REVIEWS

The Canoe and *Fiat Justicia*

Misao Dean, *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. 230 pp.

With her *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle*, Misao Dean argues "that both the practice of (recreational) canoeing and its representation in historical and literary texts in Canada is an attempt to indigenize the non-indigenous population and to elide the history of First Nations peoples, to substitute a conflict-free history of inclusion for the reality of genocide and theft" (20). Dean says also that "instead of accepting the non-indigenous characterization of the canoe as a symbol of Canada, First Nations communities have reappropriated it in order to represent their own journeys towards both healing and justice" (19-20). Even though Dean calls this last element an argument, she does not so much advance a premise as describe an existing practice among First Nations peoples. The book's labour, then, lies almost exclusively with Dean's efforts to demonstrate that the canoe represents the ways in which "the First Nations were invaded, colonized, and subsumed by non-indigenous culture in Canada" (17). By the same token, the canoe thus signals the imperative whereby non-indigenous Canadians must acknowledge that their "desire for a nation that is material and experiential…will always be frustrated" (16). For Dean, then, the canoe secures and re-establishes identity for First Nations, and for all others it should awaken both ancestral and personal accountability for historic and contemporary injustices to First Nations peoples.

Words such as "indigenize" and "reappropriated" hint that Dean drives her argument by means of Terry Goldie's *Fear and Temptation* and Margery Fee's essay "Romantic Nationalism and the Image of Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature." Dean finds in Fee's essay a way to analyze the efforts of contemporary writers who refer to Aboriginal culture and peoples in an effort to secure the authenticity of being Canadian. This argument makes clear that non-indigenous people necessarily hold a failed and alien citizenship, for the very act of gesturing symbolically at Aboriginal ancestors underscores the absence of any autochthonous link to Canadian soil. Goldie, as Dean puts it, uses indigenization to describe the efforts of non-indigenous "Canadians to make themselves either literally Native, or merely native to place" (15). In addition to Fee and Goldie, Dean draws inspiration from Jurgen Habermas's "Concerning

the Public Use of History," which holds that subsequent generations of Germans share responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust.[1] By extension, Dean holds herself and her non-indigenous reader responsible—that is, guilty—for committing "genocide and theft" against Canada's First Nations (20). Dean's foundational premise, then, rests on historic and recent legal decisions on the principle of Aboriginal title, on the Supreme Court of Canada's affirmation that First Nations peoples have a right to their land and to its subsurface minerals. I will say more about the *Calder* decision that established the legal foundation of Aboriginal title when I reach my final paragraph. For the moment, my reference to it indicates that I view Dean's book as an essay written to change attitude, thought, consciousness, and action among what Dean calls "middle-class white Canadians" (17).

Dean structures her book by means of an Introduction, which sketches her theoretical and critical paradigms, and eight chapters, each focused on the canoe. Chapter One and Chapter Five are the only ones directly focused on the canoe and Canadian literature. For reasons that I will explain later, I do not find these chapters to be Dean's strongest work. Even though Dean says her "purpose in writing this book is not to write about the canoe, *per se*, but about what it has been made to represent," and even though she disavows an interest in the actual history of the canoe, she is at her best when examining the canoe as it exists within the object world and within history (19). This work occurs in the remaining six chapters, which consider the canoe and historiography, the canoe and its advocates (Chapter Three on Eric Morse and Chapter Six on Bill Mason), the Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant, the Canadian Canoe Museum, and her final chapter on First Nations canoeing in British Columbia. Dean averages some twenty pages a chapter, so when the two chapters on Canadian literature and the two previously published sections (Chapter Four on the canoe pageant and a version of Introduction) are set aside *Inheriting* is a rather slim volume given its ambitions.

I want to say now that I agree with Dean's aim of pursuing justice for Aboriginal peoples in Canada, yet there is room to critique the book's argument. In part, my remarks broach the question of audience. Published in the Cultural Spaces series by the University of Toronto Press, the book is neither a fully orbed scholarly endeavour nor a trade book pitched at a more general reading audience. Its emphasis not merely on representations of the canoe but also on the practice of recreational canoeing makes it best suit readers from what can loosely be called Canada's paddling community. I do not think this group of readers cares nothing about the fusion of

literary and cultural theory, yet much of the Introduction could have been stated more simply and powerfully. Moreover, a number of key concepts such as place, nation, property, Aboriginal title, identity, First Nations, and commodity fetishism could be given sharper definition.

Dean uses the first few pages to recount movingly the death of her father, thus setting the stage. Heir to his paddle, Dean makes it an aide-memoire and recalls her own and her family's connection to canoeing and to "a cottage near Haliburton" (5). In the course of this narrative, Dean observes that objects in general, particularly those inherited from her father, serve also as signs and that this substitutionary function admits to the absence of the referent—in this case her father. She explains her point in this way: "even an accumulation of objects owned by my father can never be more than a Derridean supplement, a fruitless attempt to fill in the gap between their materiality and his" (4). Although this remark participates in an orthodoxy often accepted within contemporary thought, Dean's willingness to evaporate the metaphysics of presence ill suits an inquiry into the injustices committed against peoples who are called First Nations. Firstness—that is, temporal priority—is another name for presence, for a species of transcendence which is not merely temporal but also placial. My point is straightforward: one must relinquish the undecidable to affirm Aboriginal title and thus to affirm the legal standing and validity of oral history, that is, of speech, as does, say, *Delgamuukw vs. British Columbia*, 1997. One cannot with Jacques Derrida, and Martin Heidegger before him, commit to the always already of a conceptual and existential *in media res* and then affirm firstness. This point is crucial, for, again, Dean's book hangs upon the principle of Aboriginal title. By identifying this inconsistency I remain in agreement with Dean, yet I worry over the way in which her gesture at supplementarity gives away the connections among place, time, experience, and language. Language is rather more than an unavailing system of substitutions for what cannot be made manifest: it translates our embodied sense perceptions, which are themselves translations, yet these things begin somewhere—with the body, not merely with the abstraction of thought and symbol. It is the connection between language and embodiment that motivates principles of justice and their codification. For this reason, I disagree quite strongly with Dean when she says that the way her inherited paddle is "associated with my childhood, my love of canoeing, my father, and his family" amounts only to "meanings [that] are an illusion, a product of a process that resulted in what Marx called the fetishism of commodities" (5). To commit herself to this position logically entails committing First Peoples to it, and this move makes the idea of

property, that is, of land, require a deeper examination than Dean offers. I admit my remarks here are somewhat schematic, but I think Dean's combination of Derrida and Marx must be interrogated because the goal of working toward justice for Aboriginals centres very much on material property and thus on treaty agreements. Marx quite rightly gives Dean a way to theorize the mysterious nature of objects and commodities such as the canoe, yet when Derrida is added to the mix I want Dean to say more and to show how one theoretical model squares with the other.

Several more examples of shortcomings in Dean's Introduction should be mentioned. History in general and fur trade history in particular get flattened a good deal when Dean writes of the canoe that "Europeans adopted this technology, 'improved' it with the techniques of mass production, and used it to make money out of the land inhabited by the canoe-makers" (10). This statement obtains, yet only up to a point. The company that carried off the riches accessible by rivers draining into Hudson Bay replaced the canoe with the York boat simply because the canoe lacked sufficient cargo capacity for the task at hand. This replacement process began as early the mid-eighteenth century, and by the opening decades of the nineteenth century the canoe was no longer the single vital component of the fur trade for the Hudson's Bay Company. In its various permutations, the North West Company did employ canoes, and it did so with remarkable success. However, the NWC managed only some forty years of existence before it was forced into merger with the HBC, a step which further reinforced the York boat as the preferred vessel of trade. The bateaux, scow, and steamboat figured prominently also in the making of money, particularly in the northwest.

I rehearse these commonplaces with some hesitation, yet an event such as the Norway House Cree Nation Treaty and York Boat Days festival manages to celebrate the historical reality of the fur trade without becoming a macabre memorial of "genocide and theft" (20). This example need not be taken as my blind acceptance of the canoe's ideological power to create a national myth of cooperation among so-called founding peoples. Rather, my example suggests that Canada's colonial history will not fit entirely into the mould that Dean occasionally casts for it. Against such compression of history, Dean offers nuanced inquiry and argument in her fourth chapter on the Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant, to name but one strength of the book. The detailed research that invests key chapters makes possible some more carping. Dean says that the making of money by appropriating First Nations technology happened in British Columbia "without even the treaties that exist in some other parts of the country"

(10). In fact, Treaty 8 was enacted in northern British Columbia by 1899, and the fourteen Douglas treaties (1850 to 1854), even though they predate British Columbia's entry into Confederation in 1871, factored significantly in *Calder*. A final quibble with the Introduction: Dean credits the word topophilia to Yi Fu Tuan and his *Topophilia* (1974) when it belongs to Gaston Bachelard ("le nom de *topophilie*") and his publication of *La Poétique de L'Espace* in 1957, English translation 1964 (17). Bachelard bears mentioning in this context, for his emphasis on the analysis of place includes the cellar of the house and the "irrationality of its depths," a paradigm which maps smoothly onto the ways the uncanny is used later in Dean's study (trans. Jolas, 18).

Chapter One surveys the canoe as it appears in a selection of poetry and fiction, beginning with Duncan Campbell Scott's "Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon," extending to Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Douglas Lepan's *Far Voyages*, and ending with Hugh MacLennan's *The Watch that Ends the Night*. This chapter draws on D.M.R. Bentley's "UnCannyda" that serves as the prefatory essay to the 1995 fall/winter issue of *Canadian Poetry*. Bentley's "UnCannyda" (which Dean or her editor misspells throughout the book) draws in part from Freud's idea of the uncanny and in part from Joseph Addison's essays on the aesthetic pleasures of the new and uncommon in the 23 and 24 June 1712 numbers of *The Spectator*. The combination of these elements leaves intact a version of the Freudian understanding of comfort in the familiar (*heimlich*) yet adds attractiveness to the discomfiting sense of the unfamiliar (*unheimlich*). Bentley calls these "contradictory but complementary urges" that help to define "the rational order we call home" at the same time they point toward the "boundary between the known and the unknown" (14). In contrast, Dean does not see the uncanny as that which holds the like and unlike together; rather, she views it as a structure of division, as something which expresses the "impossible coexistence of both Canadian sovereignty and Aboriginal title" (25). Nevertheless, Bentley's "UnCannyda" bears a much closer affinity to the reality of relations between non-indigenous and Aboriginal peoples. Consider, for example, the kind of uncanniness evident in Christina Godlewska and Jeremy Webber's observation that when the Nisga'a Final Agreement was "ratified by the Canadian Parliament, the Nisga'a representatives in the public gallery stood to sing 'O Canada'" (9). Coexistence is, in fact, possible.

Of the writers examined in Chapter One—Duncan Campbell Scott, Archibald Lampman, Isabella Valancy Crawford, Thomas Moore, Pauline Johnson, Marjorie Pickthall, Margaret Atwood, Douglas LePan, and Hugh

MacLennan—only three, Scott, Pickthall, and Atwood, come close to making visible a suppressed narrative about "the way that First Nations were invaded, colonized, and subsumed by non-indigenous culture in Canada" (39). Dean's analysis of the "canoe-scapes" in "A Country without a Mythology" and "Canoe-trip" makes LePan's "coming out as a gay man in his 1990 collection, *Far Voyages*" her means of discovering desire in these poems, but the reading offered—engaging as it is—does not address the invasion and colonization of Aboriginals in any way (37). Furthermore, the "singular motif, that of a motionless canoe seemingly suspended in a bubble, surrounded by an indeterminate element composed of reflection, illusion, light, and depth" that Dean finds suggestive of the "panic that is compulsively revisited in generation after generation of Canadians" is patient of another reading (25). Dean concludes that a suspended canoe signifies "panic" by introducing Homi Bhabha's explanation of the uncanny as "the unheimlich terror of space or race of the Other," but the passages Dean examines do not all express terror or panic per se (qtd. in Dean 25). Rather, they suspend canoes, and this motif owes as much to the fact that canoes float as it does to the prospect that floating in a canoe can be an unfamiliar experience. Readers of travel poems will also recognize in some of these examples a very ancient trope, one which R.A. Aubin calls the "water mirror" and dates to the poem that Decimus Magnus Ausonius composed to mark his 371 journey from Bingen on the Rhine to Trèves on the Moselle (5). Aubin's citation of Ausonius's description of "the deluded boatman … the boatman whose skiff of bark floats on the watery floor out in mid-stream" should be factored into the uncanniness of the suspended canoe in Canadian literature, for Aubin says it "appears times without number in English local poetry" (6).

In Chapter Five, Dean offers another analysis of the canoe in literature, this time on seven retellings of the John Hornby story. In 1926, Hornby, an English adventurer, set out on the Athabasca River with his nephew Edgar Christian and a companion named Harold Adlard and made his way into the Barren Grounds where he died in a cabin on the Thelon River. The precise date of death is difficult to ascertain for the bodies of all three men were found in 1928. The works under consideration—Malcolm Waldron's *Snow Man*, George Whalley's *The Legend of John Hornby*, Thomas York's *Snowman*, Lawrence Jeffrey's *Who Look in the Stove*, M.T. Kelly's *Out of the Whirlwind*, Clive Powell-Williams's *Cold Burial*, and Elizabeth Hay's *Late Nights on Air*—fit into a chapter that is just twenty pages long. From this group, Dean treats Waldron's and Whalley's books more thoroughly, but she offers plot summaries of the other works. This chapter, then, pro-

vides broad rather than nuanced detail in support of Dean's thesis, and although Hornby travelled to the site of his death in one the canoe is strangely absent from this chapter. Also, it is worth noting that the Thelon River runs through the Barren Grounds, a coincidence which underscores the fact that Dean never gives consideration specifically to the Artic. Indeed, Dean's habitual use of First Nations as her term for indigenous people too often leaves the Inuit and Métis out of her consideration.

Chapter Two, "Inheriting a Historiographic Tradition," examines the writings of Harold Innis, Donald Creighton, and A.R.M. Lower in relation to the canoe and fur trade history. Dean's goal in this chapter lies in discovering the attitudes that recreational canoeists derive from historians. From this transfer of ideas, Dean finds the warrant paddlers use for canoeing: the fur trade required "a liberal state policy towards First Nations, which laid the basis for Canada's current 'liberal' policies; and the common experience of life in the bush and its requirements moulded Canadians as individuals and as a nation" (47). Extrapolating from this premise, Dean advances three interrelated arguments that she says canoeists use to become "identified both with the landscape and with the nation" (47). First, the canoe was the only way to travel in Canada, and adopting it for transport brought about a change in European cultural assumptions; second, use of the canoe gave access to indigenous cultures and world views; third, canoeists—"in the form of explorers, voyageurs, and traders"—became "the founders of Canada" (47). Dean argues that the historiography of W.J. Eccles overturns the validity of the views held by Innis, Creighton, and Lower, yet populist history and paddlers themselves valorize the more romantic and ideological understandings of the canoe. By now it should be clear that this chapter is one of Dean's most important in substantiating her thesis. On the whole, she does so effectively by tracing the work of Innis, Creighton, and Lower into popular and influential books on canoeing in Canada. However, when this argument transfers to Chapter Three and the influence of Eric Morse on canoeing culture in Canada, Dean overleverages it. Her otherwise strong and researched work on Morse thus becomes marred, albeit temporarily, when she claims that canoeists who read popularized historiography succumb to "the process of interpellation as Canadian: the canoeist takes up a subject position created discursively through history and popular representation, and in so doing inserts himself into the narrative of nationality" (71). This strong view of ideology and interpellation suits the rhetorical moment, but it is incongruent with other portions of the book where Dean mobilizes a weak view of ideology and the prospect that individuals are just that—rational agents—

rather than subjects of discursive formation. Canoeists, in my experience, are not so easily taken in by historiography, and often canoe for the expressed purpose of teasing out the fault lines, contradictions, and errors of primary and secondary documents that record and comment on the experience of European contact with Aboriginal peoples and with the land of Canada.

In her examination of Eric Morse (Chapter Three) and the Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant (Chapter Four), Dean presents worthwhile research into the personalities that sought to make a causal relationship between canoeing and Canadian identity. From time to time, I found myself thinking of Suzanne Zeller's splendid *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation* as I read Dean on Morse and the canoe pageant. This connection is possible because both Zeller and Dean present historical research into the people, ideas, and processes at work in Canada's development. Insofar as Zeller's work examines geology, meteorology, and terrestrial magnetism it partly affirms the function of the canoe in the formation of Canada because it was often the vessel used by scientists in their field work. By the same token, Zeller's work must be read against Dean's thesis because Dean so tidily makes non-indigenous individuals always into oppressors and thieves. Zeller's examination of Alexander Kennedy Isbister (1822-83), a Métis born in HBC territory and educated in Aberdeen and Cumberland House, shows how his 1855 paper read before the Geological Society in London and published in the society's *Quarterly Journal* played a key part in Canadian expansionism into northwestern and Artic British North America (98). There is, then, at least a grain of truth in John Ralston Saul's assertion—even though Dean contests it—that "we are a métis civilization" (3).

Chapter Six examines one of Canada's most influential paddlers, Bill Mason. Dean frames this chapter by referring to an essay by Beverly Haun-Moss (which does not appear in Dean's Works Cited). The essay, "Layered Hegemonies: The Origins of Recreational Canoeing Desire in the Province of Ontario," locates the motivation to canoe at the "overlap of two conflicting desires: the desire to dominate the land and the desire to submit to it" (123). Dean puts Mason into the latter category and pursues her argument in large part by drawing a biographical profile of him, much of it deriving from James Raffan's *Fire in the Bones*, rather than from personal friendship or acquaintance. This approach explains why Dean says "Mason's environmentalism and his faith joined together in the aesthetic ideology of the sublime" (132). I want to agree with Dean, but her treatment of Mason's faith displays a typical ignorance of Christianity when

she writes "of course, as a contemporary Christian Mason would have considered himself as governed by the 'New Covenant' represented by the New Testament and not necessarily bound by the statements in Genesis" (132). Dean's expectation that a "contemporary Christian" is necessarily and effectively a Marcionite ill equips her to understand the intersection of Mason's faith and his environmentalism. Nevertheless, via Raffan's biography Dean shows the way in which Mason accommodated his faith to suit National Film Board production values during the creation of *Waterwalker*, his feature length film on canoeing.

Chapter Seven, entitled "Recapitulation: The Canadian Canoe Museum," shows Dean's desire to "increase the complexity and seriousness" of the museum's exhibits and mission (144). Dean tempers this desire with her admission that such achievements can jeopardize popular appeal as well as financial support. Because the museum is very much a work in progress this chapter exhibits Dean's urges to reorganize the museum at the same time that it has her admit how easily nuance and density of information can be "ignored by a parent supervising an outing on a wet summer day" (158). This chapter's concluding sentence provides the strongest display of Dean's own sense of the uncanny—better, of "UnCannyda"—when she says, "the Canadian Canoe Museum is a place I love, a place I find myself and my family history of complicity, complacency, patriotism, and love" (158).

Dean's last chapter "Decolonizing the Canoe" evinces the "revival of canoe carving and canoe journeys among coastal First Nations in BC" to contend that "this practice is not easily subsumed under the rubric of canoe nationalism" (160). Dean explains: "And the reason why is Aboriginal title" (160). Dean's account of Aboriginal title attributes it to *Delgamuukw*, a Supreme Court of Canada decision made in 1997 (169). Ironically, Aboriginal title emerges from the 31 January 1973 decision in *Calder et al v. Attorney-General of British Columbia*.[2] I say ironically because a conference was held on Dean's own campus—the University of Victoria—at the Faculty of Law, 13-15 November 2003, to commemorate the decision in *Calder*. Moreover, three of Dean's colleagues, albeit all from the Faculty of Law, served as editors and contributors to produce a collection of essays reflecting on the consequences of Aboriginal title for the Nisga'a and for all of Canada's Aboriginals. This volume, *Let Right Be Done*, would help Dean know that British Columbia is not so unique, for *Calder* unifies Canadian First Peoples, at least in legal code, through Aboriginal title. At the same time, as a Supreme Court of Canada decision, *Calder* functions

placially by stretching *a mari usque ad mare* and joins British Columbia to the rest of Canada.

Dean's final chapter raises an additional difficulty. As Dean records some of the commentary on the revival of canoeing, she cites several First Nations paddlers. One of these, Ann Atleo of Ahousaht, says, "you realize in that canoe that one wrong move by one of the paddlers could capsize the entire canoe" (171). Dean then writes that "respect for the canoe derives from the belief that the canoe is a living creature, created from a living tree" (171). These two examples show Dean granting to First Nations what she denies non-indigenous peoples: embodiment and beliefs. Throughout her argument, Dean styles non-indigenous paddlers as deceived by historiography, interpellated by ideology, enveloped in myth, and ensnared in a narrative. They are the products of ideas or abstractions: they have minds but not bodies. The prospect that canoeing involves a multitude of synaesthesias and kinaesthesias goes some distance to explain why it can be so satisfying an experience for any paddler. Dean hints at this in her Introduction and her final words when she writes of learning to be still in a canoe, but the body is too often elided when she writes of non-indigenous paddlers. This imbalance implies a subtle primitivism that risks mystifying First Nations peoples as somehow more corporeal than other people. In the same way, allowing unexamined belief to stand in First Nations people while problematizing it in Mason, for example, also imputes to them an exoticism that has the potential to strengthen one of the myths Dean finds at the bottom of canoeing ideology.

Because the theft of First Nations land stands as the central premise of Dean's book her reason for writing risks a certain kind of irrelevance. That is, Dean assembles a convincing argument that canoeing as a practice and as a discursive formation helps to obscure the history of injustices committed against First Nations peoples in the name of nation building and wealth generation. Moreover, when viewed from Dean's perspective, canoeing reveals the futility of an unproblematic sense of citizenship in Canada because it is impossible to be Canadian in a land that belongs to its dispossessed peoples. By making this argument, Dean takes up the work of bringing about justice where injustice prevails, but the power and authority to effect such change meaningfully lies primarily in the hands of First Nations plaintiffs and in Canada's legal system. *Calder* shows this process more clearly than any other particular instance, for Frank Calder, president of the Nishga Tribal Council and lead plaintiff in the decision which bears his name, based much of his effort to secure Ottawa's acknowledgement of the Nisga'a's title to ancestral land on opposition that began in British

Columbia's Nass Valley in the 1880s (Godlewska and Webber 1). This pattern of First Nations resistance and advocacy as well as reciprocal resistance and occasional advocacy from imperial, federal, and provincial governments could be called the history of Canada, one which the *Calder* decision effectively dates to the very first contact between Aboriginal and European peoples. In its broad affirmation of Aboriginal title, the Supreme Court of Canada's *Calder* decision opened a new period of Canadian First Nations relations. Treaties such as the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* involving the Cree and Inuit (1975) and recent agreements among the Crown, British Columbia, and the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation (2005) only underscore the fact that the process of seeking justice is often beyond the reach of recreational canoeists and, even, English professors (Godlewska and Webber 16-17). I include myself in this latter group, and therefore admit that any victories won in the classroom or even in the pages of a book such as Dean's are somewhat pyrrhic, particular when diabetes and tuberculosis remains such pressing concerns among First Peoples in Canada. Moreover, there is something rather uncanny in agitating for social change through a book about canoeing: for all its imbrication in a national myth Dean implicitly admits that the canoe has a strange power. By writing as a paddler chiefly to paddlers she admits a modicum of assent to one of the premises she seeks to overturn, namely that canoeists play an inordinately large role in the definition of Canada. In this sense, the title of my review—*fiat justicia* or let right be done—names the reason why it is possible to disagree with Dean's methods, to chafe at her style of argument, to worry about its errors, details, and omissions, yet affirm its purpose.[3] In the interest of self-disclosure, I want to end by saying that I am a lifelong paddler, one certified by canoeing associations to teach, one who has raced, tripped, and recreated in both open and closed boats of virtually every kind, one who has built many boats, and one whose circle of friends and acquaintances holds many paddlers. I will be asking them to read *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle*.

Notes

1 This essay was published in *Die Zeit* (1986) and is widely available in English translation through *New German Critique*, number 44, spring/summer 1988.

2 For a dense and useful overview of precedents at work in Calder see Godlewska and Webber, especially 3-7.

3 I owe this usage to Godlewska and Webber.

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