

# Canadian Ethnic Anthologies: Representations of Ethnicity

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Je veux parler de la découverte que le je fait de l'autre.

TZVETAN TODOROV (11)

The theory of being, ontology, brings us to atoms. The theory of relations brings us to the parasite.

MICHEL SERRES (185)

THAT THE OLD course of humanistic study has been subject to politicized pressures," as Edward Said puts it in *Culture and Imperialism* (xxiv), has been apparent for quite a while now; witness the recent interest in rewriting cultural history by looking beyond its hegemonic structures towards the cultural products of minority groups. In Canada, the effects of these pressures have been noted mostly in critiques of those institutional practices and established value systems that have fostered a unified vision of Canadian culture. Yet Canadian ethnic literature still remains a minor literature, minor by Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's definition—"a minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16)<sup>1</sup>—but also in the sense that its "discovery" is either deferred or is symptomatic of present political and cultural upheavals.

For example, while Robert Lecker's and Frank Davey's debate about what constitutes the Canadian literary canon shows their concern with the inclusionary and exclusionary politics that determine it, their arguments do not reach far enough into Canada's cultural history to problematize the reasons for its blatant exclusion of ethnic writing. Although Lecker, in his "A Country without a Canon? Canadian Literature and the Esthetics

of Idealism," acknowledges that "canons shift; they are fluid constructs" (8), he makes no reference to ethnic literature. He concedes that "there is no grammar of consensus" (8) and that "an idealized model of the canon . . . does ensure that claims for difference are positioned in relation to a historical backdrop" (11). Yet he keeps at bay what he calls "identity politics" because, he claims, "the end-product of such recognition is anarchy, or at least a kind of radicalized, self-consciously ideological narcissism that thrives on itself" (13). Hence his insistence on observing that "canons are the products of forces that are popular *and* learned, marginal *and* central, radical *and* conservative" (15). In contrast, Davey, in his "Canadian Canons," takes to task Lecker's "binary construction[s]" (57) and his "penchant for totalities" (67) and posits that "Canada is a field of competing canons" (69), suggesting, as he does by his cultural materialist reading and examples, that there is, among others, a major body of ethnic texts to be contended with. Still, although he looks closely at some of those "fields," he does not engage directly with ethnicity. "Every focus excludes," as James Clifford says, for "there is no politically innocent methodology for intercultural interpretation" (97). Davey's and Lecker's divergent hermeneutic practices and agendas, together with their privileging of different paradigms or cultural moments, reveal Canadian literary history to be not an agreed-upon series of events or a unified archive but rather a narrative whose meaning changes depending on who reads it and how. Still, in their reading of the forces that have shaped Canadian literature, ethnic and racial considerations remain virtually marginal.

The glaring "absence" of ethnicity, or its perfunctory "presence" that has become the custom as of late, is a recurring element, a sign both empty and full—full of the diversity of ethnic voices. Consider *A History of Canadian Literature* by W. H. New: organized as it is around genre and theme, this history is yet another instance of history being unmasked selectively. Despite his intention to destabilize what "Canadian" signifies,<sup>2</sup> New's examination of the Canadian literary tradition still succumbs to the pitfalls of a certain nationalism that does not leave much room for discussing seriously the contributions of "other" Cana-

dians. They are not absent, but they receive only a cursory look. New refers to them, mostly in the chapter entitled "Encoders: Literature to 1985," as further evidence for his argument about the "social pressures (regional and ethnic ones)" that set "a new rhetoric in motion" (218). Thus they are present not in themselves but as examples, symptoms of a change in the cultural climate. The subject heading under which ethnic writing appears in this history's index, "ethnic minorities," further illustrates the complicity of New's inclusionary strategies. Reciting the marginal position of these authors might open the way for their study as a subject of special interest, but it does not in effect help them purchase entry into the cultural economies that have kept them at bay and continue to determine the making of Canadian culture.

The general upsurge of interest in ethnic literatures, then, has accomplished very little so far by way of removing ethnicity from its quarantined position. The recent call for papers in the ACCUTE and ACQL newsletters for their joint session at the 1994 Learned's Conference on "(E)Merging Literatures"<sup>3</sup> is a sincere gesture of redress, but one that reflects a kind of condescending ethos. As the great number of ethnic anthologies and authors illustrate, ethnic literature is simply not emerging now; it is the critics who have just discovered it. Similarly, the flyer circulated by *Essays on Canadian Writing* for a special issue on "Writing Ethnicity," which states that "[m]uch recent Canadian writing . . . can be read with particular attention to ethnic specificity or cross-cultural transfer" (emphasis added), assumes that ethnic discourse is only a phenomenon of late. Advocating ethnicity in these terms does not alter its image as a silent body awaiting the benevolent gaze of well-meaning academics.

As Rey Chow warns, "the current environment in which the non-West is 'allowed to speak' by affirmative pedagogical attitudes/policies in support of 'cultural pluralism' can be . . . detrimental to the realization of a genuinely critical project" (129). It is certainly not a coincidence that the critical and theoretical appeal ethnic discourse holds these days is largely located at the juncture of the ideological shifts that invite us to reconsider what constitutes Canada as a multicultural state. At

the same time, however, that we should remain responsive to these pressures, we should remember that ethnic writing in Canada is not simply a recent phenomenon whose dissemination has been facilitated by the liberal humanist embrace of cultural difference. The ethnic subject is not mute by default nor has it kept itself concealed so that it needs to be "discovered." It is the audience that has proven to be deaf to its clamouring for recognition. If the ethnic subject has been perceived as "silent" it is because it has been contaminated by the disciplinary practices of the social and cultural systems containing it. It is the bracketing of the disruptive narratives it embodies that have "silenced" it.

In this essay, then, I examine some aspects of these disruptive narratives as they are manifested in the first wave of ethnic anthologies, especially those anthologies that appeared around the time that multiculturalism was introduced as an official policy in Canada. It would be impossible to attempt to resolve in the space of an essay the many, equally important, issues these anthologies raise. I try, however, to map out the varied and often contrary constructions of ethnicity that emerge from these anthologies by focussing on some of the thematic, political, and formal aspects of the writing featured in them and by reading that writing through the editorial prefaces that situate it in ideological and ethnic terms.

### I Staking the Ground of Ethnic Difference(s)

I have selected the genre of anthology because it is usually designed around principles shared by its contributors. As a collective attempt to make a statement or to convey what is current, anthologies (perhaps more so than individual titles) reflect the values shaping a given tradition or, conversely, the need to revise those values. Canadian ethnic anthologies, which began appearing with great frequency in the early 1980s, constitute the first consistent compilation of ethnic literature. Just a few examples of anthologies that illustrate the manifold and complex ways in which ethnicity is represented, as well as the ambivalent relations between official multiculturalism and ethnic literary discourse, are: *Harvest: An Anthology of Mennonite Writing in Canada 1874-1974*, edited by William De Fehr, et al. (1974); *Paper Doors:*

*An Anthology of Japanese-Canadian Poetry*, edited by Gerry Shikatani and David Aylward (1981); *Hispanic Canadian Literature*, a trilingual anthology edited by Diego Marín (1984); *Other Voices: Writings by Blacks in Canada*, edited by Lorris Elliott (1985); *A Shapey Fire: Changing the Literary Landscape*, edited by Cyril Dabydeen (1987); *Transplanted Lives: Dutch-Canadian Stories and Poems*, compiled by Hendrika Ruger (1988); *Italian-Canadian Voices*, edited by Caroline Morgan DiGiovanni (1984); *Chilean Literature in Canada*, a bilingual anthology edited by Nain Nómez (1982); and *Yarmarok: Ukrainian Writing in Canada since the Second World War*, edited by Jars Balan and Yuri Klynovy (1987).

Although their contents are disparate in many ways, these anthologies represent ethnicity as the driving force endowing the writing featured in them with a dynamism that has ideological and cultural implications. To borrow Nancy Hartsock's words, they "develop an account of the world which treats [their] perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world" (171). When read separately, these anthologies are offered as distinct expressions of individual ethnic groups; when read collectively, they become an embodiment of Canada's mosaic. Their commonality lies in their intention to translate their image as "others" into a self-defined specificity. They are presented as texts invoked by historical necessity, reaching the reader from a marginalized but also affirmative point of view. Yet they do not function as what Alan C. Golding calls "revisionist anthologies," "collections . . . intended to shift an academic canon defined mostly by teaching anthologies" (283). Their editors are "revisionist" only in so far as they expose the ideologies behind the criteria by which the existing canon operates. They do not set out expressly to question such canon-making texts as Margaret Atwood's *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, Gary Geddes's *15 Canadian Poets X 2*, Robert Lecker's and Jack David's *The New Canadian Anthology*, and Russell Brown's and Donna Bennett's *The Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*.<sup>4</sup> Instead, their purview is to preserve and disseminate that which is skipped over by the tradition represented by these canon-making anthologies. These anthologies, then, serve a paradoxical function: on the one hand, they

ratify by default the very tradition that has disregarded ethnic literature while, on the other, they exceed that tradition by drawing our attention to its margins.

To put it otherwise, these anthologies take matters into their own hands. They do not just seize the rashly charted agency granted to them by institutions when the latter find themselves under duress to do so. Rather, by remapping the margins they have inhabited as the centres of their own cultural production, they realign the blueprint of power relations. They install themselves right in the midst of things by historicizing their diasporic and cultural trajectories. Yet, as one would expect, they do not offer a uniform concept of what ethnicity entails. Through them, ethnicity comes into view wearing many faces. It is celebrated and condemned, sought after and rejected, defined over and over again. The multifarious ways in which ethnicity is registered and articulated in these anthologies make it virtually impossible to offer a single working definition of ethnicity. If there is any single and consistent message ethnic anthologies convey, it is that ethnic discourse cannot be abstracted from the forces and conflicts that delimit it. It must always be studied within the set of cultural specificities that give rise to it.

Perhaps the diversity of these anthologies is one of the many reasons why their potential to revise the canon has remained largely unrealized. Although these anthologies were intended to reach a readership that has stubbornly ignored ethnic writing, published as they were by small if not obscure presses and barely reviewed, they have not succeeded. What these anthologies failed to do at the time of their publication—out of no fault of their own, it should be stressed—has been accomplished recently by the publications of individual ethnic authors. Joy Kogawa, Kristjana Gunnars, Josef Skvorecký, and more recently Evelyn Lau, Nino Ricci, Rohinton Mistry, and M. Nourbese Philip, to name only a few, have known success of various degrees and have been the subjects of critical discussions in ways that have eluded these anthologies. This is not the place, though, to dwell on why an individual ethnic author might be more effective than anthologies in shifting the canonical ground, or

on the now rather obvious reasons why ethnic writing has been kept until recently outside the main venues of publishing, reviewing, the curricula, and critical debates.<sup>5</sup> What I would like to thematize, instead, is some of the tropological moves in these anthologies and how they contribute to constructions of ethnicity. These constructs of ethnicity, as I try to show, are both analogous and contradictory to the group-identity mentality and the essentialization of origins advanced by the average response to ethnicity as well as by the official multicultural policy.

My choice of anthologies to discuss has been informed by my wish to represent both racial and ethnic differences and by my desire to examine what paradigms, if any, of ethnic subjectivity emerge from the first wave of such anthologies.<sup>6</sup> If these anthologies differ from each other because of the respective ethnic and racial origins of their contributors, they also differ in their various interpretations or practice of multiculturalism. The editors acknowledge an indebtedness to the official policy because of the financial support of the Secretary of State some of them received, but also, and most importantly, for its sanctioning of ethnic difference. The presence of these anthologies might lead one to conclude, then, that the Canadian Multiculturalism Act has succeeded in fulfilling one of its principal mandates, namely, its directive to "recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage" (837). Conversely, however, the self-contradictory images of ethnicity that emerge from these anthologies defy the ideological assumptions of the Multiculturalism Act: that ethnic subjectivity is determined by one's attachment to a distant, and often dehistoricized, past, that it is best understood, and contained, in collective terms.<sup>7</sup> Thus these anthologies substantiate the need for the ethnic subject to articulate ethnicity at a specific historical moment,<sup>8</sup> but offer, despite a certain common ground that they share, no cohesive "grammar" of ethnicity.<sup>9</sup> They function, instead, as allotropic sites of cultural production. Ethnicity emerges from them as both construct and "natural" fact.

## II The Anxiety of Ethnic Difference

The problematic of whether ethnicity in these anthologies is a construction or a "naturally" inscribed condition impinges upon the question of representation, a question that arises at the point where the difference that constitutes ethnicity is strategically renamed as otherness. This recasting of the ethnic subject is always the inevitable outcome of fusion and intervention as effected by both the dominant society and the ethnic subject itself. As DiGiovanni says in her introduction to *Italian-Canadian Voices*, "[t]oday, multicultural manifestations are not only accepted but actively promoted as the kind of national identity Canada wants to present to the world" (17). To give credence to her statement she refers to Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's<sup>10</sup> earlier anthology of Italian-Canadian poetry, *Roman Candles* (1978). "Assisted by funding from the Canada Council," she observes, "Di Cicco's work as an editor contributed to multiculturalism as a national policy. He brought out a book which gave all Canadians access to the creative self-expression of one ethnic group"; the writers in Di Cicco's anthology, she adds, "celebrate their culture without apology" (19). Outside the question of how many Canadians took advantage of the availability of *Roman Candles*, her summation is accurate, but also interestingly misleading.

Contrary to the singularity of cultural expression that DiGiovanni emphasizes, Di Cicco tells us that the "impetus behind" (10) the writers included in his anthology is their "bicultural[ism]" (9). Besides presenting a definition of biculturalism that begs to differ from that of the Official Languages Act, Di Cicco attempts to "map out" in *Roman Candles* "a journey towards a new citizenship, one that has little to do with anti-Americanism or the convenience of a melting pot" (10).<sup>11</sup> Although his choice of the word "citizenship," together with the legal rights citizenship connotes, would seem to imply that ethnicity is always grounded in the legislating mechanisms of states, Di Cicco circumvents this notion. Instead, what emerges from his preface is an anxiety of ethnic difference—"I'd been a man without a country for most of my life" (9). The paradoxical duality of his condition whereby two countries equal a zero home/state re-



flects an anxiety about the ambivalent location of selfhood, a concern that is also inscribed as a longing for stability and certainty. The fact that anxiety and longing are also pervasive in Canadian literature that is not, strictly speaking, ethnic, but rather bears residual signs of its colonialism, does not diminish the import of what Di Cicco is saying here. It is the historical specificity of diasporic experience that gives his sentiments their ethnic signature.

To illustrate this Di Cicco concludes his preface with "My Genealogy," a poem by John Robert Colombo. I quote a few of its stanzas because it typifies how in these anthologies anxiety of ethnic difference is engendered when plurality displaces singularity, when ethnic purity becomes an antonym of the symbolic exchange of values and states:

1.  
My great-great grandfather  
played in the streets  
of Milano, I am told.  
I take it on faith.
2.  
His son, the artisan,  
immigrated to Baden, Ontario,  
as a decorator or builder.  
I believe this, but never met him.
3.  
My grandfather was born  
in Baden, and he married  
a German girl there.  
I remember him well—  
he spoke English  
with a German accent. . . .
7.  
I remember quite distinctly  
my mother's parents, my grand-  
parents. My grandfather spoke  
with a thick Greek accent,  
and my larger grandmother,  
a nasal Quebec French. Yes,  
they made a colourful couple. . . .

11.

I seldom feel close  
to the Rocky Mountains,  
the Prairies,  
the Great Lakes,  
or the cold St. Lawrence.  
*What am I doing in Toronto?*

12.

If this means being Canadian,  
I am a Canadian. (10-12)

"My Genealogy" deconstructs the configuration of ethnicity as the unified entity for which DiGiovanni, inspired as she is by official multiculturalism, argues. Colombo underwrites the dualism implicit in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, namely the bifurcation of residents of Canada into Canadians proper and persons belonging to minority groups. He reformulates this *locus classicus* of marginalization in terms of a *multiculturalism* that can only construct a conditional identity. The irony of the poem's title, then, offers us an index to the complicated workings of ethnic semiotics. There exists a polarity between being a legal resident of a country and feeling other to its culture, but this condition cannot be viewed as a binary opposition alone. In a state like Canada, a state founded by immigrants whose descendants often conveniently forget that they come from colonial stock, the construction of ethnicity escapes from the mechanisms of a dialectic model. Colombo eschews this binarism by constantly deferring the identification of a stable origin. In doing so, he demonstrates that otherness is not always synonymous with the marginalization that might result from a state's political and social manoeuvring; otherness, in this instance, is coincident with one's own ambivalent subject position, a position sustained by resistance to any internal and external fixities. As the speaker of Colombo's poem makes clear, none of the ethnic or national origins he identifies as characterizing his family's genealogy can claim to be the primal site of his subjectivity. He can articulate his position only in conditional terms. Subjectivity, then, becomes manifest through an acknowledgement of various kinds of difference.

### III Towards an Epistemology of Ethnicity

From the point of view of the ethnic subject, lack of a solid, unamalgamated origin suggests that otherness is predicated both as a differential sign and as a minority position. What arises, then, as a pressing issue in these anthologies is a series of questions that points towards an epistemology of ethnicity: at what point and how is ethnic difference constructed as a sign of minoritization? How does a subject respond to its experience of having what was its normative position in its country of origin become "other" under the scrutiny of "foreign" eyes? To put it differently, how does the ethnic subject know itself to be ethnic, to be, that is, both inside and outside a dominant society? What are the discourses it employs to manifest its desire to make itself present?

These questions are treated variously in these anthologies, but certain common features persist in all of them. One of the most important recurring elements is the relative absence of an overt or covert questioning as to what constitutes these subjects' ethnicity prior to finding themselves in the diaspora.<sup>12</sup> The cultural and national sites left behind do not seem to cause any ambivalence as to who the subject was prior to immigration. Similar to the fact that Canadian society does not usually problematize its whiteness because of its normative status, the signature of the country of origin appears to be taken for granted. The ethnicity of the subject becomes an issue only after relocation or displacement occurs. For example, the voices of European origin speaking in some of these anthologies do so from the position of a formerly unified subject that has undergone a collapse of its subjectivity because of its diasporic experience<sup>13</sup> and the discrimination that frequently accompanies it. Conversely, when the ethnic subject originates in a former colony and/or positions itself as racial other to the normative whiteness of the Canadian society, it approaches its diasporic experience with a knowledge of displacement and discrimination already in place, a knowledge, however, that is explored principally through reference to its present Canadian context.

Whether an anthology represents a white, black, or other racial group, two factors are essential in determining the con-

struction of ethnicity: the subject's perception that it is now defined as other by the mainstream society, a definition that in effect forces it to function as parasite to the host environment;<sup>14</sup> and the painful awareness of the loss of a familiar (no matter how troubled) world, the distancing from an indigenous past. The consciousness of no longer belonging to a cultural continuum induces a condition of lack. The writing in these anthologies is an articulation of this lack. Although it cannot compensate the ethnic subject for its experience of loss, language both mediates and records these acts of knowing. More importantly, as soon as the ethnic subject enters the site of its own discourse it becomes empowered. In these anthologies, ethnic discourse tends to entwine the experiences of loss and of being othered in a web of old and new cultural registers, thus showing the ethnic subject to inhabit an in-between position. Yet there appears to be a reluctance to acknowledge the ambivalence of individuals in that position. Irrespective of the particular experiences represented in these anthologies, the starting point of the epistemological process inscribed in them invariably occurs when the difference ethnicity signifies is translated into a sign of minoritization. The crisis that results from this process of translation—in effect a process of objectification—marks the moment the subject is born as ethnic within the host society. I do not intend to suggest through this biological metaphor that these subjects have no prior histories or identities—quite the contrary. A recurring figure in these anthologies, this metaphor signals how those histories and identities are appropriated by the dominant society in its attempt to stabilize and, by implication, to frame and reduce their meanings and their impact on it. The biologism of the image of being born as ethnic in the host country, then, is conditioned by the essentialist and appropriating strategies practised by the host country. Hence the consternation often expressed in these texts when the speakers of poems or stories fail to accept what is supposed to reflect them in the gaze of the dominant society. The moment they encounter that spectral image of themselves that is not themselves is the moment in which they are born, that is, reconstructed, as others. The hiatus between *being* (what the ethnic subject was, what it thinks it still

is) and *becoming* (what becomes of that subject in the host country, how it is perceived) is what structures "the spectacle of otherness" (Bhabha, "The Other Question" 151) these anthologies interrogate. Thus the ethnic subject's diasporic experience constitutes a paradoxical instance of self-identification by negation. Ethnicity as a sign of minoritization is constructed when a subject is exposed to discursive modalities that contest or threaten what it has known itself to be.

Here is an example of this process from Youssef El-Malh's story "Jumping in Air," in Kamal A. Rostom's anthology *Arab-Canadian Writing: Stories, Memoirs, and Reminiscences*:

Licking her upper lip with the tip of her tongue, she said indifferently:

"You have a strange accent. Where do you come from?"

Without giving me the chance to answer, she resumed, looking fixedly into my eyes:

"India?"

"I am an Arab." . . .

"Here is one of you."

"What do you mean one of us?"

"Indian!"

I followed the movement of her eyes and saw a dark girl walking shyly on the beach. There was a brief period of silence, while my eyes wandered between the two bodies, the dark and the white. Then I started in an awkward manner to explain the difference in origin between Indians and Arabs, but she seemed absentminded and distracted, as if she had lost interest. My whole being was overwhelmed by the disturbing feeling that I was nothing . . . nothing at all, that I lacked so many things to become a human being like her. Those people moving on the beach represented the civilized race. As for me, I was a different creature, uncivilized and inferior; my skin is dark, you know. (22-23)

Up to this point in this two-page story, El-Malh has disclosed only the race of the woman by whom his narrator was picked up in a bar and has done so in a casual way that raises questions of gender rather than racial difference. We read of her seductiveness and of the "passionate intensity of her love-making," but also of her "blond hair" and of "her white body stretched voluptuously on the bed" (22). These qualifiers reverse the paradigm of normalization that renders white skin invisible because it is taken to be symptomatic of the status quo. It is not, then, acci-

dental that the narrativization of otherness here is initiated by the male narrator himself. In the beginning of the story, this narrativization coincides with his resistance to being the object of the woman's desire in the bar when she singles him out; gradually, however, it bears signs of real discomfort, culminating in the beach scene cited, where their liaison is acted out again, this time at the verbal level and on a social plane larger than that of the bedroom.

Having already exceeded the symmetry of the "couple" they were for one night, in the presence "of all these white bodies" on the beach, the man realizes that he is visibly a minority, a feeling that leaves him "without desire or sensation" (22). What is played out here is the structural politics between the private and the public. The characters' racial difference is circumscribed only when they find themselves in a public milieu; hence the symbolic transience of their sexual encounter. Their desire for each other dies away once they have to function as members of a larger group that includes one but excludes the other. The contrast between the private and the public spheres, between "the dark and the white," between "human being" and "creature," between the sexual boldness of the white woman and the shyness of the Indian girl, between the reductiveness and ignorance of the white woman's racism and the Arab man's abjection, is emblematic of two functions of difference: denotation, that is to say, difference as an enunciation of description; and connotation, difference as an enunciation of value judgement.<sup>15</sup> Although the difference of otherness is not always articulated in such a clear-cut manner, the distinction I am proposing is further reinforced in the story by the narrator's pleonasm on the only occasion in the narrative when he apostrophizes the reader: "my skin is dark, you know," he tells us, although we have known this for some time. It is this periphrasis, at once an affirmation of who he is and a negation of how he is perceived, that marks the moment of epistemological crisis in the story, namely, the narrator's awareness that he is constructed and is therefore compelled to speak as a racially and ethnically "other."

The racial, ethnic, and gender dynamics El-Malh dramatizes in "Jumping in Air" are shared by many contributors to these an-

thologies. Furthermore, El-Malh's narrator's pleonasm exemplifies the ethnic writer's feeling of being obliged to combat the opacity of language. A recurring element demarcating the epistemology of most of the writing in these anthologies, this reflects the relentless need to record, through a troping of language, the concrete signatures of accent and race. The means devised in the interest of connoting such signs vary, but the imperative to inscribe them as markers of identity difference remains constant. How this imperative affects the desire to articulate ethnic subjectivity is certainly a crucial question, but one that cannot easily be generalized here. Suffice it to say we cannot know the ethnic subject on its own terms unless we have access to the manifestations of its desire to make itself known—otherwise, we have access only to images of ethnicity as they are devised by dominant attitudes and perceptions. That desire, always discursively produced, voices itself with a forked tongue. It speaks of the need to address the difference between being ethnicized (objectified) by the social structures of a hegemonic society and affirming one's ethnic difference out of choice. For example, my being defined by others as "ethnic," or seen as a tourist in some cases, because of my accent, suggests a meaning of ethnicity that is dissimilar to the ethnicity implied when I choose to foreground my Greek origins. The distinction lies between having one's ethnic difference appropriated and practising one's own agency. On a general level, the desire to name oneself as other also speaks of the mutability and determinants of subjectivity that include ethnicity, but also such factors as gender and class.

#### IV The Sedimentation of Ethnicity versus Floating Subjectivities

The sentiments of unity and disparity, of affirmation and negation, of abjection and resistance, underlying the contents of these anthologies are often presented as indicators of what ethnicity entails, as a presumably faithful reproduction of its social body. At the same time that we cannot ignore as readers the message that much of this writing seems to convey—"this is what it is like to be ethnic, marginalized, discriminated against"—we must also remain alert to the risks involved when ethnicity is

postulated in mimetic terms, in terms that tend to give it a valence based on an authenticity that the epistemology of the ethnic subject often takes for granted. Interestingly enough, sometimes this overdetermination of ethnicity is not to be found in the contributions themselves but in the editors' prefaces. The editorial practices of Hendrika Ruger, the editor of a "series of Dutch-Canadian anthologies" (*Distant Kin* 7), are a case in point.

Like DiGiovanni, Ruger presents her contributors' ethnicity in the same unproblematicized, if not essentialized, manner. She tells us in *Distant Kin*, for instance, that "[t]he 'Dutch elements' in these literary works are found in details of observation, in descriptions of typical Dutch-Canadian immigrant experiences, in a certain 'Dutch outlook' of the authors, and in their perception of the world around them" (8). In her attempt to codify what is Dutch, Ruger elides any kind of functional definition and misrepresents, in some cases, a number of her authors.

Cornelia Hoogland's "How Our Feet Go On," for example, a long poem in the voice of a Dutch woman immigrant, traces its narrator's longing for "[a]n assured Dutch self" (Ruger, *Dutch Voices* 40). Although it is punctuated with Dutch phrases and expresses the narrator's acute sense of disappointment and loss caused by the difficulties she faces as an immigrant woman, the reader (at least this one) would be hard-pressed to decode what constitutes the ethnic specificity of the story's "Dutch self" or "Dutch outlook." The absence of any registers that might explain "Dutchness" does not convey, as Sneja Gunew theorizes, the "unprecedented assault on the concept of the fixed subject by all those women, minorities, non-Westerners who realized they were excluded from its purview" (10). Whereas this interrogation is practised by such authors as Claire Harris, Kristjana Gunnars, Sky Lee, Joy Kogawa, and Yasmin Ladha, many writers in these anthologies endorse a unitary ethnic identity. Thus the search of Hoogland's narrator for an "assured Dutch self," despite her emotional indictment of her husband—"I should have known this was a trap. / Emigrate with me, he said. / So why am I shut in the women's quarters / with the stench of diapers and worse" (27)—implies that its rediscovery will restore a state of wholeness shattered by immigration. Here, ethnicity is molded after a



sovereign identity, sovereign because it remains unyielding to processes of change and therefore an identity operating structurally within a humanistic context.

In contrast to this approach to ethnicity that both proves and dismisses Ruger's claims, the narratives "Whoopers" and "Who Speaks for Running Waters?" by third-generation Canadian Kevin Van Tighem do not thematize ethnicity at all. Instead, their poignancy and evocativeness reflect their narrators' attachment, for instance, to the Alberta landscape. Their inclusion, we can infer, is justified because the author gives his characters Dutch names. Ruger overlooks the fact that Van Tighem exceeds the common, and reductive, expectation that he ought to write about things Dutch. Moreover, Ruger does not explain why she does not call her anthologies Dutch *and* Belgian, since she gathers in them immigrant and non-immigrant writers with roots in both the Netherlands and Belgium. She does this without taking into account the old historical ties and differences between the two countries that were once united for a brief period (c. 1815-31); nor does she consider any distinctive national feelings the Dutch-speaking writers of Belgium might have, let alone the interrelationship of languages and nationalities in the Netherlands and Belgium and how they are carried out once "transplanted" to Canada. In contrast to the negativist and discriminating methods that El-Malh's narrator practises, Ruger's criteria of inclusion smack of a positivism that subsumes any contesting elements in her contributors' construction of ethnic subjectivity or the apparent unconcern of some of them for ethnic matters. Ruger's practice of ethnicity borders on "ethnic absolutism" (see Gilroy). There is the tendency to neglect the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism, to leave little room, if any, for cross-cultural influences, and to overlook the extent to which a given writer might express a vision of assimilation, integration, or resistance to the host country. The result is a seamless ethnicity, a suturing of the diversities or conflicts that might be part of an ethnic community's history. The possibility of ethnicity becoming a compulsory or inescapable label in a state with an official multicultural policy submits familial genealogies, or biologism, as a prerogative for subjectivity, thereby failing to

furnish the subject in question with agency, or limiting that agency within an environment that might be exclusively constructed by displacement. Posited that way, ethnicity runs the risk of becoming a master narrative of marginalization that subordinates the subject's present condition to its past roots, which are privileged because of their "authenticity." As Rey Chow writes, "whenever the oppressed, the native, the subaltern, and so forth are used to represent the point of 'authenticity' for our critical discourse, they become at the same time the place of myth-making and an escape from the impure nature of political realities" (44). The need to calibrate the authenticity of one's ethnic origins in the face of outside hegemonic attitudes becomes, as is the case with Ruger's editorial practices, a parody of irreducible differences. By conflating, if not confiscating, national histories, by converting the politics of religion into that of ethnicity, or by eliding issues of form, Ruger's anthologies demonstrate the elasticity of ethnicity, but also the dangers implicit in its overdetermination. Treating ethnicity in such a way manifests an epistemology whereby the object position is already installed in the subject.

Ruger's strategy of drawing from more than one origin but privileging only one ethnic identity clearly becomes an instance of catachresis when she tries to account for John Weier's inclusion in *Dutch Voices*: Weier, born in Winnipeg and raised as a Mennonite, is included because the Mennonites' religious roots go back to the sixteenth-century Dutch preacher, Menno Simons.<sup>16</sup> As Ruger puts it, "[f]or the Mennonites . . . the journey has been long and the times hard. Their family names still remind us of the fact that their roots were in the Netherlands" (7).<sup>17</sup> Ruger's generalizing logistics bring ethnicity to the fore in terms that are axiomatic and echo the state discourse of multiculturalism. The essentialism that imbues her approach is also reflected in her long biographical notes on the contributors that list in detail their ancestors' migratory moves.<sup>18</sup> The construction of ethnicity is here the result of an overdetermined act of nomination. Ruger predicates that one ought to maintain an ethnic and by implication marginal identity even if only one's great-great-grandfather came from outside Canada. The problem with

this position lies not in the "natural" fact that ethnic subjects acknowledge, more often than not, their roots but in its assumption that the cultural practices articulating those origins are seen as being the exclusive determinants of subjectivity.

Ine Schepers's story "Discovery in Delft" illustrates her editor's ethnic ideology. After the opening paragraph's description of the market square in Delft, the narrator wonders:

What am I doing here? For the first time since our emigration to Canada, twenty-seven years ago, I'm back in Holland alone, without husband or children. I am out of touch with my country. Restless between large, fun-filled family reunions, I'm gripped by an indefinite yearning like those cravings during pregnancy when I don't even know what I'm craving for. (Ruger, *Transplanted Lives* 11)

Despite her feelings of estrangement and anxiety inscribed in the story by a series of questions—"Did it happen the way I remember it?" (14)—the narrator concludes with the statement, "[t]his is my country. Mine forever" (15). The biologism of the narrator's "cravings" suggests that the immigrant is destined to look "forever" backwards in an attempt to recover the missing bond with the mother country. This desire for a reunion with the symbolic order of the maternal body is presented as a romance that, we are led to believe, remains unadulterated by any feelings of attachment the story's immigrant might develop towards the adoptive country. Indeed, the only sign that might compromise the presumed authenticity of these yearnings, the fact that she found herself singing in English the words of an old Dutch hymn, is quickly put aside in a brief but significant incident.

A Mighty Fortress is our God—*Een vaste burcht is onze God*. The Dutch words of the hymn flow easily now. I say them silently, sentence after sentence, while floodlights suddenly illuminate the contours of the New Church, accentuating the darkness of the sky. I leave the market square and walk back to the car. . . . The silent presence of history vibrates in the cool night air. A sense of permanence and stability invades me. Flashes of memory flood my mind . . . (14)

The metaphysical overtones of the narrator's reunion with the mother country, although narrated in the present tense, privilege the past. The religiosity attached to the physical and symbolic context of the scene, reminiscent of miraculous conversions, sanctions the immigrant's desire to embrace the maternal

body, to authenticate her origins. Thus the hymn's translation from English into Dutch parallels the symbolic conversion from immigrant to that of "natural" denizen.

The narrator's epiphany at this point, though, is made cogent only by a breakdown of temporality and logic. There is a contradiction between the narrator's claiming her country as hers "forever" and putting this feeling in practice by "visiting all those places" (15). Donning the guise of a tourist does little to prove her claim that she has gained stability and permanence. The violence and transgression implicit in the metaphor of "invasion," instead of affirming the narrator's transcendence of the immigrant condition, expose the inauthenticity of her proprietorial claims—"[m]ine forever." The epistemological position she assumes (that she thinks she knows who she is, where she belongs, and what is rightfully hers) appears to be as transient as her desire to prove herself to be, in Chow's words, "the non-duped" (52). Thus the elation with which she asserts this knowledge is tenable only in so far as she suspends her immigrant condition and what makes her different in Canada. Ironically, it is Canada as the originary point of the journey to the Netherlands that enables her to presume this experience of certainty. From being her host country, Canada now figures as the parasite to the narrator's "discovery of Delft." The metaphor of pregnancy, then, besides signifying that she carries her immigrant condition within her, illustrates that she herself gives birth to the maternal body, thus underscoring the extent to which biologism is embodied in certain kinds of multicultural discourse.

Even more interesting than these tensions, however, are the religious and cultural sites within which the immigrant narrator positions herself in the story. The polarity between the darkness of the sky and the illuminated contours of the church (intended to imply an entry into cosmic time), between forgetting and remembering the mother tongue, between recalling Delft's distant history while knowing nothing of its present, relegates the immigrant to the position of a damned figure awaiting redemption. Written as it is in English, and published in Canada for Canadian readers by a Canadian press called the Netherlandic Press, "Discovery in Delft" deconstructs its own apocalyptic end-

ing. It addresses the immigrant's relationship with Canada at the same time that it renders that condition analogous to her immanent experience in the country of origin. If this story's reading of the diasporic experience has the authenticity presumably recovered in a moment of near ecstasy, what is the immigrant to do when temporality is restored, when the fervour of her transcendent rediscovery of "home" subsides, when she returns to the host country only to discover that she has had a home there for "twenty-seven years"?

Characters that speak of the return to the homeland—a recurring motif in these ethnic anthologies—tend not to concern themselves with such questions. Instead, they are inclined to reify what their longing produces, thereby reconstructing their subjectivity with an intentionality that valorizes a past recognizable only if seen outside social and political realities. Such narrators assume a paradigmatic role in that they exemplify official multiculturalism's interpretation of the ethnic subject as one that remains the same "forever." Ethnicity is configured here as a "natural" condition, the outcome of displacement, which cannot (must not?) be absconded from or adulterated. Identity defined in ethnic terms, it is suggested, can be understood only as permanent and stable. The reluctance to problematize what ethnicity evinces, and how it does so, illustrates the extent to which ethnicity, together with the essential origins that are often taken to be its principal referents, is a construct produced by the anxiety and loss that accompany displacement.

Not all texts in these anthologies, however, articulate ethnic difference in essentialist terms. Some of them operate in an obverse way by deconstructing the assumed determinism binding immigrants to their mother countries and certain inherited premises about ethnicization. Take, for example, Nigel Darbasie's poem "Conceiving the Stranger," from *Voices: Canadian Writers of African Descent* (an anthology, despite its title, not restricted to writers of African descent), edited by Ayanna Black:

First define the tribal self  
in skin colour, language  
religion, culture.  
Add to that  
boundaries

of nation, city  
 village or street.  
 And there you are:  
 out of place  
 a foreigner  
 the strange other  
 a moving violation  
 of tribal differences. (58)

The proliferation of names designating the condition of the immigrant here speaks of the diversity of boundary lines that demarcate indigenous from non-indigenous subjectivities as well as of the impossibility of consigning marginalization to a single source or agent of power. The speaker perceives ethnicity to be a construct situated between the overlapping and conflicting meanings of difference and otherness. To be ethnically different does not necessarily mean being a "strange other." Otherness is conferred upon the subject, and it says more about those who use it as a discriminatory gesture than about those marginalized by it.

Consider Cyril Dabydeen's poem "I am not," from the same anthology, which powerfully resists ethnic nostalgia:

i am not West Indian  
 i am not—  
 let me tell you again and again  
 let Lamming and Selvon talk of places  
 too distant from me;  
 let me also recover and seethe  
 & shout with a false tongue  
 if I must—  
 that i am here  
 nowhere else . . . (31)

The immigrant speaker's affirmation of ties to his adopted country<sup>19</sup> reverses the tradition of ethnic writing that privileges nostalgia for the past, therefore denouncing what Julia Kristeva calls "the cult of origins" (2). The shift from upper- to lower-case I/i interrogates the sovereignty of identity and reflects the mutability of the subject's position. Far from being oblivious to the presence of boundaries—"we fashion new boundaries / and still i do not know" (32)—the speaker acknowledges the constructedness of the dividing lines that usually delimit ethnicity. Not unlike Jorge Etcheverry's poem "Ethnic Blues" in *Chilean Litera-*

ture in Canada, Dabydeen's "Multiculturalism," another poem in *Voices: Canadian Writers of African Descent*, offers a definition of multiculturalism contrary to the official ideology that insists on separating one ethnic group from another. Its speaking "I" bemoans the "ethnics at our door / Malingering with heritage" (29), but dons, among others, Chinese, Japanese, black, aboriginal, and Québécois identities (30). Far from presenting a utopian vision that does away with specificities, this floating "I" is paradoxically lodged in the political realities of "employment equity," the "police shootings in Toronto," "vandalism at a Jewish cemetery" (30).

These poets' visions, then, do not span only the emotional and geographical distance separating the country of origins from the host country. As Manuel Aránguiz, another poet from *Chilean Literature*, says,

We are not separated by a different song  
 nor by the colour of our skin  
 nor by our stature.  
 it is the coming and going of commodities  
 the legal plundering  
 the inhuman coveting  
 of things. (4)

The function of racial and cultural differences that some ethnic writers and ethnic studies tend to valorize in their treatment of ethnicity is shown to be subject to the political and legal commodification of such differences. The ideology implied here discloses the infeasibility of understanding ethnicity in essentialist terms, in terms that disregard the complex role played by political, economic, and legal systems in its determination.

## V Strategies of Inclusion, Literariness, and Ethnicity

The complicity that characterizes the interrelationship of official multiculturalism and some of these ethnic anthologies often becomes manifest in the writing included, a writing that seems at times to be selected with the intention of representing what is taken to be the collective ethos of an ethnic community. This strategy of representation often tends to reproduce, unwit-

tingly one would think, clichéd images about immigrants and to fulfill stereotypical expectations. For example, Marieke Jalink-Wijbrans's "Immigrant," more a document of personal anguish than a poem, reflects the need to make the immigrant's plight public, thus demonstrating that the act of writing, as is often the case in these anthologies, has a therapeutic or documentary function:

Because I'm different  
 I will never  
 really belong.  
 I left my country  
 where I now  
 don't belong either.  
 I live in a vacuum:  
 I belong neither  
 here nor there.  
 (Ruger, *Transplanted Lives* 52)

Beyond its nod towards poetic notation, "Immigrant" is artless. Its inclusion in the anthology is symptomatic of the tendency to make a certain kind of content, that is, the immigrant experience, the primary defining element of ethnic writing.

This raises a number of questions, one of them being what Carole Boyce Davies calls "the loaded question of literariness," namely, the fact that some of the writing in these anthologies was "never intended to be introduced to the public as 'works of literature'" (6). Although Jars Balan and Yuri Klynovy say that the Ukrainian émigrés and Canadian-born writers of Ukrainian descent included in *Yarmarok* "were asked to contribute pieces that drew on their ethnic background or experience," they argue that "in neither case was content invoked as a criterion of acceptance." Yet they proceed to admit that "[s]ome of the writing encompassed in this volume is primarily of historical or sociological value, and only secondarily of aesthetic interest. It has been included for the benefit of Ukrainian Canadianists and others working in the field of ethnic studies" (xii). As with some other editors of these anthologies, the common denominator of their acceptance criteria is informed by the intention to document their ethnic group's experience and "express a contemporary



Ukrainian" identity (xi). This kind of editorial intentionality is to some extent in keeping with the criteria the Secretary of State employs in funding such projects. It becomes quite obvious, then, that such strategies of inclusion are not merely representative of what presumably already exists in ethnic communities; they are complicit with the overdetermined ways in which ethnicity is defined outside of ethnic communities and with various policies that attempt to situate ethnicity inside certain parameters. When editors, overtly or tacitly, concede the fact that writing of dubious literary merit might be included in their anthologies, they give credence ironically to the old reason given by mainstream publishers that has prevented minority writers from getting published.

Lorris Elliott, Cyril Dabydeen, and Naím Nómez problematize the issue in a context that discloses the dynamics of cultural production and the marketing practices of publishers. Elliott, the editor of the black writing anthology *Other Voices*, acknowledges in his preface the financial support and the instigation of the Secretary of State in the production of a survey of literary writings by blacks in Canada, but he also challenges the expectations multiculturalism raises in readers concerning the thematics of ethnic writing.<sup>20</sup> In an essay that documents his experiences as editor and bibliographer of black writing in Canada, Elliott observes that "despite the expressed desire of the Canadian government that minority ethnic groups remain visible and not be melted into one faceless Canadian mass, one finds that the creative output of Blacks in Canada is yet to be recognized, made available and properly assessed" ("Black Writing" 170). Elliott elaborates on the systemic discrimination he refers to here by asking if "work written by Blacks in Canada" is "of an inferior quality to those [sic] written by others" (170). Since the obvious answer is no, he goes on to address the problem by talking about the lack of "commercial viability" that publishers attribute to ethnic writing (170) and the facile way this writing is rejected. Interestingly enough, these practices impact negatively not only on the dissemination of black writing but also on the black writers' own attitudes towards publishing. As Elliott says,

"[o]ne of the most surprising obstacles in my way—one that is most ironical—was the reluctance of Blacks themselves to provide samples of their work for possible publication. I eventually discovered that this attitude was a result of the fact that they had been frequently duped by people who came full of promises, but delivered nothing" (171). Despite the difficulties he encountered in compiling his anthology of black writers "of various regional and ethnic origins" (170), Elliott saw no reason to compromise his literary standards.

A similar thematization of ethnic difference and aesthetics underlies the bilingual anthology *Chilean Literature in Canada/Literature Chilena en Canada*. Its title introduces us to another national literature represented by established and new writers who immigrated to Canada primarily for political reasons. The editor's discussion of the writers' contributions is informed not so much by a need to prove their ethnic otherness in the Canadian context as by the desire to address the politics of cultural production in Canada. Nómez argues in his foreword against "a synthetic, totalizing culture that denies expression to the majority of the people" and goes on to define culture as "a plural phenomenon, a constantly renewed place of encounter and dialogue between the various cultural groups co-existing in the country" (vi). Outside of the fact that the specific ethnic focus of each of these anthologies does not help to advance the dialogue among various ethnic groups but almost exclusively reflects each group's interaction with the Anglo-Celtic mainstream society, Nómez makes it very clear that his main concern is not to appease any anxiety about ethnic difference but to locate his contributors within the various traditions of Chilean literature. "[W]e cannot expect these writers," he says, "to fully identify with their present historical situation, nor with Canadian literary production. They must be seen," he insists, "within a literary tradition that has fought in this century to free itself of its European (and especially French) influences, and to find its own mode of expression, whose most salient traits are the telluric American world, interpersonal relationships, struggles for social liberation and the reconquest of a non-colonized language" (viii). Language and exile, as Claudio Dúran says, go hand in hand:

Exile and grammar—each possessed  
 of its inexorable rules,  
 like the polar flight of migratory birds that fall  
 in Lake Ontario  
 never to stop resting. (16)

Having lost their “natural audience,” these writers have to decide on continuing to write in Spanish or adopting one of Canada’s official languages. Despite this dilemma, Nómez is absolutely clear about these writers’ “task,” which is “twofold: they must maintain their links with their native language and culture, and assimilate their experience in Canada and its culture” (x). By locating these writers in what Abdul JanMohamed would call their “generative ambience” (2), Nómez investigates the principle thematic topos of this kind of writing, namely, its relation to the country of origin, but does so without endorsing the nostalgia that informs much of the tradition of ethnic literature. The main reason for this, perhaps, is the “traumatic experience” of political “repression” (x) in Chile—in many cases what occasioned these writers’ exile. When political exile is what determines the immigrant condition, nostalgia for the place left behind does not lead to a mythologizing of origins. Instead, as much of the writing in this anthology demonstrates, it leads to the task of remembering why these writers were “lost to the history of their nation” (x). This remembering is not of memories that cherish tender images of the mother country. Quite the contrary. As Gonzalo Millán writes in “The Break”:

They peel fruit and smoke  
 and joke among themselves and with me  
 while I hang upside down by my feet. (62)

Not all of the writing in this anthology is about torture and political persecution, nor does Nómez attempt to suppress the individual differences among his contributors for the sake of presenting a collective ethos of exile. His main editorial intent is to locate the poetry and fiction he has gathered together in a specific cultural, social, and political context. He does not perpetuate the construction of cultural icons that argue for an unalterable ethnic identity. Instead, he is concerned with how that writing records the inevitable changes that occur after exile.

## VI Remapping the Past/Ethnicizing the Host Country

If the importance of Nómez's anthology is concomitant with his, and his writers', resistance to a unified thematic of ethnicity, DiGiovanni's anthology, *Italian-Canadian Voices*, attempts to consolidate the assumption that ethnic writing is always already about the same themes: it "speak[s]," as Pivato argues in his preface to the anthology, "to the modern Canadian experience of the immigrant, the ethnic and the exile" (13). This kind of supposition, still prevalent today, ascribes to ethnic writing an essentialist thematic that, on the one hand, answers to the intent of official multiculturalism to preserve and enhance ethnicity as a stable entity and, on the other, posits ethnicity as the pre-eminent agent determining subjectivity. Although a certain ethnic essentialism is arguably necessary to deal with marginalization, ethnicity is surely one element among many regulating subjectivity. There is an ironic twist, however, in Pivato's essentialist assumption in that he does not situate in the mother country the past such writing tends to embrace exclusively.

For example, to affirm that ethnic discourse is conditioned by history and creates history, he begins with a short litany of names: "Caboto, Da Verrazano, Tonti, Marini and Bressani." They are not writers, as one might expect, featured in the anthology; "these are the Italian names," he tells us, "that appear in the early history of Canada. These explorers and military heroes remind us that Italians have had a long association with Canada." And he goes on to iterate that "[i]n this century thousands of immigrants from the boot-shaped peninsula have come to this country and have made their labour felt in our social and economic life. More recently a few of these immigrants and some of their sons and daughters have begun to make a contribution to the literary life of Canada" (13). Exploration, military bravado, social history, familial genealogies: these are not just rhetorical gestures acquainting us with new literary voices. In endowing the Italian-Canadian writers he is about to introduce with as long a Canadian past as Canada itself can claim, Pivato remaps Canadian history. While most of the writing in his anthology deals with what he calls "the trauma of dislocation" in immigrant literature and is marked by the "authenticity" of its "verbal expression" (14),

his opening remarks, subtly yet purposefully, bid the reader to review the ideologies that have shaped the cultural canon of Canada.

Pivato's way of stating his claim on Canadian history certainly changes the image of the ethnic subject as a foreign other, thus working against the ideology of official multiculturalism that defines the ethnic subject by strategically privileging its origins outside Canada. He proposes an ethnic subjectivity that is domesticated not because it has been appropriated by state policies but rather because of its continuous historic presence.<sup>21</sup> Ethnicity, as is the case also with some of the black anthologies, is recodified as a "naturalized" presence. Pivato accomplishes this by practising the double gaze that structures the conventional expression of ethnic experience. His is a gaze characterized by temporality—the *now* and the *then* of Canadian history that he claims as his, ethnically. He attempts to strengthen Italian ethnicity in Canada by presenting the diachronic view of ethnicity that is lacking in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. The writers in *Italian-Canadian Voices* are exactly that, Italian-Canadian. The hyphen functions as a diacritical sign that asserts difference, but the difference it posits is offered as a qualifying mark. The hyphen, then, performs an interesting balancing act; Pivato, I believe, wishes us to hear not the articulation of a gap in the space of the hyphen but a self-identity doubly stressed. As a joinder, functioning like the conjunction "and," the hyphen does not cancel out either the Italian or Canadian identities. Identity becomes synonymous with the kind of difference that separates one group from another. Pivato's rhetoric might be much obliged to official multiculturalism, but it does not obviously condone its ideology of passive domestication.

## VII The Politics of Race

The complexity of the politics of representing a collective ethnic ethos takes a different configuration in the anthologies of writers of colour. For example, *A Shapely Fire: Changing the Literary Landscape*, edited by Cyril Dabydeen, presents, in its editor's words, an instance of an "evolving literature" of Caribbean authors framed by "the *there*, the place where one came from," and "the *here*,

temperate Canada, where the Caribbean spirit asserts itself in the desire to forge a wholesome and meaningful existence" (10). The spatial metaphor of Dabydeen's double gaze might stress his emphasis on the Caribbean, but also illustrates the diversity of race, ethnicity, and language that might characterize a single region. In this respect, his anthology is already a mirror of the multicultural and multiracial realities in Canada.

He tells us that Claire Harris's work "is expressed in the form of a spiritual odyssey to Africa as the speaker [in her poems] fuses those experiences with the present"; in M. Nourbese Philip's work, he continues, we see "virtually the same fusion but with a distinctive cadence"; in Neil Bissoondath's story he finds "attempts at bridging to the *here*"; and in "Anthony Phelps, both *here* and *there* are finally welded into a mythopoetic paean distinctively African and Caribbean and extending to the universal through the energy of sheer texture" (11). Fusing, bridging, welding—these metaphors suggest a coming together, a unity both expressive of the desire to co-exist in a space of diversities and antagonistic to the distinctiveness that his contributors advocate. Far from wanting to eliminate this paradox, the result of racial and ethnic hybridity, Dabydeen highlights it, as some of the writing he includes demonstrates. For example, Horace Goddard's "Mamaetu" foregrounds the very difference that marginalizes its speaker while at the same time relegating the reader to the margins of understanding:

Oh iponri  
 Oh iponri  
 Damballa Hwedo  
 Ogun Batala  
 Ogun Balanjo  
 Damballa Hwedo  
 Mother, we are here (112)

The poem's concluding line might strike an affirmative note, but any universalism or utopianism the reader might wish to attach to it is curbed by its irony. "Here" echoes Dabydeen's spatial metaphor, but it does so in a parodic way, for Goddard's "here" signifies Dabydeen's "there." As a floating signifier, this "here-ness" speaks of the anxiety of belonging, of the blurred lines that frame one's otherness.

*One out of Many: A Collection of Writings by 21 Black Women in Ontario* (1975), to my knowledge the first anthology of black writing in Canada, and of women alone at that, announces itself through the same rubric of a collective ethos, only this time this ethos is informed by race and gender.<sup>22</sup> With "a great deal of pride and trepidation," Liz Cromwell, the editor of the anthology, introduces the writers by addressing not only Canadian readers in general but other black women specifically: "If the work inspires other Black women to write," she says, "then it has succeeded" (5). This statement comes after what DiGiovanni would call her apology:

While some people are obsessed with involved language that attest [sic] to their great learning, I believe seldom does this contribute to clarity. I regard the poems in this book as successful. Because they are not trivial in concept or inconsequential in message, and speak of experiences common to people in the group labelled "visible minority" [sic]. And while I recognize the work has many weaknesses, I am still convinced that the words of the women must be heard and read, because the message is undeniably clear. (5)

In its stated intentions, Cromwell's anthology is multicultural in a literal sense; yet it also clearly exceeds the official multicultural imperative—the preservation and enhancement of a collectively defined ethnic identity. Her preface lacks any of the self-consciously employed strategies that would allow her to plead ethnic—she speaks as a writer about other writers. Indeed, rather than looking backwards in an attempt to consolidate the ethnic presence of her contributors, she looks forward in her desire to engender more writing by black women in Canada.

The historicity of race and gender here opens up the solidified notion of ethnicity that is characteristic of most ethnic anthologies. As Cromwell writes, some of the contributors "migrated from the United States, Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana, Africa, South America and elsewhere" and some are "native born Canadians whose parents or grand parents [sic] came from somewhere else" (5). The experiences of immigration, ethnicity, and nationality are revoked by the experience of what it means to be a black woman. In privileging race and gender, Cromwell invites us to reconsider the dogmatism that might lurk in claims made in other ethnic anthologies. More than any other anthology exam-

ined here, the hybridity of *One out of Many* bears the kind of “international dimension” that Bhabha talks about; it does not enhance homogeneity but reflects instead “the margins of the nation-space and . . . the boundaries in-between nations and peoples” (“Introduction” 4).

This international component offers an alternative to the tendency of official multiculturalism to employ ethnic difference as a dualistic instrument. Ironically, however, this complex of factors determining subjectivity is compressed in Cromwell’s attempt to make her anthology fit within the “emerging” canon of ethnic voices. “[A]ll other ethnic women have been heard before,” she says, “except Black women” (5).<sup>23</sup> The logic of her statement would lead us to assume that black and ethnic belong to the same semantic category. This collapse of differential meanings demonstrates both the competitiveness among ethnic groups that official multiculturalism and its programmes incite and the problems of defining ethnicity in exclusively racial terms or, conversely, the fact that a person of a visible minority, irrespective of her or his national alliance, is usually considered ethnic.<sup>24</sup> Further, this anthology suggests that the politics of ethnicity and/or race does not subsume the politics of gender or class. R. Radhakrishnan’s apprehension as to “[w]hy does the politics of the ‘one’ typically overwhelm the politics of the ‘other’” (78) is answered here unequivocally. These women authors never lose sight of any of the forces that mitigate their subjectivity, and they do so with great panache and irony.

For example, the title of Andrea de Shields’s poem, “Return,” parodies the “craving” to return to one’s origins. The “return” here signals that “Black is back” after “hiding in a nigger’s head / Sleeping in a negroe’s bed” (41). Similarly, Vera Cudjoe’s poem “Enough” articulates a politics of resistance that defies the representation of ethnicity through mimicry:

Rass man! Rass!  
 Enough o’dis  
 Blasted romantic stuff  
 Enuff is enough.  
 Rass man! Rass!  
 Enuff o’dis  
 Blasted white man tic stuff



Enuff is enough.  
Is all I can take  
O' dis sugar cake stuff  
And 'your skin is like silk'  
And 'mine is like milk'  
Next to you'n.  
Shit! Enuff is enough.  
Take yur tongue from my ear  
I had it to here man  
don't tell me to say  
What you want to hear.  
Cause how much I like it  
and how much I want it  
And how well we fit  
Is all fantasy shit  
A nail is a nail  
A screw is a screw  
Or didn't you know  
I'm having an experiment with you.  
And enuff is enough  
O.K. (37)<sup>25</sup>

The double spelling of enough/Enuff signals the poem's double talking, for the "blasting" of language demythologizes both the gendered and racial codes of romance and the inherited ways of defining ethnicity. The clash between written/hegemonic and aural/oral discourse, the scrambling of Standard English by black dialect (with its deliberate defamiliarizing impact on the white reader), the deafening repetition that inscribes itself as a radical departure from an established pattern of action all help to explode the stability that is often attributed to the ethnic subject in some of these anthologies. The speaker's "experiment" is already working: not only does she display her agency in showing that her racial and gender otherness must not be understood exclusively as the excess element of difference but she is acutely aware of the politics of seduction and resistance. In her poem, to borrow Said's words, "culture . . . is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that." It is a return "accompanied [by] rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behavior that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity" (xiii). Indeed, the speaker shows this kind of liberalism to be "fantasy shit."

### VIII The Ambivalence and Limits of Ethnic Success

If the anthologies examined so far demonstrate that ethnic discourse, especially that produced in the 1970s and 1980s, is usually produced and remains located within the margins of mainstream culture, a recent anthology co-edited by Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond begs to differ in rather substantial ways. *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* inaugurates a decisive shift in the articulation of ethnic difference in Canada, for, contrary to the ethnic and/or racial singularity of the anthologies discussed above, it brings together writers from various ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds. It is, then, a truly multicultural anthology in that it goes beyond the specificities of a given ethnic and/or racial group.

Contrary to the relative critical neglect from which most of the anthologies that I have dealt with have suffered, this one has been not only widely reviewed but, in the words of Hutcheon, "selling extremely well, having been adopted as a text in many schools and university courses" ("Multicultural" 9). Yet the "heated debate" it caused among reviewers, which prompted Hutcheon to "examine in writing" the complex of reasons for the "enormous diversity in [its] reception," is indeed telling, as she suggests, of how "touchy" a "topic" ethnic writing in Canada is these days (7). More than that, however, the negative criticism the anthology has elicited and the success it has enjoyed are not so much a reflection of the kind of writing included in it but rather symptomatic of the ways it challenges and attempts to alter some current assumptions about the state and status of ethnic discourse.

As Hutcheon's introduction testifies, *Other Solitudes* furnishes itself as a representative instance of the Canadian state's narrative of multiculturalism. This is reinforced by an appendix that contains the text of the official multicultural policy "in order for readers to compare the stated policy with the rest of the volume's testimony of its lived reality and its literary transcription" ("Multicultural" 8). This strategy of fusing literary and legal discourse enunciates unequivocally one of my premises in this essay, namely, that there is a correlation between the construction of ethnicity and state policy. Ironically, however, at the same

time that Hutcheon argues that the Multiculturalism Act is offered "without comment" ("Multicultural" 8), her own introduction to the anthology belies her assertion. For not only does she, like the other editors of the ethnic anthologies, endorse the policy for the "positive changes" it has effected (*Other Solitudes* 14) but she also "find[s her]self reacting against the seemingly cynical view[s]" (47) of such critics of multiculturalism as Roger Simon and the late Robert Harney. Hutcheon's introductory remarks about multiculturalism are too complex to be addressed adequately here, but suffice it to say her multicultural argument reflects the same degree of complicity found in other editors' remarks. But if all these anthologies are constitutive of multiculturalism, how are we to explain some of the discrepancies in the ways *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* situates itself?

It disputes the "canon" of ethnic marginality—the point of departure of all the anthologies examined here—at the same time that it posits itself within it. Its publication by one of the major Canadian presses, Oxford (the publisher of some of the very anthologies that have solidified the Canadian literary tradition), guarantees it wide advertising, distribution, and, by extension, critical attention. Its exclusive focus on fiction, the most accessible and marketable of literary forms, is also a factor contributing to its popularity. The intertext of its title being Hugh MacLennan's canonical text, *Two Solitudes*, indeed a rhetorical icon of Canadian cultural politics, aligns this anthology with the very canon it proposes to alter, while inviting the reader to consider the fact that the politics of ethnicity today is not different, at least structurally, from the politics of the two "founding" nations. Its second-last section, "The First and Founding Nations Respond," which includes interviews with (but not writings by) Tomson Highway, Jacques Godbout, and Robertson Davies, thematizes the title's allusion and is clearly meant to actualize the plurality of Canadian culture. Similarly, the inclusion of such established figures as Joy Kogawa, Michael Ondaatje, Mordecai Richler, Josef Skvorecký, and Rudy Wiebe lends this anthology the commercial viability and literary credibility that publishers have long claimed ethnic writing lacks.

It would seem, then, that *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* is designed in ways that put under erasure the marginalization of ethnic writing. Whereas its contents take a critical look at many aspects of multicultural and ethnic experience, its strategies counterbalance the image of marginalization that surfaces in them. Likewise, while its success is due partly to its complicity with the very power systems that have normalized the minority label placed on ethnic writing, it certainly does not disseminate a domesticated kind of ethnic difference. This anthology, then, does away with the notion that success (that is, good distribution, reviews, adoption in the curricula) and ethnicity are concepts that cancel each other out because the latter tends to be synonymous with marginality. And it obviously invites us to consider the dangers involved when marginality is reified to such an extent that it becomes impossible for the minority subject to shift its position. Although most of the writing in the anthology avoids this risk, the tendency to see the ethnic subject in reified and essentialist terms often surfaces in the interviews. For example, Karen Mulhallen's interview with Katherine Vlassie focusses mostly on Vlassie's Greek background and has very little to do with her as writer: Mulhallen remains oblivious to Vlassie's complaint that "anyone who has questioned me about the book [her novel *Children of Byzantium*] seems to stress the fact that [its protagonist] Eleni is Greek and asks about my particular background" (118). Mulhallen's interviewing strategies reflect the extent to which "the discourse of the marginal," as Jonathan Crewe remarks, "include[s] the risks of a revived positivism, of re-essentializing oppositions from the 'side' of the marginal" (123). However, that most of the literature compiled in *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* belies this attitude attests to the diversity of this anthology. One could safely maintain, then, that its success is the result of a combination of factors: the high calibre and heterogeneity of its *multicultural* contents, the recent changes in Canada's ideological and cultural climate, and its editorial strategies.

If I point out the complicitous nature of this and the earlier ethnic anthologies' strategies, it is because I want to stress that complicity in this context is not just a matter of editorial selec-

tion. Complicity is intrinsic to the construction of ethnicity, not to mention other forms of marginality, in that it speaks at once of the limits and powers of the ethnic subject. This kind of complicity posits the margin and the centre as "deconstructible oppositions" (Crewe 126), thus showing that negotiation must constantly take place between the two. Whatever the politics of these individual anthologies, then, their complicity is constitutive of their desire to represent ethnic discourse in a contextualized fashion.

### IX Conclusion?

I have tried to read one ethnic anthology through another and each through its preface—this in search of an understanding of the ethnic subject's process of self-reflection and self-representation. The conclusions that can be drawn about this corpus of writing are neither final nor straightforward. The range of strategies employed in these anthologies has demonstrated that the heterogeneity of ethnic discourse demands that we study it through the conditions that produce it. These conditions, always positioned within both the ethnic subject and the cultural context that (re)defines it, speak of its "marked subjectivity" (McCallum 432) and articulate the informing relations of complicity and power. This is why the ethnic anthology functions contrapuntally—it is a gesture affirming ethnic difference, but it is always responsive to the forces that relegate that difference to the margins. Each editorial preface, expressed with an intentionality that is likewise structurally and ideologically complicit with the forces that dispute ethnicity, functions as a metanarrative of the cultural and psychological anxieties underlying the ethnic subject.

Ethnic subjectivity, be it radically questioned or securely posited, involves an epistemological process intended to recuperate the agency lost because of displacement. Its discourse textualizes the discursive relations fastening individual identities to collective ethos, and the cumulative impact of the construction of the past on the uncertainty of the present. The signature of this writing is the product of the thematization of ethnic experience and is marked by a direct and unambiguous foregrounding of

the authors' origins. In these anthologies, the "death of the author" announced by Roland Barthes is annulled. The genealogy of the authorial name, in its ethnic specificity, becomes analogous to, if not synonymous with, authority and authenticity. The displaced author finds a "home" in writing. Or, to put it differently, characters and personae operate as facsimiles of the authorial politics of self-location. Only scant attention is paid to how this authenticity is interpellated or to what ideologies it might conserve. There well may be, as we have seen, overlapping concerns and themes whose recurrence allows us to draw some conclusions. But there is also an instability in the patterns that inscribe ethnicity. What is certain is that we must continue to study the destabilizing power of the ethnic subject.

## NOTES

- 1 Sylvia Söderlind (37) and Barbara Godard (7) have also made the same point.
- 2 See, for example, 2-3, and 219.
- 3 *ACCUTE Newsletter* (7).
- 4 On the structure and politics of mainstream anthologies, see Knight, and Steele.
- 5 What is also relevant here is that the increased interest in Canadian ethnic writing often takes place in the context of postcolonialism, which, although it raises ideological issues pertaining to ethnicity, does not quite address ethnicity in its own terms.
- 6 My particular selections certainly determine the interpretations I reach through my focus on specific authors and editors, but they do not affect, as my extensive reading of ethnic anthologies published so far has shown me, the recurring patterns I identify or the conclusions I reach. The ethnic anthologies I read would make too long a list to mention here. For lists of such anthologies see, for example, Miska and Boily, although neither author's bibliography is complete.
- 7 The merits and shortcomings of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act have been debated by many critics. See, for example, Abu-Laban and Stasiulis, and Stasiulis. For a detailed reading of the Act, see Kamboureli.
- 8 The fact that most ethnic anthologies that I have come across in my research appeared after 1971, the year when multiculturalism was introduced, is an example of this. Bill C-93, however, did not pass until 1988.
- 9 I am alluding here to Kroetsch.
- 10 DiGiovanni spells Di Cicco's name as one word.
- 11 With no exception, all of the editors of the ethnic anthologies I have studied so far would agree with Di Cicco's preference for the Canadian mosaic as opposed to the American melting-pot treatment of ethnicity.
- 12 As becomes obvious in these anthologies, there are considerable differences between immigrants and those born in Canada of immigrants, but I do not have the space to elaborate on this here.
- 13 I use the word "experience" here, as it has been defined by Teresa de Lauretis, as "an ongoing process of which subjectivity is constructed semiotically and histori-

cally," or "more accurately as a complex of habits resulting from the semiotic interaction of 'outer world' and 'inner world,' the continuous engagement of a self or subject in social reality" (182).

- 14 I employ the terms "host" and "parasite" in the conflicting and continuously metamorphosed senses that Michel Serres attributes to them.
- 15 For an example of how difference might operate otherwise in a similar context, see the Chicago Cultural Studies Group.
- 16 To complicate things even further, one of the three stories by Weier, "Beggars on Rash Behari Road," is set in India.
- 17 Here Ruger neglects the fact that many Mennonites are of German descent.
- 18 Somehow, in Ruger's and in the other ethnic anthologies that I have consulted, the convention of mentioning the author's birthplace in biographical notes assumes a heavier weight than usual. With very few exceptions, contributors' notes always include precise information about the authors' diasporic movements. In the case of Canadian-born authors, the editors make the point of referring to the authors' genealogy.
- 19 One of the referees of my essay objected to this statement because, s/he argued, it "displays [my] ignorance of Dabydeen's corpus, which draws considerably from the poet's Guyanese past." It is certainly true that both Dabydeen's poetry and fiction deal with his place of origins. I do not address this because my intention here is to show both how ethnic writers are represented in these anthologies and the kinds of ethnicity that emerge from editorial strategies and selections.
- 20 See also his introduction to his *Literary Writing by Blacks in Canada: A Preliminary Survey* (1988), published in a series commissioned by the Multicultural Sector of the Department of the Secretary of State under the general editorship of Michael S. Batts.
- 21 One might wish to push this point a bit further by inquiring as to whether Pivato is suggesting here that there should be a distinction made between, say, the Italian immigrants and those other immigrants whose ancestors had no role to play in the "discovery," exploration, and founding of Canada.
- 22 This double emphasis also characterizes *Daughters of the Sun, Women of the Moon: An Anthology of Black Canadian Women Poets*, only here the diasporic gaze of the poets, as Ann Wallace, the editor, articulates it, does not stop, for example, in the Caribbean but takes us to "[a]ncient Africa [. . . which] was multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic" (5).
- 23 This is hyperbole, of course, for it is not clear what publications by other ethnic women Cromwell has in mind. The publication of *One out of Many* preceded the other ethnic anthologies I have encountered in my research.
- 24 Although race is not thematized in anthologies by white ethnic authors, their writing occasionally draws attention to how a white immigrant might be seen as not-white because of ethnic and geographical stereotypes. I do not have the space to discuss this important element here. See, however, Frankenberg on certain aspects of the construction of whiteness.
- 25 It is hard to know whether some of the language peculiarities here are due to the use of black dialect or to printing errors.

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