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COLLECTING MODERN CANADIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY

EXPLORING DISCOURSES OF APPROPRIATION:

COLLECTING MODERN CANADIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY

By: SARAH LITTLE, H.B.A.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts

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Abstract:

By applying Canadian literary theory, museum theory, and material culture theory to 20th and 21st century Canadian literature, I argue that physical objects reflect Canada's continued engagement in colonial practices and the nation's resistance to acknowledging these practices. The act of selecting and including (which is also necessarily an act of excluding) objects in personal and institutional collections speak to the anxiety of the Euro-Canadian settler that is produced by a conflicting sense of privilege and colonial complicity. Collecting is a means of negotiating self- and shared knowledge, and by re-collecting and repatriating those things that haunt us we come closer to recognizing ourselves. Re-reading ourselves through objects will allow us to confront this anxiety and its implications, to destabilize the Euro-Canadian settler-as-victim, and to move forward as a nation.

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To my supervisor Lorraine York – your supportive and insightful comments have been invaluable to this project. Thank you for cheering me on.

To my family: thank you for listening.

Many thanks to Chris, who picked me up when I fell down
and helped me keep going. I hope someday I can return the favour.

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

This thesis is the product of my own research, which I conducted with input and resource recommendations from my supervisory committee (Lorraine York, Mary O'Connor, and Amber Dean).

Preface

Every time I purchase another book, or am fascinated by a museum display, I wonder why we bother to collect things, why we willingly pay admission fees to view collections that are not our own, and how these things, these objects, are speaking to us and shaping us. The power of objects to create or undermine discourses surfaces both in personal and in institutional contexts: in accumulating souvenirs or buying teacups, or in our reactions to museum displays. For example, the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) opened its controversial *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibit in 1989 with disastrous results. The first exhibit of cultural anthropologist and curator Jeanne Cannizzo, *Into the Heart of Africa* was a failed attempt to "display the ROM's African collection in a critical and reflexive fashion . . . to demystify the ROM's aura of ethnographic authority, and to highlight the contingencies and political implications of its practices" (Butler 2). The exhibit was comprised of five rooms, with "the first four phases . . . focused on imperialist ideology, colonial collecting, and the museum's implication in this project," whereas "the final room was promoted as a celebration of African cultural and artistic traditions" (Butler 19). Cannizzo attempted to communicate her critical intent through disclaimers at different points in the exhibit, but she primarily presented her critique of imperial collecting on the small white information cards typically used in traditional museum displays, "re-present[ing] the voices of soldiers and missionaries in an ironic fashion, using quotation marks to highlight suspect [imperialist]

discourses" (Butler 3). For example, "words such as 'the unknown continent' and 'barbarous' appeared periodically in quotes . . . [a] subtle use of irony [that] was risky, especially given that visitors typically understand museums to be authoritative truth-tellers" (Butler 20). The majority of the public responses seemed to belong to one of two categories: they either missed the critical intent entirely, or considered it to be poorly executed, racist, elitist, and inappropriate despite intentions to the contrary. In *Contested Representations: Revisiting Into the Heart of Africa*, Shelley Butler suggests several reasons for this extremely negative reaction, including the necessity of not only reading the display cards, but also of possessing "a fairly high level of education" and "a certain amount of shared knowledge with the curator" (20). In her work, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, Linda Hutcheon examines the failure of reflexive critique in the *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibit and also emphasizes the necessity of shared knowledge to the successful deployment of irony. She questions whether "curators and the 'general public' share enough assumptions to make irony safe" and, by the conflicting responses from the audiences of irony, is moved to then ask "what markers are needed to ensure that irony happens? Are quotation marks around certain words on explanatory panels sufficient signals of irony's possible presence" (178)? Even if the visitors could consistently follow the irony framed by the quotation marks, Hutcheon is still wary of such a curatorial approach. She points to the danger "that even [the] audience . . . that positions itself as postcolonial and multicultural . . . might be lulled into thinking that the irony has

done its critical work for it, and that it need only bother to question those words set apart in quotation marks" (194).With the critical irony of the exhibit so inaccessible and exclusive, the ROM was seen as propagating the racist imperialist discourses that Cannizzo had sought to undermine. As if this ironic failure were not enough, Butler notes an additional layer of irony in the ROM's decision to conclude an exhibit intended to critique colonial collecting with a specialized "gift shop, where visitors could acquire their own souvenirs of Africa" (Butler 34). Not only is text overpowered by and ignored in the presence of the object, but the discourse of colonial appropriation that reduces African culture to gift shop trinkets and profits from the commodification of the exotic "other" is perpetuated by the visitor's decision to purchase a souvenir: an act of consumption that converts the visitor into the colonial collector, thus making the visitor necessarily complicit in this discourse. Between the public's mixed reaction to Cannizzo's use of irony in the exhibit itself and the institutional irony of pairing it with its own gift shop, *Into the Heart of Africa* provides a useful point of entry for discussing how objects function, how we relate to objects, and how, through us, objects and collections speak to discourses that may create, complicate, preserve, or erase our sense of who we are, and to the danger and potential inherent in the material display and representation of culture.

There is a substantial body of work theorizing the psychological motivations and cultural/political implications of collecting, but relatively little on representations of collecting in Canadian literature. I will fill this niche by

exploring how collecting, both personal and institutional, creates a sub-text of cultural appropriation that can complicate, erase, or preserve the cultural identity of the colonial "other," and that implicitly complicates, reinforces, or subverts the cultural authority of European colonial power in Canada. As expressed in Susan M. Pearce's anthology *Museums and the Appropriation of Culture*, most theorists agree that institutionalized collecting is necessarily a practice of cultural appropriation. To subvert this inevitability, Parker B. Potter Jr. suggests "appropriating the visitor" by making the audience conscious of the discourse of appropriation and therefore responsible for the directions of that discourse (107-124). By placing collecting theory in a Canadian literary context, I explore how representations of personal collecting and museum collecting both embody and challenge the colonial tension underlying Canadian identity. Just as Potter advocates "appropriating the visitor," I advocate "appropriating the reader." The first step is to examine the dialogue implicitly created by collected objects within the text, drawing on current work in museum studies and material culture. The second step is to make the reader aware of this discourse, and aware of, and thus responsible for, their complicity in its deployment.

In his introduction to *Things*, Bill Brown begins with a quotation from Michel Serres: "Le sujet naît de l'objet" (1). In translation, Serres suggests that "the subject is born of the object," a perspective supported by modern theories of things versus objects, and their relationship to human collecting. In his distinction between objects and things, Brown argues that "we look *through* objects (to see

what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture – above all, what they disclose about *us*), but we only catch a glimpse of things" (Brown 4). Once we place a thing in relation to the rest of the world, once we can name its function within the world, it ceases to be a thing and becomes an object. Peter Schwenger examines this distinction, arguing that when something is named, "it is assimilated into the terms of the human subject…All our knowledge of the object is only knowledge of its modes of representation" (137). We collect and organize objects that we feel represent our interests and personalities, and visit museums expecting to see objects that form a representation of the world and our historical role in it. Our subjectivity is inevitably developed in relation to our surroundings, and we are surrounded by objects. Even so, "the experience of the object lies outside the body's experience – it is saturated with meanings that will never be fully revealed to us" (Stewart 133). In a sense, the act of collecting attempts to pull that which is outside embodied experience into the realm of the inside, of the self, by imposing an order on the objects that is reflexively meaningful. In this sense, "collections are a significant element in our attempt to construct the world and so the effort to understand them is one way of exploring our relationship with the world" (Pearce 37). By reading objects as texts within a text, we can both expand and destabilize this relationship; as readers, we find new ways of navigating ourselves in our encounters with the text itself as object, as a term in a collected series, and as a frame for the objects it in turn contains.

Susan M. Pearce expands on the powerful relationship between people and things in her observation that "social ideas cannot exist without physical content, but physical objects are meaningless without social content" (*Museums, Objects, and Collections* 21). Her study of European traditions of collecting offers an especially useful framework for considering Canada's history of European colonialism and its impact on Canadian identities. She notes "that the guiding principle which animated many collectors over the last five centuries or so has been primarily to create a relationship with the past which is seen as real, reasonable, and helpful" (Pearce, *On Collecting* 310). Although such an academic motivation might be initially admirable, the assumptions behind it are deeply problematic. Under the guise of scholarly archiving, the Eurocentric perspective takes a sample of what it considers to be representative of a given place, time, or people, and imposes its own version onto that history through physical objects. It does not account for the possibility that there might be other ways of telling the story, because it is convinced that history requires traditional academic intervention in order to be "properly" told. In their contribution to *Museums and the Appropriation of Culture*, Mary Beard and John Henderson criticize this Eurocentric mentality in the context of museum collections. They argue that the primary issue is not the act of appropriation itself, which is intrinsic to the practice of collecting, but rather "the museum-culture of appropriation" (7). Like Pearce's historical European collectors, the traditional museum considers itself academically driven, without considering the cultural implications of its collecting

practices and the politics of its displays. When the museum does attempt to reflexively critique its complicity in the cultural violence inherent in its discourse of appropriation, it must first successfully "appropriate the visitor"; it must convince the visitor of its self-awareness in order to be successful. The ROM did not convince visitors to *Into the Heart of Africa* of its awareness, leaving them to navigate an exhibit of the "museum-culture of appropriation" instead of a critique of it. In the ROM's *Into the Heart of Africa* publication, the curator argues that "a museum collection may be thought of as a cultural text, one that can be read to understand the underlying cultural and ideological assumptions that have influenced its creation, selection, and display" (Cannizzo 62). Just as the museum visitor can read an exhibit as a "cultural text," might we read a literary representation of the same in a similar manner? There are certainly "underlying cultural and ideological assumptions" influencing representations of museums and human interactions with objects, whether they are being supported, critiqued, or complicated by the hand arranging the words that arrange them. It is important to note that most modern theory of collecting comes from European scholars and the implications of drawing on European criticism to engage with modes of Canadian identity formation will be a critical consideration throughout my analysis and discussion.

The preceding discussion has introduced the theoretical distinctions between the concepts of thing, object, and collection, but it cannot be assumed that all accumulated objects necessarily function as a collection, as opposed to

functioning discretely from one another and with a different effect on the subject. In *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Susan Stewart explores the different ways in which accumulated objects function by juxtaposing the souvenir and the collection. She suggests that "'authentic' experience becomes both elusive and allusive as it is placed beyond the horizon of present lived experience . . . in this process of distancing, the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object, a memory standing outside of the self and thus representing both a surplus and a lack of significance" (Stewart 133). The "surplus" of material objects may appear to provide a wealth of memory that replaces the original (embodied) memory, but this is merely an illusion of remembrance: the "lack of significance" is the loss of memory itself, erased by the illusion of its accessibility in the object's proximity to the self. The souvenir, in this sense, has a sort of placebo effect on its possessor: the growing distance from lived experience is collapsed by the souvenir, which "represents not the lived experience of its maker by the 'secondhand' experience of its possessor/owner" while "displacing the point of authenticity as it itself becomes the point of origin for narrative [instead of lived experience]" (Stewart 135, 136-7). What, then, of the collection? Does the collection also "displace the point of authenticity" and become the "point of origin" for the narrative it constructs? Unlike souvenirs, collected objects do not function independently of the collected whole; "the collection is not constructed by its elements; rather, it comes to exist by means of its principle of organization" (Stewart 155). The overarching interest

(and underlying desires) governing the collection's formation writes another narrative as it arranges acquired objects in a series that serves that interest and satisfies those desires: for example, in imperial museum collections, the institution writes a narrative of preservation that attempts to smother colonial violence by romanticizing historical exploration – motivated, on a less conscious level, by a desire to deny complicity in such violence. Stewart's work speaks to the collection's potential to authenticate the narrative it constructs in the intriguing distinction between the relationship that collections and souvenirs each have to the past. She argues that,

> In contrast to the souvenir, the collection offers example rather than sample, metaphor rather than metonymy. The collection does not displace attention to the past; rather, the past is at the service of the collection, for whereas the souvenir lends authenticity to the past, the past lends authenticity to the collection (Stewart 151).

The negotiation of authenticity through material relations to the past is especially useful for considering the effect that representations of objects, and their arrangements, have on the possessor/visitor's sense of his/her cultural identity. The question of whether the relationship with the past is "authentic" is also implicitly a question of whether the sense of identity, framed by the possessor/viewer's relationship with the souvenir/collection, is itself "authentic." It is not so much a question of the object's origin, but of how it is framed: "while the point of the souvenir may be remembering, or at least the invention of memory, the point of the collection is forgetting – starting again in such a way that a finite number of elements create, by virtue of their combination, an infinite

reverie" (Stewart 152). Perhaps, as Stewart suggests, "whose labour made the ark is not the question: the question is what is inside" (152).

Jacques Poulin's novel *Volkswagen Blues* deals extensively with the issue of Canada's colonial history and its negative impact on the cultural identities of the Canadian-European and Métis protagonists. Their interactions with museum displays and their personal book collections reflect their contrasting views of European colonization, creating a physical dialogue between individual identity politics and the colonial definition of the "Canadian" identity. Through the books they choose to collect, they explore and challenge museum representations of the colonial narrative, negotiating their individual senses identity and locating them within the Canadian cultural spectrum. To navigate their struggles with cultural identity, Jack and La Grande Sauterelle must bring their views (and books) into dialogue with one another.

Here, we can take a leaf out of Poulin's book, for we cannot engage in useful literary analysis without consulting the multitude of perspectives that contribute to Canadian subjectivity. From the Métis and Quebecois perspectives explored in Poulin's novel, I turn to Joseph Boyden's novel, *Three Day Road*, which follows two Native Canadian soldiers through World War I and exemplifies the potential consequences of conforming to the Eurocentric view of Canadian identity. To prove his value as a soldier in war and to win the respect of the French, Elijah begins to collect the scalps of the German soldiers he kills. Here I use the term 'collect' to refer to his accumulation of the scalps as objects,

but they function more as discrete souvenirs of specific acts and refer to specific events. He perverts the old Iroquois tradition of eating enemy hearts while adopting the European stereotype of Native peoples as barbaric and primitive. He seeks acceptance from the colonial powers that be (i.e. France, Britain), but his shift away from traditional Native beliefs only serves to alienate him from both cultures. Before he dies, he acknowledges that his behaviour has become dangerous and unethical, saying "It [collecting] has gone too far, hasn't it" (Boyden 369). Unlike Stewart's "souvenir proper," the function of Elijah's scalps is not to "create a continuous and personal narrative of the past," but rather "to disrupt and disclaim that continuity" (Stewart 140). His death at the end of the novel alludes to the souvenir's capacity to interrupt his personal narrative of Native identity and the consequences of conforming to the Eurocentric view of Canadian identity: the death of the "other" in a cultural no man's land.

Wendy Lill's play, *The Glace Bay Miners' Museum*, also creates a cultural political dialogue in the macabre collecting and display of human remains. She uses Margaret's choice of collected items and her museum display to examine the socioeconomic relationship between Canada's east coast and the rest of the country and to mourn the fading memory of its Celtic roots. After her grandfather, husband, and brother die as a result of working in the Cape Breton coal mines, Margaret selects parts of their bodies and preserves them in jars of formaldehyde. After the police forget why they arrested her, they let Margaret return to her house and her collection. She opens her museum to the reader by making the object-

discourse explicit, saying "it's important to remember. Because we sort of are what we remember" (126). Although she is collecting evidence of violence she did not commit and for which she cannot be criminally charged, it is interesting that her gruesome collecting does not seem as transgressive as Elijah's does in *Three Day Road*. She is not heavily censured for her practice of collecting human remains, her neighbours help her make a spectacle out of her collection, and there is no concluding consequence, like Elijah's death, to caution against appropriation of the body for a cultural/political agenda. Given that Margaret is a white, European-Canadian woman, and Elijah is a Native Canadian man, there are also gender/race politics to be considered and unsettled: even though she is poor, Margaret still occupies a position of colonial privilege by virtue of her femininity (non-threatening despite the violence of her collecting) and her whiteness (body of the European colonizer rather than of the colonized Native), whereas Elijah reluctantly occupies a position of colonial oppression and exploitation by virtue of his masculinity (valued by the colonial powers only in times of war) and his non-whiteness (body of the colonized Native rather than of the European colonizer).

Pearce notes the increasing presence of the collecting motif in modern literature and comments that "it certainly signals a willingness on the part of the writing and reading public to see collecting as an adequate metaphor for large parts of experience" (13). With such willingness comes the opportunity to "appropriate" the reader, to make them aware of the social dialogue created by physical objects, and to make them active participants in this dialogue. In the first

chapter, I will expand on the theoretical underpinnings of institutional and personal collecting practices, and the relationship between narrative, identity, object, and our "selves." With the preceding framework in place, the remaining three chapters explore each individual primary text in detail, situating the implicit discourse of objects within the narrative of Canada's colonial history and gesturing towards the consequences of uncritically collecting, and thus colonizing, our "selves." Stewart observes that "a final transformation of labour into exchange, nature into marketplace, is shown by the collection. Significantly, the collection marks the space of nexus for all narratives, the place where history is transformed into space, into property" (xiii).We are then moved to challenge this implicit discourse of appropriation, to question whose history is being transformed, and to ask whose property it then becomes.

Chapter 1: Towards "Appropriating the Reader:" Frameworks for Analysis & Discussion

> "Much ink has been spilt over the definition of 'collection,' and of the differences, if any, between 'a collection' and 'an accumulation,' 'a group' and 'a hoard.'"
>
> - Susan M. Pearce
> *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*

Before we can question the implications of collecting and display for Canadian subjectivity in the twenty-first century, and begin, as Diana Brydon advocates, to "move beyond a politics of representation toward a politics of accountability," we need to outline our (somewhat tenuous) relationship with objects themselves (51). For example, as I write this sentence, I am involved in a series of relationships with the objects that construct my environment, my sense of narrative, and my sense of my "self" as a subject within that narrative. I am relying on my computer, on my collection of research notes, and on the chaotic pile of books in front of me to frame the twists and turns in the colonial narrative of collecting Canadian identity. What I see in this narrative and in these books is inevitably framed (and limited) by what meaning I have read, or failed to have read, in other books, in keeping with Christopher Tilley's contention that "the individual does not so much construct material culture or language, but is rather constructed through them" (71). In his discussion titled "The contextual analysis of symbolic meanings," Ian Hodder writes that "all objects can be given meaning" and that "the object's meaning is the effects it has on the world" (12). Each reader gives a book a different meaning; each collector attributes meaning to the objects

that make up his/her collection; each viewer of a collection or individual object attributes yet another layer of meaning as he/she is affected by the object(s). Meaning is inextricably caught up in affect, and the affective response we have to a certain object or collection of objects influences our own mode of being in the world. There is a vast body of work that endeavours to unpack the power and importance of material culture (Judy Attfield, Victor Buchli, John Elsner & Roger Cardinal, Christopher Pinney, Daniel Miller, and Peter Schwenger, to name a few) but several writers have offered particularly evocative critical commentary on the embodied, affective power of things. Sherry Turkle reflects on the spatial relationship between the body and a piece of string while tying a knot, and writes that "objects are able to catalyze self-creation" (9). Susan M. Pearce notes that "material objects are as much a part of the weave of our lives as our bodies are" and that "the glass of a showcase gives both a transparent vision and reflection of our own faces" (*Interpreting Objects and Collections* 1, 204). The object-as-mirror metaphor becomes even more poignant when considered alongside Sara Ahmed's discussion of our affective relationship with the objects we possess or encounter. Ahmed's essay titled "Happy Objects" seeks to think through affect – a notoriously slippery, complicated concept - as "sticky" in the sense that it is "what sustains and preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (29). What makes us respond to one object and not to another? What leads us to acknowledge or deny the value of things? We become "stuck" on the object, the object becomes part of the "weave" of our lives described by Pearce, and we are

moved to press fingertips and noses to the glass between us and that which moves us: we are displayed to ourselves in our affective response to the object, but the object itself is also altered. In that moment of evaluation and response, the object's meaning becomes a function of the effect it has on us. It is also altered by affect, as "we are moved by things. And in being moved, we make things" (Ahmed 33). We might be moved by a favourite book, or a favourite teacup, or a figurine in a gift shop, and as we are moved to react to something, we make it into something more. The book becomes a refuge, the teacup a comfort, the figurine a valued reflection of self instead of a cheap souvenir.

In their introduction to *The Cultures of Collecting*, editors John Elsner and Roger Cardinal also speak to Ahmed's suggestion that we make things into something else as we are "moved" by them, observing that "as one becomes conscious of oneself, one becomes a conscious collector of identity, projecting one's being onto the objects one chooses to live with" (3). In the same vein, Jean Baudrillard argues that "it is invariably *oneself* that one collects" but also leads us to share in his critical apprehension as he questions the potential scope of an object-based discourse. He asks "can objects ever institute themselves as a viable language? Can they even be fashioned into a discourse oriented otherwise than toward oneself?" (12, 24). Baudrillard's doubt that objects can speak beyond the individual they signify is not unfounded: even if someone encounters the collection of the private individual and reads a discourse underlying the collection's organization, it is not necessarily the same discourse that the objects'

possessor intended to construct. Objects may have a "language" of their own, and form a dialogue when they become part of a collective series, but their potential as a consistent mode of discourse is limited because the interpretation of that discourse will likely vary between individuals, who will read the objects differently depending on their own subjectivities. Initially, museum collections and exhibitions seem to encounter the same problem: as was the case with the ROM's *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibit, curators organize and display the collection according to a logic they develop, but the accurate transfer of that logic from the curator to the museum visitor relies on shared knowledge that is not necessarily accessible to the visitor. As in Baudrillard's example of the personal collection, the discourse created by the arrangement of objects in a museum exhibit is inevitably oriented towards the curator and the curator's logic: we are being directed to read the objects along the grain of their institutionalized arrangement, which encourages us to turn towards the curatorial vision and away from our own re-visions of that vision. In such a space, we realize the impossibility of relying on a single narrative, for "the message or meaning which the object offers is always incomplete and each viewer fills in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding other possibilities: as he looks he makes his own decisions about how the story is to be told" (Pearce, *Interpreting Objects*, 26). Although the seeming inevitability of the collector/curator and the visitor reading objects at cross-purposes leads us to share Baudrillard's suspicion of objects' discursive potential, such disruption of narrative authority creates a space for different forms

of knowledge, alternative histories, and for reading ourselves against the colonial grain.

When objects are chosen to be part of a museum collection or public exhibition, the very act of selection inherent in their accumulation simultaneously affirms the value of the selected objects and denies the value of those that remain unselected and thus uncollected. The moment of selection is potentially a moment of social change, for "it is the act of selection which turns a part of the natural world into an object and a museum piece" (Pearce, *Interpreting Objects*, 10). In this moment there is the initial promise of recognition, preservation, and remembrance, but also the underlying risk of forgetting or misremembering: for the act of selection is also necessarily (and inevitably) an act of exclusion. That which is selected and collected is not necessarily representative of the whole, but the inclusion and positioning of certain objects in the museum's collection implies that they can be taken as samples of something, symbols of that which is "other," that which is beyond the reach of the present visitor. Museum exhibitions function as "sites of interaction between personal and collective identities, between memory and history, between information and knowledge production" (Crane 12). Russell W. Belk also speaks to the museum's position of influence with collective cultural memory, writing that "just as a personal collection serves to shape the self-definition of a collector, so do museum collections serve to define the identity of a region or historical period" (322). In this sense, the museum collection is inherently political and its powers of preservation questionable: who is collecting

and appropriating the identity of the culture the collection is constructed to represent, and why? Whose identity is on display, and how will it be re-presented in the cultural memory of the visitors? What kinds of knowledge are being produced, and from what kind of information? The exhibition becomes a site of contestation as those whose cultural artefacts are being displayed resist representation, resenting the appropriation of their material culture and fearing that someone else's narrative will replace their own in collective cultural memory. In her introduction to *Museums and Memory*, Susan A. Crane suggests that "if we would hold onto memory we must find some way to preserve it" and connects the preservation of memorial ephemera to objects, observing that "memory is an act of 'thinking of things in their absence,' which may well be triggered in response to objects" (1-2). The act of selecting objects for display in Pearce's glass case carries with it consequences for memory: as we peer at the display and see our faces in the glass, what are we not seeing? What has been excluded, and how does our reading of our "selves" change as a result? Objects in seen in this mirror are not necessarily as they appear, for "being collected means being valued and remembered institutionally; being displayed means being incorporated into the extra-institutional memory of the museum visitors" (Crane 2). There is always more beyond the glass case, and as "we go to museums to learn about ourselves," it is necessary not only to consider but to reconsider "how museums represent us to ourselves" (Crane 12-13). The glass display case restricting visitor access to museum displays suggest and encourage distance between the object and

individual: the visitor to the traditional museum is permitted to look but not to touch. If it is so distant from us, if it is so "out of touch," what could the museum possibly tell us about ourselves, about our presents and futures? In his article "Museums, Civic Life, and the Educative Force of Remembrance," Roger I. Simon insists that "those who think museums are about the past have got it wrong. Public practices of remembrance are always about the future" (113). The objects on the other side of the glass are closer than they appear, and the ways in which we "read" these objects affect how we place and identify ourselves in relation to the narratives, histories, and peoples they represent. Then the question: how do we respond? If the visitor can read themselves through the objects, and read the objects as part of the present, the response of the visitor has the potential to be felt beyond the museum walls, as it influences the visitor's sense of what has come before, that there are different ways of telling the story, and that perhaps a different telling is needed in order to move forward.

In *Collecting: An Unruly Passion* Werner Muensterberger endeavours to analyze possible psychological motivations for collecting, suggesting that "man is everywhere a prisoner of his own anxiety," and that our relationships with what Sherry Turkle terms "evocative objects" offer a means of navigating such anxiety and uncovering its cause. Although Pearce criticizes Muensterberger for taking "a very traditional, not to say pedestrian, view [of objects and collecting]" and for offering "a limited range of case studies, most of which have been available for a long time," Muensterberger's comment on objects as a means of negotiating

anxiety still speaks to the potential of productively discussing collecting as an approach to the colonial tensions underlying Canadian identity formation (*Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, 6). Canada is an anxious nation; we anxiously reach back to somewhere else for our sense of ourselves, for our identities, for our histories, for our collective memories, and find ourselves stuck in-between. We are anxious because we are not certain that we know what Canada was or is, nor are we sure of what this makes us if we identify ourselves as Canadians. Perhaps collecting – whether personal or institutional - offers a sense of control that has the potential to mitigate the undercurrent of anxiety in Canada's national ambivalence. Before I turn to a more detailed discussion of how collecting, anxiety, and identity intersect in modern Canadian literature, it is necessary to expand on current issues in Canadian literary criticism and how these can be productively combined with material culture theory to form an alternate practice of reading: one that enables us to re-read our "selves" as Canadians.

The Canadian cultural identity crisis, and our anxiety about ourselves, is frequently discussed in contemporary scholarship. Although Margaret Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* does not specifically deal with collecting and material culture, I chose to begin my discussion of critical Canadian scholarship with *Survival* because her early comments on anxiety, identity, and Canadian literature set the stage for subsequent scholarship. Atwood speaks to the tendency to resist learning more of ourselves when we are uncertain of what we will find, writing that "self-knowledge, of course, can be painful, and

the extent to which Canadian literature has been neglected in its home territory suggests, among other things, a fear on the part of Canadians of knowing who they are" and describes Canada as "a state of mind . . . that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost" (23, 26). Although Canadian literature has come more into its own as a field of study since *Survival*'s publication in 1972, the suggestion that Canadians feel uneasy about "knowing who they are" and lost in that space – Canada - between knowing and not knowing is still a major theme in critical discussions of Canadian literature. These uncertainties and reservations converge in the central question of Laura Moss's critical anthology, *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*. After posing the title question to the attendees of a conference of the same theme, Moss brought the participants' responses together to create an animated back-and-forth discussion on the question of Canada and its postcoloniality, which in turn requires us to seek the self-knowledge we resist, and to ask a more fundamental and unsettling question: what is Canada? In her introduction, Moss suggests that "to read Canadian literature postcolonially is to accept that never again shall a single story be told as though it were the only one" (7). Just as two different readers will read different things in the same book, and individual visitors to museum exhibits will read the same displays of the same objects in different ways, there is a multiplicity inherent in the Canadian cultural narrative: "it depends on who is reading, who is listening, and why" (Moss 7). Awareness of this multiplicity as we read – and re-read – ourselves through our literature brings us closer to that "self-knowledge,"

to recognizing Canada as anything but postcolonial, and to recognizing our own complicity in the perpetuation of that problematic myth. The spectral anxiety underlying Canadian ambivalence about "Canadianness" hovers between us and this "self-knowledge," and by reading this anxiety – and thus ourselves – through the discourse created by objects (texts within texts), we begin to turn from recognizing complicity to realizing responsibility within the context of a materially driven culture. Moss directs Canada to look for "self-knowledge," for complicity and responsibility, in its literature, as "Canadian literature is necessarily implicated in a colonial legacy because of its continued focus on identity and nation, and in postcolonial responses to that legacy" and reminds us that "Canada is emphatically not 'postcolonial' but is still actively engaging in colonial practices" (9-10). Identity and nation are central themes in each of the texts I examine in the following chapters, and the different ways in which each text mobilizes the collection and display of physical objects to question Canadian concepts of identity, nation, anxiety, and self-knowledge support Moss's contention that Canadian postcoloniality is suspect, and suggest that there are different ways of reading ourselves through a frame tinted by a problematic "colonial legacy." We cannot dismiss this uneasy legacy by affixing "post-" to the term of our anxiety without increasing our complicity: as Brydon argues, "to ask, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, whether Canada is postcolonial, is to invoke a third, un-named term: that of Indigenous survival and resistance to colonialism and to Canada as currently constituted" (50). The varied and

ambivalent responses Moss received when she asked whether Canada is postcolonial are telling: there is uncertainty as a seemingly simple question defies a simple answer, followed by the anxiety that comes with the realization that the answer tells us something about "us," and that something may not be something we want to hear. Diana Brydon's answer best communicates this tenuous, anxious relationship with self-knowledge. She argues that

> It depends. It depends on the definitions; it depends on who is asking the question, and from what position, in space, time, and privilege. Postcolonial if necessary, but not necessarily postcolonial . . . Canada if necessary, but not necessarily Canada as originally conceived . . . This is not a bad answer and may be the best we can provide (Brydon 49).

Is this a good answer? Is it the "best we can provide?" It depends. The answer changes depending on who is asking, and to what end. It can hold the realization of one's own complicity in colonial violence at bay, or it can invite a recognition of that complicity that is a step forward: a step towards a changing concept of Canada, a step that moves "beyond a politics of representation toward a politics of accountability" and which has the potential to reframe and re-read "Canada as a decolonized space" (Brydon 51). In Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues*, it depends on Jack's anxious resistance to the sense of complicity in colonial violence that comes with self-knowledge, whereas for La Grande Sauterelle it depends on how she navigates and chooses to occupy the space in-between colonial complicity and colonial victimization. For Xavier and Elijah in Boyden's *Three Day Road*, it depends on how the subjugated position of the colonial "other," a position without agency or voice in struggles of imperial power, intersects with the privileged

position of the colonizers, and whose stereotypes keep the hierarchal structures of colonial power in place. For Margaret in Lill's *The Glace Bay Miners' Museum*, it depends on her position as a white woman in a British colony, and how these factors affect the societal (and judicial) judgement and dismissal of her decision to collect and display human remains as a political act. For us as readers, it depends on how willing we are to step outside the comforting, privileged position of the "post-" and on how open we are to re-reading ourselves against that position and to being unsettled by that new reading.

There is another layer to the anxiety underlying ambivalent "Canadianness," which is the resistance to self-knowledge: the position(s) of privilege Brydon alludes to above implicates those occupying that position in colonial aggression, rather than absolving them as victims with the assertion of Canadian postcoloniality. If we recognize ourselves in this position, we are then forced to realize that we are complicit in our identification with the falsified victimization it produces at the expense of those victims it overrides. In *Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality*, Pauline Wakeham is wary of the terms "colonial" and "postcolonial," arguing that "Canadian literary and cultural studies have used these terms perhaps too liberally, further reinforcing the concept of white settlers as marginalized subjects by categorizing their writing within the rubric of postcolonial resistance to British dominion" (31). Britain, and Canada's past (and present) political relationship with Britain, is not the only "rubric" for classifying (and collecting) allegedly "marginalized subjects:" by delineating

Canadian national identity in terms of British imperialism, we risk forgetting the people truly marginalized by the falsified victimization of the white settler estranged from "home," even as that same settler steps on those people to find purchase in Canada. It has purchased a traditional position of privilege for whiteness, and it is this privilege at the expense of the "other" and its implied complicity in colonial violence that elicits anxiety, thus producing Canada's national ambivalence about its own cultural identity. In *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada*, Daniel Coleman suggests that Canada has used various social and judicial structures to feign an image of multiculturalism and white civility, and urges us to re-examine the privileged position of whiteness (modelled on "Britishness"). Coleman critically speaks to the anxiety underlying ambivalence about Canadian identity, noting that "white Canadian culture is obsessed, and organized by its obsession, with the problem of its own civility" and calls for a "refusal to forget the history of genocide and cultural decimation of Indigenous peoples in Canada," a refusal to forget that which "is disavowed by the image of the peaceful settler" (5, 8). Refusing to forget means allowing ourselves to be unsettled, it means recognizing our complicity in our ambivalence, and it demands an active realization of responsibility. The "peaceful" settler is an attempt by those occupying the position of colonial privilege to rationalize that position, rather than confront what it means, and what occupying such a position suggests about who they are. As a nation, Canada is anxious, haunted, uneasy, and denies the source of that anxiety by feigning civility. Coleman gestures towards

the ghosts that haunt Canada's national ambivalence about its identity, arguing that "the denial of Indigenous presence in these lands, the disregard of pre-contact history, and the continuing suppression of First Peoples' claims to lands and sovereignty are all signs of the way the spectral, fantasmatic history continues to haunt contemporary Canadian life" (29). The use of the words "spectral" and "haunt" evoke sensations of fear and anxiety: uneasiness in brushing up against remnants of the past that refuse to be forgotten. We may want to hold on to the traditional paradigm of colonial privilege, but there is someone (or something) prying our fingers away from the image of Coleman's "peaceful settler," and a sense that perhaps we should have never held on in the first place. Without that comfortable framework, we find our "selves" unsettled. It is here, in between the certain and uncertain, that Canada becomes "an uncanny space; it is strangely familiar and familiarly strange" (Edwards xv).

The anxiety surrounding this sense of the uncanny and the issues of privilege and colonial/post-colonial national identity lend themselves to exploration through Gothic discourses: a mode of literary analysis that speaks to the destabilization of identifiable spaces and selves. My object-based approach to "postcolonial" anxiety and negotiations of cultural identity productively intersects with Gothic discourse, and Justin Edwards's *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature* and Cynthia Sugars's *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic* complete the framework for my analysis. Edwards writes that "the articulation of, and anxiety about, a range of borders that

define identity and oppositional relationships fracture specific national conceptions of self, a fracture that is often expressed through the use of gothic discourse" (xiv). In the following chapters, I argue that such fractures can be read in, and negotiated through, the personal and institutional collection, manipulation, and display of objects, and that these objects function as effective mediators of identity and signifiers of self because they haunt, because they are the familiar and unfamiliar, because they are fragments of the everyday made uncanny. For the purposes of this discussion, I will use the term "gothic" in the sense that Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte use it in their study of the postcolonial gothic in Canadian literature, combined with Edwards's view that the destabilization of the self plays a central role in gothic texts. Sugars and Turcotte write that "the Gothic, as a mode, is preoccupied with the fringes, the unspoken, the peripheral, and the cast aside," a definition which speaks to Edwards's contention that "[in gothic texts] the self is not fixed, but serves as a catalyst for inquiries into the ontological status of subjectivity" (*Unsettled Remains*, xv; *Gothic Canada* xviii). The negotiation of national and cultural identity is necessarily preoccupied with who belongs and who does not, with who is part of "us" and how inclusion in "us" constructs and marginalizes "them." Not unlike the collecting of objects, the nation collects and classifies people: an act of selection/exclusion that is haunted by echoes of colonial violence and which demands a re-evaluation of the problematic status of Canadian subjectivities. Edwards's comment on the implications of selection and inclusion also speaks to the nation as collector and

collection, as he reminds us that "power . . . is always about the ability to include and exclude, to determine who inhabits the centre and who is forced to live on the periphery" (111). Sugars and Turcotte write that "the very persistence of gothic motifs of haunting and monstrosity that invoke the colonial past testifies to the incomplete resolution of those histories," arguing that "if postcolonialism is inherently unsettling, this might suggest that tropes of the Gothic and uncanny are especially useful in figuring Canadians' ambivalent relation to the past and present" (*Unsettled Remains*, x, xvi). If Canadians are anxious and ambivalent, it is because we know (whether we want to or not) that Canada's past demands something more from its present, that something more is being demanded of us – and we are afraid of what it might mean to answer that demand. It means acknowledging our complicity in colonial violence, denying the false comfort of identifying as "postcolonial," and responding to what haunts us: ourselves. Canada is an anxious, haunted nation: how to exorcise its demons? Edwards explicitly outlines the complicity and responsibility that haunt Canada and Canadian literature, reminding us that

> to be haunted is to be called upon, for the phantom presence returns to collect and unpaid debt. In Canada, this unpaid debt refers back to the imperial dominance and territorial appropriation that has forced the voice of the colonized into the unconscious of the imperial subject and thus haunted the colonizer across generations, time and space (xxix).

The gothic destabilization of subjectivity, the sense of being called upon, and the anxiety this call evokes, are central to my reading of objects and collections in modern Canadian literature. Poulin's book-collecting writer is haunted by his

failure to remember his collection's contents accurately, and struggles to acknowledge his failure as a function of his privileged position as a descendent of white, Quebecois settlers. Boyden's Cree protagonists are haunted by their victimization by British imperialism, and Elijah's scalp collecting is haunted by his complicity in the construction of the imperial stereotypes that marginalize and disavow him. Lill's east-coast housewife is haunted by Canadian national ambivalence, and endeavours to mitigate this ambivalence by creating a museum of the human remains produced by that ambivalence: an act that is not acknowledged as violent because it is normalized by her traditionally privileged position as white British settler. Diana Brydon suggests that "remembering and reading differently, then, may require a new vocabulary, new values, and new techniques" (54). As Canadians, as readers of Canadian texts, and as readers of ourselves through those texts, we must learn to re-read the *things* that haunt us.

Chapter 2: Re-Reading Readers in Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues*

> Literature is . . . a geography of the mind . . .
> We need such a map desperately, we need to
> know about here, because here is where we live.
> For the members of a country or a culture, shared
> knowledge is not a luxury but a necessity.
> Without that knowledge we will not survive.
>
> - Margaret Atwood, *Survival*

When I was first thinking about what Canadian literature included a focus on objects, affect, and our tendency to define and understand ourselves through objects, I was immediately drawn to Poulin's novel *Volkswagen Blues*: a book implicitly centred on the collection of books themselves and the difficulty of reading and reconciling multiple (and conflicting) narratives. A Canadian road novel, *Volkswagen Blues* focuses on the protagonists' experiences as they travel from Quebec to the United States, and along the Oregon Trail – a symbol of their journey towards self-knowledge and their uneasy identification as Canadians. In different ways, self-knowledge is a source of anxiety for both of Poulin's characters: Jack Waterman, a middle-aged Quebecois writer, resists recognizing the complicity of his childhood heroes (and thus, himself) in colonial violence by misremembering the contents of his book collection, whereas La Grande Sauterelle, a young Métis mechanic, struggles to navigate the space in-between Canadian-European complicity in colonial violence and Indigenous complicity in pre-colonial, inter-tribal violence through the books she collects and remembers. When in need of travel directions on the road, Jack and La Grande Sauterelle favour books the books they own (and forgot they had), and those they acquire

instead of relying road maps alone – for, as Atwood reminds us above, "literature . . . is a geography of the mind:" a map that we need, and without which we cannot move forward. In order to read this map and navigate their "Canadianness," Jack and La Grande Sauterelle must re-evaluate themselves as readers, and be open to re-reading themselves through the books they look to for guidance – even if that guidance comes at the price of unsettling self-knowledge. In the following discussion, I explore how their personal practices of book collecting shape their relationships with anxiety, identity, and self-knowledge, and how their books and reading practices intersect to produce a new politics of reading – one that mobilizes the objects themselves to deny the authority of any single narrative and asks us to insist, along with Moss, "that never again shall a single story be told as though it were the only one" (7). Their progress as readers is reflected by their affective responses to institutional collecting and the politics of museum displays, which are shaped by how they identify themselves through their books.

In his essay, "Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting," Walter Benjamin wrote that "every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories . . . For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?" (257). The image of Benjamin's book collector is exemplified by the chaotic memory and personal collecting behaviour of Poulin's Jack Waterman: he cannot remember the knowledge he has collected, the scope of

which is limited by his restrictive reading practices, and describes his head as being "full of a sort of permanent fog and everything's all muddled up" (Poulin 11). His sense of self as collector/reader and as Canadian relies on the familiarity of narrative disorder, for he has become so dependent on the Eurocentric romanticization of Canada's colonial "heroes" that he must be forced, by an external critical presence (La Grande Sauterelle), to acknowledge his collection's disorder so that he can become reconciled with his memories and recognize his implicit complicity in North America's violent colonial history. When he first picks up the hitchhiking La Grande Sauterelle outside of Gaspé, Quebec, Jack tells her about finding the "lost" postcard that has finally sent him on his delayed quest to reconnect with his brother, Théo. As they later learn from visiting the Gaspé museum, the text on Jack's "lost" postcard is not a personal message, but an excerpt from Jacques Cartier's writings on his "exploration" of Canada describing "a cross made thirty feet high, which was put together in the presence of a number of Indians on the point at the entrance to this harbour" and the French demonstrating proper worship to gain "redemption" (Poulin 9). The disorder of Benjamin's book collector surfaces here, as Jack admits that he had "stuck it [the postcard] in a book and forgot it," and then clarifies the object of his forgetting, saying that he had remembered the existence of the postcard itself, but that it had been "lost" because he "couldn't remember what book it was in" (Poulin 4). The collection gives a false sense of orientation: while the physical form of the collected book stands as a symbol of knowledge, it also becomes a mode of

forgetting as the need to remember and distinguish between texts is subverted by the proximity and ready availability of the object containing (and binding) that knowledge. The collector remembers the postcard and book as objects within a series, but is incapable of distinguishing between terms of that series in order to extract their original meaning. As a result, Cartier's text describing the early stages of Canada's colonization and the implicit violence of religious assimilation becomes a bookmark lost within a series of forgotten books. The postcard text itself is denied its historical value, a disavowal of significance that in turn denies colonial violence and renders Jack complicit in Canada's continued denial of, and engagement in, colonial practices. Jack's "fog" of memory, his inability to recall the contents of his bookcase and the location of Cartier's text within those collected narratives, is highlighted by the book in which he found the "lost" postcard: *The Golden Dream* by Walker Chapman (Poulin 5). The book describes the myth of El Dorado, set in a land "unknown to white men," where "the chief of an Indian tribe would shed all his clothes, coat his body with a resinous substance, and roll in powdered gold," and "word spread . . . farther and farther, that somewhere in America there existed a rich, mysterious land that was the kingdom of gold" (Poulin 17-18). Jack loses the violence of North American colonialism in a fictional account of "other" resource-rich lands, which are converted into morally acceptable targets for European exploitation by virtue of their exotic distance, "farther and farther," from the imperial centre. Unaware of how his misplacement of Cartier's text within a romanticized colonial fiction leads him to

disavow violent colonial histories closer to home, Jack uses Chapman's book to comfort La Grande Sauterelle as she outlines the distance between their perspectives on Canada's history (Eurocentric versus Indigenous), "wipes at her eyes" as she feels displaced by both sides, and says "Excuse me . . . I was starting to take myself seriously! Anyway, I'm not a real Indian. My father's white. I'm a Métis" (Poulin 17). Instead of telling her that she does have the right to take herself and the multiplicity of her identity seriously, Jack reacts by retreating to the contents of his book collection, and the book that enabled him to forget Cartier's text and the implicit violence in its narrative of assimilation. The books Poulin's characters read and collect are published books, and in the case of *The Golden Dream*, the author's main literary focus complicates the dynamics of Jack's relationship with that book. His decision to turn to this particular element of his collection to clarify a moment of uncertain identity is further complicated by "Walker Chapman" being a pseudonym of science fiction/fantasy writer Robert Silverberg ("Robert Silverberg"). Poulin does not make his readers aware that Chapman is a pseudonym of Silverberg's, and does not indicate whether Jack knows whose hand guides Walker Chapman's pen. Instead of wondering who constructs the narrative and how the reliability of the narrative might be compromised by fantasy, Jack turns to *The Golden Dream* – to fantasy – for reassurance as he resists the reality of colonial complicity. In finding reassurance, he forgets the implications of Cartier's text and loses himself in fantasy. The disorder of Benjamin's book collector becomes a fantasy of order, illustrating the

risk of forgetting underlying the empty/false preservation of collecting. Jack maintains his fantasy of order and his ideal (non-colonial) self by restricting his selection, collection, and reading of books. He is "an anxious, parsimonious reader. He had his favourite authors, all of whose books he had read, but those authors were few in number: Hemingway, Réjean Ducharme, Gabrielle Roy, Salinger, Boris Vian, Brautigan and a few others. And he had his favourite books, which he reread frequently" (Poulin 27). Jack is a prisoner of his own anxiety: he only reads within the limits of reassurance he has set for his books and resists the introduction of alternate narrative voices, because he is haunted by what re-reading his childhood heroes (and himself) will require him to acknowledge about Canada, national responsibility, and about himself as a Canadian.

The antithesis of Jack, the "anxious and parsimonious reader," La Grande Sauterelle attempts to evade the trap of narrow selection in her collecting of narratives, and instead of reading only her favourites, she "devoured every book she could get her hands on," and is driven by a desire "to become reconciled with herself" instead of Jack's desire to avoid himself (Poulin 27, 56). She is not familiar with Jack's source of literary reassurance, Chapman's *The Golden Dream*, and instead of attempting to maintain a position of faltering colonial privilege by collecting select Eurocentric narratives, she accumulates books as a means of navigating the space in-between privilege and victimization. The antidote to Jack's "fog" and disordered memory/bookcase, she has "an excellent memory," remembers "dates and figures," and "always knew exactly where she

was" (Poulin 154, 66). Instead of collecting within the judicial parameters of capitalist consumer culture, La Grande Sauterelle steals books "quite unscrupulously, because in her opinion most booksellers were far more interested in money than in books," but "borrows" them from libraries by hiding them "under her clothes or in her knapsack" and then would "return them by mail after she had read them" (Poulin 26-27). Her approach to personal collecting deviates from the typical image of the collector, who accumulates objects by removing them from public circulation so that they only function in relation to the private collector's self. She circumvents the familiar disorder/order that traps Benjamin's book collector by putting fewer books on the shelf, but instead of an overstuffed bookcase she must navigate the memory of conflicting narratives that leave her "stuck" in-between the two sides of her Métis identity. Instead of turning to *The Golden Dream* to assuage Jack's anxiety, she reads the relationship between them (and, by extension, between the two sides of her identity) through an excerpt from *The Secret Lives of Animals*. The excerpt she selects describes how exchange between the centre and periphery enables the survival of present and future generations: a tactic that allows penguins and their eggs to survive arctic winters, as "the ones that had been in the middle give their places to the others, so that each one takes a turn at being exposed to the cold, then comes and takes shelter in the middle of the circle" (Poulin 42). To rely on one form of knowledge or on a single narrative is to limit access to the centre and disavow the periphery; present and future generations will not survive unless strengthened by different ways of

knowing, and by acknowledging that the traditional colonial model of centre/periphery/"us"/"them" is still in effect, and requires re-evaluation and re-reading. As she seeks to re-read herself through narratives from the periphery, La Grande Sauterelle is forced to acknowledge that not all Europeans had engaged in colonial violence against Indigenous peoples, and that not all Indigenous peoples had been peaceful. She tells Jack that she "likes the *voyageurs* very much" and "thought that they had behaved acceptably toward the Indians," and tells him about the "vanished" Illinois tribe, who "were exterminated – by other Indians!" (Poulin 30, 79-81). The militant anti-imperialist position she takes when visiting museums is undermined by the realization that she cannot mitigate her own complicity in colonial practices by taking one side or the other, and the distribution of narrative power between centre and periphery must avoid becoming a static binary. The incorporation of alternate/peripheral narratives, particularly those that challenge the dominance of Eurocentrism, elicits anxiety in Jack, and La Grande Sauterelle confronts him with his anxiety by introducing him to her books – books that are outside the realm of his bookshelf favourites, and that unsettle European privilege and question the value of the objects that represent that privilege. Jack is particularly unsettled by a book she steals from a museum bookstore, *Explorers of the Mississippi* by Timothy Severin. In its pages, Jack is faced with colonial violence rather than romanticized explorers; he is disturbed by several accounts, such as that of "Hernando de Soto," who is described as being "a bloodthirsty brute, he had come from the south and killed

almost all the Indians he encountered along the way," and by "Henri de Tonti," who "imposed his authority on the Indians by striking them in the face with his famous iron hand" (Poulin 89). As he reads, Jack is haunted by the sense that his own position as a Euro-Canadian renders him complicit in colonial violence, that he must take responsibility for a hand that is not his own. His complicity is sealed when he makes the decision to stop reading against the colonial grain and retreats "in a state of almost total despondency," unable to wrestle with the modern implications of the "violence [that] burst out on every page" of Severin's anti-imperialist text (Poulin 89). Ahmed's approach to the powerful affective relationship between people and things is applicable here: as Jack is moved by La Grande Sauterelle's book, he makes it into the source of his anxiety and negative self-knowledge, and closes it as he is moved closer to himself. Instead of closing the book, La Grande Sauterelle insists on the importance of keeping it (and ourselves) open, arguing that

> You shouldn't judge books one by one. I mean, you mustn't see them as independent objects. A book is never complete in itself, to understand it you must put it in relation to other books, not just books by the same author, but also books written by other people. What we think is a book most of the time is only part of another, vaster book that a number of authors have collaborated on without knowing it (Poulin 124).

Books themselves are inherently collective: for "classification precedes collection," and they are classified by a number of taxonomic principles - such as author, fiction/non-fiction, time, and genre – which determine their positions within the larger collective body of published literary work (Elsner & Cardinal 1). By restricting his collecting and reading practices to books by the same author or

to include few authors, Jack disconnects his books from their discursive potential and himself from his potential to disrupt the centre/periphery binary he perpetuates by surrendering his grasp on Eurocentric narratives and colonial privilege. Benjamin's book collector must re-read his "order" as the disorder it truly is, and read beyond the limits of physical accumulation to realize that what he thinks is a book – an independent object to be added to his personal collection – is truly not a book at all. For Jack, it is this idea – the idea that perhaps he knows very little because "'everything [he] know[s], or just about, [he's] learned from books,'" and that books must be read in relation to other books to truly function as a book and not an object – that undermines his memory and his ability to participate in dialogue, and that produces his anxious resistance to remembering the complicity he has forgotten (Poulin 18). La Grande Sauterelle's collective approach to reading, and her insistence that "'if you haven't reread you haven't read,'" is reflected in Poulin's decision to connect published books to one another within his own book; if we do not read his book as being in dialogue with other books, we fail to read responsibly; we fail to see our own complicity and anxiety in Jack's limited and romanticized collection, and we fail share La Grande Sauterelle's realization that we cannot escape being complicit in colonial practices by answering to one identity or another when convenient (Poulin 194). There is an echo of Brydon's words here, for we can be "Canadian" if necessary, or "postcolonial if necessary, but not necessarily postcolonial," but can we overcome privilege and anxiety to identify as Canadians and colonial participants? First, we

must learn to read – and to re-read – through the emptiness of accumulation beyond the "post-" and reconcile ourselves to the "colonial" designation that haunts us.

Jack's bookshelf highlights the risk of replacing memory with materiality, and the potential for remembering things that have been forgotten by re-reading ourselves through our collective literature. In her discussion of narrative and the book, Stewart writes that "just as the still life is a configuration of consumable objects, so the book's minute description of the material world is a device which tends to draw attention to the book as object" (29). As La Grande Sauterelle's philosophy of reading indicates, only treating books as independent objects rather than considering them as part of a larger collective is problematic, but Poulin's book itself also suggests that there is something to more to be learned by looking at the ways in which books function when they are objects displayed on a shelf or shoved in the glove compartment instead of open on the table for discussion. Jack's bookcase "was rather narrow, because the room was so cramped, but it went up to the ceiling," and his desire to look for things he cannot remember is frustrated by "the disorder that prevented him from finding the book he was looking for" (Poulin 28). Faced with the realization that he cannot find a book he knows he has, that it has become "lost" within his collection, Benjamin's book collector must recognize that the shelves alone do not create or maintain order, but that the disorder of their contents is the consequence of materiality overwhelming the collector. Unable to remember any bibliographic information

that would have enabled him to classify, organize, and then find the "lost" book, Jack cannot retrieve the narrative he has put on the shelf. He thinks that the book is "a blue one" that "should be somewhere near the top" and that the title might be "'*The Exploration of the American Continent* or something like that,'" but is corrected by the accurate memory of La Grande Sauterelle, who has also read the book, remembers that the author is Brouillette, knows that the title is "'not Exploration, it's *The Penetration of the American Continent by the French Canadians,*'" and finds it on "the bottom shelf" with a "brick red" cover (Poulin 28). Overwhelmed by the disorder of his collection – and, by extension, the disorder of his memory – Jack is "so embarrassed [that] [he] can't even remember why [he] wanted to reread it [Brouillette's book]" and must acknowledge that he "really ought to tidy up [his] books" (Poulin 28-29). The collector admits that he is overwhelmed by his collection, but does not recognize the implications of misremembering the contents. He shies away from the strong colour and violent, "penetrating" title, constructing an alternate memory of Canada's colonial history that allows him to keep his heroes in his ancestors at the cost of being rendered complicit in their acts by his disavowal of their violence. His disavowal is not a conscious decision, but his mind's way of mitigating his anxiety about the traditional Euro-Canadian position of privilege and the sense that his comfort in the centre comes at the cost of the peripheral other: the victim whose suffering and exploitation must be acknowledged before there can be dialogue that transcends the "narrow" Eurocentric perspective (and the confines of Jack's

bookshelf) (Poulin 28). In leaving his books on the shelf, Jack implicitly leaves himself on the shelf and out of circulation; he finds that he is unable to participate in a dialogue with La Grande Sauterelle because he cannot remember the things he needs to take off the shelf. It is as if he has never read Brouillette's book, supporting La Grande Sauterelle's assertion that "if you haven't reread, you haven't read" and suggesting that once books become objects on a shelf and are put into relation with the individual collector instead of in relation to a larger cultural collective, perhaps they are no longer "books."

In contrast to the memorial emptiness of Jack's "narrow," overstuffed bookshelf, his Volkswagen minibus begins to function as a mobile book depository/library once he shares it with La Grande Sauterelle, with "books in every nook and cranny . . . To the books the man [Jack] had packed when he left Quebec City had been added those he had bought or the ones the girl had 'borrowed' [stole] along the way" (Poulin 114-115). Beyond the disordered confines of Jack's Quebec City apartment, his books and La Grande Sauterelle's books create a dialogue of their own, a negotiation between centre and periphery that creates and gives voice to a space in-between – a space that, literally and figuratively, moves them both forward as they navigate their own anxieties about what it means to be "Canadian." For Jack, identifying himself as "Canadian" implies colonial privilege, whereas the label "French-Canadian" evokes estrangement from the homeland and displacement rather than the position of New World privilege that comes with participating in colonial practices. For La

Grande Sauterelle, identifying herself as "Canadian" means a disavowal of her Indigenous heritage and sharing in Euro-Canadian complicity, and identifying herself as Indigenous also means appropriating the position of the colonial victim and becoming complicit in that victimization. Both are affectively "stuck" to the books that move them – Jack to *The Golden Dream* by positive affect (comfort), La Grande Sauterelle by negative, troubled affect (anxiety and displacement) to books like *Explorers of the Mississippi* – and in being individually "stuck" to opposing narratives, their ability to read productively is limited. As they trade a flat drive without obstacles for the rougher route over the Rockies, their books – their things – to which they are "stuck" gain an agency of their own: hearing the Volkswagen protest under the weight of its load, Jack observes that they have "too many books . . . it's much too heavy on the hills," and regrets the dependence on his collection (and lack of confidence with literature) that led him to bring his "big dictionaries" only to "[have not] written a word since [they] left" (Poulin 157). His need to bring the dictionaries speaks to his anxiety as a reader and his communicative paralysis as an inactive writer; his dependence on traditional definitions and forms of knowledge limits his comprehension as a reader, and weighs him down as a writer. He can neither read nor write on his own, and his reliance on the familiar, definitive physicality of the dictionaries prevents him from moving beyond them, and beyond traditional (European) hierarchies of knowledge and power. Dependence on material things limits futurity, and comes with the risk of losing progress, of sliding back to the centre/periphery binary both

readers seek to transcend. Something needs to be left behind. Jack and La Grande Sauterelle begin to become "unstuck" from their opposing collections as the narratives they have identified themselves with are superseded by the first book they read together, *The Oregon Trail Revisited* by Gregory M. Franzwa. In their search for Jack's brother Théo, La Grande Sauterelle speaks to a reporter who remembers Théo's name appearing in a newspaper and gives her a copy of what quickly becomes "their favourite book" and "the book they were in love with" (Poulin 158,122). Once they open the book together and begin reading in dialogue with one another, road maps and tourist guides become obsolete, as "all the information they needed could be found in *The Oregon Trail Revisited*," and "not only did the book tell them the location of the old trail and how to get there, but it also provided data on each of the historic sites, even quoting passages from diaries the emigrants had kept during their journey" (Poulin 121). Literature becomes not only a "geography of the mind" and a means of negotiating individual self-knowledge within the national context of shared cultural knowledge, but also something that has the potential to physically move the reader closer to home when that shared knowledge is accessed. As readers of *The Oregon Trail Revisited*, Jack and La Grande Sauterelle are moved closer to themselves, but also to the question of what needs to be taken off the shelf, re-read, or let go. The books that fill the Volkswagen hinder their progress forward, but Jack does not let them go even as he laments their negative impact: the collector is held captive by his collection. Aside from literally and figuratively

acting as a road map, *The Oregon Trail Revisited* also implicitly gestures towards the limitations of material accumulation – of being "stuck" to those objects we collect and which become our "selves" – and the potential for agency beyond the limitations imposed on human behaviour by things. La Grande Sauterelle quotes the following passage from their new "favourite" book to Jack as an antidote to the weight of materiality:

> 'When they [the emigrants] reached the Rockies they got rid of everything that was weighing down the wagons. Often they were things they were very fond of, but they had to throw them out . . . So the Oregon Trail was strewn with all sorts of objects, like oak furniture, grandfather clocks and musical instruments' (Poulin 157-58).

Rereading themselves through the experiences of settlers past suggests that things which have become objects – things that cease to have use value once divested of their original function and put in relation only to their possessors (see Baudrillard 7) – become obstacles themselves. The obstacle arises out of both the physical presence and affective presence of the object: the shape, weight, or size of an object serves as a barrier to easy possession, transport, or display, and a positive affective relationship with the object (like fondness) moves the owner to resist becoming "unstuck" from the object that has become part of the individual's identity. Jack, however, is not ready to be "unstuck:" he admits that "it was ridiculous to bring the dictionaries," but says "let's hope the motor holds out" instead of letting go of the traditional references that cannot help re-read old narratives or define the new narratives that need to be written. With some mechanical assistance from La Grande Sauterelle, the motor holds out; with the

antidote she offers for his "anxious, parsimonious" reading by keeping things off of the shelf, La Grande Sauterelle also mitigates the risky weight of Jack's traditional collection by taking a look under the hood.

The discussion thus far, focused on the book as object and to contrasting Jack and La Grande Sauterelle as private book collectors and individual readers, creates a productive framework for reading their negotiations of identity and self-knowledge through their interactions with museum exhibits. In *Collections and Objections,* Michelle Hamilton writes that "museums, and by extension, the collection and exhibition of material culture, have been characterized as contact zones of colonial encounter in which coercion, inequality, and conflict occurred" and as a result, "elements of museum exhibitions – the choice of objects, their labels, and the order in which they are organized – are socially constructed texts" (11). Before they have had much opportunity to compare book collections and reading practices, Jack and La Grande Sauterelle visit a museum in Gaspé, Quebec to identify the historical text reprinted on the old postcard Jack "lost" in *The Golden Dream*. Cartier's text is displayed on a "huge poster" in the main hall at the start of a chronological exhibit of Canada's colonial history, and is the first thing to affect them in the museum's collection (Poulin 8). Having read very little beyond the traditional Eurocentric narrative in which he finds comfort, Jack fails to understand the implications of the display, superficially reading it as a "fine text" that does not get them "much farther ahead" and missing what its political significance suggests about his brother as the postcard's sender and about himself

as its recipient (Poulin 9). The text's large-scale display and location at the start of the museum exhibit indicate social significance, and imply that the text offers a framework for interpreting the rest of the exhibit and the collection as a whole. Cartier's description of French colonial practices and religious assimilation has been converted into an object of material culture by its inclusion in the museum collection and its display as an oversized visual spectacle, creating a "contact zone of colonial encounter." The exhibit is built on the foundations of colonial coercion, as Cartier glorifies the practice of assimilation he begins by soliciting admiration for displays of Christian worship and "redemption" (Poulin 9). The text that merits a "huge" display and primacy in the exhibit's organization is miniaturized and trivialized when his brother converts it into a postcard – a format reserved for the visual souvenir of somewhere else, not "here," for a few short phrases rather than full-bodied, serious communication. A problematic moment in Canadian history becomes a romanticized, "lost" souvenir in a process of conversion that is traumatic in its illusion of remembrance. Jack's brother may be rendered complicit in the colonial violence of European evangelism by trivializing it through the postcard, but Jack himself is also implicated in that same violence as he fails to reread the text through the politics of display in the Gaspé museum. The significance of the display and of the conversion of the historical text into a consumable souvenir is not lost on La Grande Sauterelle, who reminds Jack that "'we've made some progress . . . now we have to think a little'" and encourages him to walk through the rest of the exhibit with her (Poulin 9). She stops in front

of two maps, one showing the distribution of Indigenous territory in North America before European colonization, and one showing only the European territories overriding them. The maps are also displayed on a large scale, and are "beautiful" and "equally impressive:" as with Cartier's text, the scale of the display makes it stand out from the other objects in the exhibit series, directing the visitor to make a connection between the first large-scale object display and the second, and to recognize how both objects create a dialogue that frames the exhibit's critique of European imperialism and its effect on Canadian history – and, by extension, its impact on modern Canadian identity (Poulin 9-10). Being less of an "anxious and parsimonious" reader than Jack, La Grande Sauterelle is able to read the two "equally impressive" maps through Cartier's text, understand the critique being made of that text through the equal scale of the two maps, but struggles to re-read herself through the maps as she cannot fully find herself on one or the other. Again, Jack fails to re-read himself through the museum display because he anxiously resists reading beyond *The Golden Dream* of Europe's colonial expansion, and as La Grande Sauterelle stands in front of the map of Indigenous territories, "her eyes wet and shining," Jack decides that "it was better to leave her alone for a moment" rather than confront the possibility that the maps are a display of trauma rather than beauty, and the possibility that trauma is the cost of his own Euro-Canadian identity (Poulin 10). It is the act of stepping away from unsettling displays that renders him complicit, not his identity itself; he cannot decide whether or not to be born into a Euro-Canadian identity, but he can

decide whether to confront the present implications of past trauma, or to disavow (and the perpetuate) the trauma by stepping away.

While Jack's capacity to be affected and moved by the Gaspé exhibit is limited by his fixation on the few books he collects and his anxious resistance to being unsettled by difficult knowledge in Canadian history, La Grande Sauterelle is almost too susceptible to the affective power of objects. Her strong affective relationship with narratives describing the violence of European imperialism (recall Severin's *Explorers of the Mississippi*) moves her to read colonial violence indiscriminately in all North American institutional collecting, and to be moved by what such books lead her to project onto the object instead of being moved by the object itself. When she encounters the Gatling gun on display in the museum at Fort Laramie (U.S.A), she immediately assumes that a spectacle is being made of Indigenous trauma because she reads the Gatling gun as a once-functional European tool and symbol of colonial violence instead of reading it as defunct and empty. She stands in front of the display, "crying and shouting and swearing, half in English, half in French," and when a ranger working at the museum asks her what is wrong, she demands to know whether "'YOU SHOOT INDIANS WITH THAT TABARNAK DE MACHINE GUN?'" (Poulin 152). In answer, he reads her a passage from the fort commander's diary, on display in a locked glass case in the same room as the Gatling gun. He reads the gun through the pages of an object that is not readily accessible to the museum visitors, and not part of the knowledge they are able to share with the museum curator. Having opened the

glass case, the museum employee tells La Grande Sauterelle, and the crowd of other visitors attracted by her confrontation with the Gatling gun, that "the commandant had recorded there [in the diary] a despatch he had sent to the authorities in Washington to complain because the Gatling constantly jammed with black powder from the ammunition, which rendered it totally useless" (Poulin 152). Although La Grande Sauterelle's approach to collecting and reading books enables her to connect to a larger body of shared knowledge through which she attempts to negotiate her relationship with her Métis identity, her knowledge of violent histories leads her to be moved by things that elicit negative affect, and to displace that affect onto other things that move her. In being moved by her books, she is moved by the museum collections, and makes some of the objects in those collections into something they are not (again, recall Ahmed's essay on the power of affect and the "making" of things through affect). The Gatling gun symbolizes European intent to commit colonial violence, but its lack of functionality troubles the Eurocentric assumption of cultural superiority, as does the conversion of a military stronghold into a museum whose collection subverts that power. By moving towards a politics of display that opens the glass case and is driven by shared knowledge between curator and visitor, the museum enables La Grande Sauterelle to re-read the defunct Gatling gun and herself; the militaristic anti-European position she takes in resistance to her own European heritage is revealed as the anxiety that it is, and which is assuaged by re-reading one object through another.

Although the scope of this project does not permit a sustained exploration of the relationship between critical archive theory, collecting theory, and material culture theory, reading collections as material culture archives and viewing collecting as an archival practice (with all the responsibility therein) reminds us that the ways in which our things affect us can have implications of their own beyond how they look on the shelf. In her introduction to *Lost in the Archives*, Rebecca Comay uses an evocative metaphor to describe the risk of forgetting that is seemingly inextricable from practices of preservation and collection. She uses the image of an overstuffed, disorganized bookshelf – the bookshelf of Benjamin's collector and Poulin's Jack Waterman – to highlight the emptiness of materiality and accumulation. She argues that

> Trauma is the heap of books that you only notice when it's too late: you don't know why you bought them, you'll never be able to read them all now, you'll never be able to part with them, and there's no more bookshelf space left. Everyone seems to think that trauma calls for archive – that something is going on in the archive about trauma and its binding – but this gets it exactly backward. It's the archive which is always sending out the binders: the archive is itself the very trauma it would resolve. The collection turns every gain or acquisition into a cipher of loss and dispossession (Comay 15).

The disorder/order of the book collection becomes traumatic as it is retained not for the value of the contents and the importance of preserving and remembering those contents, but for the comfort of their physical weight and the appearance of preservation in possession. Each term in the series blends into the next, lost in the material volume of the collection that overwhelms the collector, who realizes that he/she has passed the point of no return, and cannot assert control over the

vacuum created by the collection. We cannot let go of things, and so they will not let go of us: the book collector cannot get rid of the books he/she will never read even though there is "no more bookshelf space left," and so the full shelves remain empty. The collection is traumatic in that, like the archive, "it is the very trauma it would resolve;" the private collector or museum visitor constructs and consumes an illusion of proximity to that which the collection seeks to preserve, but the illusion is ultimately more damaging as it overrides the original moment in its false proximity to that moment. In this moment of estrangement and replacement, "the collection turns every acquisition into a cipher of loss and dispossession," and it is this recognition of obliteration in 'preservation' that is traumatic. If we apply Comay's metaphor to Jack's bookshelf, what are the implications of the overstuffed Euro-Canadian bookshelf in which one becomes lost? If the books on that shelf cease to function as tools for remembrance, discussion, and the negotiation of colonial complicity and responsibility, and instead become mere objects, what have we lost? Canadians have lost what Canada is – a country still engaging in colonial practices – inside a fantasy, in Brydon's words, of "Canada as originally conceived." In losing sight of what Canada is – and was - we lose ourselves. Jack's bookshelf is a "cipher of loss and dispossession," as the trauma of Indigenous victimization is shelved and forgotten, blurred by "golden" fantasies of the promise of European westward expansion. The "heap" of books may be overwhelming, but we must resist becoming immobilized by the collection and thus putting ourselves on the shelf of

ambivalence – one book, and one thing, at a time. Although books are not included in the collections discussed in the following chapters, the idea that the act of selection and collection erases the memorial ephemera it intends to preserve is critical, as is the idea that we must re-read the Eurocentric Canadian narrative and the traditional position of privilege that it occupies in order to recognize and destabilize the centre/periphery binary that upholds this privilege.

Chapter 3: Re-Collecting Identity in Boyden's *Three Day Road*

"Things are our way of dealing with a world in which we are enmeshed rather than over which we have dominion."

- Elizabeth Grosz, "The Thing"

The preceding discussion of the book as object and how the book functions (or fails to function) as part of a collection gestured towards the power of inanimate objects to influence our affective responses to other things and the politics of their displays, and examined this power through the politics of reading itself. This chapter and the following chapter shift from this discussion of nonhuman things to the controversial act of collecting and displaying human remains, and explore how the act of collecting converts the body into a consumable object. We cannot treat human remains as texts per se, as using a metaphor here fails to account for the body-turned-thing on its own account (see Olsen's *In Defense of Things* for a more detailed ontological discussion). These things are beyond reading as such, as to "read" them would be to impose our own subjectivities onto something that is not part of ourselves but of another. It is not the things themselves that require rereading, but rather the colonial centre/periphery binary that frames Canada's acceptance of some bodies as subjects and its rejection of others as objects. Elsner and Cardinal write that "the social order is itself inherently *collective*: it thrives on classification, on rule, on labels, on sets and systems" (2). It is the Canadian collective and its imperialist system of classification that requires re-reading and it is resistance to such re-

reading that produces Canada's national ambivalence. Despite our resistance to acknowledging it, anxiety about the violent implications of Euro-Canadian colonial privilege surfaces in Canadian literature: an implicit challenge to traditional hierarchies of power that becomes explicitly "embodied" in Boyden's World War I novel, *Three Day Road*. Denied agency and recognition of their value to the Canadian army (and the European war effort as a whole) based on their Cree identity, Elijah and Xavier seek to assert themselves through different forms of materiality with varying degrees of success. Elijah endeavours to assert the value of his body in war and surpass that of the French soldiers he meets by collecting the scalps of the German soldiers he kills. By converting parts of the European bodies over which he exerts physical power into collectible trophies, he detaches them from the original subjects they signify in a risky appropriation of the colonial stereotype of the "bloodthirsty savage" (Edwards 112). He fails to re-appropriate and assert his body's agency through the bodies of others, as the violent excess of his collecting behaviour traps him in the same "Otherness" that he desires to escape. It is in the realization of this trap that the collection ceases to be oriented towards what is lacking and ultimately becomes psychologically destructive. For Xavier, his relationship with the things he collects and possesses is healing rather than damaging, as his things keep him positively connected to his Cree identity and give him a means of "dealing with a world in which [he is] enmeshed rather than over which [he has] dominion," and of asserting agency by maintaining that connection. His compulsion to collect Elijah's things after killing

him leads Xavier to inadvertently appropriate and be haunted by Elijah's conflicted identity – a haunting that is only exorcised once Xavier brings Elijah home by bringing his things back to Canada. Elijah's "embodied" collecting disconnects him from the cultural knowledge he shares with Xavier and from himself, disrupting both his ability to identify himself and his ability to value the identity that European imperialism encourages him to disavow. Things may be our way of "dealing with a world in which we are enmeshed rather than over which we have dominion," but the act of selecting and collecting those things – the act of making things into objects – extends beyond ourselves, and says something about the politics of the position we occupy within that world. We are haunted by things, and in being haunted we are held accountable by things.

The previous chapter's discussion of the Eurocentric centre/periphery binary, the importance of deconstructing it, and its impact on how Canadians read themselves through things is also applicable to Boyden's novel. Instead of navigating the Euro-Canadian anxiety of *Volkswagen Blues*, Cree soldier Elijah "Whiskeyjack" attempts to reverse the assumption of European superiority over the colonized "other" by collecting physical evidence of his fighting skills to assert Indigenous agency and superiority over the Euro-Canadian soldiers and their European allies. In their contribution to *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, Russell Belk and Melanie Wallendorf suggest that "in striving for perfection in a collection, the collector also strives for an ideal self" (240). The objects the collector selects function as signifiers of that collector once they

become part of the collective series. The act of selection is also necessarily an act of self-definition, as the logic of the collection reflects the desires – and thus, identifies the mind – of the collector. Stationed on the Western Front with the Canadian army, Elijah still finds himself dismissed by colonial politics as the imperialist mindset of the other (Euro-Canadian) soldiers and his superior officers deny the value of his enlistment. While Xavier resists being assimilated into the Canadian army by refusing to speak English, Elijah begins "talking in an English accent," which "makes the soldiers laugh . . . it's like he wants to become something that he's not. He tells jokes and . . . brags that he has now killed men, all of them close enough that he could hear them die" (Boyden 77). He tells Xavier that speaking the English he learned at the residential school with a British accent "makes him feel respectable" and that "there's a magic in it that protects him" (Boyden 137). Although speaking with a British accent might make Elijah feel "respectable," it does not win him the respect and equal valuation he desires from the Canadian army, who "laugh" at his jokes but still answer to British officers. Speaking English allows him to make jokes, but leaves the centre/periphery binary intact and does not attest to his value or agency as a soldier. When he tries to join the French soldiers drinking in a bar, they do not readily accept him, implicitly critiquing his non-whiteness and his claim to "Canadianness" with the observation that "'you do not look like the Canadians that I have seen'" (Boyden 203). Elijah replies that he is "Indian" and then promptly disavows his cultural identity by constructing Xavier as "other" and "a

heathen" for not being fluent in the languages of Canada's European colonizers. For the French soldiers, linguistic disavowal is an insufficient testament to the value of Elijah's body alongside European bodies in war: they tell him of another Native Canadian sniper whose success in battle is denied by his commanding officer, who avoids confronting anxiety about the agency of the colonial other by denying evidence of such agency. To "buy [his] honour among us [the colonizers/Europeans]," a French soldier tells Elijah that he must "do what we do. Collect evidence of your kills. Do what my people taught your people a long time ago. Take the scalp of your enemy. Take a bit of him to feed you" (Boyden 204). Elijah initially dismisses the power of collecting and its potential to affect his peripheral position in colonial politics, asking "what will these trophies really do for me?" (Boyden 204). He is told that embodying the image of colonially stereotyped "Indian" brutality through the collection of such "trophies" will determine his identity and the recognition of that identity, rather than his ability to separate himself from such stereotypes. He twists his cultural heritage to absolve himself of the violence the colonial hierarchy demands of him, reminding himself and Xavier that "'besides, the Iroquois eat their enemy's heart to take his power. We grew up with those stories'" (Boyden 320). He acknowledges his cultural identity only when convenient (but not when necessary), and misreads the collection of human remains as a subversion of the centre/periphery binary instead of accurately reading it as that which will "feed" the devaluation of Native

soldiers by justifying the Eurocentric classification of "their" violence as "other" and deviant.

Collecting inanimate objects is potentially traumatic in its illusion of proximity to the moment it would preserve, but the act of collecting human remains is more unsettling in its annihilation of the original subject. Susan Stewart gestures towards the trauma underlying the accumulation of dead things, arguing that

> Because they are souvenirs of death, the relic, the hunting trophy, and the scalp are at the same time the most intensely *potential* souvenirs and the most potent antisouvenirs. They mark the horrible transformation of meaning into materiality more than they mark, as other souvenirs do, the transformation of materiality into meaning. If the function of the souvenir proper is to create a continuous and personal narrative of the past, the function of such souvenirs of death is to disrupt and disclaim that continuity (140).

Instead of creating a system of meaning that signifies the collector, the scalp is emptied of its meaning as subject as it becomes an object for collection. Although the Frenchmen promise Elijah "honour among *us*" (my emphasis) if he is a successful collector, their promise is as devoid of meaning as the subject-turned-thing they would have him collect, for the scalp converts "meaning into materiality" and places the collector of the antisouvenir in relation to this material abyss instead of his desired meaning. It does not create a "narrative" of past conquest or prophesy future success; it "disrupts" the narrative of "ideal self" that the collector desires to create by disconnecting the past from meaning and the future from its potential to retain and act on that meaning. Elijah resists acknowledging this risk as he begins to collect souvenirs of his kills, but anxiety

over his disconnection from his cultural identity and the alienation he seeks to mitigate surfaces in Boyden's use of gothic discourse. Elijah's macabre collecting is motivated by his desire to trade his position on the colonial periphery for a position of privilege in the centre, and creates "disruptions in the stable categories of race, [and] nationality," which, Edwards writes, "result in a dread that is often represented by gothic discourse" (xxiv). Returning from the field to tell Xavier about his mission, Elijah thinks that "the possession in his kit bag almost pulsates" and does not display the subject-turned-object that haunts him (Boyden 211). The "pulsating" scalp echoes the beat of Edgar Allen Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," and voices the internal conflict Elijah endeavours to stifle with things. Poe's murderer cannot divest himself of the guilt that consumes him by hiding it under the floorboards, and Elijah will be consumed by the literal and figurative violence of those things he makes even as he believes himself to be the consumer. As Edwards says, "the ghosts of the past will return to haunt the living; the sins of the father will revisit their children; the murdered victim will refuse to rest in his grave" (132). The collector comes closer to his "ideal self" as he fills his pack with things, but much like Poe's victim, those things come from moments of violence and refuse to go quietly. These are the things that haunt us, remind us that the centre/periphery is inherently violent, that materiality can amplify that violence, and that negotiating identity in terms of colonial politics always leaves someone (or something) out in the cold.

In "The System of Collecting," Baudrillard writes that the collector accumulates objects organized around a central logic – or Belk & Wallendorf's "ideal self" – out of a sense of cultural displacement. The collector becomes drawn to certain objects over others because they feed the collector's desires in some way, even if those desires are not shared by the world of the social collective in which the private collector finds himself "enmeshed." The collector begins collecting

> because he feels himself alienated or lost within a social discourse whose rules he cannot fathom that the collector is driven to construct an alternative discourse that is for him entirely amenable, insofar as he is the one who dictates its signifiers – the ultimate signified being, in the final analysis, none other than himself (Baudrillard 24).

Elijah begins collecting German scalps because he feels alienated from the Eurocentric discourse of the Canadian army, and creates an "alternative discourse" for himself in which his secret collection would succeed in transcending the colonial centre/periphery binary that it fails to subvert in reality. In contrast, Xavier's relationship with things is not determined by a desire to resist cultural alienation through alternative discourse, but by his sense of home that drives his positive affective response to "the moosehide bag in which [he] keeps the tobacco which protects [him]" that his "Auntie gave [him] before [he] left [for the war]" (Boyden 73). The medicine bag "feels warm against [his] skin, like it is filled with blood" as if it were a living thing, but functions as an object of physical, spiritual, and cultural comfort rather than an object of discomfort (as it would be for Elijah) (Boyden 73). For Xavier, the medicine bag moves him to

remember his cultural identity, and to make the bag into a nurturing object that locates him within the larger social collective that shares his Cree identity. He cannot understand Elijah's collecting behaviour – his "madness" – because he does not feel the need to construct an "ideal self" on Eurocentric terms (Boyden 246). He is able to separate – literally and figuratively – his cultural identity from his unrecognized military identity, and to hold onto self- and shared knowledge without creating an alternative discourse through materiality. Frustrated with the life-endangering decisions of the Canadian army and its British officers, Xavier "reach[es] for the twine with its [military] ID's about [his] neck and rip[s] it off . . . [leaving his] medicine bundle around [his] neck," reminding himself "that alone is who I am" (Boyden 365). Instead of the medicine bundle/Cree identity being the source of embarrassment it is for Elijah, it allows Xavier to hold onto himself even as he is "enmeshed" in the army because it affectively moves him closer to home. Elijah's tenuous affective relationship with his medicine bundle/Cree identity drives him to construct an "alternative discourse" of an "ideal" European self by collecting – and consuming – the enemy other. He is consumed by his consumption, and Xavier is forced to end the collection by destroying the collector. Elijah's conflicted cultural identity is reflected in his material possessions, which Xavier collects in turn as the final consumption of the consumer. Elijah's things resist re-collection even in death: his medicine bundle "does not want to break" from his neck, but is complicated and constricted by the Canadian military "ID wrapped about it" (Boyden 370). Moved by his own

affective relationship with the medicine bundle as a symbol of healing, self-knowledge, shared knowledge, and cultural identity, Xavier reads Elijah's medicine bundle as embodying a dislocated sense of self. He re-collects Elijah's identity by bringing "him" home and exorcising the inner conflict produced by the colonial centre/periphery binary in a healing ceremony. With the act of repatriation and healing, Elijah's conflicted identity no longer haunts Xavier and both are able to move forward. By re-collecting and repatriating those things and identities that have been disavowed by colonial practices, we can begin to recognize and respond to those things that haunt us.

Stewart's suggestion that souvenirs of violence are traumatic in that "they mark the horrible transformation of meaning into materiality" speaks to the consequences of collecting human remains, and provides a useful framework for reading Elijah's death as a consequence of his failure to re-collect himself through his German scalp collection. As he collects trophies of his violence, his identity and the past cultural experiences that define that identity are "disrupted" by those trophies. His self is no longer signified by shared cultural knowledge or the medicine bundle's positive affect, but by the consumption of others as objects. Instead of creating a collection that signifies his disavowal of his "peripheral" Cree identity and his access to the exclusive colonial centre, Elijah creates a series of objects that signify the threat of meaningless material consumption that is realized in his death. Baudrillard argues that "the point where a collection closes in on itself and ceases to be oriented towards an unfilled gap is the point where

madness begins" (13). Elijah's collecting behaviour is oriented towards the "unfilled gap" he perceives in his "ideal self:" recognition as Canadian instead of being dismissed as "Indian." The scalps are accumulated with the goal of obtaining access to Euro-Canadian privilege, but when Elijah realizes that the collection will not allow him to transcend the discriminatory lines of colonial politics, his collection "ceases to be oriented towards an unfilled gap" and becomes his "madness." Observing the collector from outside of the collection, Xavier observes that although the French "are the ones who told him [Elijah] about keeping trophies of the enemy . . . his madness is all his own" and "see[s] a hunger in Elijah that he can't satisfy" (Boyden 308, 326). When Elijah finds the soldiers who "taught" him to record his violence by collecting/consuming his victims, he shows them his "trophies" and is satisfied to find that they "[act] nervously around [him] after that" (Boyden 310). Although Elijah reads this reaction to his collection (and himself) as another step towards the "unfilled gap," the soldiers' nervousness is the product of colonial anxiety, which fears the destabilization of the power and privilege they have traditionally held. Anxiety only strengthens the barrier between centre and periphery/ "us" and "them," it does not shift that barrier or make it permeable. Edwards writes that

> At the heart of the construction of the Other is a fear that the forces of disorder will overwhelm the existing institutions of power and privilege and disrupt the stable lives of those who inhabit the centre. Discourses of monstrosity have thus contributed to the policing of the nation, particularly when official rhetoric identifies the Other and removes him to the margins (111).

When one of the Euro-Canadian soldiers in Elijah's detachment finds out about his scalp collection and reports the behaviour to the British officer overseeing their regiment, "discourses of monstrosity" are mobilized to police the borders of traditional colonial privilege and demonize the other at whose expense such privilege is retained. The British officer with authority over the Canadian army (and, implicitly, Canada's power to resist colonial politics) serves as this policing body, demanding "'and what of this claim that you scalp your enemies like your heathen ancestors?'" (Boyden 339). The officer's decision to investigate the Euro-Canadian soldier's claim is valid, as the practice of making human remains into personal trophies crosses the line dividing acceptable defensive actions in war and "atrocities on the battlefield." The language of his investigation is less valid, and betrays the fear Edwards locates at "the heart of the construction of the Other." Instead of citing relevant legislation that would outline the criteria of Elijah's offence and the legal consequences for such behaviour, the officer invokes the stereotypical rhetoric of colonialism to demonize and "other" Elijah based on his "heathen" Cree heritage – his non-whiteness. Resistant to the idea that the Eurocentric privilege of the centre/periphery binary needs destabilizing in order for modern national identities to move forward, the colonizer reinforces its position by applying "discourses of monstrosity" to "the victim that refuses to rest in his grave" (Edwards 111, 132). The officer asks Elijah about his collection, but by doing so in terms of colonialism and monstrosity he assumes and asks for a confirmation of guilt rather than allowing for the possibility without evidence.

Elijah sees the world through the lens of his collection and cannot see beyond its violence to refute the accusation, drawing his pistol even as he says that the Euro-Canadian soldier (and by extension, the officer) "acts out of jealously and fear" (Boyden 339). Elijah's own jealousy of Euro-Canadian privilege and his fear of being denied access to that privilege motivate both his collecting and his decision to pull the trigger, killing the Euro-Canadian soldier who betrayed him and the British officer who valued the soldier's word over Elijah's. For all his collecting Elijah is still trapped on the periphery, where the realization of his collection's flawed logic, and its inability to alter this position, removes the promise of Baudrillard's "unfilled gap." As the logic of accumulation collapses, Elijah is consumed by his own consumption and his fractured sense of identity. Thinking that Xavier's higher quality rifle will allow him to kill and collect more successfully, he tries to kill Xavier when Xavier refuses to give him the weapon. He has lost sight of their shared cultural identity and the personal narrative of their shared past; no longer able to identify with Xavier and their Cree heritage and unable to access the Euro-Canadian identity he covets, Elijah is stuck in-between. Xavier is forced to kill him out of self-defence, literally and figuratively in no-man's land. As he is about to be consumed as he has consumed so many others, Elijah acknowledges his "madness" as the consequence of converting "meaning into materiality," saying "'It has gone too far, hasn't it . . . I have gone too far, haven't I'" (Boyden 369). Xavier confirms Elijah's failure to re-collect himself and the consequences of disavowing his identity, saying "'you have gone

mad. There is no coming back from where you've travelled'" (Boyden 370). Consumed by the collection and disconnected from the implications of rendering subjects into consumable objects, the collector is overwhelmed by accumulation and incapable of re-collecting himself by signifying power of the things he has made to move him. Elijah's collection is a closed loop of Stewart's "antisouvenirs:" the scalps "disrupt" the narrative of his cultural past, making it impossible for him to untangle his medicine bundle from his army I.D. and re-collect the stable cultural identity Xavier retains.

Elijah's decision to negotiate his identity through the possession of human remains and its consequences are further complicated by the precedent they set for my discussion of *The Glace Bay Miners' Museum* in the final chapter. While Elijah's collecting behaviour is culturally read as deviant, transgressive, and "heathen," the Euro-Canadian housewife Margaret collects and displays parts of her deceased family's bodies for public consumption alongside tea and scones. Although there is a fundamental distinction to be made between the origins of their respective collections – Elijah kills the people whose scalps he collects, whereas Margaret collects her family's remains in the wake of industrial disaster - colonial politics affect how each collection is culturally read. Elijah's collecting becomes his physical and mental undoing, leaving his dislocated identity to be appropriated and repatriated by Xavier, whereas Margaret's collecting gestures towards the positive development of her voice and agency to the benefit of future generations working in the dangerous conditions of the Cape Breton coal mines.

As Edwards notes, "to place the Native North American in the position of the bloodthirsty savage is to articulate deep-seated fears about the otherness of the non-European" (112). Boyden's novel highlights the healing power of shared cultural knowledge and the potential of such knowledge to withstand the assimilative pressure of Canada's Eurocentrism, but also gestures towards the anxiety behind the country's ambivalence about its national identity. The nation apologizes for colonial violence it locates in the past but does not apologize for its colonial practices in the present, rendering itself complicit in the victimization of the non-European other as it anxiously clings to traditional Euro-Canadian privilege. The colonial hierarchy of power in the Canadian army places Elijah and Xavier "in the position of the bloodthirsty savage" to assuage its fear of being consumed by the other in its own imperial collection. The collection consumes Elijah as he tries to stifle it, and out of a fear of a similar consumption, the agents of European colonial power work to maintain a centre/periphery binary within the imperial collective. Although things may be "our way of dealing with a world in which we are enmeshed," they still have the potential to destabilize the "dominion" of traditional dynamics of power and privilege. Collecting - whether of books and maps or souvenirs and weapons - reveals us to ourselves, and we cannot move forward to re-collect ourselves until we are prepared to acknowledge what is looking back at us. Through our things we are "enmeshed" in ourselves, but the false comfort of materiality affects our ability to see others.

Chapter 4: Unsettling Privilege: The Settler-As-Victim in Lill's *The Glace Bay Miners' Museum*

> "The most glaring challenges to our own assumptions go unnoticed and unexamined."
>
> -Daniel Coleman, *White Civility*

As I indicated in the conclusion of the preceding chapter, Elijah's collecting behaviour and its consequences create a productive framework for reading objects and colonial politics in Wendy Lill's play *The Glace Bay Miner's Museum*. There are assumptions, whether implicit or explicit, affecting the ways we read ourselves, others, and things. As Coleman suggests above, challenges to those assumptions "go unnoticed and unexamined" even when they are the most apparent. The ambivalent outcome of Margaret's collecting behaviour and museum display in *The Glace Bay Miner's Museum* relies on several implicit and problematic assumptions that are the product of Canada's colonial history and its reticence to acknowledge its colonial present. These assumptions include the following: that acts of physical and mental violence are less reprehensible if committed by a Euro-Canadian person than if committed by an Indigenous person; that the collection and display of human remains is controversial only if colonial exploitation of the non-European other is involved; that female collecting behaviour is less threatening or unsettling when it appears to be domesticated within the home; and that the Euro-Canadian settler is a victim of colonial politics, estranged/distanced from the centre of shared European knowledge that would enable them to readily identify themselves instead of being unsettled by

cultural displacement in Canada. I begin by exploring the construction of the Euro-Canadian settler as victim, which frames the central discussion of Margaret's collecting as a political act that gives voice to another layer of cultural and socioeconomic estrangement – that of Canada's east coast from the wealthier central and southern regions of the country. From the layered politics of Margaret's collection and its display, we can then examine how the ways in which Margaret's and Elijah's collections of human remains are culturally read presents a "glaring" challenge to the assumptions above, which would go unexamined if the two texts were read independently instead of in dialogue with one another. Although the circumstances that literally produce the collected bodies differ in each text – Elijah kills and scalps enemy European soldiers while Margaret collects parts of her family in the aftermath of natural and industrial disaster – the issue of voice, and the power of objects to limit or amplify agency, affects how each collection is read. Both texts are part of Canada's literary collective and their different perspectives and implications for Euro-Canadian privilege and colonial complicity expand on Canada's ambivalence about its own national and cultural identity, as introduced by my preliminary theoretical discussion of Atwood's *Survival* Moss's anthology and the literary analysis of Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues*. In keeping with La Grande Sauterelle's contention that "you shouldn't judge books one by one . . . a book is never complete in itself" (Poulin 124).

Throughout the play, the personal poverty of Margaret MacNeil's family and the regional poverty of Cape Breton are repeatedly emphasized, as is the Glace Bay community's ambivalence about its sense of cultural identity and the larger national dismissal of the community's low socioeconomic status. The coal mine is the primary employer, offering only the dangerous working conditions and wages of "a dollar a day" that do not improve with union politics (Lill 121). When Margaret meets her husband Neil Currie, she and her family are shaken from their ambivalent perspectives on their lives by his refusal to "'talk English to the [mine] foreman'" at the cost of his job, his insistence on "'using the Gaelic, like our ancestors,'" and his refusal to silence his bagpipes despite fights and complaints (Lill 28). He highlights the failure of the Euro-Canadian settlers to locate their cultural identity in the face of Canada's national ambivalence because they "'came here and lost their tongues, their music, their songs. Everything except their shovels'" (Lill 77). The east-coast Euro-Canadian settler becomes cast as a colonial victim instead of colonizing aggressor, losing a sense of home and self with increased distance from the imperial centre, making the settler more vulnerable to industrial exploitation by a new nation that is only interested in the settler-as-object instead of the settler-as-subject. In *Taxidermic Signs*, Wakeham is critical of recasting the colonial settler as the colonial victim, arguing that

> "the narrative of Canada's so-called open evolution from empire is easily utilized to pass colonial culpability back onto the British metropole in a way that distances Euro-Canadian settlers from responsibility, portraying them as victims or at least marginalized subjects of British imperial power" (31).

The language of marginalization is repeatedly used to construct Margaret and her family as victims of British imperial power. In the opening scene of the play, Margaret wistfully tells the audience that "'if it weren't for that little stretch of water out there you could see right clear over to the Isle of Skye'" (Lill 9). The "little stretch of water" is the Atlantic Ocean; the Isle of Skye is considered part of Scotland, and, by England's colonial expansion, part of Britain. The east coast feels rejected by and dissociated from a government that is more concerned with the wealthier (central) regions of Canada than with the mining town's poor working conditions and low wages, which in turn lower the community's quality of life and hope for revival. This sense of dislocation and disavowal evokes the desire to reach back to the imperial centre, but Britain has abandoned the settler on its colonial periphery, and the colony itself offers no substitute for lost cultural roots. Neil is the voice of the centre, encouraging the others to reach back to Britain for their selves instead of looking to a Canada that refuses to reach out to them and forces them to work in the mines. He reminds Margaret's ambivalent brother, Ian, "'that's why you need to know where ya come from. You got roots deeper than these pits [mines]; You weren't born into them, you were born to beautiful rolling fields. We were farmers and we were sailors...'" (Lill 77). The Euro-Canadian settler loses the freedom promised by the "rolling fields" and outdoor occupations of ancestors living closer to the "British metropole," denied that birthright of freedom by a colony driven by economy at the expense of lives and culture. The Euro-Canadian settler becomes the victim in colonial Canada,

implicitly disavowing the victimization of Indigenous peoples that made the settler's life possible. There is another layer to the colonial politics at work here: Margaret's family is descended from Scottish immigrants, and Neil's reaching back to the centre from which they are estranged is a reaching back to colonized Scotland, rather to the primary seat of British government and imperial power in England. Reaching back to specific aspects of Scottish cultural identity instead of generally to "British" identity (Neil's Gaelic, bagpipes and traditional songs, and Margaret's reference to the Isle of Skye) doubly reinforces the position of settler-as-victim. This sense of victimization and Canada's ambivalent treatment of the miners drive Margaret's decision to collect, preserve, and display her family's remains, and sets the stage for reading her things as problematic and unsettling.

When Margaret's husband Neil and her younger brother Ian are killed working in the coal mine and her grandfather dies of lung failure as a result of working in the mine, she tells the audience that she "'knew what to get'" and immediately procures two gallons of formaldehyde (Lill 121). While she is preoccupied by her desire to collect and preserve parts of her dead brother and husband, her grandfather dies in her absence. Her statement that she "knew what to get" suggests that she not only knew what chemical to use for preservation, but also that she knew what she was going to choose to preserve or discard – what she was going to "get" from each member of the family and what was going to be remembered of the selves and bodies they leave behind. Her selections are made carefully according to the logic governing the collection: that Canada's failure to

reach out to regions of lower socioeconomic status must be acknowledged and redressed, that safe working conditions cannot be sacrificed for corporate profit, and that above all the Euro-Canadian settler must remember who he/she is and where he/she came from. Margaret constructs the Glace Bay Miners' museum as a testament to the workers' lives curtailed by poor wages and even poorer working conditions. Her act of selection, collection, and display is an act of political activism that criticizes Canada's national ambivalence and speaks to the importance of meeting that ambivalence with cultural remembrance. She explains the logic of her selections to the audience and first visitors to her museum. She begins with her grandfather, taking his ruined lungs because "'they were a good thing to take . . . something to remind me of the doctor who told him he couldn't get compensation because he was fit to work'" (Lill 122). In contrast to the lungs that made speaking painful, Margaret takes "'Neil's lungs because [she] thought of them connected to his pipes and they show, compared to grandfather's what lungs should look like'" (Lill 122). She also takes Neil's tongue "'since he always said he was the only one around still had one'" and his fingers "'because he played the pipes with them'" (Lill 122). She cannot think of anything culturally or politically significant to collect from and preserve of Ian, who resisted raising his voice against poor working conditions and unfair union politics, believing instead that the union would protect the workers from exploitation by corporate interests. Left with only his inaction, Margaret takes "'his dick since Neil always said that it was Ian's substitute for religion to keep him from becoming a pit pony when he

wasn't drinking rum or playing forty-five'" (Lill 122). Her grandfather stops using his voice after he is unjustly denied workers' compensation for his ruined lungs and is told to return to work he cannot do, and his lungs are selected as a physical testament to the industry's consumption and exploitation of the body of the settler-as-victim. Neil's working lungs and tongue speak to the importance of voice, and the juxtaposition with the grandfather's lungs highlights the responsibility of the next generation to give voice to past injustices in hopes of creating a healthier present and a more promising future. Margaret says that she also decided to take his lungs because she "'thought of them connected to his pipes'" in that they power his bagpipes, but his lungs are also connected to another set of "pipes" – the vocal chords he uses to speak only Gaelic to the mine foreman. Both sets of "pipes" are powered by a body that has not been exploited by industry and move Margaret in their ability to revitalize her ambivalent family and their potential to defend the interests of a community that receives no national assistance. Ian's failure to believe in something larger than himself makes him good at only one thing, and that thing acts not as a testament to what could (Neil's lungs) or could not (grandfather's lungs) be done to right past and present wrongs, but what is left of use when nothing is done. Stewart writes that "souvenirs of the mortal body are not so much a nostalgic celebration of the past as they are an erasure of the significance of history" (140). Although Margaret's decision to collect these parts of her deceased family members is motivated by a desire to preserve evidence of trauma and testify to those lives affected by that trauma, the

act of appropriating the body disconnects it from its place as a subject within history and denies the significance of the subject as such. Again, Ahmed's words on affect and objects are applicable here: Margaret is moved by her affective relationship with the family members to preserve evidence of their trauma, but in being moved she inadvertently makes them into something else. The subject becomes an object, and in becoming an object, becomes inaccessible to those on the outside of the collection looking in. The parts of the past she seeks to criticize (through Ian and grandfather) or commend (Neil) are accessible only to her, as reading those parts requires the visitor to read a past and present that has been literally and figuratively dismembered by the mode of its collection.

Stewart's statement above and the argument discussed in the previous chapter - souvenirs of death are traumatic in their conversion of "meaning into materiality" – also provide a useful framework for reading the politics of display in Margaret's macabre museum and how the audience/visitor experience is affected by curatorial decisions, shared knowledge, and guided reading. The opening scene of the play Margaret addresses the audience as if they were visitors to the Glace Bay Miners' museum, insisting "'don't be shy. There's lots to see. Look and ye shall see'" (Lill 10). Her second statement, "look and ye shall see," echoes the old saying "ask you shall receive" and tells us that we must look at things differently or more closely in order to truly see them. Margaret's statement makes the exhibit seem more accessible, implying that meaning is in everything if only we look for it. This initial sense of accessibility and comfort is disrupted

when we return from Margaret's reflection on the events leading to the museum's creation to the present, and are confronted with the jars of lungs, tongues, fingers, and male genitalia that are not mentioned in the first scene. As outlined above, Margaret does explain these selections to the audience/visitor, but the display necessarily relies on her as guide and curatorial authority. Without her explanations and her story, the collection is fragmented, dismembered, and inaccessible; the body parts are arranged on shelves in separate pickle jars filled with formaldehyde, but "'everything else [for example: clothing, housewares, playing cards, rum flask] can go on tables and chairs or hang on the wall or from the ceiling'" (Lill 125). The effect (and affect) of the Glace Bay miners' museum is contingent on Margaret's narrative, as it relies on shared knowledge of her family and community dynamics, and on shared cultural knowledge. Without her narrative, the museum's political and cultural message is occluded by the spectacle of the fragmented body – an "erasure," as Stewart writes, "of the significance of history" and meaning is lost in materiality (140). The danger of spectacle unsettling the politics of the display is reflected in the absence of visitor traffic to the museum, as the play's audience is supposed to be the first to see the exhibit. Margaret fails to understand how materiality is in itself traumatic, and how it negatively affects the political power of her collection, saying "'we give tea and scones free to anyone who comes. You're the first. I guess not too many people know about it yet. But it will pick up. These things take time'" (Lill 125). The consumption of tea and scones mirrors the consumption of people and things

in the collection, making the exhibit even more unsettling as it attempts to pair domestic comfort with the uncomfortable spectacle of the fragmented body. The museum occupies the house by the sea Neil had promised to build for Margaret upon their marriage and in which Margaret now lives, adding to the disturbing juxtaposition of domestic comfort and the discomfort produced by the spectacle of the body-turned-thing in pickle jars as if they were jars of preserves. Margaret and her collection appear to be domesticated, safely at home with a cup of tea. Her attempt to convert domestic space into political public space is not clearly successful or unsuccessful, as the play ends with her explanation of her selections and their display and her insistence on the importance of remembering "'because we sort of are what we remember'" (Lill 126). Her museum neither catalyzes the political change or cultural revitalization she hopes for, leaving her visitors/audience with a sense of ambivalence that reflects Canada's ambivalence about its own "Canadianness" and questions the potential of materiality to positively affect this ambivalence. As we go to leave the museum/close the book and the curtain falls, Margaret reminds us of the settler-as-victim and the importance of "reaching back" to the imperial centre that is "'just an ocean away. Just one good spit away'" (Lill 126). By the same token, disavowal of Indigenous victimization under British imperialism and complicity in the continuation of that violence is also "'just one good spit away.'"

At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined some implicit assumptions I see in Canadian literature, and which I read as being particularly challenged by

reading the conclusion of Lill's *The Glace Bay Miners' Museum* against that of Boyden's *Three Day Road.* As I have noted at the end of the previous chapter and at the start of this chapter, the violent circumstances that produce the deceased bodies Elijah and Margaret collect are very different. Margaret does not kill the people she collects like Elijah does, so in this literal sense her collecting is not malevolent and does not have greater judicial repercussions. Having established this fundamental difference, we can consider how the collecting of human remains is being culturally read, and how that reading speaks to and unsettles assumptions of innocence, guilt, and complicity that are produced by colonial practices. Elsner and Cardinal suggest that

> socially admissible collecting – whether a manifestation of bureaucratic dictates or of tolerated foibles – enables the rhythms of communal life to play according to their accustomed beat. But collecting can also attempt to challenge the norm . . . [and] the accepted patterns of knowledge into whose regulative frame the interests and energies of the world have been corralled (3).

Margaret's collecting results in her being briefly arrested but not in her being charged with a crime, but the lack of sentence does not mean that her collecting is "socially admissible." There are degrees of social admissibility, and this gradient is determined by "accepted patterns of knowledge" that are the product of colonial politics. Both Margaret and Elijah attempt to "challenge the norm" and "accepted patters of knowledge," and both fail in different ways and for different reasons. Elijah's attempt to challenge the Canadian army's reluctance to recognize Indigenous soldiers to the same degree as their Euro-Canadian counterparts fails because it inadvertently fulfills the colonial stereotype of the "bloodthirsty

Indian" that it seeks to refute. Margaret's attempt to challenge Canada's national ambivalence about its cultural identity and its exploitation of the Euro-Canadian settler fails because its domestication of its display perpetuates the ambivalence it seeks to criticize and disrupt. Elijah's collecting behaviour is read by his commanding officer through the lens of colonial racism, demonizing the "other" as "heathen" and discounting his body and its labour in war based on a racially-determined concept of deviance. Margaret's collecting behaviour is met with a more ambivalent response; aside from her mother's resistance to staying in the house she converts into the museum and the lack of visitor traffic, her collection is read as eccentric and unsettling, but not as deviant, "other," or "heathen." The contrast highlights Eurocentric assumptions of racial and cultural superiority and suggests that the Euro-Canadian settler is not the innocent victim of colonial politics that he/she appears to be in some literature. Margaret is equally capable of collecting human remains out of a desire to negotiate her ambivalent relationship with her cultural and national identity, of making subjects into objects, and of placing distance between herself and the trauma their production by describing them as "things" in their own pickle jars (Lill 122). The "things" in pickle jars do not unsettle the police in Glace Bay, who "'put [her] in [jail] 'til they forgot about [her]; then when they remembered [her] they forgot what they put [her] in for . . . [and] they let [her] go'" (Lill 123). We cannot let the assumption of settler-as-victim go so easily, but to do so is to take a step towards acknowledging our colonial complicity and re-negotiating our ambivalent national identity.

Chapter 5: Conclusions & Further Questions

> If collecting is meaningful,
> it is because it . . . opens its eyes
> to existence – the world around
> us, both cultural and natural in
> all its unpredictability and
> contingent complexity.
>
> -John Elsner & Roger Cardinal,
> *The Cultures of Collecting*

At the end of *Survival,* Margaret Atwood cited two questions someone asked her after reading the book. The reader wanted to know, "have we survived? If so, what happens *after* Survival?" (Atwood 293). These are difficult questions, and as Stephen Slemon writes, "good questions always exceed their answers. And answers are not really what good questions are meant to provoke, anyway" (Slemon 318). I do not aim to propose definitive answers because to do so would be to dismiss the difficulty of these questions, but to look at how material culture presents us a means of exploring possibilities. I began this project with an exploration of the ROM's *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibit to ask us to re-read where we, as Canadians, have ended up, and the implications of that position for the growth of our sense of national and cultural identity. The question is not whether we have survived, but rather of what happens next. *Into the Heart of Africa* taught us that we are still caught up in colonial practices, and regardless of whether those practices and their effects are implicit or explicit they still affect how Canadians locate themselves on the cultural spectrum. Material culture reflects the negotiation of identity, and by re-reading and re-collecting ourselves through things we come closer to ourselves. We may not like what we see when

we press noses and fingertips to Pearce's glass display case, but looking, as Margaret tells us, is the first step to seeing the politics behind the things themselves. Marlene Nourbese Philip's poem, "African Majesty: From Grassland and Forest (The Barbara and Murray Frum Collection)" mourns the "culture mined to abstraction" in a museum collection of African tribal artefacts, and criticizes the exploitation of the colonial "other" for First World Eurocentric consumption (Nourbese Philip 48). The collection and its display are not benign; "circles of plexiglass" imprison and erase "the lost I's" and "mourn the meaning in loss" (Nourbese Philip 48-49). Her words "mourn the meaning in loss" are especially resonant, speaking to the trauma of losing meaning in materiality and of making subjects into objects, and asking us to reclaim – to re-collect – that meaning. Jeanne Cannizzo, the curator of *Into the Heart of Africa*, failed to reclaim the meaning of a collection steeped in colonial politics and bring that meaning through the plexiglass that stifles it, despite demonstrating an understanding of visitor dynamics and the politics of display in her 1991 paper, "Negotiating Realities: Towards an Ethnography of Museums" (see works consulted). As Cannizzo's experience with the ROM exhibit shows, theoretical self-knowledge is not a substitute for shared cultural knowledge, and Canada's shared cultural knowledge is fractured by colonial power dynamics, dislocation, and disavowal. These fractures are reflected in Canadian literature and implicitly through the things that speak to us from within the literature: Cartier's text, the maps, the Gatling gun, the scalps, and the pickled body parts of the settler-as-

victim all say something to us about who we as a nation are now, and who we have been. As Atwood reminds us, "literature . . . is a map of the mind," but we do not have the entire map yet, and we do not know where we will end up.

Our lives are lived in constant relation to things, and these things have something to say about the lives they shape and to which they bear witness. Olsen writes that "people become human by living with and uniting with things" and that "things play an immensely important and indispensible role in making society possible as a rational and hybrid collective" (136, 139). By re-reading ourselves through things we are opening ourselves up to an implicit form of self-knowledge, and by reading how our personal things affect the ways in which we are moved by public collections and displays, we can re-read ourselves as Olsen's "hybrid collective" instead of as being polarized by the colonial centre/periphery binary. Benjamin's words on the world through the eyes of the collector highlight the power of collection to reinforce or subvert what he/she sees in the world. He suggests that the collector is motivated to collect because "right from the start, the great collector is struck by the confusion, by the scatter, in which the things of the world are found" (*The Arcades Project*, 211). The things of the world are also found in patterns of displacement and disavowal, and the literary Canadian collectors I have discussed are "struck" by these patterns in different ways. In Poulin's novel, Jack is "struck" by his inability to remember the "scatter" of his bookshelf as a meaningful and problematic pattern, whereas La Grande Sauterelle is "struck" by how the colonial centre/periphery binary has confused her

negotiation of cultural identity and seeks to re-collect herself through books. In Boyden's novel, Xavier is not "struck" as Elijah is by the uneven Eurocentric "scatter" of privilege among the soldiers. Elijah becomes a collector because of his desire to subvert and access the privilege created by the centre/periphery binary, but fails to order the "scatter" of colonial politics as he desires. In Lill's play, Margaret is "struck" by the confusion of the sudden and accidental deaths of her family members, and seeks to collect meaning from their deaths by collecting and politicizing parts of their bodies. Like these collectors, we are also "struck" by confusion and disorder, and materiality offers an effective (and affective) coping mechanism. As a coping mechanism, it is not without its risks – as Baudrillard and Stewart remind us – but this does not mean that collecting is devoid of promise, or that positive cultural change and national growth cannot be achieved by re-purposing and repatriating existing collections or by beginning new collections with new knowledge. Benjamin's comment gestures towards a human need to clarify, to collect, to re-collect, and to understand. Pearce also speaks to this need, offering an evocative comment that works well alongside Benjamin. She writes that "the need to decipher gives us the chance to bring out both what is in the object and what is in ourselves; it is a dynamic, complex movement which unfolds as time passes, and in the act of interpretive imagination we give form to ourselves" (Pearce, "Objects as meaning," 27). Benjamin's collector is "struck" by the "scatter in which the things of the world are found," is

motivated by Pearce's "need to decipher," and in-between the confusion of objects and the order of collection we find ourselves.

In *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*, Peter Schwenger writes that "identity . . . is a separating out, an attempt to distinguish one's own existence from other existences in the world. This attempt . . . can never be wholly successful; what is 'me' is always tacitly defined against what is 'not me' . . . and thus depends on the other" (9). Objects offer a means of negotiating what is "me" and what is "not me;" they construct and reinforce identity by reinforcing such binary distinctions in the act of selection. By selecting one thing over another we bring that object closer to ourselves and leave those we do not select excluded on the periphery. By selecting certain books to the exclusion of others, Jack maintains the Eurocentric centre/periphery binary and renders himself complicit in colonial practices, past and present. By attempting to exclude nothing, La Grande Sauterelle finds herself stuck in the midst of the same binary and must negotiate a position in-between. By selecting scalps according to the French soldier's instructions, Elijah inadvertently reinforces the binary and his exclusion from colonial privilege. Read alongside Elijah's collection, Margaret's collection reinforces Euro-Canadian privilege at the expense of the Indigenous periphery by constructing the Euro-Canadian settler-as-victim. Although these collections reinforce the centre/periphery binary or resist it with varying degrees of success, re-collecting and re-reading ourselves through things – and through books themselves as things – has the potential to destabilize this binary. The

recognition of implicit centre/periphery discourse in modern Canadian literature is the first step towards acknowledging our complicity in colonial practices that are still ongoing. From acknowledgement we can move towards accepting responsibility in place of ambivalence, and move forward in our re-collection of what it means to be Canadian.

Before I bring this project to a close, I will return briefly to concepts borrowed from archive theory that speak to the power and unsettling capacity of the material collection. I would have liked to deal with these ideas in greater depth throughout the thesis, but as Olsen says *In Defense of Things*, "to write is also to be selective and to include what one knows and, for various reasons, considers relevant" (18). I do consider this tangent to be relevant, but the scope of the project does not allow for much theoretical expansion in this direction and for the amount of postcolonial and material culture theory needed to frame the discussion. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida suggests that "to have a concept at one's disposal , to have assurances with regard to it, is to presuppose a closed heritage and the guarantee sealed, in some sense, by that heritage" (33). He is referring to the concept of the archive, but this statement is also applicable to our ambivalent relationship with our own "Canadianness." To assume that we know what Canada is, and what that says about us as Canadians, is to assume that our concept of Canada is static rather than fluid and to limit our cultural growth as a nation. As I suggested in my earlier discussion of Comay's bookshelf metaphor and the collection as a "cipher of loss and dispossession," the

act of collecting is also an act of archiving, and the collection also functions as a material culture archive. Derrida argues that the archive (and, by extension, the collection) "is not the question of a concept of dealing with the past that might *already* be at our disposal, *an archivable concept of the archive*. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow" (36). The archive – and the collection as material culture archive – necessarily deals with the implications of the past for the future, and the act of archiving/collecting can be an act of assuming or denying responsibility for that future. Brydon speaks to Derrida's call for responsibility in the archive/collection, and speaks to the necessity of moving "beyond a politics of representation toward a politics of responsibility" (51). Although the things that are archived and collected are divested of their original functions, they still present us with a tool for re-collecting and understanding ourselves. They provide us with a new kind of knowledge – a tool for seeing our own reflections in Pearce's display case more clearly, for reading and re-reading our complicity in Jack's bookshelf, for feeling our vulnerability in the darkness of Elijah's rucksack as he collects his pound of flesh, and for seeing the denial of our national cultural responsibility in Margaret's macabre museum. The collection may act as a "cipher of loss and dispossession," but only if we do not take it – and ourselves – off of the shelf we have constructed with our own ambivalence.

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