

“No place like home”: the facts and figures of homelessness in contemporary texts for young people

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Abstract

The most common story for children is one in which a central character leaves home in search of an adventure or is pushed out of an originary home, journeys to an unfamiliar place, and, after a series of exciting and/or dangerous experiences, either returns home, or chooses to claim the unfamiliar space as a new home. Whether as historical novel, domestic fiction, or fantasy, this story finds its happy ending in the agreement of the child to be secure (and secured) inside. The turn of the millennium, however, has seen an increasing number of narratives for young readers that challenge the earlier pattern. Using three Canadian novels for young people (published in 2004, 2006, and 2007) as examples, I demonstrate that, while these narratives may locate themselves within the context of a social-justice pedagogy and are concerned to teach young people the *facts* of homelessness and to promote thoughtful reflections on the underlying social causes of which homelessness is the symptom, readers are also invited to understand the young characters in the text more abstractly, as *figures* that represent possible ways of being in the world. Indeed, many of the recent narratives for young people replicate, almost uncannily, the metaphors and rhetorical turns of the theorists of globalization.

Keywords: *children’s literature; street kids; globalization; mobility; figuration; Canadian literature; award-winners*

The most common story for children, Perry Nodelman and I argue in *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, is one in which a central child character leaves home in search of an adventure or is pushed out of an originary home by the behavior of powerful adults, journeys to an unfamiliar place, and, after a series of exciting and/or dangerous experiences, either returns home, or chooses to claim the unfamiliar space as a new home. Whether as historical novel, domestic story, or fantasy, this story takes its main character from home to homelessness to (new) home, finding its happy ending in the agreement of the child to be secure (and secured) inside.¹ The 1939 MGM film of Frank Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz*, from which this paper takes its title, is an example of such a narrative.

The turn of the century, however, has seen an increasing number of narratives for young readers

published internationally that challenge the terms of the earlier pattern. Since the 1990s, narratives about child subjects on the move have proliferated around the world: these children might be immigrants, refugees, or exiles, if the narrative is working within political valences; vagrants, street kids, runaways, or “throwaways”, if the narrative is working within (or against) the terms of domestic realism (the genre that continues to predominate in contemporary texts for young people); or tourists and travelers, if the narrative is working within the generic terms of fantasy and adventure (including comic misadventure). While children on the move have been at the heart of children’s literature for a long time, what is different about these recent narratives is that the central child characters do not move inside or settle at the conclusion of their narratives. For them, it appears, there *is* no place to call home.

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My most systematic mapping of such narratives has occurred within the Canadian context, in part because, as the texts of my own national tradition, these are the texts that are most immediately accessible to me, and in part because of the research out of which this current project emerged. In 2008, together with eleven other scholars, I published a collection of essays entitled *Home Words: Discourses of Children's Literature in Canada*. The project was funded by a three-year grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which allowed us to work collaboratively and over an extended period of time with one another's key findings and developing arguments. My own analysis for the project focused on the collection of novels for young people that won awards in Canada between the years 1975 and 1995: I considered the ways in which these narratives worked to realize the generic patterns of children's literature. I was particularly fascinated by how often the final achievement of home was the result of a strenuously asserted refusal of homelessness in the narratives and by the frequency with which characters achieved home only by stretching the definition of home and family. In the happy endings in Canadian novels, I concluded, *home* was often a heterogeneous collection of people affiliated through choice, rather than a family bound by filial ties.² That such a view of home should be much favored in the narratives of a nation that was built on immigration and that has defined itself officially and legally as *multicultural* for more than thirty years is not surprising. That such a view of home as formed by affiliation has its unarticulated limits will also not be surprising to cultural critics: as various other essays in the *Home Words* collection demonstrated, in Canada those limits are often racialized ones, built on a disavowal of the presence of Canada's First Peoples within the spaces of the nation.³

It was the first conclusion, however—my observation of the insistence with which homelessness was refused in the award-winning fiction—that prompted me to take notice when I realized, late in the course of the project, that a new pattern seemed to have appeared among this corpus of texts. I was scanning award results from the decade between 1995 and 2005, the decade that followed the area of my primary concentration, largely in order to verify that my conclusions continued to be supported by the evidence. What I found, however, was that there were a number of award-winning narratives in Canada from these

years that not only did *not* refuse homelessness but actually found happy endings—or, at least, narrative closure—for characters who remained homeless at the end of their stories. I rather hurriedly added a third section to my chapter in *Home Words*, organized around a close reading of a 2004 novel by Canadian writer Martine Leavitt, *Tom FINDER* (a novel I discuss further below). Since then, I have been working on the question of the cultural functions of homelessness in texts for and about young people both more systematically and more extensively, considering, for example, non-fiction such as social-studies textbooks on homelessness; narrative films about street kids⁴; the media discourses surrounding the passage of what were called “Safe Streets Acts” (which governed the movement of homeless people on public roadways) in several Canadian cities during the 1990s; and, most recently, the Occupy movement.⁵ In this essay, however, I want to return to the focus on fictional narratives for young people that first started me on this research trajectory.

In my hasty survey in the last days of the *Home Words* project, I quickly found six novels that had been published within a few years of one another that seemed to be doing something new with the themes and the plots of homelessness. While the effects of fear, anxiety, and shame that were attached to the representations of earlier texts were still palpably present in many of the narratives, such feelings were often defused by the end of the narratives, with characters and narrators moving toward an accommodation with, and sometimes even a celebration of, the condition of homelessness. After the project was over, I set myself and my research assistants the task of finding out what other fiction for young people about homeless characters had been published in Canada since the turn of the century. We found 24 books published between 1999 and 2008 that featured what I call mobile child subjects, among them, exiles, refugees, runaways, street kids, and travelers. Many of these were books that had been nominated for or won various prizes and awards.⁶ (I emphasize award winners in assembling my corpus of books for analysis, because it seems to me that it is in these books that I am most likely to find the narrative patterns and projects that are valued by or important to the society that produces them at the time of their production. My overall focus as a critic is to consider the cultural work of young people's texts, and, in order to do this, I believe that I need to pay close

attention to the contexts of texts.) There are now many more books that could be added to this list—in fact, I probably add at least one title a month to my cumulative bibliography—and, more recently, I have also been collecting international titles. After accumulating my initial list, I turned for a time to the task of trying to figure out what these books sought to do. After reading many of the texts in quick succession, I reached the conclusion that, while many of the narratives clearly locate themselves within the context of a social justice pedagogy and are concerned both to teach young people the *facts* of homelessness and to promote thoughtful reflections on the underlying social causes of which homelessness is the symptom, readers are also invited to understand the young characters in the text more abstractly, as *figures* that represent possible ways of being in the world. The relevant context for this interest in homelessness, I've argued in several of my papers over the past few years, is globalization and the new subjects required to support a world system that, according to political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), takes "as its very conditions of possibility" "[c]irculation, mobility, diversity, and mixture" (150).

I arrived at this conclusion through a consideration of recurrent thematic elements in this group of texts. When I first set my research assistant Joshua Ginter the task of reading through the two dozen Canadian books in order to classify the variations of homelessness represented in them, he quickly pointed out to me that there were many more shared elements in these texts than the mobility of the central characters, and he developed a spreadsheet to demonstrate this. Most of the texts, he observed, are interested in communication systems: not surprisingly, in these 21st century texts, these systems are often computers connected to the Internet. Perhaps more surprisingly, many also allude to texts of "elite" culture and often use these "elite" texts extensively as intertexts: Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, Einstein's theories of relativity, and Van Gogh's painting *Starry Night* are just a few examples that come to mind.⁷ An interest in numbers, sometimes explicitly money or the lack of it, recurs in many of the texts; sometimes this interest is focused on what appears to be a group of random numbers, or puzzling sets or sequences of numbers. Forms of mental illness appear in almost all of the books, as do broken relationships with fathers and father figures, and sometimes also broken relationships with mothers and mother

figures. Perhaps as a displacement of, or substitution for, the fathers, the police and other institutional representatives regularly intrude into the homes of the characters and otherwise intervene in their stories. These intrusions are just one of the many instances in which there is evidence that boundaries between the inside and the outside are porous and confused.

Taken together, this cluster of thematic elements pointed to a deep anxiety being expressed in these texts about a social, economic, and cultural system under stress or struggling to find a new formation. Confused and shifting borders—things that won't stay in place—are literally and metaphorically related to changing forms and structures. If, as Kaja Silverman (1992) has maintained, in patriarchal societies the "dominant fiction is above all else the representational system through which the subject is accommodated to the Name-of-the-Father" (34), then the broken relationship with a father or father figure surely can be read to signal a disturbance—or the fear of a disturbance—in the narrative arc of the fiction. Similarly, the frequency with which mental illness appears can be read as a registration of the incomplete or unsuccessful accommodation to the dominant fiction. Michel Foucault, for example, has taught us to read madness as the outside that reveals the limits of the norm in a society. When I began to think about what events in contemporary culture might represent such a fundamental shift or provoke such anxiety about, to quote Silverman (1992) again, "everything . . . that commands general belief" (2), the most likely answer seemed to be globalization and the new world order said to be attendant on it. The persistent interest of these texts in networked communication systems, systems that are both the literal vehicle of, and the metaphor for, globalization, confirmed for me that I might be on the right track.

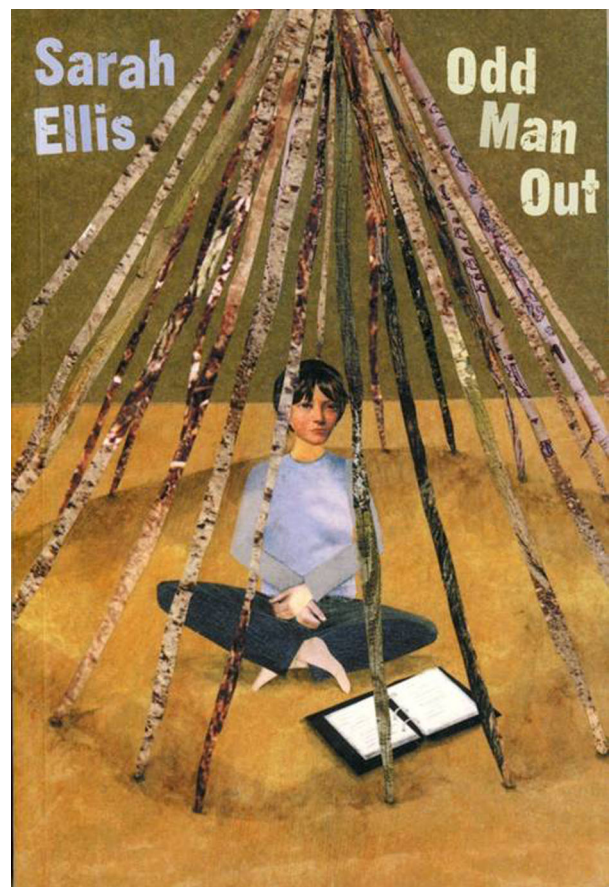
And, indeed, much globalization theory, and postmodern theory more generally, is taken up with characterizing various manifestations of the mobile subject: the "unhoused, decentred, and exilic energies" described by Edward Said (1993, 332), the nomadology of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari,⁸ Arjun Appadurai's "global cultural flows" (2003, 30), or the liquid modernity Zygmunt Bauman understands to be among the human consequences of globalization. Since the events in New York of September 11, 2001, of course, movements toward the borderless world trumpeted by the proponents of globaliza-

tion have existed in uneasy tension with what William Walters (2004) calls “domopolitics” (237), which includes not only the border fortifications of “homeland security” measures, but also the dispersal of borders and border controls within the whole territory of the nation. In these times, Walters (2004) says, “[i]nsecurity is bound up with themes of mobility”, since it appears to be “the movement, the circulation, the presence of unauthorized bodies which have violated the borders of the nation-state” (247). In other words, attempts to imagine the normal subject as a subject on the move—the global, supranational, unhomed subject wanted for the project of globalization—exist in tension with fears of unauthorized subjects on the move. That this fear is being extended and exacerbated in the face of the ongoing global financial crisis is being brought home to all of us at present, I suspect, albeit no doubt inflected differently in our different places. Nevertheless, there has been no evidence yet that the world is turning away from globalization: while the Occupy movements of 2011 *might* signal such a turn, it appears that many of these movements are consolidating their rhetorics around “alter-globalizations” rather than “anti-globalization” (Hardt and Negri 2012, 4).

One of the functions of children’s literature throughout history has been to create good citizens, or, as I often put it, to produce the subjects required by the dominant ideology to reproduce itself. Children’s literature is embedded within institutions that produce and distribute social values, such as family, schools and curricula, state-supported publishing houses, and public libraries. Given the basic situation of children’s literature, I assume that texts for young people are likely to register, and to work to resolve, the contradictions being thrown up by the new imperatives to produce liquid or mobile subjects. And, indeed, many of the recent narratives for young people I have been studying do replicate, almost uncannily, the metaphors and rhetorical turns of the theorists of globalization. In the remainder of this paper, I want to look at three of the Canadian novels for young people to demonstrate more specifically how these fictional texts speak to the theoretical issues that surround the unhomed subject of postmodernity. All three of the novels I’ve selected work within the generic terms of realistic, domestic fiction; all are set in an unspecified present moment and in identifiable locations within Canada. These choices of generic conventions signal that the narratives present

themselves as commentaries about contemporary young people in Canadian society.

In Sarah Ellis’s *Odd Man Out* (2006), the description of the contemporary situation of the future citizen as a form of homelessness is explicitly denied but implicitly admitted (Picture 1). Kip, the central child character of the novel, spends a summer with his five female cousins and Gran at her home on an unnamed island off the British Columbian coast while his mother is on her honeymoon on another island, Hawaii, with his new stepfather. Gran’s community appears to be one of the many retreats developed by counter-cultural resisters on the B.C. islands during the 1960s and 1970s: she lives in a big, old house close to the beach, next door to a helpful and artistic neighbor, and within a short distance of a small town defined in the text by its cooperative recycling center and its Free Store. But this utopian idyll is about to be disrupted. Gran has sold her house to a buyer whom she knows will be demolishing it. The buyer is neither named nor described, but the most obvious, extra-textual explanation for this figure who shadows the text is that he is either a member



Picture 1. Sarah Ellis: *Odd Man Out*, Toronto, ON: Groundwood-Anansi, 2006.

of the class of the new global super-rich who fuelled the rise of the B.C. housing market in the last decades of the twentieth century or a developer who plans to build a subdivision of houses. In other words, to use the terms of Pierre Macherey (1966), what this realistic text “wants to say” is to affirm the co-operative and barter economies of Gran’s local community, but what it is “compelled to say” is that these economies are framed by the pressure of global markets (94). Indeed, the text “knows” that the local economy of Gran’s island is subtended by larger economies: a repeated motif in the novel is the listing of objects and services that must be purchased from “the mainland” (Ellis 2006, 97). Moreover, the consequence of the intrusion of the global into the local will be to unhome Gran.

The disavowal—the simultaneous affirmation and denial—of the presence of the larger world in Gran’s insular home occurs in a number of scenes in the novel. One example is the family’s “hobo dinner”, a traditional summer event for them, for which Gran and the children dress up to play at being vagrants as they cook dinner on an outdoor fire. Their impersonations of these dispossessed of an earlier generation are a strange pastiche they put together from old black-and-white films and from their own successful past performances. The narrative account of this scene ends as Kip recognizes that the holes in his father’s old clothes, some of which the children are wearing as costumes, mark the places where he has carefully cut-out the labels sewn into the clothes—a cogent protest, one of his cousins asserts, against the “logo-driven power of multinational corporations and the exploitation of garment workers in the Third World” (Ellis 2006, 99). Kip, however, recognizes the act as a symptom of his teenage father’s spiral into schizophrenia, a time during which he came to believe that clothing labels were portals for a shadowy conspiracy that was seeking to take over the free world. This picnic is suddenly no longer only play.

Schizophrenia, defined by Jacques Lacan as, in Fredric Jameson’s words, “a breakdown in the signifying chain” that is grounded by the paternal cultural authority he calls “the Name-of-the-Father”, is taken by Jameson (1991) as a useful definition of the postmodern aesthetic of “late capitalism” (26). If “personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one’s present” (Jameson 1991, 26), the schizophrenic might be understood as “reduced to an experience of . . . a series of pure

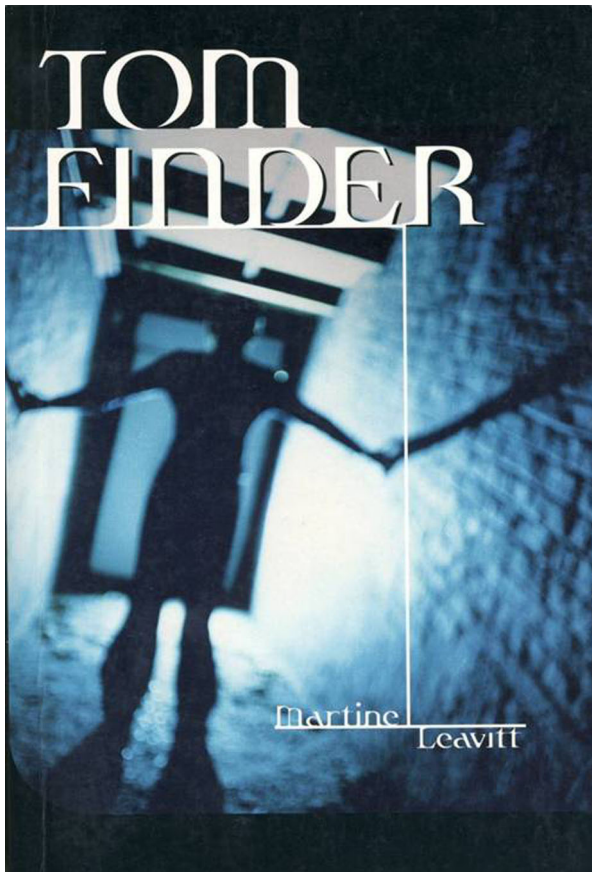
and unrelated presents in time”, an experience of life as a series of fragments rather than a coherent temporality (27). *Odd Man Out* is usefully interpreted within these terms. The demolition of Gran’s house will break the continuity between the past, the present, and the future for the family: the summer weeks Kip is spending with her are his last opportunity to inhabit the spaces in which his father (who died in a car accident when he was five years old) grew up. For Kip, his father has always been “made out of pieces . . . photo albums, Mom’s stories and Kip’s own scattered memories” (Ellis 2006, 25). But Kip’s reading of the journal kept by his father at the onset of his adolescent illness makes his accounts of the world as present to Kip as the manic activities of his plethora of cousins in the “madhouse” into which he feels he has “wandered” (Ellis 2006, 15). Because bits of the journal are interpolated into the main narrative, this experience is replicated for readers of Ellis’s text.

The book ends as it began, with Kip on an airplane, apparently on his way to a new home with his mother and stepfather, a futurity unrepresented in the narrative. Gran’s new home in the city on the mainland, too, is never depicted. Ellis works to reassure her readers that connections can be made and maintained between and among people even if connections to places and to coherent narratives are disrupted. In *Odd Man Out*, the most important linkages are created through writing, but all of the writing represented in the text is fragmentary and ephemeral: the incomplete narrative of his father’s journal; Kip’s notebook in which he lists the Rarely Asked Questions that occur to him during the summer; the rules and maps and pictures that Gran allows the cousins to draw on the walls of the soon-to-be-dismantled house; and Kip’s erratic email correspondence with a friend, made frustratingly difficult because of Gran’s outdated dial-up network connection. Kip’s final act in the narrative is to write a sequence of numbers he has found in his father’s journal “along the top inside edge of the motion discomfort bag”. He understands this as a “secret message” for an imagined future occupant of his seat on the plane who, like him, is interested in “[s]aving the free world” (Ellis 2006, 162), although Kip himself has been unable to decipher the code of the numbers or to discover their meaning during his story.

In what political theorist Jodi Dean calls the system of “communicative capitalism” under which we now live, the disruption of the connections to place is refigured as the breaking of

the constraints of place. As Dean (2004) explains the term, it refers to the merging of capitalism and contemporary communications, especially as that merging is figured through the Internet (266). In a networked age, Dean (2004) says, “[c]onsumers and producers, workers and capital, are not constrained by territory or, more specifically, by the political boundaries given by states” (269); rather they are bound together through communication over distances to produce commodities. Further, as Hardt and Negri (2000) observe, under the new form of Empire that now governs the globe, “[a]t the pinnacle of contemporary production, information and communication are the very commodities produced” (298).

That taking up one’s place within the network of communicative capitalism is the only way to survive as a homeless subject is the conclusion reached by the second of the narratives I am considering, Martine Leavitt’s *Tom Finder* (2003). Tom’s story begins as he runs away from home after a beating by his mother’s boyfriend (Picture 2). As he moves toward the urban core of Calgary, he forgets everything about himself other than his first name. For Tom, the breakdown in the signifying chain of cultural meaning



Picture 2. Martine Leavitt: *Tom Finder*. Red Deer, AB: Red Deer Press. 2004.

is almost complete. His only clue to his identity is a notebook he finds in his backpack, which contains some notes about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and a pen in his pocket advertising an upcoming performance of *The Magic Flute*. Like an anthropologist, Tom uses his notebook to record what he observes to be true about himself and the world around him, “making himself up, inventing the story of himself” (Leavitt 2004, 57), as he says. The power of this performative practice to hold his identity in place leads him to conclude that “words are in charge of the world” (Leavitt 2004, 100). This being so, he reasons, the most obvious way to find his way home to the parents he is convinced are desperately seeking him, is to rent a billboard advertising his habitual locations in what he calls “the Core”. Much of the narrative follows Tom as he tries to earn the \$5,388 he learns he will need to rent signage for two weeks, time he also spends piecing together the clues to himself that seem to lurk inside the mysteries of Mozart’s opera. When the music eventually does unlock his memories and the elaborate narrative of his life as a member of a happy and prosperous family unravels, he chooses not to return home.

Leavitt’s narrative ends with Tom sitting on the curb of a public street, writing the stories of a group of his homeless friends who have died in a fire in an old warehouse, once the site of a trendy restaurant, in which they had been squatting. Earlier in the novel, in his movements around the city parks, he has talked to the editor of a local newspaper, who has told him that he would pay “[g]ood money” for someone who could write well about what it is like to live on the streets (Leavitt 2004, 48). Tom’s story ends with his determination to solicit the attention of this powerful man and so to find his way inside the structures of his society without the need to return to his family home:

He would write their stories. Every one of them had a story. The newspaper man would buy it, Tom was sure. And maybe take him home to meet his wife. He wrote their names. Not their real names, but their street names, the ones they had died in Tom wrote their stories, there on the curb with his feet on the pavement and his head in gravity. He had no trouble finding the words. (Leavitt 2004, 141)

The final scene of Tom’s story is consonant with the terms Dean uses to describe the spectacle that is an essential component of contemporary global communications. In her terms, “[s]pectacle is

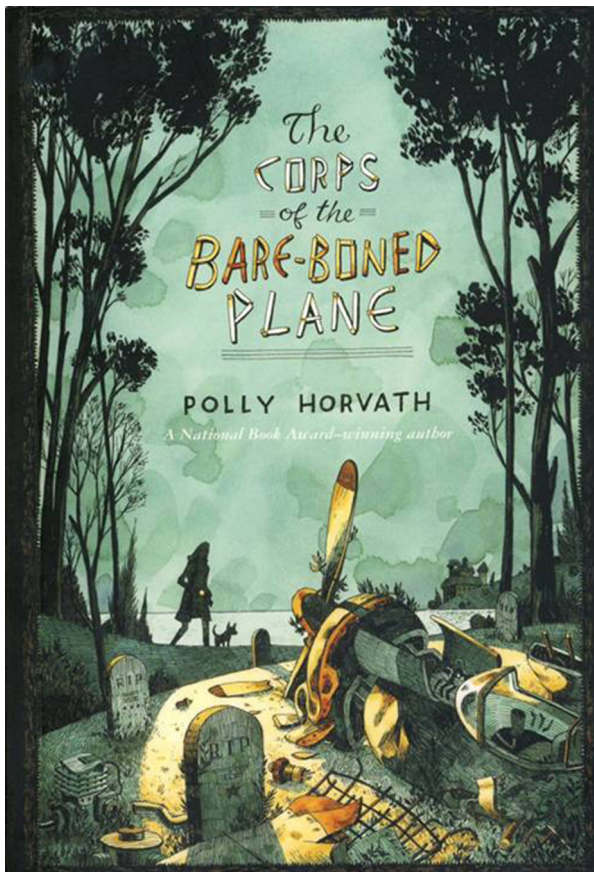
a form of social integration presupposing audiences rather than participants” (Dean 2004, 270), a form of collectivity that bypasses “intersubjective relations or group identifications” and so “makes political action difficult” (Dean 2004, 271). Indeed, there is no promise in Leavitt’s narrative that contributing the stories of the street kids to an organ of the public media will make any significant difference to the “beautiful office workers, their arms hung heavy with all the good business of the world” who stop to gawk at the scene of the smoking ruin (Leavitt 2004, 140). There is only the hope that, by entering the “global circulation of information and production of affect” (Dean 2004, 272), Tom will display his suitability as a candidate for “a new life, a new home” (Leavitt 2004, 141).

Like Ellis and Leavitt, Polly Horvath in *The Corps of the Bare-Boned Plane* (2007) finds the only possibility for unhomed subjects to rehome themselves to be in language. But Horvath moves further than either Ellis or Leavitt to define a practice in which home can be reimagined as a global place (Picture 3).

Horvath’s narrative presents itself as a detective story, a genre that Peter Brooks (1984) has

suggested is most insistently concerned with hermeneutics, the search for the principles of interpretation or meaning-making (18). *The Corps* is an indictment of the delusions of people who believe that they can be self-contained and, on another level, an allegory of the futility of any attempt by the nation in the world of the post-nation to make itself invulnerable to global catastrophe. Two cousins, whose parents have died in a horrific train derailment and massacre in Zimbabwe, a massacre apparently politically motivated, have been sent to live with their guardian, an uncle who, having made his fortune trading in the global stock markets, has retreated to another B.C. island on which he has built a grand Victorian-style house in order to pursue his solitary study, ironically, of “unified field theory” (Horvath 2007, 76). The island he has bought is the graveyard of another odd attempt to renounce connectivity to the larger world. Once the property of the Canadian Department of National Defence, it was used to train air-force pilots to land under “adverse circumstances” (Horvath 2007, 86). The isolation of the site allowed a renegade commander to push the notion of “adverse circumstances” to an extreme. Insisting that a corps of pilots accustomed to use only their own observations and judgments “would be the most powerful fighting force anyone . . . had ever seen” (Horvath 2007, 86), he stripped the planes of their radar and other instrumentation: it is in this sense that they are “bare-boned”. His experiment was a disaster: the planes regularly crashed and the pilots in them regularly died. Cousins Meline and Jocelyn set themselves the task of finding the downed planes, which have been sinking into the fecund earth and vegetation of the B.C. rainforest, with the plan to assemble the parts into a working machine which they can use to “liftoff”, to “leave the [island] behind”, if and when they choose to do so (Horvath 2007, 91).

In many ways, this novel fits a story pattern common in children’s literature, that of the orphan tale. In a novel such as *Anne of Green Gables*, for example—notably, the iconic novel of Canadian children’s literature—the red-haired waif is adopted into a longed-for family home, itself encircled by the close-knit community of Avonlea, located on an island at the other end of Canada. Horvath’s story inverts the basic premises of Montgomery’s story: the central girl characters have no desire to be made part of a new family and the home to which they are sent has been deliberately isolated. In an early scene in the narrative, as the girls pass



Picture 3. Polly Horvath: *The Corps of the Bare-Boned Plane*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood-Anansi, 2007.

through the down-market east end of Vancouver en route to the helicopter that will take them to their uncle's island, Horvath (2007) metonymically links them to the "panhandlers, drunks, druggies, homeless" whom they see "slumped against buildings and doorways. As if legless" (16). This scene acts as a hermeneutic key to the themes of the narrative: mobility and immobility at different scales—personal, local, national, and global—are to be seen as variations of one another.

That the girls' project of rebuilding the flying machines is madness is predicted by the fate of the commander who is "put ... away" where "he couldn't do any harm" after he is eventually reported (Horvath 2007, 87). Both of the girls become ill over the course of the novel, Meline delirious with pneumonia and Jocelyn pinned within her dreams of her parents by her addiction to the homemade painkillers supplied by the housekeeper, Mrs. Mendelbaum. The narrative proceeds in fits and starts as most of the central characters one by one address an unidentified audience with their accounts. A formal version of spectacle, this turn to the audience dramatizes the fragmentariness of any one character's knowledge of history—the family origins of the girls' parents, the facts surrounding their deaths, the history of the island on which the motley collection of characters has landed—and their reluctance to engage one another in a collective project. "We were each of us entirely alone", Meline says at one point (Horvath 2007, 75). But, for readers who, along with Meline and Jocelyn, act as detectives, the fragments gradually assemble themselves, not into a complete picture, but into some lines and patterns.

The last two pages of the novel are literally given over to lines and patterns, a glossary of the Yiddish terms with which Mrs. Mendelbaum has peppered her conversation throughout the novel. The English translations can almost be read as a blank-verse narrative, a narrative that appears to hesitate on the threshold of sense. Here, for example, are the opening lines of the glossary in English:

completely broken
lecherous old man
rich man
serves him right
he should grow like an onion, with his head
in the ground
to hell with it
dung-y
crazy
nothing of value (Horvath 2007, 269)

This conclusion might be said to thematize in its form the work of making meaning. Meline at the story's end has set herself the task of learning Yiddish in order to understand the last words spoken by the housekeeper before she dies. She is helped in this project by Mrs. Mendelbaum's Catholic Polish friend, Sophie, like her a refugee from the holocausts of World War II. Indeed, by the end of the novel, the island has become a crowded place, housing not only Uncle Marten and the cousins, but also the graves of the "wrecked men" of the corps (Horvath 2007, 88); Mrs. Mendelbaum; Sophie; Father John, a priest from a "street shelter for runaways" (Horvath 2007, 266) who has come to the island at Sophie's urging to ensure that Mrs. Mendelbaum is safe and who, mistaken by Mrs. Mendelbaum as an applicant for the position of butler, stays to act in that capacity; Dr. Houseman, a physician in love with the priest, who has taken up residence to care for all of the sick people on site; and assorted pets.

The acceptance of this ménage as home is a textbook example of the nomadic forms of citizenship that Deleuze and Guattari have theorized. In nomadic citizenship, heterogeneous groups self-organize more or less spontaneously rather than under command from above. As Claire Colebrook (2005) has explained, "[n]omadic space ... is smooth—not because it is undifferentiated, but because its differences are not ... cut up in advance, [nor does it require] ... prescribed moves ... there is not one law that stands outside and determines space; law is produced in the traversal of space" (182). The "alternative interpretation of place" advocated by cultural geographer Doreen Massey is a related idea (Massey 1994, 152). What is needed, says Massey (1994), is the reconceptualization of place not as static, bounded, or homogeneous—as, for example, in the mapping of a nation—but, rather, as a particular locus of "networks of social relations and movements and communications" (154), an articulated moment and mixture of experiences understood to be the sedimentation of far larger, indeed global, scales of space and time. For Massey (1994), such a conceptualization allows for a perspective that values both the local and the global, since each local place is "a meeting place", "a particular, unique, point" of the intersection of global forces and histories (154).

Canadian narratives for young people, I concluded in my essay in *Home Words*, have long valued chosen, affiliative linkages over given,

filial ties. The recent Canadian narratives I have been discussing are less persuaded that the space of *home* can be either claimed or made by contemporary young people. Sarah Ellis’s *Odd Man Out* leaves its young protagonist literally up in the air—suspended between a multi-generational family home that is about to be demolished and a home he has never seen that will be headed by a new father—and travelling with only a code that he cannot decipher as a guide. Martine Leavitt puts the most abject version of homelessness—a life lived on public streets—at the center of her narrative about Tom Finder. With no claim to the private enclosure of a home, Tom’s only recourse is to master the public discourses in which he finds himself enmeshed. Polly Horvath’s narrative imprisons two homeless girls within an undesired home, in order to explore the ways in which the auratic condition of being *at home* is an inadequate description of the contemporary subject in the world. For Horvath, affiliations are not always chosen, they are more likely to be multiple and shifting assemblages than consolidated groups, and, while the implications of such linkages cannot always be known, they must, nevertheless, be lived and traced.

I said at the beginning of this paper that these recent Canadian narratives replicate, almost uncannily, many of the metaphors and rhetorical turns of the theorists. That this is so suggests the extent to which these figures have entered the discourses of our times. That these figures recur in contemporary texts for young people suggests, I propose, that these are now hegemonic discourses. Schizophrenia and addiction, homelessness and mobility, communicative networks and spectacle, smooth space: this, it seems, is the vocabulary available to us for the production of subjectivity and the understanding of our place in the world.

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Notes

1. See the chapter entitled “Children’s Literature as Repertoire”, in *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, 184–217. I demonstrated the variations of this pattern common to Canadian children’s literature in English and French in an article written jointly with Anne Rusnak.

2. See my chapter entitled “Homing and Unhoming: The Ideological Work of Canadian Children’s Literature”, in *Home Words*, 1–25.
3. See, in particular, the chapter by Doris Wolf and Paul DePasquale, entitled “Home and Native Land: A Study of Canadian Aboriginal Picture Books by Aboriginal Authors”, 87–105, and Louise Saldanha’s “White Picket Fences: At Home with Multicultural Children’s Literature in Canada?”, 129–43.
4. This keynote talk, delivered at the Congress of the International Research Society in Children’s Literature that took place in Brisbane, Australia, in August 2011, has now appeared in a revised version under the title “On Location: The Home and the Street in Recent Films about Street Children” in *International Research in Children’s Literature*.
5. See “It’s the kids who made this happen’: The Occupy Movement as Youth Movement”, in the Summer 2012 issue of *Jeunesse*.
6. The 24 novels on which I based the analysis I present in this paper are listed in the Primary Works Cited.
7. These intertexts are, respectively, Leavitt’s *Tom Finder*, Barbara Haworth-Attard’s *Theories of Relativity*, and Eric Walter’s *Sketches*.
8. See Chapter 12, “1227: Treatise on Nomadology: The War Machine”, in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

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