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Making a Difference: Canadian Women Writers and the Fiction of Social Justice
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Article abstract

In January 1944, when the influential Toronto critic William Arthur Deacon lamented the absence of a Canadian "equivalent of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'" because Canadians are "still pioneering, still afraid of ourselves intellectually and emotionally,"[1] little did he know that a significant candidate was on the horizon. Gwethalyn Graham's second novel, Earth and High Heaven, which appeared later that year, launched an analysis of anti-Semitism that was quickly embraced by cultural arbiters and the general public in both Canada and the United States. This essay situates the production and reception history of Graham's book in relation to other novels by English-Canadian women writers that advocated for social change, and offers cases studies of the three most widely disseminated works that used the power of fiction to marshal empathy: Marshall Saunders's Beautiful Joe (1894), Graham's Earth and High Heaven (1944) and Joy Kogawa's Obasan (1981).

Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada 60 (2023)

Making a Difference: Canadian Women Writers and the Fiction of Social Justice[1]

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Abstract

In January 1944, when the influential Toronto critic William Arthur Deacon lamented the absence of a Canadian "equivalent of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'" because Canadians are "still pioneering, still afraid of ourselves intellectually and emotionally," little did he know that a significant candidate was on the horizon. Gwethalyn Graham's second novel, *Earth and High Heaven*, which appeared later that year, launched an analysis of anti-Semitism that was quickly embraced by cultural arbiters and the general public in both Canada and the United States. This article situates the production and reception history of Graham's book in relation to other novels by English Canadian women writers that advocated for social change, and offers cases studies of the three most widely disseminated works that used the power of fiction to marshal empathy: Marshall Saunders's *Beautiful Joe* (1894), Graham's *Earth and High Heaven* (1944) and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981).

[1] Earlier versions of this article were presented in 2016 at the conference on "Speaking Her Mind: Canadian Women and Public Presence" at the University of Calgary and at the seminar on "Literature and History: A Look from the Margins" in Jerusalem.

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Résumé

En janvier 1944, lorsque le critique influent de Toronto William Arthur Deacon a déploré l'absence d'un équivalent canadien de *Uncle Tom's Cabin* en affirmant que les Canadien·ne·s « sont encore en cours d'élaboration et ont toujours peur d'eux-mêmes au sens intellectuel et émotionnel », il ne savait pas qu'un important candidat était à l'horizon. Le deuxième roman de Gwethalyn Graham, *Earth and High Heaven*, paru plus tard cette même année, a lancé une analyse de l'antisémitisme qui fut rapidement adoptée par les arbitres culturels ainsi que le public général au Canada comme aux États-Unis. Cet article contextualise l'histoire de la production et la réception du livre de Graham en relation à d'autres romans par des écrivaines canadiennes anglophones qui ont plaidé pour le changement social, et comprend également des études de cas sur les trois œuvres les plus diffusées qui ont employé le pouvoir de la littérature pour mobiliser l'empathie : *Beautiful Joe* par Marshall Saunders (1894), *Earth and High Heaven de Graham* (1944), et *Obasan* par Joy Kogawa (1981).

In January 1944, when the influential Toronto critic William Arthur Deacon lamented the absence of a Canadian "equivalent of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'" because Canadians are "still pioneering, still afraid of ourselves intellectually and emotionally,"[2] little did he know that a significant candidate was on the horizon. Gwethalyn Graham's second novel, *Earth and High Heaven*, which appeared later that year, launched an analysis of anti-Semitism that was quickly embraced by cultural arbiters and the general public in both Canada and the United States. Deacon warmly welcomed Graham's book, but he had no inclination to identify or

[2] W.A. Deacon, "Gearing the Arts in Canada to Postwar Nation-Building," *Globe and Mail*, 1 January 1944, p. 13.

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promote the Canadian women who had written literature to advocate for social justice prior to Graham. Nor have later critics or scholars focused on the production and reception history of novels authored by Canadian women who used the appeal of fiction to advance social causes before the current era of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). While the writers who appear in the following discussion shared a common goal of seeking to improve the situations of those who were marginalized by religion, ethnicity, or species (in the case of Marshall Saunders's animal stories), it would be an overstatement to present their works as a lineage as there is little evidence that they paid direct attention to one another. Nonetheless, all were acutely aware of the power of fiction to marshal empathy, as apparent in the following case studies that examine the different contexts of production and reception of the best-known works of three very different writers: Graham's 1944 delineation of Canadian anti-Semitism was preceded by Marshall Saunders's stories promoting animal welfare at the end of the nineteenth-century and followed near the end of the twentieth by Joy Kogawa's trenchant depiction of the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. In recent decades, changing notions of social justice have illuminated the variability of socio-cultural relevance and its relation to literary canonicity. When they first appeared, the novels by Saunders and Kogawa effectively bolstered movements that led to enduring legal and social reforms, and both still receive attention today: Saunders because of renewed concerns about animal welfare and Kogawa because anti-Asian racism remains an ongoing issue. On the other hand, the failure of Graham's novel to achieve canonical longevity, despite the huge immediate uptake evidenced in its production and reception history, suggests that combatting anti-Semitism has never been a general cause in Canada.

It is commonly believed that in 1862, when Abraham Lincoln first met Harriet Beecher Stowe, he greeted her with the words, "So you're the little

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woman who started this great war."[3] Of course, Stowe did not start anything; rather, her novel provided a critical point of emotional identification for the abolitionist movement that had been gathering force for decades. While this anecdote is likely apocryphal, the legendary role of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) in galvanizing the American anti-slavery campaign exemplifies how creative writing has long been a medium through which women in North America and Western Europe have addressed social issues.[4] The printed page offered a relatively safe space in which writers could articulate many concerns, while reading provided an effective (and often private) way for people in all walks of life to connect with larger issues and events.

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canadian female reformers admired both the content of Stowe's book and its legitimation of a woman's public voice as they harnessed fiction to such causes as labour reform in Agnes Maule Machar's *Roland Graeme: Knight* (1892), spousal property rights in Minnie Smith's *Is It Just?* (1911), suffrage and pacifism in both Francis Marion Beynon's *Aleta Day* (1919) and Alice Chown's *The Stairway* (1921), and temperance and other current issues in stories and poems in newspapers and magazines.[5] Nellie McClung, now better known for her leadership in Canada's women's suffrage movement than for her lively fiction, drew on her own experiences in *Purple Springs* (1921), the third novel in the Pearlie Watson trilogy. Advocating for both women's property rights and suffrage, the narrative recounts the Women's Parliament of 1914 in which McClung bested Manitoba's Conservative premier, after whose defeat Manitoba became the first province to grant

3 Christopher G. Diller, Introduction, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852; Broadview Press, 2009), 40.

4 In *Mightier than the Sword: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Battle for America* (Norton, 2011), David S. Reynolds documents the breadth of the book's influence. For example, in Russia, sixty-seven editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were published between 1857 and 1917 (174) and a Yiddish version was performed in Chicago in 1900 (176). In the United States, the popularity of "Tom plays" created opportunities for black actors (180).

5 See Carole Gerson, *Canadian Women in Print, 1750-1918* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 146-57. Not all women's causes were progressive; for example, Hilda Glyn-Ward's *The Writing on the Wall* (1921) cautioned Canadians about the "yellow peril" of Oriental immigration.

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women the provincial franchise in 1916. While McClung's books sold well,[6] most of the other publications just mentioned did not circulate widely when they first appeared and have received more attention from recent scholars searching for lost feminist works[7] than from the readership to which they were originally addressed. Such was not the case with the works and authors discussed here. Far from being disregarded, Saunders, Graham, and Kogawa quickly captured the public imagination of their time, impacted individual readers, and demonstrated the power of literature as an agent of change in promoting social justice.

While none of these authors took up Stowe's topic of slavery or discrimination against people of African descent, Canadians like to foreground their connection with Stowe in relation to Josiah Henson, who settled in Upper Canada after escaping enslavement and whose autobiography was one of Stowe's sources. His restored home in Dresden, Ontario is now the core of the Josiah Henson Museum of African-Canadian History (formerly known as the Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site), supported by the Ontario Heritage Trust. The Museum's website celebrates Henson as "one of the most famous Canadians of his day [whose] celebrity raised international awareness of Canada as a haven for refugees from slavery."[8] Notwithstanding Canadians' self-congratulatory sense of benevolence regarding the Underground Railroad, Robin Winks presents a grimmer picture of the Canadian reception of fugitive slaves in *The Blacks in Canada: A History,* and cultural critic Cheryl Thompson crisply reminds us that "Sentimental novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may have

6 For the publishing history of McClung's Pearlie Watson trilogy, see Wendy Roy, *The Next Instalment* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019), 33-104.

7 These titles have all been recently reissued: Francis Marion Beynon's *Aleta Day* (1919) by Virago in 1988 and Broadview Press in 2000; Alice Chown's *The Stairway* (1921) by the University of Toronto Press in 1988; Machar's *Roland Graeme* (1892) by Tecumseh/Borealis in 1996; Minnie Smith's *Is It Just?* (1911) by the University of Toronto Press in 2010; and McClung's *Purple Springs* (1921) by the University of Toronto Press in 1992.

8 "Josiah Henson Museum of African-Canadian History," Ontario Heritage Trust, accessed 1 December 2022, https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/en/properties/josiah-henson-museum.

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galvanized the abolitionist cause, but they did not refute widely held beliefs about the supposed inferiority of Black people."[9]

Marshall Saunders and Beautiful Joe

The first internationally visible Canadian intervention into the sphere of social justice concerned the humane treatment of animals – a movement aligned with campaigns for the rights of women and children in the nineteenth-century – with the publication of *Beautiful Joe*, Marshall Saunders's story of an abused dog. In the words of Keridiana Chez, editor of the 2015 Broadview edition, "If Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the story that ignited the Civil War, then Margaret Marshall Saunders's 1894 *Beautiful Joe* was the book that revolutionized a generation's view of animal welfare."[10] An animal autobiography modelled on British writer Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877), the best-selling story of a horse that was in turn inspired by the focus of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on "others' capacity for suffering,"[11] *Beautiful Joe* was reputedly "the first Canadian book to become a world bestseller, the first to sell over a million copies, and the first to achieve multiple translation [into] eighteen languages."[12] While the book's publication history in myriad editions has yet to be fully documented, its success story is well known. *Beautiful Joe* has remained continually in print, often shortened for younger readers and

9 Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd ed. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014); Cheryl Thompson, *Uncle: Race, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Loyalty* (Coach House Books, 2021), 16.

10 Keridiana Chez, Introduction, *Beautiful Joe*, by Margaret Marshall Saunders (1894; Broadview Press, 2015), 11. For an analysis of the historical involvement of women in Canada's animal welfare movement, see Darcy Ingram, "Wild Things: Taming Canada's Animal Welfare Movement," *Animal Metropolis: Histories of Human-Animal Relations in Urban Canada*, edited by Joanna Dean, Darcy Ingram, and Christabelle Sethna (University of Calgary Press, 2017), 87–113.

11 Chez, Introduction, 13.

12 Elizabeth Waterston, "Margaret Marshall Saunders: A Voice for the Silenced," *Silenced Sextet*, edited by Carrie Macmillan, Lorraine McMullen, and Elizabeth Waterston (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 137–68 (137). Waterston also claims that "The first American edition sold out in ten days and by 1900 had sold 625,00 copies. The Canadian edition had sold 558,000 by 1900 and the British 146,000 by the same date" (147), but the sources of these figures are not cited, and the Canadian number is especially questionable.

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sanitized to remove gruesome details of animal abuse such as the brutal killing of unwanted puppies.[13] According to Gwendolyn Davies, who remembers the book being read to her in school in Cape Breton in the early 1950s, it was frequently adopted in school curricula in order to teach children "social responsibility and generosity through their love of pets."[14] Over the years, *Beautiful Joe* was issued in various authorized and unauthorized formats by American, British, and Canadian publishers who took advantage of inadequate copyright protection to pay as little as possible to Saunders as they adjusted and adapted the book for different audiences.[15] In 2015, *Beautiful Joe* was canonized in a definitive Broadview edition with supplementary material that reflects the current renewal of interest in animal welfare.

This Canadian-authored book became an international bestseller because of its American production and distribution – a pattern that would reappear in 1944 with Graham's *Earth and High Heaven*. To qualify for publication by the American Humane Society, Nova Scotia-born Saunders had to transform the Ontario dog that inspired her story into a resident of Maine. The success of *Beautiful Joe* propelled Saunders into a lifetime commitment to social betterment by writing fiction and journalism, supporting progressive women's organizations, and delivering lantern-slide lectures. In addition to the many books about animals for which she is best known – whose protagonists include canaries, monkeys, and ponies – she also advocated for the protection of children in such novels as *The Story of the Graveleys* (1903) and *The Girl from Vermont: The Story of a Vacation Schoolteacher* (1910). The message running through Saunders's fiction as a whole is that the ills of urban, industrialized society can be cured by banning child labour, providing constructive recreation programs, and inculcating compassion by teaching kindness to animals.

[13] See Chez, Introduction, 30–35, and Gwendolyn Davies, *Marshall Saunders and* Beautiful Joe*: Education through Fiction* (Nova Scotia Teachers College, 1995).

[14] Davies, 2–3.

[15] Summarized by Keridiana Chez, "A Note on the Text," *Beautiful Joe*, by Margaret Marshall Saunders (1894; Broadview Press, 2015), 39–40.

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Awakening the North American reading public to the plight of brutalized pets and work animals, her books contributed to the progressive climate that saw the inclusion of animal welfare in Canadian and American legislation at the end of the nineteenth century.

Saunders was recognized with an Honorary Master of Arts from Acadia University in 1911, and in 1934 she was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire and also received a medal from the Société protectrice des animaux in Paris, France. Shortly after her death in 1947, she was designated a National Historic Person, followed by the mounting of an associated plaque in her birthplace of Milton, Nova Scotia.[16] In recent decades, the revival of concern about animal welfare has brought fresh attention to *Beautiful Joe* with the creation of Beautiful Joe Park in Meaford, Ontario, the dog's original home, by the Beautiful Joe Heritage Society, founded in 1994. Their activities have included a stage adaptation of the book that was performed in 2014.[17]

Gwethalyn Graham and Earth and High Heaven

While we do not know whether Saunders's novels numbered among the "four or five thousand books" that filled Gwethalyn Graham's unconventional childhood home (her list includes "Ibsen, Shaw, Suderman, Hauptman, Dickens, Plato, and Sinclair Lewis, beginning with Main Street"),[18] we do know that she grew up in a multi-generational household committed to liberal ideas and social betterment. Her mother, Isabel Erichsen-Brown, was a university-educated suffrage activist whose sense of justice had been fostered in turn by her father, Professor James Frederick McCurdy, a distinguished scholar of oriental languages who

16 There is, however, no plaque on her family's home in Halifax: Harry Bruce, "The Miracle of Bluenose Writers," *Unravel*, accessed 5 January 2023, https://unravelhalifax.ca/the-miracle-of-bluenose-writers/.

17 See Beautiful Joe Heritage Society, accessed 3 February 2021, https://beautifuljoe.org/.

18 "Biographical Note from Gwethalyn Graham, Author of *Swiss Sonata*," typescript, Concordia University Library, 1. Hereafter "Biographical Note."

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would not tolerate racist attitudes or verbal slurs. A precocious child who published her first poem at the age of twelve,[19] Graham experienced an erratic education that included four months in a Swiss finishing school and "the happiest year of my life"[20] at Smith College before a disastrous marriage at the age of nineteen left her a young single mother. Her first book, *Swiss Sonata*, which projects the social and political tensions of the 1930s through the international roster of students and teachers at a girls' boarding school in Lausanne, won the Governor General's Award for Fiction for 1938. Between 1936 and 1948, while working on her fiction, Graham also published magazine articles voicing her feminist and progressive views. Along with her mother and her sister (author Isabel LeBourdais), she was active in the Canadian National Committee on Refugees, out of which came two pieces on the plight of European refugees, published in *Saturday Night* in November 1938.[21] Both articles focus on Canada's restrictive immigration policies, foreseeing the terrible story that would be fully revealed many decades later in Irving Abella and Harold Troper's *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948* (1982). As the Second World War advanced, Graham turned to fiction as "the most effective means of getting ideas into the public mind."[22]

Earth and High Heaven (1944) is a middlebrow romance of two mature lovers overcoming obstacles; its style and content reflect the social realism that has long been identified as the dominant mode of twentieth-century Canadian literary fiction. The book's opening scene, a cocktail party in the upper Westmount home of the downwardly mobile Drake family, establishes the complexities of the moment. In Montreal in June 1942, shortly after the conscription plebiscite that divided the country along

19 Barbara Meadowcroft, *Gwethalyn Graham: A Liberated Woman in a Conventional Age* (Women's Press, 2008), 36. Unless otherwise noted, details of Graham's life are taken from this biography.

20 "Biographical Note," 2.

21 "Refugees: The Human Aspect," *Saturday Night*, 12 November 1938, p. 8; "Economics of Refugees," *Saturday Night*, 19 November 1938, p. 8.

22 Editorial introduction to Gwethalyn Graham, "Let's Have Immigrants and Not All Farmers," *Saturday Night*, 30 December 1944, p. 6.

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linguistic lines, frictions intensify as French-Canadians resist participation in the war while many English-Canadian men are in uniform, awaiting assignment overseas. The recent marriage of the Drakes' son Tony to a francophone has forced unexpected intimacy between the separate enclaves of French Catholics and English Protestants. Unmarried 28-year-old Erica Drake is a labour union advocate who has reached a glass ceiling as women's editor at the *Montreal Post*. Her relationship with her loving, manipulative father is problematic and she resists his invitation to become his partner in the family's declining mercantile business. Into this web of political, gendered, and Freudian tensions enters Marc Reiser, a soft-spoken 33-year-old Jewish lawyer whose appeal is reciprocated by Erica and repudiated by her father. As the lovers' connection quickly develops, Graham focuses less on their emotions than on the insidiousness of racism, showing how easy it is for basically decent, liberal-minded individuals to be poisoned by the stereotypes they unthinkingly absorb. While English and French Canadians openly banter about their generalized perceptions of each another, anti-Semitism tacitly festers throughout the English community, normalizing discriminatory practices that include "Select Clientele" signs in hotels and restaurants, restricted apartment buildings, and quotas for Jewish university students. The love story ends with all the objecting parents reluctantly accepting the engagement of their adult children. Nonetheless, despite occasional internal references to *Romeo and Juliet*, including a bedroom scene in which Erica quotes Juliet ("It is the lark …") and Marc cites the first two verses of Wilfrid Campbell's "Indian Summer," the conclusion lacks Shakespeare's definitive reconciliation of Montagues and Capulets.[23] While the lovers finally plan to marry and enjoy a sanctioned embrace on

[23] In addition to echoing *Romeo and Juliet, Earth and High Heaven* may contain an oblique reference to Stowe. Michèle Rackham calls attention to the significance of the print of Van Gogh's *L'arlésienne* hanging in the Drake living room, noting that in one of the six versions of this work, the books on the table can be identified as French versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and a collection of Dickens's Christmas stories. See "Romantic Recognition in Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven*," *English Studies in Canada*, vol. 36, nos. 2–3, 2010, pp. 121–40 (132).

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the book's last page, wartime uncertainty clouds their future. It is now September 1942; Marc's unit is on its way overseas and Erica has quit her newspaper job to join the Canadian Women's Army Corps. The social issues have been aired but not resolved; Canadians would long maintain the country's "none is too many" immigration policies and continue to accept open racial discrimination.

After Graham's manuscript was rejected by Houghton Mifflin "on the grounds that it wouldn't sell,"[24] her persistent agent landed a contract with Lippincott in New York for publication in the fall of 1944. The book became an instant success with adoption by the Literary Guild of America contributing to its sale of about 1,250,000 copies within a year. In the UK, it was issued by Jonathan Cape (publisher of Graham's previous book, *Swiss Sonata*), in an edition that reportedly "sold out on the day of publication."[25] A significant factor in building the book's massive American readership was its advance serialization in *Collier's Weekly,* for which Graham received $7,500.[26] The magazine's editor justified his decision to publish this potentially controversial novel as a "public service" that made a "solid and valuable contribution to the cause of informed and enlightened tolerance in a war-wracked world."[27] *Collier's* 2.8 million wartime readers[28] received an abridged version lacking material that was regarded as controversial, such as Erica's support for the unionization of newspaper staff and her agency in arranging an abortion for her sister,[29] as well as details viewed as too specifically Canadian for

24 Meadowcroft, 120.

25 Meadowcroft, 119. While the chapter and section divisions in the Cape edition differ from those in North American editions, the text is unchanged except for anglicized spelling and punctuation.

26 My thanks to Crystal Bjerke for her work on the *Collier's* serialization while a graduate student at Simon Fraser University. *Earth and High Heaven* was also serialized in Australia in 1945 in the *Argus Weekend Magazine*.

27 "Earth and High Heaven," *Collier's Weekly*, 2 September 1944, p. 82.

28 "*Collier's*," *Wikipedia*, accessed 19 January 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collier's.

29 The three paragraphs concerning the abortion (in chapter 8) were cut from several mass market editions. These include an undated impression of the1944 Lippincott edition that has been digitized by archive.org (despite its claim to be "complete and unabridged") https://archive.org/details/earthandhighheav001138mbp/mode/2up, the 1948 Bantam paperback, and the undated Lancer paperback issued in New York, likely during the 1960s.

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the American general reader, such as references to British Imperialism and to the complexities of French–English relations.[30] In addition to sanitizing Graham's text, *Collier's* sought to pre-empt negative reactions by securing endorsements from a range of prominent writers and public figures whose testimonials complimenting the magazine's courage in publishing a novel on such a sensitive topic accompanied the first and second installments. These endorsers included a Jewish religious leader (Rabbi Sidney Tedescho), a Jewish performer (Eddie Cantor), and a Black leader (William White, Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), alongside representatives of organizations that stood for ethnic harmony (the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the Institute of American Democracy), as well as the Writers' War Board. Individual supporters included feminist Catholic writer Margaret Culkin Banning, popular Lutheran novelist Lloyd C. Douglas, and conservationist Louis Bromfield. As befitting a popular magazine, each of the four installments (August 26, September 2, September 9, and September 14) was highlighted with a large illustration that dramatized key moments of confrontation or recognition. The same kind of illustration accompanied the Literary Guild of America's full-page advertisement headed "Can Love and Religion Mix Without Exploding?" (Figure 1).

[30] Yet *Collier's* retained Marc's recitation of Wilfrid Campbell's "Indian Summer," a poem presumably more familiar to Canadians, who often memorized it at school, than to Americans.

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Figure 1. *Liberty*, 14 July 1945, p. 5.

When the full book appeared in October 1944, most British, Canadian, and American reviewers praised Graham's ability to negotiate the tricky genre of the "thesis-novel,"[31] with an unnamed contributor to *Saturday Night* likening this "fierce Canadian novel" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because "it told the truth about a social danger."[32] Deacon welcomed Graham's book into the tiny category of current Canadian fiction addressing controversial issues (in his view, thus far occupied only by Morley Callaghan's *Such Is My Beloved* and Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage*), claiming that "No Canadian novel heretofore has exercised the slightest influence

[31] Rosemary Carr Benet, "Drawing Room 'Abie's Irish Rose,'" *Saturday Review*, 7 October 1944, p. 9.
[32] "Race Prejudice Is the Theme of a Fierce Canadian Novel," *Saturday Night*, 9 December 1944, p. 28.

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on the mass thinking of our people. Now that the process of social criticism is beginning, an increasingly intelligent interest will be taken in affairs because our writers are feeling deeply about our behaviour as a people."[33] Reviewers' negative comments largely related to the gender of the author, with some male critics finding the novel's style too close to that of women's magazines;[34] its only devastating review issued from the caustic pen of fellow Montrealer John Glassco, who flayed Graham's book for portraying "the symbolic castration of the hero."[35] History has its ironies, and plaques for Graham and Glassco now adorn the same wall in the Writers' Chapel in downtown Montreal, which thus far has honoured eleven of that city's major authors.[36]

In Canada, Graham's Montreal details were regarded as one of the strengths of *Earth and High Heaven*[37] and contributed to its winning of the Governor General's Literary Award for fiction. The book's geographical setting was of less interest to Americans, whose welcoming of Graham's timely discussion of racial prejudice enabled her book to top the *New York Times* bestseller list for the weeks of 22 April and 29 April in 1945.[38] In addition to being the Literary Guild of America's selection of the month for October 1944 with sales of about 500,000, and along with the Lippincott edition that sold some 300,000 and a Doran reprint that sold

33 W.A. Deacon, "Canadian Novel Challenges Montreal's Race Prejudice," *Globe and Mail*, 7 October 1944, p. 10.

34 John Hyde Preston, "Six Novels and a Chore," *New Republic*, 30 October 1944, p. 573; Orville Prescott, "Books of the Times," *New York Times*, 4 October 1944, p, 17.

35 J.S. Glassco, review of *Earth and High Heaven*, by Gwethalyn Graham, *First Statement*, vol. 2, April–May 1945, pp. 33–34 (34). While I have found no evidence of direct interaction between Graham and Glassco, it is possible that the vehemence of Glassco's attack derived from his anger with *First Statement*'s editor, John Sutherland, who had refused to issue Glassco's *En Arrière* with First Statement Press due to the likelihood of censorship. See Brian Busby, *A Gentleman of Pleasure: One Life of John Glassco* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 115–18.

36 Writers' Chapel Trust Web Site, accessed 22 August 2022, http://www.writerschapeltrust.com/home.php; see Ian McGillis, "Writers' Chapel," *Canadian Notes and Queries*, vol. 94, 2016, pp. 31–33.

37 For example, see W.J. Hurlow, "Under the Reading Lamp," *Ottawa Citizen*, 21 October 1944, p. 13.

38 "*The New York Times* Fiction Best Sellers of 1945," accessed 1 December 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_York_Times_Fiction_Best_Sellers_of_1945.

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about 150,000,[39] *Earth and High Heaven* was one of the few Canadian titles to appear in an Armed Services edition, a format that guaranteed free distribution of a further 300,000 copies to enlisted American soldiers.[40] As well, it was both the first Canadian work and the first novel to receive the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, established in 1935 by Cleveland poet and philanthropist Edith Anisfield for "books that make important contributions to our understanding of racism and cultural diversity."[41] This award has mostly gone to works of non-fiction and to books about the core American problem of black–white relations, with occasional attention to titles about other groups, including Jews and Native Americans.[42] *Earth and High Heaven* was soon snapped up by American paperback publishers, appearing with Bantam in 1948, Paperback Library (New York) in 1965, and Lancer Press (New York) in an undated edition, presumably during the 1960s.[43] In 1960, it received its first publication in Canada as number thirteen in the New Canadian Library.[44]

Not surprisingly, the romantic aspects of Graham's novel appealed to Hollywood, resulting in the story of the movie that was never made. In late September of 1944, before the release of the hardcover book on 4 October, Metro-Goldwyn Meyer purchased the film rights for $100,000 and nearly two years later announced that Gregory Peck was to play Marc Reiser with Joan Fontaine as his co-star.[45] In 1947, however, the theme of anti-Semitism was scooped by Twentieth-Century Fox's Oscar-winning

[39] Gwethalyn Graham, "Gwethalyn Graham Replied," *Canadian Author and Bookman*, December 1945, supplement, p. 20. As well, there were translations for which sales figures are unavailable.

[40] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Armed_Services_Editions, accessed 5 January 2023.

[41] Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards, accessed 1 December 2022, http://www.anisfield-wolf.org/. Over the years the value of this prize has risen from $1,000 to $10,000.

[42] The majority of the winners have been Americans, with a sprinkling of writers from Europe, South Africa, and the Caribbean; on the Canadian side, Graham was followed by Farley Mowat for *People of the Deer* (1953) and Esi Eduygan for *Halfblood Blues* (2012).

[43] See Graham's letter to Malcolm Ross, 16 September 1964, cited in Janet Friskney, *New Canadian Library: The Ross-McClelland Years* (University of Toronto Press, 2007), 62.

[44] See Friskney, 49–50.

[45] "Peck to Play Lead in Goldwyn Film," *New York Times*, 2 August 1946, p. 24; "Joan Fontaine Signs to Co-Star with Peck in 'Earth and High Heaven' for Goldwyn," *New York Times*, 12 October 1946, p. 22.

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film[46] of *Gentlemen's Agreement*, also starring Gregory Peck (in this instance, playing a pretend Jewish man rather than a real one) that was adapted from the novel of the same title by Laura Z. Hobson. While Hobson's book topped the *New York Times* bestseller list in 1947, it lacks Graham's subtlety and style; nevertheless its New York setting offered familiarity to its American audience and its post-war time frame gave it greater currency than the 1942 Canadian wartime setting of *Earth and High Heaven*. According to Samuel Goldwyn's biographer, the film was aborted because Goldwyn could not settle on a satisfactory script, despite the efforts of three major screenwriters (Ring Lardner, Howard Koch, and Elmer Rice), and "not making that one film haunted him more than most of his failures."[47] There were promising newspaper stories about adapting *Earth and High Heaven* into a stage play,[48] but that format also failed to materialize. The only known performance is a radio version that aired on CBC's *Tuesday Night* on 18 January 1966.[49]

An Oscar-level film with major Hollywood stars would certainly have enhanced the long-term visibility of Graham's book. While its Canadian context of English–French tensions contributed to its lack of enduring appeal in the United States, *Earth and High Heaven* was scooped in Canada by Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*, published a year later, in 1945. Likewise set in Montreal, this novel makes grand claims for recognition as a national narrative and uses the motif of cross-cultural romance to examine the gulf between English and French Canada. As Graham was friends with MacLennan and his wife, Dorothy Duncan, and all three were active in the Montreal branch of the Canadian Authors Association, the two novelists may have discussed their books' similarities. Graham stated that she "started cooking *Earth and High Heaven* in the autumn of 1940"[50]

46 It was nominated in eight categories and won in three: Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Supporting Actress.
47 A. Scott Berg, *Goldwyn: A Biography* (Knopf, 1989), 395.
48 "2 Novels by Canadians Due Soon on Broadway," *Globe and Mail*, 7 June 1950, p. 8.
49 Meadowcroft, 205.
50 Gwethalyn Graham, "Gwethalyn Graham Replied."

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while early drafts in MacLennan's fonds at McGill University indicate that he began *Two Solitudes* in 1941–42, but it is not clear when he added the concluding romance between Paul Tallard and Heather Methuen.

MacLennan had mixed feelings about *Earth and High Heaven*. In public, he praised it as an example of a Canadian writer striking "a universal theme,"[51] but in personal correspondence he revealed his jealousy of Graham's success. Writing to Dorothy Dumbrille in 1945 about her new novel, *All This Difference* (which addresses conflicts between families of Scottish descent and French-speaking Catholics in Glengarry County), he commented that Graham's book was "not really Canadian as yours is."[52] In 1957, he told Marian Engel that *Earth and High Heaven* owed much of its fame to "the deliberate use of it by the Jewish communities in the States for propaganda purposes" and concluded that it "is not deep enough to endure into another age."[53] MacLennan's bitterness about the greater economic success enjoyed by *Earth and High Heaven* in comparison with *Two Solitudes* underlies his view that American reviewers misunderstood his novel's significance and read it as "simply another mixed marriage story."[54]

It is unlikely that MacLennan could have foreseen that his clever choice of title would quickly become a national catchphrase. "Two Solitudes" could have equally applied to Graham's story and the Housman epigraph that supplied Graham's title could have been attached to MacLennan's epic narrative; one wonders how the eventual status of the two books might have altered if their titles had been exchanged. However, canonicity requires visibility. Graham did not publish another novel, made a second disastrous marriage, and spent the 1950s as an unhappy faculty wife in the

51 Hugh MacLennan, "Canada Between the Covers," *Saturday Review of Literature*, vol. 29, 7 September 1946, p. 30.

52 Hugh MacLennan to Dorothy Dumbrille, 26 October 1945, Queens University Archives, Location #2055, Box 1.

53 *Dear Marian*, *Dear Hugh*: *The MacLennan Engel Correspondence*, edited by Christl Verduyn (University of Ottawa Press, 1995), 49.

54 Elspeth Cameron, *Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life* (University of Toronto Press, 1981), 184.

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United States, whereas during the 1950s and 1960s MacLennan forged a commanding presence as a prolific Montreal-based author and public intellectual.

Also contributing to the sidelining of *Earth and High Heaven* was Gabrielle Roy's fictional depiction of the francophone underclass of Montreal, which appeared as *Bonheur d'occasion* in 1945 and as *The Tin Flute* in 1947. In its English translation, it too was a monthly choice of the Literary Guild of America, which led to spectacular sales. Together, *Two Solitudes* and *The Tin Flute* captured the attention of the English-Canadian literary realm by addressing the otherness of French Canada through their representations of the social geography of Montreal. At the same time, both books' lack of attention to the city's substantial Jewish community enabled English-speaking Canadians to disregard their tacit acceptance of their own anti-Semitism.[55] The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s and the 1969 report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism did much to enshrine this pattern of canonicity, leaving it to Jewish writers such as Irving Layton and Mordecai Richler to take up Graham's project of publicly expanding the English–French dyad by triangulating with Canada's Jewish community, soon identified as the country's "third solitude."[56]

[55] There is one brief reference to Jews in chapter 27 of *Two Solitudes* when Emilie works for a Jewish clothing manufacturer, and one in chapter 28 of *The Tin Flute* noting an old Jew who gives a guitar to Pitou. On a different occasion, Roy depicted Jews sympathetically in an article in the *Bulletin des agriculteurs* (vol. 39, no. 2, fevrier 1943) about the Jewish farming community of Edenbridge in Northern Saskatchewan; this was later translated as "Palestine Avenue" and included in *The Fragile Lights of Earth* (1982). For a rare indictment of Canadian anti-Semitism by a Gentile writer, see Earle Birney's poem, "Restricted Area," *Saturday Night*, 6 December 1947, p. 49.

[56] Tom Marshall, "Third Solitude: Canadian as Jew," *The Canadian Novel, Here and Now*, edited by John Moss (NC Press, 1978), 147–55; Michael Greenstein, *Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish-Canadian Literature* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989). Although A.M. Klein was Graham's contemporary, she seems to have been unaware of his writings, which addressed relatively selective reading communities. Graham's most outspoken literary successor as a critic of English Canada's normative anti-Semitism was Mordecai Richler, who often integrated the issue of intermarriage into his ongoing inquiry into what it means to be Jewish in the modern world. While his own marriage to a Gentile was long and happy, in his novels similar marriages contribute to the anxieties of his protagonists.

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Despite being an early selection for the New Canadian Library, which featured an erudite introduction by Eli Mandel, *Earth and High Heaven* faded from the radar of both the general public and academia. In reviewing the New Canadian Library reissue, George Woodcock dismissed Graham's novel for the overtness of its message.[57] *Earth and High Heaven* did not make the list of the one hundred most important works of Canadian fiction generated for the 1978 Calgary Conference on the Novel, although it did appear on the ballot, nor was it taught in any university-level course in 1997–98 or 2007–08, the two academic years analyzed in Paul Martin's study of Canadian literature courses in Canadian universities.[58] It lingered in the New Canadian Library into the 1970s with sales totalling over 25,000 by 1978,[59] but it soon slipped out of print until it was re-issued by Toronto's Cormorant Books in 2003 in an edition with availability that has sometimes been sporadic.[60] In 2017, *Earth and High Heaven* was recuperated as a female-authored book by Persephone Books, a London press dedicated to reprinting "neglected fiction and non-fiction by mid-twentieth-century (mostly) women writers,"[61] with an intelligent introduction by Emily Rhodes that points out the book's relevance to current social issues in Britain.

Graham's last major publication appeared in 1963. *Dear Enemies*, a vibrant dialogue with Solange Chaput-Roland about English–French relations that was issued simultaneously in French as *Chers ennemis*, suggests that Graham would likely have returned to visibility with the new wave of Canadian writers who rose to prominence in the late 1960s and

57 George Woodcock, "Short Reviews," *Canadian Literature*, no. 7, Winter 1961, p. 84.

58 Paul Martin, *Sanctioned Ignorance: The Politics of Knowledge Production and the Teaching of Literatures in Canada* (University of Alberta Press, 2013), appendices 2–5.

59 Friskney, 196-97. For images of the book's cover, including the misspelled name of the author on the NCL reprint of 1970, see Brian Busby, "The Dusty Bookcase," accessed 29 January 2021, https://brianbusby.blogspot.com/2013/10/ten-gwethalyn-graham-earth-and-high.html?m=1.

60 In 2017, it was unavailable for a course I was teaching, but several years later it could be ordered from the Cormorant website.

61 Persephone Books, http://www.persephonebooks.co.uk/. This is their second Canadian title, following their reprint of Ethel Wilson's *Hetty Dorval* in 2005. My thanks to Sarah Gellatly for this reference.

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1970s had she not died of a brain tumour in 1965 at the age of 52.[62] In the annals of Canada's literary history, she is often better recognized for leading the Canadian Authors Association's successful campaign to change legislation in order to permit writers to average their incomes for tax purposes[63] than for her actual writings.

Joy Kogawa and Obasan

The year 1942, when *Earth and High Heaven* takes place, saw the enactment of one of the most dramatic examples of Canadian racism shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, when all residents of Japanese extraction were swiftly removed from the west coast where most of them worked in the fishing industry. Some twenty-two thousand people (fourteen thousand of whom were born in Canada) lost their property and their civil rights as they were interned in makeshift camps in various inland sites where they often served as forced labour. After the war there was minimal restitution for property loss. In the 1970s, the redress movement took on fresh momentum, resulting in further restitution and a formal apology from the federal government in 1988. Perhaps the most obvious Canadian parallel to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is Joy Kogawa's novel, *Obasan* (1981), whose powerful fictionalization of the Japanese internment gave resonance to Canada's need to recognize and rectify its history of racism.

Obasan was not the first literary work by a woman writer to address Canada's mistreatment of its Japanese citizens and residents during the Second World War. Dorothy Livesay had articulated their plight in her radio verse drama, *Call My People Home*, which was broadcast on CBC radio in 1949 and published in 1950. Jessie Louise Beattie had likewise called

62 In the 1950s, when she lived in Virginia during her second disastrous marriage, Graham became interested in Harriet Beecher Stowe; see Meadowcroft, 159.

63 Meadowcroft, 126-32. After Graham's death, MacLennan gracelessly took sole credit for this effort; see his contribution to a panel on "Author-Publisher Relations" in *Publishing in Canada: Proceedings of the Institute on Publishing in Canada*, edited by Gertrude Pomahac and Meg Richardson (School of Library Science, University of Alberta, 1972), 72–78; 78.

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attention to Canada's history of injustice in her novel, *Strength for the Bridge: A Chronicle of Japanese Immigration* (1966), which was dedicated "to the Canadian Japanese." As with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which had been preceded by a substantial body of anti-slavery literature in both Britain and the United States, *Obasan* owed its success in part to the timeliness of its appearance, cresting a movement that was gathering momentum and was ready to attach itself to a specific human story. Ken Adachi had previously published a detailed history of Canada's racist treatment of the Japanese in *The Enemy that Never Was* (1976), and Kogawa had written poems about her childhood trauma of losing her home and community that were included in her first collections of poetry. Several of these poems were aired in a 1977 episode of CBC's "Anthology," described in the CBC catalogue as "a collection of Japanese-Canadian writing presented in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrant to Canada." According to Katherine McLeod, this "occasion was galvanizing for the movement toward redress," an aspect of the broadcast that can only be gleaned by listening to the poems themselves.[64] Such public recognition can now be seen as a prelude to *Obasan*, Kogawa's superb novel that quickly grabbed public attention.

The fictional memoir of Naomi Nakane, *Obasan* reflects Kogawa's childhood experience of being thrust from middle-class urban comfort into the disentitlement of being redefined as an "enemy alien." While Kogawa's own family remained intact during the internment, the fiction heightens the child's destabilization when Naomi's mother disappears while on a visit to Japan. The figure of the lost mother hovers over the entire novel, to be resolved only at the end when Naomi learns that her mother had perished during the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. Kogawa's structurally sophisticated narrative balances the child's pain and

[64] Joy Kogawa, "When I Was a Little Girl"; "What Do I Remember of the Evacuation," *A Choice of Dreams*, by Kogawa (McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 53, 54–55; Katherine McLeod, "Audible Collections: What Remains of Voices on the Radio," *Collection Thinking: Within and Without Libraries, Archives, and Museums*, edited by Jason Camlot, Martha Langford, and Linda M. Morra (Routledge, 2022), 137–153 (146–47).

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bewilderment against the perspective of two adults: the adult Naomi, who has retreated into silence, and activist Aunt Emily, who seeks justice and restitution. By the end, Naomi has learned to articulate her grief and come to terms with her past, but it is left to Canadian readers to recognize and resolve the injustice of the internment.

Like *Earth and High Heaven*, *Obasan* quickly garnered prizes, including the First Novel Award from *Books in Canada*, the Periodical Distributors of Canada's Best Paperback Fiction Award, and the Canadian Authors Association's "Book of the Year" Award. In 1982 it was designated a Notable Book by the American Library Association; in 1983 it received an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation; in 2006 it was cited as one of the most important books in Canadian history by the *Literary Review of Canada*;[65] and in 2015 it was the only literary work to appear in "The Forty on Forty Project" of *English Studies in Canada*, which asked forty scholars to briefly identify "a work, or idea, or event of the past forty years that has been key to the project of literary, cultural, and theoretical inquiry."[66] This novel played a significant role in recruiting participants into the Japanese-Canadian redress movement[67] and in confirming Kogawa's own commitment to the cause, in which she was "a driving force behind the formation of the National Coalition for Japanese Canadian Redress, enlisting the support of many high profile contacts in the arts community."[68] National recognition of Kogawa's novel attended the federal government's official apology of 22 September 1988 when NDP leader Ed Broadbent read a passage from *Obasan* into the records of the House of Commons.[69]

[65] "The LRC 100 (Part Two)," *Literary Review of Canada*, accessed 30 January 2021, http://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2006/03/the-lrc-100-part-two/.

[66] Michael O'Driscoll and Mark Simpson, "The Forty on Forty Project," *English Studies in Canada*, vol. 41, no. 4, December 2015, pp. 1–22 (1, 9).

[67] Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Raincoast Books, 2004), 200.

[68] Ad Hoc Committee for Japanese Canadian Redress, *Japanese Canadian Redress: The Toronto Story* (HpF Press, 2000), 187; see also Kogawa's epilogue, 351–53.

[69] https://www.lipad.ca/full/1988/09/22/1/, accessed 30 Jan. 2021.

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Unlike *Earth and High Heaven*, *Obasan* remains in public view, particularly in Vancouver, where it was the 2005 selection of the Vancouver Public Library for its "One Book, One Vancouver" community reading program. Shortly thereafter, the house in south Vancouver that Kogawa's family had occupied for five years before being ousted in 1942 was rescued from demolition and restored as the Historic Joy Kogawa House, which opened in 2009 with programming as a literary centre.[70] This accomplishment was not without complications. In Canada, a handful of writers' houses have been preserved as museums or cultural centres, most of them secured after the writer's death. Kogawa herself, however, was a participant in the process of saving her family's home, with "the house and Kogawa herself becoming cognitive metonyms for the larger injustice" due to the "blurred boundary between the real and the literary realms," in the words of Gregory Dean Gibson.[71] In her memoir, *Gently to Nagasaki* (2016), Kogawa acknowledges that as the house became established, painful opposition arose among some members of the Japanese community – in part because some Japanese Canadians opposed aspects of the redress movement, but mostly because Kogawa's beloved father had been an unreported pedophile, a secret shared by many others but not revealed to her until 2006: "Thousands had had their homes stolen. Why should the completely unworthy house of horrors win the lottery?"[72] Yet the house remained one of her hallmarks, as evidenced in her contribution of her poem "Happy Birthday Dear House" to the 2009 anthology, *A Verse Map of Vancouver*.[73]

Although her father's abusive behaviour is now recognized in the "Apology to Survivors and Survivor Families of Nakayama Sexual Abuse"

70 See Ann-Marie Metten, "The Little House that Joy Saved," *Joy Kogawa: Essays on Her Work*, edited by Sheena Wilson (Guernica Editions, 2011), 256–77.

71 Gregory Dean Gibson, "Moving Forward: The 'Save the Kogawa House Campaign' and Reconciliatory Politics in Canada," (MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2009), iii, 46.

72 Joy Kogawa, *Gently to Nagasaki* (Caitlin Press, 2016), 74.

73 George McWhirter, editor, *A Verse Map of Vancouver* (Anvil Press, 2009), 164–65.

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on the website of Historic Joy Kogawa House,[74] it long remained out of public view as Kogawa's honours accumulated. In 2004, Vancouver declared 6 November "Joy Kogawa Day." The following year, 1 November was designated "Obasan Cherry Tree Day" in recognition of the symbolic role of the cherry tree in the backyard of Kogawa's childhood home, which in her writings "represented her family and community," [75] and a graft from the dying tree was planted in the garden at Vancouver's City Hall. In 2008, this sapling was designated as a Friendship Tree with a plaque from the Japanese-Canadian Friendship Society. Over the years, Kogawa has received many personal honours, including Member of the Order of Canada (1986), Member of the Order of British Columbia (2006), the Order of the Rising Sun from the Japanese government (2010), and eight honorary doctorates.[76]

While Kogawa has received much well-deserved recognition for a stunning novel, *Obasan*'s publishing history supports Scott McFarlane's argument that Broadbent's invocation of Naomi Nakane's emotional pain confirmed the association of a child-like identity with Japanese Canadians, whose story has been appropriated into Canadians' self-congratulatory national narrative of redemption while diminishing the agency of the National Association of Japanese Canadians in securing a settlement.[77] This trajectory of infantilization has accompanied the book from its beginning, with regard to both the structure of the story and its material representation. The novel was preceded by Kogawa's story, also titled

74 Historic Joy Kogawa House, accessed 1 December 2022, https://www.kogawahouse.com/wp/.

75 For the somewhat complicated story of this tree, see Melody Pan, "The Friendship Tree," *Kerrisdale Playbook*, 14 April 2015, https://www.kccplaybook.org/2015/04/14/the-friendship-tree/.

76 See Sheena Wilson, "Awards and Honours Garnered for *Obasan* and for a Lifetime of Literary Work and Community Activism," *Joy Kogawa: Essays on Her Work*, edited by Sheena Wilson (Guernica Editions, 2011), 352-54.

77 Scott McFarlane, "Covering *Obasan* and the Narrative of Internment," *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies*, edited by Gary Y. Ohikoro, Marilyn Alquizola, Dorothy Fujita Rony, and K. Scott Wong (Washington State University Press, 1995), 401–11. For a detailed account of the dynamics of the redress movement see Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Raincoast Books, 2004).

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"Obasan," published in *Rikka* in 1977 and reprinted in the *Canadian Forum* in 1978. This early piece recounts the unnamed adult narrator's growing awareness of the memories and history of her elderly aunt, with no reference to a child's experience of the internment.[78] The expansion of the story into the full-length novel included the addition of the traumatized child, a figure that was quickly picked up by the book's trade publishers in the editions that followed its initial publication in 1981. *Obasan*'s first appearance, on the International Fiction List of Lester and Orpen Dennys, bore an artistic front cover that presented the novel as a serious literary work, with the title appearing in eye-catching Japanese characters that are accompanied by the book's poetic opening words (Figure 2). The declared intention of this list, which put Kogawa in the company of Josef Skvorecky, Marie Claire Blais, and Italo Calvino, was "to seek out and publish fine fiction – new works as well as classics – by authors from around the world."[79]

Figure 2: Three covers of *Obasan*: first 1981 edition from Lester and Orpen Dennys (8.5" x 5.5"); current edition from Penguin Modern Classics (7" x 4.25", photograph in use since 1983); 2014 Puffin Classics (7" x 5").

[78] Joy Kogawa, "Obasan," *Rikka*, vol. 4, no. 1, Spring 1977, pp. 36–39; *Canadian Forum*, vol. 25, March 1978, pp. 25–28

[79] Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* (Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1981), [i].

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When *Obasan* was taken over by Penguin in 1983, its appearance was significantly transformed. The large, literary format of the first edition (8.5" x 5.5") was reduced to the size of a pocketbook (7" x 4.25") and the abstract cover was replaced with a realistic photograph of a solemn unaccompanied little Asian girl looking out the smeared window of a train. Retained over nearly four decades, including the book's current incarnation as a Penguin Modern Classic (see Figure 2), this photograph has become the book's branding image. McFarlane reads this picture of the child framed in steel and looking away from the viewer as creating distance while also emphasizing the "pathos" and "victimization" that represent an "Orientalist" perception of the Japanese as "child-like, quiet, passive, and in need of protection."[80]

This focus on the figure of the child accords with Kogawa's retelling of Naomi's experience in modified juvenile versions, beginning with *Naomi's Road* (1986), directed at readers aged 8 to 11. While publication in the US and the UK did much to shape the audience and reception of *Beautiful Joe* and *Earth and High Heaven*, for Kogawa, a source of significant international attention was Japan. When *Naomi's Road* was translated into Japanese, Kogawa worked with the translator to expand the story at the publisher's request. The Japanese version, released in 1988 as *Naomi-no-Michi*, was followed in 2005 by a "significantly longer"[81] English version based on the enhanced Japanese text without any change to the title. In this revised *Naomi's Road*, the original first-person narrative is replaced by a third-person voice, thereby losing some of the immediacy of the original text, with additional new scenes that contain political and cultural content adapted from *Obasan*. Rocio G. Davis assesses these alterations as an improvement, opining that "the third person narrative gives the author a critical distance that permits her to include details that might prove

[80] McFarlane, 406.

[81] Rocio G. Davis, "Rewriting the Autobiographical Story of the Japanese Canadian Uprooting for Children," *Joy Kogawa: Essays on Her Words*, edited by Sheena Wilson (Guernica Editions, 2011), 205–35 (219).

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problematic in a first-person children's story: Kogawa is more explicit about racism, suffering, and death, for example." Davis argues that the new version enlarges Kogawa's scope so that the book "not only tells the story of a child but also unveils the psychological pain in the history of the Japanese-Canadian journey toward acceptance and the acknowledgement of the injustice perpetrated upon an entire community of loyal Canadian citizens."[82]

Whereas the stylized illustrations in the first version of *Naomi's Road* depict children about the same age as the intended readers (8 to 11), the more realistic images in the second edition portray a younger Naomi who looks closer to Kogawa's actual age of six in 1942. This pattern continued with an even smaller girl on the cover of *Naomi's Tree* (2008), a picture book to be read to pre-schoolers that poetically develops the image of the cherry tree to represent safety, kindness, and the security of home. *Naomi's Road* was brought to the stage with Paula Wing's award-winning adaptation that premiered in the 1991–92 season of Toronto's Young People's Theatre and has since been remounted several times.[83] A 45-minute operatic version, commissioned by Vancouver Opera in 2005, was composed by Ramona Luengen with a libretto by Ann Hodges. It has frequently been performed for student audiences,[84] most recently by Tapestry Opera in Toronto in November 2016. These adaptations focus on the trauma of the displaced child without the political and historical context provided by Aunt Emily and other adult characters in *Obasan* or the poetic prose and complex narrative structure that capture the different situations of the major characters.

82 Davis, 224–25.

83 It was remounted in Toronto in 1995-96 and performed in Edmonton in 2000: "YPT Production History 1966 to 2015," Young People's Theatre, http://www.youngpeoplestheatre.ca/50/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ALL-SEASONS-revised-Spring-2015.pdf; "Wing, Paula," *Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia*, accessed 30 January 2021, http://www.canadiantheatre.com/dict.pl?term=Wing%2C%20Paula.

84 "Joy Kogawa," *Wikipedia*, accessed 5 February 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joy_Kogawa.

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While an author is always at liberty to expand her audience by creating a juvenile version of her story, she is done a disservice when the original book is also infantilized, as occurred in 2014, when the Penguin Group issued the full text of *Obasan* only in a Puffin Classics edition with a cover drawing of a frightened Asian girl, aimed at "Ages 12+," according to the back cover (Figure 2). The effect of packaging *Obasan* as a book for adolescents was to recast a novel that analyzes racism and history through the effects of war on a child into a story for children about a child's suffering. In contrast to Saunders's animal stories, which deliberately address a juvenile readership under the theory that children should learn empathy at an early age, *Obasan* was originally directed toward adults who can understand the history of racism and do something about it. It is important for Canadian children to learn about the Japanese internment, but the wholesale shift of *Obasan*'s audience to juvenile readers diminishes the sophistication of its examination of discrimination and injustice. This pattern of devaluation may account for the fifty percent drop in *Obasan*'s appearance on Canadian literature course lists between 1997–98 and 2007–08, according to Paul Martin's calculations.[85] In 2017, when the book was repackaged in an adult version as a Penguin Modern Classic, it retained the earlier cover photograph of the child alone at the train window, demonstrating the durability of this representation of Kogawa's book.

In 1992, Kogawa published *Itsuka* (which translates as "someday"), the sequel to *Obasan* that follows Naomi into adulthood and her involvement with the Japanese redress movement under the leadership of Aunt Emily. The cover image of the Penguin paperback reiterates the theme of the protagonist looking out a window, in this case a more positive photograph of a thoughtful young Asian woman whose windowsill is decorated with cheerful potted red chrysanthemums, a flower that carries powerful symbolic value in Japanese culture. This book has had no uptake in

[85] Martin, 221, 250.

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Canadian literature courses as recorded by Paul Martin and has received surprisingly little critical attention. The dynamism of Aunt Emily led to a revised version of *Itsuka* appearing under the title *Emily Kato* in 2005, further distancing this narrative from the story of Naomi's childhood. In a penetrating analysis of Kogawa's various approaches to the internment through different narratives and revisions thereof, Benjamin Lefebvre argues that her frequent rewriting demonstrates "the extent to which her story of oppression, dispersal, and trauma is *unconcludable*" and therefore must be continually revisited to ensure that these "narratives of Canadian cultural memory remain current and relevant to later audiences of readers."[86] Despite her many subsequent publications, Kogawa's reputation rests primarily on *Obasan* because it is the book that has had the greatest impact.

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As illustrated by the publication and reception histories of *Beautiful Joe*, *Earth and High Heaven*, and *Obasan*, different elements pertain to the fate of each book. Factors involved in establishing and maintaining the public presence of socially didactic novels include not only the contemporary and ongoing relevance of the issues they address, but also adaptations for new audiences and into other media, international interest and dissemination (especially in the United States), and recognition of the author with literary awards, honorary degrees, and similar distinctions. Also significant is local commemoration: on the calendar with special events such as Vancouver's Joy Kogawa Day, and in the landscape with plaques, parks, and the preservation of special sites, including writers' houses. Both Saunders and Kogawa have enjoyed many of these gestures, whereas public recognition for Graham has been limited to a plaque in a Montreal chapel that is not always open to the general public.

[86] Benjamin Lefebvre, "In Search of Someday: Trauma and Repetition in Joy Kogawa's Fiction," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 3, Fall 2010, pp. 154–73 (156).

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While there is no Canadian *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that can be mythically credited with the historical equivalent of starting a Civil War, the three novels discussed here have had what can be described as an "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* effect" as landmark achievements that made a difference in their readers' understanding of pressing issues of their time. These woman-authored works humanize the other by seizing the popular imagination with sympathetic fictional portrayals of those who have been victimized because of their religion, ethnicity, or species (in the case of animal-welfare stories), and implicitly or explicitly recommend how the social fabric might be repaired. Whether or not these publications directly influenced Canadian legislation, their calls for justice expanded the social consciousness of their original audiences and should continue to have an impact upon readers who encounter them today.

Author Biography

Dr. Carole Gerson (FRSC) is Professor Emerita in the Department of English at Simon Fraser University. She has published extensively on Canada's literary and cultural history with a focus on early Canadian women writers, from well-known figures such as Pauline Johnson and L.M. Montgomery to more obscure figures who can be found in her two databases: Canada's Early Women Writers (https://cwrc.ca/project/canadas-early-women-writers) and the more inclusive Database of Canada's Early Women Writers (https://dhil.lib.sfu.ca/doceww/). A member of the editorial team of the foundational *History of the Book in Canada / Histoire du livre et de l'imprimé au Canada* (2007), she was co-editor of vol. 3 (1918-1980). In 2011, she received the Gabrielle Roy Prize for Canadian criticism for *Canadian Women in Print, 1750-1918*, followed in 2013 by the Marie Tremaine medal from the Bibliographical Society of Canada. Her most recent book, co-authored with Peggy Lynn Kelly, is *Hearing More Voices: English-Canadian Women in Print and on the Air, 1914-1960* (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press 2020).

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