

# Mothering Sons: Stories by Findley, Hodgins and MacLeod Uncover the Mother's Double Voice

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## Abstract

Maternal feminist criticism argues that we are culturally constructed, but also recognizes the embodied experiences of mothers. This maternal "double voice" shifts between subject/object, passive/active and resistant/conforming positions. "Mothering sons" reciprocate the maternal practice of preservation by supporting this "double voice."

## Résumé

La critique féministe maternelle soutient que nous sommes construites culturellement, mais reconnaît aussi les expériences des mères. Cette "double voix" maternelle change du sujet à l'objet, du passif à l'actif, et de position résistante à conformiste. "Mothering sons" réciproque la pratique maternelle de la préservation en appuyant cette double voix.

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These stories of "mothering sons" are Timothy Findley's "Almeyer's Mother," Jack Hodgins's "Invasions '79," and Alistair MacLeod's "The Road to Rankin's Point."

It is perhaps self-evident that female parents raise male offspring, but what is a "mothering son"? And why is he of interest to feminist critics? As Adrienne Rich pointed out thirty years ago, motherhood has been misrepresented, minimized or misunderstood by the discourses of medicine, psychiatry, organized religion, law and the "traditional family." Since then, feminist critics across the spectrum have uncovered the cultural constructedness of family roles, including their reliance on what I call "gender scripts," alluding to Butler's formulation of gender identity as performative. Their work generated critiques described as both "daughtercentric" and "matrophobic" - or "the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of becoming one's mother" (Rich 1976, 235, my italics). Such "matrophobia" was perhaps necessary in raising awareness of the reality of gender scripts, but led to "mother blame" where "daughters sever themselves from their attachment with their mother," argues Andrea O'Reilly (1998, 75). And according to Marianne Hirsch, "So long as mothers remain objects of exploration rather than social, psychological and linguistic subjects, the hold of tradition cannot be broken, and new stories cannot be told" (1989, 161).<sup>1</sup> Consequently, there has arisen a counterbalancing interest in creating a maternal - and embodied - feminist criticism by scholars who are also mothers.<sup>2</sup> For instance, while provocatively deconstructing "gender" and sex" by showing that "materiality [can be] rethought as the effect of power, as power's most

productive effect" (1993, 2), Butler has been criticized for de-emphasizing embodied gender to the extent that "she leaves little space for a consideration of the ways in which women may actually 'live' their bodies precisely as such" (Hughes and Witz 1997, 56, italics in original). Maternal feminist criticism incorporates the awareness that we are culturally constructed, in many ways, but also recognizes the embodied, common and valued experiences of mothers themselves. The mother/daughter relationship may thus be redefined. Nancy Gerber writes that, "Contemporary feminist maternal theorists have resisted the pathologizing of mother-daughter attachment as abnormal and have moved toward theorizing the relationship as one characterized by fluctuations of separation and connection" (2003, 10). The metaphor of "fluctuation" encourages a spectrum-of-experiences model, whereby mothers inevitably speak with a "double voice": as both culturally-constructed objects and as embodied beings who engage in the potentially-politicizing practice Sara Ruddick terms "maternal thinking" or "works of preservative love, nurturance, and training" (1989, 17). Mothering recognized as such may foster not just the child's development, but the mother's - and ideally, society's. Jessica Benjamin's psychoanalytic theory of "intersubjectivity," for example, questions the orthodoxy of identity construction by arguing for a more balanced reciprocity of exchange between mother and child. Benjamin claims that "the infant is never totally undifferentiated (symbiotic) with the mother" (1988, 18); thus, the focus of the child's development becomes "not only how we separate from oneness, but also how we connect to and recognize others, . . . actively engage and make ourselves known in relation to the other" (1988, 18).<sup>3</sup> Studying recent works by African-American writers Morrison and Walker, Hirsch also perceives a "double voice" - shared by mothers and daughters - reflecting fluctuations not just between separation and connection, but between positioning as subject/object, passive/active and resistant/conforming. Maternal feminist scholarship thus encourages us to recognize this fluctuation as fertile

ground for nurturing the mother's potentially liberating double voice which insists "upon a dialogic (both/and) rather than a monologic (either/or) subject" (Daly and Reddy 1991, 6).

Which brings me back to "mothering sons." For reasons historical, political and cultural, I believe Canadian writers have a special attraction to constructing double voices: narratively, linguistically, relationally, culturally. Claire Wilkshire argues that "the short story allows voice a prominence it rarely achieves in the novel, where plot drives the narrative forward" (2000, 892-93). Short story analysis traditionally begins with a formalist approach, analyzing the "voice" of the character/narrator/focalizer. But "voice" is resonant with meaning - symbolic, political, cultural - and I would like to adapt Bakhtin's concept of "double voicing" (1984) to refer to the narrative construction of moments of dialogized discourse, including parody, as one way of revealing the mother's double voice. I suggest that Findley, Hodgins and MacLeod represent characters' voices as internalizing cultural or gender scripts that limit their humanity, but also as enacting more emancipatory narrative performances, through mothering. A "mothering son," then, is one who reciprocates the practice of preservation by fostering his mother's autonomy through "maternal aspects of recognition (nurturance and empathy)" (Benjamin 1988, 218) that uncover the power of her "both/and" subjectivity. These stories of "mothering sons" are Findley's "Almeyer's Mother" (Stones 1988a), Hodgins's "Invasions '79" (The Barclay Family Theatre 1991a) and MacLeod's "The Road to Rankin's Point" (The Lost Salt Gift of Blood 1976). All offer discussions of the mother/son dynamic exclusive of the father (extended to grandmother/grandson in MacLeod), and all centre on a socially over-determined event: the family, specifically maternal, visit. In each case, the sons have destabilized their own "gender scripts" to appear as "failed" men within their families. Thus sharing in a marginalized perspective, each son creates the conditions for his mother to uncover/discover

her double voice - for the delayed sharing of a family secret ("Almeyer's Mother"), for interrogating social hypocrisies especially invidious to women ("Invasions '79"), and for embodying narratives which define the borders of communal, ethnic, even human, identity through memory ("The Road to Rankin's Point"). Specifically, the sons "mother" voice through speech acts of witnessing (Findley), parodic performing (Hodgins), and memorializing (MacLeod). As a result, formerly patriarchal families are reconstructed, joining mother and son across divides of gender and generation.

#### Surviving Family Secrets: "Almeyer's Mother"

It is a mental health axiom that secret-keeping is inimical to family well-being, yet as Langellier and Peterson note, "The repressed also transmits family culture" (2004, 51). Timothy Findley himself writes with a "double voice" as a "feminist-sympathetic" gay writer, but declares, "I just don't think I want to be collected exclusively in gay anthologies..." (Kruk 2003, 85). Findley's canon offers many compassionate portraits of "mad" women, animals, children and other "crazy people" brutalized by authority figures. The maternal voice is re-valued through his flawed yet heroically resistant mother-heroines, Mrs. Noyes, Mrs. Ross, Lily Kilworth, Minna of the "Minna and Bragg" stories,<sup>4</sup> Mottyl the cat.

The lingering patrilineal structure of the Western family, whereby name and inheritance is passed through the son, is here dissected in a story which signals its concern in its title's syntactic subordination of the nameless mother. Unnamed until almost the end, Edith Almeyer is initially known under the sign of "mother." Edith Almeyer's son is also deprived of his first name (Peter) until well into the story, while Peter Almeyer's wife is known, curiously, by both first and "maiden" name: Julie Fielding. This third-person narrated story begins with an equally curious statement about what did not happen: "There was a time when Almeyer's mother chose not to visit him" (Findley 1988a, 173). It

is noted that she had "always maintained a certain distance from those who should be closest to her: husband, brother, son" (1988a, 173). This partial resistance to nurturing males becomes an invisible wall against her own repressed anger: anger at her actual father, as we will see, but also resentment at her lesser place in the symbolic order. Edith's failure to exhibit "mothering" behaviour expected by a grown-up son - the visit - is juxtaposed against her former behaviour as a caring wife who "mothers" her hospitalized husband publicly, taking the bus twice a day to bring him home-made sandwiches, for "five intolerable years" (1988a, 174, my italics). The addition of the adjective which passively dialogizes the passage (Morson and Emerson 1990, 149-50) clearly directs us to see the story as focalized, initially, through Edith, although her family visit will be seen through Peter's eyes. In the hospital visit, she reverts to the nurturing behaviour developed in child care by wiping her husband's lips as he struggles to feed himself, pushing him in his wheelchair/carriage around the grounds. Mrs. Almeyer thus performs the act of "the good wife/mother" in the hospital's setting of normative "health," repressing feelings of resentment. For despite his righteous protestations, and her loyalty, her husband was unfaithful to her (1988a, 175).

Edith's compulsion to perform her gender script is shown also through the earlier family visits she stages with her son and his wife, such as lunch in the member's lounge of Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). Despite her discomfort with a daughter-in-law who works, keeps her own name and declines to become a mother, and her son's career as a drama teacher, which "brought him dangerously close to public displays of emotion," she feels it necessary to wave the "flag of family unity" in other people's faces to avoid "talk." Edith finds satisfaction not only in being there with her son and daughter-in-law, performing an act of seeming unity, but in watching others see herself perform, the mirror "reflection" she craves "of herself, her boy and

his wife as they sat above their chicken salads....This is us, the picture informed her, sitting where we belong" (1988a, 175-77). Class hegemony, as well as family image, is preserved in this idealized snapshot of "belonging" in the exclusive ROM member's lounge.

The death of Mr. Almeyer and the end of her son's childless marriage together create the crisis that precipitates Mrs. Almeyer's belated visit to Peter at his country home. Certainly, there had been an earlier pattern of visits from his parents, counterpointed by his mother's anti-social tendency to retreat to the surrounding fields. But this is Edith's first visit without father and husband, and without Julie as spouse and prop within Peter's own gender script.

Edith Almeyer's repressed discontent, I suggested earlier, is due to the sexual double standard employed by Mr. Almeyer. His predatory attitude towards women is demonstrated by his attitude towards his daughter-in-law: "Look what our son's brought home, he would say as he put his arm too far around her shoulder and gave the underside of her breast a flick with his fingers" (1988a, 178). This "game," which threatens the boundaries of familial sexual propriety, presenting Mr. Almeyer as a rival to his son, had been played earlier with his young nieces "until their father had put a stop to it one afternoon" (1988a, 179, my italics), demonstrating that fathers become guardians of their women's sexuality. Mr. Almeyer's sexual teasing of daughter-in-law and nieces foreshadows the narrated "family secret" of submerged incestuous and patriarchal desire which Edith Almeyer will share with her son during their last visit together in a testimony and witnessing which "mothers" the double voice of Edith Almeyer. As she admits, telling this story is such a departure from her every day "gender script" that it may well bring her last visit to an early end - a visit that has the opposite effect of previous ritual occasions Peter and Edith both participated in, with partners, thereby affirming the "traditional family."

This family secret starts with a photograph:

Edith as a young girl, her father, mother and two brothers; Edith and her father sharing an unguarded look of "almost alarming affection" (Peter's dialogizing adjective, my italics, 184). The photo functions as a mirror image, offering a glimpse of the previous generation's publicly fixed self-presentation of class, [hetero]sexual, gender and racial subjectivities. Until now, Peter has only known his female ancestors and an uncle, Charlie Walker. The family history unfolded here suggests a reason for Edith Almeyer's acceptance of the double standard in her marriage, and her refusal, after caring for Peter's father in his final illness, to "mother" Peter or his Uncle. The blue sedan she just purchased in a surprising act of widowed freedom recalls the earlier purchase of another blue car, by her father, for her fourteen-year-old brother, Harry. An illicit late-night ride ends in double tragedy with both sons killed. The shock is great for their father, as he becomes obsessed not so much with their personal deaths as with the loss of what sons represent: a link with a legitimated future. His desperate desire for genetic compensation divides the parents: as in other Findley fiction, we see a mother who shuts her bedroom door in a refusal of coercive sexual intimacy.

Yet his wife's sexual rejection does not end his quest. A year later, Edith's father takes his teenaged daughter across town to the home of a man he had somehow "befriended" in the war. Here, Edith meets another mirror image: Lily, fifteen, lovely and pregnant, "proffered like a gift from my father" (189). Her father's obsessive desire to create another son, which could have been directed into his "alarming affection" for Edith, turning his daughter into a wife/mother surrogate, has been transferred onto another man's daughter. Thus the existence of Uncle Charlie Walker; thus Edith's distance from her half-brother. By passing this family secret on to her son, Edith shares her embodied experience of an abusive family contract, deeply embedded through memory in her sense of her sexual, and maternal, self. In effect, Edith initiates what Shoshanna Felman defines as a

"speech act" (Felman and Lamb 1992) of testifying to traumatizing family narratives. The son as nurturing witness affirms the value of her testimony, mothering this newly-politicized voice as it speaks through, and because of, his mother's object/agent position. Peter, neither husband nor father at this point, gains knowledge of an egotistic interpretation of masculinity, proving that "Family storytelling by particular embodied families may rupture master narratives of The Family" (Langellier and Peterson 2004, 69). Next morning, Edith disappears in the new car, with no destination in mind, she tells him in her note, which is signed both "E.M. Almeyer" and "your mother," as if to distinguish two identities - wife and mother - which have shaped her life to this point and which she now puts aside for self-defined adventure. Peter also reads in her double signature the fact that "she would always be alone" (1988a, 191), aloof from relational ties - of love, sex and mothering - that together have worked to silence the individual woman.

#### Translating Women, Performing Men: "Invasions '79"

If mirror and photograph in "Almeyer's Mother" point to a political concern with performing identity, the mock-performances of identity in Jack Hodgins's "Invasions '79" (of academia, of motherhood, of Ottawa culture, of Cold War paranoia) are more satirical. This complex story portrays another widow, Bella Robson, visiting her grown-up son with a goal which comes out of her acculturation as a mother: to rescue James, a professor of Medieval Literature, from an ill-chosen romance with a beautiful Russian spy at the time of the Cold War between American and Soviet blocs, just before the 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan. Associated by many with magic realism, as well as regionalism, Hodgins is also part of an older comic and satiric tradition. Ambivalence towards authoritative discourse of all kinds is here played out in a mother/son pair who recognize each other's shared need to speak both from within their cultural conditioning, and against it. Throughout their visit, James "performs" or parodies

various cultural discourses, thereby undermining their authority. But Bella takes the questioning of hegemonic scripts a step further when she uses her double voice to encourage her silenced "daughter," Marta, the Armenian poet, to reveal the sexist subtext behind an authorized male discourse licensed by the academic world James uneasily inhabits (Hodgins 1991a).

What do we make of the title, "Invasions '79"? One of the Barclay sisters declares elsewhere in the story collection that "all fiction was an invasion of one kind or another" (Hodgins 1991b, 299). Are we to read the writer as colonizer, or merely recognize the possible threat in the leap of imaginative faith? Hodgins's countering of "invasion" with "overlapping," related to the valuing of "shared experience" (Kruk 2003, 144) and even intersubjectivity, seems important here, as what began as attempted "invasion" concludes with a blurring of emotional boundaries between mother and son. The central "invasion," then, is the mother's probing of her son's private life with her initially reluctant, later heartfelt, performance as protective mother, in response to his own performance as irreverent intellectual, drawing on pop culture (spy stories, movies) to mock her xenophobic anxieties. Such performance comes easily to James, Bella realizes: "As a child, she remembered his talent had been for such mockery. She'd even expected him to become an actor" (1991a, 35). The story, focalized through naïve Bella Robson, structurally "double voices" by alerting us to Bella's lack of appreciation for her son's lifework on Chaucer's famous poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*, which she calls "Toil Less and Crusade" (1991a, 24). Although unsophisticated and timid, Bella bravely subordinates her own personal desires (to tend her garden, away from grown children) to the cultural belief, enforced by her domineering daughter, Iris, that a mother ought to continue to "mother" her son - who is behaving like an "overgrown baby" anyway - by sternly showing him the pain he is causing his family with his "immature" infatuation with the foreigner. As Iris points out, James is a failure for "he was already at an age

when most men were married, fathers of growing children, and making responsible decisions" (1991a, 29). Yet by obeying her gender script, Bella falls prey to her culture's polarizing objectification, being both mocked and elevated in maternal authority by James, Iris and James's colleagues.

Despite his delight in mocking cultural and gender scripts, however, James appeals to a power he believes is embodied by her motherhood, a power to save his "soul" (1991a, 44). After provoking her Cold War fears in front of his appreciative colleagues, and forcing her along on a tour of MacKenzie King's mock-ruins with Marta and the Russian poet Marta translates, the mask slips at lunch when he cries out, "'Mother, what am I going to do?' She felt as if a leg had dropped off her chair, or the floor had tilted....When he looked up at her now, she saw in his eyes everything she'd hoped she would never see in her life" (1991a, 47-48). In this "overlapping" of boundaries, Bella reads her son's problem as unrequited love, recognizing his own double voice of mocking intellect/emotional vulnerability, and she becomes truly protective, however ineffectual. James's anti-performance as romantic hero, a Troilus facing abandonment by Criseyde, in effect cancels out his earlier role as victim in Bella's Cold War espionage fantasy. Despite her maternal protectiveness of the little boy she sees inside the academic -"he still knew how to look like a six-year-old when he wanted to" (1991a, 31), Bella finds herself unable to reject her gender script when tested by meeting a handsome Russian Air Force colonel at an Embassy party, and continues to play the "good girl (as) mother": "Even fighting mad as she was now, she couldn't bear the thought of hurting the feelings of anyone who had been nice to her" (1991a, 57).

Meanwhile, Marta, object of James's affections, is forced into a grimmer performance. An accomplished poet, she is nevertheless placed in a typically feminine "caretaking" role as translator for the contemptuous male Russian poet. Literally "double voicing," Marta "cleans up" the poet's public statements in order to

protect their hosts from his real opinion of Canadians, Ottawa and herself. Aware of Marta's plight, James earlier urged her to "Let people see what kind of a man he is" but is met with Marta's look of "mock alarm" (1991a, 54, my italics), or an ambivalence which both accepts and questions the strictures of her position, in an echo of James's own stance. It is left to Bella, both recognized and challenged as a mother by her son's mock-performances, to reach out fully to the silenced translator and in effect "mother" this "daughter"'s voice as well. During question period, Bella persists in asking Marta, "Is that what [the Russian poet] really said?" This interrogation of another woman's cover-up becomes, in turn, a vehicle for her own uncovering of her embodied maternal voice. James, or "Doctor Robson," as he is recognized by a (male) student, is shocked, temporarily put in the position of defending the hypocritical public discourse she exposes. Bella is even shocked herself: "Was it really her own voice she had heard?" Nevertheless, an expert on interpretation, her son has been playfully arguing for the possibility of multiple voices ever since she arrived, for he "can't take anything serious for long," as his sister complains. Marta then tells her story as subordinated female, at first nervously, and then, in a "clear, determined voice," translating his visible contempt unflinchingly: "Now he says...that I am a no-talent stupid Armenian whore." Both women briefly "overlap," like mother and daughter, recovering their voices for a moment of new-found authority which reveals the hollow performance orchestrated by men licensed to perform public speaking: Bella's son the professor and Marta's father the Embassy officer (1991a, 61-66).

However, the mother's maternal feminist "victory" leads to Marta's disappearance, and the end of the romance plot, for like Criseyde, Marta rejects her would-be lover. It is as if the honesty Bella insisted on meant the end of Marta's role as decorative go-between, uncovering her real anger and so ending James's fantasy. He hides his heartache behind more sarcastic joking, imagining Vladimir the poet a Soviet conscript in

Afghanistan, punished for his "exposure" by Bella's double voice. If James has been "invaded" by deep feelings for another person for perhaps the first time, his mother "overlaps" with him in mutual recognition of emotional needs. From her earlier position of having "no idea what went on in her own son's head," now "[S]he felt that somehow James and his complicated life had moved inside her while she was there in Ottawa, and resided in her yet, like a big uncomfortable dangerous weight that she couldn't dislodge" (1991a, 25, 66). This "weight," suggestive of a difficult pregnancy, implies a second birth: Bella's own greater empathy as witnessed by her "overlapping" with the victims of the televised invasion: "Like people anywhere they seemed to be going about their business as if they didn't know they could be surprised by an invasion at any given moment of their lives." Just as the television news has brought the real Soviet threat into Bella's life, her family visit has revealed James's "double voice" of suppressed neediness hiding behind mostly parodic performances of hegemonic discourse. James's playful undermining of authority has in turn prompted Bella to move beyond her role as objectified "good mother" and raise the powerful maternal voice of protection - protecting her son, Marta, and the truth. Together mother and son help break down a monologic code of gendered silence and social censorship that has stifled Bella and Marta, while locking James into a satirical posture that is really a defensive shield against emotional "invasions" of all kinds (Hodgins 1991a).

#### Memorializing the Maternal: "The Road to Rankin's Point"

"I am speaking now of a July in the early 1970s..." (MacLeod 1976, 126). Thus Alistair MacLeod begins, voicing a male first-person speaker, enhancing the realism through the suggestion of near-autobiography and "the sustained deployment of a present-tense first-person narration" (Hiscock 2000, 59). As MacLeod explains his choice of narrator, "[T]he question I ask myself is 'Who

gets to tell the story?' Because that changes everything..." (Kruk 2003, 168). MacLeod offers the engagement of realist writing, but also mixes elements of folklore, myth and metaphysics into Calum's circular journey narrative. Dying of a blood disease at twenty-six,<sup>5</sup> Calum nevertheless creates a storytelling memorial to himself as well as his ninety-six-year-old grandmother. It is also a dialogized text, for by retelling his grandmother's story on the way to the farm she has inhabited for seventy years, Calum enfolds her double voice, origin of a "group-ordering" narrative (Langellier and Peterson 2004) which defines both family and ethnic identity. The ethnicity is Celtic, specifically the bloodline of the MacCrimmons, who had "the gift of music and the gift of foreseeing their own deaths" (MacLeod 1976, 139), but part of what is being memorialized in MacLeod are the archetypal "old World clan social structures with their bodies of mythic knowledge" (Hiscock 2000, 53).

The family history embodied by the character Grandmother is the story of "The Little Turn of Sadness," site of his grandfather's freak death, which occurred on his way home, and her reconstruction, at twenty-six, as the heroic single parent to seven children. It provides not just an explanation for the hard life Grandmother endured, but also an example of maternal strength, for as she says, "'No one has ever said that life is to be easy. Only that it is to be lived'" (1976, 150). The lesson of maternal strength is embodied most fully in Grandmother's endurance not just in time, but in space - her farm marks the end of the road, literally, defining the eastern limits of travel on Cape Breton Island: "As the road dips and twists around many of its hairpinned turns the icy little streams cascade across it; washing it out in a minor way, the water flowing across the gullied roadbed instead of beneath it through the broken, plugged and unused wooden sluices" (1976, 129). The leisurely description of Calum's journey over this hazardous old road, during which he retells Grandmother's life story, can be read not simply as a reminder of Grandmother's closeness to the elements. It

provides a material version of their family story in the memorializing performed by the land - the vanishing road, wild farm animals, broken-down buildings, all signs of decline that parallel Grandmother's aged state. The description of her old house as sinking "into the earth" infuses Grandmother and farm with archetypal power, as if the house's "stone foundation were some sort of cosmic root," as Simone Vauthier observes (1997, 160) and the journey east to her figured as a death/rebirth journey. Indeed, Calum enters Grandmother's house with a sense of prophetic significance, remarking "I enter now...to take my place in time" (MacLeod 1976, 136).

MacLeod's synecdochal signature is the hand.<sup>6</sup> It reminds us that identity, while partly constructed, is also embodied, physically, in a person and in a place. Calum recognizes himself as the weak one of the pair, and this contrast is realized through the reference to his act of trimming the nails of Grandmother's strong hands: "...I begin to trim her fingernails. They are long and yellowed and each is bordered by a thin layer of grime...I realize that I am admitted now to the silent, secret communication that the strong have always known in their relationship with the weak" (1976, 142). Grandmother's strength is associated not just with her physical and cultural endurance, including a successful translation of their Scottish past which her Gaelic and fiddle music recall, but in her embodied maternal knowledge, including "[T]he awareness and memory of dirty diapers and bed wettings and the first attempts at speech and movement...of nocturnal emissions and real and imagined secret sins" (1976, 143). Mother and Crone archetypes join in Grandmother, and are used both to counter gender scripts about women's weakness and to raise awareness of our contemporary somatophobia. Calum appears to stand in for a feminized, weak culture, Grandmother for a strong, masculinized Mother Nature who must be civilized before the rest of the family arrives. Tellingly, the process is only half-completed, as she interrupts the manicure with the proposal that Calum live with her and inherit the farm. By publicly colluding

with her liberating fiction, delivered during the family visit, that he will live with her at the farm and so preserve the woman who embodies their family history from institutional care at the nursing home, he also mothers Grandmother's double voice, which both reflects and resists the "good mother" stereotype, seeking autonomy within a context of continuing family loyalties.

Although he may appear as the answer to the family problem "What to do about Grandma?," Calum is doomed to die without the consolation of "taking his place in time" as she has through the proliferating generations. Still, they occupy analogous positions, as family members who refuse to fit into expected gender, social and familial roles, for Calum has given up his teaching job and come home to his family, solitary and unemployed. And Grandmother, though she will accept being reduced to her gender script within the photograph sessions proudly presenting the "four generations" she has lived to see, will not be passively "put away," like so many of her female friends, in the dreaded nursing home. Both are presently outside the mainstream of family life; both are facing death. When Calum confronts Grandmother with this fact, they share an outburst of weeping, hand in hand, in mutual recognition of loss.

In the story's climax, Grandmother leads the way into a shared death that brings both ends of the clan together while re-enacting the family narrative of loss of which she has been keeper as well as heroine. Back in his parents' home again, Calum is dreaming, longing to go "[B]ack to the priest with the magic hands....Back to anything rather than to die at the objective hands of mute, cold science" (1976, 153-54, *my italics*). Calum longs for a healing touch he cannot find in the present but it will be Grandmother who acts as "priest," easing his end. For he receives his Grandmother's promised gift in the sound of the "death bell" which calls him back, that night, to the cliffside road and "the Little Turn of Sadness." There he finds the body of Grandmother, hands "still warm to the touch" (1976, 155). In this re-enactment of family myth, Calum

is in Grandmother's role, exactly her age when she discovered her husband's dead body at this spot. Unlike Grandmother, Calum will not endure, yet her role in his life as mythical mother who guarantees death even as she gives life, frees Calum from a sterile end. Preceded by the gatekeeper of past and future whose double voice of maternal role-playing and resistance he magically preserves, beyond time and space, the son is likewise mothered into knowledge of that ending, where, in the final lines of the story: "the internal and the external darkness reach to become as one" (1976, 156). This "darkness" represents more than two individual deaths: it signifies the end of one family's history, and, more mystically, foreshadows the end of human history through the eclipsing of the storyteller role, if not the story. For Calum's personal consciousness, through which the story, and Grandmother's voice, has been filtered, is extinguished, but the last three lines of the story introduce, narratively, a "cosmic" storyteller, who leads us, with the son, towards that final metaphysical intersubjectivity, itself finally unrepresentable.

If the construction of "double voices/voicing" is especially Canadian, it may prove also especially useful for feminist critics who wish to engage in sophisticated analyses of our complex lives as women, as mothers, as sons. Perhaps there's more in common than we realize. Jack Hodgins reflects, "I'm always surprised when I see people writing about women and men as if they were foreign to one another" (Kruk 2003, 143). In all three stories, the sons struggle with their own "gender scripts," echoing their own mother's attempts to speak honestly, both demonstrating complicity with, and resistance to, the ideology of "the good man/the good mother." The mothers' resistance is made through recognizing truths they have lived as women with a shared legacy of maternal values fostered in the "mutual recognition" of an-other, a male child. Each "mothering son" enacts a different speaking or listening role: witnessing a traumatic narrative, playfully performing voices that undermine patriarchal and xenophobic discourses, memorializing a

maternal voice that goes beyond defining family to become identified with a universal matrix/mater. Each thus reciprocates care through uncovering the maternal double voice in all its complexity. These provocative, powerful and poignant Canadian stories allow both generations to resist objectifying gender scripts and master narratives of Family by creating collaborative dialogues between "failed" men and silenced women who ultimately become allies in voice.

#### Endnotes

1. See Daly and Reddy (1991); Garner, Kahane and Sprengnether (1985). More recently, see Jeremiah (2006).
2. The international Association for Research on Mothering was established in 1996 by O'Reilly.
3. I am indebted here to Bailey's 1998 essay, "Finding Lily: Maternal Presence in The Piano Man's Daughter."
4. These are "A Gift of Mercy," "Minna and Bragg," Stones (1988b&c); "A Bag of Bones," "Come as You Are," Dust to Dust (1997a&b). The other mothers are from (in order), Not Wanted on the Voyage (1984), The Wars (1977), and The Piano Man's Daughter (1995).
5. See Vauthier, "Time and Space in Alistair MacLeod's 'The Road to Rankin's Point'" (1997).
6. See "Hands and Mirrors" (Kruk 1999).

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