adoptions of the ark as a symbol of apocalyptic totality, its hull the covers that surrounds an encyclopaedic catalogue of all life on earth. In this first ark poem—in the coming year, Macpherson would write a whole suite of them—the boat contains an encyclopaedic collection of birds—"Cock-robin and the jenny-wren, / The eagle and the lark, / The cuckoo and the broody-hen" (25)—who are "All bedded down inside" (25). The most important two:

... sat upon the hatch-lid
The turtle and the crow.
One I've heard the Flood did,
One the fire shall, overthrow
—Not in our lifetime, though. (25)

The two birds Noah sends out to see if the apocalyptic floodwaters have receded—the dove and the raven—sit atop the ark, but the world has not yet ended, and will not in our lifetime. Macpherson strategically chooses to close the poem with a rhyming couplet and make the final line its own clause in order to give that final statement emphasis, driving home the fact that she is content to let the apocalypse—

and its attendant problematic identifications—remain safely in the future. As in “Sero,” and indeed in “Ideas of Order,” we might read “The Ark” as Macpherson’s admission that she is skeptical about the belief system being presented to her—in this case, in a wholehearted adoption of Frye’s theories of all-identifying apocalyptic vision and a systematic approach to literature. She was still committed to using Frye and his ideas as a source of inspiration, but not as influence—a managed trickle, not a flood.

The Canadian Modernists Meet: The Kingston Writers’ Conference

In March, Macpherson met up with F.R. Scott, to whom she had been introduced by Johnston. Over lunch, she told Scott about her work on, and plans for, Emblem Books. In turn, Scott told her about his work on, and plans for, a conference to be held in the coming summer that would bring together many of the people who were responsible for the production and dissemination of Canadian literature—writers, publishers, and the media. Would she like to come as one of the representatives of Canadian publishing, Scott asked? Macpherson was both amused and annoyed that she was being asked not as a writer but as a publisher, but not so annoyed that she felt tempted to turn down the invitation. She would be there, she told him (JMP Box 2 File 3).

Macpherson took a break from her poetry and her thesis to travel from Toronto to Kingston in late July, and joined over a hundred other members of the Canadian literary community on the leafy campus of Queen’s University. A veritable who’s who of poets and novelists had also driven and flown in from across Canada and the United States—Earle Birney, Elizabeth Brewster, Morley Callaghan, Leonard Cohen, Louis Dudek, Hugh Garner, Irving Layton, Dorothy Livesay, Eli Mandel, Phyllis Webb, James Reaney, Malcolm Ross, W.W.E. Ross, F.R. Scott, A.J.M. Smith, Miriam Waddington, George Whalley, Anne Wilkinson, Adele Wiseman, and many others. Of these, a number were clearly members of the burgeoning mythopoeic modernist community: Cohen’s *Let Us Compare Mythologies* would be published the next year, Eli Mandel’s first collection *Minotaur* had just come out in the volume *Trio*, Reaney was at work on the eclogue *A Suit of Nettles*, and Wilkinson’s highly mythic *The Hangman Ties the Holly* had just appeared. After settling into her room, Macpherson threw herself into the discussions of “the problems of publication, of reaching an audience, and of the acceptance of the role of the writer in contemporary Canada” (Scott, “Introduction” 3) that made up the bulk of the proceedings.

For the first two days of the conference, Macpherson and the rest of “Group C,” which also included Birney, Cogswell, Callaghan, Livesay, Jack McClelland (of McClelland and Stewart), Layton, Dudek, Lister Sinclair, and Kildare Dobbs (of Macmillan), primarily spent their time engaged in a very lively discussion of A.J.M. Smith’s essay on the state of poetry and publishing in Canada. They were particularly

interested in—or opposed to—his belief that poetry was languishing in obscurity and neglect, and that the poet was “the exile...the rejected man...[the] nobody” (Smith, “Poet” 15). With the notable exception of Macpherson, most in the group argued that Smith had unfairly limited his discussion of poetry and its audiences to the lyric, and criticized Smith’s tendency to ignore those poets who wrote for popular publications and a wide audience. Macpherson found herself the odd woman out in this argument, as “No poet in our group, with the exception of Miss Jay Macpherson, admitted to writing primarily for poets” (Birney, “Discussion” 47).²⁴ “Some,” including Macpherson, “took the view that we should not assume that good poetry should necessarily be unpopular, and Mr Callaghan remarked that Mr Smith’s ‘private poetry’ if good, inevitably became public poetry” (47). In the third day’s discussion of Robert Weaver’s talk on the writer and her public, Livesay notes that “a mid-way position was taken by Miss Macpherson, who suggested that a community of listeners was of the greatest possible help in developing this higher standard of taste; and that we ought to be willing, as suggested by Mr Weaver’s paper, consciously to help develop a body of listeners” (Livesay, “Group” 133). This position ought not to surprise us, given how essential community had always been to Macpherson’s poetic practice. Developing this community of listeners was certainly also one of the major reasons that Macpherson began Emblem Books and, as she would after the Kingston conference, start acting as a promoter and distributor of small-press publications from across Canada.

Even more than the official group discussions that took up a good part of each day, Macpherson found the conference’s informal poetry readings, and the community that gathered to participate in them, enormously stimulating. To her, and to “many of us[,] these two short sessions were the most useful part of the whole Conference” (Macpherson, “Report” 137). Not originally planned as part of the conference’s activities, the readings came about when Irving Layton “suggested during the first morning’s general session that anyone who had new poetry with him and would like to read it, or who would be interested in hearing others read, should come along in the early afternoon to a lounge in one of the University buildings” (136). The first day’s informal readings, of “poems... all recent ... and for the most part un-published” continued into the next day by popular demand. Macpherson attended both sessions and, despite her usual reluctance to perform in public, gave a reading herself. Her enthusiasm for the poetry sessions was so clear that that Scott and Whalley asked her write up her experience as the official record of the readings for the published conference proceedings, *Writing in Canada*. As one of Macpherson’s only public statements about poetics,

²⁴ Macpherson shared this perspective with Graves, who wrote in the foreword to *Poems 1938-1945* “I write poems for poets, and satires and grotesques for wits. For people in general I write prose and am content that they should be unaware that I do anything else. To write poems for other than poets is wasteful” (i).

hers or anyone's, this essay is a valuable one for understanding how she understood Canadian literature of the 1950s and her place within it, and as a record of how significant the conference was to her as a developing poet. Her essay also records a signal moment in the development of the mythopoeic turn, the moment when the mythopoeists recognized themselves as a coherent unit and banded together to explain why myth was so integral to their poetic practice.

Macpherson found the opportunity Layton's readings provided to hear and to read aloud new poetry a rare and valuable one: "the spoken word remains the basis of poetic speech, yet few of us have much opportunity of trying new poems out on a sympathetic ear. To ask a friend to sit still and listen is at best likely to be embarrassing" (137). Macpherson had certainly gone some time without a sympathetic ear. She still occasionally sent poems to Crawley, but many fewer than in the days when *Contemporary Verse* was still active, Johnston sent her more verse than she sent him, and few of her friends at Victoria College were literary; of the mythopoeists, Mandel (who was a few years ahead of her in graduate school) had already departed the university for a teaching job in Quebec, Reaney would not arrive to start his PhD until 1956, and Atwood would not begin her undergraduate degree until the year after that. The Canadian poetry community was so small and so dispersed that "the most useful channel for this purpose is of course the C B C [sic] programme 'Anthology,'" which allowed readers to reach audiences across the country, "but the amount of material it can take up is naturally limited" (137) and unlike the conference, "Anthology" readings did not allow for questions, feedback, and good-natured ribbing to be exchanged during the reading. All the conference discussions about writers and their reading publics had led the poets present to realize that they, far more than their novelist friends, had little sense of their audience, and thus of what their readers knew. Many believed that this was what led to either overly simple poetry, aimed at an uninformed reader, or obscure poems targeted at a more informed audience than actually existed. Macpherson fell somewhere in the middle, for although she admitted to writing primarily for other poets, she also saw in myth the potential for a universal language that could make her poems resonant to a broad audience. Exposure to an audience at the conference, even one skewed in the direction of 'poet,' was illuminating to the poets present: "Questions put to the reading poets often indicated that additional information might help the reader...but I don't remember any accusations of general difficulty or obscurity. If anything, the listeners seemed to feel that the poets were going to extreme lengths to explain themselves" (137) and could be a bit more centripetal in their orientation.

Of the many other topics up for discussion, "Writing now several months after," Macpherson "recall[ed] only one": "Miss Webb asked Messrs Reaney and Mandel, and Misses Macpherson and Wiseman (novelist) why they insisted on the priority of myth" (138). It is no wonder that this discussion was what

stayed with Macpherson, for it represented a signal moment in the history of Canadian modernism, and in her life as a poet. As she wrote to Crawley after the conference, “[Reaney] and I and Eli Mandel soon segregated ourselves as the mythologists of the group: had to defend selves against Phyllis Webb and others who have no patience with myth” (JMP Box 1 File 8). Not only was the conference the first time that all three, figures at the centre of what we now call the mythopoeic turn, met: it was also the moment when they recognized themselves as a distinctive group, as the writers behind Canadian poetry’s major new movement, as “the mythologists.” Sadly, the recordings that Robert Currie made of the poetry readings have not been recovered, and so all we know of the defence of mythopoetics that Macpherson and her compatriots made is her single sentence recap: “No quarry, of course, but it started off a good chase, with realism and symbolism all out in full cry” (138). And yet, even despite her framing of the debate as a fox-hunt with “the opposition” (GJP Box 5 File 31) on one side and the career boys and their friends on the other, Macpherson experienced it as a moment of community building, writing later that “Under such congenial circumstances, even to explore our differences makes a community of us—of writers of all kinds, and of our vital vis-a-vis and other self, the reader” (138).

This community-building function was, for Macpherson, the reason the Kingston poetry readings were such an important event in the history of Canadian literature. In “Looking over these remarks, I find I have not really accounted for the excitement that the readings generated in all of us, at any rate in those who read (these were mostly, by the way, the younger poets present)” (138): Livesay, Macpherson, Mandel, Reaney, Jones, Dudek, Brewster, Waddington, Layton, and Webb. Macpherson, so often stifled and stymied by her lack of inspiration,

came home to Toronto wanting to read poetry from roof tops and street corners. Probably the cause lies in the sense of community that I have mentioned. Whereas a novel or other work with an obviously factual structure can draw reasonably articulate and specific comments from its readers, to the poet his reader generally remains a faceless head on a dubious body. Besides one’s friends—the specialists among them—one has no notion of by whom one is read or, to put it flatly, why. Anything, then, that brings home to us the sense of our community as a lively reacting organism to be pleased or thwarted or argued with or transfigured, gives us something of which most of us stand in continuing need. (138)

And it was not just the poets in attendance who needed the community that the Kingston conference provided—it was writers across Canada, who were inspired just by hearing about what had taken place at Queen’s. Eight years later, reviewing the conference proceedings for the University of Toronto’s *The Varsity*, Sue Lyons writes that “When Jay Macpherson, attempting to describe the excitement generated by the unscheduled poetry readings of Irving Layton and others, says ‘I for one came home to Toronto wanting to read poetry from the roof tops and street corners,’ this concern becomes contagious” (12r). Macpherson

would have been pleased to know that the conference had this effect: “I don’t know how much was achieved of a measurable kind, but it hardly matters if anything was: to me it was all wonderful, The Community that one had believed in for years all of a sudden fleshed & walking about. Act of faith justified” (GJP Box 6 File 1), and a host of new connections made—and ideas inspired—to take back home with her. As she wrote to Crawley,

Was very pleased to meet at the conference so many people I felt I knew, especially Daniells and Reaney. Reaney’s finishing up a set of eclogues based on Spenser—*A Suit of Nettles*, of which you may have heard some on Anthology—I’m very much impressed with them. Like him awfully. He and I and Eli Mandel soon segregated ourselves as the mythologists of the group. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

She even found herself reconciled to Layton: she thought him quite gentle in person, and even admitted that “the best is very good” (GJP Box 6 File 1) in his new collection *In the Midst of My Fever*.

While Scott had invited Macpherson to the Kingston Conference as a publisher, it was as both publisher and poet that she engaged with her fellow attendees, and it was as both publisher and poet that she came away from the conference with new opportunities. She had gotten to know Dorothy Livesay and Jack McClelland in Kingston, and soon after the conference had concluded, Livesay had asked Macpherson if some of her new poems could be published as an Emblem Book, and McClelland had requested that Macpherson send him a manuscript of poems to consider for M&S’s Indian File poetry series. Macpherson said yes to both; she had not been sure if she would do more Emblem Books, as it was difficult to recoup her costs (about twenty-seven dollars per volume for the first two in the series), but Livesay was too great a catch to say no to. Macpherson was likewise “very pleased” about the potential opportunity to publish an Indian File volume: “it’s a chance to get some of the old ones issued in a proper form, & redeem what I can still face of 19P [*Nineteen Poems*]” (GJP Box 6 File 1). Still, there was work to be done first, as “I want to get the set I’m working on now in order first, though, to go in as well. Am like the rest of the world bothered by inability to write a poem of any size: but now they come in related sets, which is a step in the right direction” (GJP Box 6 File 1). *O Earth Return* was already hanging together well, and made even more sense “with the Plowman attached as its shadow side” (GJP Box 6 File 1). “I’ve never written all through a summer and into the fall before, always was a spring stirrer,” a burst of inspiration she laid at the feet of the Kingston conference. The new series of poems she was working on, “a sort of variation on pastoral themes, with various gardens—Circe’s island is one—and a shepherd for central figure” (GJP Box 6 File 1), would work nicely in an Indian File volume but was still in progress.

But, like anyone who has ever had to balance the demands of writing, scholarship and teaching, Macpherson knew that McClelland and the poems had to wait—“must get exams clear first” (GJP Box 6 File 1), for grading could not wait. Not that Macpherson much minded: “Donship & teaching job both

renewed for next year, to my absolute delight: especially pleased about teaching, which is becoming a passion with me. I love to do it” (ACP Box 1 File 18). If teaching could not wait, nor could her thesis, which she completed and submitted in mid-October: “230 pages of an endeavour to harness my old hobby-horse, *Lycidas*, though with a different slant from the underwater one I once had on him. The topic was Milton and The Pastoral Tradition” (ACP Box 1 File 18). The project “started off as an application of Frye and ended up as a commentary in a sort of a way on O Earth, which itself is largely a commentary on Milton: so inspiration goes round in circles, but anyway keeps going” (ACP Box 1 File 18). What a change from those days at Bishop Spencer, where Macpherson mourned not having a single friend who appreciated the literature she loved, or even from her days at Carleton or McGill, where her studies skirted, but did not focus on, the books and stories to which she continually turned. Finally—in Kingston, at Victoria College—she was immersed in communities that supported her exploration of those books that had kept her company as a poor child in Newfoundland, Milton and Blake foremost among them, and her transformation of those stories into ones of her own through her poems.

For the first time since she started writing poetry as a child, Macpherson was inspired to keep composing through the fall and winter. And now that her thesis was submitted, another thing could continue: her doctoral studies. Despite the fact that she believed, as she wrote to Crawley, it caused her a minor nervous breakdown (ACP Box 1 File 18), Macpherson sat her oral comprehensive exam the Monday after submitting her M.A. thesis. Once she had believed that she needed to choose either poetry or scholarship, that her inconsistent Muse would not allow her to turn her energies to both. What her work with Frye, the nearest person who spoke her mythopoeic language fluently, had shown her was that scholarship and poetry could be mutually productive. Inspiration goes round in circles, and those circles—not only the interrelation between her poetry and scholarship, or between her thought and Frye’s, but also the expanding circle of her mythopoeic elective community she had found in Kingston—functioned as an engine that powered Macpherson as a poet and a scholar. The coming years would be the most productive, and the most groundbreaking, so far of her life as a writer. They would also be transformative for Canadian literature, and indeed for Canadian culture more broadly.

Chapter Three

Toronto: 1955-64

*Then whistling makes for home and bed
As the last morning breaks in red;
But God the Lord with patient grin
Lets down his hook and hoicks him in.*
—Jay Macpherson, “The Fisherman” (1956)

*Say: Wisdom is a silver fish
And Love a golden hook.*
—Jay Macpherson, *Dedication...* (1956)

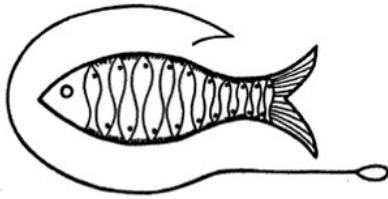


Figure 5: Jay Macpherson's fish emblem from *The Mind That Ocean* (Source: Thomas Fisher Special Collections).

In 1952, Louis Dudek could still ask “où sont les jeunes?” and suggest that the character of fifties poetry in Canada had yet to be determined. The shuttering of little magazines like *Northern Review*, *here and now*, and *Contemporary Verse* between 1952 and 1956 likewise suggested that Canadian poetry was still in a period of transition, and the elective community that had dispersed at the end of the Montreal forties had not yet fully reconstituted itself elsewhere to begin producing the new poetry, and the new periodicals, of the fifties. But the Canadian Writers' Conference that gathered in Kingston in July of 1955 marked a turning point in the development of Canadian modernist poetry, as would the publication of Macpherson's *The Boatman* not long thereafter. By 1955, Macpherson, Reaney, and Mandel could identify themselves as the mythologists, an identifiable elective community with distinctive reproducible poetic characteristics. By 1958, Dudek would no longer be asking where the new Canadian poetry was and wondering what it would look like—instead, he would be arguing that in all the most prominent fifties poets, “an intellectual disorder (not only in politics, but in morality and in religion) leads to a primitive mythological effort to organize chaos” (“Patterns” 414). At the same time, Frye would proclaim that almost all Canadian poetry was

produced by academics like Macpherson and “the poetry of what we have called the academic school is overwhelmingly mythopoeic” (“Poetry” 88). By the time Macpherson’s *The Boatman* was published in 1957, the miscellany of voices that had emerged after the end of the Montreal forties had consolidated into a coherent mythopoeic cosmos in the 1950s. Macpherson was central to that shift—so central, in fact, that the publication of *The Boatman* would set off a mythic explosion that would ripple not just throughout Canadian literature, but throughout Canadian education and culture well into the 1970s.

The Anagogic Man

The inspiration Macpherson found in Kingston fuelled her writing well into a new year. She continued working on *The Shepherd by Moonlight*, the set of variations on the pastoral based on different versions of the gardens of Eden, Arcadia, and Beulah that became a handmade volume completed in 1956. One of the first poems she wrote toward it was titled “The Anagogic Man,” which is still one of her best-known verses. As Macpherson explained it to Crawley, “The Anagogic Man” was a poem “about Norrie” (ACP Box 1 File 18) and about the concept of anagogy, which “is one of the levels of allegory he talks about, the one where you suddenly see the whole of life as forming one living body, Christ or Here Comes Everybody or whoever else” (ACP Box 1 File 18). The standard definition of anagogy is “spiritual elevation or enlightenment, esp. to understand mysteries” (*OED*), but Frye’s version of anagogy is much closer to the “medieval conception of anagogy or universal meaning” (Frye, *Anatomy* 118): a state of apprehension not unlike a dream, where “the universe of the dream is entirely within the mind of the dreamer” (119) and “literature imitates the total dream of man” (119). This dream, at least as Frye conceived of it, was to be at one with the whole of the universe—as Donna Bennett puts it, “Rather than an event to be feared for those who valued this world and its best products, Frye regarded apocalypse as a state to be actively sought within the experiential world: ‘By an apocalypse I mean primarily the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate’ (*Anatomy* 119)” (“As” 814). While Bennett uses the term apocalypse rather than anagogy, they are here very closely related: Frye’s total dream of man within

the mind and body of the dreamer is also a version of Macpherson's apocalyptic, all-encompassing third-eyed vision.¹

Critics have long suggested, or at least insinuated, that Macpherson's anagogic, apocalyptic vision is the result of Frye's influence, but as we have seen, this form of total identification is one that concerns her even in the mid-1940s, long before they meet. We might wonder, in fact, how much of this idea Frye takes from her. As he once noted, he has "been very deeply aware of the kind of soil that I am rooted in and of the impossibility of my having developed as I did under any formative conditions other than those which I have encountered in southern Ontario" (Frye, "Critics" 6). His relationship with Macpherson and reading of her work—and too, his reading of the work of the other visionary mythopoeic writers like Wilkinson, Reaney, LePan, and others—was an integral part of the soil in which Frye and his ideas, which found their expression in *Anatomy of Criticism*, grew. While "The Anagogic Man" is Macpherson's first poem to use that specific term, the anagogic dreamer appeared in Macpherson's poetry long before she wrote it in early 1956. The dreamer is Macpherson's speaker in "Private Deluge" before the flood, when she is still completely one with her garden; she is Eve before she is expelled from Eden in "Eve in Reflection"; she is the "poor child" who "yearn[s] / To swing in dark or water, wanting / Not childhood's flowers but absolute return" (*Poems* 11) to a time when she was totally identified with her mother. Thinking back to Macpherson's writing of the late 1940s, we should remember that the anagogic dreamer is also, in "Ideas of Order," humankind who "dared to think to find / In heaven the order of his constellated mind" (JMP Box 5 File 2). Anagogic vision is, and has long been, the function of Macpherson's cosmos-building third eye, which contains the miscellany it sees and transforms it into an ordered, perfected universe contained within the golden bubble of her mind. The total dream of (wo)man is always, for Macpherson, a return to the time before the alienation of the Fall, of war, of modernity—a return to a time (although that time may be a myth) when humankind and the natural world were one and the same, to a time when the fragmentation and dislocation of the world around her was (or could be imagined to be) an orderly cosmos.

As Frye will write in the second essay of *Anatomy of Criticism*, which at this point he is still in the middle of drafting and refining through discussion with his classes, and with Macpherson,

When we pass into anagogy, nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the garden, the quest, the

¹ Although Frye defines the anagogic in the glossary to *Anatomy of Criticism* as simply "ANAGOGIC: Relating to literature as a total order of words" (365), Frye's belief that literature's total order can resemble and potentially encompass "the

marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way. This is not reality, but it is the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence apocalyptic. By an apocalypse I mean primarily the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body... (119)

Frye is unsure that this infinite and eternal living body is actually human (although it “is closer to being human than to being inanimate” [119]) but she is always human when she appears across Canadian poetry, for she returns again and again in the form of the all-seeing, world-creating poet, as in F.R. Scott’s “Lakeshore,” Anne Wilkinson’s “A Poet’s-Eye View,” and A.M. Klein’s “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape,” where the all-seeing poet is the “nth Adam” (146). For Macpherson, at least up until the point that she composes “The Anagogic Man,” that infinite and eternal living body was the body of those artists who possess a third eye. Remembering that anagogic vision sees “the whole of life as forming one living body,” the anagogic (wo)man is also simply Earth, Gaia, Terra: the ultimate goddess whose body formed the perfected garden of the pastoral that contains all life. But in “The Anagogic Man,” we see that in Macpherson’s affectionate estimation Frye had turned himself into that “one living body, Christ or Here Comes Everybody” that contained, through the anagogy of his supposedly all-encompassing literary theory—itsself an apocalyptic, encyclopaedic² construct—“the whole of life.” She wrote her portrait of her Muse one afternoon in the spring of 1955, after observing Frye walking through Victoria College campus:

That one³ walks with head bent down;
For between his nape and crown
He carries, balancing with care,
A golden bubble round and rare.

Its gently shimmering sides surround
All us and our worlds, and bound

² As Frye suggests in *Anatomy of Criticism*, poetry moves from ritual to encyclopaedic and from there to apocalyptic: “we notice ... the tendency of ritual to become not only cyclical but encyclopaedic, as already noted. In its anagogic phase, then, poetry imitates human action as total ritual, and so imitates the action of an omnipotent human society that contains all of the powers of nature within itself” (120). The encyclopaedic work, because it contains within a greater body discrete parts which are totally identified with it—each element of the encyclopaedic work makes up a part of the whole, but is also contained by it, just as each drop of water in a puddle makes up that puddle but is also contained by its larger structure—is apocalyptic.

³ In all later versions of this poem, “That one” becomes “Noah,” another of the mythical figures who corresponds to Frye in Macpherson’s work.

Art and life, and wit and sense,
Innocence and experience (*Shepherd*)

Norrie's mind, that "golden bubble round and rare," is like Macpherson's third eye in its ability to see and contain all of life, "all us and our worlds." Her speaker warns that those traversing the campus alongside him must

Forbear to startle him, lest some
Poor soul to its destruction come,
Slipped out of mind and past recall
As if it never was at all.

O you that pass, if still he seems
One absent-minded or in dreams,
Consider that your senses keep
A death far deeper than his sleep. (*Shepherd*)

Frye's seeming absent-mindedness was, from Macpherson's vantage point, only a symptom of his heightened sense of perception and his preoccupation with keeping safe the contents of that all-encompassing golden bubble. His mind in "The Anagogic Man" is truly all encompassing, for "Angel declare: what sways when that one nods? / The sun, the stars, the figure of the gods" (*Shepherd*). In working toward his *Anatomy of Criticism*, which attempts to systematize and contain all of literature and the worlds it writes into being, Frye, Macpherson suggests, has become the infinite and eternal living body in which the whole of nature, and of the heavens, is contained. It is evidence of her affection for Frye that "The Anagogic Man" expresses none of that suspicion of the frailty or falseness of totalizing, apocalyptic vision that so much of her earlier and later verse and correspondence does.

Although Sandra Martin does not directly address Macpherson and Frye's relationship in her obituary, she suggests that "knowingness and the affection" that characterized Macpherson's feelings for him "are all there in [the] first two stanzas" (Martin, "Nurturing") of "The Anagogic Man." It was widely understood upon the poem's publication that "The Anagogic Man" was about Frye, and for those readers who have seen in it the same knowledge and affection as Martin does, the poem has very likely contributed to the suspicion that their relationship was more than professional. Three unpublished poems Macpherson seems to have composed at about the same time as "The Anagogic Man"—"A Candle in Charles Street," "To Norrie at the Winter Solstice," and one untitled poem—as well as "office darling," which I quoted in the introduction, seem to

confirm what “The Anagogic Man” suggests.⁴ Macpherson’s feelings for Frye are clear in “A Candle in Charles Street,” which she sent to Johnston in the spring of 1955:

All’s dim but where
Heavn’s candle ever fair
Upon the green, the drifting airs adorning,
Shakes out his shining hair,

And now I can remark
Where, like a travelling spark,
Norrie along the wall in early morning
Lights up the dark. (GJP Box 6 File 1)

Two other love poems contained in the unrestricted section of Macpherson’s archive appear to have been written for the winter solstice sometime between 1954 and 1958. Unlike Macpherson’s poems for and about Wels-Schön, which almost invariably transform her Muse into a goddess, and even unlike “The Anagogic Man,” which transforms Frye into “Here Comes Everybody” and later Noah, these two poems do away with most of the trappings of impersonality and the mythic method to treat Frye as himself. We might read this as a function of Macpherson’s increasing willingness to loosen her commitment to a considered, impersonal poetic, at least in those poems she did not intend to publish, and of her continued commitment to not writing those she loved as icons or images. We might also read Macpherson’s writing of Frye-as-Frye as a response to the fact that (unlike Wels-Schön, whom she rarely saw) Macpherson was now able to spend considerable time with the person she loved, and thus as a reflection of that immediacy of experience. In the first of these poems, “To Norrie at the Winter Solstice,” Macpherson begins by teasing Edmund Spenser for marrying Elizabeth Boyle on the summer solstice and thus (as he recounts in his *Epithalamion*, written upon the occasion of their marriage) being forced by the long day to delay their retirement to their wedding bed. In contrast, Macpherson’s couple—whom she calls “Alive and Hope,” and whose “native wit / Is fortified by English Lit” (JMP Box 6 File 2) as hers and Frye’s certainly was—have more wisely chosen the winter solstice to consummate their union:

Where thoughtless Spenser & his bride
The day their nuptial knot was tied
Let Barnabas the slow preside,⁵

⁴ Macpherson sent “A Candle in Charles Street” to Johnston in a letter dated April 28, 1955. The other two poems are undated, but have been catalogued in her fonds (JMP Box 6 File 2) as “Poetry 1954-1958.”

⁵ St. Barnabas’s Day—June 11—was, by the Julian calendar at use in England when Spenser wrote his *Epithalamion*, the longest day of the year. As Spenser writes in the fifteenth stanza,

Alive and Hope, whose native wit
Is fortified by English Lit,
Applied to his opposing number
And roused from depths of winter slumber
Thomas Apostle, whose brief light⁶
A moment flares against the night. (JMP Box 6 File 2)

Macpherson's are a "Sensible pair!" for choosing the winter solstice, the year's longest night, to consummate their union. She instructs them to "now make the most of / Occasion's nod to lay the ghost of / Celibate rigours best disposed of" (JMP Box 6 File 2). Her hope is that if "you" (by whom we might assume Frye, given that the poem is "to Norrie") "persevere, no question / But shortly, taking the suggestion, / Approving powers, so trusts this rhyme, / Will add fit blessings to fit time" (JMP Box 6 File 2). This version of Macpherson, in her openly sexual invitation to Frye, is certainly not the asexual schoolmarm that Dudek accuses her of being and we find here the *eros* that Jernigan identifies as missing in much of Macpherson's other verse (Letter).

But the counterpoint to this poem, an untitled verse Macpherson likewise wrote for the winter solstice, is both more earnest and more heart wrenching in its admission of the costs of illicit love, although less so than in the later poem "office darling" I discussed in my introduction. We should remember that Frye was married to Helen Kemp, and that Macpherson also considered her Prophet's wife a dear friend—indeed, *The Boatman* is dedicated to them both. In the first stanza, Macpherson suggests that although their love is "between the lines," the sun still shines on her and Frye like any other, socially sanctioned, couple:

Norrie my joy, dear love so long
Attentive to my wandering song,
On us as well the short sun shines
Who only love between the lines. (JMP Box 6 File 2)

But because their relationship is secret, and they are thus prevented from any outward display of regard around others, they are primarily reduced to talking about the weather:

This day the sunne is in his chieftest hight,
With Barnaby the bright,
From whence declining daily by degrees,
He somewhat loseth of his heat and light,
When once the Crab behind his back he sees. (*Epithalamion*)

⁶ December 21, the winter solstice, was traditionally St. Thomas's Day.

“For us is all that’s left to say, / How bright, how cold, the winter day?” (JMP Box 6 File 2). Still, given that their love exists not only outside the lines of propriety but also between the lines of seemingly inconsequential small talk and in snatched moments between the activities of their public lives,

Nothing that is can be to us
Unwanted or superfluous,
Not winter dusk that festive lends
Lights, music, and the prayers of friends,
Nor night that sees the good to bed
And covers Norrie’s shining head. (JMP Box 6 File 2)

The final stanza of the poem is Macpherson’s most explicit statement about her feelings for Frye in the unrestricted papers from this period, for she declares her desire to spend the entirety of the longest night with him in person and not just in thought:

Norrie, my shape of man complete
From Prophet-head to Prophet-feet,
Accept as nothing less than real,
Breathing, not ghostly or ideal,
My drowsy wish that takes its flight
To keep with you the longest night. (JMP Box 6 File 2)

These poems make quite clear the romantic and sexual nature of Macpherson’s and Frye’s relationship, one that was apparently an open secret in the Victoria College community, as implied in Young’s aside in *Canadian Notes & Queries* about whispers of a secret passage behind the bookshelves that connected Macpherson’s office with Frye’s.

However, the state of the Macpherson and Frye archives threatens to skew the public perception of their relationship and of the impact it had on the work of both by suggesting that all of that affection was on her side. While the reciprocity of their feelings seems to have been known to those who knew them, we simply do not have much evidence—because it has been left unrecorded, because it has been concealed, or because it was destroyed—that Frye felt for Macpherson what her poetry suggests she felt for him, to illuminate how and when their relationship deepened beyond that of student and teacher, to explore the extent to which Frye fits into the tradition of the “important, inappropriate literary man” (Tolentino) and their relationship into the

long history of rape culture on Canadian university campuses,⁷ or to clarify how her thinking and their long collaboration influenced his work. Frye's fonds at Victoria College contain very little correspondence to or from Macpherson: five undated letters, plus six sent and/or received between 1976 and 1986, many of which are reprinted in Denham's *Selected Letters* volume. The contents of Macpherson's archive suggests that she arranged to have the rest of their correspondence placed in her hands, as their outgoing and incoming correspondence fills two boxes in the restricted section of her fonds and covers the period from the early 1950s to the advent of email. These papers will be unsealed in the 2060s, and promise to be a rich source of information about Macpherson's and Frye's relationship, about the academic culture of the 1950s and onward, and about the ways in which their mutual affection and intellectual affinities shaped the work and lives of each. Beyond the archives, Frye's journals are of some, but not much, help in illuminating the nature of his feelings for Macpherson, for as Graham Forst notes in his review of Frye's diaries from the first three years Macpherson was at Victoria College, Frye "never speaks in depth about his feelings for his father (who lived occasionally with Frye during these years), or for his colleagues, friends, or even students, even when he was sexually attracted to them" (131), which he certainly was to Macpherson.

Even so, there is substantial evidence to be found that Macpherson's and Frye's affection was reciprocal, and that a reading of Macpherson's mythopoetics as the result of a one-sided idolatry for an equally myth-obsessed Muse is wrong. Critics have not explicitly made such an argument—although Norman Endicott, for example, has insinuated as much—and many may not have been consciously aware of the personal nature of the Macpherson-Frye relationship. However, evidence of that closeness—Macpherson's dedication of much of her work to Frye, his glowing reviews of her books, their long history of collaboration—has arguably led critics, as I argue in the introduction, to suggest with significant frequency and strength that Frye was a defining influence on Macpherson. While the evidence of their relationship in the unrestricted sections of

⁷ Both CWILA and *Hook & Eye* have been involved in documenting the extent and specifics of rape culture in Canadian academia, as have essayists like Emma Healey, and there is work to be done to trace the roots of this rape culture in the period before and during Macpherson's early years at the University of Toronto. See Erin Wunker's "Love, Anonymous," which speaks about CWILA's project of documenting sexual harassment in the Canadian literary and academic communities, and her piece "Faster Feminism Redux" on the suspension of the *Hook & Eye* "This Month in Sexism" column due to an overwhelming number of submissions that depressed readers. See also Emma Healey's "Stories Like Passwords" essay about sexual harassment by a professor at the Banff Centre. Despite the fact that their affections were apparently mutual, many would class Frye's and Macpherson's early relationship as an instance of sexual harassment in light of the significant power differential between them in their supervisor-graduate student roles. While the archival record is hazy, we can see the suggestion of the negative impact of this power differential in 1960, when Macpherson changes PhD supervisors, and in the aftermath that is her poetic silence until the early 1970s.

Macpherson's papers is certainly more explicit, Frye's diaries and letters from this period do record his growing affection for Macpherson, and serve to counter the potential claim that affection, and influence, were one-sided. Even when Macpherson was still an M.A. student, Frye began to rely on her as a barometer for how well his classes were going, noting in his diary after a number of auditors dropped his Canadian literature class that "Without Jay I wouldn't have much morale left" (Frye, *Diaries* 598). Not long after, he wrote to Johnston that "My affection for Jay ... grows with my growing sense of her good qualities" (Frye, *Selected* 49), and when it came time to review *The Boatman* after its publication in 1957, Frye had to think carefully about how to proceed given the tension between his desire to maintain his reputation as a dispassionate critic and the growing public awareness of his feelings for Macpherson. As he wrote to Johnston,

I'm glad you liked the review of Jay: it was tough to write, at first, until I remembered that my personal fondness for Ned [E.J.] Pratt was equally public and equally involved with my critical views. I thought I'd keep clear of entanglements by refusing to write poetry myself, but I haven't altogether. So far I've escaped being very fond of a bad poet, and I saw no reason for leaning over backwards about Jay. (54)

In another letter to Johnston circa the fall of 1959, Frye writes of a moment when he sees Macpherson not simply as a student or a fellow academic, but as a sexual being: he notes that he had had "a most pleasant evening" at a cocktail party he and Macpherson both attended, "disconcerting as it was to see Jay's gentle face ... suddenly transformed into a femme fatale, with a couple of drinks lighting her up behind the eyes" (57). Despite Frye's being somewhat circumspect in his public statements about his feelings for Macpherson, we can reasonably assume that his private feelings were rather stronger. Taken all together, this evidence provides compelling evidence of their mutual affection.

Along with their hints at his feelings for Macpherson, Frye's journals also reveal that he had an extremely high regard for her intellectual and perceptive abilities. This is an important fact given that some of the products of those intellectual and perceptive abilities—like Macpherson's own conception of the anagogic third eye, the increasingly apocalyptic and encyclopaedic structure of her collections, and her wide-ranging mythic allusions and references—are often attributed to Frye's influence, rather than to her own talents and early interests. While Macpherson, with affectionate bias, believed that Frye's perceptive abilities far outstripped those of everyone else—"Consider that your senses keep / A death far deeper than his sleep"—Frye had rather a different view. At least in this regard, he viewed Macpherson as more than his equal, believing that her perceptive abilities

significantly outstripped his. This is a significant admission for someone well known for his high opinion of his own merit. As Frye wrote in his journal,

I wasn't expecting this diary to turn personal, but it has. ... I take in more of my surroundings than Aunt Lily does: she's deafer than I, but it isn't just perception: there's conceptual apprehension as well. Whenever I'm with Jay I realize that her level of perception is higher than mine: I'm more short-sighted, but it's the mental patterns she creates out of her livelier mind that make the difference. Let's say that Aunt Lily takes in one per cent of what's there, I two per cent, & Jay three per cent. The maximum, limited by the structure of the human mind & by its biological need to select for coherence, maybe, let's say, ten per cent. Even above five per cent you'd have perceptions that we call psychic or extra-sensory: ability to read others' thoughts, awareness of the presence of the dead, & the like. (*Third* 38)

In Frye's estimation, Macpherson's third eye was nearly powerful enough to border on extra-sensory perception, and despite being well known for the "mental patterns" he created in his theory, Frye suggests that the ability to create those more properly belonged to Macpherson. At least one critic is beginning to acknowledge that Macpherson most certainly played "an unacknowledged role in helping Frye formulate ideas that appeared in *Anatomy of Criticism*" (Brown, "Sad") and continued to play that role for much of Frye's later career as a public intellectual. Unfortunately, we may never know just how her powerful perceptions and mental patterns influenced his writing: to disentangle her ideas and structure-building from his is not within the scope of this project, and other scholars who work to assess the relationship between Frye's work and that of those who influenced him are seemingly uninterested in assessing the shaping force of a writer who worked with Frye for nearly half a century. This is particularly true of Robert Denham, Frye's most frequent editor and the author of the recent volume *Northrop Frye and Others: Twelve Writers Who Helped Shape His Thinking*, of whom Macpherson is not one. This reluctance on the part of scholars still interested in Frye is partially a function of the current state of Frye studies, which is populated primarily by older, white male academics who are invested in polishing the reputation of a scholar who resembles them. They do so by reading Frye almost solely within the context of other canonical male public intellectuals, and by ignoring the contributions of others like Macpherson, who—as a woman, poet, and teacher—does not resemble them.⁸ This failure to consider Macpherson's influence on Frye is also a function of the fact that she was a woman, poet, and teacher in an era (one that has not ended) that

⁸ The Frye centenary conference at Victoria College in 2011 was an illuminating experience. The Frye scholars in attendance were very prone to a sort of hero worship for the subject of their studies and little interested in papers (like mine) that challenged the originality and mastery of his thought and writing; see the expanded version of this paper, my "Frye Unschooled: Mythopoeic Modernism in Canada." For an account of this conference, and of its implications for gender bias in Frye studies and in the academy more generally, see my piece "Who Fills the Chairs" from *Hook & Eye*.

privileged being male, a theorist, and a public intellectual, long to the detriment of her reputation. What is certain, however, is that Frye and Macpherson shared a mutual admiration that would eventually turn into rather more. What is likewise certain is that her work of the period during which their relationship began to deepen—at this moment, in early 1956, *The Shepherd by Moonlight*—is marked not only by her feelings for her Muse (as her earlier work was by her feelings for Wels-Schön, and to a lesser extent for Graves), but also by the pattern- and connection-making that were the result of her extraordinary abilities of perception and conceptual apprehension. Indeed, *The Shepherd by Moonlight*—a suite of interconnected lyrics that are an encyclopaedia of variations on the pastoral, and set variously in Eden, Arcadia, Beulah, and other gardens—is additional evidence of Macpherson’s own status as an anagogic woman, the work of her cosmos-building third eye.

The Sleeping Shepherd

Macpherson continued to work through the relationship between the anagogic and the pastoral as she wrote the poems for inclusion in *The Shepherd by Moonlight* that came after “The Anagogic Man,” and began working out what she would pursue for her doctoral dissertation. She decided that her research would in essence be a critical counterpart to her new poems, much as her Master’s thesis had been to *O Earth Return*. She decided that she would write her dissertation

about a fella called the Sleeping Shepherd: he’s in a rhyme in Lear, Little Boy Blue, & a folksong called The Farmer’s Son: sort of secular Endymion, connections with Adam & Beulah & Spenser’s Adonis & Abel, & I love him dearly: will be a farrago like the last, but NF promises to get through committee, & will feed verse. (GJP Box 6 File 1)

She named *The Shepherd by Moonlight* after the sleeping shepherd of her research, the archetypal form of Endymion in his eternal sleep who is visited nightly by Selene the moon. She also named it after Frye, who was another version of the shepherd. As she wrote in the collection’s dedicatory poem,

When N*rr**’s absence prov’d too hard a thing,
My muse that Angel did divide to sing
(Divided far & scarcely to recover,
But recognizable on looking over).
And now, refresht, the goof⁹ begins to say
She won’t believe he ever was away,
Maintaining, though he wasn’t quite around,

⁹ This poem is handwritten and in places hard to decipher; the word I have transcribed here as “goof” is particularly difficult to read, and while this is my best stab at deciphering Macpherson’s handwriting, the transcription could be inaccurate. However, the general sense of the poem is still discernible even if Macpherson chose a different word to describe herself than “goof.”

He surely slept beneath some local ground,
With Arthur and bright Helen & the rest—
Tough luck on paradises in the West! (*Shepherd*)

Frye, who “surely slept beneath some local ground,” is another sleeping shepherd, slumbering somewhere alongside his sheep rather than gone from Toronto (the Fries were in Indiana in the spring of 1956, while Frye taught there on the invitation of Harry Ransom). The dedication suggests that Macpherson’s sleeping shepherd is another anagogic man, in whose dreams a perfected world lives for so long as he sleeps. His waking world is the world of her fallen women from *O Earth Return* and *The Plowman in Darkness*, a world where humankind is divided from the Edenic, Arcadian garden of the time before the fall.

Macpherson was interested in the appearances of her sleeper throughout literature and myth, a reflection of not only her wide-ranging reading but also her increasing willingness to foreground the archetypal aspects of her scholarship despite her earlier contention that “I can’t make a living by fantasy-spinning” and coming up with “mythological theories” (JMP Box 1 File 8). In *The Shepherd by Moonlight*, the sleeping shepherd appears in his most familiar forms first—as Endymion, and as Adam—but then takes on different, less expected forms. Even in his more familiar guises, the sleeping shepherd does not look like we might expect him to, or in a number of cases like a “him” at all, despite Beattie’s contention that it is the “men of archetypal significance—Adam, Endymion, and the heroes associated with Circe, Psyche, and Helen” who “provide the *personae*” (Beattie 302) of the suite. One of the collection’s first poems, “The Caverned Woman,” hinges on allusion to Endymion and Selene, and as in her earlier poem “The Image,” Macpherson writes Selene as the cavern-bound sleeper instead of Endymion. Even when working within the conventions of the pastoral, Macpherson is seemingly unwilling to relegate her goddesses entirely to the wings. As Marnie Parsons notes, for Macpherson “no single word or image is stable: sleepers, shepherds, mothers, fishermen—these staples of myth and pastoral are continually recast with an epigrammatic precision that makes it possible for Macpherson to collapse in one brief poem the whole eschatological history of humankind” (697). Macpherson’s willingness to destabilize the conventions of the pastoral, and the image of the shepherd, allows her to conflate him with the caverned woman and transform her into the eschatological, apocalyptic body—as the shepherd already is—of the anagogic woman:

What’s packed around her ivory bones
Is cruel to the wondering touch;

Her hard skull round the roots of stones
And cannot give or comfort much.

Her lap is sealed to summer showers,
Ice-bound, and ringed in iron hold:
Her breast puts forth its love like flowers
Astonished into hills of cold.

Not here the Sun that frees and warms,
Cherishes between fire and flood:
But far within are Seraph forms,
Are flowers, fountains, milk, blood. (*Shepherd*)

Macpherson had originally given “The Caverned Woman” the title “The Snow-Maiden,” a choice that foregrounded her juxtaposition between the woman’s icy outer form and the warmth of the “flowers, fountains, milk, blood” that are “far within” alongside the fiery forms of the Seraphim.¹⁰ We might also be reminded of Snow White, who sleeps in a glassine, icy coffin, her warmth and life contained and suspended. The poem’s original title also makes more apparent Macpherson’s allusion to Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera of the same name, in which the Snow Maiden’s warm heart, once thawed, brings about not only her death but that of the endless winter, thus allowing the return to the spring of the pastoral. Macpherson’s sleeping woman, who is at once the shepherd’s companion (for she is Selene and also Spenser’s Phoebe¹¹) and the shepherd herself, is another anagogic woman.

Frye, whose ways of thinking about the apocalyptic often mirrored Macpherson’s and may have been taken directly from her, can help us understand the nature of her anagogy here and the relationship between her pastoral and her increasingly wholehearted embrace of a poetics of apocalyptic, integrated vision. As Frye notes in *Anatomy of Criticism*, “The god”—or in Macpherson’s case, goddess—“whether traditional deity, glorified hero, or

¹⁰ As Aquinas notes in *Summa Theologiae*, “the name ‘Seraphim,’” for the highest order of angels, “does not come from charity only, but from the excess of charity, expressed by the word ardor or fire” (1004). The Seraphim are the closest beings to god, and their holy fire cleanses and purifies.

¹¹ As Spenser writes in the seventh eclogue of *The Shepherds’ Calendar*, July:

There is a holy place
Where Titan riseth from the main
To run his daily race,
Upon whose top the stars be stay’d,
And all the sky doth lean;
There is the cave where Phoebe laid
The shepherd long to dream. (97)

apotheosized poet, is the central image that poetry uses in trying to convey the sense of unlimited power in a humanized form” (*Anatomy* 120). Reaney suggests, in reference to “The Caverned Woman” and a few other poems, that “what [Macpherson] means by an angel is anything or anybody or any being seen in its Eternal aspect, that is, at its most glorious and most real, its most expanded” (“Third” 24).¹² Like the goddess of *Nineteen Poems*, who in Reaney’s words “is like everything...*is* everything and contains everything she is like” (“Third” 20), the caverned woman’s dreaming body contains the potential to expand into the total world of the Edenic, Arcadian pastoral garden—with its flowers, fountains, milk, and blood—that is the homeland of those who bear unlimited power in humanized form, the Seraphim. All of this is asleep within her until the thaw releases her power, and like Graves’s goddesses (or Persephone, Snow White, Frazer’s god of Nemi Wood, or Christ, for this figure repeats throughout myth and folklore), her return to the living world outside of the cave will bring about that world’s renewal through the return of “the Sun that frees and warms,” the life and growth of spring.

The body of the titular figure in the collection’s opening poem, “The Sleeping Shepherd,” is likewise another container for the pastoral garden, the perfected, total world of Eden or Arcadia: “Such dreamers—ask the Moon who sees— / Can only wake to weep: / For flocks and birds and streams and trees / Are golden in his silver sleep” (*Shepherd*). The perfected, post-apocalyptic world exists only in the mind of the sleeping shepherd, and to wake is to re-enter the flawed, fallen world of the pastoral elegy, where “The gold day gone, now Lucifer / Lights shepherds from the eastern hill” (*Shepherd*). The mind of the sleeping shepherd is the “golden bubble / round and rare,” and the shepherd by moonlight simultaneously is and is not Frye himself.

Crucially, however, Macpherson suggests that the anagogic man can only be such because of the unacknowledged power and protection of the female half of the world, the silver Moon Goddess, Mother Earth. As she writes in “The Secret Sleeper,”

His sleep sustains the golden tree,
His night the shining day,
His dream the garden of the west,
The firebird on her spray. (*Shepherd*)

¹² We should remember that Macpherson is not the only Canadian mythopoeist working in conversation with Spenser and the pastoral at this point, for Reaney is also at work on *A Suit of Nettles*, an explicitly Spenserian eclogue, during this period.

Described in language that strongly connects him to the golden sun—and, if we think back to McLuhan’s comment about his being figured as the sun, to Frye—the anagogic shepherd contains within his dreams the symbols of the unfallen world of Eden and Arcadia: the golden Tree of Knowledge, the shining day, the Garden of Eden, and the self-contained, timeless phoenix. And yet, the sleeping shepherd’s golden bubble does not contain the entirety of “all us and our worlds,” for someone watches, and watches over him: a female presence on whom his ability to dream this perfected world into existence depends. Of this, and her, the shepherd is well aware, and

He need not ask what jealousy
Stars the dark with eyes,
Nor buried in what silver breast
He securely lies. (*Shepherd*)

He dreams his golden dreams while lying on the breast of the silvery Moon Goddess, the necessary female counterpart to his sun god, she without whom the world would be only half of a whole, without a night to complete the day. Macpherson’s other pastoral gardens complete her set of variations. “The Garden of the Fall” is a corrupted version of the Garden of Eden, where all life is turned to stone and ice, and all love turned inward. “The Underwater Tree” describes what Macpherson might have called an “Atlantean Arcadia or underwater paradise” (*Spirit* 262) where the tree of knowledge becomes a tree of coral that

...shelters shiny fishes
And leggy crustacee,
Becomes whatever wishes,
And shines a perfect tree
Of coral in the sea. (*Shepherd*)

We have returned to the underwater garden of “Eve in Reflection,” where the dream is also the Narcissus-like reflection of the thing we most desire but cannot reach; the biblical tree of knowledge has become, in her watery pastoral, a part of the underwater world of reflection and dream.

By the autumn, Macpherson had completed most of *The Shepherd by Moonlight* and sent poems to a number of outlets across Canada for review and publication. The connections with editors and poets she had made at the Kingston conference were serving her well, and she began to burst out in periodical publication in a way she never had before. This was not only because she knew so many more editors now, but also because there were simply more good places to publish than there had been when she started out. In October she wrote to Johnston that “[Malcolm] Ross is taking Snow-Maiden (revised & entitled The Caverned Woman—remember ‘Five windows light,’

etc.) [to publish in *Queen's Quarterly*], F'head [*Fiddlehead*] any amount of stuff, *Forum* the Plowman entire" (GJP Box 6 File 1). Not long after, she wrote again to say that

Continue being on point of bursting out in print: F'head, Forum, Q's Q, & now *Origin*: Layton's doing a Can. number and wrote Cogswell to ask how to get in touch with me, & I sent him five (including my pet Anagogue whom no-one else wants: the rest duds, Symp. Shepherd & some nursery-rhymes), & he's sent back a wildly enthusiastic letter to say this is the best he's got & how'd I like to be known as the Blake of Bloor St – 'with a dab of Emily'. (GJP Box 6 File 1)

Macpherson was understandably surprised at Layton's reaction, a change of heart about her and her work that we might attribute to their having gotten to know each other in Kingston. As Layton concluded his letter about the *Origin* poems, which were published in the Winter-Spring 1956 issue, "I shall look forward to seeing the Plowman intact in the *Canadian Forum*, though it can never equal the pleasure I got when I heard your cool and passionate voice reading it in Kingston. That was one of the unforgettable moments of the conference" (JMP Box 1 File 20). Macpherson likewise sensed that their meeting had changed how they approached one another:

Such enthusiasm is touching, but I can't think what he's basing it on – his tastes must have undergone radical change since we met. Though it's curious how meeting people helps one to understand their verse: have always had a tenderness for *Deeper into the Forest* [by Roy Daniells, whom she likewise met in Kingston], but it never got me as it did on re-reading the other night. (GJP Box 6 File 1)

Although their relationship would always be a little spiky, Macpherson could write to Johnston that after Kingston she found Layton quite gentle, and she had no objection to being published by him—a marked change from the days in which she accused him, in not so many words, of writing poetry in faeces and printing it on toilet paper. In addition to all these periodical appearances, Macpherson was also presented with the opportunity for some longer publications: "Fred [Cogswell] suggests I volunteer as next victim in their pamphlet series: Souster's all set to give me four pages in a mimeo collection of *Ten Younger Poets* [later titled *Poets 56: Ten Younger English-Canadians*], with Avi Boxer and all the lot: amused to find self somewhat flattered by his acceptance" (GJP Box 6 File 1). And perhaps most importantly, there was still talk of a volume to be published by McClelland and Stewart (M&S).

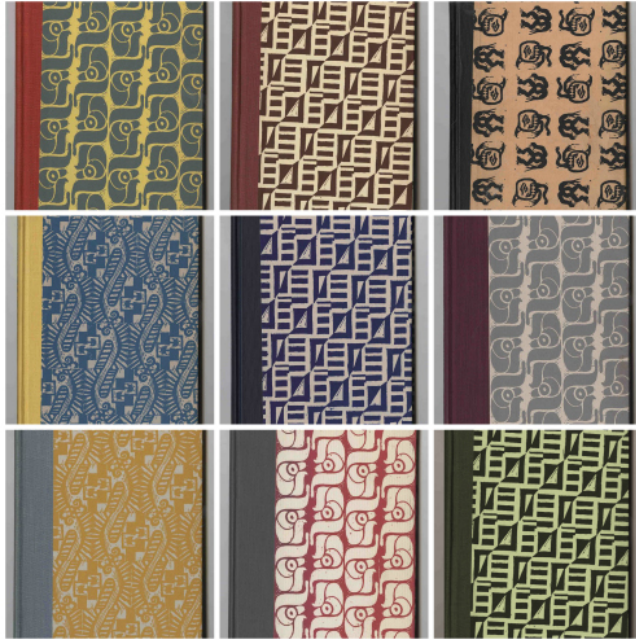


Figure 6: The covers of the nine Indian File volumes, designed by Paul Arthur. (Source: McMaster University archives).

The book contract with M&S that Jack McClelland offered to Macpherson after the Kingston conference had always hinged on her completing *The Shepherd by Moonlight* and adding it to a selection of her existing poems that spanned her poetic production from 1948 all the way up to *The Plowman in Darkness*. The plan was for M&S to publish this body of verse as a sort of four-part selected poems volume, one that would become part of the Indian File series¹³ with its beautifully patterned covers and reputation for high quality. Macpherson was not entirely pleased with M&S's pursuit of her manuscript, at least at first. As she wrote to Johnston, "I resisted & was downright nasty:

but capitulated at last long enough to listen to them, & am now surprised they put up with me so long. They want a book for Indian File, anytime between now & next fall, & will practically promise publication untouched of anything I give to them" (GJP Box 6 File 1). She was "frightened at first" about the idea of publishing a substantial collection of her poems, "but am now pleased: I want a proper roof to put my wandering gods under, especially the Anagogue ["The Anagogic Man"]. And it means I can redeem under their proper title—which is Poor Child, I always knew that—the poems Robert printed, or the ten or so of them that I want to keep" (GJP Box 6 File 1). To Crawley, she explained in what form she intended to see her wandering gods (and goddesses) find a home: "I want to get the set I'm working on now [*The Shepherd by Moonlight*] in order first, though, to go in as well. Am like the rest of the world bothered by inability to write a poem of any size: but now they come in related sets, which is a step in the right direction" (ACP Box 1 File 18). While Macpherson's critics have been little able to, Macpherson herself was able to identify that her mythic cycles, in the form of her suites of interlinked poems, had become a solution to the problem of the singular image and limited lyric that led—when she could not find a way to "write a poem of any size" but a short

¹³ For more on the history of the Indian File series, which were designed by Paul Arthur (of *Here & Now* and Toronto Transit Commission fame), see Debra Antoncic's "'To Dress Our Letters in Such Strong Fancy': The Indian File Poetry Series."

lyric—to Page’s silence and to the end of forties lyric modernism more generally. Not only would Macpherson’s suites have internal coherence—“O Earth seems to me to hang together” (ACP Box 1 File 18), she remarked to Crawley—but she was also planning, as she completed her manuscript, to give the larger collection its own apocalyptic, highly structured coherence. The combination of *O Earth Return* and *The Plowman in Darkness*, like Blake’s combined *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, gave those poems a significance they could not have without being paired. *O Earth* hung together “even more so with the Plowman attached as its shadow side” (ACP Box 1 File 18), and her apocalyptic structure seemingly needed just two more walls (“Poor Child” and “The Shepherd by Moonlight”) to be complete.

In being convinced that the Indian File volume required all four complementary suites, each with its own internal coherence and its dialogue with each of the others, Macpherson committed to creating something different from the prevailing trend in Canadian modernism: she decided to create a unified volume of lyrics, a form and structure that would become a bridge, albeit a little recognized one, between the collection of unrelated lyrics that dominated the 1940s and 1950s and the postmodern long poem that would dominate Canadian poetry in the 1960s and beyond.¹⁴ There is a compelling argument to be made that *The Boatman*, in exposing to a wide readership the creative potential of a lyric cycle, is one of the missing links between the modernist book of miscellaneous lyrics and the postmodern Canadian long poem. As Sharon Thesen notes in the introduction to the first edition of *The New Long Poem Anthology*, which is still considered the major collection of Canadian contemporary long poetry,¹⁵ “various and beautiful long, sequential or suite poems” (453) like Macpherson’s could have been but were not included in the anthology. Her argument that “the long poem in Canada is often a way of handling the distrust of the ‘poetic’ associated with the lyric voice” (452) suggests that Macpherson’s brand of formalist, dedicated lyricism has excluded her from consideration within this tradition despite the inclusion of her contemporaries (Jones, Atwood, Lee) and the mythopoeic character of canonical long poems like Kroetch’s *Seed Catalogue* and bpNichol’s *The Martyrology*. Too, the postmodern long poem “is a place where union and separation, entering and exiting (and existing) can go on, unencumbered by the pressure of lyric closure” (452),

¹⁴ While the book of interrelated lyrics was not uncommon during the Canadian romantic period—for example, Archibald Lampman’s *Lyrics of the Earth* or Bliss Carman’s *Sappho*—the advent of Canadian modernism, and the adoption of imagist principles, led to its almost complete disappearance.

¹⁵ rob mcLennan was to have edited a third version of the anthology, which was to have begun in 1985 and extended to the present, but this project has since been abandoned due to various editorial difficulties. See “The Penultimate Long Poem Anthology, edited by rob mcLennan (unpublished)” for what would have been the edition’s introduction and Table of Contents.

while the version of Macpherson's mythopoetics that most critics tend to recognize—the closed lyric cycles of *The Boatman*—still exert this pressure, even as they strain against closure in playing with the potential of accumulation and of cycles without obvious endings or limits. While Macpherson's brand of suite-building lies too far within the modernist lyric tradition to have garnered any significant recognition as an important source-text for the Canadian postmodern long poem, it could and should be considered a crucial link in the lineage of Canadian long poems from the nineteenth century to the present. In the mid-1950s, M&S seemed to find Macpherson's suite poems a compelling innovation during a period where lyric miscellanies still dominated, and in their promise of “publication untouched of anything I give them,” the publisher seemed also to suggest that the readers of the 1950s would find them likewise. This early version of what would eventually become *The Boatman* was already well on its way to becoming what Munro Beattie will call “the most intricately unified book in Canadian poetry” (300).

Once she got over her internal conflict, Macpherson was mostly thrilled to have the opportunity to see a proper collection, and not just another chapbook, in print: “Many a slip, of course: I may get cold feet or be unable to finish the Shepherd, & they may change their minds—or it may take years to get the thing through: but so far am pleased” (GJP Box 6 File 1). The two main reasons for her pleasure were McClelland's seeming willingness to take the collection largely as she sent it, thus avoiding another *Nineteen Poems* situation where a publisher demanded full editorial control and left her unhappy with the end result, and “the relief to me of having someone else responsible for publicity & distribution,” which “would be unearthly: what I write is so involved with my organic life that I get to feel as if walking about without a shirt on, & the nervous strain gets fearful” (GJP Box 6 File 1). What Macpherson did not originally realize was that McClelland included in his publicity work securing for the collection Canada's top poetry prizes, and M&S “said more or less that they reckoned to keep the G[overnor]-G[eneral]'s prize in the firm (have pulled it off with 3 out of 7 [Indian File volumes])¹⁶ & hadn't a candidate for next year & had settled on me: all very curious. There isn't a poet in Canada to whom as a publisher I'd commit myself as M&S have to me: these blokes generally make a point of not showing enthusiasm. Again am touched” (GJP Box 6 File 1). While M&S's plan to have Macpherson as their next Indian File author would

¹⁶ Of the seven Indian File volumes published up to this point—Roy Daniells' *Deeper into the Forest* (1948), Robert Finch's *The Strength of the Hills* (1948), James Reaney's *The Red Heart* (1949), James Wreford Watson's *Of Time and the Lover* (1950), Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey's *Border River* (1952), Patrick Anderson's *The Colour as Naked* (1953), and P.K. Page's *The Metal and the Flower* (1954)—three (Reaney, Wreford Watson, and Page) had won the Governor General's Award.

not pan out, their pegging her for the Governor General's Award would prove to be prophetic, if damaging to their own winning record.

In addition to the teaching, donship, and research that took up much of her attention and energy, Macpherson was “still very happily playing with my Sleepers” (GJP Box 6 File 1) early in the new year, and the plan was to publish her Indian File volume once that suite was complete. What exactly happened to bring the curtain down on the idea of the Indian File collection we do not know. Macpherson's letters during that time contain a record of her day to day life—her teaching, her grading, her frustration, which she vented to Johnston, that she has “been three years here and still cannot find a man I can take out,” as men either “despise me or are afraid of me,” or “are so lonely they won't refuse even me, but quickly get so sticky I can't stand them” (GJP Box 6 File 1)¹⁷—but not of her ongoing discussions with M&S. Possibly because she later regretted those letters and destroyed them, there is no record of whatever falling out or business decision led to Phyllis Webb's *Even Your Right Eye* being the next Indian File book instead of Macpherson's selected works. *The Shepherd by Moonlight* was seemingly done by February, but rather than turning to revision and the publication process, Macpherson immediately launched into a new suite of poems quite different from her shepherds, and indeed from anything she had done before. We might suspect that Macpherson got cold feet about publishing her collection without these new poems, and that Jack McClelland objected to either the new length of, or new timeline for, her Indian File manuscript. Given how Macpherson chafed against excessive editorial control and wanted her poems published in a form of which she could be proud—remembering back to her admonition to herself “*Don't alter to please. Fatal*” (JMP Box 5 File 2), how furious she was at Reaney when he blamed her for Graves's missteps in *Nineteen Poems*, and indeed her creation of Emblem Books to put herself in control of the publishing process—this is more than likely an approximate version of what happened. But whatever the reason, Macpherson's never easy relationship with M&S was now over, and she had the freedom to continue shaping her burgeoning manuscript as she saw fit.

¹⁷ Macpherson is not known for her occasional poetry, but the dress she was to wear to the formal for which she could not find a suitable date inspired one of her few occasional poems, “Mortal Dress (A Poem for Antamon).” In Blake's *Milton*, Antamon (whose crystalline, cloudy form symbolizes semen and male fertility) creates corporeal forms for the Spectres, who put them on like dresses (28: 13-18). In her poem, Macpherson expertly combines humour and the macabre to beseech the Lord to, when she dies, “Extend thy mercy, Lord, and raise / Together with me to thy praise / —Surely, Lord, thou canst guess— / My blue silk dress” (JMP Box 6 File 2). We might wonder what kind of dates Macpherson was expecting to have in Antamon's dress, and how she felt about her lack of a traditional committed relationship and children (or, more importantly, society's expectation that she desire both), given that Blake suggests that the Spectres remain ghostly, incomplete women until touched by Antamon's male seed.

The Mind, That Ocean

Macpherson dashed off her new suite of poems, *The Mind That Ocean: A Book of Riddles*, sometime in the early winter of 1956. Like so many of her suites, Macpherson took her title for this one from another poem, Andrew Marvell's "The Garden." Marvell's piece, about the rejection of "busy companies of men" and "their uncessant labours" in favour of a pastoral contemplative life at one with nature, shares much with Macpherson's personal mythology, and with her ongoing attempts to understand and reconcile with the new world (post-war, expatriate, slowly becoming more accepting of women artists) in which she found herself. As Cecil Day Lewis notes in *The Poetic Image*, the resonances between seventeenth century poets like Marvell and modernists like Macpherson are many, especially because they shared the experience of navigating a chaotic and unstable world: "when we find the seventeenth-century loading his verse with metaphor drawn from new discoveries in science, new fields of thought, what we are seeing is his attempt to reconcile reason with revelation: and, if a twentieth-century poet belabours us" with verse likewise attempting to integrate the new, post-war world, "we must bear with him, for he is, however ineptly, about the poet's old business of bringing emotional order out of material and intellectual confusion" (104). In *The Mind That Ocean*, Macpherson is working to do the same. She took the title of her suite from the middle of "The Garden," where Marvell narrates the experience of entering into total identification with the garden in which he sits, an experience he frames within the metaphor of the new science of his time:

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness;
The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find,
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds, and other seas;
Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade. (Marvell)

Like Macpherson, Marvell believes in a kind of apocalyptic vision, where "the mind, that ocean" is like her constellated mind that sees in the world "its own resemblance." The prevailing theory in the seventeenth century was that for every species that lived on land, a corresponding species lived in the sea. Marvell's mind, that ocean, can likewise create within its sphere a corresponding image for everything that exists in the world. Marvell's oceanic mind is another golden bubble in which all of the world can be contained and identified. Like Macpherson in "Ideas of Order," Marvell finds this identifying vision limiting, for the mind is thus restricted to thinking only what it sees, and creating a

distorted vision of the world that corresponds to the structure of the human mind and not to its own reality. But in “transcending these” fixations on identification and the search for resemblance, Marvell suggests that the mind “creates... / Far other worlds, and other seas” that are nothing like what exists in our world. This creative “green thought in a green shade”—for this creative power is enhanced by the pastoral landscape—makes non-existent “all that’s made,” and makes more real than reality the products of the imagination. These products of the imagination become the subject of Macpherson’s riddles in *The Mind That Ocean*.

Part of the reason that the suite came so quickly to Macpherson was because she had a head start; she moved two of the poems in *The Shepherd by Moonlight*—“Coral” and “The Mermaid”—immediately into the new suite, and her dedication to *Shepherd* suggests that she may have intended those two suites as a matched pair (much like *O Earth Return* and *The Plowman in Darkness*) from the beginning, much as Marvell imagines a correspondence between the ocean and the garden. As Macpherson writes in the dedication to *Shepherd*,

When N*rr**’s absence prov’d too hard a thing,
My muse that Angel did divide to sing
(Divided far & scarcely to recover,
But recognizable on looking over). (*Shepherd*)

Thee resemblance between *The Shepherd by Moonlight* and *The Mind That Ocean*, though divided, is indeed recognizable on looking over, for Macpherson’s switch from an earth-bound to an oceanic landscape is not as great a shift as it might seem. Marvell suggests as much in his linking of the oceanic and pastoral, and as Milton Wilson notes in a review of Macpherson’s poems, “No one who recalls *Lycidas* will be surprised to find the shepherd and his pasture” of *The Shepherd by Moonlight* “turn into the old man and the sea” (41) in *The Mind That Ocean*. *Lycidas*, being a pastoral elegy about a drowned poet, is steeped in imagery of green grass and blue water, and the imagery of *The Mind That Ocean* likewise forms a bridge between Milton’s earthy pastoral and the watery world of Edward King’s grave.

Given the discussion above of golden bubbles and *integritas* that is like “the water bead’s surface tension [identified] with the water itself” (Trehearne, *Montreal* 67), Macpherson’s choice of title and imagery for her new suite seems inevitable. She had moved from the pastoral symbolism of the garden back to the biblical symbolism of the flood that had characterized poems like “Private Deluge,” “Drowned Eden,” and “Eve in Reflection,” and as she had once framed the anagogic mind as constellated, or as a golden bubble, now she framed it as the ocean, its expansive contents completely identified with their container. In *The Mind That Ocean*, each poem is a riddle unto itself,

but the suite itself is a riddle too. Just as the riddles are coded textual descriptions that point to something that exists beyond the text—an egg, a mermaid, coral, a whale—the encyclopaedic riddles likewise point to something whole beyond their boundaries, the oceanic mind from which they and their collection spring. The riddles, in relationship to *The Mind That Ocean*, are very much like the fish emblem that concludes that suite and begins this chapter, a symbol of apocalyptic totality and total *integritas*: a fish made of fish, container and contents fully identified.

Despite all her previous moves toward and interrogation of a poetics of total identification—one that started with her first published poem, “Non-Identification,” continued with her invocation and mistrust of apocalyptic vision in “The Third Eye” and “Ideas of Order,” and turned into a critique of the ways in which total identification means a loss of identity for women in *O Earth Return* and *The Plowman in Darkness*—*The Mind That Ocean* is the first time that Macpherson allows that total identification without reservation. We might wonder why, given the serious reservations she long had about engaging in the kind of systematizing, totalizing thinking that in Graves and Frye made her uncomfortable, and that in much of Western literature left her, as a woman and a writer, either othered, silenced, or undifferentiated from men. I find it surprising that the suite does so, especially given Marvell’s key condition for enabling his perfected, pastoral contemplation in “The Garden.” He must inhabit it alone, and in particular there must be no women admitted to the garden. Marvell alters the myths of Daphne and Syrinx to suggest that trees are to be preferred to people, rewriting both myths to argue that both are pursued by their respective gods not because of their beauty or desirability, but because that pursuit will force their arboreal transformations:

Apollo hunted Daphne so
Only that she might laurel grow;
And Pan did after Syrinx speed,
Not as a nymph, but for a reed. (Marvell)

Marvell’s speaker’s resentment toward women comes to the fore toward the end of the poem, when he argues that for Adam, “Two paradises ‘twere in one / To live in paradise alone” (Marvell)—that Eden would have been a more perfect paradise without an Eve to disturb its tranquility. This kind of overt sexism inspired Macpherson to write her parodic fallen pastoral in *The Plowman in Darkness*, but why does she seemingly not challenge it here in *The Mind That Ocean*?

The dedication to the suite, when read in conjunction with Macpherson’s fish emblem, provides a partial answer to that question, although perhaps an unsatisfactory one. In its original version—she revised it for inclusion in *The Boatman*—the dedication is one of Macpherson’s most

public declarations of love for Frye, and a suggestion of how we might read the relationship between that love and the apocalyptic total identification she writes in *The Mind That Ocean* and later in *The Boatman* itself:

To Norrie take my dearest wish
And blessing, little book.
And should he ask what's in the dish
Or how the beast was took,
Say: Wisdom is a silver fish
And Love a golden hook. (*Mind*)

She then signs the dedication with her first initial made to mimic the shape of a fishhook. Wisdom is figured as the anagogic silver fish that heads this chapter and concludes the collection, a symbol that should make us think of Macpherson's Frye and his golden bubble that contains "All us and our worlds, and bound / Art and life, and wit and sense, / Innocence and experience" (*Shepherd*). Love—J(ay) herself, her name the golden hook—is the means by which that wisdom is drawn from one oceanic, anagogic mind into another. For Macpherson, total identification within Frye's anagogic bubble means being contained within and identified with the one person who speaks her mythic language fluently, creating total *integritas* within their elective community of two. This is a powerful reason for Macpherson to embrace total identification, not just the idea of order but order itself, despite the fact that, as Marvell points out in "The Garden," this form of identificatory vision limits both vision and art to that which is identifiable and excludes that which has yet to be seen or imagined. Even so, this impetus will become even more powerful when Macpherson makes clear, to her readers and herself, that this apocalyptic vision has the potential to identify not just her and Frye, her Reader with a capital-R, but her, her text, and readers plural—to create a perfected community of reader, writer, and text.

This recognition happens the most powerfully in the riddle "Egg." In direct address to her readers, a technique she first uses in "Poor Child," Macpherson speaks in a voice that is both herself in her poet's persona and also her book:

Reader, in your hand you hold
A silver case, a heart of gold.
I have no door, however small,
Unless you break my tender wall,
And there's no skill in healing then
Shall ever make me whole again
Show pity, reader, for my plight:
Pass by, or else consume me quite. (*Mind*)

The riddle, the book within which it is contained, and the writer herself: all these are golden bubbles, eggy anagogic containers that are miniature cosmoses in and of themselves. They must be viewed with an apocalyptic eye, consumed in their entirety, or their structural *integritas* will break like the shell of an egg. Macpherson's riddles must be read all together for the construction of *The Mind That Ocean* to make sense, consumed quite as an apocalyptic, encyclopaedic whole. (On the other hand, if we read "Egg" as a riddle about both book and writer, Macpherson's doubled language suggests she desires to be "consumed quite" by her capital-R reader—Frye—who can best access her innermost self by "break[ing] her tender wall" and consummating their union sexually.) For that broader community of readers to whom "Egg" is also addressed, and for whom the answer to this riddle is the book of verse they are holding, "a silver case, a heart of gold," their act of consumption is to enter into total union with the writer and text, to become part of an apocalyptic, all-containing circle that connects and identifies writer, reader, and text.

Macpherson used direct address to her readers in "Poor Child" to similar effect when she listed not just "the royal goosegirl combing / Her hair in the field; poor children too / Achilles sulking, Odysseus returned" as poor children but also "Philoctetes, Prufrock, and you and you," making her readers some of her poor children and hopefully more desirous of helping her to answer the question of "Poor child, what have they done to you?" (*Poems* 11). After "Poor Child," Macpherson experimented with both impersonality and the mythic method to connect and create community with her readers, to ensure that her symbolism was public and open rather than private and obscure, and to better guarantee that her poems were transforming her experience into evocative language that resonated with her readers' own emotions and experiences. All these strategies are fundamentally intended to create connection between reader, writer, and text. But in reframing the act of reading as apocalyptic total identification, the text and their writer consumed by and totally identified with the body of her reader, Macpherson seems to have believed that she had found an even more powerful way of creating a community of readers, one that began with her community of two and extended outward to encompass all who were willing and able to "consume me quite." "Egg" can thus be read on two levels—as a love poem about the desire for total communion with that first Reader, Frye, and as an invocation of (and invitation to) all those other ideal readers, those fluent speakers of her language, that Frye proved to Macpherson could exist.

We might wonder at Macpherson's new embrace of this total identification, given her past reluctance to allow her fallen women total identification in the face of their likewise total loss of specifically female identity, and her concern about the ways that totalizing systems of literary history

and theory tended to exclude writers who were female, queer, or of colour. In an essay about Macpherson's verse, Suniti Namjoshi wonders if "For the purposes of the central theme, that is the closure of 'the rift in Being'" that occurs when the central figure is re-identified with the rest of creation, "it does not really matter very much" to Macpherson, or to us, "whether Man is represented by a male figure or a female one" (57). It always has for Macpherson before, but it seemingly no longer does. If *O Earth Return* and *The Plowman in Darkness* suggested that personal identity is more important than inclusion within community—that being separate but fallen, a poor child forever condemned to being on the outside, is preferable to total identification that erases identity and makes woman a part of mankind—*The Mind That Ocean*, and even more strongly *The Boatman*, suggests that inclusion, community, and communion trump concerns about sexism and distinctive gender identity. Macpherson has decided that it is time for Earth to return to the world of man, even if the attendant issues she pointed out in her earlier work remain unresolved. It should not surprise us that this is the case, given how powerfully the experiences of finding, and finding belonging within, her chosen elective community of mythographers with Frye and in Kingston affected her. In finding this community, Macpherson was a poor child on the outside no longer, and she sought to extend that experience of belonging to her readers.

Of Macpherson's other riddles in *The Mind That Ocean*, we should pay particular attention to a few. One, "Phoenix," marks Macpherson's return to the bird imagery that she used throughout her goddess poems—like "The Encounter" and "The Comforter"—but here situated within the framework of apocalyptic totality and identification. Macpherson's phoenix is, like her egg, a self-contained and all-encompassing circle without beginning or end:

If I am that bird, then I am one alone.
 Father, mother, child, I am my own.
 Ashes and bone of a dead life I save
 And bear about with me to find a grave,
 Token that my renewed and living breath
 Is kindled from a still repeated death.
 That fire is my element, consumes and lights me,
 Heals and accuses and again requites me.
 I feed on the dew of heaven and live without desire:
 Reader, consider a life in the fire. (*Mind*)

Perhaps even more powerfully than "Egg," this poem suggests that Macpherson had fully embraced the potential of total identification, for she figures not just her text as an apocalyptic cycle, but herself—she is the phoenix, self-contained, all-encompassing, life and death together in one fiery

body. And she wants her readers to join her there in the fire, to create an apocalyptic, anagogic community within which every member is totally seen, totally known, totally identified.

When Macpherson finished writing her riddles, she sent them to Johnston in Ottawa explaining that they were once again intended for the Pratt Prize. In the accompanying letter, Macpherson noted that:

Fisherman is naturally the last & inconclusive one (i.e. poet becomes Leviathan). His last two [lines] were just added: when composed (Sun.) he ended with a couplet only. Better or worse? It's the only time I've ever managed to get past what you might call a consummation-point and am feeling somewhat tickled: feel he needs adumbration, but now hardly dare tamper. (GJP Box 6 File 1)

Macpherson was perhaps most interested in the poem that concluded *The Mind That Ocean*, and we should likewise pay it considerable attention, for "The Fisherman" is the key not only to understanding *The Mind That Ocean* but to understanding how the suite, and especially that poem, reframed her mythopoetics in a way that would fundamentally alter readings of all the rest of her poems, especially when they were grouped within the overarching structure of *The Boatman*. "The Fisherman" tells, in just a few short stanzas, the story of Eden and the fall, Noah and the flood, and of a version of Macpherson herself, the apocalyptic poet. Using a form and cadence very evocative of some of Marvell's work, Macpherson writes that in the beginning,

The world was first a private park
Until the angel, after dark,
Scattered afar to wests and easts
The lovers and the friendly beasts.

And later still a home-made boat
Contained Creation set afloat,
No rift nor leak that might betray
The creatures to a hostile day. (*Mind*)

Both the park (Arcadia, Eden, Beulah, the perfected garden of the pastoral) and the ark (Macpherson's "home-made boat") are, like the mind, the egg, and the ocean, apocalyptic containers that in Macpherson's mythology encompass all of creation. After this quick tour of the Old Testament, Macpherson then brings us to the present day, where "beside the midnight lake" that is the mind that ocean, "One single fisher sits awake / And casts and fights, and hauls to land / A myriad forms upon the sand" (*Mind*). In biblical mythology's original moment of all-encompassing apocalyptic vision, which Wilkinson and Klein also write about in "A Poet's-Eye View" and "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," Adam uses his third-eyed vision to at once survey all of

creation in order to begin naming it. Macpherson's fisherman is "Old Adam on the naming-day," and he "Blessed each and let it slip away" (*Mind*). But Macpherson's poet, "The fisher of the fallen mind / Sees no occasion to be kind" (*Mind*), and he names his creations but does not set them free. Rather, being a greedy fellow,

But on his catch proceeds to sup;
Then bends, and at one slurp sucks up
The lake and all that therein is
To slake that hungry gut of his.

Then whistling makes for home and bed
As the last morning breaks in red. (*Mind*)

This act of apocalyptic total identification—containing, within his body, everything that ever was, shall be, and is—is, as in the Book of Revelation, a sign of the end times. The fisherman makes his way home "as the last morning breaks in red" and the old world ends. If we take the Book of Revelation to be true, a perfected, fully-identified new world—where everyone is on the ark, and no poor children or fallen women are left behind—will come after.

The version of "The Fisherman" quoted above is from Macpherson's original, handmade chapbook version of *The Mind That Ocean*. In it, the poet is—as she writes to Johnston—the Leviathan: a sort of human ark, for in Macpherson's eyes the ark and the Leviathan were one and the same. As she writes in another of her riddles, "Whale":

"Art thou the first of creatures, that Leviathan,
The Egyptian trickster that strives with man?"

My maker saw his work and called me good.
I am an ark to swim the perilous flood.
With gold and spices, with candles burning sweet
In wakeful silence at his head and feet,
Vaulted in my sepulchre lies the first man,
The burden I am given to bear as I can.
I am God's creature, that Leviathan. (*Mind*)

In much mythology, Frye suggests in *Anatomy of Criticism*, the Leviathan—Jonah's great whale, and Macpherson's too—symbolizes the "fallen world of sin and death and tyranny into which Adam fell" (190), and "Adam's children are born, live, and die inside his belly" (190). Adam is "the first man, / The burden I am given to bear as I can" (*Mind*), and the Leviathan the apocalyptic container that holds him and all creation. Macpherson's poet is likewise that hungry fish: even after letting his "myriad forms" escape the golden bubble and rest upon the sand, he slurps them all back up, along

with the lake from which they came, and contains all creation once again. But in the version of “The Fisherman” that Macpherson sends to Johnston, and that appears in *The Boatman*, the poem ends quite differently, since Macpherson added a final couplet a few days after completing the poem. In the new ending, the fisherman walks off whistling, thinking that he has successfully become the all-containing Leviathan, but there is a fisherman greater than he, and “God above with patient grin / Lets down his hook and hoicks him in” (GJP Box 6 File 2). This kind of addition was unusual for Macpherson, for she almost never revised poems after she considered them completed, and as she noted to Johnston, “It’s the only time I’ve ever managed to get past what you might call a consummation-point and am feeling somewhat tickled” (GJP Box 6 File 2). The addition of two lines might seem insignificant, but the closing couplet—its contained form providing an instant sense of closure and neatly reflecting the moment of apocalyptic consumption—fundamentally changes the nexus of power in the poem and in the world of which it is a microcosm. In the revised version, the fisher-poet is only the “nth Adam” (Klein 146), naming and containing all of creation, for a moment. Almost immediately thereafter, God hoicks him up and, in consuming him, becomes the ultimate apocalyptic container. After leaving the apocalyptic cycle incomplete in *O Earth* and *Plowman*, where her women stay fallen, in “The Fisherman” Macpherson finally gets to a point of total return—all creation is re-identified with God its creator, as it was at the beginning of “The Fisherman,” before God “Scattered afar to wests and easts / The lovers and the friendly beasts” (GJP Box 6 File 2). The world is returned to what in biblical mythology is its original state of perfected union.

It is tempting, when reading “The Fisherman” and Macpherson’s other biblical poems, to assume that her use of the Bible’s symbolism is a profession of faith. Indeed, most of Macpherson’s readers have succumbed to that temptation. We should remember, though, Macpherson’s admonition not to conflate a poet’s use of symbolism and mythology with her personal beliefs. There is no evidence to suggest that the God of “The Fisherman” functions any differently than the gods of Greek and Roman mythology she deploys elsewhere in her verse. All of her gods and goddesses serve as useful shorthands, characters, and symbols—of the failed quest, of the desire for immortality, of a love seemingly inhuman in its strength, of alienation and despair. These gods and goddesses include the God of the Bible, who here—like the Leviathan, Christ, Here Comes Everyone, Ark, and Anagogic Man—serves as a symbol of that expansive vision, inclusion, and identification that characterizes the anagogic and apocalyptic. This vision of total identification and inclusion—no poor children, no outsiders, the world perfected and whole—is an immensely

appealing alternative to the realities of the world in the mid-1950s, a world still marked by exclusion, fear, and the looming threat of the Cold War. It would not surprise me if insisting on the necessity of including *The Mind That Ocean* in her Indian File volume was the reason that Macpherson broke off talks with M&S, for this poetics of total identification would shape not only what Macpherson wrote next, but the entire character of *The Boatman* and—problematically— understandings of her entire poetic for decades to come.

The Ark and Its Boatman

Despite the deal with M&S having fallen through, Macpherson had not given up on the idea of seeing her poems published by a larger press than her own Emblem Books. Once *The Mind That Ocean* was complete in April, she “assembled Selected Works into a manuscript and dumped on Norrie to vet” (GJP Box 6 File 1). Macpherson had taken more than a decade’s worth of poetic production and edited it down to what she saw as her best work: “Seven poems from 19P [*Nineteen Poems*] titled *Poor Child, O Earth & Plowman* unchanged, a set that needs weeding called *The Sleepers*, nineteen of them assorted, full of shepherds & enchantresses & people, and finally the Riddles [*The Mind That Ocean*]” (GJP Box 6 File 1). Macpherson wanted Frye’s input not as the person with whom she was in a relationship, but as arguably Canada’s most prominent critic of its own literature. By the spring of 1956, when Macpherson gave him her manuscript, he had published six years of his “Letters in Canada” poetry reviews for the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, along with forty-some other essays and reviews—including “Canada and Its Poetry,” “The Narrative Tradition in English-Canadian Poetry,” and “Preface to an Uncollected Anthology”—that had garnered him a reputation as one of Canada’s foremost critics.¹⁸ Still, Frye maintained his position: he would not offer pre-publication criticism to anyone who might take his opinion seriously, which by this point was likely a good portion of the Canadian literary community, including Macpherson. Macpherson knew that this was the case; as she wrote to Johnston,

He pretends not to know what one wants him to do; one is getting used to that. He also vetted *O Earth* an age ago, but refused to throw anything out: I weeded everything he had mentioned with anything but unmitigated approval, thereby cutting the set to half—it hurt, but consequently have never felt regretful or guilty over anything still in. (GJP Box 6 File 1)

¹⁸ Much of Frye’s Canadian criticism, including the essays noted above, is collected in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*.

“A charitable scalpel” like the one that Crawley used to offer her “is always in order” (GJP Box 1 File 1), but these days was hard for her to find; even though she and Johnston wrote to each other about verse almost continuously, she offered far more criticism of his work in progress, *The Cruising Auk*, than he did of hers. Prize committees were one of her only reliable sources of critical assessment, and until a publisher for her selected works could be found, Macpherson was content to continue sending her poems to the Pratt Prize committee. As she noted to Johnston, “Pratt to be offered twice this year: have done a Frisch & entered both the riddles (leaving out 3 previously published) and a set of ten sleepers” (GJP Box 6 File 1).

It was not long, however, before a new publisher offered itself up. In the spring, a group of “conspirators ... [Robert] Weaver, [Millar] MacLure, Anne Wilkinson, Kildare Dobbs (Macmillan’s), Ivon [sic] Owen (OUP), with a kindly interest being taken by Smith, Scott, Crawley, etc.” came together to create “the proposed *Tamarack Review*” (GJP Box 6 File 1), a new little magazine intended to fill, at least partially, the hole left by the closure of *Contemporary Verse* and the quick flaring out of *Here and Now*. Macpherson was involved in *Tamarack* from the planning stages, and noted that

The intention is to put out a first issue in Oct., and to pay for all contributions. MacLure asked me if I wouldn’t like to submit the book of riddles for the first number, deadline June 1st, & said he thought it’d get past the others. That means they’re prepared to publish longer chunks of verse than the usual. I may ask them, if they take the Riddles, whether they’d consider the head-&-tail-pieces as well that I drew for it—that in case they hope to follow in the footsteps of *Here and Now* & be arty. (GJP Box 6 File 1)

Tamarack’s editors were indeed interested in her riddles, retitled as “The Fisherman” and with the inclusion of a few new poems—“Book,” “Retina,” and “Reader”—that like “Egg” frame the act of reading and writing as a collaborative, although not always easy, relationship. Macpherson seemingly anticipated that some of her readers would have a difficult time with her riddles, for the act of reading she describes in “Retina” is quite the struggle. As she wrote to Owen, one of *Tamarack*’s editors and the managing editor of Oxford University Press, “in my scheme the ring is the retina which is also a fishnet” (OUPP),¹⁹ and her reader is both fisherman and fish, “The struggler in the net” (*Poems* 48) and the one holding it. Once her reader gives up the fight, however,

¹⁹ As the Oxford University Press papers still reside at the Oxford offices in Don Mills, and have not been administered or organized by a professional archivist, their organization is idiosyncratic and the two Macpherson folders (the first containing documents relating to *The Boatman* and *The Boatman and Other Poems*, the second containing documents relating to *Poems Twice Told*) are not numbered or labeled in any meaningful way. Therefore, I have simply chosen to cite them as the Oxford University Press Papers (OUPP).

His agon past
Through a true gate
Comes in at last,
Leaving behind him
In quite a fix
An old man's skin and bones
Cross as two sticks. (48)

Reading her poems promises to be not just a pleasure, but also a harrowing experience that lets not the body but just the soul enter into the perfected world her verse creates. In "Book," Macpherson switches perspectives to speak for her navicular work as it is launched on the seas of periodical publication:

Dear Reader, not your fellow fish and blood
—I cannot love like you, nor you like me—
But like yourself launched out upon the flood,
Poor vessel to endure so fierce a sea.

The water-beetle travelling dry and frail
On the stream's face is not more slight than I;
Nor more tremendous is the ancient whale
Who scans the ocean floor with horny eye.

Although by my creator's will I span
The air, the fire, the water, and the land,
My volume is no burden to your hand.

I flourish in your sight, and for your sake.
His servant, yet I grapple fast with man:
Grasped and devoured, I bless him. Reader, take. (48)

Macpherson's riddles brought her verse to Owen's attention and, having dissolved her relationship with M&S, Macpherson felt free to approach him in May about publishing an edition of her work. Oxford was not one of Canada's more prominent poetry publishers in the 1950s, and indeed would never publish as much as some of the other Toronto-based presses, but it had published Canadian verse on and off since 1913, when *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* became the first book to carry the Oxford Canada imprint. In the 1940s, Oxford had published work by Robert Finch (whose *Poems* won the 1946 Governor General's Award and indirectly sparked the mass exodus of the *First Statement* editorial board), Emily Carr, and Paul Hiebert (whose novel, *Sarah Binks*, inspired the noun 'Binkery' that Macpherson used to denigrate the contents of *Canadian Poetry Magazine*). In the early to mid-1950s, however, Oxford was publishing little poetry or fiction, mainly because, like many

Canadian publishers, it “faced a significant increase in the cost of materials, production, and labour” and

issued fewer Canadian books as one means of minimizing financial loss to their businesses. This was not surprising, since publishers often had lost money on the weak sales of Canadian titles. Canadian books could not compete with popular, inexpensive paperbacks or the luxury items that had become available to consumers after the war. (Panofsky 15)

Indeed, Owen had to do some fancy footwork to convince his colleagues at the press—William Toye (who had also just joined the *Tamarack* editorial board, and who would be responsible for design and typography) and Charles Cannan Johnson (the Press’s manager)—that it was worth taking the financial risk on a book of poems. As he wrote to Johnson, who had been imported from England to turn the press’s finances around, “knowing how you feel about poetry I will try to stall off a decision” (OUPP) about Macpherson’s collection—but despite Johnson’s concerns and the fact that Oxford had not published a work of verse in nearly a decade, Owen saw something in Macpherson’s poems that made him want to take a chance on her manuscript. He was confident that Macpherson’s book would earn them not only money but goodwill and an enhanced reputation as a publisher: “We can do an edition of 500, sell it, and get our relatively small investment back. We will do a distinguished job of design and production and earn a great deal of respect and goodwill among literary people. I say we should do it” (OUPP). Johnson and Toye ultimately agreed with him, although it was probably helpful that Johnson seemed to have known Dorothy Macpherson when they both still lived in London, that Toye saw Macpherson’s collection as the beginning of the Canadian publishing programme he wanted Oxford to undertake, and that Owen was at the same time in the midst of launching what he hoped would be (and was) a profitable new Canadian atlas project.

Owen gave Macpherson the go-ahead to submit her manuscript for review in early 1956, and she spent the summer at work on four books. The first two were Jonas’s Gnosticism books, for she was still working with him from his homes in Ottawa and New Rochelle, New York. The second was her dissertation: she wrote to Crawley with disappointment to say that her “[a]mbition to cross Canada” and visit him in British Columbia was “indefinitely postponed, I’m afraid: next summer reserved for thesis” (ACP Box 1 File 18). The fourth book was her own, and she embarked on the project of turning the selected works draft she had dumped with Frye that spring into a manuscript for Owen. The task Macpherson set herself that summer was to do a final selection of the best of her collected poems, revise those with which she was not entirely pleased, shape them all into a structure that had the *integritas* to act as a container for her encyclopaedic verse, and then fill in the

gaps so that the overall shape was as smooth and blemish-less as her anagogic golden bubble or her riddling egg. Perhaps the best symbol for how Macpherson imagined her new collection is the one that concluded *The Mind That Ocean* and heads this chapter: a fish made of fish, a container fully identified with its contents.

In their notice of new publication, Oxford would describe Macpherson's book as "both a collection of her most recent poems and a cycle composed according to a consistent design" (OUPP), and Macpherson planned and understood it as both. This is another case where the common perception of Macpherson as someone who did not revise, and who did not compose poems to fit a pre-determined scheme, is misleading. *The Boatman's* apocalyptic schema required Macpherson to revise and to compose new poems that would ensure its completeness and integrity. *The Boatman's* hybridity—it is at the same time a rather miscellaneous selected poems edition, and what Beattie calls "the most intricately unified book in Canadian poetry" (300)—has long been disguised by the focus on Macpherson's apocalyptic poetics and the way that her newfound adoption of a poetics of total identification has shaped how we read *The Boatman* and the poems within it as a totalized and coherent whole, the all-encompassing container of the volume identified with its contents. What I have sought to do throughout this project is work to see through the unified cosmos that the constellated minds of Macpherson's readers have projected onto her collected works—although, admittedly, this is a cosmos that she herself works to create—to the miscellany that has long been disguised behind it. As we have seen in tracing her poetic development to this point, Macpherson's poetics are far less unified and more complex than the totalizing structure of *The Boatman* has often led readers to believe, and that totalizing structure is almost the last part of the collection that came into existence.

In order to create that structure, one that she intended to help reinforce the creation of that community and communion of reader-writer-book, Macpherson had to assess the current state of her apocalyptic cycle—which would now traverse the entire path from fully fallen (in the "Poor Children" section) to partially fallen (in "O Earth Return," "The Plowman in Darkness," and "The Sleepers") to redeemed and totally identified (in a new section, "The Boatman," and the final "The Fisherman" section)—and fill in the gaps that remained. Perhaps the best example we have of Macpherson composing poems to fit a pre-determined scheme is the Ark suite, which she wrote just after *The Mind That Ocean*. It was also published in the February 1957 issue of *Poetry*, and would become most of the new "The Boatman" section of her forthcoming collection. As Wilson outlines in his review of *The Boatman*,

The opening section ('Poor Child') is post-natal and retrospective.... In sections two and three ('O Earth Return' and 'The Plowman in Darkness') fallen mankind stands on the shore ... In section four ('The Sleepers') man's lost wholeness achieves a fragile and ambiguous recovery in the pastoral world of dream ... [and w]ith section five ('The Ark') we reach the wilful dream of art. ... The last section ('The Fisherman') sets in order the archetypal contents of the fallen ocean, all ready for the last catch and the last supper. (39-40)

Without the Ark suite, Macpherson's new collection would jump from the tentative move towards recovery and identification that happens in the ambiguous pastoral space that is *The Shepherd by Moonlight* straight into the total re-identification of *The Mind That Ocean*, which becomes "The Fisherman." In composing the "Ark" suite, Macpherson recognized that her readers—and she—needed an intermediate stage to fill in the cycle, a suite of poems that would suggest, as "Egg" and "The Fisherman" will in *The Mind That Ocean*, what is to be gained by accepting and working towards a poetics of total identification and fully integrated community.

Macpherson sent one of her usual letters to Crawley just after the Ark poems appeared in print, and in it she explained to him why she chose Noah's ark as the organizing symbol for the suite:

Ark is a medieval figure: there's all sorts of pleasant information available about the material it was made out of (gopher-wood is generally thought to have been cypress, or perhaps cedar) and its dimensions—St Augustine says it was built 'to man's proportions'—and what became of it afterwards and all. It gets to be interpreted as a figure of the Church in the stormy sea of this world, or the body of Mary or Christ or man in general—frail vessel, you know—, or God's frail creation delicately balanced on the chaos, or the serpent-depth that the dove subdued. I used it as a figure of the creator's relation to his creation which is also an object of love. Oddly enough got some of this out of Alice in Wonderland and Carroll's relation to Alice. However, I hope all the digested information becomes immaterial to the poem: it's supposed to. (ACP Box 1 File 18)

Macpherson's Ark speaks as a creation to its creator, Noah, who is an ambiguous and doubled figure in the suite. He is especially so if we read the Noah of the Ark suite in relation to other poems like "The Anagogic Man," where Noah is a coded reference to Frye. Given that boat equals book in Macpherson's metaphor for her collection, her Ark-voiced addresses to Noah are spoken as a poet to her Muse, a book to its author and reader, and as creation writ large to the creative force of the world, which for Macpherson, as for Blake, is the human imagination. All are the book's creators, for it could not exist without any. To read the figure of Noah as an exact equivalent for Norrie in the context of the Ark suite is misleading, for if read this way the poems (if we understand the words of the ark to be at least occasionally congruent with Macpherson's speaking voice as their author)

give Frye more credit as a creator of her work and of her as a poet than he rightfully deserves, no matter how much she and her work are “an object of love.” But of course the Noah/Norrie connection is only one layer of the signification happening in the Ark poems, for as in “Egg” and “The Fisherman,” these poems envision the work of creation—that for Macpherson is the work of creating her book, and the worlds it imagines into being—belonging jointly to the reader and the writer. In consuming the poem and the collection (both analogues for the Ark), reader and writer—together an nth Noah—work together to create a world where they are both identified within the all-containing body of the egg, the book, and the ark. As Macpherson suggests in the epilogue to her dissertation, which she was also writing as she finalized her new collection, “The dream, the Atlantean Arcadia or underwater paradise, and the ark, are all similar and connected symbols” (“Narcissus, or the Pastoral” 442). This total identification within the mind of the dreamer, who is also the reader, and the body of the ark creates an all-inclusive community that is the product of an antediluvian world where no one is fallen or left outside. This is Macpherson’s “wilful dream of art” (Wilson 39) and of humankind, and the ark is a perfect symbol of the potential for the creation of this new and perfected world after the storm has passed.

In the first Ark poem, “Ark to Noah,” the ark is in suspended animation—“I wait, with those that rest / In darkness, till you come” (*Poems* 38)—until its creator arrives, just as the written work is not fully alive until its ultimate creator, the reader, arrives to bring it to life via reading. The ark invites its creator, “when you come,” to

... be pleased
To shine here, be shown
Inward as all the creatures
Drawn through my bone. (38)

In Macpherson’s fundamentally social vision of textual creation, to read and thus create the book-ark is to be drawn inside it and spend time inside its all-containing hull with the creatures two-by-two—Macpherson’s poems—that call it home. In “Ark Apprehensive”—which Macpherson used less in the sense of anxious than in the sense of perceptive—the ark’s role is one of protector, keeping safe inside its hull the total dream of humankind that is Macpherson’s wilful dream of art, a dream of inclusion and identification in the minds of her sleepers who are, as they were also in *The Shepherd by Moonlight*, her readers:

I am a sleeping body
Hulling down the night,
And you the dream I ferry

To shores of light.

I sleep that you may wake,
That the black sea
May not gape sheer under you
As he does for me. (39)²⁰

But it is not just the ark that cradles, contains, and protects its creator. Given that Macpherson's vision of creative power is a fundamentally hopeful one at this point in her writing life, "Ark Apprehensive" suggests that books, which are the analogue of her ark, have a protective power that can shield readers from "the black sea" that is despair, evil, loneliness, alienation by sheltering them within the hull/covers of the ark/book. This is also, in Macpherson's poetic world, a reciprocal relationship: the reader also contains and protects the book, and the worlds it contains, as the text enters into the body of the reader through the symbiotic and mutually productive act of reading. As she writes in "Ark Overwhelmed,"

When the four quarters shall
Turn in and make one whole,
Then I who wall your body,
Which is to me a soul,

Shall swim circled by you
And cradled on your tide,
Who was not even, not ever,
Taken from your side. (40)

The Ark is no Eve, taken from Adam's side, and thus is not threatened with fallenness or alienation; the ark will never be Eve in reflection, reduced to a Narcissus figure who sees only a reflection and mistakes it for a world he is desperate to enter. In total communion with its creator, the Ark is in—and indeed is—the perfected world of the pastoral, the Eden inside the golden bubble of the mind.

But the last poem of the Ark suite, "Ark Parting," makes clear that this world is still a dream, and that the true apocalyptic renewal of the world is still to come, after the flood. But even so, it is the anagogic dreamer who makes the apocalyptic revisioning and renewal of the world come to pass:

You dreamed it. From my ground
You raised that flood, these fears.
The creatures all but drowned

²⁰ Former Editing Modernism in Canada fellow Gene Kondusky, as his musical alter ego Kites Overhead, set "Ark Apprehensive" to music on his album *You are a secret, and you must never tell it*: <http://homeisnothere.com/track/ark-apprehensive>

Fled your well of tears. (40)

As in “Private Deluge,” it is after a flood that is both biblical and personal that a new world arises: “Outward the fresh shores gleam / Clear in new-washed eyes” (40). But the Ark will not make the journey into this new world, for it has done its work in allowing us to dream that this new world of total identification and wholeness could exist: “Fare well. From your dream / I only shall not rise” (40). The creation of that new world will happen at the end of *The Boatman*, in “The Fisherman,” when “all us and our worlds” will be hoicked up and totally identified within the body of God after the last morning breaks in red.

Once she had written her Ark suite—and submitted it to *Poetry*, where it would be published in February—Macpherson realized that she wanted to give her boat its own Noah, a boatman to steer the ship of her collection. She created him in writing the poem that would become *The Boatman*’s namesake and the title of the “Ark” suite. Written in rollicking sextillas—a Spanish sestet that typically has an aabccb rhyme scheme, as “The Boatman” does—the poem takes Macpherson’s figuring of Norrie-Noah-Anagogic Man-capital-R-reader and extends it outward so that all of her readers become nth Noahs, apocalyptic arks that contain the entirety of the encyclopaedic world she creates through her poems. The defined structure and pronounced rhythm of “The Boatman” serve two purposes: to mimic the rolling rhythm of Noah’s ark on the waves, and to reflect the well-defined structure of the Ark, the poem, and the collection, all of which are versions of each other. “The Boatman” (and eventually the whole collection, when we read it through the lens of its title poem) is fundamentally about the relationship between reader, writer, and work that has so concerned Macpherson from the earliest days of her career. Getting one’s words properly inside the mind of a reader is, as Macpherson well knows, harder than it seems:

You might suppose it easy
For a maker not too lazy
To convert the gentle reader to an Ark:
But it takes a willing pupil
To admit both gnat and camel
—Quite an eyeful, all the crew that must embark. (37)

Indeed, Macpherson suggests, both the reader and the writer must possess that expansive third eye—the punning “willing pupil”—to admit the eyeful, all of creation coming two by two, that her poetry offers up. But if one can find a willing pupil, an understanding reader who speaks one’s language, that reader can offer a welcome refuge, a safe harbour for a carefully crafted work:

After me when comes the deluge
And you're looking round for refuge
From God's anger pouring down in gust and spout,
Then you take the tender creature
—You remember, that's the reader—
And you pull him through his navel inside out.

That's to get his beasts outside him,
For they've got to come aboard him,
As the best directions have it, two by two. (37)

The reader is the ark, and his beasts—by which Macpherson seems to mean his own associations, emotions, and experiences, all of those things that the objective correlative is intended to evoke in Eliot's theory of impersonality—are inside him. The work of Macpherson's poetry is fundamentally the connection-making work of impersonality; to write verse is to get your crew (the poems) inside your reader in order to pull him inside out and draw out all those evocations you have inspired. If the writer can do this successfully, Macpherson's speaker suggests, then those associations, emotions, and experiences join up with the crew of poems and end up back inside the reader, where they happily live (and ideally procreate) within the mind of the reader that is the protective ark:

And you've marched them through his sockets,
Let the tempest bust Creation: heed not you.

For you're riding high and mighty
In a gale that's pushing ninety
With a solid bottom under you—that's his.
Fellow flesh affords a rampart,
And you've got along for comfort
All the world there ever shall be, was, and is. (37)

That solid bottom is not only the ark, but also the anagogic golden bubble of the reader's mind, for this kind of reading turns everyone into an anagogic man. And we will not have forgotten that the golden bubble, round and rare, is the ultimate apocalyptic container, seeing and containing within the body of the reader "all the world there ever shall be, was, and is." To write and to be read, Macpherson suggests in "The Boatman," is to at once create and be shaped by a profoundly hopeful vision of total identification and community, to be given the creative power to imagine a new and perfected world in which you and your readers can live in community. This is the ultimate extension of Macpherson's early experiments with impersonality, and her later work with the potentially universal language of archetype and mythic symbology—the creation of a community of readers-

writers-books where all live in total identification, where no one is on the outside, where there are no fallen women or poor children.

This vision, which Frye, Reaney, LePan, Wilkinson, Watson, and others of the Toronto mythopoeic writers all share, is the key identifiable characteristic of the mythopoeic turn. Too, sharing this vision of community created via language must have helped bring together the active, local community of Toronto-based mythopoeic modernists of which Macpherson was such a central part. But like a bubble soon burst, the belief in this form of apocalyptic vision, a belief soon shared not only by those who read the work of the mythopoeic modernist poets but also who came to understand it via Frye's theory, would prove to be fleeting. This was the case not only for Macpherson, whose third-eyed vision had always been contingent and torn between a desire for and suspicion of order and coherence, but for the wider literary and critical communities who first adopted Frye's apocalyptic structuring of literature and then, like Macpherson had before and would again, rejected it. As the history of both Canadian poetry and criticism has demonstrated, readers and writers rejected the structured, systematic approach of the Toronto mythopoeic modernists in favour of understandings of writing and the world that were more complex, less systematic, and could make space in their ruptures and dislocations for all those poor children—the voices of people who were not white, male, middle- and upper-class, straight—that the supposed total identification of visionary apocalypics still in practice left outside the golden bubble.

From “The Boatman” to *The Boatman*

With the Ark poems and “The Boatman” complete and the gaps in her apocalyptic cycle filled, Macpherson's work to finalize the structure of her new collection, which she titled *The Anagogic Man*, was for the most part done. She had selected the poems she wanted to keep from *Nineteen Poems* and *Contemporary Verse*, now retitled “Poor Child” as she had long meant them to be. To these she added the “O Earth Return” and “The Plowman in Darkness” suites in their entirety, then selected the best of her sleeping shepherds (now titled “The Sleepers”) and riddles (now titled “The Fisherman”), between which she inserted the new section “The Boatman.” The other changes and additions Macpherson made as she smoothed the edges of her new collection were less dramatic, but still important. She included a few new non-ark poems in “The Boatman” section, revised some of her riddles, and gave “O Earth Return” a new subtitle, “A Speculum for Fallen Women,” that served to emphasize the purpose and critical perspective of that suite and to connect it more strongly to the newly apocalyptic structure of the collection as a whole. In the medieval period, a

speculum²¹ was another term for the work of literature also known as the anatomy or encyclopaedia—apocalyptic, all-encompassing structures like “The Anagogic Man,” Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*, and Wilkinson’s “Notes on Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*” (and indeed her entire unpublished third collection, *Heresies*).²² Speculum has a curiously gendered double meaning, for it can mean either a medical instrument used to see inside women or a mirror that reflects far and wide, one that in the myth of Prester John has the all-seeing function of the third eye.²³ As a mirror and a text the speculum is both a lens that allows for the kind of all-encompassing vision that the third eye specializes in, and a mirror in which fallen women can see themselves reflected. As Barbara Godard writes in an essay about Atwood’s parodic poetry, an analysis that is also highly relevant to Macpherson’s work, “in paradises of art, grounded in but limited by the issue of gender, we write/weave our mirror doubles, men or women as the case may be, into eternity” (“Telling” 12). Macpherson’s speculum writes into her art the women that she (and her readers) have been looking for and not finding elsewhere in the canon. But despite Macpherson’s efforts in giving “O Earth Return” this new subtitle, the apocalyptic, visionary lens through which *The Boatman* has long been read has mostly obscured the feminist critique of that suite, one that the early history of that suite recounted in Chapter Two re-reveals.

Of the few other poems Macpherson added to *The Anagogic Man* manuscript, the most significant is the first, “No Man’s Nightingale,” which we might read as Macpherson’s pre-emptive attempt to thwart accusations of excessive influence by Frye (or Graves, or Johnston, or anyone else). In it, her speaker declares that she is

Sir, no man’s nightingale, your foolish bird,
I sing and thrive, by Angel finger fed,
And when I turn to rest, an Angel’s word
Exalts an air of trees above my head,
Shrouds me in secret where no single thing

²¹ For a survey of the genre of speculum literature, see Bradley’s “Backgrounds of the Title Speculum in Mediaeval Literature” in *Speculum* 29.1 (January 1954): 100-115.

²² For a detailed analysis of Wilkinson’s “Notes on Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*” and an assessment of the function of the encyclopaedic in Wilkinson’s work, see my “Revealing Reciprocity: Anne Wilkinson, Northrop Frye, and Mythopoetics in Canada.” As I argue there, Wilkinson chooses the anatomy—which is “characterized by a great variety of subject matter and a strong interest in ideas” (Frye, *Anatomy* 365), as Frye does, as an encyclopaedic literary form that sits along the continuum between ritual and apocalyptic total identification: “As Frye states in *Anatomy of Criticism*, poetry moves from ritual to encyclopaedic and from there to apocalyptic: ‘we notice ... the tendency of ritual to become not only cyclical but encyclopaedic, as already noted. In its anagogic phase, then, poetry imitates human action as total ritual, and so imitates the action of an omnipotent human society that contains all of the powers of nature within itself’ (120)” (76).

²³ For more on the myth and historical basis of Prester John, see Nowell’s “The Historical Prester John” in *Speculum* 28.3 (July 1953): 435-45.

May envy no-man's-nightingale her spring. (*Poems* 9)

We should be thinking of the myth of Philomela here, the Athenian princess who is transformed into a nightingale after her rape and mutilation by King Tereus of Thrace. Macpherson wishes her readers to know that she, in contrast, is no man's bird but is a jay unto herself.²⁴ Given what we know of Macpherson's own transformation—from one who had much to sing to one who was largely silent—after what seems to have been a damaging end to her relationship with Frye, her reference to Philomela serves as a kind of foreshadowing. Philomela's avian transformation depended on the actions of men, but despite what people like Sandra Martin would write years later—that “It didn't hurt that as a very young poet, she had already attracted the attention of three key mentors and literary scholars: George Johnston, Northrop Frye and Robert Graves” (“Nurturing”)—Macpherson wanted her readers to know that she was transformed into a poet by, and sang for, no man. She seems to have anticipated, and attempted to counter, the arguments of excessive male influence that have plagued her in the decades since this poem was written. With a sense of nervousness we might find endearing, she also wanted to invoke her Angel-Muse's protection from the envy of unfriendly critics. Thus protected, Macpherson sent her book out into the world via the hands of Ivon Owen.

Ophelia and Jenny Lear

Macpherson's papers, and the poems that appeared in periodicals around this time, suggest that she found the process of reworking her manuscript extremely generative, and not only in the directions her poems had recently been taking her. A folder in her archives labelled “MS verse c.1956” (JMP Box 6 File 3) contains a number of preliminary suites and manuscripts written around the time she was revising *The Boatman* that she either published in parts or never published. Some, like “Of Creatures of the Net,” “The Journey,” and “Times,” all of which appeared in *Fiddlehead* in 1956, seem like poems originally intended for *The Anagoric Man* that did not make the cut for the final manuscript. Others appear to be entirely new suites, with a symbolism and frame of reference quite different from her anagoric poems and from the ones that came before. The folder contains a

²⁴ Macpherson may also be referencing here Frye's review of A.J.M. Smith's *The Oxford Book of Canadian Poetry*, in which Frye argues that Smith, in selecting poems for inclusion, “had to remember that a modern poet may hold deeply and sincerely to the more enlightened political views and become so gnarled and cryptic an intellectual that he cannot even understand himself, and still be just as conventional a minor poet as the most twittering Victorian songbird” (*Bush* 129). Macpherson does not want to be read, “No Man's Nightingale” suggests, as a conventional, minor twitterer.

manuscript for the “Pretty Ophelia” suite, which Dudek would publish in *Delta* in January 1958, Reaney would republish in *Alphabet* in 1960, and that would eventually constitute most of the “Other Poems” section of the second Oxford University Press edition of her verse, which was published as *The Boatman and Other Poems* in 1968. Macpherson wrote the rest of the “other poems” published in the 1968 edition around the time she was finishing and then promoting *The Boatman*. While common understanding has long been that the “Other Poems” section represents Macpherson’s poetic production of the mid-1960s, it was composed a full decade before. In reality, Macpherson wrote almost no poetry after the publication of *The Boatman* in 1957, a poetic silence that would last until she began work on *Welcoming Disaster* in the 1970s.

The Ophelia poems Macpherson composed in late 1956—“The Woods No More,” “A World of Glass,” “Girl with Buck Teeth,” “Very Sad Song,” “The Gardeners,” “A Mermaid’s Grave,” “Tobit Casting,” “The Death-Angel,” “The Love-Song of Jenny Lear,” and “Love-Song II of Jenny Lear”—are quite different from the other writing (the shepherds, riddles, and arks) Macpherson had produced in 1956, not least in their use of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* as a frame of reference and Macpherson’s choice of Ophelia as a central fallen woman. If Macpherson’s shepherds and arks are all figured as male, her Ophelias and Jennys are, like her fallen women, very female and for the most part very heart sore. “Very Sad Song” is just that, and in “A World of Glass,” Ophelia is seemingly drowning in her own tears:

Sensible people as they pass
 Encounter with compulsive eyes
 A small damp female who applies
 Nose, nipples, tummy flat against the glass
 And weeps, and howls, and cries. (*Poems* 56)

We might read these poems as a challenge to the way that the “sensible people” of the world react differently to male and female expressions of emotion, of that dreaded term to the modernists: sentimentality. Milton’s expressions of grief for the death of Edward King in “Lycidas,” Eliot’s mourning for the destruction of London in *Four Quartets*, Blake’s railing against convention and small-mindedness in much of his work, have long been lauded as classics of the canon but Macpherson here reveals the double standard, where women’s emotion becomes a spectacle for “compulsive eyes” and the women expressing that emotion become impersonal, dehumanized “female[s]” reduced to body parts and noise. We might also read these poems as Macpherson’s challenge to her own commitment to impersonality, to disguising the self and the experience out of which her poems have always emerged. As we will see in the conclusion, the work she produces

after these poems—especially *Welcoming Disaster*—reveals that Macpherson’s approach and adherence to impersonality undergoes a radical shift, and that she is increasingly willing to explore and challenge the expression of and reaction to emotion, to sentiment, in her own work.

If sadness is the defining emotion of the Ophelia poems, anger—the kind we have not seen in Macpherson’s work since her high-school declaration that she would commit to impersonality and the catalytic transformation of emotion into evocation via metaphor—defines the Lear poems. “The Love-Song of Jenny Lear” and “Love-Song II of Jenny Lear” suggest that Macpherson was ready to be done with her boatman and her whale even before they had been cast out to sea, and that the version of apocalyptic vision and transformation she crafted in *The Boatman* now occasioned disappointment and anger.²⁵ Macpherson’s Jenny is one of Lear’s less sympathetic daughters—no Cordelia she—and in the former poem she has little patience for her fishy father. Written as a series of limerick stanzas, “The Love-Song of Jenny Lear” is a parody of love, and of the loving total identification of “The Anagogic Man”:

Come along, my old king of the sea,
Don’t look so pathetic at me:
We’re off for a walk
And a horrid long talk
By the beautiful banks of the sea.

I’m not Arnold’s Margaret, the pearl
That gleamed and was lost in a whirl,
Who simpered in churches
And left him on porches,
But more of a hell of a girl.

Poor old fish, you’re no walker at all,
Can’t you spank up that elderly crawl?
I’ll teach you to hurdle,
Led on by my girdle,
With whalebone, elastic and all. `

We’ll romp by the seashore, and when
You’ve enough, shut your eyes and count ten.
I’ll crunch down your bones,
Guts marrow and stones,

²⁵ Macpherson’s choice of name is possibly an ironic reference and implicit riposte to Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s supremely passive and objectified prostitute of the same name in “Jenny.” It may also be a reference to the British folk song “Jenny Jones,” where Jenny, the obedient daughter, tragically dies after a lifetime of obedience and service. For more on “Jenny Jones,” see the introduction to Martinengo-Cesaresco’s *Essay in the Study of Folk-Songs*.

Then raise you up dancing again. (60)

The power of post-apocalyptic renewal no longer lies with the Leviathan, but with Jenny Lear—she has destroyed him, that old symbol in “The Fisherman” of anagogic vision and total identification, and it is her power that raises him, and the world, up again. In “Love-Song II of Jenny Lear,” the poem ends with the same implicit threat of destruction as “The Fisherman,” but this is not the productive, renewing destruction of the visionary apocalypse—this is something rather more sinister:

Were I a Shakespearean daughter,
Safe restored through fire and water,
You the party in the crown
—Someone get the curtain down. (61)

Jenny Lear can be read as one of Macpherson’s harrowed readers from “Retina,” one who barely survived the experience of working to get inside the golden anagogic bubble, and who hints at the threat of offstage violence against the one who put her through her ordeal. The “Pretty Ophelia” suite suggests that Macpherson’s willingness to entertain Frye’s version of visionary total identification—where the visionary is him, or Christ, or Klein’s drowned poet, but certainly not her or women like her and where achieving that identification requires tests of fire and water—seems to be at an end. Her women are violently sad or just plain violent, and her parodic, angry verse suggests that she has turned away from Frye’s hopeful vision for the apocalyptic and back toward the scepticism of totalizing structures and excessive systematization from her early years of working with Graves and Frye. If this truly is the case, it means that Macpherson’s readers have, for more than fifty years, read her entire body of work through a systematizing, totalizing visionary lens that she was willing to look through for only a few months herself.

The Ark Finds a Harbour

Macpherson submitted the completed manuscript for her third published book of verse, still titled *The Anagogic Man*, on July 8. It kept its original name until not long before her contract was finalized the next February, when it—after A.J.M. Smith’s suggestion that “the title...might be changed to one less high-brow and frightening to the common reader” (OUPP)—officially became *The Boatman*. As she noted in the accompanying letter to Owen, the manuscript “comes to I think eighty poems” (OUPP)—seventy-nine, to be exact—in the six sections she had composed between 1947 and the summer of 1956. Macpherson also included with her manuscript the emblem drawings she had

designed to accompany her poems, and noted to Owen that “If possible I should like the drawings to be considered as part of the manuscript. I can provide a better version of the crowned head emblem”—the same one that graced the cover of Hine’s *Five Poems*—“accompanying the first section: some of the others need working over” (OUPP). The other emblems included the swan that heads Chapter Two of this work (for the section “O Earth Return”), a cello (for “The Plowman in Darkness”), a doubled shape that can be viewed as a mother and child from one perspective and the gaping maw of the Leviathan from another (for “The Sleeping Shepherd”), an ark (for “The Boatman”), and the fish that heads this chapter for “The Fisherman.”

Owen immediately sent the manuscript to A.J.M. Smith, who had agreed to act as external reviewer and provide a second opinion upon which a decision to proceed or not to publication could be based. Given the natural sympathies Smith had for Macpherson and her verse based on their belonging to the same elective community of Canadian poets he labelled practitioners of “eclectic detachment” (“Eclectic” 7)—his term for their shared ability to detach themselves from a sense of cultural debt or tradition to pick and choose as inspiration and influence “just those poets (or just those aspects of those poets) that can satisfy our needs” (12)—it is unsurprising that Smith heartily approved the publication of Macpherson’s collection. As Smith wrote to Owen that November, after he had finally (after much procrastination, to Macpherson’s consternation) finished his review,

I have read this over several times at some intervals, and while I think some sections are better than others and the general charge of being literary (that Margaret Avison levelled at Watson in her Tamarack article) can be made against this too, and while also there are a *few* instances of coyness or over self-consciousness, the book as a whole strikes me as a brilliant and exciting tour-de-force. (OUPP)

The cohesiveness of Macpherson’s manuscript was also seemingly to Smith’s taste, for he noted that “It gains rather than loses, I think, from the multiplicity of illustrations it affords of a single theme (or two or three closely related themes—sex-death-love-hate-pleasure-pain-woman-child-man etc.)” (OUPP). Her poems, from the “Poor Child” poems written when she was in her teens, all the way up to the Ark poems she composed the first summer of her doctorate, frame and reframe the central theme of inclusion, of being inside or outside one’s chosen community, fallen or unfallen, a poor child spurned by all or an anagogic (wo)man who contained all. That underlying unity of subject, mirrored by the unified, apocalyptic structure of the collection itself, seems to have kept Smith from recommending any substantive changes to it. As she asked her readers to in “Egg,” he consumed it quite. We might imagine that the *integritas* of its structure gave him the sense that every poem was

essential to its encyclopaedic makeup, and in consequence the furthest he was willing to go was to say he “could specify two or three pieces (not more) that might be omitted or modified but I don’t think this is essential. Any reader would probably find two or three pieces a little inferior to most, but they wouldn’t be the same two or three; and I think the book can stand safely enough as it is” (OUPP). Smith was not the only admirer of Macpherson’s verse Owen heard from as he made his decision about her manuscript. “The Fisherman: A Book of Riddles” came out in the first issue of *Tamarack* about the same time as Smith’s reader’s report arrived, and as Owen wrote to Johnson, “I have been surprised by the warmth with which all kinds of unlikely people have received the bit of them published in *Tamarack*” (OUPP). The praise of Macpherson’s verse that came to Owen as *Tamarack*’s editor, plus Smith’s glowing reader’s report, convinced Owen that he needed to put his full weight behind the collection. He convinced his colleagues that they should publish more poetry, and Macpherson’s contract was executed in early February; she was to receive royalties of 5% of domestic sales, she had three weeks to submit a clean manuscript, and publication was set for May 10, 1957.

Owen’s pre-publication remarks about the collection to his colleagues at the Toronto branch and in his announcement of the volume to the other branches that might lend a hand in selling *The Boatman*—primarily New York and Oxford—illuminate not only how the publisher thought of and intended to market Macpherson’s book, but also the culture of book publishing in Canada and the places where gender came into play. In a letter to Johnson, Owen wrote of his “one serious objection” to *The Boatman*, which was “that it has too much unity—i.e. adherence to a single theme to a degree that suggests obsession” (OUPP), although what he believed that theme to be he did not say. Like other men in Macpherson’s life, Frye included, Owen was also concerned with Macpherson’s more sexual verse, and with her sex life: “And I am one who is disturbed by the idea of girls going to bed with snakes—as Norrie remarked to me recently. But poetry nowadays usually *is* disturbing if it is any good,” and he conceded that “Jay, though we may worry about her sex-life, is undoubtedly very good” (OUPP). This Owen did sincerely believe: her official author description, which he penned into the author field—signalled by the question “Who is he?”—on Oxford’s unsurprisingly sexist new publication information sheet, reads “Graduate student at the University of Toronto and most prominent young poetess in Canada” (OUPP). Whatever Owen thought of her and her work, Macpherson could not escape the unconscious biases that coloured responses to women writers, even amongst those who were championing her work. But although Oxford still assumed in the mid-1950s that all authors were male, Owen was genuinely convinced that the future

of Canadian poetry lay in the hands of a woman, and an extremely talented one at that. In his description of her manuscript to Johnson, he noted that Macpherson “is a mean hand with metre and rhyme, she is on one level clear and another extremely subtle,” and described her as a “totally committed poet...[who] will become Canada’s leading poet of her generation. I am ready to predict that she will win wider international recognition in her lifetime than any previous Canadian poet” (OUPP). In announcing the book to the other Oxford branches, Owen incorrectly stated that “This is Macpherson’s first published book” (thus dismissing both *Nineteen Poems* and Macpherson’s own work as the publisher of her own Emblem Book) but went on to describe the forthcoming volume in terms that suggest he had gotten over any concerns about the collection being too unified. He described *The Boatman* as “both a collection of her recent poems and a cycle composed according to a consistent design; so that it has both variety and unity” (OUPP) and as work that “appeals to a wide range of readers, its surface clarity, grace, and wit being balanced by highly complex symbolics [sic] at a deeper level of meaning” (OUPP). This initial description is important, for it would set the stage for how *The Boatman* would be promoted and marketed by its publisher. We will see how these terms get repeated, and contested, by *The Boatman*’s reviewers once the collection came out.

For many authors, the period after the contract is signed but before the final manuscript is submitted is a busy and difficult one, for it is the rare manuscript that gets accepted as it is. Many writers receive requests for substantive—a reorganization here, the removal or addition of a few poems there—or minor edits, and those edits can be both time-consuming and painful to writers being asked to kill their darlings. Macpherson was apparently not one of these writers, however, for neither Oxford’s records nor her papers suggest any significant editorial interventions on Oxford’s part, beyond asking her on Smith’s recommendation to give the book a simpler title and dispensing with her emblem drawings (OUPP). Comparing Macpherson’s description of the manuscript to Crawley (JMP Box 1 File 8) and the final published version of *The Boatman* suggests that the final version of her collection was identical, or near enough, to the manuscript she submitted in July—a condition that we might lay at the feet of Macpherson’s ability to write a perfectly formed poem the first time around, and at the effect of the *integritas* of her work, which seemed to make every poem seem essential to the collection’s total structure in the eyes of her readers. Macpherson returned marked up proofs in mid-February with minor corrections to spelling and spacing, but was “on the whole very pleased” with how her book was turning out—“the verses look as though they had sat in that type since they were born” (OUPP). *The Boatman* was in good hands.

As her collection wended its way through the publishing process, Macpherson continued doing what she and her doctoral-candidate colleagues—who now included Reaney, who had started his degree in September—were all doing: teaching, reading, and working toward their dissertations. At the same time, Macpherson was watching a number of her recent poems appear in print or arranging for them to do so: a version of her Ark suite appeared in the February 1957 issue of *Poetry* and she continued to field permission requests, including those from F.R. Scott and Ralph Gustafson, to include her poems in anthologies and textbooks. Emblem Books was, however, temporarily on hold. As she wrote to Gustafson, “I have no takers at the moment” (OUPP), although she had received and rejected in the last few years manuscripts from Eloise Street (*Sepass Poems*, a collection of ancient songs of Y-Ali-Mihth translated from the oral tradition by Chief William K’HHalserten Sepass, later published by Vantage), G.V. Downes (*Lost Diver*, later published by Fiddlehead), Stephen Pike (*The Disagreement and Other Poems*, never published), Marya Fiamengo (an untitled volume), and Elizabeth Harrison (*Poems for the Predicament*, never published). A rather different editorial project, the Folkways *Six Toronto Poets* recording, was in its nascent stages: Macpherson had taken charge of gathering together six readers, herself included, for the recording and Scott was in the process of organizing a collective of Montreal poets to record a complementary version.

Over the course of the fall and winter, Macpherson also worked out the details of *The Boatman* with Owen and Toye, most of which were sorted out by March. The last significant change Macpherson requested was for the dedication—“For Northrop and Helen Frye” (*Boatman* v)—to be changed from all-caps to “a smallish italic or something less like a placard: dedications are after all personal, not part of the advertising matter” (OUPP). We might wonder if Oxford did see the dedication as advertising matter, given that they were well aware of Frye’s growing critical reputation, that his forthcoming book would be released within months of *The Boatman*, and that creating a strong association between their author and her supervisor, who was openly fond of her, might help to sell her work. Even if they did, Macpherson got her way, although the smaller font did little to discourage readers from noting and commenting on her dedication and what they believed it signalled about the Frygian nature of her inspiration. The decision about the volume’s cover art, however, seemed to be all Toye’s, as he was in charge of the book’s design. Macpherson seems to have taken issue with his choice to use not her own emblem drawings but a lineograph by Jean de Beaugrand, which I have included below, whose central crown mimicked the design of her likewise-lineographic crowned head emblem, but in the end she let him have his way. In the end her

emblems would not be published until 1965, in the tenth issue of *Alphabet*. But by the March before *The Boatman* appeared, Macpherson was “beginning to think the cover design quite inspired, what with the chain of fish-man-bird-ring-crown (hell-purgatory-upper slopes-ring-of-fire-joys-of-heaven, Frye would say,” though in her scheme “the ring is the retina which is also a fishnet, & I tend to be doubtful about heaven: but good enough)” (OUPP).

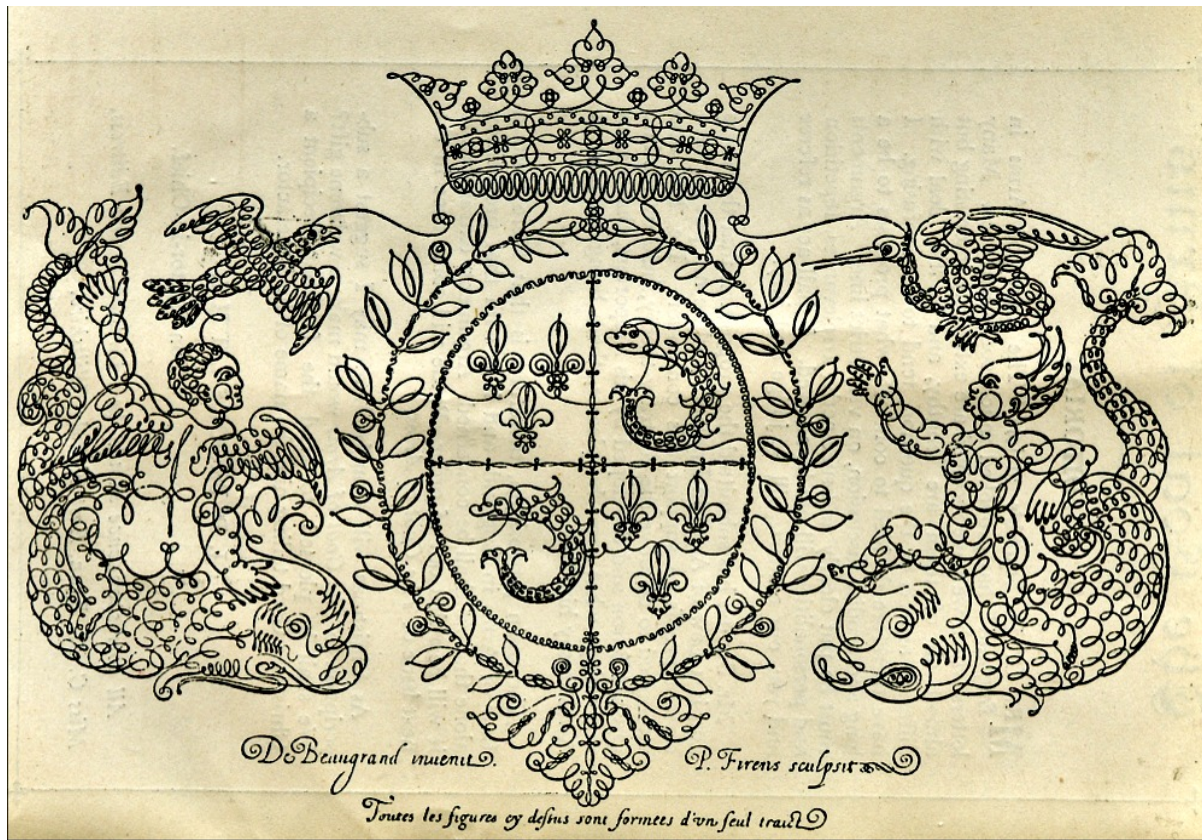


Figure 7: A lineographic representation of the arms of the Dauphin of France by the French calligrapher Jean de Beaugrand, an adapted version of which (without the centre trefoils or seahorses) appears on the cover of *The Boatman*. (Source: *Panchrestographie & Poecilographie*, 1604.)

Owen and Toye would have been pleased to hear her assessment of the cover, for they were taking special care to ensure that *The Boatman*, from front to back, was an object of physical presence and beauty. Toye carefully selected fonts, paper, and binding, and when he sent the galley proofs to J.W. Dyell Printers to be typeset, he sent them along with an admonition: “I expect this appearance of this book to be most attractive. I have done everything I can to make it so; the rest is up to you. This is a chance for you to produce a distinguished example of the book-maker’s art, and I am hoping that you will do yourselves (and us) proud” (OUPP). And they did, for the final version of *The Boatman*, with its Laurentian Blue cover papers and gold inked lineograph is a handsome physical object and would be praised for being so in many of the coming reviews.

The Boatman entered the world in mid-May 1957, timing that pleased Macpherson not the least because of “it’s managing not to conflict with term & kids & all, which I’m afraid I should have found embarrassing” (OUPP). The letter Macpherson wrote to Owen immediately after its publication is a strong contrast to her letter to Crawley after *Nineteen Poems* came out, for this time around she was entirely happy with how her book had turned out: as she wrote to Owen, “I wanted to say how pleased I am with the book and in general with the whole performance of getting published by you” (OUPP). One of Macpherson’s primary concerns when revising her poems and placing them within the frame of *The Boatman* was using its structure to create a self-contained and self-sustaining community of reader-writer-book, which Owen well understood. He concluded the book’s descriptive blurb with lines from her riddle “Book” that illuminate her vision for *The Boatman*:

Although by my creator’s will I span
The air, the fire, the water and the land,
My volume is no burden to your hand.

I flourish in your sight and for your sake.
His servant, yet I grapple fast with man:
Grasped and devoured, I bless him. Reader, take. (*Poems* 48)

Macpherson constructed her book for her readers’ sakes, and for their consumption. In consequence, the things she loved best about Oxford University Press’s work on her book were the elements that demonstrated they understood her focus on the reader and project of community building via both form and content:

The format is perfect. It makes a nice object pleasant to handle and not resisting the Dear Reader who is so important, and moreover it is in my view brilliantly suited to the text, or more than brilliantly. I find it very reassuring that the idea of the book translates so completely into someone else’s medium of type, design, and so forth: should be some guarantee that one isn’t concocting a private world. (OUPP)

Owen had commented on his work of absorption and translation when he sent her the book’s blurb text for review: “Most of what I wanted to say got digested and is now inside me in the proper *Boatman* manner; but I hope that what is left is not too inadequate” (OUPP). He anticipated that many other readers would be able to enter the book and have it enter them in turn, like the beasts and their ark in “The Boatman,” and he concluded the blurb by saying that “on its own this book will find a public as varied as are its levels of meaning” (OUPP). *The Boatman*’s public reception upon

its publication in May suggests that this was true, for it was “launched out upon the flood” (*Boatman* 68) of responses and reviews from across the continent.

One of the first recognitions Macpherson received was the announcement in mid-June that, as Owen wrote to “The Publisher” in Oxford, John Bell, “‘The Fisherman’ as published in *TR* [*Tamarack Review*] has won the national award for the best poem published in a magazine in 1956. And *The Boatman*, only out a few days, has already sold about half its printing” (OUPP). Crawley was among the first to receive a copy from that first printing, and to write to Macpherson with congratulations. His letter is very touching in its warmth and fatherly pride in the accomplishments of the woman he had seen such promise in as a lost and lonely teenager:

The very great pleasure you have given me in sending the book is made very precious and lasting by the warm and generous inscription to Jean and me which you wrote in it and by the note of gratitude to me that is printed in the book, and I know that every poem I find in the collection will remind me of the MSS. you have sent to me in these past ten years and of the many letters from you. It, the book, is a beautiful thing you have made, a far cry from the small poem I read in *Canadian Forum* over the initial J.M. and which excited me enough to start me on a search to find out the writer leading me to learn from P.K. some more about you and your gift. (JMP Box 1 File 8)

Macpherson’s note of gratitude immediately after the dedication—“I want also to thank helpful readers Alan Crawley, George Johnston, and Lore Jonas”—let her make up for obeying Graves’s injunction to *NEVER ACKNOWLEDGE*, and allowed her to restate what she had told Crawley when he was deciding to end *Contemporary Verse*: that without him, her career as a poet would never have started. Despite having dedicated at least four manuscript notebooks of poems to Wels-Schön, in addition to her first *Contemporary Verse* suite, Macpherson did not acknowledge her first Muse; nor did she mention Robert Graves. These omissions signal that Macpherson had truly broken with that goddessist version of mythopoeic modernism that had dominated her early career, and with those once-helpful readers who were unwilling to support her creative growth in whatever direction it wanted to take. As another of her acknowledged readers, Johnston was likewise among the first to congratulate Macpherson on her achievement, and he wrote to thank her very much for

The *Boatman*, which arrived on Monday. They have done you handsome, & though I’m sure I would have preferred your own decorations, I must say I like their jacket very much. The whole layout is just beautiful; you must be feeling really smug these days, because it is so clearly, in all respects, the best book of poems that has been published in Canada, or is likely to be for a long while. (GJP Box 6 File 1)

Johnston also commented explicitly on the issue of public versus private symbolism, and on Macpherson's always-present anxiety about being thought overly complex or obscure. He was all reassurance: "I wonder if [George] Grant"—the Canadian philosopher whose contribution to the Massey Commission report on the state of philosophy argued that education and art should encourage thinking about the world "in the broadest and deepest way" (5)—"will now realize how big a world can be comprehended by the small verse. Nobody can say any longer that your symbols are private, or even obscure; they have to be worked out but they seem to me quite explicit, though of course they clearly have private layers of meaning as well" (GJP Box 6 File 1). F.R. Scott also wrote to say that he was

proud to be the owner of an inscribed *Boatman*. Thank you for sending it. I had seen many of the parts before, and had felt a statement evolving. But the whole is so much greater. This is the rarest book in all our poetry, standing apart from the rest of us and looking at us with its quiet, ancient eye. It fills me with great wonder and delight. What a power of enchantment you have! May its magic grow and turn all of us into lovely beasts and birds. Enough of these mere humans! (JMP Box 2 File 3)

And among one of the most thoughtful appreciations for *The Boatman* was A.J.M. Smith's poem "To Jay Macpherson," which read:

Dear no-man's-nightingale, our Fisher Queen,
Whose golden hook makes muddy waters green,
With what dexterity of wrist and eye
You flick the willow-rod and cast the fly:
And when the silver fish is caught and drawn,
How neat the table he's divided on,
How white the cloth, how elegant the dish,
How sweet the flesh—O sacramental Fish! (37)

At least amongst the poets, *The Boatman*—and Macpherson as the collection's Fisher Queen—had found safe harbour.

The Ark on the Seas of Criticism

Soon after, more official notices of *The Boatman* began to come out in print and on the radio—many of them, for *The Boatman* was very widely reviewed for a book of Canadian verse, especially after November 1957. It was then that *The Boatman* really made its public impact, for it was in that month's issue of *Poetry* magazine that the announcement was made that "THE LEVINSON PRIZE, of one hundred dollars, for a poem or group of poems published in *Poetry* during its forty-fifth year, is awarded to JAY MACPHERSON for *The Ark* [suite] in the February 1957 issue and *Five Poems*

in the September 1957 issue” (“Announcement” 134-35). The announcement also listed those luminaries who had previously been awarded the Levinson, widely considered at the time to be the most important poetry prize in the United States; these included Marianne Moore, e.e. cummings, Dylan Thomas, William Carlos Williams, and Edna St. Vincent Millay, among others. Macpherson was, as numerous local publications would note with exultation, the first Canadian to ever be honoured with the prize, and her profile was raised significantly by the win. As Anstee reveals in his work on the Contact Poetry Reading Series, Souster invited her to be an early reader at the new series held at the Greenwich Gallery at 736 Bay Street, which is now a convenience store just steps from my office (“Poet” 80). The *Globe and Mail*’s coverage of the event stated that she was now, just months after the publication of *The Boatman*, “considered by many Canadians our finest young poet” (“Arts” 13). This kind of statement was not unusual: *Chatelaine* called *The Boatman* “the Canadian publishing surprise of the decade” (14), and on the CBC’s *Critically Speaking*, Chester Duncan “wonder[ed] that ‘others have tried hard to write poetry, in vain,’ but Jay Macpherson, our newest light, succeeds. ‘This is what we have been waiting for!’” (qtd. in Dudek, “Eye” 79). *The Boatman* was reviewed and mentioned in dozens of Canadian and American periodicals, from popular American magazines like *Time* to Canadian little magazines like *Delta*, and Macpherson became a local celebrity to the point that she began showing up in the society pages of Ottawa newspapers. Much of the criticism was glowing, and many critics grasped from the beginning what Macpherson was aiming to do with her third published collection. It seemed her Ark had launched onto calm seas.

Aside from general compliments, a few critics were more pointed and insightful in their praise than others, and they give us a sense of how *The Boatman* was understood by its readers. Kildare Dobbs was one of the few to note, as this project has again made plain, that “the six cycles of poems in the momentous little volume have already been published in various places” (88), and that although they were published over a long period of time and without the original intention of being read as a whole, they had a newly “powerful effect when read together, their concinnity and wholeness as a cycle” (88). For Dobbs, Macpherson’s verse is “song transparent and mysterious as a crystal ball: a child could delight in it, a professor be puzzled by it. The format of the book itself is so beautiful and so apt that many will buy it for that reason alone. But it’s certain that once they begin to read they’ll be hooked, as I am” (88). I imagine Macpherson would have enjoyed his fishy pun, one that suggests the power of her golden hook to reel in readers. John Robert Colombo provides a useful counterpoint in pointing out that *The Boatman* might best be understood within the theme of “cold pastoral,” one “that contrasts an orderly world of green against a watery world of

blue—a flood receding and the phoenix rising, of love and lust, of the plowman and the boatman” (“Cold”).²⁶ Despite having concerns about Macpherson’s ability “to depict a world that seems to be well rooted in reality”—a criticism Pacey will repeat in relation to the entire mythopoeic school when he accuses them of writing “literature about literature, not literature about life” (245)—Colombo argues that “*The Boatman* is a rare aesthetic experience” and that “a lack of youthful exuberance in the lines...is more than made up by the personal intensity through which the world is seen and expressed” (“Cold”).

Frye was an obviously engaged reader, considering that he was the book’s dedicatee and that a number of the poems in *The Boatman* are about him, and his review in “Letters in Canada” is astute. We would expect it to be so given Frye’s place alongside Macpherson within the mythopoeic modernist culture of letters, a place that gave him an enhanced ability to identify and comment on the essential characteristics of her work—ones that he shared—that marked her out as a fellow member of that community. Like much of his Canadian criticism, Frye’s review is non-evaluative in the sense that he works to illuminate Macpherson’s verse and place it in context, but offers not much in the way of either praise or criticism. Frye recognizes, like Dobbs, that *The Boatman* is at once a set of collected poems—he reminds readers that he reviewed the earliest of them in 1952—and at the same time “the most carefully planned and unified book of poems that has yet appeared in these surveys” (*Bush* 70). He comments primarily on Macpherson’s various mythical references, her tendency toward small frames and tight metres—both of which allow her poems to function as discrete but interlocking units within a larger structure, much as individual myths and archetypes do within the larger structures of literature and culture—and on the way that “As the ark expands into the flooded world, the body of the biblical leviathan, and the order of nature, the design of the whole book begins to take shape” (72). Frye counters potential charges of obscurity by noting that “although a glance at the opening page of Robert Graves’s Penguin book on Greek myth might help with Eurynome”—a recommendation that would have horrified Macpherson, given how terrible she thought that book—“I find no poem that has the key to its meaning outside itself” (74-5), and suggests instead that “It is true that for many readers there is nothing so baffling as simplicity” and if readers are baffled, it is because “Miss Macpherson’s simplicity is uncompromising” (73).

²⁶ Colombo takes the title of his review from Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” an apt allusion given that Macpherson was a frequent reader of Keats and shared with him an interest in traditional forms and in using stories and things of the past as objects of contemplation that could reveal truths about the present.

As was his wont, Frye was perhaps most interested in looking at *The Boatman* as a case study for what was happening in Canadian poetics more broadly in the 1950s. His remarks are especially useful for thinking about, as I have argued we should, Macpherson and *The Boatman* as representative of the mythopoeic turn in Canada more broadly:

I have glanced at the critical issues raised by *The Boatman* because it seems to me a conspicuous example of a tendency that I have seen growing since I began this survey eight years ago. With the proviso that “professional” in this context has nothing to do with earning a living, the younger Canadian poets have become steadily more professional in the last few years, more concerned with poetry as a craft with its own traditions and discipline. The babble of unshaped free verse and the obscurities of private association are inseparable from amateurish poetry, but they are emphatically not “modern” qualities: serious modern poets in Canada struggle hard for clarity of expression and tightness of structure. The second volumes of Douglas LePan, P.K. Page, and James Reaney (of whom more next year) show this markedly, as do the first volumes of Wilfred Watson and Anne Wilkinson, and all the volumes of Irving Layton since *In the Midst of My Fever*. It is consistent with this that the more amateurish approach which tries to write up emotional experiences as they arise in life or memory has given way to an emphasis on the formal elements of poetry, on myth, metaphor, symbol, image, even metrics. The development is precisely parallel to the development in Canadian painting from deliberately naive landscape to abstraction and concentration on pictorial form. As in 1890 with the Scott-Lampman-Roberts group, and again in the New Provinces generation, there seems to be once more in Canadian poetry, on a much bigger scale, a “school” in its proper sense of a number of poets united only by a common respect for poetry. (75-6)

The publication of *The Boatman* allowed Frye to consolidate the work of the writers dominating the poetry of the fifties under the umbrella of a new professionalism, and to identify that professionalism as an element of the mythopoeic turn in the emphasis Macpherson and her fifties colleagues place on “the formal elements of poetry,” the first of which is “myth,” and on its related elements of “metaphor, symbol, image, even metrics.” Frye additionally notes that *The Boatman* is the most “conspicuous example” of this tradition thus far. He may avoid evaluative criticism, but this review suggests that as the collection that is the most professional, and most “concerned with poetry as a craft with its own traditions and discipline,” he considers *The Boatman* the best book of Canadian poetry he has reviewed “since [he] began this survey eight years ago.” In this opinion he was not alone.

But no book receives entirely positive reviews, not even *The Boatman*. Interestingly, the negative criticism Macpherson received was mostly of a curious type that Lorraine Weir has termed “complimentary dismissal” (“Toward” 60). Most of these less enthusiastic reviewers, including W.T. Scott (*Saturday Review*), Norman Endicott (*Tamarack Review*, which I discussed in the introduction),

Ned O’Gorman (*Poetry*), and to a certain extent Louis Dudek (*Delta*) and Milton Wilson (*Fiddlehead*), framed, in ways that were highly gendered or subtly nationalistic, their negative or mixed reviews as a failure to grasp Macpherson’s apocalyptic world-building project that was her fault. Macpherson is not, to be sure, always the most transparent or easily comprehensible poet—a fault, if we consider it one, that is certainly hers, and one that sometimes stems from her attempts to disguise the life out of which her literature emerges. But as I suggested in the introduction to this dissertation, the nature of her negative reviews suggests that there is more to her dismissal by negative reviewers than just distaste for the typical modernist difficulty. Scott, writing for an American magazine, is willing to admit that “Miss Macpherson, a Canadian, evidences a mind of her own,” but dismisses her thought as “not expressed in distinctive language, and the furniture of her poems, an incessant stream of mythological and biblical personages, is worn and weary” (32). O’Gorman spends the majority of his review stating and restating, in a variety of terms that suggest this is Macpherson’s fault and not his own, that he does not understand *The Boatman*: “Jay Macpherson’s book is a difficult one. I am not sure what I can say about it. There are seventy pages of lyrics written in a lovely manner... But I read it and read it and find myself where I was when I begun. I wonder if I am not just dull. There is a technique here that seems to be amazing. But as hard as I try I cannot understand what she is saying” (272). And Wilson, despite the first half of his review for *Fiddlehead* demonstrating a clear understanding of and appreciation for Macpherson’s project, degenerates into straight-out sexism. Because her archetypes are not his—and the male pronoun is key here—Wilson declares that “Although a lyric cycle, *The Boatman* is by no means encyclopaedic. Endymion and Noah can serve Miss Macpherson as archetypes, but hardly Prometheus or Socrates, unless we are willing to accept Cain and Herod as substitutes. Her palace of art is distinctly feminine, not Byzantium or Golgonooza or ‘Athens, on the will of man as a mount of diamond set’, but an egg or a water-encircled ark” (43). Calling hers a distinctly feminine palace of art could be read as a neutral descriptor if not for the fact that while Wilson’s review suggests that he could accept a wholly male symbology and archetypal structure as encyclopaedic, a female one cannot possibly be for him comprehensive enough to merit that term. In case we might not take his point that a largely female universe is an illegitimate one, he goes on to argue that Macpherson’s “apocalyptic imagery, pervasive as it is, remains gratuitous and decorative—a phoenix more frequent than promising” and that “Her Atlantis is a pink cloud, not a prophecy” (43). Louis Dudek likewise reads *The Boatman* as unintelligible woman’s writing: despite conceding that Macpherson’s work shows “a very heroic (and justifiable) confidence in her prowess as a poet and a poetic craftsman” (“Eye” 81), he calls her “a

mythologizing, cosmological, religio-moralistic poet: like Emily Dickinson, the pattern of all modern women poets,” who despite “Not competing in man’s ... world ... yet aspire to private revelations beyond the reach of the male mind” (81). To Dudek, Macpherson’s gendered work reads as “a witty self-rationalizing of celibacy, asceticism, and high-spinsterhood” and he expects further “constriction of language and imagination, not a very great growth for her—unless some reader, or illiterate, refuses to be convinced by that impregnable wit and logic” (82). Dudek, like the others noted above, seems not to consider that it may mostly be his fault, and not Macpherson’s, that her language is impregnable to him.

Barbara Godard’s writing on ex-centricity offers an illuminating explanation of what is happening in the reviews that dismiss *The Boatman* without attempting to understand it, frame it as unintelligible, or call into question the legitimacy of Macpherson’s project as a woman writer. Godard suggests that in order to make use of the male language of official discourse (the discourse that, as *O Earth Return* and *Plowman* so pointedly note, tends to exclude women), women may “assert the right to speak an already existent language whose use has been forbidden or restricted” (“Ex-centricques” 62). An example of these restrictions are those that were put on Macpherson by Graves—and by the masculinist culture out of which his thought emerges—in his belief that women may only write as *pais* or Muse. One of the modes of assertion that women writers have deployed against this kind of restriction is “embark[ing] on linguistic subversion (the extensive use of puns, paratax, etc.)”—the puns and riddles for which Macpherson is known—or by “repossessi[ng]...the Word (a woman’s body and bodily functions expressed by women)” (62)—as Macpherson does by choosing language and images that are “post-natal and retrospective ... umbilical and uterine” (Wilson 39). The result of asserting this right to speak in a specifically female language is to be figured, as Macpherson is by her critics, as one of her fallen women: outside of the male-dominated systems of language and patronage and therefore dismissed as incomprehensible to those within them. In deeming her language illegitimate or incomprehensible, Macpherson’s more masculinist critics label her as eccentric, ex-centric, and “Ex-centricity implies many things—bizarre, fantastic, unconventional, incomprehensible, other—all subsumed by the concept of difference” (Godard, “Ex-centricques” 58). By declaring Macpherson’s work incomprehensible, or her symbolism illegitimate, these critics have made her seem, despite her place at the centre of the mythopoeic modernist community, ex-centric. And this seeming ex-centricity, when it filters down to readers and to the writers of Canadian literary history in the decades since, has had long lasting repercussions for Macpherson and her reputation, for it has played a significant role in driving the

need for a recuperative project like this microhistory, one that works to pick Macpherson up from where she has been placed at the margins of Canadian modernism and move her back to the centre.

The other powerful role that the criticism of *The Boatman* has played is to reframe the entirety of her poetic production up to the point of its publication, from 1947 to 1957, within the totalizing, apocalyptic vision of the collection's final two sections. Most critics—especially those writing at some distance from *The Boatman*'s publication—lose sight of the fact that suites that make up *The Boatman* were written and published over the course of a decade, and that their approach to poetics, to gender, to the power and value of apocalyptic vision, is by no means consistent. But the result of reading *The Boatman* only as unified collection and not as also a volume of selected works is to lose sight of the former and focus only on the latter. The result is that Reaney—for many years the only academic critic of Macpherson's work—reads "The Third Eye" not as Macpherson's exploration of the inconsistency of a very limited apocalyptic vision—the vision that she used primarily to write her university essays for her—but as a totalizing apocalyptic lens through which to read the entirety of *The Boatman*. "The Fisherman," which Macpherson moved into the powerful concluding position in the collection, is likewise transformed by critics into a lens through which to view all of her other writing. Donna Bennett, for example, takes "The Fisherman" as exemplary of the entire Canadian visionary tradition—which she very strongly connects to Frye's version of the apocalypse—in an article titled after a line of the poem. Milton Wilson, in his review of *The Boatman*, reads "The Fisherman" as the poem which contains and makes sense of all Macpherson's others; after suggesting that the previous sections of the collection are a sort of fallen ocean, he notes that "The last section ('The Fisherman')," and its title poem, "sets in order the archetypal contents of the fallen ocean, all ready for the last catch and the last supper" (41). Reading all of Macpherson's verse through the lens of the totalizing apocalyptic vision of "The Fisherman" elides the problematic aspects of total identification, especially for women, which Macpherson's post-*Boatman* poems (*Pretty Ophelia!* and the other poems she wrote in 1956) make clear she still takes issue with, and disguises the diversity not only of her verse, but of its inspiration. The apocalypse of "The Fisherman," "The Boatman," the Ark poems is the version of Macpherson's visionary *integritas* most closely—and quite strongly—related to Frye's. Reading *The Boatman* only through the lens of this particular, late version of her third-eyed vision has without doubt contributed to the belief that Macpherson's poetry can be summed up and dismissed as turning Frye's theory into poetry. But as Atwood argues,

Like all hermetic poetry, *The Boatman* offers the reader multiple choices about its true 'subject.' Is it 'about' the relationship between two lovers, the relationship between Creator and fallen

world, the relationship between author, book and reader, or dreamer and dream, or man and his imaginative world? Why not all? (“Jay” 409)

Macpherson’s early readers were more able to see the “all” than her later ones, and the intent of this project is at least in part to remind us that Macpherson’s verse is diverse, sometimes contradictory, and inspired by many places, times, and Muses, not just one. As with the revelation that Macpherson’s seemingly late “other poems” were written before the publication of *The Boatman*, revealing that Macpherson’s major collection is far less integrated and homogenous than it has long been made out to be—and that what has been taken as the central tenets of her poetic and philosophical beliefs is far less stable and far less central—opens up new avenues for reading and understanding Macpherson’s work of the 1940s and 1950s.

After the Flood

Some reviewers of *The Boatman* had ventured the prediction that Macpherson would win the Governor General’s Award for Poetry, and we might remember that Jack McClelland had tried to secure Macpherson as his next Indian File author at least in part because he expected that her book would win his publisher another of those awards. These predictions were prescient, for rumours began to fly around the time that *Poetry* announced that Macpherson had won the Levinson Prize that so as not to be outdone by Canada’s neighbours to the south, Macpherson would be given the Governor General’s Award. The official announcement came in January: the judges, Roy Daniells, Ira Dilworth, and George Whalley, had chosen Macpherson, who at twenty-six was the youngest writer ever to win that award.

The myth of Macpherson as a retiring flower has had a strong grip on the Canadian literary imagination, and Sandra Martin suggests that Macpherson was “Too shy to attend the public ceremony to accept the Governor-General’s Award for *The Boatman*,” and so “asked William Tøye, who had designed the book for Oxford University Press, to go in her place” (“Nurturing”). But in fact the ceremony, which was held on June 6, conflicted with The Learned—what we now call Congress—which was being held in Edmonton that year. Long before she had learned of the award or the date of the ceremony Macpherson had proposed to present a number of papers at the conference, and she felt that her commitment to her scholarship had to come first. Besides her pre-existing engagement, Macpherson was not particularly excited about the award, nor about having to pay to attend the ceremony herself, both of which would have reinforced her decision not to attend. As she noted in an interview with Dorothy Howarth in *The Telegram*, “they don’t even pay your

expenses to the Montreal dinner to accept the governor General's Award. Winning it is something I'll have to take in my stride. I'll be forgotten next year when someone else gets it.' Awards, says Jay, 'are sheer Kudos'" (22). She initially asked her mother to accept the award in her place, but when it proved infeasible for Dorothy to attend, Toye travelled to Montreal to accept on her behalf, as was Oxford's common practice when one of their authors needed a proxy.

After the Learned's, Macpherson stayed out west to attend the Canadian Author's Convention in Winnipeg, and then headed to London and Mallorca for the rest of the summer. She had not seen her father, or the Graves family, since the summer of 1952. Her two weeks in Spain were a pleasure, although a mixed one, for Graves now saw her not as a member of his elective community, but as "a poet Robert is fond of but has no use for" and as someone, she shared with Toye, who "had to keep quiet on what used to be topics of common interest" (OUPP). Macpherson seemingly did not mind overmuch, for she now had an elective community, a culture of letters, of her own back in Ontario, and a community of likeminded readers across the country. As she noted in an interview with the Canadian Press she gave while in London,

Although the temptations of Europe with its cultural traditions are strong, I don't feel the need to work there as many others might. I enjoy living in Canada. It's a lively place to be, and people who do things there are doing them well. There's a general sense of fresh air in Canada as it retains something of the atmosphere of a pioneer country. (JMP Box 6 File 11)

She also argued in the same interview that "culture is 'fairly flourishing' in Canada. 'The market for poetry is remarkably good. When you consider the population, it is perhaps higher than in many other places.'" Certainly, the market for her own poetry was good: by the end of the summer, *The Boatman* was into its second printing, and by November it had sold over 820 copies, far more than the 500 copies needed to certify it as a Canadian bestseller, and was entering its third printing— unheard of for a volume of modern Canadian poetry; as Howarth would note in May 1958, "Her poems are 'her life,' but 1,000 copy sale 'astonishing' success" (22).²⁷ Despite her pleasure at being back in Europe, and her long ambivalence about her adopted country, Macpherson now considered Canada her true home and as she wrote to Toye in August as she was preparing to leave London, she was "Looking forward to being home, & quietly doing my own work again in a place I like" (OUPP).

²⁷ As Toye will note in a letter to Macpherson in the mid-1970s, "without going into the actual sales records, I can tell you that over the years we printed 2120 of *The Boatman* and 2758 of *The Boatman and Other Poems*" (OUPP). Her "astonishing" success is modest compared with the more than 30,000 copies Christian Bök's *Ennoia* has sold in North America alone, and both are eclipsed by the sales of Robert Service's *Songs of Sourdough*, which number in the millions.

Back at home in Toronto, Macpherson returned to her teaching and research, but now had to balance those commitments with her role as Canada's reigning Governor General's Award-winning poet. Invitations abounded, but she accepted few, preferring to focus on her work. One she did accept was from the library committee of the all-male Hart House student union. What they had not realized was that their invitee, despite her name, was a woman—a circumstance that *The Globe & Mail* found intriguing enough to devote to it a number of column inches ("Tradition" 5). Not wanting to be rude—nor, we might assume, to lose out on the chance to hear from Canada's reigning poetess—the committee let the invitation stand, but women were barred from attending despite the fact that they were "ordinarily welcome at Hart House...on special occasions such as dances and banquets" (5). Quite the uproar ensued, with Hart House and *The Varsity* (the campus newspaper) casting aspersions at each other, but Macpherson was either unaware of the controversy or chose not to intervene. Ever the consummate teacher, all she would say to the *Globe & Mail* reporter after her talk on Canadian poetry was that "I enjoy talking to student groups wherever and whenever I have the chance" ("Woman" 5), although the accompanying press photo pictures her looking less than pleased with the attention this controversy brought her.

And what a time for her to be a teacher, for Margaret Atwood and Dennis Lee were now Victoria College students and Gwendolyn MacEwen was also on the scene. As Rosemary Sullivan notes in her account of Atwood's early years, "Students thought of [Macpherson] as a more amiable Emily Dickinson as she scuttled by, her waist-length hair trussed up in a bun. She was enormously good-hearted but skittishly shy. As don, she lived in the college dorm" at 147 Bloor Street West, now a Northface store in one of Toronto's tonier shopping districts, "and students in residence might find her delivering their term papers to their doors at midnight in her dressing gown" (*Red* 87).²⁸ Atwood and Macpherson very soon became friends; as Macpherson would recount to Sullivan, "I don't remember whether Peggy was called 'the Beetle,' or if I just thought of her as a beetlish character" (101), but "She wore a brown winter coat which she rarely took off. It was a kind of disguise. And she had a stooping walk, like a scuttle, designed to be inconspicuous, which of course made her conspicuous" (101). But even as an undergraduate, Atwood had, in Macpherson's estimation, "the Sibylline touch. She had such healthy instincts" (101) when it came to her writing. And although she got off to a slow start—for the university was not, as the Hart House incident had

²⁸ In a delightful coincidence, Atwood would take a job that summer at Camp Hurontario along with my mother-in-law, Barbara Godard, who recounts listening to Atwood's parodic campfire songs in "Telling it Over Again: Atwood's Art of Parody" (1987).

proven, a terribly welcoming environment for literary women—by the time Atwood got to her “last two years of university...She was on a writing streak” (101). Her talent was immediately visible to her new friend, and in Macpherson’s estimation, “Sparks were coming off her” (101).

The next year proved a busy one for Macpherson as both an editor and publisher. Her work producing the Folkways *Six Toronto Poets* recording came to fruition, and it was released with herself, W.W.E. Ross, Anne Wilkinson, Margaret Avison, Raymond Souster, and James Reaney as readers. Macpherson’s hand as an editor was visible in the gender balance of the recording—F.R. Scott’s companion *Six Montreal Poets* record features no women at all—and in the liner notes, which sketch a portrait of what she believed the character of the Toronto poetry community to be in the late 1950s. Despite the fact that she, Reaney, Atwood, Lee, Wilkinson, and MacEwen were all in Toronto (Mandel had left the city in 1953, but visited frequently) and all writing mythopoeic verse, she still believed in 1958 that the character of the Toronto poetry scene was indistinct:

Toronto poetry is hardly an entity distinct from any other Canadian kind ... [and] Toronto writers, accordingly, are not to be identified by interests, influences, platforms or publishing projects. ... The poets represented by our six constitute, not a particular sub-group or tradition within the area of Canadian poetry, but a kind of cross-section of it ... The Toronto poet as composite is interested in most things, works hard, can read as well as write, has a clear sense of his own tradition, whether acquired, achieved, or thrust upon him, and in short resembles poets everywhere; further generalizations would be unwise. (*Six*)

She was, however, in the minority in this belief, for Canada’s critics had begun to recognize the growing dominance of the Toronto mythopoeic culture of letters and its core members—many of the same poets who appear on Macpherson’s recording.

Despite the fact that the fifties were not yet over, critics had already begun to name mythopoeia as the decade’s prevailing poetic mode. Frye was obviously early to the gate, having watched both Macpherson and Reaney storm the poetry scene as his graduate students, reviewed most of the up-and-coming poets of the decade, and recently begun teaching Atwood and Lee. He noted in *Arts in Canada: A Stocktaking at Mid-Century* (a somewhat misleading title, as it was published in 1958) that economic conditions had forced most Canadian poets to take the poet-scholar route, as Macpherson had, and that “the poetry of what we have called the academic school is overwhelmingly mythopoeic” (88). When he listed those of “the great number of contemporary Canadian poets who have some valid claims on our attention” (89), his list was entirely populated with mythopoeists: LePan, Watson, Wilkinson, Reaney, Macpherson, and Hine. After lauding *The Boatman* as “one of the most carefully and exquisitely constructed books of Canadian poetry” (90) and the one that was currently dominating the Canadian poetry scene, Frye concluded with a

paragraph that made clear he connected himself, even if unconsciously, to this elective community of mythopoeic modernists:

In the best contemporary Canadian poets one senses an extraordinary sureness of direction. They work in the midst of a society which is largely indifferent to them, not because it is stupid or vulgar or materialistic, but because it is obsessed by the importance of putting ideas into words, and cannot bring itself to understand that putting words into patterns is a much more profound and fundamental reshaping of thought. (90)

If we substitute patterns of literature for patterns of words in Frye's statement, he might be describing himself. And, perhaps surprisingly, even the Montreal poets were now willing and able to see what they had not been able to just six years earlier—that *les jeunes* had turned into the major practitioners of Canadian poetry, and that mythopoeics had overtaken Canada. Dudek argued in "Patterns of Recent Canadian Poetry" that although "there is a division between the poets more entirely committed to the mythologizing method—Hine, Macpherson, Mandel—and those still attached to the method of social realism" (414), for all of these writers, as I quoted earlier, a widespread intellectual disorder had led them collectively to land upon mythologizing as a way to deal with the chaos of the modern world. Macpherson may have been the first to describe her poetic vision as making a cosmos from a miscellany, but she was now first among many. The mythopoeic turn, which had been gaining momentum since the late 1940s, was now recognizable to the Canadian literary world at large, in large part because of Macpherson and *The Boatman*.

In addition to her work editing *Six Toronto Poets*, Macpherson's main editorial work, Emblem Books, likewise continued. Earle Birney brought to her attention the work of a young West Coast poet, Heather Spears, who was taking his creative writing course at UBC. She had begun writing verse as an undergraduate after two summers working in a psychiatric institution and Macpherson selected her work as the next Emblem Book, which was published as *Asylum Poems* in mid-1958. Violet Anderson's *The Ledge*, the fifth in the series, followed shortly thereafter. Macpherson also edited and published Dorothy Roberts's *In Star and Stalk* in 1959, and was working with Al Purdy to develop a volume of his work titled *The Blur in Between*—or rather, more accurately, convincing Purdy not to abandon the poems as early ones of which he could no longer be proud and instead focusing all of his efforts on a new edition with Ryerson. She eventually convinced him, although not without having to resort to a bit of well-placed emotional blackmail (APP Box 22 File 55). During this period, Macpherson was also helping Colombo edit the selection of poetry from *The Varsity* that would be published as *The Varsity Chapbook*.

It is unsurprising that Macpherson was making little progress on her thesis or her poetry, given the amount of editorial work and non-dissertation writing she had committed herself to in addition to her teaching. Perhaps the most demanding project was the textbook about Greek and Roman mythology she had begun writing for Ontario high schools students. As Frye and Dudek had observed, the wider world was becoming as mythology-mad as Macpherson had always been, at least in part because of her, and Kildare Dobbs suggested that as a devoted mythologist and teacher she would be the perfect person to create a mythological primer for the school division of his employer, Macmillan. The intention was that the book would introduce students to “these stories, among the oldest in the world, ... [and] still among the best” (Macpherson, *Four* 277), the stories that “have been so important to writers from Homer right down to the present that we can no more study literature without them than we can without the Bible, the fountain-head of Jewish and Christian tradition” (277). In essence, Macpherson was working to ensure that the next generation of readers would find the mythological framework and references that made her work—and all work, in her belief—intelligible, for

most modern novels and films are set firmly in the ordinary world and deal with characters whose powers are limited like our own. Nevertheless, in many the old patterns can still be traced out. The cruel father, the helpless princess, the brave rescuer, the child of mysterious origin, the wise old prophet, the curse, the quest, the fatal treasure—these may take as many forms as the shape-changing Old Man of the Sea, but like him they are indestructible, and like him they can tell the one who holds them fast something of where he is going and what he is. (278)

As she noted in an interview in *The Globe and Mail*, “‘Teaching first year English at Victoria College, I had discovered the students didn’t even know heroes like Hercules.’ Either mythology, on the Ontario curriculum for grade 9, was badly presented, or to the children it was incoherent, she decided” (Mungall 8). The book was supposed to be a simple overview of classical mythology, but as Macpherson wrote to Crawley, it ended up consuming almost all of her writing energy for the next two years, which meant that her work on her poetry, and on her thesis, was minimal (JMP Box 1 File 8). That Macpherson prioritized her work on the textbook and her teaching over her poetry and scholarship suggests that she saw in *Four Ages of Man*, as it would eventually be called, a new avenue for connection and communication with a much larger (and more impressionable) group of readers than her poetry afforded her.

But Macpherson did find some time to publish a little of her own verse, although nearly all of it seems to have been written back in 1956. “The Beauty of Job’s Daughters” came out in *Poetry* at

the end of 1958, and Colombo put together a minute two-poem edition for his Hawkshead Press in 1959, titled *A Dry Light & The Dark Air*. This text, of which he printed only 50 copies, is just a single folded sheet containing two verses we might call love poems, or as close to love poems as Macpherson tended to get in work she knew would have a public audience. The first, “A Dry Light,” which appears to have been written specifically for this publication, frames the act of love within the story of Moses parting the Red Sea:

What if my bed is Egypt’s clay,
I might still offer passage-way
And baffle all men know of me,
Dividing for you like a sea,
To let you march where none yet tried,
Laid up in heaps to either side. (*Dry*)

It takes a miraculous lover to cross the seas to the Promised Land, and it is a treacherous journey, but the poem’s speaker promises that she will

Then safely bear your little light,
So prized, so clear, so angel-bright.
I’ll threaten neither hair nor toe;
But cannot tell you where you go. (*Dry*)

It is up to her Moses-angel-Prophet—all terms Macpherson used for Frye—to decide the nature of his final destination: “Say, Prophet, on my farther strand, / If wilderness, if promised land” (*Dry*). Macpherson’s speaker was seemingly willing to leave it up to her Prophet to decide the nature of their relationship, to see it as a return to the blissful garden of Eden or as a threat to his peaceable kingdom. Seemingly written back in 1956, the volume’s second poem “The Dark Air,” like “The Anagogic Man,” returns to the idea of an apocalyptic mind containing all the world:

Look: forests, cities, gardens, fair
Expanding in the upward air.
The same world hangs below, but dark,
Unlit by any dreaming spark,
And there the flowering world of light
Seeks its roots in darkest night.

That head you bear above the earth,
Exalted from a different birth,
Whose gardens, cities, forests, seem
Substantial and our day their dream (*Dark*)

But the speaker likewise figures herself as an anagogic woman, one whose own hospitable golden bubble can be his refuge: “Lay down, for in your night I see. / Set in my body, sleep in me” (*Dark*). Both poems, despite reading on one level as love poems to her Prophet, also suggest that Macpherson and Frye’s complicated relationship—or more broadly, her relationship to her creative powers—had not gotten any easier. Macpherson’s speaker must assure her Prophet that she is no threat to him and leaves it up to him to decide if he is headed into the wilderness or the Promised Land. Frye may have come down on the side of the former, deciding that their relationship was a threat to the stability and safety of his settled marriage and growing power as a public intellectual, for he was asked or chose to leave his position as Macpherson’s doctoral supervisor not long after the publication of *The Dry Light & The Dark Air*. Or it may have been that Frye decided Macpherson was his Promised Land, and stepped aside to avoid a conflict of interest. The third possibility is that Macpherson’s Jenny Lear poems were inspired by her relationship with Frye, and that she truly was ready to “get the curtain down” (60) on some or all of their professional and personal relationship, at least for a time. Whichever was the case, despite what Macpherson may have felt about him after his overtly sexist review of *The Boatman*, Milton Wilson took over and saw her dissertation to completion.

Atwood, *Alphabet* and Alden

In her five years as don in the women’s residence at Victoria College, Macpherson lived on campus with her students and with friends like Eleanor Cook who were fellow dons. It was a job she loved, and living rent-free let her save a good portion of her salary alongside the continuing royalties from *The Boatman*. But for reasons that may have had nothing or everything to do with Frye, she began to feel the need for a space of her own and more financial security. In the summer of 1960, Macpherson bought a house at 17 Berryman Street, just a few blocks north of campus. In those days the northern end of Yorkville was still, as we would put it in common parlance, sketchy, but it was conveniently located and affordable. Even though her term as don extended for another year and she would not be able to move into her house until the next summer, she saw it as too good an investment to pass by.

Macpherson invited Atwood to live in the house while she finished up her final term as don, recognizing that the long commute from Leaside to the university was wearing on her friend. It was at Macpherson’s house that Atwood first encountered some of the books that had been important to her teacher and friend as a developing writer, and that would also become important to her as she

wrote *Double Persephone*, to be published the next year. Colombo's Hawkshead Press published the volume, and it seems that Macpherson may have begun to do for Atwood what Page once did for her, both in making connections with congenial editors and publishers with whom she already had good relationships and in becoming the provider of new reading material that could help Atwood orient herself to the major currents of Canadian literature. Macpherson later recalled that when Atwood moved in and began raiding her bookshelves, "I think she chose the Jung part of the shelf and Graves's *White Goddess*, and all the modern Canadian poetry" (Sullivan *Red*, 105). Macpherson's library included work by P.K. Page, Anne Hébert, Margaret Avison, Phyllis Webb, Anne Wilkinson, Jay herself, Elizabeth Brewster, Miriam Waddington, Kay Smith, Gladys Downes, and many others. Atwood's reading and her conversations with Macpherson are traceable in her work. Her highly mythopoeic *Double Persephone* is marked not only by echoes of Macpherson and Page, but also by Atwood's response to Graves's misogynistic conception of the relationship between gender and art, particularly his contention that women were Muses only, meant to inspire but not to be inspired. In Atwood's words, "Ah yes, the moon-goddess: Man does / woman is" (*Negotiating* 114), and she—like Macpherson before her—would have none of it.

The inspiration and sharing went both ways in their friendship. Macpherson's affinity for the macabre and Gothic was already well developed and quite evident in her *Boatman* poems, as well as in her interest in the more Gothic elements of romance that appear in her dissertation, but Atwood's own intense interest seems to have brought hers to the fore:

Margaret introduced Jay to Béla Bartók's Duke Bluebeard's Castle, and also gave her a watercolour she had done called The Robber Bridegroom. Jay understood the power of the Gothic for Margaret. It provided machinery to get at disturbing reality. For Jay, the essential archetype of the Gothic is the story of Cain and Abel, of the man who kills his brother and is eternally exiled. That fratricide is reflected in the human psyche: the divided halves of the self are locked in eternal struggle. The Gothic has a sense of soul fragmentation, of parts of the self that need to be reclaimed. "The dark shadows come back in under the skin and tend to be more vengeful for being exiled and denied" is how she puts it. "I think of Blake: 'My spectre round me night and day.'" (Sullivan, *Red* 105)

We can see some of the reverberations of this connection and mutual interest in some of Macpherson's later individual poems, like the Frankenstein-inspired "Karloff Poem," and in the

Gothic construction and concerns of *Welcoming Disaster*,²⁹ although it would be a number of years before Macpherson re-found her poetic Muse and worked through this inspiration.

In addition to working with Atwood to strip the horse-patterned wallpaper from the walls of her new kitchen that summer—they called it “the vanishing prairie” (Sullivan *Red*, 105) after a 1954 Disney documentary—they frequently went together to the Bohemian Embassy, a coffee shop on St. Nicholas Street not far from campus where the Toronto poets had all begun gathering to drink coffee, talk, and read their work over the hiss of the espresso machine and the loud toilet flush (113). The obsession with mythology that Macpherson had tapped into and that exploded with the publication of *The Boatman* still raged on at the Embassy. As Sullivan notes,

It had filtered down from Robert Graves’s *White Goddess* and from Northrop Frye’s lectures at the University of Toronto. And everyone had read Leonard Cohen’s *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956). Jay Macpherson’s *Boatman* had come out in 1957, Margaret Avison was publishing *Winter Sun* (1960), Gwen MacEwen was writing *Julian the Magician*, and Margaret was working on *Double Persephone*. (113)

Although Macpherson, MacEwen, and Atwood were relatively close in age, the passing of the torch from generation to generation that had happened at the end of the 1940s when Macpherson was being mentored by Page seemed to be happening again, for Macpherson would take a step back into silence for a number of years, just as Page had, while Atwood and MacEwen would take up the mythic torch and forge a new path forward.

The obsession with mythology that permeated the Embassy Room transcended the Toronto literary community, for schools seemed to recognize the usefulness of mythic fluency in understanding both literature and culture and were clamouring for the kind of basic mythological primer that Macpherson had just finished for Macmillan. She wrote to Crawley in June that she

Took text & notes down [to Kildare Dobbs] ten days ago, & appendages followed two days ago—maps, family trees, questions, a chronology. It turned out an immense job, I still don’t understand why: 150 pages or so, a survey of Greek mythology from the beginning to the return of Odysseus, as simply done as possible. I don’t write a good expository prose, or command detail easily. (ACP Box 1 File 18)

Now that *Four Ages of Man* was complete, Macpherson finally had the time and energy to resume working on her dissertation in earnest, and the forthcoming first issue of Reaney’s new little magazine *Alphabet: A semi-annual devoted to the iconography of the imagination* provided much needed

²⁹ For a fuller treatment of the Gothic in Macpherson’s later verse, see Tanis Macdonald’s “‘Absence, havoc’: Gothic Mourning and Daughterly Duty in Jay Macpherson’s *Welcoming Disaster*” (2009).

incentive to get new research into her old love Narcissus written up and ready for publication. In the same letter to Crawley, she wrote that

Two days ago I started in to write thesis on the later career of Narcissus (outline of subject—that is, part of the paper of which the Helena herewith is also a part—is to be published in first issue of Jamie’s *Alphabet*, whenever that gets out). Am still struggling with an opening chapter, on Goethe’s Werther & such—romantic melancholy, & some of the symbolic apparatus that goes with it—palaces of art, ladies with lutes, spiders spinning out of their bowels—risk getting melancholy myself when I think of it. (ACP Box 1 File 18).

The publication of *Alphabet* marked the first time that the mythopoeic modernists had a journal they could properly call their own, and the Narcissus-themed first issue came out just as classes started up again in September. In his opening editorial, Reaney told the story of how the magazine came to be, emerging out of the community of mythopoeic writers who congregated at the University of Toronto from the late 1940s onwards. But the focus of the magazine, the juxtaposition of life and myth, did not take its shape until 1958, when

Jay Macpherson read a paper on myth at the English Club ... and afterwards there was a party on Yorkville. Here Hope Lee told the stories about being a twin that we’ve also printed. It suddenly came to me that here was proof that life reflected art. The myth of Narcissus reaches out and touches with clarifying rays the street scene where the two human beings glided by also in the toils of reflection. That’s how poetry works: it weaves street scenes and twines around swans in legendary pools. Let us make a form out of this: documentary on one side and myth on the other: Life & Art. In this form we can put anything and the magnet we have set up will arrange it for us. (4)

Reaney’s description of the magazine’s purpose—life and art, documentary and myth, reflecting each other like Narcissus or Eve in reflection—paints a different picture of Canadian mythopoeic modernism than critics had begun to in their characterizations of the work of the mythopoeists. Desmond Pacey is a key example, for not long after the appearance of the first issue of *Alphabet* he published a survey of fifties poetics in Canada in which he argued that the mythopoeists, foremost among them Reaney and Macpherson, were now the most brilliant school in Canada despite taking much of their inspiration from Frye (“Literature” 235). As well as a number of the figures then involved in *Alphabet*—who included familiar names like Norman Newton and Daryl Hine—Pacey’s survey also listed Avison, Mandel, and Wilkinson (who had sadly passed away in early May) as members of the mythopoeic group. Pacey was not entirely approving of this mythic development, seeming to wish for a return of the social realism of some of the forties Montreal poets. He was unwilling to accept Reaney’s premise that mythopoetics can be about literature and life, for his “own prejudice leads me to fear that [mythopoeic poetry] too often degenerates into artificiality, into being

literature about literature rather than literature about life” (245). George Woodcock expresses a similar concern when he argues that part of the reason Macpherson’s reputation has suffered is because we can see only the art, not the life, and thus cannot understand or evaluate the relationship between the two (“Smith’s” 106). As I noted in the introduction, a major reason for taking a biographical approach in this project was to allow us to understand not just Macpherson’s myth and art, but what Reaney calls the documentary and the life as well. In doing so, it has become increasingly clear that Pacey’s criticism needs tempering, for life is both what inspires Macpherson’s verse and what keeps her from writing it, even as literature and myth provide the symbolic language and overarching framework she works within.

Unsurprisingly, given her closeness with Reaney, *Alphabet*’s first and second issue were packed with Macpherson’s work. In addition to about a dozen poems from her “Pretty Ophelia!” suite, which had been written back in 1956 and parts of which had previously been published in *Delta* and *Poetry*, the first two issues also contained the two-part essay about which she had written to Crawley, “Narcissus: Some Uncertain Reflections.” In it, Macpherson “trace[s] out the connection ... between Narcissus’ love for his own image and the temptation and fall of man” (42), which she identifies first in *Paradise Lost* where Eve, entranced by her own reflection, has to be tempted away toward “he / Whose image thou art” (41). When humankind becomes figured in religion and literature as God’s mirror image, Macpherson suggests, is when “the transcendent implications with which the Narcissus theme comes into Renaissance literature” (43) come about, and “the reflecting surface actually catches not just an image of the body but the soul or spiritual being itself” (47). What Narcissus actually longs for is not his own beauty but, as in “Eve in Reflection,” his soul, his unfallen double who is lost to him in an imperfect, fallen world. The dream of the pastoral, Macpherson suggests, is a dream of the mirror world, perfected and whole, in which our reflections live, rather like the world Alice sees on the other side of the looking glass. It is this world of which her sleepers dream in *The Boatman*, and that God hoicks the fisherman into as the last morning breaks in red.

Around the time that Reaney finally got *Alphabet* to press, Macpherson’s own publishing practice had moved into a new phase. Through her circle of acquaintances in Ottawa, Macpherson met Robert Rosewarne, a visual artist who had worked as a “heraldic artist and designer of regimental accoutrements for the Canadian Army” (North 34) since the early 1950s. He was also an extraordinarily talented printmaker, and wanted to attempt fine literary printing on what he called his Blue R Hand Press, a 130-year old “Washington” press set up in his studio at 317 Queen Street in

Ottawa. Macpherson had agreed to publish Alden Nowlan's *Wind in a Rocky Country* alongside Al Purdy's *The Blur in Between*, although Purdy would not reluctantly agree to the publication until 1962. Rosewarne designed colour graphics for both volumes and printed 300 copies of each book, volumes that in the estimation of Cameron Anstee "are surely among the most beautiful produced in Canada in the 20th century" ("Emblem"). They are, as the cover and illustration from Nowlan's Emblem Book below demonstrate, extraordinarily beautiful books and a far cry from the first two in the Emblem Books series in their design and quality. They would also be Macpherson's last small press publications until she founded Saanes Press to publish *Welcoming Disaster* in 1974.

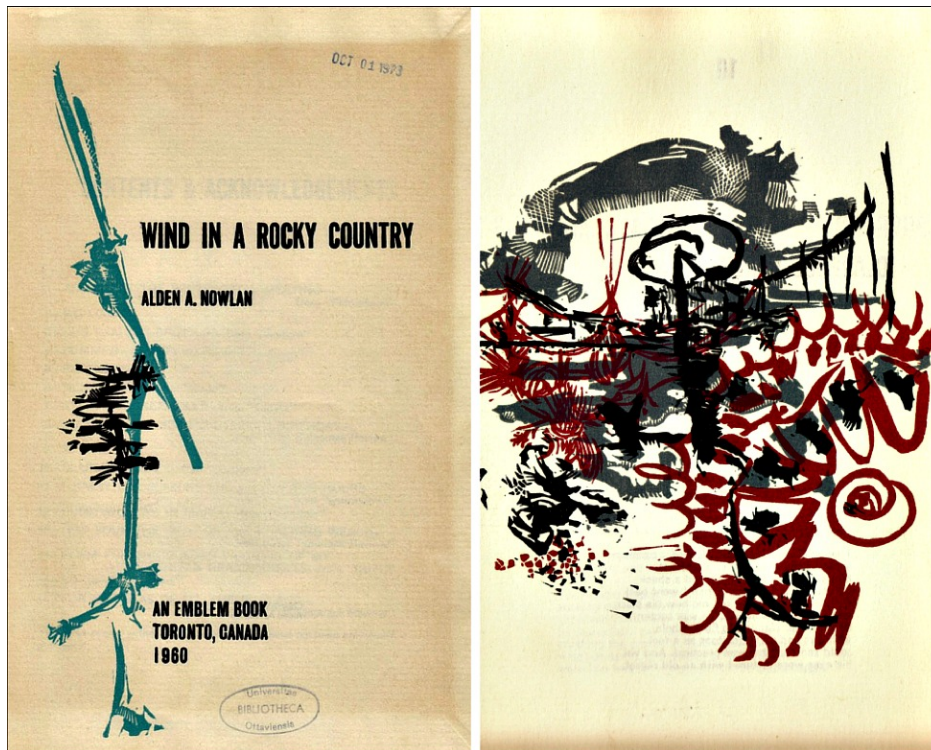


Figure 8: The cover of Alden Nowlan's *Wind in a Rocky Country* (1960) and an illustration for one of his poems, "At the Fair," both by Robert Rosewarne. (Source: Cameron Anstee.)

This period also marked some of the first appearances of Macpherson and her work in writing other than reviews of her poems. Hine's first novel, *The Prince of Darkness and Co.*, was "coming out before too long," and even before reading it, Macpherson wrote to Crawley that she was "not at all happy about the novel: apparently it's a take-off on Graves and friends, & he told me this in a way that suggested I would share the joke, which I couldn't exactly" (ACP Box 1 File 18). She was seemingly not yet aware, but would soon be, that Hine had written her into *The Prince of Darkness* as Emily, Graves's fictionalized daughter. Macpherson was not the only one—the entire Graves family show up in various forms, and Helga von Traum, who the jacket blurb describes as "a prophetess

who speaks English as though it were German” may have been intended as a fictionalized Wels-Schön. Hine’s portrait of Macpherson was neither flattering (Emily is a prim and uninteresting religious dilettante) nor accurate, and she furiously broke off their friendship when his transgression became clear.

Macpherson’s other appearance in someone else’s publication—Reaney’s “The Third Eye: Jay Macpherson’s *The Boatman*” for the new scholarly journal *Canadian Literature*—was rather more satisfactory, if still problematic. Because it fits so neatly with his own conception of the function and structure of poetry, Reaney focuses almost entirely on the apocalyptic, anagogic elements of *The Boatman* and connects them strongly to Frye’s theories of the same. We know now that Macpherson put aside her concerns about the negative aspects of total *integritas* and identification for only a little while, but Reaney’s essay suggests—and has led many to believe—that Macpherson’s belief in and practice of anagogy is thoroughgoing and total. Reaney is limited in his close focus on the figure of the anagogic man as the ultimate sleeper in whose mind the dream of a perfected world is protected, but he also usefully notes that

Other Canadian poets, as a matter of fact, have handled this figure, and he is a figure that a poet has to handle in one shape or another sooner or later, since the very process of being interested in metaphor evidently must lead to an interest in giant and mythical figures. Once you start saying that ‘my love is like a red, red rose’, you might as well start saying that she is like a great many other beautiful things as well, and then of course if she really is a goddess she is like everything, because a goddess isn’t a goddess unless she can control both beautiful and ugly things, even things indifferent. So she *is* everything and contains all the things she is like. If anything is like anything (metaphor) it eventually is everything (myth) and is an anagogic figure similar to Macpherson’s. (26-7)

The mythopoeic turn had many hands at the wheel, Reaney’s included, and he notes some of the others who have steered its course: Macpherson’s Noah is also Douglas LePan’s Silenus, “the Emily Carr of Wilfrid [sic] Watson’s poem who has been coughed up on the shores of Eternity by a green Leviathan” (29), E.J. Pratt’s dragon, and Reaney’s own goose. But of some of the key aspects of Macpherson’s work—gender, sexuality, her suspicion of anagogy and system building when it presumes to claim that order is anything more than an idea and that systems can include everyone—he says nothing. As the only scholarly work on Macpherson’s verse for many years, Reaney’s “The Third Eye” shaped and misshaped how readers thought and wrote about Macpherson’s work for a long period. Critics including Weir, MacDonald and now myself continue to reveal and make plain those elements of Macpherson’s work that Reaney’s narrow vision, however unconscious, has long hidden.

“I wind up the journey I have come / And follow it back home”

The richness of the archival and periodical record that has allowed us to trace Macpherson’s poetic and personal development up to this point fails us in the early-to-mid 1960s. There are no poems, little correspondence, and no very clear record of what Macpherson was thinking, doing, or writing. A profile in *The Toronto Daily Star* in August 1962 suggests a continued public fascination with Macpherson, who is described variously as “poet, gentlewoman and scholar,” “a creature apart, other-worldly, almost mythical,” and “in the words of one admirer ‘a really charming witch’” (“Jay” 24). The profile also noted that

In the last two years she has published no new poetry, and is painfully sensitive about it. Other projects are taking up her time: Lecturing at Victoria college, her Ph.D. thesis ‘on Frankenstein and friends,’ a chapter about autobiography for a Canadian Literary History, a recently published book of classical myths (‘The Four Ages of Man,’ MacMillan, 1962), and a private press publishing venture started to help other Canadian poets get printed.
(24)

Despite the fact that Macpherson could claim in early 1958 that “I’ve enough put away for half a book now” (Howarth 22), profiles published in *The Star* and *The Telegram* in the early 1960s repeated the refrain that Macpherson was so busy supporting her students and their activities that she had no time for her own work. The *Telegram* article listed her various activities—being “an indefatigable supporter of campus debates, concerts, art shows, poetry, readings, film screenings and dramatic productions” and “the Graduate English Club, the Goethe Society, the Student Christian Movement and the Canadian Universities Committee on Nuclear Disarmament” (“Jay” 17)—and her demanding teaching schedule: “a course on Milton, another on Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold; and a third on Canadian prose and verse” (“Jay” 17). Certainly, all of these commitments would have left Macpherson little time for writing. But those who were her friends during this period have suggested that there was more to this painful poetic silence than just her energies being diverted to other work. The portrait we have of Macpherson supports this theory, for up until this point she had always, when inspired, been willing—indeed driven—to ignore all those other commitments that might take her away from her work. It has been suggested that this was a period of creative crisis for Macpherson, one that engendered a long poetic silence much like the one Page had suffered when she moved to Brazil precisely a decade before, and I am likewise inclined to read Macpherson’s absorption in her teaching and student support as evidence that her Muse no longer demanded her attention and

energy, which she turned elsewhere. As Eleanor Cook noted in the address she gave at Macpherson's memorial,

In 1967 she gave me a souvenir from a trip to Hong Kong, a hand-made bookmark, with a biblical text: "Oh, God. O beg you don't keep silent; Oh God, O beg you don't shut your mouth, and don't keep speechless too." It's Psalm 83, verse 1. Seven years later she published *Welcoming Disaster*, the great disaster being her muse's abandonment of her. ("Jay")

The origins of this disaster are unclear, although we might wonder what role Frye played. When Macpherson does eventually begin writing again, her new work is marked by a crisis—"Absence, havoc — well, I missed you — / Near and dear turned far and strange, / Dayshine came disguised as midnight" (Macpherson, *Poems* 67)—that is connected to the loss both of love and her Muse, the "One thing altered [that] made all change" (67). As W.J. Keith suggests, *Welcoming Disaster* "reveals hints (like *The Waste Land*, we might add) of a palpable if subtly personal trauma" ("Macpherson's" 32), and this trauma, Tanis MacDonald points out, is strongly connected to the "dominating influence of a male muse" ("Absence" 62) we might assume is Frye. Macpherson's Muse has gone missing, and he becomes a "wandered love" (Macpherson, *Poems* 67) and a "wandering magus figure [whose] 'absence' is equated with nothing less than 'havoc,' the wanton destruction of worlds" (MacDonald, "Absence" 62). It seems that both Macpherson's personal world, and the Edenic, Arcadian worlds that her most visionary poetry imagined into being, had been destroyed.

By the summer of 1964, Macpherson believed that she had finished two things very, although by no means equally, dear to her: her dissertation and her career as a poet. As she wrote to Crawley, she had "succeeded in finishing my thesis this spring, by cutting out just about every other thing but that and teaching over the last academic year" (ACP Box 1 File 18), although she was disappointed that her defence had to be postponed to the fall because a member of her committee failed to read the final draft in time. Her thesis, "Narcissus, or the Pastoral of Solitude: Some Conventions of Nineteenth-Century Romance," examined the elegiac and pastoral strain in romance from *Paradise Lost* to *Death in Venice*—and indeed beyond, for despite ostensibly being about nineteenth-century pastoral, Macpherson could not help but include a final chapter on the pastoral in a Canadian context. She titled it "This Swan Neck of the Woods," a nod not only to her own pastoral swans, but to the obsession shared by a number of Canadian poets with rewriting the myth of Leda and the swan in a colonial context. As *The Shepherd by Moonlight* and Macpherson's sleepers in *The Boatman* so vividly show her readers, the pastoral dream offers an escape from the floods and blood of the pastoral elegy—Endymion dreaming of a perfected world from his protected cave on Latmos Hill. In a Canadian context, "in this age and setting, where extraordinarily little faith is put in

the powers of art, the important, and even rescuing, imaginative creation is the dream, which when elaborated and sustained is usually—read either way—of a highly literary nature” (*Spirit* 259). Macpherson knew that she was one of many Canadian literary dreamers, and she mentions in her thesis those whose pastoral dreams likewise imagine a perfected world quite different from the fallen one in which we actually live: A.M. Klein’s poet in “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape,” the wilderness-Leviathan of Sheila Watson’s novel *The Double Hook*, Douglas LePan’s heron that is “the embodiment of dreams in his ‘Image of Silenus,’ here representing unity and completeness of being” (262), and Reaney’s “old goose Keziah at the end of *A Suit of Nettles*, who, with ‘all possible eggs inside her,’ carries life over from the Christmas massacre into the new year” (262). We might notice that Macpherson’s examples of pastoral, anagogic creatures are all fish and birds, which she suggests are the favoured symbol of the all-containing dreamer in Canadian literature. We might wonder how much her conclusion is also about herself, about her fisherman and her fish, her whales, her phoenixes and jays, all symbols of *integritas* and wholeness contained within the dreaming minds of her anagogic men and women.

In the days that Macpherson was finishing her dissertation, her belief in the power of the pastoral dream was considerably dimmed, for she was no longer able to dream new worlds into being and, as the haunted and haunting poems of *Welcoming Disaster* that are rooted in the crisis of this period suggest, her old dreams had turned to nightmares. But even so, she still believed that “The dream, as distinct from that kind of separatist somnambulism, at least points towards communion” (265), and that it “not only looks towards a community but is a communal possession” (265). Canada is, in Patrick Anderson’s words, “a gauche but beautiful mirror” (265), one that “generate[s] spectres and soulmates, images of horror and desire” (265). For Macpherson, Canada’s mirror was long the speculum in which she sought to see others like her—women, writers, speakers of her mythopoeic language—reflected. She sometimes did, with glorious (as in the transformation of Canadian poetry via the mythopoeic turn) or tragic (as when her best mirrors, her Muses, hid their reflections away and left her silent) results. But what she and her fellow writers had always truly seen in that mirror was Narcissus, a reflection of themselves, the order of their own constellated minds mirrored in the world around them: “The bride of desire, the elusive dream of the union of what is creative in man with what is idyllic in his vision of nature, in this setting is both the untouched wilderness retreating before him and the human Arcadian city he hopes to shape it into” (265). This vision may be only an idea of order, but it has transformative power all the same. Macpherson succeeded in bringing parts of her vision to life, for she had helped to shape staid and

provincial Toronto into a mythic Arcadia with her work as a scholar, teacher, and poet. She also worked to create new mirrors for the writers—women, especially—who came after her, allowing them to see themselves reflected in the Canadian literary landscape in a way that she had not been able to when she started writing.

But by the time her dissertation was done, Macpherson had resigned herself to the end of her career as a poet. She was no longer writing verse, and instead had worked to find other places where her love of words and their music could be useful. As she wrote to Crawley, one of those places—despite her agnosticism—was the United Church: “[I] have found a place where poets can go when they die, and that is the United Church Subcommittee on the revision of the Hymnary” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Macpherson’s role was as poetic advisor and occasional translator, and

I like the work enormously—it involves defending or attacking particular hymns from a literary point of view, and also some practical work helping edit—we do some adapting, such as cutting out or combining stanzas in some long hymns or rewriting parts in order to make something clearer, or the piece less personal & emotional. (ACP Box 1 File 18)

Despite the fact that “I’m a hopeless agnostic” (ACP Box 1 File 18), Macpherson was still welcomed by the reverends and organists who made up the rest of the committee, at least in part because they were willing to let her advocate for one of the things that had drawn her to biblical mythology a decade before: “biblical poetry and adaptations of same” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Dorothy Macpherson had likewise been non-religious, and indeed had forbidden her daughter from reading the Bible as a child, but Dorothy “was brought up in Wales, and sings the hymns that the chapels and her Methodist mother taught her, and all that seems to have got a very firm grip on me in early youth” (ACP Box 1 File 18). It was only when Macpherson began working on the hymnary that it became “clear to me after all these years how much a part of my life many old hymns have been—I sing them by myself, walking along the street whenever it’s reasonably deserted—in a literal sense I couldn’t say I believed a word, but they are a real comfort and support ... Can even look back and see bits of dissolved hymns in some of my poems” (ACP Box 1 File 18). Oxford marketed Macpherson as a writer whose “voice is clear and youthful, witty and melodious” (*Boatman*), and Macpherson herself recognized that her ability to write quickly and revise little had much to do with the fact that “the tune has been in her head for a long time” (Howarth 22), but it was not until she had mostly stopped writing that she realized how rooted her interest in poetic rhythm was in the ballads and hymns of her youth. For all those reasons, “It is a pleasure to be involved in this, and to feel that whatever practice I’ve had is still good for something” (ACP Box 1 File 18), even if it was for the moment no longer good for producing more of her melodic, revelatory poetry.

Whatever Macpherson's feelings about the seeming end of her poetic career—and the collection she wrote after her Muse returned, *Welcoming Disaster*, suggests that those feelings were painful and profound—her practice as a poet was certainly valuable to far more than just the hymnary. Macpherson was also actively teaching and mentoring a new generation of poets, just as Crawley, Page, Wels-Schön, the Jonases, Graves, Johnston, and Frye had taught and mentored her. As Atwood notes,

Despite the fact that Jay was very shy and was always whisking around corners, she was an excellent teacher. As long as she could direct your attention to a third thing – the work of someone else rather than her own work, or another person rather than herself – she was on safe ground. Both of you could look at the third thing, and communicate through it. ... She was able to pinpoint the essence of whatever you were both observing. She saw into things, which I suppose is what is meant by insight; this is a great gift for the possessor, made greater when shared with others; as Jay did share it" ("My")

And she shared it not only with Atwood, but with Dennis Lee, Alexandra Johnson, "the brightest young person around ... Gwen MacEwen" (ACP Box 1 File 18), and all of those other unnamed students who were inspired and educated by Macpherson as she spoke from one of her favourite places: the front of the classroom. By 1964, a new generation of mythopoets had seemingly taken up the torch: Atwood's *Double Persephone* and MacEwen's *Selah* had both been published in 1961 to great acclaim and Atwood's *The Circle Game*, which is clearly indebted to both Macpherson's poetic trailblazing and her friendship, would soon win the Governor General's Award.

Atwood has long argued that Macpherson is "still the best example I know of someone who lives as if literature, and especially the writing of poetry, were to be served, not used" ("Jay" 411). In the 1960s, Macpherson felt that serving literature through writing poetry was no longer a form of service available to her. But her devotion to her art did not wane, and she found other ways to serve it—supporting a new generation of writers, working on the hymnary, better understanding the world of words through her scholarship, and sharing her love of that world in the classroom—until it was time once again to heed the call of the Muses.

Conclusion

Toronto: 1964 and Onwards

*Pie is not for Doctor Coolie:
God gives pie to white guys duly, He
Knows white guys deserve it truly:
Professorial pie.*

—Jay Macpherson, “The Ballad of Dr. Coolie” (1999)

*Something besides I still hold back—for what? whom?
Not that good woman—*

*She had her Lord: I clutch my gift ungiven,
Selfish and sterile—so I was commanded.
Dark god or bright I wait for, him who sent me,
Known by his absence.*

—Jay Macpherson, “For This Ointment...” (1976)

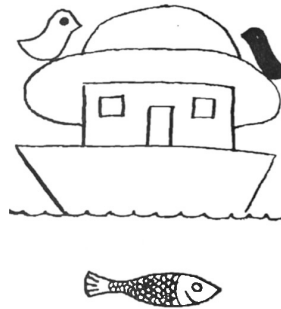


Figure 9: Macpherson’s Ark emblem. (Source: *Alphabet* magazine.)

During a roundtable about ancient myth and poetry that convened at an academic conference in the mid-1970s, Jay Macpherson made one of her rare public statements about her writing life. When asked to illuminate her view of “the special relationship between myth and poetry,” (“Ancient” 1), Macpherson told the audience that her “main interest in life is the relation between literature and myth” (“Ancient” 5). We already know this to be true, for we have seen Macpherson obsessed with the echoes of Narcissus in *Lycidas* from the time she arrived in Canada as a child; the fanatic Blakeanism that led to the publication of “Non-Identification” when she was just fifteen; the wry reworking of the classical, Biblical, and nursery rhyme myths in her *Contemporary Verse* poems; her bringing to life mythic goddesses, shepherds, and creatures in her chapbooks; and her creation of a poetics of total *integritas* and apocalyptic vision in *The Boatman*.

Macpherson went on to explain to the roundtable that her interest was not in just any old myths, but in what she called “authentic myths” (14). We should already have a good sense of what she means by authentic myths, ones that “we would all recognize without being able to narrowly define” (14). These myths are “the ones that have some imaginative force behind them, those that are in an imaginative, disinterested dimension—the return to innocence, the purification of society, the transformation of the self which advertising and politicians both promise us” (14). We still hear echoes of them in the debased myths of marketing and mass media, “the myths of the modern world that seem to us shoddy or thin, or, above all, not disinterested” (14), the myths that, as Barthes notes in his *Mythologies*, become ads for laundry detergent and cars and politicians. But Macpherson argues that these sad, corrupted myths have persuasive and evocative power only because they “draw what force they have from their power to recall ... the authentic myths” (14) and the imaginative force behind them. These “authentic myths” had long been the symbolic and structural framework within which Macpherson’s poetry—and later her teaching, her criticism, and her activism—worked.

Macpherson had lived through more than a decade of poetic silence when she made these statements: she seems to have published a single poem between 1960 and 1973, after having been extraordinarily productive as a writer from the mid-1940s until that point.¹ But even though she was not able to tap into that source herself any longer, Macpherson still believed in the power of myth and mythopoetics, still believed that the echoes of these authentic myths—Selene and Endymion, Narcissus, Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, Atlantis, Sibylla, Mary of Egypt, Jonah and the whale—reverberated even when cased in the debased, corrupted form offered by the mass media and by the poorer forms of popular writing. These echoes, however faint, still for Macpherson inspired and responded to the authentic, primal desires—for inclusion, for identity, for a return to innocence, for a world better than the one in which we live—that are expressed on the imaginative level by mythology. Myth, Macpherson argues in her response to the roundtable, is fundamentally a lens through which we see and understand the world, its patterns helping us to organize and connect with what we read, watch, and experience on an imaginative level. Myth is our third eye, letting us not just see with the “two [that] saw green, saw sky, saw people pass” (*Poems* 13), but rather lets us see the perfected, pastoral Edens and Arcadias that are the Platonic ideal of the green our everyday

¹ Macpherson’s “Alph” appeared in a 1965 issue of *Alphabet*; her last poetry publication before that seems to have been in the magazine’s first issue in 1960. Her next publication appears to be a group of poems published in the October 1973 issue of *Poetry*, likely the same that she mentions in the letter to Bill Toye quoted below.

eyes see. Macpherson's version of mythopoetics has the ability to create moments of perfected vision and total identification, moments in which we can see beyond the shadow within the cave to the true world beyond illuminated by myth's sunny light. Perhaps most importantly to Macpherson, the repetition across time and place of myth and archetype, and the evocative power of familiar stories and their wide ranging emotional resonance—for who has not quested after something like Jason, or felt tricked like Sibylla, or longed to be included and protected inside the loving body of something like Macpherson's Ark?—can create a community of all the people who have shared our dreams and the stories we make out of them.

Just how significant Jay Macpherson and *The Boatman* were to the Canadian poetry scene, and to Canadian culture more broadly, in the 1950s and 1960s came as something of a surprise to me given her current lack of prominence and place within the Canadian canon. The reasons for that sea change are complex and multifaceted: the general neglect of non-Montreal modernism in studies of Canadian poetry, the bias against academic poets among influential critics, Macpherson's long silence after the publication of *The Boatman*, the lasting repercussions of complimentary dismissal by readers and reviewers, pervasive gender bias, and a sense among postmodern writers—even those we might call the postmodern mythopoeists, like Kroetsch, Nichol, Carson, and Dewdney—that Macpherson's brand of mythopoeic practice had little to teach them. This last reason merits some attention (albeit brief, as it could be a study unto itself and I can do little more than gesture to its contours here), as it can help us better understand Macpherson's place within the ongoing tradition of Canadian mythopoeic modernism. As Bennett and Jones among others argue, and as I have noted elsewhere in this dissertation, Macpherson's brand of mythopoeic modernism emerges not only in relationship to Anglo-American and European mythopoetics, but out of an ongoing Canadian mythopoeic tradition with its roots in the nineteenth century, one that includes writers like Isabella Valancy Crawford, Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman, and Charles G.D. Roberts, among others. It is these writers of whom Douglas LePan speaks in "A Country without a Mythology," those for whom

Sometimes – perhaps at the tentative fall of twilight –
A belief will settle that waiting around the bend
Are sanctities of childhood, that melting birds
Will sing him into a limpid gracious Presence.

The hills will fall in folds, the wilderness
Will be a garment innocent and lustrous
To wear upon a birthday, under a light
That curls and smiles, a golden-haired Archangel. (*Wounded* 11-12)

This belief results in what Carman calls “a northern pantheism” (165), one that led to the overlaying of what Maia Bhojwani calls “the cult of Pan” (“Northern”) over Canada’s northern landscape in poems like Carman’s “The Reed Player,” Lampman’s “The Poets,” and Roberts’s “The Pipes of Pan.”² As Bhojwani notes, by 1895 “the cult of Pan had acquired a local habitation and a name (“kinship”)” (“Northern”), exactly the conditions required to create—and to mark this out as—a Canadian culture of letters that used its approach to myth as one of its key recognizable and reproducible characteristics. We can see Crawford’s mythopoetics, which are in many ways distinct from those of the Confederation poets, reflected in Macpherson’s interest in pastoral, Edenic myths and related ones focused on the potential of creating new worlds in which humankind is totally identified with itself and with the natural world, although her general ahistoricism divorces that mythology from the myths of Canadian progress and civilization that Crawford both writes and challenges. It should not surprise us that the key characteristic of this earlier Canadian mythopoeia, the creation of kinship between human and landscape, is very much the same impulse toward identification and communion that drives Macpherson’s mythopoetics.

Macpherson and the other Toronto mythopoeists were, as LePan’s verse should make clear, very aware that they were an ongoing part of this tradition despite the fact that they more frequently connected their mythopoetics to Anglo-American and European modernists like Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Graves and despite the fact that their acknowledgement of this earlier tradition was often missing or disguised. (Reaney’s extensive work on Crawford is a key exception). Bloom’s anxiety of influence suggests that this kind of distancing from one’s literary foremothers and fathers is a natural consequence of developing one’s original voice as a writer. In consequence, this same distancing has led to the relative obscurity of the mythopoetics of the Toronto fifties in the present, for the postmodern mythographers have often failed to acknowledge the significance and influence of their immediate predecessors. bpNichol—whose martyrologies are also mythologies—is an exception, but the extent to which he feels the need to justify his continuing interest in Reaney’s work, a justification I explored in the introduction, suggests that this recognition is not widespread. In “Learning the Hero from Northrop Frye,” Robert Kroetsch, another of our canonical postmodern

² For more on the Confederation poets’ mythography, see D.M.R. Bentley’s “Pan and the Confederation Poets” and Maia Bhojwani’s “A Northern Pantheism: Notes on the Confederation Poets and Contemporary Mythographers,” as well as James Reaney’s, Catherine Ross’s, and Cecily Devereux’s work on Crawford.

mythographers, explores the influence of Frye on his work but acknowledges the Toronto mythopoeists only as those who were likewise influenced by Frye, not as those whose work as poets influenced him directly: “Canadian writers like Eli Mandel, Margaret Atwood, Doug Jones, James Reaney, Jay Macpherson, and Dennis Lee, to name only the most obvious, were changing Canadian literature because they had in turn been changed by Northrop Frye” (154). As Linda Hutcheon notes, there are crucial differences in the way that the modern and postmodern mythographers approach history and myth: “Modernists...have usually been seen as profoundly humanistic in their paradoxical desire for stable aesthetic and moral values, even in the face of their realization of the inevitable absence of such universals” (6). In contrast, “Postmodernism differs from this in the provisionality of its response to them: it refuses to posit any structure or, what Lyotard calls, master narrative—such as art or myth—which, for such modernists, would have been consolatory. It argues that such systems are indeed attractive, perhaps even necessary, but this does not make them any less illusory” (6). These differences have led to the elision of the mythopoeistics of the Toronto fifties from this mythic lineage.

This leads us to one key reason for Macpherson’s neglect that reverberates throughout all of those that provided the impetus for this project and the rationale behind its microhistorical and biographical approach: Jay Macpherson—once one of the best known, most promising, and certainly most widely read poets in Canada—has been long and unfairly neglected because her critics and readers have not recognized that from the earliest days of her childhood Macpherson’s main interest in life, as the relation between literature and myth. Instead, readers—not knowing much, if anything, of Macpherson’s life and writing before she began her work with Frye and Victoria College—have long assumed that her interests and her approach stemmed from him. This assumption, which Macpherson’s general unwillingness to talk about herself publicly as a writer or as a person allowed to go unchecked, is what has allowed readers to include Macpherson under the umbrella of the Frye School, to declare that she gets her myth straight from his mouth, and to suggest that her poetry is little more than the conversion of his theory into another genre. As Kroestch’s essay suggests, for those who believe that Macpherson’s mythopoeia, and that of the other poets of the Toronto fifties, comes “straight from the horse’s mouth viz. Northrop Frye’s” (Dobbs 88), there is little justification not to go straight to that presumed source and ignore its supposed derivatives. For a late modernist writer still bound by the period’s prescription to “Make it new” (Pound, *Cantos* LIII), and for a woman thought to be excessively influenced by a romantic partner who was for a time an enormously influential public intellectual, charges of derivativeness

have proven fatal to Macpherson's poetic reputation. Not able to access Macpherson's ambivalence toward the idea of myth as representing "stable aesthetic and moral values," nor able to identify her awareness that the systems of myth are attractive but illusory—that they are just ideas of order, the function of the flickering, failing, falsifying third eye—later writers have had no reason to look to Macpherson as a foremother for their own mythic explorations. Macpherson's attempts to make more apparent this underlying understanding of myth and history in *Welcoming Disaster*—a volume that, as W.J. Keith notes, "can be interpreted as...a departure from the mode...of its predecessor," a departure from the understanding of myth as "hermetic, unifying, 'impersonal' in the approved modernist sense" ("Jay") most have taken from *The Boatman*—came too late, as Macpherson's reputation as a systematizing, Frygian mythopoeist was solidified during the decade of her poetic silence. This misunderstanding of the contexts and motivations for Macpherson's mythopoeia—and for the other actors behind the mythopoeic turn, who likewise have been characterized as "zonked-out Trilbys...warbling Frye's tune" (Atwood, "Northrop" 400)—allows a reading of Canadian mythopoeic modernism as an isolated, belated, and solely Canadian phenomenon, one for which Frye from his perch in Toronto could take most of the credit and to which the continuing tradition of Canadian poetics need pay little attention.

But a microhistorical examination of Macpherson's life shows us that this is not the case, for her or for the other actors behind the mythopoeic turn. Her juvenilia, her choice to pursue a classics degree, her fanatic Blakeanism, her relationships with mythopoeic practitioners and sympathizers from Canada and abroad like P.K. Page, Alan Crawley, Hans and Lore Jonas, Grete Wels-Schön, Robert Graves, and George Johnston, show that Macpherson's mythopoeia was neither Frye-dependent nor belated nor specifically Canadian. Macpherson was a mythopoeist bred in the bone, and her life was spent seeking those who could speak her mythopoeic language and help her become more fluent in it herself. Northrop Frye proved, for a little while at least, to speak the most closely related dialect—and certainly he spoke it most loudly, and was listened to most closely by the rest of the world. This is why he was so important to Macpherson both personally and professionally, as she was to him. But this project has demonstrated the fundamental sociality of literary production, and "the networks, allegiances, and interactions among diverse peoples in the modernist period" that provide "evidence of collaboration, cooperation, and multidirectional flows" (Cuddy-Keane 558) that produced not only Macpherson's modernism, but the mythopoeic turn more broadly. Frye was by no means the only speaker of Macpherson's mythic language, for Grete Wels-Schön, Robert Graves, and George Johnston had been there before him, P.K. Page and Alan Crawley encouraged

Macpherson's mythopoeic development, and all of the Canadian mythopoeic writers belonged to a much broader international elective community that included Eliot, Jung, Graves, Barthes, Levi-Strauss, Campbell, Frank, Joyce, and all those others who, like Macpherson, believed in the ancient power and present relevance of myth and archetype. Rather than being one of the "trickle down" effects of European and Anglo-American innovative genius" (Friedman 38) or of Frye's individual genius, mythopoeic modernism in Canada emerged, at least partially, out of the relationship among the people and ideas of this broad elective community. Macpherson's personal connection to this international community of mythopoeic writers and thinkers illuminates Toronto's role as one of many "interlocking and mutually constitutive centers" of mythopoeic modernism "that are influenced by and that in turn influence others" (36).

That Frye, along with Reaney, Mandel, Wilkinson, the Watsons, LePan, Johnston, and so many others—even the career boys, at points—should turn to myth and create an identifiable mythopoeic culture of letters in Canada when they did should tell us something. It should tell us that Canadian mythopoetics gain steam in the mid-to-late 1940s because something had gone wrong, in the world and in Canadian verse, that myth and archetype promised to remedy. The post-war poets of the Montreal forties and the Toronto fifties were searching for ways of making meaning, for connecting with readers, that could take them beyond the static images and short utterances of the lyric: the search for the *integritas* that Macpherson and her friends found in a visionary mythopoetics that could see and write "All us and our worlds, and bound / Art and life, and wit and sense, / Innocence and experience" (*Poems* 42). More broadly, the world was seeking a remedy for the sense that people and countries had been utterly and irrevocably divided by the horrors and nationalisms of the Second World War, and for a time art became driven by a desire for ways to imagine into being a world that was whole and healed. Macpherson had experienced that destruction and division firsthand, being thrust into a forced exile from her beloved London by the threat of German bombs and continually in search of a community to which to belong. Her brand of visionary mythopoetics proposed to imagine a world that was renewed and whole, for it spoke in the language of ancient stories that transcended and connected readers across personal and national boundaries. At the same time, her poetry allowed her readers to imagine along with her a world in which everyone and everything was contained and connected, unified within the golden bubble of her constellated mind. That community building between reader-writer-book that Macpherson pursued in *The Boatman* was reflected by the community building she pursued in real life, bringing together via her editorial work, her correspondence, her friendship a Canadian elective community of mythopoeic modernists that

improved upon the earlier, smaller communities she had participated in along with Wels-Schön, Graves, and Jonas. Community, connection, coherence: these are what Macpherson's mythopoetics ultimately promised and performed, and what she continually sought. Her poetics are made even more powerful by her admission that despite the fact that community, connection, and coherence were often illusions produced by our constellated minds, and that inclusion and identification often meant invisibility for women and the world's poor children, they were worth seeking and writing into being none the less.

Choosing a biographical approach to a literary critical and historical project is an unusual choice at present, although it has not always been. The reasons I have chosen this approach are many: to counter the misreadings of Macpherson and her work engendered by a lack of biographical information (about the deep roots of her mythopoeic tendencies, her relationship to the writers of the Montreal forties and Alan Crawley, her time in Spain) or by misinformation (for example, assumptions about her religiosity), to challenge the erasure of female experience that attends when we talk about the author function instead of the author, to foreground the sociality of literary production by placing it within the frame of social networks and cultural developments in Canada, and to join a tradition of recuperative feminist biographical scholarship like that performed by Joan Coldwell, Sandra Djwa, and Rosemary Sullivan. In better understanding Macpherson's life, we also better understand the literary and cultural movements in which she participated, debunk the myth of the Frye School, illuminate how and why the mythopoeic turn occurred, and elucidate her role in it. I have begun this process of finally attending properly to the Toronto fifties, but in focusing solely on Macpherson, and solely on her poetics of the modernist era, I have left much yet undone. Future scholarship might go in a number of directions. One may be to include the other mythopoeists more fully in this history so that we may gain a better sense of how the mythopoeic turn coalesced and gained momentum from multiple directions. This project has implications for Frye studies, and an opening up of Frye scholarship to understand Macpherson's influence on his thought and work would be a welcome new direction, although one that will likely be impossible until the 2060s when their joint correspondence is unsealed. As I deliberately chose to limit this study to an examination of Macpherson's life and work in the modernist period, others might want to turn their attention to more fully exploring Macpherson's life and work from the 1970s until the time of her death in the light of what this project has revealed, to see how her lifelong interest in myth and the reverberations of the mythopoeic turn played out, and how her mentorship of younger poets—

Atwood and MacEwen foremost among them—transformed the face of Canadian literature up to the present.

In closing out this early part of Macpherson's story, we should turn our attention to that later work, to what Macpherson was doing from 1964 onwards. For at least a decade, and to varying degrees for the rest of her life, Macpherson found her creative energies turned away from poetry and toward other kinds of communication and community building: her teaching and supervision, her scholarship (including her monograph *The Spirit of Solitude: Conventions and Continuities in Late Romance*, which was published by Yale University Press in 1982, and an unfinished book, *Seeing the Light*, on *The Magic Flute* and Freemasonry), her mentorship of other artists, and her friendships. She never did become what Ivon Owen predicted she would in 1956, the poet who "will win wider international recognition in her lifetime than any previous Canadian poet" (OUPP). In no small part because both *Poetry* magazine (which her old friend Daryl Hine edited from 1968 to 1978) and the critic Harold Bloom long championed her work to American audiences, Macpherson's work is arguably better known in the United States than it is in her home country. As Eleanor Cook noted in her memorial address,

I'm not sure how many people in the academy had much idea of how very good the poetry was, and is. She was the person that major American poets used to ask me about when I ran into them, people like the late Anthony Hecht or Mark Strand, Pulitzer-Prize winners both. A recent British editor called her one of the great poets of the twentieth century, and compared her with Stevie Smith, but her emotional range is far wider than Smith's. She once called herself a minor Housman, yet there is nothing minor about what she wrote, and again the emotional range is wider. If ever the William Blake of *Songs of Innocence and Experience* found a descendant, it was in Jay Macpherson. ("Jay")

Even so, the recognition of and appreciation for her work is by no means widespread. Instead, it is Macpherson's student and longtime friend Margaret Atwood who arguably holds the title of Canada's best-known writer. This is a fact that I doubt Macpherson, always more concerned with her private relationship to her creative powers rather than public recognition or acclaim, minded much at all.

From the early 1960s until the early 1970s, and at many points after, Macpherson's muse deserted her—but her audience did not. *The Boatman* stayed in print until 1968, when Bill Toye decided that he could reach a new audience for Macpherson's work with *The Boatman and Other Poems*, an updated edition that included the "Pretty Ophelia" suite and a few other poems written in the mid-1950s along with Macpherson's original text. It was not until the winter of 1973 that Macpherson began writing poetry again in earnest. As she wrote to Toye the next spring,

I've been writing some verse last winter & this: what's resulting is a very small collection of about 25 pieces...5 were published last fall in *Poetry*.... [T]hey form a sequence, or a couple of sequences, & they don't belong in *The Boatman* or anywhere near it—a friend in fact calls them rather accurately *The Anti-Boatman*. (OUPP)

Those couple of sequences ended up being rather longer in the end, for they became a slim but substantial collection entitled *Welcoming Disaster* that worked through the absence and havoc that ensued when her Muse had disappeared all those years before. Toye, still committed to ensuring Oxford's support of Macpherson's work, put into motion the publication of her final published collection, *Poems Twice Told*, which combined together *The Boatman and Other Poems* and *Welcoming Disaster*. The book is still in print, and its publication has inspired a number of new examinations of Macpherson's work—especially *Welcoming Disaster*—by Lorraine Weir, W.J. Keith, Tanis Macdonald, Miriam Nichols, and Amanda Jernigan. Recent anthologies like Jernigan's and Evan Jones's *Earth and Heaven: An Anthology of Canadian Myth Poetry*, Jones's and Todd Swift's *Modern Canadian Poets: An Anthology*, and Trehearne's *Canadian Poetry: 1920-1960* contain generous selections of her work, and I am in the process of collecting a selection of unpublished and published poems for a new collection that will be included in the Porcupine's Quill Essential Poets series. A number of recent remembrances and reworkings of Macpherson's life and art—Gene Kondusky's setting of “Ark Apprehensive” to music on the Kites Overhead album *You are a secret, and you must never tell it*, Toronto City Councillor Kristin Wong-Tam's successful bid for the creation of Jay Macpherson Green at the corner of Macpherson Avenue and Avenue Road, David Blostein's planned volume of her political poems, and indeed this project—suggest that once again, a resurgence of interest in Macpherson's work is building. I hope that it will prove a sustained one.

Despite the fickleness of her Muse, which she mourned in the second epigraph above—“Dark god or bright I wait for, him who sent me, / Known by his absence” (“For” 69)—Macpherson remained a poet to the last. She continued writing poetry, much of it political, right up until her illness made doing so impossible. Macpherson may have been lumped in with those who were accused of writing poems that were about literature instead of about life, but she was also a woman who wrote in protest of the mistreatment of the world's poor children and wore a “Ban the Bomb” pin while giving media interviews in the early 1960s. We might take offence at the title of Sandra Martin's obituary in *The Globe and Mail*, framing Macpherson as it does as one with a nurturing nature rather than stunning poetic and intellectual gifts, but it should not surprise us that Macpherson found a renewed poetic voice in standing up for some of the world's fallen women and poor children. Macpherson's poem about one of those to whom she wanted to lend her voice, Dr.

Kip-Yun Chun—a physics professor who sued the University of Toronto for systemic discrimination, and who was subjected to racist language like “coolie”—heads this chapter.

Macpherson’s last two published poems appeared in Toronto’s *Descant* magazine the summer before she died; the issue is appropriately titled “Possible Worlds,” a likely accidental nod to Macpherson’s belief in the world-building, or a least world-imagining, power of art. The first poem, “Plants,” suggests that Macpherson was aware that her own life, like that of her houseplants, was in its winter season:

It’s sombre, looking at plants
This dying shoot in my window
Mistreated by me all winter
Puts out what it can. (107)

And yet the plant, like her Muse, still “Puts out what it can.” Macpherson had dispensed with her usual ballad-like rhymes, but she never gave up her short, direct stanzas, which remained a trademark. Here, her short, terse form emphasizes the poem’s themes of death and endings, allowing her poem to resemble the dying shoot still active, but stunted, in its growth.

Macpherson titled the second *Descant* poem “A Winter Night (long after Lampman),” a nod to Archibald Lampman’s sonnet “Winter Evening” and his lyric poem “Midnight,” and perhaps more broadly to his position as one of her Canadian mythopoeic forebears. His winter evening is ending in the blaze of a golden sunset, and

soon from height to height,
With silence and the sharp unpitying stars,
Stern creeping frosts, and winds that touch like steel,
Out of the depth beyond the eastern bars,
Glittering and still shall come the awful night. (Lampman, “Winter” 243)

Macpherson writes as one for whom for whom the awful night has already come, and “From where I sit I see no stars” (Macpherson, “Winter” 108), no constellations to reflect her constellated mind. This is a perfect reversal of the opening line of Lampman’s “Midnight” — “From where I sit, I see the stars” (34) —one made even more poignant by the fact that Lampman’s hopeful first line is undercut by the fact that his speaker then looks down on “the chilly floor” and watches “The moon between the frozen bars” (34) of his prison. 17 Berryman Street is not a literal prison, and yet it is darker still than Lampman’s speaker’s cell. Even so, all is not wholly dark, for although Macpherson cannot see the stars,

But yonder, where the traffic turns,
All night across the darkness burns

DEMOS FOR SALE
ELECT USED CARS (108)³

These are desperately ironic lines, ones that have special resonance as we watch an American presidential election in which one of the nominees perfectly fits the stereotype of the shady used car salesman. We live in a world, Macpherson suggests, where our “DEMOS,” our *dēmos*, are “FOR SALE”: our demonstrations, our democracy, our personhood are for sale to the highest bidder, that we give away so that others can use them to collect ratings and data and advertising dollars. This seems to be, Macpherson suggests, a world without authentic myths, one that is left just with their debased and manipulative resonances used to sell, and to sell out. And yet this is not an entirely hopeless and ironic vision. For one like Jay Macpherson, in possession of a magnificent all-seeing third eye, one is never wholly “Contained in crying flesh and bone” (Macpherson, “Non-Identification” 15) or “to body’s darkness cursed” (15): even during the awful night, the dark winter of her life, Macpherson can see and show us the light of her constellated mind, which still “across the darkness burns” (Macpherson, “Winter” 108). For this reason, and so many others, Macpherson’s work deserves a new look and a place much closer to the centre of the Canadian canon than it occupies at present. This project takes up the torch lit and carried by poets, scholars, musicians, painters, and editors who believe the same, so that her life and work can continue to live on in the golden minds of her readers.

³ Macpherson is referencing here the old car dealership at 76 Davenport, just at the end of Berryman Street, which has since been replaced with luxury condominiums. As the planning process for the new development began in 2006, which likely corresponds to the date of the dealership’s sale, it is difficult to date the original composition of “A Winter Night (Long After Lampman),” as Macpherson could be writing from immediate experience or memory.

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