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1 Asked to explain how he begins a new short story, Canadian author Jack Hodgins emphasized the role of storyteller, declaring “the voice is the story” (Kruk Voice 156). My interest is in the remarkable ability of four Canadian writers—King, MacLeod, Senior, Vanderhaeghe—to evoke the spoken word on the page through first-person narrators, often creating what I call the “double voice”: narratively, linguistically, culturally. Drawing on Bakhtin’s illumination of the fictional strategy of “double-voicing” as a means of creating meaningfully “dialogized” narratives, I will examine how these writers create orality effects that undermine dominant discourses, especially those of gender, nationality, ethnicity and class. My first question is, who is speaking, and why? Alistair MacLeod addresses focalization when he explains, “I just think about the story and the question I ask myself is, ‘Who gets to tell the story?’ Because that changes everything...” (Kruk Voice 168). In literature, “voice” can initially be defined simply as “the verbal characteristics of the narrator, the one who speaks” (Frye et al), but always trailing a complicating tie, according to Bakhtin, to the “speaking consciousness” with “a will or desire behind it, its own timbre and overtones” (Bakhtin Dialogic 434). Bakhtin’s interpretation suggests a complication of voice by an author, whether biographical or implied, and that consequently, the operation of ideology within fictional voice is inevitable. Going beyond a formalist study of the narrator’s role, I would like to ask, what is the speaker’s (peculiarly Canadian?) relation to dominant cultural discourses? And how is the speaker involved in collaborative family narratives of self/subjectivity? In what ways do these voices “redraw” family circles, politically speaking?
So (as King’s storyteller would begin), how can a short story “keep” the quality of voiced “orality” on the page, post-poststructuralist debate about signs and signifiers? And how are these constructed voices the outcomes of differently compelling family arrangements? King, Senior, MacLeod, Vanderhaeghe echo aspects of the “psychodynamics of orality,” as Walter J. Ong puts it, within stories which foreground storytelling voices performing rhetorically for constructed auditors. In order to shape both performance and audience, each speaker defines a different “family circle,” from widest to narrowest scope. The authors’ shared success at creating first-person voices which appear to undermine, while paradoxically supporting, textuality, reflects views of “family” not unrelated to the culture of primary orality, with its view of speech as sacred and narrative as foundational to human existence. First, and most expansively, family may be redefined as “the relations” which are omnipresent in King’s controversial trickster tale, “A Columbus Coyote Story,” which originally wore the “sheep’s clothing” of an illustrated children’s book. Second, family embraces the community of neighbours addressed by Senior’s street-prophet Isabella Francina Myrtella Jones (“You Think I Mad, Miss?”). MacLeod invokes ancestry by encompassing five generations with his tale in “As Birds Bring Forth the Sun,” while Vanderhaeghe draws us into the contemporary nuclear family’s “Cages,” focusing particularly on the triangle of “Pop” and his two sons, Gene and Billy Simpson.

All four authors may also be brought together as writers of “realist” fiction, although with qualifications. Teresa Gibert argues for King’s blending of “realism with “myth” into “magic realism,” a term which may call for even more qualifications. And in a lengthy interview with Charles H. Rowell, Senior makes this observation: “Though most of my writing is in a realistic vein, I am conscious at all times of other possibilities lurking just beyond consciousness, of the great ineffable mystery that lies at the core of each life, at the heart of every story” (484). As well, King and Senior may be joined as subjects of a “postcolonial” reading, or a reading that foregrounds the cultural politics of Natives in Canada, a “settler/invader” colony, as some would define it, and the cultural and linguistic subordination of the Jamaican Creole like Senior who is “racially and socially a child of mixed worlds, socialized unwittingly and simultaneously into both” (Rowell 481). As writers and subjects King and Senior both enact multiple “border crossings.” First, each is ambiguously situated in terms of Canadian literary citizenship: King, a dual-citizen of both Canada and America, is a mixed-blood man who identifies himself as a Native writer and Senior is a self-exiled writer living in Toronto but memorializing Jamaica in her fiction and poetry. Despite different points of origin, both King and Senior present counter-hegemonic perspectives from the indigenous and the marginalized, disrupting the “monologic” writing voice and modernist short story with the creation of multiple story-creators, as in King and the appearance of obsessive retelling (with a difference), as in Senior. In both stories, the storyteller’s gender is similarly marginalized—feminine, for Senior or unknown for King. Gaps in the reader’s implied understanding open up silences which resonate with other voices, other linguistic and social systems that test the boundaries of imperialistic “Englishness”. Their writing highlights the hybrid nature of communication, revealing different kinds of authority behind what appears, in King’s case, to be an extended “joke” on a non-Native audience, or a testifying, in Senior’s, to an act of ostracism which demands a new hearing in Creolized English. Thus each story interrogates the power of dominant cultural
discourse (the history textbook, medicine, law, the state—standard English itself) and so offers what Davidson, Walter and Andrews cleverly call “an alterna(rra)tive” (5).

King’s “A Coyote Columbus Story” was written in response to the quincentennial of the Columbus expedition to the Caribbean in 1992 (Davis 59), and by metonymic extension, to North America or the “New World.” King himself calls this a “voice piece” meant to be “read aloud” (Davis 50, 51) and as a result, it works as a deliberate attempt to revise dominant discourse in terms of conceptual structure as well as overt content. However, as Sharon Bailey points out, analyzing Green Grass, Running Water, King’s most-discussed text, King foregrounds the opposition between oral and written authority, undermining the latter but yet inscribing the oral within textuality. King’s texts “work to conflate the oral and written modes, and function, in effect, as ‘hybrid’ works” (Davidson, Walton and Andrews 110). Drawing on his research on canonized Native storytellers such as Harry Robinson, King creates a storyteller voice that remembers, he says, that “his audience was a part of the story” (Davis 50). The importance of audience suggests King’s use of “associational” to describe the type of Native literature that treats the community largely for its “insiders,” rather than non-Native “outsiders”. The audience is thus immediately drawn into the text as auditor—“You know, Coyote came by my place the other day”, the story begins—and there shares space with Coyote, the implied listener within the narrative frame that precedes the parody of the Columbus narrative. Coyote is stopped from happily attending a “party” for Columbus, the “one who found America” (and Indians) and “We” are invited to the teller’s kitchen table for a different teaching:

“Sit down, I says. Have some tea. We’re going to have to do this story right. We’re going to have to do this story now.

It was all old Coyote’s fault, I tell Coyote, and here is how the story goes. Here is what really happened.

So.” (124).

The narrative frame actually implies a series of such tellings, gesturing to a community still knit together by storykeeping, reminiscent of Ong’s primary orality culture. Indeed, both history book and map, products of a chirographic culture—and later, the television and computers Columbus’s men seek, 126—are negatively compared to the storytelling as a “doing.” King’s storyteller remains anonymous (ungendered, unhistoricized) yet this voice is authoritative within a cultural context of Native storytelling, as adapted by King. This authority is partly based on what we as educated readers would recognize as the deliberate absence of English “literariness”—for instance, the story’s “seemingly plotlessness” and solecisms (Davis 51). Defining speech tics such as grammatical errors (“I says”), phatics and connectors (“So” and “Well,”), simple sentence structure and weighted pauses help to remind us, when read aloud, of aspects of the “psychodynamics of orality.” One stock phrase, “I can tell you that” acts as a statement of veracity, almost of testifying, enhancing the illusion of the storyteller’s communally responsive voice.

Coyote as listener is drawn into the story in the guise of Old Coyote, the ancestor, who replays the canonical Eurocentric story, but from the other side. King here uses parody as a form of double-voicing where “parody introduces into [the imperialist discourse] a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one” (Bakhtin, Problems 193). The Indians are “created” first, as friends for baseball-playing Coyote, who eventually drives them off by not playing by “the rules,” rules which are admittedly flexible in Coyote’s usage. This is a violation of friendship, they say, reminding us that in the Native version of discovery-as-creation, the emphasis “is on family and friendship, not on domination and division” (Davidson, Walton, Andrews 82). Almost out of boredom,
trickster/creator Coyote “dreams up” the Italian explorer, marked out as Other with his “red hair” and “silly clothes,” his men and his three famous ships. King’s critique of European proto-capitalism is sharp, as the explorers care only for things to sell, leaping from 15th to 20th century in a breath (actually, paragraph break): “Yes, they says, where is the gold?/...silk cloth?/...portable colour televisions?/...home computers?” (125-26). Their comically insatiable greed finally turns the Indians themselves into commodities. The Europeans act “as if they have no relations,” or in King’s own interpretation of pan-Indian values, “they’re not responsible to that larger and extended [family] group” (Davis 61). This is the final example of “bad manners”, but still appears only as a “joke” to Coyote, who laughs until she is out of playmates (except for some “blue jays”). The Indians are sold and Columbus becomes rich and famous. Then the narrator returns as teacher to underscore the point to Coyote (and us) that “those things [America, Indians] were always here. Those things are still here today” and “that’s the truth. I can tell you that” (129). Besides, in a final joking inversion which collapses academic distinctions between cultures, the “big red History book” (123) that contained the other version was probably written by Coyote, to start with.

Senior’s “You Think I Mad, Miss?” also enacts historical revision, through the specific history of the “mad” woman, Isabella Francina Myrtella Jones, whose angry voice accosts us in ten different passages addressed to townspeople, driving through the downtown area she haunts like a Caribbean Cassandra. This monologue mixes Jamaican patois/patwa with Standard English in a hybridized construction that “actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two languages, two semantic and axiological belief systems” (Bakhtin Dialogic 304-5). In her Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage, Senior explains: “Standard English belongs to academic and formal experience, Patwa belongs to everything else. Quite unconsciously, Jamaican speakers move between the two, using modified versions of each in order to meet the subtle demands of topic, audience and situation (what linguists call ‘code switching’).” Isabella participates in this “code switching,” making her narrative inevitably “double-voiced,” especially if considered as a Jamaican speech act called “tracing,” through which “the tracer projects him/herself into the public eye and demands some form of recognition and validation” (Simpson 839).

This story also begins with an address to the second person listener but “you” as narratee is a shifting position:

“You think I mad, Miss? You see me here with my full head of hair and my notebook and pencil, never go out a street without my stockings straight and shoes shine good for is so my mother did grow me. Beg you a smalls, nuh? Then why your face mek up so?” (75)

We develop a picture of a homeless woman, living on handouts, highly aware of her self-presentation—of gender propriety and social independence—who proudly denies the begging she will resort to in a moment. Her primary concern is with getting her version of the story out, while refusing to inhabit the abject “fallen woman” position. The forceful nature of her lament makes this clear: formerly an aspiring teacher, “Isabella was dragged down” by charming cad Jimmy Watson, who left her, pregnant and unmarried, for rival Elfraida Campbell. Even her mother, known only by her unmarried title as “Miss Catherine,” has broken ties with Isabella. In Jamaican culture still, as Senior confirms, women-headed households and absent husbands are common, and pregnancy for unmarried middle-class women is especially “dreadful” (Binder 110-14).
Isabella’s social isolation as a supposedly unmarriageable, middle-class woman seems to fuel her compulsion to repeat, with variations, her appeal to her community circle, into each version of which she weaves a thread of her narrative. The haunting reiteration of phrases like “Is from morning I don’t eat” (“don’t eat a thing from morning/don’t get a thing to eat from morning”) (76, 79), and “I have to whisper and tell you this for I don’t want the breeze to catch it” (75, 77, then at the end, the reversal: “I going to make the breeze take it to the four corners of everywhere”: 82), stylistically links her appeals. Meanwhile, the listeners comprise different family groupings—courting couples, young men who leer, a mother and daughter—reflecting different players from what has become her own psychodrama. Each appeal finds psychological closure with a ritual statement of gratitude for a positive encounter (“bless you”) or agonistically-toned curses for the unsympathetic.

Isabella’s marginalization is made more complete by the recurring mention of Dr. Bartholomew and his threat to lock her up at Bellvue psychiatric hospital, as he claims that her baby does not exist. Unlike King’s narrator, invested with the communal responsibility of a cultural storyteller, Isabella’s reliability is at issue. She does have a fantasy about disappearing inside her “wappen-bappen” or “slum ‘house’ (Cassidy and LePage) so effectively that “they could shine they torch, bring searchlight and Ex-ray and TV and atomic bomb. Not one of them could ever find me” (78). This exaggerated boast suggests that the “mad” woman is truly invisible to her society, with all its tools of reason (including television and the bomb, of course). Isabella’s speeches at least ensure that she will not go unheard. Admittedly, the baby’s sex, and weight, change in different addresses, leading us to wonder if there even was a baby. Yet her sharp-tongued scolding of her witnesses, and their resentful or cowed retreats, signals an authority, like that of King’s storyteller, due to someone who is “keeping” an important story safe. Finally, Isabella claims that Caribbean “obeah” was used against her by her enemies; in Senior’s explanation, this is “witchcraft, evil magic or sorcery by which supernatural power is invoked to achieve personal protection or the destruction of enemies” (Encyclopedia). This reference to folk belief certainly gives this story a primary orality connection to “the other world which lurks not too far beyond our everyday existence” (Rowell 484).

The story ends with Isabella’s final demand for justice, as “I want to have my day in court, I want to stand up in front of judge and jury” (81) just as she has held her own “people’s court” in the marketplace. These demands as questions ascend up the social hierarchy from the betraying individuals involved in the alleged love triangle, to Dr. Bartholomew, the government and ultimately, God: “If there is still Massa God up above, is what I do why him have to tek everybody side against me?” (82) Senior’s construction of Isabella’s voice through impassioned appeals to her community, individual by individual, in her community’s double-tongue, creates Ong’s “empathetic and participatory” atmosphere, drawing a large family circle which ultimately affirms her dignity, with words and donations of support more often than not. How do we answer the accusing title question? The actual truth of Isabella’s speech may perhaps reside not in the details but in the drive of her “mad” oratory, its adaptive and eloquent questioning of those (like us?) who would try to ignore the voices of the powerless, the homeless, women. For if we are “captured” by her monologues, we are willing captives. Senior recreates Isabella’s “hybridized” speech in tribute to her own growth as a writer: “I was born and grew up in rural Jamaica….My major influence then was the oral tradition—storytelling, ‘hot’ preaching, praying and testifying … concerts, ‘tea-meetings’ and so on” (Rowell 480). Yet
far from trying to recapture this, Senior “‘implicitly acknowledges the interpenetration of the cosmopolitan and the insular as an essential element in the process of creolization’” (cited in Donnell 129-30). In “You Think I Mad, Miss?” we find an instance of artful “testifying” to an act of ostracism which demands a new “hearing”—within the marketplace of the book.

By contrast with King and Senior, MacLeod and Vanderhaeghe occupy the privileged category of “white writer,” being Canadians of Celtic and European descent who do not share the same degree of alienation from narratives of nationhood that Senior and King may claim, although both explore the “cages” of economic mobility through portraits of working-class men who are often fishers, farmers and miners. In doing so, I argue that they are also “double-voicing,” by gesturing towards a marginalized subjectivity associated with primary orality—class consciousness in Vanderhagehe, ethnicity in MacLeod—but within the quintessentially literate, and literary, short story.13 The auditors their speakers address are thus implicit—reader surrogates—rather than the community members King and Senior dramatize. MacLeod’s stories have been praised for their “regional” emphasis on Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and their folkloric quality of orality. “As Birds Bring Forth the Sun” reflects the construction of family myth, showing how narratives shape families in what Langellier and Peterson call “group ordering” performances of communal identity. If King’s and Senior’s stories highlight cultural difference with titles that interrogate the “norm” by subverting traditional history or standard English, MacLeod’s title suggests the pre-scientific world view of the oral culture still accessible in the continuing family story of the “cù mòr glas a’ bhàs” or “big grey dog of death” (translated from Gaelic).14 As well, both MacLeod and Vanderhaeghe offer subtle interrogations of dominant nationalist narratives from an ethnic (Scotland within the British Isles) or a regional (western Canada) perspective, while also undermining masculinist stereotypes by redrawing family circles to include what is often unspoken or unspeakable.

Beginning MacLeod’s story, as with the others, brings a different world into consciousness, one evoking Ong’s primary orality culture, although relayed more distantly by the third-person narrator, concealing a first person “storykeeper” who will emerge officially on the seventh page of this ten-page story. “Fairy tale” colouring still clings to the humble adverb “Once” (…”upon a time”…) and the temporally loose description that follows: “Once there was a family with a Highland name who lived beside the sea. And the man had a dog of which he was very fond. She was large and grey, a sort of staghound from another time” (118). Unlike King, MacLeod de-historicizes his story, not naming the family except by a “Highland name” (symbolic of Scottish nationhood), and not locating them, except by maritime geography. The active if wordless presence of the past in MacLeod’s fiction has been much noted; he here links man and atavistic dog in what will be a fatal bond, repeated in this family down five generations to the latest, contemporary, teller of this “group ordering” narrative. As Colin Nicholson describes it, “A genealogical fiction produces a fiction of genealogy that has been internalized as self-definition” (98). So the first “family circle” drawn is between man and animal—an animal introduced mysteriously to the household as a “foundling” in a handmade box—reminding us of the “relations” between humans and nature valorized in King’s interpretation of Native philosophy, and in a similar interdependence found in the pre-industrial society frequently treated in MacLeod’s fiction.
Elsewhere, I have noted the emphasis on the “hand” in MacLeod, and in this story as well, the father is a “large and gentle man” (124) with “large and gentle hands” (120). The careful use of repetition too reminds us of the “stock phrase” found in the oral tradition while the selective use of Gaelic performs “code-switching” which makes us aware of a submerged past and its untranslatable beliefs. The irony of this “uncanny” story is that the “cù mòr glas” is taken in, saved when as a run-over pup, only to become the unwitting instrument of death for the man who helped her to breed: “And at the proper time he took the cù mòr glas and the big dog down to the sea where he knew there was a hollow in the rock which appeared only at low tide….He was a man used to working with the breeding of animals ... often with the funky smell of animal semen heavy on his large and gentle hands” (120). Running away to bear her young on the island, she later brings death to her master when her six feral pups turn her friendly assault on him into a deadly one after they are discovered (121). His two sons witness this, holding on to his “warm and bloodied hands” (122); both of their lives will end early due to an unbearable vision of the murderous dog. But it is the father’s death that will be most often retold, just as it is being retold now, as we are reminded by the narrator’s asides: “so the story goes/as the story goes” (120, 121).

This legend of the “big grey dog of death” and her offspring that grows out of this ironic tragedy will become a family narrative which provides identity through a perceived destiny, the supernatural notion, like Caribbean “obeah,” of a “buidseachd or evil spell cast on the man by some mysterious enemy”(123). Thus, his descendants retain a fear of a curse, however “improbable” to literate minds, represented by the fatal vision. As Nicholson observes, “the effect of story upon self, and the making of self through the making of story expose narrative identity as self-deferral” (102). Fear and identity are linked in the moment of paternal death, as the last storykeeper reflects in present time on the deathwatch undertaken for another “large and gentle man” (126) now dying of old age, for “we are afraid to hear the phrase born of the vision” (126). The story ends with the speaker suspended in terror and wonder at this anticipated phrase, “if and when” they hear their father call down “his own particular death” (127) and thereby enter the communal narrative of their ancestral identity through the shared story-become-vision of the fateful cù mòr glas a’ bhaids.

Vanderaheghe’s “Cages” offers a contemporary variation on the fatedness of identity, but less metaphysically and within the smallest family circle of all: the nuclear family of “Pop,” silent mother, Gene and Billy Simpson. The title has multiple references, but most obvious is Pop’s entrapment by a masculine economy of mine work, symbolized by the mineshaft elevator Billy once nauseatingly experienced on a mine tour. There is also the cage of male violence which especially tempts Gene, the good-looking but impulsive “body” to Billy’s more reflective “head.” Finally, it is seventeen-year-old Billy’s fate to become his “brother’s keeper” that emerges in an identity-forming narrative as he tells the story that leads him to make that constricting family promise.

Vanderaheghe has commented that “the biggest advantage of the first-person voice is intimacy. Because I’m interested in colloquial language, I’m drawn to the first person” (Kruk Voice 222). He uses this interest to good effect, as we enter the story: “Here it is, 1967, the Big Birthday. Centennial Year they call it. The whole country is giving itself a pat on the back. Holy shit, boys, we made it.” (99). Billy’s elastic voice is effectively introduced, along with another myth of national origin: the marking of Canada’s centenary. But this myth is punctured by an adolescent who sarcastically (and with
good-natured profanity) applauds our hapless success as a young country stumbling along with the rest of its “boys.” As in King, there is a suggested critique of national narratives that suppress otherness; here, the otherness has mainly to do with working-class masculinity, in which violence is accepted if not expected. Billy and Gene are introduced right away as physical competitors, as when Gene reacts to an unexpected loss at darts by “drilling” one at Billy. Gene is punished with a “whaling” by Pop with an extension cord, but Billy bears the brunt of the responsibility with “that yap of yours” (100-01). This long-standing pattern reveals how the father sees Gene’s “rage” as a trap, appealing to younger Billy as “manager” of Gene’s temper. Billy’s loyalty to the father leads to his role in protecting Gene from the consequences of the poolroom fight which is the major episode, leaving Billy, ironically, with a “criminal record and a social worker” who feeds him “bullshit” about how his father loves both boys equally. As an outspoken, long-haired adolescent seen as “kind of a hippy” (115), Billy also questions authority figures like the social worker Miss Krawchuk or the police who arrest him for Gene’s crime, mocking them with insults and putdowns.

Billy counters the family narrative offered by the social worker with his view, to a sympathetic second-person auditor, of the family triangle. He does so with a voice fluent with colloquialisms, slang (at times sexist) and profanity appropriate to the posture of adolescent defiance. His intelligence is evident not just in his academic success, his baseball strategizing, but in his obvious enjoyment of competitive wit, from his needling of his brother to sarcastic exchanges with his father to his colourful similes, of which he offers half a dozen. Watching TV while waiting up for Pop, he comments “Most of those characters with all the answers couldn’t pour piss out of a rubber boot if they read the instructions printed on the sole” (102). I am reminded here of the “agonistic” tone to ritual “insult contests” described as “standard in oral societies across the world, [such that] reciprocal name-calling has been fitted with a specific name in linguistics: flyting” (Ong 44). Billy’s frustrations with life are thus verbalized in a version of “flyting,” while his brother’s anger finds a less acceptable outlet in violent outbursts and acts of disobedience. Meanwhile, Pop is perpetually frustrated by his role as miner. As in MacLeod, the father is presented as large, but not gentle, his hands also marked by his labour, but punitively: “He has cuts all over those hands of his, barked knuckles and raspberries that never heal because the salt in the potash ore keeps them open, eats right down to the bone sometimes” (103). Day by day, Pop is literally consumed by his employment.

The father’s threat that the boys will either succeed at school or go to work in the mine is tested on the last day of school when failing Gene attempts to cheat a couple of “plough jokeys” at poker-pool, as witnessed by Billy. The two boys—big Marvin, described by Billy as having acned skin “looking like all-dressed pizza, heavy on the cheese” (109), the other with a “duck ass” haircut that becomes his identifying moniker—are treated somewhat too casually by Gene, in his bravado, despite Billy’s help, and the accusation of cheating leads to the inevitable fight between Gene and Marvin. This test of Gene’s working-class masculinity becomes another example of the fated “terrible thing” (101, italics in original) that Pop predicts Gene will do with his anger. Using the pool ball as a concealed weapon, he viciously assaults Marvin and runs. Billy, left behind with Gene’s bloody jacket, decides to reverse the family triangle by allowing himself to be arrested as the “hard case” who beat up Marvin. But the moment of being placed in the jail cell recalls that other “cage,” and his failure then is replayed as he screams his innocence at the constable. The father’s
response to his “good” son’s second failure as a man is both to strike him as a “snitch” and confide in him his fears for Gene’s future, even barring Pop’s threat (now abandoned) of a future in the “cage”: “What’s going to happen to Eugene?” Billy’s storykeeping ends with his adoption of the role of brother’s keeper, as he makes this understated but unmistakable vow to Pop, “Nothing...I’ll do my best” (118). Billy thus trades rivalrous triangle for caring circle, in an underplayed gesture of protectiveness.

In distinct yet overlapping ways, King, Senior, MacLeod and Vanderhaeghe “construct” first-person voices in fiction which “keep” aspects of an oral culture alive if we have the ears to “hear” as well as the eyes to read. This is only one way in which the stories “double-voice”—each speaker either creates hybrid constructions, linguistically and narratively (King, Senior) or addresses two audiences simultaneously by means of subtler “code switching” and shifts in register for minority communities defined by ethnic nationalism or working-class identity (MacLeod, Vanderhaeghe). Each writer traces different “family circles” which reflect their implicit view of the contract between teller and community: the teller’s responsibility to weave individuals narratives into a culturally true story. It is worth noting that the largest family circles are traced by the first two feminine/femininized speakers, King’s storyteller and Senior’s Isabella. MacLeod and Vanderhaeghe present male speakers who preserve and explain family identity. While speaking to the psychological importance of feminine voices in Caribbean and Native cultures, this correspondence may be attributed to the fact that, on many levels, women create families and men defend them. Voices may be readily invented or performed, as these stories show, but the voices of orally-strong communities—Native American, Creole, Celtic, working-class—will never be completely suppressed or silenced as long as they have storykeepers like these.

1. I would like to thank Professor Peter Clandfield, Nipissing University, for his helpful discussions with me on Bakhtin and his complex concept of “voice.”

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NOTES

2. In a somewhat different version from the one that was later published—without illustrations—in One Good Story, That One. Most King criticism to date treats the picture book version but I will be discussing the later, collected one.

3. In a Canadian context, see the discussion of “Realism, Surrealism, and Magic Realism” in New.


5. See his much-anthologized story, “Borders” (One Good Story, That One), in which the Blackfoot mother rejects the binary opposition, Canadian/American, insisting instead on traveling under her third, unauthorized identity.

6. I note that Senior is listed in the new Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada (2002); however, Michael Thorpe, reviewing Discerner of Hearts in 1996, disagrees, concluding that “hers is a Jamaican, not (yet) a Canadian voice.” However, in interview, Senior argues that “It does not matter any more where you live, it’s what you are bringing into that marketplace” (Binder 113)

7. See “Coyote Tricks Owl,” (Robinson) in Bennett and Brown. Wendy Wickwire, an ethnographer, is responsible for transcribing and preserving Robinson’s stories in text form.

8. See King’s formulation of four types of Native literature in his essay, “Godzilla vs. Postcolonial,” reprinted in Unhomely States. His own work suggests the “interfusional” category.

9. For an earlier and fuller explanation of “the relations,” see King’s Introduction to All My Relations: ix.


11. Hyacinth M. Simpson argues persuasively that Isabella’s “schizophrenic delusions are rooted in a crisis over her sexuality....”and that “the mad woman’s public act of tracing brings unhealthy, distorted and ultimately destructive social beliefs and perceptions about female sexuality to public attention in an effort to help individual women and the community move toward more liberating and affirming views of female sexuality” (841).

12. From my reading of her response to her listeners, with the ritual exchange of “God bless you” and “Thank you” in conclusion, it seems as if a majority, six out of the ten encounters, ends with Isabella receiving some charitable donation (but not necessarily moral support). This suggests that financial support is easier, and quicker, to give, in the modern world...

13. It could be noted that MacLeod and Vanderhaeghe, who are white, presently middle-class, males are more detached from their presumed marginalized audiences than King or Senior. However, King also crosses borders from popular audiences—writing for CBC radio and TV—to more intellectual ones, as he has had a lengthy academic career as well.

14. MacLeod’s story is based upon a Celtic legend, The Grey Dog of Meoble, according to Nicholson (97-98).
15. See my “Hands and Mirrors: Gender Reflections in the Short Stories of Alistair MacLeod and Timothy Findley.”

16. Unlike Senior and her use of patois/patwa, MacLeod glosses his Gaelic phrases, but even this draws attention to a gap in meaning. For instance, to highlight the opacity of language, the narrator recalls their ancestor calling out on the island, “M’eudal cù mòr glas,” and says in an aside, “m’eudal meaning something like dear or darling” (121).

17. The uncanny “having the double semantic capacity to mean its opposite, signifying at once the homely, familiar, friendly, comfortable, intimate and the unfamiliar, uncomfortable, alien and unknown. Besides having the power to signify antithetical meaning, the uncanny also has the power to signify the development of meaning in the direction of ambivalence, from that which was familiar and homely to that which has become unfamiliar, estranging” (Chisholm).

18. In an interesting act of transference, the mother dog becomes the “big grey dog of death,” although her only crime was in bearing the feral pups.

19. It should be noted that “Centennial Year” celebrations offer another example of the dominant narrative not speaking to all perspectives: Billy lives in Saskatchewan, which, along with Alberta, officially entered Confederation (1867) much later (1905). The Queen’s Royal Visit to the Western Provinces in May 2005 was intended to properly mark their Centennial, and later commitment to Canada.

20. For instance, Billy refers casually to Gene’s girlfriends as “seatcovers” and “hair pie” (104), although it is not clear if he is reflecting his own attitude towards women or a borrowed version of his brother’s. He presents himself as jealous of his brother’s sexual success and implicitly lacking such experience.

21. Gene and Pop also share Billy’s colourful lower-class vernacular, but he is the most proficient with it, and he is also the one implicitly shaping and recalling the story, in which their voices are subsumed. See for instance the vivid, biting flavour of the following analogies and similes: about the mine tour, “In my book it was kind of like taking people into the slaughterhouse to prove you’re kind to the cows” (107); about Gene’s pool playing, “He had a shape for the three which slid in the top pocket like shit through a goose” (110); when Marvin finds the ball shot unfairly he pulls it out of the pocket, “just like little Jack Horner lifting the plum out of the pie” (111); before the fight “Gene shrugged and even kind of sighed, like the hero does in the movies when he has been forced into a corner and has to do something that is against his better nature” (112); when Marvin grabs Gene, “I started looking around right smartly for something to hit the galoot with before he popped my brother like a pimple” (113-114); the expression on the smug police sergeant’s face as he put Billy in the cell “looked like a ripple on a slop pail” (116).

22. “Cages” contains a possible allusion to Cain and Abel (Gen. 4), with its family triangle of two contrasted brothers seeking their father’s approval, the dart game’s mock fratricide and the conclusion’s implications for Billy who will adopt the role, as Cain did not, of being his “brother’s keeper.”
examinés (ressourcement culturel, hybridité, mise en cause, construction ou destruction d'un mythe, etc.). Référence est faite à des entretiens d'écrivains conduits par l'auteur de l'article.

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