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Revisiting Canadian Modernism: Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* (1959)

André Dodeman

- 1 Robert Kroetsch once wrote in the 1970s that Canadian fiction evolved directly from Victorian fiction to postmodernism in the 1960s, and although such a statement was meant in jest, it nevertheless showed to what extent readers were more familiar with realist and postmodernist writers than with the modernist innovations of the 1950s. The fact that most modernist texts of the 1950s had been printed by small presses had the effect of relegating Canadian modernism to a short period of transition in Canadian literary history, not to mention the acclaimed rise of Canadian postmodernism in the 1960s and early 1970s with internationally famous writers like Leonard Cohen and Margaret Atwood. In the first half of the twentieth century, the realist tradition held a strong position in Canada thanks to writers like Frederick Philip Grove and Hugh MacLennan who familiarized readers worldwide with a specific local or regional Canadian time and space by resorting to the more well-known, classic modes of realism and romance. It was in the aftermath of World War Two, which destabilized notions of order and meaning, that writers began experimenting with narrative form and reshaping Canadian fiction. Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) and Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel* (1954) are only two examples of innovative experimentation with storytelling, but it is more importantly Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* – published in 1959, but completed in 1952 – that critics identify today with the emergence of Canadian modernism.
- 2 Watson's novel played a role in challenging classic modes of storytelling and former realist conventions, and in contributing to a specifically Canadian modernist aesthetic. The result is a story that, to this day, remains exceptional in its inclination to resist clear-cut classification. In the United States and Europe, modernist novels were concerned with representing the fragmented nature of the world and the long-term effects of the First World War.¹ There is no denying that Watson was inspired by these

models, but rather than drawing a macrocosmic portrait of a fragmented world, her novel sought to represent a microcosmic dislocated community in the British Columbia interior in need of spiritual reconnection and social reconstruction.

- 3 This article will first examine Watson's aesthetics of narrative and spatial fragmentation in the novel before focusing on the problematics of linguistic fragmentation, which has always been one of the major concerns of European and American modernist texts. Watson's narrative technique and stylistic devices question the very ability of language to speak for a community that is unable to articulate their own concerns and find meaning to their existence. The result is a highly exceptional novel that is now associated with a specifically Canadian modernist aesthetic, which problematizes the relationship between a vast and ominous landscape and the language that is used to represent and appropriate it. Recent readings of *The Double Hook* in this light have allowed many readers and academics to develop a more profound understanding of Canadian modernism.

A fragmented narrative for fragmented spaces

- 4 In *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature*, published in the early 1960s, Frank Joseph wrote that one of the main differences between realist and modernist aesthetics is the presence or lack of "historical depth" within the narrative. In modernist novels, such "historical depth," he writes, has been replaced by a "spatial fusion" (qtd. in Morriss 2015, 77) of past and present in which plot and character seem to evolve in a centripetal fictional world outside history. Time becomes purely mythical in the story as the characters go through a collective crisis in a nameless landscape without clear time indications. *The Double Hook* is set in a small, rural and extremely isolated community located at Dog Creek, in an area more commonly known as the Cariboo country, in the Canadian province of British Columbia. The isolation of this small community from a vaster outside world is illustrated by the incipit, a form of *dramatis personae* that not only serves to introduce the readers to the characters, but also grounds the characters in a local space and prefigures the content of the entire chapter:

In the folds of the hills
under Coyote's eye
lived
the old lady, mother of William
of James and of Greta
lived James and Greta
lived William and Ara his wife
lived the Widow Wagner
the Widow's girl Lenchen
the Widow's boy
lived Felix Prosper and Angel
lived Theophil
and Kip

until one morning in July (Watson 1959, 19)

This modern technique of disrupting the classic layout of narrative recalls earlier works by Lost Generation poets such as e.e.cummings and writers like John Dos Passos whose *U.S.A.* trilogy displayed the same features of break and fragmentation to

challenge classic conventions, disrupt the readers' expectations and awaken them to the political and cultural transformations of the modern world. In Watson's incipit, the spaces between the opening lines foreground the break between the first two haunting figures of Coyote and the mother and the small community made up of James, Greta and William, the Widow's family, Felix Prosper and his wife Angel and finally Kip. It also foregrounds Watson's deliberate choice to downplay the classic function of the omniscient narrator by reducing it to an exterior, impersonal function dominated by the trickster figure of Coyote and his all-seeing eye/I. Even though Watson openly admitted in an interview that she "wanted to get rid of reportage" and "the condescension of omniscience" (Watson 2015, 165), this barely perceptible, yet all-encompassing narrator serves to expose the deeply fragmented nature of the community by dealing with each character separately in the opening chapters of the novel. The only action that brings the characters together is the haunting figure of the slain mother seen fishing on everyone's property.

- 5 As mentioned above, the novel's regional setting, the community's isolated location and the absence of any clear time indication anchor the characters in a mythical time and space which foregrounds Watson's intention to draw universal meaning from a rural, microcosmic community in the British Columbia interior. Many reviews and articles have been written about *The Double Hook* and its recreation of a mythical time of beginnings. The plethora of biblical references in the story has led Margot Northey, in "Symbolic Grotesque: *The Double Hook*," to write that "the message of *The Double Hook* is religious" and that the story is "about redemption written from a Christian vantage point" (Northey 2015, 62). It is true that the story begins with the crime of matricide that will affect the entire community and act as a triggering moment in the narrative. James, the leader of the community, kills his own mother by throwing her down the stairs:

James was at the top of the stairs. His hand half-raised. His voice in the rafters.

James walking away. The old lady falling. There under the jaw of the roof. In the vault of the bed loft. Into the shadow of death. Pushed by James's will. By James's hand. By James's words: This is my day. You'll not fish today. (Watson 1959, 19)

This *in medias res* beginning, enhanced by its dominant ING forms, deprives the incipit of the causality so characteristic of realist fiction and gives the scene a mythical dimension. Killing his own mother, who is understood to have ruled over the community with an iron fist, becomes an original act of rebellion and a sin that disrupt the apparent tranquility and unity of the community. In his chapter entitled "Sheila Watson, Wyndham Lewis and Men Without Art," Dean Irvine associates James's clenched fist with "what the German expressionists called *Aufbruch*, an awakening from a repressed condition and a violent breaking free from the past" (2016, 185). This inaugural matricide constitutes an original sin that echoes the biblical myth of the fall, the main consequence of which was the isolation of humanity and man's permanent separation from the divine. The crime itself is the triggering act that moves the plot forward to elicit a silent, fragmented, and postlapsarian world. It is only after James's descent from the hill to the "town below" and his subsequent return that the community begins to rebuild itself on more solid grounds.

- 6 The community is a nameless microcosm in a nameless valley, the position of which can only be determined in relation to the nameless "town below" and the "Indian reservation" in between. Watson's diegetic world plays on the metaphor of the *axis mundi* insofar as the monolithic, yet anthropomorphized hill (with its arms, lips and

ribs) towers above the characters and the town below. The valley and the town both serve as the community's upper and lower boundaries that foreground the fragmentation of the community in which each individual is a separate inarticulate entity. However, this metaphor of the *axis mundi* suggests possible upward or downward movements that, as Northrop Frye contends in *Words with Power*, are prone to moments of development and transformation.² After blinding Kip – the First Nations character closest to Coyote – for seeing too much of the truth, and striking his sister Greta and Lenchen, the girl he has made pregnant, James saddles his horse and leaves to go to the town below:

The world didn't seem to care. James passed William's house. He passed Theophil's. He passed the Wagners'. Smoke was rising from the Wagners' chimney; otherwise, there was no sign of life. James passed Felix Prosper's. (Watson 1959, 91)

The paratactic style of the paragraph marking the beginning of James's descent from the community "up above" (96) to the "town below" (92) unveils a fragmented community that stands in sharp contrast with the paragraph relating his return after a transformative stay in the town:

The horse had brought him on the brow of the hill. Below him he could see the road which ran up the creek past Felix Prosper's, past Theophil's, past the Widow Wagner's, past William's, round by the flat lake to his own gate. (127)

- 7 The preposition "past" serves, like all other prepositions, to link words together and convey a sense of syntactic unity. This unity expressing his renewal and return is in keeping with many earlier modernist works which aimed to portray the fragmented nature of the world after catastrophic cosmic events such as World War One and the Great Depression, all the while hinting at the possibility of a return to order and wholeness. In the same way, Watson's novel ends with the return of the hero, his reconciliation with the rest of the community and the birth of his child. This well-rounded denouement is clearly a result of her own experience with geographical and psychological isolation in the midst of the ineffable British Columbian landscape she discovered when she was working as a schoolteacher from 1935 to 1937. In "Ethics, Spectres, and Formalism in Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*," Marlene Goldman underscores the writer's view that such isolation could only be resolved through contact and communication: "Watson's experience of loneliness and of the unendurable physical and, more importantly, psychological isolation directly inform her novel about the moral imperative to transcend isolation, to care for others, and to create a sense of community" (2007, 193). Drawing on her own experience, Watson leads readers to understand that the sense of community which is absent from the beginning of *The Double Hook* can only be restored through language and communication.

A broken language for a broken community

- 8 Watson's own experience of reading and teaching along with her interaction with the Dog Creek community in the British Columbia interior led her to investigate the problematics of language and art that resulted in the very original and exceptional form of *The Double Hook*. The singular and yet all-seeing and unidentifiable narrator, the highly symbolic content of the novel which minimizes the importance of plot and history, the highly condensed syntax and the prevalence of prose poetry are only some of the main features of the book that mark a break with what was being written at the

time. In fact, Watson's work, like many other modernist novels written before hers, anticipated some of the later poststructuralist concerns with language and meaning. The various rhetorical devices in her novel point to the discrepancy between signifier and signified and the subsequent fluctuation of meaning it entails. These renderings of the discrepancies and fluctuations in meaning heralded the epistemological questions raised by later poststructuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida who would introduce new ideas such as *trace* and *différance* and problematize the interplay between identity and otherness.

- 9 The enigmatic title of the novel already testifies to Watson's argument that words cannot be limited to a single and easily identifiable meaning, and that they also contain the trace of otherness. It is the enigmatic oracular character Kip that gives the title its meaning:

[James] doesn't know you can't catch the glory on a hook and hold on to it. That when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. That if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear. (Watson 1959, 61)

The recurrent term "glory" was chosen for its polysemy and points to the inextricable nature of the connection between life and death. After James kills his mother, each of the characters sees her spectral figure fishing in a place where she does not belong, evoking the haunting presence of death in the very fabric and meaning of life.

- 10 In addition to polysemy, other rhetorical devices are used to arrest and draw the reader's attention to the instability and ambiguity of meaning. The text is replete with anaphoras which aim at evincing the internal workings of a character's thought processes. The widow's son Heinrich chases Kip away because of his role as harbinger of death and the narrator invites the reader into the young character's mind:

Stood thinking how a horse can stand in sunlight and know nothing but the saddle and the sting of sweat on hide and the salt line forming under the saddle's edge. Stood thinking of sweat and heat and the pain of living, the pain of fire in the middle of a haystack. Stood thinking of light burning free on the hills and flashing like the glory against the hides of things. (Watson 1959, 28)

The anaphora and the /s/ alliteration in the first sentence formally illustrate how words and sounds naturally associate with others and how meaning tends to naturally disseminate. The polyptoton and tautology are also frequently used to hint at the precarious relationship between form and meaning. While the polyptoton ("People keep *thinking thoughts* into other people's heads," 75) suggests the morphing of meaning into other meanings, the tautological expressions in the text that are usually spoken by James's brother William ("The thing about a dog lying in the sunlight is it just lies in the sunlight," 130) hint at the reflexivity of language and, more importantly, its shortcomings. These devices show that language and meaning constantly elude the characters, some of whom feel the need to fall back on the reassuring, fixed languages of the past.

- 11 Yet fixed words and expressions are much too burdened by meanings related to the past to fit into a new environment and a new era. In her analysis of language in Watson's *The Double Hook*, Barbara Godard argues that Watson tried to "free language from the burden of the past" (1978), a burden that is best illustrated by the many proverbs, aphorisms and Latin expressions that tend to disconnect language from experience. It is the character of Felix Prosper, the priest-like figure of the novel, who is associated with ossified Latin expressions that are gradually downplayed by the surrounding modern and experimental form of the text. In the first chapter of the

second part of the novel, the readers discover that Felix's mind is replete with ritual expressions and words:

His mind sifted ritual phrases. Some half forgotten. You're welcome. Put your horse in. Pull up. *Ave Maria. Benedictus fructus ventris. Introibo.*
Introibo. The beginning. The whole thing to live again. Words said over and over here by the stove. His father knowing them by heart. God's servants. The priest's servants. The cup lifting. The bread breaking. *Domine non sum dignus.* Words coming. The last words. (Watson 1959, 51)

Even though Linda M. Morra is right in asserting that Felix's "memory of Catholic liturgy offers a specific mediating ritual" which will enable him to become a "necessary disruptive element in the existing media ecology" (2016, 224), words come to Felix's mind in a chaotic fashion at the beginning of the novel. The liturgical Catholic expressions are set against the everyday language of ordinary existence, blurring the border between mythical time and the present. In his study of myths, Mircea Eliade defines Christian liturgical time as a means to return to the *illud tempus* of the beginning (1963, 208), a sacred time that also justifies the absence of verbs and the frequent use of ING forms in this particular passage. Such forms represent the past as a patchwork of ossified images and memories that hampers progress and stalls Felix's development into a more empathetic, communicative character. The last two lines that follow a slightly chiasmic pattern show to what extent Felix is trapped in the world of rituals and reified language that work against any effort to unite the dislocated community. Even though the novel focuses primarily on the inability to communicate, it concludes on an optimistic tone with Felix rising to the occasion and acting as Lenchen's midwife. In addition, the plot comes full circle with James's return to the village and the birth of his child, hinting at the possibility of a new beginning that has yet to be articulated. Morra shares a similar reading of *The Double Hook* and argues that it can be read as

an exploration of communication, of its attendant failures, and of the repercussions for a group of people whose environment is no longer a source of mutual understanding and for whom the current "technology" – language, art, and mediating rituals, the vehicles for communication – does not function. (2016, 213)

- 12 The fact that Watson's characters are unable to use language to communicate with one another also accounts for the narrator's reluctance to mention their cultural identities explicitly. Watson's elliptical style and narrative silences run the risk of turning the novel's characters into mere stereotypes, which was what Watson was trying to avoid. As Watson once stated in one of her interviews, she wanted to do something about the West without turning the story into a Western; she wanted to do something "about Indians which wasn't about... Indians" (2015, 164). More importantly, she wanted to discuss

how people are driven, how if they have no art, how if they have no tradition, how if they have no ritual, they are driven in one of two ways, either towards violence or towards insensitivity—if they have no mediating rituals which manifest themselves in what I suppose we call art forms. (164)

- 13 The characters in her novel are defined negatively and the universality Watson aspired to in her narrative had the downside effect of relativizing cultural identity and origin. Margaret Morriss, in her research into the evolution of the book, explains that the novel had undergone two major revisions (that is to say three major versions overall, including the published one) which have dialed down what she calls the "identification tags of nationality and history" (2015, 74). The First Nations communities in the novel

are located in an in-between space between the valley and the town below and the earlier versions of Watson's text were much more explicit about ethnic origin and cultural identity. For instance, the characters of Kip and Angel are identified as First Nations in the earlier versions while James, William and Greta are identified as a mixed group. In the final version, however, it is Coyote who solely stands for First Nations cultural identity. If these identities are not explicitly defined in the final version of the text, it is to better show how these characters are cut off from their origins and their original language. Being severed from one's origins provides yet another reason for this apparent want of identity and subsequent inability to communicate which are liable to trigger wanton violence. The antiquated languages of the past lose their meaning in this new space, which is why Watson insists on the importance of finding a new language for a new space, a space that Bhabha would later identify as a third space between the old and the new and which would enable "other positions to emerge" and new forms to appear (1990, 211).

A new form

- 14 Watson's exceptionally modern experimentation with language in *The Double Hook* was also a way of standing out from the dominating realist tradition of the first half of the twentieth century in Canada. Stephen Scobie, who wrote a biocritical study entitled *Sheila Watson and Her Works* in 1984, did not hide his enthusiasm for her work and his judgement of previous male-dominated realist writing. He stated that her work was a reaction against the "clumsy intensities of Frederick Philip Grove; the dreary and derivative banalities of Morley Callaghan; the urbane and academic essay writing of Hugh MacLennan" (qtd. in Pivato 2015, 11). It is worth noting here that this quote does not do justice to the works of Grove, Callaghan and MacLennan that have shaped early twentieth-century Canadian literature. Not only has Callaghan's work often been read as a gradual transition between realism and modernism, but MacLennan's unpublished novels, *So All Their Praises* (1933) and *A Man Should Rejoice* (1937), are clear evidence that these writers were fully aware of the literary experimentation that characterized modernist novels. In fact, it was MacLennan's publishers who wanted a local novel, which is why he returned to the more classic mode of realism.
- 15 As "a mode of writing embedded in history" and centered on "empirical and observable life" (O'Gorman 2012, 485), realism left little to no space for the problematics of language. Grove's realist prairie fiction and Hugh MacLennan's blends of realism and romance are set in fictional worlds where meaning is stable and where the silences and gaps that Watson artfully elicited in *The Double Hook* are filled in by an omniscient demiurgic narrator. In his study of early twentieth-century realist writing in Canada, Colin Hill prefers to use the term "modern realism" to refer to their work. In *Modern Realism in English-Canadian Fiction*, he explains that one of the major differences between modern realism and modernism in Canada lies less in the realists' ability or inability to innovate than in their attachment to a "national-referential ideal" (2012, 20) that served as the groundwork for their representations of a contemporary Canada. It therefore comes as no surprise that, after decades of realist fiction, readers were ready to discover new forms of writing that clearly stood out from more traditional plotlines and discourses. Indeed, after participating in two world wars, Canadians were less in demand for the didacticism that was so central to Hugh MacLennan's work, such as *Two*

Solitudes (1945) or *Return of the Sphinx* (1967) that both tackle the duality – but not the diversity – of the Canadian nation. It is perhaps the rigidity of both modes of realism and romance that opened up a different space for other writers – namely women and minority writers – to explore. The absence of First Nations in the works of Hugh MacLennan for instance is just as telling in terms of inclusion in or exclusion from the discursive formation of nation.

- 16 It is no doubt the opening up of this space in Canadian fiction that makes Watson's *The Double Hook* so exceptional. In fact, Watson was at a historical and literary crossroads between the traditional realist mode of early twentieth-century Canadian literature that promoted stability and the European and American modernist texts, many of which resulted from the writers' sense of alienation from the contemporary world. This connection between Watson and the Lost Generation is made clear in Emily Ballantyne, Marta Dvorak and Dean Irvine's *Translocated Modernisms* in which they argue that writers and artists such as Watson "have at once real and imagined affiliations with the Lost Generation that come from shared aesthetic engagements with cultural modernity as articulations of alterity and a common lived experience of social dislocation and alienation" (2016, 4). While *The Double Hook* manages to combine the modernist techniques of European and American writers (Watson not only read but also taught and wrote on Joyce's *Ulysses*), the novel nevertheless centers on the particularities of a local Western landscape and the idiosyncrasies of its inhabitants in an attempt to draw universal meaning from a local environment. In her study of Sheila Watson, Marshall McLuhan and Wyndham Lewis, Elena Lamberti goes further and posits that these writers rather "transcend modernism" and "are better read as representatives of a universal search that transcends the local and temporal dimension, and reaches a more international scenario and broader spectrum of interpretive possibilities" (2016, 45). Overall, Watson's work can be said to be inspired both by Lost Generation writers and by local Canadian landscapes, and it continues to owe its exceptionality to the exploration of these in-between geographical and literary spaces. In her interview "Sheila Watson in Her Own Words," Watson explains that she wanted her characters to interact with the landscapes of British Columbia to show that "the people are intertwined in, [...] interacting with the landscape, and the landscape is interacting with them ... not the landscape, the things about them, the other things which exist" (2015, 165). In the first pages of the novel, William's wife Ara observes the landscape from the rails of a fence:

If a man lost the road in the land round William Potter's, he couldn't find his way by keeping to the creek bottom for the creek flowed this way and that at the earth's whim. The earth fell away in hills and clefts as if it had been dropped carelessly wrinkled on the bare floor of the world. (Watson 1959, 22)

Watson describes a landscape that isolates the community from the rest of the world. The misleading course of the creek, along with the clefts, wrinkles and other interstitial spaces of the landscape, testify to the slow geological transformations of the natural world that demonstrate that change is the rule, not the exception. While the ever-retreating landscape helps Ara, the main focalizer of this passage, realize how isolated and divided her community truly is, it takes on a new meaning for James during his return journey insofar as it helps him understand that the rifts that keep the members of his community separate are just as impermanent as the "folds and creases" of the earth (127). James's interactions with and crossings of the various edges, borders and natural obstacles between the town below and his own community evince Watson's

non-essentialist views of identity, the investigation of which remains central to her modernist aesthetic.

- 17 Critical interest in Canadian modernism has grown over the past decade as a response to the seeming lack of attention paid to works that had been published in Canada over a relatively short period of time between the 1950s and early 1960s. In 2011, Richard J. Lane tackled this question of Canadian modernism in his *Routledge Concise History of Canadian Literature* in which he wrote that “[Canadian modernism’s] distinctiveness [was] still being explored and discussed in Canada [...], using new critical paradigms and newly edited and published texts” (2011, 95). The aforementioned academic work on Canadian modernism is a clear response to this need to complete the history of twentieth-century Canadian literature. Such work has also had the advantage of shedding light on other works of fiction that have more or less thoroughly explored the same linguistic and aesthetic questions. Ernest Buckler’s *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952), for instance, belongs to the tradition of the *Künstlerroman* and similarly focuses on the artist’s difficulty in finding the appropriate language to voice the concerns and worldviews of his native, inarticulate community in the Annapolis Valley. In *Ernest Buckler: Rediscovery and Reassessment*, Marta Dvorak shows how his work illustrates his adherence “to the modernist questioning of the status of language [and] of linguistic conventions” (2001, 4). Another contemporaneous example is Ethel Wilson’s *Swamp Angel* (1954), which recounts the journey of Maggie Vardoe, a female character who walks out of her marriage in order to start her life over in the British Columbia interior. Her new-found freedom enables her to exult “in each small sight and sound, in new time, in new space” (Wilson 1991, 21) and discover a new identity away from the social pressures of marital life. The various concerns with and questions about the silences meant to bring inarticulateness to the fore would also seep into realist and romantic fiction. Even though Charles Bruce’s *The Channel Shore* (1954) is not categorized as modernist fiction and does not attempt to draw the reader’s attention to the problematics of language, it nevertheless focuses on thought processes and anamnesis, both of which are associated with the idea of memory as a patchwork of images. Bruce’s representation of memory as an accumulation of images is artfully rendered by the various ocean and shore metaphors evoking the eroding power of time.
- 18 Revisiting Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook* and these other contemporaneous novels also offers the advantage of challenging the clear-cut distinctions that are usually made between the aesthetic trends making up literary history. In fact, this observation loosely echoes philosopher Paul Ricœur’s views on the novelty, originality and exceptionality of certain narratives. After studying the works of early modernists like James Joyce and T.S. Eliot, Ricœur explains that modern narratives, however new and schismatic they claim to be, can never be completely new and are always shaped by texts of the past (1984, 52). This is why many realist texts dating from the beginning of the twentieth century are never completely devoid of innovation and why the novelty and meaning of a modernist novel depends on the literature published by previous generations. Even though it can be said that *The Double Hook* is truly original and exceptional in terms of form as it subtly combines prose and poetry while drawing attention to the power of words and the dire consequences of the failure to communicate, the novel still owes a great deal to all the earlier novels that have also examined, albeit differently, the problematics of local identity and cultural transformation.

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NOTES

1. Sheila Watson was very familiar with the works of European modernists like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. In the late 1970s, she was asked to write a study guide for a literature class at Athabasca University which gradually evolved into an essay entitled "How to Read *Ulysses*." Sections of this essay can be read in Joseph Pivato's *Sheila Watson: Essays on Her Works* (2015).
 2. In *Words With Power: Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature*, Frye defines the *axis mundi* as "a vertical line running from the top to the bottom of the cosmos," which "is related only to a verbal universe, though naturally the images used to illustrate it suggest climbing into the sky or descending into the depths of the earth or sea" (1990, 151). Frye also argues that ascending or descending movements are often associated with the acquisition of new forms of consciousness and awareness.
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ABSTRACTS

This article proposes to revisit Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* (1959) and the role it played in the emergence of Canadian modernism in the 1950s. Watson's experimentation with narrative and her examination of the traditional borders between prose and poetry account for her novel's position in Canadian literature as a singular text. While this paper will consider Watson's novel in light of the realist tradition that shaped early twentieth-century Canadian literature, it will also pay close attention to the writer's desire to break free from such conventions by writing a story that remains exceptional in its inclination to elude clear-cut identification.

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André Dodeman is currently working as an Associate Professor at the University of Grenoble Alpes. He wrote his PhD thesis on Hugh MacLennan's work. He published several articles on English-Canadian writers such as Margaret Atwood, Alistair MacLeod and Yann Martel and he co-edited four volumes on postcolonial literature and culture, the latest entitled *Negotiating Waters: Seas, Oceans, and Passageways in the Colonial and Postcolonial Anglophone World* (Vernon Press, 2020) published in close collaboration with Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada.