



# UNSETTLING STORIES

*Settler Postcolonialism  
and the Short Story Composite*

By Victoria Kuttainen

Unsettling Stories:  
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**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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by Victoria Kuttainen

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In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a “metaphor”—a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories. In this respect, narrative structures have the status of spatial syntaxes.

—Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* 115



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Figure 2: “The Manner of Their Dying.” Illustration by Dennis B. Meehan in Scott R. Sanders, *Wilderness Plots*. New York: William Morrow, 1983: 126.

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## INTRODUCTION

### DIFFICULT RELATIONS

The short story composite has many names: the *short story cycle*, the *composite short story collection*, the *short story sequence*, and even the *rouvelle*; but despite a large body of critical discussion and an enormous amount of writing that has been produced in this form, the genre lacks a real place in critical discourse—even though it has played and continues to play an integral role in the way writers have conceived of place, particularly in the postcolonial imagination. Perhaps this is because interconnected short story collections trouble boundaries of many kinds of narratives—not least narratives in which literary critics try to place them. In 1971 Forrest Ingram defined the composite genre—which he called the short story cycle—as a book of interconnected short stories that can be read independently, but which, when read in relation to the other stories in the collection, have a different, sometimes unsettling effect. The subsequent experience of each tale modifies the perception of other stories, Ingram observed, and alters one's reading of the whole. Unsurprisingly, because this genre draws attention to the dynamics of collection and to the relationship between the singular and the collective, short story composites are often used to tell tales of families and communities, rather than charting a single hero's progress through novelistic narrative. This is appropriate because short story composites are epitomes of difficult relations; they have boundary trouble. Surprisingly, however, until now the genre has itself been read within imposed boundaries that have limited the possibility of alternative interpretations and critical configurations. While there have been claims for the short story composite as a quintessentially American genre<sup>1</sup> or as a form appropriate to specific Canadian concerns,<sup>2</sup> these nation-based readings of the genre have seldom noticed that short story composites have a prolific publishing record in former colonies quite generally, and in the settler colonies of the USA, Canada, and Australia specifically.

Even though the nation has become a stable reading frame for national literary studies, the boundaries of the settler nation are by no means stable, and it is useful to remember all of these nations are troubled with

boundary issues, too. Each of them continues to be engaged in territorial disputes with Indigenous communities whose land titles remain in many cases unrecognized. Other disputes about boundaries within these nations also reflect the precariousness of cultural and territorial borders inside the nation-state. Those who argue that the mosaic model of Canadian multiculturalism is outmoded, for instance, are essentially concerned about the way it polices the geo-spatial and temporal borders of minority groups.<sup>3</sup> The rise of border studies in the USA reflects similar concerns with the limitations of certain cultural and conceptual boundaries. Until recently, these boundaries have hindered dialogue in and between diverse and often inequitable kinds of Americans and Americas, and many impasses remain. Australian scholars interested in discussing Australian identity mean something more complex than the version of "Indigenous Australia" as it is marketed to tourists and also something less absurd than the blokey show-Australian type popularized by Paul Hogan and promoted by the late Steve Irwin for consumption by American audiences. These scholars also remark upon the limits of multicultural models and the tenacity of settler stereotypes and preoccupations in Australia. After the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in September 2001, it has become clear how these first-world nations have attempted to police the limits of their own political borders at the same time as they have profited by the increasing flexibility of their reach into global trade markets. It is now indisputably the case that the USA can be regarded as an aggressively neo-imperial world power. Derek Gregory, drawing from Edward Said, observes that this "colonial present" has an evident history in the colonial past. The present colonizing practices of settler nations appear to relate to their shared history in the imperial-colonial project, but as a difficult relation, not as the product of a causal relationship or direct descent.

The premise of settler studies is that the imperial-colonial foundations of the settler nation have significant implications that resonate beyond the moment of contact and the place of the frontier. As David Pearson succinctly puts it, settler societies are "states of unease" (201). In the context of its history of invasion and subsequent settlement, the settler nation has never been an unproblematic category with set boundaries. *Unsettling Stories: Settler Postcolonialism and the Short Story Composite* explores what happens when the national and theoretical boundaries within which short story composites have been read are expanded to consider the genre within this wider context of settler colonialism and its aftermath. The history of settler colonialism has been germinal to all three of these nations in which the short story composite has been popularized,

although the persistent effects of settlement are widely unacknowledged. Until recently it has been difficult to read writing emerging from these nations through a settler framework. As they have gradually emerged (at different stages) from the shadow of Anglo-centric literary tastes, standards, and reading practices, Australia, Canada, and the USA have all been involved in national-canon building projects that have focused on the unity of the national voice and the expression of national identity. As a result of these national agendas, writing emerging from these countries has been read in terms of a national bildungsroman. For the Indigenous communities affected by settlement and for other cultural groups that have remained sidelined by these dominant narratives, however, the nation cannot be regarded as a progress plot. Rather, these projects of national consolidation can be seen as concomitant with certain de-colonizing phases in each of these settler states. Yet in settler colonial nations, any notion of de-colonization represses the nation's own continued status as a colonizing force. Narratives that are read along trajectories of national foundation and development in settler colonies have often served the interests of majority stakeholders in a project of national consolidation that was inaugurated by imperialism and which has continued the colonization of Indigenous peoples, even as nationalism in the recent past has attempted to distance domestic culture from, and even define itself against, its colonial origins and British forbears. Settler nations began with boundary trouble, and it is increasingly apparent that these nations and their national literatures remain haunted by boundary problems. Michel de Certeau, in the epigraph to this book, observes that narrative structures "traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them" (115). This is particularly the case for short story composites that attempt to write and organize difficult relations between place, home, identity, and the past in the abidingly unsettled aftermath of migration and settlement in these settler nations. Many of the story composites that have emerged from former settler colonies are peculiar spatial syntaxes that foreground particular anxieties about difficult relations on, in, and to settler postcolonial territory, and this book reads and analyzes them as such.

In short story composite theory, current discussion concerns issues of unity, fragmentation, collocation and coherence.<sup>4</sup> These issues have also been discussed in settler theory, in entirely separate conversations happening on different theoretical and geographical turf.<sup>5</sup> Despite this overlap in interest areas, theorists of the short story composite and scholars of settler studies have yet to take notice of their shared concerns. Until recently, the large portion of work on the composite short story collections has



originated from the USA and its concentration has been on American narratives. It is understandable in this context that this research has tended to place its theoretical preoccupations within American national frameworks.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, comparative work in settler studies has been limited. Confined mainly to studies in and of Australia and Canada, even there work on settler literature and historiography has been received coolly on several counts. This is largely because settler studies remain an isolated outcrop of postcolonial theory that is regarded suspiciously for its insufficiently pure postcolonialism. Postcolonial theorists who equate the status “postcolonial” with “third-world subaltern” have been uncomfortable with a theoretical category that deals in in-betweens: simultaneously colonizing and erstwhile colonized. Often these rejections contain a tacit assumption that colonialism is an index of victim status which the “post” in postcolonialism can overcome. As Peter Hulme has suggested, these paradigms imply a chronological trajectory of development from occupation to independence and recovery, when it is instead clearly the case that the cultural aftermath of colonialism begins in the first gestures of colonization, and is tenaciously persistent long after the status of political independence has been conferred. Hulme also observes that these views unhelpfully invoke postcolonialism as “badge of merit” (120). This relies upon a narrative of the good and a notion of redemption which does not do justice to the complexities of the process of colonialism and its aftermath, which are perhaps nowhere more apparent than in settler colonies. On other grounds, settler postcolonialism has been approached cautiously by critics who are suspicious of its potential for an overemphasis on settlers and a re-inscription of settler cultural authority even as it seeks to understand the complicity of settlers in the colonization of Indigenous peoples.<sup>7</sup> And even those willing to go so far with settler colonial and postcolonial theory argue that the old centre-periphery model relied upon and perhaps made famous by one of postcolonial theory’s earliest critical bibles—*The Empire Writes Back*—which is invoked in settler studies is no longer relevant in contemporary multi-ethnic society, where migrancy and multiple diasporas have displaced the foundational Anglo-centrism upon which it relied.<sup>8</sup> Theorizing how the aftermath of settlement still inflects contemporary culture and literature in these settler colonies, if it does at all, has been scant.

And though there have been calls to import settler studies into the arena of American studies—and there has been a weak but steady pulse keeping these appeals on a lifeline since the 1980s, they have remained unheeded.<sup>9</sup> Part of the reason for this may be a resistance within some circles to include the USA. Laurie Hergenhan conjectures:



Perhaps it is a case of the Commonwealth and ex-Commonwealth countries sticking together not out of common interests but also out of a shared defensiveness against a new imperial power, a distrust heightened by the difficulties in freeing themselves from the old. (447)

Alan Lawson makes the obverse point, about the resistance *within* the USA academy to including America in discussions about the cultural aftermath of settler colonialism. Lawson suspects that this “overdetermined repudiation of invader-settler postcolonialism *in* the US academy” (“Postcolonial Theory and the “Settler Subject” 23; italics mine) suggests the existence of anxieties about America’s own illegitimate foundations:

[T]hese settler colonies might remind the US of the repressed memory of its own historical circumstance and of its painful and tricky need to negotiate its own idealized constructions of origin. (23)

The comparative thrust of this book places Canadian and Australian texts alongside American texts with the hope that comparative readings of Canadian and Australian short story composites might unsettle a few American discussions, which are only now becoming increasingly interested in their own imperial past and colonizing present in the wake of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent apparently unbounded “War on Terror.” It also proceeds from Leslie Monkman’s discussion of the “Anglo-American axis” (Monkman 129) and his sense of urgency for “internationalizing the United States” (130), as new hegemonies in the Anglo-American academy now uncannily mimic the way English Literature has been implicated in a process of universalizing cultural values and standards of literary taste that proceeded from heart of Britain’s empire. Infusing settler colonial theory into Canadian and Australian short story composite criticism has the potential to challenge the myth of American exceptionalism.<sup>10</sup> But a rigorous comparative study also has the power to challenge Canadian and Australian myths about their differences from the USA. Rather than producing a celebratory narrative about the one and the many, careful studies of the short story composite, as this book aspires to be, might draw our attention to the unsettling dimensions of the stories we tell ourselves, and to lingering anxieties about boundary management that register on several levels.

Including settler studies in general and the USA in particular within discussions about postcolonialism has clearly been one source of anxiety and discontent within scholarly debates. The short story composite formalizes related, though more general kinds of anxieties that characterize settler postcolonial culture and *its* discontents. One of these discontents, as

Hergenhan's remarks suggest above, is the status of marginality which has come to hold an almost talismanic quality in discussions about postcolonialism (Huggan 2005, Söderlind 1995), and which has curiously gained status as the USA has increased and consolidated its neo-imperial sway in the world. It could be said that marginality is a renewed form of "authenticity" that has been given a new measure of "authority" in terms of contemporary, postcolonial cultural capital. Another of these discontents concerns related anxieties about legitimacy, as Lawson's remarks suggest. Perhaps in their own bid to assert the legitimacy of settler studies within the arena of postcolonial studies, earlier discussions of settler culture and literature often overemphasized the sense of marginality felt by settlers as they were measured against perceived literary standards which emerged from the imperial center, whether this center was perceived to be Britain *or* the USA.<sup>11</sup>

Despite their flawed overemphasis on marginality, however, these discussions were important for highlighting how settlers negotiated the relationship between "imported" language and "new" places, and particularly for their insight into how distinctive settler literatures appeared to question "the suitability of inherited literary forms" (Ashcroft et al 16). The emergence of short stories and sketches in the settler colonies, at the time when the long novel was popular in England, has often been linked to such a questioning of and contending with received literary standards (Reid "Generic Variations"; Whitlock "The Bush") as well as to the material exigencies of production in the colonies (Johnson-Woods). This association between colonial writing and the genre of the short story has also produced important observations about their shared concerns with articulating marginality (*New Dreams*). Frank O'Connor is often quoted for his remarks about the suitability of the short story form to "submerged population groups" (18) and marginalized peoples. But although settler colonies may once have been deemed marginal adjuncts of the imperial center, Australia and Canada are now indisputably allies of the world's only superpower, the USA—and, curiously, all three nations continue to boast a strong output of short story production and short story composites in particular. Short story composite theory that celebrates narratives of "the one and the many" emblemized in the composite form has been over-invested in the narrative of a national bildungsroman for which the "new development" has been a postcolonial fetish for marginality. This marginality is, for settlers now, in many ways a thing of the past. And in consideration of the Indigenous peoples who have been and continue to be directly affected by settlement, it has always been relative. Nevertheless, in what appears to be a disguised bid for legitimacy,

and perhaps a concealed desire for the new postcolonial authority of authenticity, postcolonial settlers appear to desire to attach themselves to images of marginality, and in some ways now so more than ever. The short story composite is a genre in which settler postcolonial writers and readers have done so in a particularly curious and somewhat inscrutable form. Scholarly studies of the genre often classify it as a closer cousin to the genre of short story than its star-sibling, the dominant novel; but this awkward, defensive positioning of the short story composite only partially conceals an anxiety about the form as a hybrid which passes as marginal but which has what I call “shifty qualities.” These shifty qualities are part of the difficult structuring principles of the composite form, which will be considered here at length.

My central argument is that some of the difficult and inscrutable ways in which short story composites relate are well-suited to expressing the “difficult relations” that Alan Lawson has observed as defining characteristics of settler cultures and their poetics. Settlers are difficult subjects because they have an anxious colonial history; because they have a continued tense relationship to the Indigenous peoples who have been colonized by their settlement; and because their desires for authenticity are often bound up in concealed bids for cultural authority. Fundamental to Lawson’s thinking about “the complex nature of settler relatedness” (“Difficult Relations” 53) is his understanding that settlers are characterized by “a particularly doubled subjectivity” (50). As Lawson puts it, this doubled subjectivity is defined by “endless secondariness to *two* primaries” (ibid). One of these primaries is what Lawson calls “the First World of cultural origin and source of...cultural and political authority and authenticity (Europe)” (50). The other primary is the “geo-legal-temporal First World of aboriginal peoples” (50). Negotiating tense relations between the between the authority of the imperium the settler mimics (and denies) and the authenticity of the Native subject the settler both longs for and effaces, the settler subject as Lawson sees it emerges out of conditions of difficult relationality, and endlessly enacts irresolvable dramas of duplicity and anxious proximity. In particular, Lawson’s work has pointed out how settler writing encodes a double inscription of authority and authenticity, where settlers teeter between an established European authority which inscribes them as inferior colonials (but which they also mimic on new ground) and an indigenous sense of authenticity belonging properly to the Indigenous peoples whose “nativeness” settlers seek to appropriate and whose authority they seek to efface. The settler subject Lawson theorizes becomes the paradigmatic split subject *and* the quintessential revisionist historian, who is constantly shifting his relation

to himself, to the past, and to others, in order to inhabit the authentic with some authority. Not the least of these difficult relations concerns the relation between text and culture which settlers appear to complicate more than usual. In the spirit of establishing their own authority on their own ground, settlers misread textual precursors, and efface cultural precedents. On the other hand, and this is in the spirit of their doubleness—they imitate, appropriate, claim lineages that are untenable, and obsequiously defer to atavistic textual progenitors in their attempt to establish an authoritative and authentic native tradition. Gillian Whitlock has referred to settlers as “unpalatable subjects whose texts rest uncomfortably on the cusp of coloniality” (*The Intimate Empire* 41). One of the ways settlers have been unpalatable to recent postcolonial theory that has focused on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples caused by their settlement is the way in which settlers position themselves in shifting, and sometimes *shifty* ways alongside images of marginality or centrality, depending on what is at stake. The short story composite is a genre that shares a similar “shifty” status and which has been read through different frames at different times.

Lawson’s theorization of settler culture and poetics implies continuity between the postcolonial present and the colonial past that is not widely researched. In popular culture, issues relating to settlement are often relegated to the past, generally considered as “over and done with.” Settlement is thought of as history, often limited to pioneering times, and this implies a developmental phase that has been surmounted (like the covered wagons used to transport settlers and their goods to the frontier), and is which is no longer fashionable or relevant (like the outmoded frocks worn by pioneer women). Despite popular perceptions that settlement is a thing of the past, theorists have long understood settlement as complex process with significant and lasting cultural implications. Seminal studies on settlement such as the “Hartz Thesis” have laid the groundwork for other anthropological and sociological studies that point out how settlement has wide-reaching and long-term cultural effects.<sup>12</sup> But even as these theorists have been interested in pursuing the persistence of these effects, quite often their research has been limited to the direct aftermath of settlement and early colonial culture, *or* it has generalized the persisting effects of settlement into a single, largely un-interrogated version of settler history, poetics, and identity. Laura Moss’s edited critical collection *Is Canada Postcolonial?* is unique for bringing together research about the colonial past in Canada with questions about the persisting effects of settlement in the present, and ways in which a variety of postcolonial concerns and cultural anxieties presently manifest in complex and particular ways across Canada. In her study of settler romances in the



nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which looks at representations and cultural uses of the Australian Girl, Tanya Dalziell anticipates the position outlined here that elements of settler colonial culture persist in the supposedly multicultural, global, transnational and “post”-colonial present. As Dalziell points out, of the many boundaries settlement does not respect, one of the most indefinite and perhaps most important to note *because* of its inscrutability is this difficult relation to history (137). Settler postcolonial culture is structured on difficult relations to the past, to place, and to empire, nation, region, land, and home. It also bears traces of anxious relations to authority, authenticity, Indigeneity, narrative, and to community and structures of kinship and belonging quite generally. Reading composite fictions that elucidate these difficult relations can contribute to a deeper understanding of these dynamics in settler postcolonial societies and how they manifest in literature; closer attention to these aspects of settler postcolonial societies can also introduce new approaches to reading and interpreting writing, and particularly so in the composite genre—a form of writing organized and indeed premised upon a network of difficult connections between stories, characters, themes, places, time, meaning, and narrative.

There are several sets of “troubling relations” that have a place in a study such as this. One is the way different national literatures relate to each other. This involves the challenge of reading for cultural specificity as well as identifying the common cultural elements produced by a shared history of settler colonialism. Another level of difficult relations involves how we relate to the past and its texts. All of the short story composites considered here involve structural difficulties in locating core stories in a series, and trouble ideas of reading sequentially—corollaries of difficulties in locating traditional or canonical texts and in reading the past deterministically from the present. Dilemmas about reading and relating to cultural and textual progenitors are central problems in settler postcolonial theory. The short story composite is a particularly appropriate form to contemplate in this context. In studying how linked texts exist independently and how independent cultural products appear to cohere with other material co-located with it, the short story composite is *the* genre to go to. In thinking about whether it is *our* reading that imposes cohesion or the authority of the work that makes connections between texts, we find ourselves reading in a genre that textualizes difficult relations to textual precursors. In discussing these questions, as they relate to this genre, we also find ourselves discussing those problem relations that haunt settler culture. Many short story composites highlight ambivalent, tentative, and tenuous relations between past and present,

story and history, cohesion and fragmentation, independence and interdependence, authorial control and readerly invention. The critical reception of these books has been equally fraught—at times the genre has been sidelined altogether, at other times certain stories or composite fictions have been selected over and above others to represent features of the settler nation, and in recent times the composite has been praised as a marginal genre that retains its aesthetic integrity and its fidelity to realism in spite of market-driven tendencies to produce pulp novels that feed public demand and supposedly low-brow tastes for fantasy and escapism. Settler postcolonial literature is also characterized by awkward relations to market capitalism, high-brow tastes, literary canons, and popular culture, and particularly, as we shall see, by difficult relations to realism and romance.

This is not to argue that settler postcolonialism has an exclusive purchase on the short story composite. It is a form that suits many forms of expression and many cultural and personal circumstances. But it is particularly well-suited to meditations on the settler postcolonial condition. Further, this is not to argue that there is a single coherent phenomenon or category that can be identified as settler postcolonialism. Instead, I draw here from recent discussions about various postcolonialisms (Moss “Is Canada Postcolonial?”) which posit that settler postcolonialism is a not a phenomenon or a stable quality that certain people or certain societies possess, but rather that it is a problematic, striated by a number of specific and local concerns that manifest in the literature this study reads. George Grant, whose *Lament for a Nation* Cynthia Sugars identifies as an important precursor to discussions about postcolonialism in Canada, observed in 1965 that “[t]he manifold waves of differing settlers must not be simplified into any common pattern” (5). The focus on the legacies of settlement considered here in close discussion of select short story composites from Australia, Canada, and the USA endeavours to contemplate some of the complexities of settler societies without oversimplifying them. It aims to do this with an attention to historical specificity to contextualize its readings, and also by its methodology of focusing on specific narratives without generalizing too broadly from them larger trends. Neither is the tri-national focus of this book—on the literatures of Australia, Canada, and the USA—meant to reify what Laura Moss has called that “unified notion of nation that is outdated and exclusionary” (10) at the expense of regionalisms, tensions, and multiple modes of belonging. And it is not to devalue the importance of inward-looking nation-based studies of various postcolonialisms which have recently gone far to illustrate the diversity of postcolonial problematics

within any singular nation-state. The comparative focus of this study does not pretend to be comprehensive in scope, as some earlier studies in the comparative postcolonial or Commonwealth tradition perhaps unwittingly implied. Rather, it takes single short story composites as particular case-studies that provide opportunities for close readings of specific settler problematics as they manifest in narrative. Earlier comparative studies, in the heyday of Commonwealth Literature, have been accused overemphasizing similarities between settler nations that were once colonies of Britain struggling to articulate a national identity after independence (Moss 1-2). This book looks instead at how the short story composite is useful for articulating certain inconsistencies in those national fictions and in the myths that these settler nations once told of themselves. Composite short story collections textualize the ways in which settler nations, like composite fictions, are comprised of many contending and congruent stories, not one single coherent narrative (Moss 7).<sup>13</sup>

In "Proximities: From Asymptote to Zeugma" (2000), Lawson (who has thus far theorized settler literature more extensively, and certainly more comprehensively, than any other postcolonial literary critic) suggests a project of cataloguing a stock of tropes that characterize difficult relations in settler literature and culture, and which are persistently redeployed in settler narratives at different times in history. This differs from the outmoded (and probably overly maligned) project of thematic analysis made popular by the likes of Margaret Atwood and Northrop Frye and others in the 1970s, where the aim was to come up with a list of qualities that inhere within a coherent national culture; which was a part of the nationalist project of coming to terms with national identity; and which used literature in a somewhat unselfconscious way as a transparent window on reality. In Lawson's way of thinking, literature is not necessarily a privileged repository of culture, but rather, narrative in general is of interest in settler cultures because colonialism is intimately tied to the production of discourse and systems of representation; because settlers have anxious relations to texts and to self-representation; because their act of writing enacts a collision between "authentic" forms of native self-expression and the "inauthentic" authority of inherited literary forms and standards; and because they have a penchant for revisionism. According to Lawson, settler anxieties and tensions are fundamentally enacted in struggles over narrative:

The settler, it increasingly seems to me, is above all a teller of tales. It is in narrative that settler subjectivity calls itself into being and it is in narratives that it can be located and its symptomatic utterances analysed. The settler...is "essentially" a narrating subject. That is to say, I am drawn to



an analysis that is not so much located in “culture” and almost certainly not located in consciousness, but one located in texts, or more precisely, in various forms of narrative...I argue that settlers narrate themselves into subjectivity in the act of making particular narratives. And so conflict in settler colonies is frequently a conflict over narrative or representation. (“Proximities” 28)

As Lawson explains (in much the same way that de Certeau does, too), narrative tropes encode grammars of relating. They mediate, through language and representation, awkward relations of collocation and propinquity. They yoke one thing and another together, in complex ways. And they are particularly powerful for registering the difficult relations of doubleness that Lawson earlier theorized (in “Second World”) as structuring settlers’ self-positioning to (at least) two originaries: the European and the Indigenous. Tropes can be scrutinized in literary language which is explicitly figurative, but they also translate into everyday language where they become naturalized and where they often undergird implicit cultural assumptions. Unlike themes, which can be thought of as *properties* of a work of art (or more problematically, in thematic analysis—properties of a culture), tropes *move* a story; they are essentially a text’s underlying relational code. As Lawson explains, tropes are “rhetorical figures, because they *function* rhetorically—that is, they *turn* a history, a narrative” (“Proximities” 31). They are persuasive rhetorical structures that do the work of comparison and affiliation, and contrast and distancing. In settler literatures, tropes sometimes stake “polemical and tendentious” (31) claims and do so trickily and seductively, usually not openly drawing attention to themselves but constituting the deep structure of a text’s language. And on settler terrain, the claims staked by these tropes are fundamentally spatial; that is, they organize relations to history, belonging, legitimacy, and authenticity that bear directly upon how settlers position themselves to their land(s). *Unsettling Stories* does not attempt an exhaustive “A to Z” catalogue of these devices, as Lawson’s “Asymptote to Zeugma” proposal cheekily implies there is a need for, but it does look at a number of settler tropes used to organize several short story composites selected here for close reading. Because of their contending and collocated narratives, short story composites epitomize that “conflict over representation” that Lawson has pointed to as an index of conflict in settler culture, and these struggles also take the form of conflict over narrative space. In short story composites, tropes are fundamentally used to organize their difficult relations, and Gerald Kennedy has identified a similar need to catalogue the poetics of this genre based on their organizational topoi (Kennedy “Towards a



Poetics” 19). This book considers short story composites organized around the tropes of the family, the small town, home, history, and trauma.

Chapter One, “Tales about Family” considers short story composites organized around the trope of the family. It reads William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* alongside Margaret Laurence’s Canadian classic *A Bird in the House*. These composites invoke the trope of family genealogy to trouble ideas about descent and lineage, particularly to deconstruct myths about filial descent. Myths about race and biological inheritance have been especially pernicious in settler colonies, where they once underpinned and bolstered national myths about authority, property, belonging, legitimacy and entitlement. Ideas about descent, in particular, contributed to ways in which settlers came to think of themselves as particular kinds of Britishers or national citizens. In this sense, the trope of the family has been deployed in settler colonial discourse as a model for civil society with universal and sacred values. Yet the myth of uniform filial descent from English forbears ill suits the need national writers also have to establish their own traditions on new ground. With recourse to Edward Said’s concepts of filiation and affiliation, this chapter shows how these composites are concerned with deconstructing myths about tradition and heritage that radiate beyond the family to settler society in general. But these composites also reveal persistent and troubling postcolonial and modernist investments in the trope, in which their own canonical literary sites and the national traditions they head-up become newly enshrined “sacred sites.” These composites become memorials of the past they simultaneously seek to de-sanctify and de-mythologize, and aesthetic emblems of a modernist quest for authentic national history. In their attempts to reconfigure old myths, these stories *about* difficult relations *become* models of difficult relations, specifically between the colonial past and the post-colonizing present. They display one of the governing tropes of settler postcolonialism—what Graham Huggan has identified as “characteristic postcolonial reversals” and repetitions—insofar as their attempts to deconstruct imperial-colonial myths of lineage betray troubled postcolonial attempts to indigenize settlers or put in place artificially coherent boundaries between awkward settler colonial forbears and postcolonial citizens at home in their nation.

Many of composites discussed throughout this book also feature the trope of the family, or settler genealogy—namely Thea Astley’s *It’s Raining in Mango: Portraits from a Family Album* and Sandra Birdsell’s *Agassiz Stories* (in Chapter Four). For the purposes of coherence, however, they are considered in other sections of this study, although the ways in which they connect with these other composites about family is

certainly commented upon. If objections might be raised regarding the basis for comparing these texts, particularly Faulkner's antebellum South, which has become an American classic, against more contemporary Canadian and Australian narratives, it might be observed that this project is not primarily concerned with the "good fit" but with awkward relations more generally. The dates of settlement across shifting frontiers in these three settler nations vary significantly. And in any case, a study that adhered to synchronic or diachronic models of objectivity and comparison might misleadingly appear to indulge in a false progress-narrative of "cultural development" that mapped stages from colonial fog to postcolonial redemption, which this study strenuously wishes to avoid.

Chapter Two, "Tales about the Small Town" looks at short story composites arranged around the trope of the small town. In this chapter, nostalgia emerges as a governing modality in many of these short story composites which feature the bucolic village. In this context, I call upon Stephanie Foote's notion that regional short story collections often involve a nostalgic and inward looking focus on a small region within national borders that fictionally construes relations between insiders and outsiders to consolidate a feeling of being at home in the whole nation. This chapter considers how composite stories of the small town have historically been read as metonyms for the composite nation. As mentioned earlier, readings of the short story composite have been involved in national canon-building projects even as they notice how the writing in this genre challenges traditional scholarly interpretations of nation-narration based on the dominant form of the novel or the long-poem. These readings reveal another level of difficult relations considered here: short story composites, because of their unsettling non-linear effects, often prompt multiple interpretations. As Gerald Kennedy has observed, the "ostensible unity of such works" can sometimes be seen as an intrinsic property of the narrative, rather than a product of one's own reading ("Poetics" 11). This is perhaps nowhere more relevant than in readings of composites which filter their material through the frame of the nation-as-unity. This chapter considers at length interpretations that have continued to favour the nation as the dominant frame for interpretation. It considers how the town-tale has been co-opted into fraught national narratives of group-based "folk history," progress, and development that are produced by the process of reading the past in a selective way. The small country town is an apt trope for the myths of independence these narratives require and develop. Reading the small-town composite in such a way lends itself to a form of "boundary drawing" that transforms complex narratives and scattered stories about life in the settler small-town to the level of nation-narration.

In this chapter I show how reading the composite in this way lends Stephen Leacock's Mariposa in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* to be figured in Canadian literature as a metonym of the "peaceable kingdom" and how Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* becomes enshrined, too, as a seminal site of national literature that is so expansive that it includes visions of dissonance. I explain here why the short story composite of the small town is particularly well-suited to the purposes of nation narration and canon formation.

Chapter Three, "Tales about Home," considers how the trope of the small town has a slightly different function in home-town stories, which are particularly suited to the needs of second-wave feminist readers in the 1980s. The trope of home and the concept of a private female domain held a certain allure for feminists during this era, and this chapter considers how this domain is configured in the short story composite. Discussions about homeliness and un-homeliness also have particular relevance and a specific cadence in settler postcolonial domains, as they suggest ways in which settlers have made the "new" land their own, and ways in which settlers generations after settlement can still feel insecure in this land, or register anxieties about their place in the nation. Issues of homeliness and unhomeliness also relate to the place of Indigenous peoples whose homes settler nations have claimed, and the rhetoric and strategies of dispossession they have used to make Indigenous people seem strangers in their own homelands. This chapter looks at late-twentieth century modes of writing back to earlier nationalist modes of framing the nation seen in Chapter Two, as increasing attention to postcolonial theory and politics, particularly in Australia, made nationalism seem crass and outmoded, and as feminists made the charge that nationalist narratives had been patriarchal and exclusionary.

Returning to considerations about settler nostalgia, this chapter considers how the home-town composite registers a particular form of cultural nostalgia that uses the past in particular ways for the purposes of the present. Olga Master's *A Long Time Dying* is looked at for how it revisits 1930's Australia to consolidate a picture of the past that is particularly suitable for creating a myth of the postcolonial present. By focusing myopically on small, isolated details and fragments of story, the micro-narratives of Master's homely tales assemble, as if by pointillism, a picture of home as an idyll-in-miniature, a lost paradise that nurtures the myth of a separate female domain uncorrupted by metropolitan values and politics. These are settler postcolonial romances, where the lost idyll exits off-stage, and where the settlers are always-already victims of failed independence. But the myth of independence these stories rely upon and



nurture is integral to their attempt to conceal their own larger designs to redeem the postcolonial nation from its colonial and colonizing past by producing a new, allegorical national meta-narrative that emerges out of the accruing smaller fragments of story. These stories require a nostalgic myth of lost purity, and pine for a “separate sphere” in which the settler colonial nation was distinct from the Imperial metropolitan centre from which (in reality) it was never fully distinguishable.

The re-emergence of short story collections in the composite form in the late twentieth century itself has a nostalgic quality. After all, as Susan Garland Mann and others have pointed out, one of the early forms of short story collections were turn-of-the-nineteenth-century local color stories.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the widespread publication of the short story collection genre is associated with the rise of modernism. The publication of no less than five scholarly books on the subject of the short story composite since 1989 (by Mann, Lynch, Nagel, Davis, and Lundén respectively) reveals a curious emergence of interest in short story composites at the end of the twentieth century, during the rise of postmodernism. The genre of the short story composite might be seen as a contemporary throw-back to narratives that were preoccupied with myths of lost union and purity that were popularized during these earlier eras. Short story composites organized around the trope of region particularly display nostalgia for roots and for a rootedness in place that the small country town and the home town—for all its boredom and backwater—seems to promise for these less certain, less rooted, and transient times, and for the largely metropolitan late twentieth century imagination. Fundamentally, nostalgia is an affective relation to the past; on settler ground, it stakes claims to land based on fantasies about history and narratives of historical romance of the kind Amy Kaplan has called in an American context “Romancing the Empire.”

Chapter Four, “Tales about History” focuses on settlers’ difficult relations to history. In the 1990s, the short story composite was often used by writers engaging in projects of historiographical metafiction—using fiction and multiple perspectives to question the grand-unified narratives of a singular national and nationalist past. When they were written, these composite fictional histories were invested with all kinds of cultural significance, as many emerging postcolonial critics turned to them as model for how new kinds of postcolonial history might be best approached. In contrast to these earlier celebratory readings, this chapter reads postcolonial historiographical composites as quests for settler redemption that attempt to come to terms with the unsettling legacy of settler colonialism. In this context, it looks at Scott Russell Sanders’ *Tales*

about the Settlement of the American Land, Thea Astley's *It's Raining in Mango*, and Sandra Birdsell's conjoined composites *Night Travellers* and *Ladies of the House* collected together under the title *Agassiz Stories*.

Birdsell's collection is another composite fiction organized around the trope of the small town, this time a fictionalization of Birdsell's own hometown, renamed "Agassiz." Birdsell's composite, like Masters' *A Long Time Dying*, uses the small town to organize a fiction of roots and authenticity. However, this composite is mostly concerned about the difficult relations between personal heritage, contained within family genealogy, and family cultural traditions, cultural heritage, and national heritage. Further, its particularly difficult relations between settler postcolonialism and the settler-invader past are emblemized in the difficult relations between the two discrete, but collocated composites that comprise the *Agassiz* series. While the first story collection within the series—*Night Travellers*—invokes the Canadian past in a nostalgic mode even as it appears to realistically portray its problems, Birdsell's subsequent composite in the *Agassiz* series—*Ladies of the House*—invokes hallmarks of postmodern aesthetics in a complex, "shifty" way that conceals an underlying modernist national myth-making project. Following Hayden White's central idea in *Meta-History* that history-telling fundamentally involves a series of identifiable narratives that are linked to ideological claims with important material effects, this chapter considers various different modes of relating history in a settler context. Within the different modes of relating and regulating relations to the past that this study uncovers, it identifies several different historical narratives and the relations between them: national meta-histories and various other official histories to do with governance, popular histories, genealogical and cultural histories, family history, regional history, natural history and heritage, and considers the various claims they stake.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, "Tales about Trauma" introduces the concept of the trauma fiction composite, and follows on from ideas about difficult relations to the past raised in Chapter Four. Anne Whitehead has defined "trauma fiction" as a troubled genre of writing that invokes the hallmarks of trauma-testimony in an uneasy, fictive mode. The composites looked at here—Tim Winton's *The Turning* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*—invoke the forms of trauma testimony such as fragmentation, dislocation, repetition, and belatedness in recycling historical material from the national past for the purposes of fiction. Again, these composites are often backward-looking. The fascination of the trauma narrative is that it routes the problems of the present back to an event, sometimes forgotten, in the past. As such, these narratives

emblemize “difficult relations” to the national colonial past because they produce realistic, traumatic narratives that convey a sense of authenticity, but which relate “reality” in a highly fraught way. Gao Xingjian’s 2001 acceptance speech for the Nobel Laureate in Literature, “Literature as Testimony: The Search for Truth” reveals a rising trend on the cusp of the new millennium to view literature as having a special purchase on the search for truth. In this view of literature, narrative becomes a privileged site for the relating of “authentic human feelings” (Xingjian 55), such that the testimonies of literature are often now regarded as “much more profound than those of history” (Xinjian 54). But the late twentieth century has also witnessed the rise of the cultural authority conferred upon postcolonial narratives of suffering and marginality. In light of these two values, these narratives present a particularly intensified form of *tricky* reading. It becomes difficult to tell if they are belated cultural testimonies of national trauma, or if they are mimicking traumatic modes of relating which belong more authentically (or perhaps—more ‘ethically’) to Indigenous peoples dispossessed by colonial settlement and the minority groups sidelined in and by dominant national narratives and cultural practices. This chapter asks if these are telling tales that reveal in a fictive format deep-seated and real cultural trouble, or rather, if they display more generally a crisis for settler narrative in the late twentieth century. It draws from Lawson’s observation that the role of an imagined England in colonial romances, as it functioned as “the key to the personal hermeneutic, the key to full intelligibility” (“Difficult Relations” 57) has been replaced in troubled postcolonial narratives with “a personal neurosis of incompleteness” (57) in which the quest—or search—for origins has become existential and psychoanalytic. The notion of belated or deep-seated cultural trauma offers, through its alluring explanatory powers—that is, through its *story*—the promise of the restoration of full subjectivity and recovered plenitude. In these narratives, then, the trope of “colonial trauma” vies with the trope of narration itself, to become possible keys to intelligibility. These texts represent a problematization of modes of knowing, a curious reversal of earlier colonialist tropes of certainty and authority, and they feature a large degree of indeterminacy that threatens to become a new form of authenticity.

Furthermore, this chapter returns to debates about whether postcolonialism is a reading practice or a feature within narratives, to consider the way in which colonialism becomes a very conspicuous and *shifty* trope in these collections, subject to a degree of narrative manipulation. By drawing attention to the ways these composites manage and manipulate the tropes of authenticity and colonialism, this chapter



concludes that these composites reveal both *trouble telling* and *telling trouble*, depending very much on perspectives of framing and positions of reading. Both of these books also call attention to notions of innocence and complicity, which have significant implications in the settler postcolonial domain. Because victimhood can be seen to confer innocence, this chapter reads innocence as a key theme, which it positions next to issues of silence and questions about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a settler postcolonial speaking or reading position. Do certain stories dominate or threaten to overwhelm and even eviscerate our impressions of other stories? What do we make of the differences between patent connections between stories, and covert associations? Are hidden connections more authentic because of their suppressed associations? Do generalized “colonial trauma” stories elide important differences between different kinds of trauma narratives, and different sorts of colonialisms? Does the choice to respect one kind of trauma narrative and silence the other involve a gesture to let “the subaltern speak?” Or does it create a new kind of postcolonial reversal, involving the trope of the mute settler who doubles the “mute native” found in so many colonial romances? Does the desire to “lose oneself” and abrogate the authority of one’s speaking position—as some of the unstable narrators in these stories seem to do—represent a new postcolonial desire to shed one’s skin and immerse oneself in the landscape? These composites raise particular problems for narratives in settler postcolonial societies that have the potential to reinforce impasses, and retreat into realms of unintelligibility, for which narrative is seen both as a potential, troubled therapeutic solution, and as a poststructuralist end-in-itself: a substitution for meaning altogether. This chapter ends with a discussion about how the indeterminacy of interpretation foregrounded by composites such as these points to a need to consider and develop an ethics of reading and modes of ethical response that are predetermined by political debate, but which nevertheless engage responsibly in community dialogue.

A comment needs to be made on some terminology used in throughout this book. The short story composite is a curious genre. As mentioned in the outset of this Introduction, one of its most curious features is that it has many names. When Forrest Ingram first commented upon the form in 1971, he gave it the appellation “Short Story Cycle.” This remained for many years to be the dominant name for the form, and in many ways it remains to yield the most returns when it is entered as a search-term into scholarly databases. J Gerald Kennedy, who has written at length on the short story composite, argues for the relevancy of the term “Short Story Cycle” for this very reason, but then switches to the term “Short Story

Sequence" in his later work after having been persuaded of its efficacy by Robert Luscher. James Nagel and Rocio Davis also use the term "Short Story Cycle." As I just suggested, Robert Luscher prefers the term "Short Story Sequence." Luscher is interested in various configurations of sequential formations he has identified in different, mostly American composite narratives. Like Gerald Lynch, Luscher is interested in the sequential aspects of the form. Lynch's idea is that Canadian composites are cyclical in form, and so he calls them "cycles." He contrasts English-Canadian cycles to American composites, which he suggests tend to be linear in structure, and therefore progressive and sequential. Rolf Lundén uses the term "short story composite," as I do. Lundén prefers this term for its scholarly accuracy (*United Stories of America*: 12-16). W.H. New has also more recently commented that the term "composite" more accurately embraces the polyvalent nature of different composite fictions ("Edges" 86-87). The thrust of this study is a careful attendance to the particular structure of composite fictions, whether they are cyclical or sequentially linear; proleptic, incremental, and accumulative; and whether they display rhizomatic connections or even analeptic, revising gestures of erasure; in some cases they have framed sub-sections, and even conjoined diptych structures are not uncommon. As in Lawson's notion of "tropology" ("Proximities" 35; "The Anxious Proximities" 1221) figures of resemblance, contrast, and contiguity contribute in various ways to the complex spatial patterns and networks of meaning created in composite short story collections. The term "composite," then, best describes the many cultural and literary configurations that can be discerned in this literary form.

As for that most acrimonious term "postcolonialism," its use here draws from theorists such as Brydon, Hutcheon, Tiffin and others who argue that "post" is not a marker of time in which the colonial has surmounted colonialism, achieved independence, and somehow, impossibly recovered from the experience, but rather that it is a signal of the enduring aftermath of colonialism. As Helen Tiffin has so clearly put it, "[t]he term post-colonial implies the *persistence* of colonial legacies in post-independence cultures, not their disappearance or erasure" ("Plato's Cave" 158). In settler postcolonialism, I argue, the aftermath of colonialism is particularly fraught and tenacious.<sup>15</sup> Settler postcolonialism is also troubled by postmodernism, another "difficult relation" this study comments upon. Just as postmodernism, as Linda Hutcheon explains it, "paradoxically manages to legitimize culture even as it subverts it" (*Politics* 15), postcolonial settlers often conceal their stakes in perpetuating the very structures of colonialism they appear to undermine,



by continuing to legitimate their presence even as they deconstruct self-authorizing colonial discourses of the past. Short story composites share with postmodernism an interest in border crossing, boundary blur, the de-centring of linear narrative, and what Lyotard has identified as postmodernism's central feature—an "incredulity toward meta-narratives" (xxiv). Many short story composites discussed in this study have a similar dynamic to that Hutcheon describes with regard to postmodernism more generally. They invoke the "authenticity" of a form associated with realism and the sketch, but need to be watched for their complicity in re-installing and perpetuating the very meta-narratives they sometimes appear to deconstruct. These dynamics can be particularly troubling in terms of how contemporary settlers position themselves and tell their stories.

This brings us to another issue of terminology: the term "settler."<sup>16</sup> As mentioned earlier, in popular discourse in North America, this term generally connotes "pioneer," and is limited to a period of settlement generally consigned to the past. To a large extent, this consignment of settlers to history reflects both a contemporary desire leave the past behind, and the related fact that the nature of white settlement and its aftermath is largely taken for granted. In South Africa and Zimbabwe, nations where settlers are not the majority, but comprise a very obvious privileged racial minority that has been forced to come to terms to varying degrees with the aftermath of its colonizing and colonial settlement,<sup>17</sup> settlers have been more aware of their own migrant histories, and they often self-identify with the term. In scholarly discourse, the term "settler," its more accurate permutation "settler-invader," or its more recent formation "invader-settler," has a more established genealogy; though also as mentioned earlier, it has not been widely embraced. Generally, the term "settler" has been used to describe English-speaking settlers, though it is not limited to those of Anglo-Celtic descent, even though settlement has often been thought of as primarily British and white. As Moss remarks, "it is restrictive to lump together the histories of Irish, Mennonite, and Icelandic Canadians, to name only three groups of "whites" who immigrated to Canada as settlers" (15).<sup>18</sup> This book begins to explore what this might mean in the case of Sandra Birdsell, who is an Anglophone Canadian writer with a German Mennonite and Métis background.<sup>19</sup> But the methodology of this study that focuses on close readings of narratives aims to circumvent reductive readings that might suggest an identity between "ethnicity" or a given "wave" of settlement and their cultural expression. As a result, it avoids reducing the particular literary expression of one writer who happens to identify in such a way to the status of voice box for a given cultural group, or to stereotypes about their ethnicity. To

be a settler is by no means to possess a coherent identity, as Lawson ("Postcolonial Theory" 24) and Slemon ("Unsettling" 38) have separately observed. As the pursuit of that chimera "national identity" that preoccupied so much theorizing in the 1970s and 1980s has now for the most part been abandoned, this study is by no means interested in superficially altering the nature of the national quest to define "settler identity" instead, or by producing a national narrative that is the sum total of a series of smaller subsets, one of which includes "settlers" or even, as in Birdsell's case, "Mennonite settlers."

Instead, settlement produces a problematic that involves multiple and complex histories of migration and displacement; the transposition of language(s) and art forms to a different culture and territory; the dispossession of Indigenous peoples; the appropriation of Indigenous lands and continued tense relations to Indigeneity; and the difficult process of coming to terms with the continuing effects of this legacy and all that it entails, including the first-world privileges, wealth, and status that settlers from the USA, Canada, and Australia now enjoy. My interest in *Unsettling Stories* is not in defining settler subjectivity, which would be an impossible task even if it were possible that the "settler" was a singular and coherent subject willing to stand still long enough to be defined. Rather, my concern here is with ways in which settler postcolonial narratives manifest struggles with difficult relations to authority, authenticity, marginality, and legitimacy through narrative, all of which are components of writing in the short story composite genre. Another concern I foreground here is the way that many of these narratives continue to enact the problematics of settlement even as "the settler subject" has proceeded to disappear once again from literary theory and history.

Laura Moss argues that it is "ineffective" and "anachronistic" (11) to look at contemporary writing *only* in response to the legacy of colonialism. This is surely true. But Moss's point that the aftermath of colonialism is not the sole preoccupation of contemporary writing does not imply that the case is closed on how residual postcolonial anxieties and preoccupations continue to inflect contemporary narratives. Shifting scholarly attention to the colonization of Indigenous peoples and to other subjects cannot overlook the ways in which the fact of settlement is persistent, contemporary, and relevant, even if some scholars wish *settlers would just go away*. As Leslie Monkman has suggested in light of the new hegemonies of the American academy, and in consideration of rejections of settler-invader studies by American-centred postcolonialism for its "impure" taint (in its associations with whiteness and Britain), the settler

can sometimes seem like a disappearing subject. This is a curious postcolonial reversal of the “dying race” trope Alan Lawson has attributed to colonial narratives, which settlers once used as an indigenizing tactic to elegize Aborigines out of existence. Even though those narratives were curiously effective and persuasive, Indigenous people never went away. And neither have settlers, despite what Chris Prentice and Rosemary Jolly have separately identified as an emerging postcolonial desire to escape the past through the postcolonial romance of reconciliation.<sup>20</sup>

Bain Attwood makes the point that all non-Indigenous peoples are settlers (*Telling the Truth* 1), and thus all non-Indigenous people are implicated in this particularly persistent relationship of awkward proximity, for which there is no readily available “dis-identificatory gesture” (Lawson “Proximities” 28). All non-Indigenous peoples have once been migrants, though clearly (as Arun Mukherjee has pointed out) not all migrations are equivalent, and not all migrants experience and deal with settlement in the same ways.<sup>21</sup> Even more importantly, as Margery Fee has observed, settlers have commonly repressed the history of their own migrations as a result of which, “Anglo-Canadians are seen as without ethnicity” (“What Use?” 270). More recent attention to the ethnicities of settlers who were once seen as “ethnicity-free” has been welcome in this context, as long as it does not become a veiled attempt for settlers to align themselves with ethnic minorities—a new bid for settlers to reconfigure relations to perceived shifting sources of authenticity and authority based on marginality.<sup>22</sup> As long as it does not produce new kinds of cultural determinist readings, this focus should enrich readings of the cultural and literary archive. A renewed scholarly focus on the colonization of Indigenous peoples that the process of settlement has involved has also been welcome, especially in the work of Tanya Dalziel and Jennifer Henderson, who have made the point that earlier settler studies that still emphasized “resistance” despite also acknowledging settlers’ complicity within imperial colonizing projects have been highly compromised and over-invested in notions of oppression and marginality. The readings of short story composites produced in *Unsettling Stories* keep in mind the specific migrations and histories of particular settlers in reality; on the other hand these readings pay attention to how settlers position themselves in relation to Indigeneity, marginality, and ethnicity in their shifting and sometimes *shifty* stories.

Alan Lawson and Stephen Slemon have separately argued that settler literatures have been sidelined in postcolonial studies because of their lack of pure postcolonial pedigree. Their general argument is that settler texts should be considered within postcolonial discussions of culture and



identity precisely *because* of their “in-between” status, especially insofar as the predicament of the settler draws attention to the perceived shortcomings in postcolonial theories that require the myth Lawson identifies as “the simple dyadic coloniser-colonised paradigm of pure self-otherness” (“Difficult Relations” 52). However, Arun Mukherjee has more recently pointed out a problem with recent postcolonial theory that has fetishized hybridity and “in-between-ness” (“Difference and Identity”). To a large extent recent studies of the short story composite have privileged the genre for its portraiture of hybridity just as much as discussion of the short story in the recent past has overly privileged the notion of marginality. These national studies that have looked at how the genre expresses universals about belonging and migrancy that characterize national writing risk reinscribing, in a twentieth century context, the decontextualising, oversimplifying modes that have long characterized colonial discourse, especially insofar as they contain implicit desires for a kind of scholarly and cultural legitimacy to be conferred upon the genre *because* of its hybrid form. This study is intended as a corrective to its scholarly predecessors, but like the difficult relations of settlers to their forerunners, even as it seeks to extend and revise these past directions, it owes them an enormous debt. This debt is owed to scholars of settler studies, and the rigorous debates that have emerged within this field, and to numerous scholars of short fiction and short story composites as well. The painstaking scholarship in studies of the short story composite form by Davis, Dunn and Morris, Ingram, Kennedy, Lundén, Luscher, Lynch, Mann, Nagel, and New as well as numerous others has benefited this study enormously. Similarly, the close-readings contained in this book owe much to a long tradition of theorizing postcolonial short fiction, especially in the work of Jacqueline Bardolph, William H. New, and Peter O. Stummer, and, more recently, to those scholars who participated in the 2004 conference “Postcolonial Short Fiction: Tropes and Territory” at the Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, France. I—and my work here—have also gained much from the scholarly exchange generated by the members of the Society for the Study of the Short Story who have been hospitable and encouraging of new work in their field. The collective work of these scholars has produced numerous engaging and energetic debates that have inspired many of the directions this book attempts to follow, and which have made the work of this study itself seem, like the settler condition it discusses, a belated arrival on the scene.

Research on the topics of collection and collocation also brings to this study a heightened awareness of what it means to place texts alongside others. Reading any particular text or unique work of literature through

lenses of scholarly and social debate multiplies the difficult relations, and urges caution. The various biases and agendas of interpretive communities have the power to determine meaning and create new hegemonies even as they defer to literature for its power to exceed institutionalized knowledge. National *and* postcolonial studies can lend readings what Mukherjee, in a different context, has identified as a certain “pre-packaged quality” (“How Shall We Read” 249) that goes with the way some texts can be loosely interpreted and predetermined by the frames through which they are read. Composite fictions foreground the difficulty of reading, relating, and making connections. They draw attention to the strains between what Derek Attridge has identified as literature’s “singularity” and the social lives of texts as they are gathered together in collection and affiliate, as alliances emerge between stories, as certain tales appear to dis-identify with the rest of the collection or as they complicate previous material, and as connections are made between stories and their readers. It can only be hoped that my readings here are duly attentive to so many of the uneasy relations that structure these short story composites, and settler literatures, in general. Derek Attridge’s call to read a text responsibly—by trying to resist an “attempt to pigeonhole it or place it on a scale of values” (128)—has an acute importance for this way of placing complex texts and difficult contexts together:

To read a literary work responsibly... is to read it without placing over it a grid of possible uses, as historical evidence, moral lesson, path to truth, political inspiration, or personal encouragement, and without passing judgment on the work or its author (although in other contexts it may be vital to make such judgments). (130)

In any discussion of settler literature, the call to read a text responsibly inevitably must also be balanced against a difficult socio-historical and geo-legal context, without allowing that context to predetermine all meaning or judgments of value. Such a reading also necessitates a respectful consideration of the autochthonous peoples that settler literature so often co-opts as subjects for its own narrative devices, or disavows altogether. Len Findlay’s call to “Always Indigenize!” sets a particularly important precedent for settler studies that this book also hopes to observe.

That said, it might also be observed that reading texts from the still-recent twentieth century for their tendentious claims and tricky plots requires a certain amount of de-familiarization and negative capability that is sometimes more of a quest than a celebration of arrival. Reading historical narratives separated from the present by the passage of history, from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for instance, can create a

distancing effect such that those narratives produce a de-familiarizing jolt but still remain close enough to the present-day to be coherent within our contemporary frameworks of understanding (although this of course is not without its own set of problems). The key feature in the experience of reading historical texts is that often their ideological investments are ridiculously apparent to us. A major impetus for this project is the observation that the distance between the colonial and colonizing past and the present day is not as far away as we would sometimes like it to be. As much as recent postcolonial theory can express a desire for geographical or temporal distancing by focusing on colonialism in the third world or in history, the colonial present, as Derek Gregory has taught us, is both persistent and tricky. One of its greatest tricks is its apparent invisibility from within. As David Lloyd explains, most often our own ideological investments are rendered invisible to ourselves, and the related myth of common-sense is probably of the most dominant *doxa* of modernity and imperialism. No narrative is ideology-free. And this applies to conservative narratives and liberal narratives as much as it does to postcolonial theory as well, which as we will see in our more thorough discussion of settler postcolonialism in this book, is haunted especially on settler turf by a desire for personal, postcolonial redemption. This personal desire for redemption is difficult to disentangle from the scholarly project of postcolonialism. At the turn of the millennium, critical narratives of postcolonialism, popular narratives about colonialism, and literary representations of all things colonial have ballooned. As Graham Huggan points out in *The Postcolonial Exotic*, the postcolonial *industry* is booming. And it is tricky to avoid the seductive lure and the convincing push-and-pull of the narratives we read, the academic and political discourses which interpellate us, and the movies we see. But it is important we do not persist in maintaining the existence of narratives that are “common sense” and value-free. Just as this book details a number of twentieth century quest narratives that search for lost origins, authenticity, completion, and legitimacy, it contains its own “meta-quest”: a search for scholarly objectivity. In the often political fracas of postcolonial theory, this is no easy task, and to find a writing position and voice in the midst of this noisy squabble is an equally difficult quest.

At various times in history settlers have looked back upon the dustbin of the past and exposed the invested imperialist or colonialist or nationalist ideologies at play, but re-located themselves in a mythical ideology-free-zone. Obviously, this “winning post” position is no longer innocently available to any informed scholarly study of colonialism. There is no value-less vantage point or Archimedean point of reference upon which to



rest one's case and look down on the ideologies of the past. As Frederic Jameson has pointed out, narratives often conceal ideologies that are active and persistent, and which continue to interpellate and push and pull their subjects in various directions, particularly as they undergird realist representation. The value of scholarly objectivity here is motivated by the desire to uncover some of these concealed ideologies, and how they have pushed and pulled their "dear readers" throughout the twentieth century just as colonial romances in the nineteenth century are now recognized to have played an important role in subject-formation and in perpetuating the ideologies of empire.

Developing the ability to read twentieth century rhetoric and narrative in this way is critically important in order to recognize the ways narrative tropes persist in manipulating and seducing their readers into realms of fantasy. One of these fantasies, of course, is detachment itself, which enables modern settlers to insist upon narratives of innocence. Several forms of this narrative are the folksy "why do they hate us?" gesture and its antitheses, the "how can they be so dumb?" plot or the ugly "they asked for it" narrative so often heard echoing through the halls of academe after September 11, 2001. Objectivity, as it is related to the trope of detachment, can become a narrative of exculpation, superiority, or moral indifference as well. In many ways here I am making a case for an informed, moral, scholarly objectivity that parallels Edward Said's representation of the intellectual, who is "sceptical, engaged, devoted to rational investigation *and moral judgment*" (*Representations of the Intellectual* italics mine 20); who is motivated by a desire to confront and desist stereotypes, old metaphors, stock types, and routine plots (32); who draws attention to issues that have been swept under the rug; and yet, who above all else, must leave space in the mind for doubt, such that apparently politically-oppositional certainties also do not foreclose upon new dogmas in place of the old orthodoxies they have sought to expose and deconstruct (121). If this all sounds very big, my focus is small and specific: what function has the short story composite played to shape and arrange our settler postcolonial and national imaginaries in the twentieth century? *Unsettling Stories* considers some ways this putatively marginal genre has perhaps not been so marginal after all, but played a part in shaping the twentieth century imagination in the aftermath of colonialism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See primarily Kennedy, J. Gerald. "Introduction." *Modern American Short-Story Sequences: Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995; Lundén, Rolf. *The United Stories of America: Studies in the Short Story Composite*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999; Nagel, James. *The Contemporary American Short-story Cycle: The Ethnic Resonance of Genre*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> See Lynch, Gerald. *The One and the Many: English-Canadian Short Story Cycles*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Janice Kulyk Keefer, "From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope." *Books in Canada* 20.6 (1991): 13-16. See also Eva Darius Beautell. "Writing Back and Beyond: Postcoloniality, Multiculturalism, and Ethnicity in the Canadian Context." *Tricks with a Glass: Writing Ethnicity in Canada*. Rocío Davis and Rosalía Baena, eds. Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000: 19-35.

<sup>4</sup> These issues are raised in different forms by all of the major contemporary theorists of the short story composite: Rosio Davis, J. Gerald Kennedy, Rolf Lundén, Gerald Lynch, and James Nagel.

<sup>5</sup> The emergence of settler criticism can be traced to comparative work in Commonwealth literatures in the 1970s in the research of Donald Denoon, Bruce King, John Matthews, and WH New, among others. In the 1980s, this work was expanded by critics like Diana Brydon, Terry Goldie, Helen Tiffin, and Russell McDougal. Throughout the mid-1990s, settler theory wrestled for a place in postcolonial theory, and began to focus much less on earlier models of centre-periphery, dislocation, and colonialism set out in poco-primers like *The Empire Writes Back* and more on the repressed history of colonizing Aboriginal peoples, as indicated by the term 'settler-invader' which was adopted during this period. The work of Anna Johnston, Alan Lawson, Chris Prentice, Stephen Slemon, Joanne Tompkins, and Gillian Whitlock (and Brydon's work from this period) has been important in this regard. More recently, scholars of settler literary studies such as those included in the special issue on settlement studies of *New Zealand Literature* 20 (2002) and in Annie Coombes' *Rethinking Settler Colonialism* (2006), and two recent monographs on settler studies by Tanya Dalziel (2004) and Jennifer Henderson (2003) have provided more thoroughly historically-grounded work on settler societies and have begun to question the overemphasis on models of 'resistance' and 'writing back' in previous settler research, even as these earlier studies highlighted the complexities of settler subjectivity. Recent important Canadian contributions to settler studies also include discussions (about the state of field, its origins and intractable problems, and its context in the midst of other kinds of postcolonialisms in the nation) in Laura Moss's edited collection of essays *Is Canada Postcolonial?* (2003) and Cynthia Sugars' anthology *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism* (2004). The growing interdisciplinarity of the field is another fairly recent and positive development: Bain Attwood, Anne Curthoys, David Pearson, and Patrick Wolfe for example have provided historical, social-scientific, and anthropological analyses of settler dynamics. This reference



to collocation and coherence draws specifically from Alan Lawson's provocative article 'Proximities: From Assymptote to Zeugma' (2000).

<sup>6</sup> The exceptions to this are usually Canadian and therefore remain anglo-North American in their outlook, though they usually still view their subject through a national lens instead of invoking a pan-American view of the genre. See Lynch; see also Davis, Rocío. *Transcultural Reinventions: Asian American and Asian Canadian Short Story Cycles*. Toronto: TSAR, 2001. Davis's book looks at the genre in the USA and Canada, but still largely privileges national frames.

<sup>7</sup> In 'Is Canada Postcolonial? Introducing the Question' in *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2003 : 1-23) Laura Moss sums up some of these debates, specifically as they pertain to Canada. With regard to the problematic inclusion of settler nations more generally within the ambit of postcolonial studies, Moss observes :

A clear divide in the postcolonial paradigm is often perceived between the invader-settler nations of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, where the process of colonization was predominantly one of immigration and settlement, and those parts of the world where colonization was more predominantly a process of displacement, impoverishment, sublimation, and even annihilation. However, too sharp a division may obscure the terrible consequences of colonialism for the Indigenous peoples in the territories settled, as it might overlook the complexity of cultural and political reconstruction in territories exploited under the economic and political imperatives of empire. (2)

<sup>8</sup> See Linda Hutcheon "Circling the Downspout of Empire." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995: 130-135. While this may be true in a Canadian context, especially after the Trudeau era, it is perhaps less so in the Australian context, as Tara Brabazon shows in *Tracking the Jack: Retracing the Antipodes* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1997) and as David Malouf considers in his 'Made in England: Australia's British Inheritance' *Quarterly Essay* 12 (2003).

<sup>9</sup> See Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin *The Empire Writes Back* (2); as well as Tiffin, Helen. "Commonwealth Literature and Comparative Methodology." *WLWE* 23.1 (1984) : 26-30 ; and Lawson, 'A Cultural Paradigm for the Second World' (67). Also, Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1993: 62-63. Louis Hartz's fragment theory (1964)—an important forerunner of these calls—includes a section on the USA.

<sup>10</sup> This is not to give the mistaken impression that scholars have been entirely avoiding the issue of the inclusion of the USA within postcolonial paradigms. Some of the most stimulating recent debates in the US academy center on this. See Kaplan, Amy. "Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture." : 3-21; Kaplan, Amy and Donald Pease, eds. *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993; Rowe, John Carlos, ed. *Postnationalist American Studies*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000; Rowe, John Carlos. *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000; Schueller, Malini Johar and Edward

Watts, eds. *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies*. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2003; Sharpe, Jenny. "Is the United States Postcolonial?" *Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race*. *Diaspora* 4.2 (1995): 181-99; Watson, Tim. "Is the 'Post' in Postcolonial the US in American Studies? The US Beginnings of Commonwealth Studies." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 31:1-2 (2000): 51-72. It is noteworthy, though, that these debates fall short where they have not engaged in any seriousness with settler colonial theory. John Carlos Rowe is not alone in being more comfortable with the term *Postnational American Studies* than *Postcolonial Studies of the USA*. Often, the postcolonial paradigms these scholars invoke, if only to refute, are those in which the terms *postcolonial* and *third world* have been collapsed, or in which "post" is too clearly a term "after" a colonial period, rather than an expression of an abiding state of existence. Schueller and Watts frame their work on "including America" within the postcolonial paradigm as part of a broader project to identify more complex forms of colonialism, and more particularly, to encourage readings of contemporary forms of imperial culture that "do not overtly present themselves as repeating the past" (x).

<sup>11</sup> See Syliva Söderlind's critique of the trope of marginality (in Canadian postcolonial criticism, particularly), in "The Contest of Marginalities" (1995).

<sup>12</sup> Hartz theorizes each colony as a fragment of its motherland petrified in the social dynamics that frame its initial breaking away. His fragment thesis has now been outmoded by more complex ways of contemplating colonialism, but nevertheless has been foundational in early discussions of imperialism. David Pearson is not alone in viewing Hartz as worth revisiting; P.A. Buckner's "Making British North America British" (in *Kith and Kin: Canada, Britain and the United States from the Revolution to the Cold War*. C.C. Eldridge, ed. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1997: 11-44) supplements some of McCrae's ideas, in Hartz, regarding the foundational dynamics of Canada. Buckner essentially argues that British identity in North America did not coalesce until overwhelming waves of later migrants revised and supplanted earlier waves of French, English, Celtic, Scots, and European migrants whose communities had been distinct. This hypothesis is in tow with the Hartz thesis, which envisions Canada's founding culture as somewhat in a state of flux, whereas Australia has been portrayed as retaining "a remarkable distinctness and fixity" (Hartz 275). Gary Cross also revisits and updates Hartz in "Comparative Exceptionalism: Rethinking the Hartz Thesis in the Settler Societies of Nineteenth-Century United States and Australia." (*Australian Journal of American Studies*. 14.1 (1995): 15-41). Cross and Buckner are historians who analyze patterns of immigration and political economy, respectively, through the lens of the Hartz's work. More recent work seeks to understand settlement as inflected by a series of historical and cultural complexities that are specific, local, and difficult (although not entirely impossible or unproductive) to theorize. Socio-anthropological work by scholars such as Patrick Wolfe and David Pearson and historical work by Bain Attwood shows that this sort of research is continuing in these academic fields, but perhaps—in light of similar challenges to the legitimacy of settler studies that parallel those in literary



debates— at a slowed pace. At issue for me, instead, are not appeals to the bare facts of national history or to sociology, but rather the discursive structures in the form of particular tropes, myths, and fictions mobilized as part of the rhetoric of managing legacies of settler colonialism in each nation's history.

<sup>13</sup> This is a reference to Laura Moss's gloss of John Berger's epigraph to *In the Skin of a Lion*: 'to read Canadian literature postcolonially is to accept that never again shall a single story be told as though it were the only one.' (7)

<sup>14</sup> Mann's genealogy of the genre is more ambitious than most. She looks at antecedents of the genre from the 1500s to the 1900s in her study of representative composite short story collections from the 20th century. Kennedy ('Regionalism' 1) explicitly refers to local color stories as 19th century antecedents.

<sup>15</sup> Usefully, David Pearson remarks "Some identities are more pervasive and enduring than others, and the 'post' in post-colonial requires some thought" (3). Pearson introduces the term 'post-settler,' which I avoid for the reason that the 'post' in postcolonial (which no longer needs hyphenating) has already caused enough trouble. Pearson invokes this term in his discussion of the legacies of settler colonial migration patterns in contemporary settler multicultural societies. Just as the 'post' in postcolonial has produced a score of definitions and provoked long, tiresome academic debates, the 'post' in 'postsettler' is equally polemical. Also, just as postcolonial cultural manifestations do not exactly duplicate or predictably extend colonial preoccupations, one cannot be too careful about avoiding overly deterministic readings of postsettler culture. Sociological models like Pearson's are informative and necessary background to a historically grounded study of settler literature, but we cannot assume that writers are merely the voice-boxes of coherent communities. Rather, it is because settler nations are, as Pearson puts it, "states of unease" that the texts they produce require careful reading practices that are attentive to difficult modes of relating.

<sup>16</sup> By their reversal of the descriptors in the term 'settler-invader' made popular during the 1990s, more recent scholars of settler studies reflect a change in emphasis from the acceptance of the double role of colonialism and colonization to an attempt to follow Len Findlay's call in the often cited 'Always Indigenize!' to put the long-undervalued and overwritten concerns and points of view of Indigenous peoples first. This move also reflects an understanding of how the doubly colonized and colonizing role of the settler is not a balanced form of hybridity, but one that always-already *primarily* privileges the settler. That said, I still prefer the more general term 'settler' instead of invader-settler *or* settler-invader, partly because of my straddling of two literary conversations, in which terms imported from debates about colonialism and its aftermath may seem too overtly hostile and embattled, and partly because this book is concerned that postcolonialism be used as a methodology to open up discussions rather than foreclose upon them or pre-empt them. That said, the term settler implies invasion, and a redundancy is also avoided.

<sup>17</sup> The processes which have forced settlers to come to terms with these issues are, specifically, the establishment of the post-apartheid *Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* and, in Zimbabwe, the less discussed and truly

disastrous land redistribution schemes under the government of Robert Mugabe. The degree to which these settlers have succeeded in coming to terms with their complicitous roles is arguable as Derek Attridge and others have pointed out. Of course, African settlements and migrations are not part of the scope of this study, and they are mentioned here only for their differences in terms of how settlers self-identify as a category in Africa, in contrast to the relative evisceration of the term 'settler' in common parlance in nations such as Canada and the USA where settlement has swamped first-nations populations and where it is often in settlers' interest, as Terry Goldie has observed, to disavow the living presence of Aboriginal peoples.

<sup>18</sup> Moss also draws attention to the presence of 'black' settlers which is often overlooked, as does Rinaldo Walcott, in his essay 'A Tough Geography': Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s)' in Canada which is anthologized in Sugars' *Unhomely States* (277-288). It is clearly not within the scope of this study to consider black settlers, or, more problematically black slave/settlers but Jean Toomer's *Cane* could be productively read through this frame. Lucy Evans's PhD Dissertation (University of Leeds, 2010) considers Caribbean composite fiction in this way.

<sup>19</sup> For obvious reasons, namely the English-speaking background of the author of this book and the necessarily limited scope of the book format, the settler writing looked at in this thesis is Anglophone. Canadian francophone writing clearly *could* be read in these terms (see Syliva Soderlind's *Margin/Alias: Language and Colonization in Canadian and Quebecois Fiction*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991). Similarly, Spanish language texts emerging from the USA might be read in such a way, as the work of Gloria Andalzua demonstrates.

<sup>20</sup> In "Rehearsals of Liberation: Contemporary Postcolonial Discourse and the New South Africa," Jolly discusses the construction of an Afrikaner national identity within a post-colonial paradigm for "strategic[ally] forgetting their collusion in apartheid (18). In 'Reconciliation and Cultural (In)Difference,' Chris Prentice notices disturbing trends in postcolonial reconciliation narratives that elide cultural difference in their quest for resolution and closure.

<sup>21</sup> Mukherjee's particular point in the important essay 'How Shall We Read South-Asian Texts?' is that literary production by migrants from the sub-continent cannot be read in terms of a unified voice that speaks for the collective experience of all migrant subjects. Mukherjee appreciates that interest in these writers in Canada has 'broken the hold of Canadian literary nationalism' (249) but that reading these texts by a predetermined rubric that has come to privilege 'group history, group culture, racial persecution, etc.' (ibid) has 'lent the reception and analysis of these texts a certain pre-packaged quality' (249). Economic migration, in which migrants have voluntarily left their homelands in search of a better future associated with financial opportunities and rewards cannot be confused with the very different migrant circumstances of political and economic refugees and exiles (256).

<sup>22</sup> Even what might be seen as a recent compensatory desire to elevate Indigenous writing over discussions about settler narrative may be viewed as symptomatic of a desire to realign settlers with shifting notions of authenticity and authority, and cultural capital.