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Article abstract

Katherine Govier's *Between Men* is a complex fiction combining elements of the novel of feminist empowerment, historical fiction, contemporary romance, the academic novel, and historiographic metafiction. It develops and weaves – braids – three narrative lines together into a composite, intertwined narrative that blurs the boundaries between history and fiction. Govier's use of the "Metafictive Braid" is central to this project of feminist historiography. Analysis of characterization – particularly the main character in the novel – reveals its presentation of both false and true guides, as well as its function in driving and determining the plot: a contemporary rewriting of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, which becomes a story of self-recovery instead of self-loss. Govier's novel is a complex feminist work that closely examines the worlds of public and private history.

THE TRUE AND FALSE GUIDE: CHARACTERIZATION IN KATHERINE GOVIER'S *BETWEEN MEN*

Dermot McCarthy

There is no absolute, positive past available to us, no matter how rigorously we strive to determine it—as strive we must. Inevitably, the past, so far as we know it, is an inference, a creation, and this, without being paradoxical, can be said to be its chief value for us. In creating the image of the past, we create ourselves, and without that task of creating the past we might be said scarcely to exist.

Robert Penn Warren, "The Use of the Past"

Why does Katherine Govier have such a hard time being taken seriously? Is it because early in her career she was pegged as "a chronicler of 30-something angst" (Collinson) and written off as treating seriously a generation whose crises are considered frivolous, self-indulgent, and materialistic? Or is it because of her high-profile and highly regarded life-style journalism, which allows some to consider her fiction the work of a slumming features writer, "a second-rank, [if] not second-rate, author" limited by the limitations of her subject-matter, the consumptive banality of the lives of "urban baby boomers" (Dunphy C1, C6)? While much reviewed, Govier's *Between Men* (1987) has yet to receive the kind of close critical attention accorded works by her peers, novelists like Jane Urquhart, Daphne Marlatt, Susan Swan or Gail Scott, for example. This is particularly surprising when a work as complex as *Between Men* combines the elements of the novel of feminist empowerment, historical fiction, contemporary romance, the academic novel, and historiographic metafiction, and when it presents so vividly as well a character working her way through a crisis of self-understanding that is profound, historically rooted, and as emotionally complex as it is realistic.

Reviewers recognized Govier's development of two narrative lines in the novel, but there are really three. There is the contemporary story of the protagonist, Suzanne, a Calgarian who returns to her native city after graduate study in Toronto to teach western Canadian history at Foothills College and, at the same time, divorce Ace, her husband of ten years. Shortly after her return, she meets and begins an affair with Simon, a former federal civil servant who has come to Calgary to parlay his insider-knowledge of the National Energy Policy he has helped to formulate into a new career as consultant. Still sexually attracted to and emotionally confused about her husband, Suzanne must sort out which, if either, man she wants in her future. She imagines that future to be in academia, but is insecure because of the academic establishment's attitude to her interest in exploring "'certain left-alone areas'" (85) in local history rather than "'the coronations . . . campaigns . . . politics and military matters'" (84) that most male historians privilege.

The second narrative line in the novel is Suzanne's research project in local history: an attempt, in her view, to get to the truth behind the murder of a native woman, Rosalie New Grass, in Calgary in 1889; and it is Govier's development of the inter-connections between Suzanne's own story and her archivo-imaginative reconstruction of this nineteenth-century 'mystery' that leads to the third narrative line in *Between Men*, the story of the story-making, and a reading of the novel as an example of what Linda Hutcheon has defined as historiographic metafiction.¹ Through the characters of Suzanne and Rosalie, Govier braids (she uses the metaphor explicitly) fiction and history into a composite narrative, a 'story,' that blurs the boundaries between the discourses. Like her contemporaries, Daphne Marlatt, in *Ana Historic* (1988), and Jane Urquhart, in *Changing Heaven* (1990), Govier dove-tails two narratives and their time-lines in a way that draws attention to narrative process itself. It is the latter which comes to move "between life and death" (2), the present and the past, and this movement becomes the dangerous alternating current (xvi) of imaginative energy which generates the light that illuminates the shadow land where Suzanne's identity is shaped.²

The Metafictive Braid

The metafictional subplot in *Between Men* is introduced in Chapter 4. If, at the beginning of the novel, Suzanne understands herself to be a different kind of historian from her traditional male

counterparts, she is nevertheless like them in her belief that historical facts are the basis of historical research, and that these exist but are usually hidden from plain sight and require the archival-archaeological skills of the research historian to turn them up. In the case of Rosalie New Grass's murder, however, Suzanne is stumped: "Fact, the supposedly irreducible thing, was not so easily preserved" (38); instead, she has only words: "On the prairie the longest surviving relic was the printed word; it had replaced the artefacts of history; it was the object of her search" (38).

The only other time "relic" appears in the novel is as a metaphorical description of the murdered Rosalie's braid (52), and the braid image comes to symbolize the narrative process, both Suzanne's and Govier's, through the doubleness of the historian's use of language. The historian's words braid past and present, are her own invention as well as her appropriation of the words of the past. Suzanne's search is for her own words as much as for those of Rosalie's story. This ambiguity is expressed in her understanding of the words of the past as agents of mediation: "These written words were her mediator when she sought to confront that bygone world. They were her medium in an occult journey backward, her tour guide, translator, her means of transport too" (38). Suzanne's "occult journey backward" is Govier's feminist revision of an Orphic descent, but Suzanne's words do not become the medium of that journey until she abandons her passive questing for "the supposedly irreducible thing" and accepts the risk of re-imagining the event. When Suzanne takes up this challenge, she releases her own ventriloquial powers and speaks for the silenced woman within history, and within herself; then she writes a history that is the opposite of reduction, that is the expansion and efflorescence of the untold into narrative.

Ironically, Suzanne's first powerful act in this direction is her appropriation of a male voice, that of the anonymous journalist whom she names "Murphy." The irony is managed brilliantly by Govier, who develops the theme of history and history-writing throughout the novel in feminist terms. Govier's reviewers tended to misrepresent her use of Murphy. Adachi and French both thought Suzanne invented him, but she does not. The journalist and his accounts of the trial exist; Suzanne finds them in the archives. Her significant act is to *re-name* him and, by that, write him into her own writing; more important, through this act of appropriation she elects her "guide." Suzanne's writing is her own

journey; she writes her way back into history in order to write her way out of the crisis in her life in the present.

If we hear the banal homophony of writing/righting in this, it is nevertheless precisely what this character's project is about; not in the naive sense of 'correcting' the record, although Suzanne's version of Rosalie's story does provide a closure to what has been a historical mystery, but rather in the sense of righting an off-balanced life, of regaining emotional and psychological equilibrium. It is this version of feminist historiography which draws together all three narrative lines: Suzanne's journey into "that dark club and the men who frequented it" (39) in 1889 mirrors her journey into the Calgary of her own lifetime, which she also describes as a "club" (77). Her *nostos* thus follows the archetypal pattern found in Homer, Virgil, Dante and Joyce: the return to home cannot be achieved without a journey to the dead. Suzanne senses that Rosalie's story "had a shape which, laid bare, might explain more than itself" (39), and that "more" which it might explain is her own life. The mysterious "shape" she moves toward is something in her own mind which she wants to unwrap (25); ultimately, it is the shape made by the braided narrative of her subject and herself.

Suzanne considers herself at a disadvantage as a woman historian in a profession dominated and defined by men; but though she thinks of herself as a historian *against* this establishment, she is self-deluded. Her imagery expresses how she remains a victim of masculinist perspectives: Rosalie's story, hidden between the lines in newspaper accounts, needs to be "laid bare" (39); she senses that it represents a moment in the past where the superficial civility of her society "broke open, revealing the core" (39). The past is a dark, concealed, feminine cavity. Typically, the historian is the male quester who penetrates and illumines this dark space with the light of his analytical intelligence. Unknowingly, Suzanne aspires against her gender in two ways here: in setting out to know the past in this way she imitates the patriarchal historiography she professes to reject, and in the process, jeopardizes her self-understanding as a woman: "But to see that core, Suzanne needed a way in. Something was missing. She needed a guide, a torch, a pick-axe. Something, or someone" (39).

One does not need Lacan to figure out what Suzanne is "missing"; her sense of her own lack derives from the persistence of phallogocentric thinking in her view of her occupation. But when she solves her writer's block by re-naming the journalist, Suzanne finds a way out of the phallogocentric maze by appropriating the

very principles that would keep her trapped “between men,” serving what she mistakenly thinks is “her kind of scholarship” (41). In need of a phallic “torch” to illuminate the “dark byways” (39) of the past, in need of a male guide “to lift the story out of its gloom and perversity” (39), Suzanne decides to invent what circumstances and patriarchy have denied her. Having identified an anonymous journalist who “was a spectator to the entire sequence of events” (39), Suzanne appropriates this “invisible man” (39) to serve as her missing part, her “torch,” “her man” (41), her “way in”:

She could use him, but only by breaking the rules of her kind of scholarship. . . . She would have to make assumptions, to invent. But she was sure that if she did, this man would be her vehicle to carry her past the great century behind her. He could cut through the intervening rings of darkness and light But if he were to be the means for this ungeographical journey, and she to follow him, she would have to make him her own. (41)

With this archetypally patriarchal act of possession, Suzanne appropriates patriarchal power and, as she recognizes, breaks the rules that would limit *her* power. She discovers that she has not been practising “her kind of scholarship” at all, and because of that, while she has identified the historical subject she wants to pursue, she has been impeded in that pursuit by following rules that preclude her learning what she wants to know.

What needs to be recognized in this is how Govier, in a subtle and profound way, is showing us a woman leading herself. It is as if in the deepest recesses of her self, Suzanne already knows where she needs to go, both as a historian and as a woman. To get there, she summons someone who has already been there. That guide is a product of her own imagination; indeed, he is her historical imagination, though the history she is setting out to explore is as much a life that has yet to happen, her own future, as it is a life that ended, violently, a century before. This act of possession is Suzanne’s first step in repossessing, re-inhabiting herself.

The True and False Guides: Murphy

Govier’s protagonist may not find herself in the midst of a dark wood, but her condition is nevertheless Dantescan in that she realizes she is lost and in need of a guide to find her way forward. Along with Murphy, all the other characters in the novel

perform this role. What is difficult for Suzanne, however, is not so much determining who are the true and who the false guides, as discovering how all guides may be both. When the narrator remarks that “Suzanne’s search for true love and freedom too led down the rabbit hole of history” (65), the allusion suggests that Suzanne, like Alice, needs to regard whomever she meets as possibly offering her much-needed direction, but also that only she can determine the meaning of the advice; that is, it is Suzanne herself who has the power to make the advice into true or false guidance.

In the course of the novel Murphy comes to function as what Freud, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, calls a *Sammelperson*, or ‘composite’ (Gay 83; see also Freud 399-403, 431-38). Beginning as a witness to the events in the past she wants to understand, Suzanne uses him to project her reading of those events into the present; then, gradually, he becomes a composite projection of her understanding of the men in her life, Simon and Ace, back into that history, as she begins to discover how the secrets of the historical and her personal past are linked.³ But even as a composite figure containing elements of Ace and Simon, Murphy is primarily a projection of his creator, Suzanne. Like her, he is an insider/outsider in Calgary (42). He describes his interest in Rosalie as “academic” (91). The movement from journalism to art in his editorial attempt to cast the event in terms of Greek tragedy, with Fisk (Rosalie’s murderer) as the scapegoat who must be banished if the community is to be cleansed (268-69), reflects Suzanne’s abandonment of traditional historiography in the quest for her own sense of narrative truth.

But Murphy is Suzanne’s guide to more than the historical mystery of Rosalie New Grass. Her self-projection into the character becomes clearer as his guilt becomes more explicit, and this suggests that he is a figure who rises as much from within her own unconscious as from the Calgary archives. When, as a result of his increasing guilt, he hallucinates an encounter with Rosalie that leads to an admission of his sexual liaison with her (219), his mental instability is immediately paralleled by Suzanne’s in the next chapter (226). When he admits that his writing is confessional—“I need to do this writing. I need to confess, yet I am not even sure as to why. I imagine that if I just keep writing I will arrive at what I want to say” (272)—Murphy’s role as his creator’s surrogate is clear.

The narrative structure of *Between Men* reflects the protagonist’s use of Murphy as a psycho-heuristic device; the chapters

written from his perspective often follow important developments in her self-understanding. We are meant to read these 'historical' passages as Suzanne's reconstruction, but she is writing *through* Murphy. In Chapter 12, for example, Murphy's account of Fisk's trial, follows the important episode in which Suzanne, spurred on by Simon's encouragement, decides to proceed with her use of Murphy as her illuminator. Murphy's statement that "The most amazing thing, to me, was that there seemed to be no reason [for Rosalie's murder]" (172) becomes Suzanne's starting point for her final push to finish her investigation. We can see Suzanne projecting herself into her guide when Murphy tries to categorize the event as an instance of "those lost to mental disturbances brought on by an excess of sexual feelings" (172). His generalization—"There was no simple explanation for behaviour in sexual matters" (172)—reflects her own bewilderment at her sexual recidivism with Ace while beginning the new relationship with Simon, as well as her inability to understand Ace's original infidelity; both are concealed within Murphy's reference to "the sudden lust displayed by my previously obedient and intelligent wife!" (172). In the midst of these ruminations, Murphy lets out that Rosalie was his wife's maid; but what this signals is Suzanne's intuitive leap to a connection between Rosalie and Murphy which he is concealing (174).⁴

In Chapter 19, Suzanne describes Murphy's return to Rosalie's grave; then, in the following chapter, Suzanne makes her own pilgrimage to the riverbank. The parallel scenes remind us that Murphy is still Suzanne's guide, but the differences within them announce that this marks the end of her dependence upon him. Earlier, in Chapter 15, Murphy hallucinated Rosalie's presence in his house; at her grave, he calls to her again, but this time is unsuccessful: "I heard nothing, but I sensed that she was there" (274). To Suzanne, however, Rosalie not only appears, chanting the same prayer that Murphy heard at the funeral, but tells the story of what happened to her. Of course, what Rosalie tells is what Suzanne has already 'worked out' for, and *from within*, herself: it was Murphy who was responsible for Rosalie's pregnancy, and he had given her the money for the abortion. Suzanne's conclusion, however—"It would have to be Murphy. Causing it all, then writing about it" (278)—should also be read as a gloss on her own actions up to this point, as well as on what follows.

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century storylines merge explicitly in this visionary scene. Suzanne 'sees' and 'hears' Rosalie tell her story, but "It was her own voice speaking, not the ghost"

(281). As Suzanne hears herself tell the truth of Rosalie's story, like Murphy, she is confessing her own.⁵ The memories she has been repressing are finally released. The mystery of Rosalie's murder is also the secret of Suzanne's abortion: "The doctor had told her it was too late, it was dangerous. But she could not have this child. She was not ready" (282). The language completes the braid of past and present, history and historian: "Suzanne was raving. There'd been nothing to see. There was no child, only blood taking fabulous shapes on the sheets" (282). Those "fabulous shapes" of Suzanne's repressed memories have been the shapes she has been trying to unwrap from before she began her research into Rosalie's murder: "Shapes that had been there before she returned to her hometown, that led her here, that she came back to finally see, and make clear" (25), but which the historical work itself releases: "Because of the work, a part of her was always living in another story" (25).

Suzanne's progress as a historian does not begin until she takes the leap of creating her own guide or medium into the darkness of the past; it concludes when she herself becomes the medium for the story she is telling. Rosalie needs Suzanne to get her from the "limbo" (282) of the forgotten into the spirit world of story, and with that passage Suzanne is released from the mourning that has oppressed her all these years without her consciously knowing it: "A lightness spread on her, as if from a kindly, restful spirit. . . . she wished she could be Rosalie again. Only this time she . . . would bear her child. She would go on living and the child would go on living, and there would be more life after that" (283). Suzanne has braided the Calgary Turf Club of 1889 and the Calgary hospital in the twentieth century into a continuity of women's tragedy between men. Her question to Rosalie is a modern woman's question to a pre-modern woman: why didn't you fight back? But Suzanne is really asking herself how she got into her own predicament.

Simon

If Murphy is Suzanne's guide to the truth buried in the nineteenth century past, her lover, Simon, serves the same function in her life in the present; moreover, it is Simon who encourages Suzanne to accept the challenge of the double descent into the world of public and private history. Like Murphy, however, Simon is a true and false guide whose help is not without danger.

He is a narcissist—he talks to her “as if pledging into a mirror” (27)—whose solipsism threatens to imprison her in an illusion of love. Ironically, Suzanne turns this to her advantage when she draws her lover into the looking-glass world of her nineteenth-century story by merging him with Murphy in the final stages of her journey when she abandons both as her guides.

Before this, however, Simon functions as a true and false guide to Suzanne in a number of important scenes. In Chapter 6, when he invites her to “rewrite my character” (83) and seems to offer her power over him, the invitation ironically puts him on the same level as Murphy, whom Suzanne is already ‘rewriting.’ Her rhetorical reply: “Don’t you think I’d have a better chance of rewriting my own?” (83) allows Simon to suggest shrewdly that that is precisely what she’s doing with her research paper. In this exchange Simon is already acting as the ironic guide and Suzanne’s relationship with him is a mixture of acceptance and resistance. His language has a way of entering her own: he tells her that she is someone who will “reverse the pattern” (81) of his relationships with women, but just as she redirects his metaphor of rewriting his character to her own situation, so she takes up the pattern metaphor and uses it to describe herself: “I’m only interested in laying out a pattern” (84). The difference between them is that Suzanne understands her pattern as internal, personal, and not intended “to take hold of other lives” (84).

Simon connects Suzanne’s desire for pattern and order with her choice of profession, but here, too, Suzanne asserts her difference. She argues that she is not “a typical historian”: “I only care about real life” (84). When Simon describes this view as naive, he is actually pushing her to define her values in more detail; and when she caves in, he criticizes her: “Just when you’ve got a good point to make, you undermine yourself” (84-5). This gives Suzanne her second wind:

“I have to start from tiny clues, events that stand out for their bizarreness, because they’ve never been explained. I have to weave my way through the sources, visiting the living, the dead, sifting the detritus. I have to interpret a lot from a very little.” (85)

In this and later scenes, Simon guides Suzanne toward self-definition and self-discovery, but he does this as much by giving her pointers on the way as by being someone whom ultimately she will have to reject.

When he replies to Suzanne's description of her method—"You work by instinct. . . How very female of you" (85)—Simon reveals himself as the true and false guide, for the remark is patriarchal and patronizing but also true. What Suzanne must come to recognize and hold to is that her approach is intuitive and her own, but not in the patronizing-patriarchal sense—i.e. illogical, irrational, 'feminine'; rather, her intuitive historiography is an expression of her living connection to the past she is trying to understand. (She also knows that "Men do it too. They just have fancy names for it" [85].) Her method has less to do with being a woman than with her becoming the kind of historian she wants to be. Suzanne obviously needs Simon's support and even approval. This scene ends with her relapsing into self-deprecation and Simon once again supporting her; when she tells him of her Department Head's opinion of her, Simon replies: "I think he's wrong . . . I think you've got a great deal of drive" (85). This has a powerful effect upon her: "He stood up, touching the top of her head. The touch went down to her heart. His unpredictable kindness had the force of blows. He made her valuable. He had that power" (85). Suzanne eventually has to discover her own value, but at this stage she needs to be helped on her way to that independence. Govier's paradoxical method is also emotionally realistic: Suzanne will discover her independence *through* her relationships, to the living and the dead, all of whom she will come to rewrite as she takes charge of her own life-story.⁶

Simon reveals himself as guide, again ironically, in Chapter 10, when he teaches Suzanne to walk in the dark: "she shuffled behind him, holding a candle. 'You've got to put that out,' he said. . . He blew on the candle. 'Now. Stare directly into the dark. Let it enter you. Let your eyes adjust. In a minute you'll be able to make out shapes'" (148). The language shows how Simon will become encoded in the figure of Murphy: trying to find a way through the dark recalls Suzanne's frustration with the "dark by-ways" (39) of Rosalie's story in Chapter 4; Simon shows her the literal way here in the same way that Murphy shows her the figurative light in the dark; and learning "'to make out shapes'" recalls her description of her work as unwrapping the "shapes in her mind" (25), shadows which come from her own repressed past as well as the dark of public history. As guide here, Simon is evoking a talent that Suzanne does not know she possesses: she "let go of his waist; she could walk by herself now. The whole night had become transparent" (148). He is also building her con-

confidence: as soon as she acquires this new night-vision, Suzanne decides that "She could be the leader now" (149) and strikes out for the lake: "It seemed an extension of their exploring, breaking into another element" (149). By helping her see her way to the lake, Simon is helping her find her way to the archive of her own unconscious.

The morning after this tutorial, however, marks the beginning of the end of their relationship (150). Following an argument, "It came to Suzanne that Simon had two faces" and "was two people" (152). Significantly, while Suzanne's new perception of her lover moves him closer into the dream world of the collective unconscious, and so strengthens his role as guide, it also signals a lessening of his power over her as lover.⁷ As this episode draws to a close, they argue about the relation of power to creativity and when Simon turns to art for his example, it is clear how Govier is using him to guide Suzanne toward an understanding of herself and her obsession with Rosalie New Grass. His pompously rhetorical, "Does Michelangelo ask the stone what it wants to be?" (153) inspires Suzanne to reply that "He would have to, if he wanted to do a good job. He couldn't make the sculpture on his own. He had to find out what was in the stone, didn't he?" (153) What Suzanne has been brought to articulate is the approach she is developing to her problem with the mystery of Rosalie's death. Like the sculptor who has to find out what is in the stone before he can release it, so she must find the shape hidden in the dark of that past, so that she can bring it to light in the form of her narrative.

In this rich and complex episode, Suzanne is taken forward by Simon at the same time as she begins to fall away from him. The "division" (150) which has opened up between them will not be bridged. His crass reduction of Rosalie's story to "A hooker done in by a john" (155) confirms the breach. Suzanne's search for truth is at odds with her lover-guide's notion that "Success is merely a matter of organizing your material" (154). By teaching her to walk in the dark, Simon, ironically, has taught her to walk a different path from his. She does not want to "hold life at bay" (154) so much as to enter into it, as he counselled her the night before, when he wore his other face, that of the true guide. Suzanne does not understand her task or desire to be the organizing of chaos into order because she already intuits that the narrative order she must construct must admit the chaos of history, in particular, the ambiguities and violent contradictions of women's lives lived between men. Suzanne does not expect the truth she is

searching for to be Simon's "'perfect order'" (154) but rather "'A true story'" (163). She is particularly wary of contracting what she thinks of as "that disease of women" (161) and constructing yet another story of woman as victim.

Following her argument with Simon, what is most upsetting to Suzanne is the knowledge that he has invaded that room of her own where she does her writing. In this, the tutor has gone too far; symbolically, he has tried to interfere with her imagination, to assert his presence where it threatens her own:

All she knew was that she didn't want to be *known* by him, that being "known" in the total way he meant was only appropriate to the dead. Of her body he knew enough. She'd let him get in there; she didn't want to let him into her mind, to let it become a conquered territory, out of which he could coax responses she had no control over. (165)

Ironically, Suzanne does not want Simon to know her in the way that she wants to know Rosalie New Grass,⁸ or, in terms of the ultimate formal irony of the novel, Suzanne does not want him to know what she does not yet know herself, that *she* is Rosalie New Grass. Knowing he has read her notes alters her knowledge of them: "She hadn't wanted that invasion, but once it was made, she could not pretend it didn't matter. He had entered the work. He had become party to it" (165).

Govier's management of her protagonist at this point is crucial: Suzanne evades imaginative conquest by Simon by absorbing him into her imaginative project, first, in the sense that she discusses it with him, and then, more complexly, by unconsciously writing him into the character of Murphy. But throughout the process, Govier continues to develop Simon as the true and false guide. It is Simon the figure of patriarchal authority who, ironically, frees Suzanne from her bondage to the career version of academic history, from her ambition to be accepted in *Studies in Western Canadian History* (166): "She used to love the authority of archives, but something had changed. The archives were the same, so it must be her. She wanted her spare room, to lay her notes out on the bare pine floor, to bend the goose-necked lamp over a fresh piece of paper, and to go forward" (168). While Suzanne feels gratitude to Simon for helping her commit to this way forward, she also senses that his role as guide has come to an end, and even though their relationship seems to get more involved—

with house-hunting and talk of children—the complications are all denouement.

Simon's significance as a true guide is very much connected to his symbolic identity as a manifestation of Suzanne's own unconscious wisdom; his danger as a false guide derives from his identity on a realistic level in the story as the strong male, obsessed with power, who treats women as romantic conquests and bandaids to cover his gaping insecurities, who interprets Suzanne's desire for a baby as a power-play (245), etc. As their relationship cools, Suzanne senses that he had been as much a creation of her own unconscious as he was a real figure: "he was the satyr she had always been waiting for, not at all handsome, not always charming . . . but still the magical whiskered, hooved, sinewed man of her dreams" (227). Here, as throughout the novel, Govier's method is to show Suzanne's conscious self being instructed by her unconscious, but, in a realistic way, lagging behind or not acting immediately upon what her deep self is urging. Other characters, her girlfriends especially, with a realistic variety of compassionate and self-serving motives, help her to act upon her intuitions. Jennifer, for example, forces Suzanne to draw upon her unconscious wisdom: "If you give up on being yourself, then who do you become? In the height of passion [Simon] once said to her, 'You are so perfect. You remind me of someone I made up.' What if he had made her up?" (239) Then, a more profound insight dawns: "What if—a worse possibility, somehow—*she* had made *him* up? What if they had made each other up?" (239)

This is "a worse possibility" for Suzanne only because she cannot see how she might have invented her own guide—summoned him, *as guide*, from within her own unconscious. When she concludes, bitterly, that "He was nothing. He was an invention that had failed" (264), she is only recognizing how she had invented Simon as her jailor. On another level, Suzanne must sense the parallel between her relationship with Simon and her strategy with Murphy, because she worries that "Giving up [on their relationship] had somehow come to mean abandoning that other adventure too, putting Rosalie's story back between the pale covers of *Studies in Western Canadian History*" (240). Suzanne's description of Simon as "a trick with words, a trick with mirrors" (265) not only draws us closer to the complex interweaving of Simon and Murphy in her life, it reminds us of the complex combination of realistic narrative and metafictional play in the novel.

Evangeline

The character of Murphy's wife serves to foreground the feminist dimension of Suzanne's research project. Named after Longfellow's long-suffering heroine, she is a feminist revision of this Victorian-patriarchal symbol of feminine fidelity: Suzanne's Evangeline leaves her husband out of loyalty to her sense of self, and only revisits him out of gender-loyalty to her wronged friend, Rosalie. Evangeline's role in the novel develops when Suzanne decides to use Murphy to go the whole distance with her exploration of the "dark byways" of Rosalie's murder. Gradually, Suzanne seems to use her to explore her own invention; that is, as a device to fathom the meaning of her intuitive turn to Murphy as the key to the mystery.

In Chapter 12, Suzanne has Evangeline come to Murphy and ask him as a journalist to defend Rosalie against the slanders being spread about her in the town. In the exchange that follows, Suzanne begins to dismantle Murphy as her erstwhile objective witness and to re-fashion him into the subjective and involved participant that Simon has already gotten her to admit she is. That is, if Suzanne's original strategy with Murphy was to use him as the missing witness she needed to acquire a form of historiographical authority recognized by the patriarchy, she now begins to subvert that authority and replace it with her own, a woman's testimony. During the episode, Murphy's objectivity—"I was a reporter" (172)—is revealed as completely bogus. His motive for following the case has been to see if the truth will be discovered, namely, his own role in Rosalie's death. Suzanne transforms her instrument of illumination into a conspirator in a cover-up. When he chides Evangeline for attending the trial: "It's not to do with you. It's something between men" (176), Murphy ironically confirms the suspicion Suzanne expresses to Simon in the previous chapter; namely, that "there's more to Rosalie's story" than "some aberrant sexual thing between an isolated man and a woman. . . . It stands for something" (165-66).

The history that is "something between men" (176) and that Murphy wants to keep secret from his wife is literally, and symbolically, the murdered woman, history as the violated female body, buried and hidden, and a cult object of phallogocentric historiography. Suzanne's use of Murphy results in an androgynous historiography that not only revises the patriarchal myth of Orpheus, but also that of Isis and Osiris, as she, Isis-like, searches

the scattered remains of the record in order to reconstitute the torn body of her other/Isis, Rosalie. The re-membering of that body, again literally and symbolically, is imminent/immanent in Suzanne's decision to have another baby at the end of the novel, another baby which will be both Rosalie's and her own.⁹

Evangeline's appearance in Chapter 12 precipitates Suzanne's unravelling of Murphy's authority. When he tells her to let the matter drop—"What good would the truth do Rosalie now? She's dead" (179)—it is clear that Evangeline has become Suzanne's representative. Her challenge to Murphy pits his journalistic commitment to the truth against his sense of loyalty to his sex: "I knew they were lying. I just could not bear to hear her say it. Women ought to believe men. It put my loyalty in conflict with my sense of truth" (176). The whole episode seems intentionally overwritten; ironically, Govier—or Suzanne—has Murphy's melodramatic prose verge on the hysterical. The episode is not only a major advance in Suzanne's discovery of the truth behind Rosalie's story, Suzanne's use of Evangeline as a heuristic device against Murphy connotes her growing independence of the patriarchal authority embodied in both Murphy and Simon (even though Simon's authority is itself subversive of the patriarchal profession Suzanne belongs to). Following the jury's withdrawal to deliberate, Suzanne shows Murphy writing two versions of a verdict; this is the ultimate debunking by Govier/Suzanne of the kind of male-authored 'history' that passes itself off as based on authoritative historical records. The record is exposed as the product of a particular subjectivity, which in this case has a hidden agenda ("I sat down to the task, suppressing my own fear of being found out" [216]):

In the first version, the guilty version, I used phrases like "deformed fiend" and "more animal than man." In the second I called Fisk "that unfortunate citizen who got himself caught in a sordid affair." Similarly Rosalie was "a young girl of blameless reputation" in one draft, and "the type of lost woman who frequents these spots" in the other. (216)

What this shows is not that there is no such thing as history, but how immediately it passes into 'history,' into text. What Suzanne has been struggling with from the beginning of her project is how, once this happens, history is impossible to recover. All the historian can do is produce another text, more 'history.' What Suzanne has come to recognize—and which Govier shows through her use

of Murphy's journalism—is that 'history' conceals as it contains its nature as 'story.' Murphy writes and rewrites the record, 'history,' before the event has even happened (217). In her own project, Suzanne has turned from the self-delusion of 'history' to the self-conscious narrative of 'story.' Suzanne's use of Evangeline represents her way forward as a woman and as a writer, to the stage that follows her time between men, the true and false guides on her quest for self-definition. In the chapter that follows this episode, Suzanne's divorce from Ace is finalized and she realizes her relationship with Simon has changed irrevocably (187).

Roberta Asp

Characterization and plot in *Between Men* lead to more than a fiction of feminist historiography. The way Govier develops Suzanne's research project calls for a reading of the novel in relation to the problem of 'the investigating subject' and the representation/re-presentation distinction theorized by Spivak.¹⁰ A discussion of the novel in relation to such issues in postcolonial theory is beyond the scope of this essay, but the character of Roberta Asp, a young Cree and Suzanne's student, would figure prominently in it. In relation to the present discussion, it is sufficient to point out how this character serves as another of Suzanne's guides, and ironically so, for it is a case of the student teaching the teacher.

Asp's appearance, manner and didactic method are all ironic. Her physical appearance reflects the form of the novel itself: "It was an androgynous-looking person with white makeup all over her face, a headlight hanging around her neck, and hair that stuck up all over in greenish white spikes" (32). Her "androgynous" appearance points to the hidden androgyny in Suzanne's construction of Murphy as a ventriloquial instrument for her self-exploration, and Asp's concealment of her native self beneath the white mask and punk costume points to Suzanne's gradual discovery of the meaning of her own circumstances through her imagining of Rosalie's. Her enrolment in Suzanne's course, "Re-Inventing the West," is ironic. For Asp as a Cree, 'the west' is an alien concept, a fabrication of the European imagination; to Suzanne's question about where her people came from, she replies: "'They didn't come from anywhere. They were just there'" (34). Asp does not need to re-invent her people's past or place; nor does she need to organize them into something called 'history' (33).

Asp teaches her teacher with irony in two scenes. The first

occurs when she takes Suzanne to a native bar called The Northwest Rebellion during Stampede Week. The Stampede is a parody of the concept behind Suzanne's course. Everyone, including Suzanne, dresses up for this carnivalesque pseudo-pageant, a costuming already parodied by Asp's punk disguise. "Everything was fake" (98) but the phoniness conceals traces of authenticity, namely, the wildness that Suzanne senses as the "real life" (84) buried in history and beneath the layers of symbolism and cultural gimcrackery. The Stampede comes to represent this culture's delusion that it remains connected to its past. In contrast, in *The Northwest Rebellion* Asp shows Suzanne a more authentic living history. The walls are "papered in brown wrapping paper, and written all over from floor to ceiling" (105), resulting in a palimpsest of recent native history in Calgary: "Every five years or so they paper this over. But they always cut around that one. Underneath they must have stuff that goes back to the fifties" (106). Asp shows the historian "'what I call history'" (106), the signature of Nelson Small Legs, a native activist who committed suicide after the failure of "an abortive sit-in" (106). Suzanne recognizes that the walls of the bar compose a historical text and we recognize that the levels of 'historical' wall-paper are analogous to her research project, "The story that appeared, in layers on the desk in [her] spare room" (25).

Asp's informal seminar on new world bibliography moves Suzanne to talk about her work and to admit that she's not sure what she's writing: "It's either an essay or a mystery story" (107). Then she suddenly makes a more important admission: "'You see it's really something about *me* I'm looking for,' she stumbled on. 'To do with my own—'" (108). 'Past' is the word we want to supply here; that Suzanne doesn't finish the sentence shows she is still stumbling towards the meaning of her activity, the goal of her quest. But again we see the role of the secondary character as guide. Asp, like Simon, helps Suzanne to see her way forward, but Govier develops the progress slowly and realistically. Their conversation ends when Suzanne gets up to dance with a native man only to discover that she cannot: "Suzanne understood that she was meant to dance out some fantasy of her own, but she didn't trust herself to improvise. Instead she kept to her tried old two-step" (109). One step forward, one step back, perhaps. Suzanne is stalled in more ways than one, and it's not until she risks greater improvisation as a historian that she will make real progress, both with her essay and the mystery of her

own life. In keeping with her role as guide, before they leave the bar Asp shows Suzanne the way; she tells her to write her name on the wall: "You've got to have your place in history" (109); after Suzanne does, "Asp stood up on the chair and wrote 'Rosalie New Grass' on the wall" (109). The two storylines have merged.

Immediately after the visit to the bar, Ace takes Suzanne to the Stampede midway. The contrast is significant: from the learning cave of The Northwest Rebellion Suzanne is taken by one of the men she is caught between, and who now assumes the role of tempter, to the world of cheap thrills and short rides, funhouse illusions; what he tempts her with is a false resolution, a way forward from her unhappiness which is really a regression to the past which has caused it. As she sits on the ferris wheel, gradually moving higher as it loads, "She saw her years stacked beneath her in stages; she had ridden on that seat, and then that one" (111). The circular motion of the ferris wheel represents the nightmarish repetition of Suzanne's life lived between men. She needs to break free of this cycle of entrapment-escape-entrapment, but at this point she cannot see her way free. Significantly, she ends up back in bed with Ace in the townhouse he tells her "is for us" (112).

Simon, too, asks Suzanne to sell her own house and move into a different one with him. The traditional symbol of women's domestic incarceration, each man's house is a temptation Suzanne must reject, a false haven from the world she must struggle to order in her own way, in her own terms. At the centre of every house in the novel is a bed, but the most important bed is that encountered in the Prologue, the bed in the Turf Club on which Rosalie New Grass is slaughtered. Rosalie goes to that bed thinking she is going to undo the mistake she has made with a man, but in it she becomes the victim of a brutal parody, both of that undoing and of the original making. That scene is the horrific shadow which hovers in the background of all the sex scenes involving Suzanne in the novel, just as its background, at first unknown but eventually imagined by Suzanne, becomes the explanation of her own misery.

Asp also teaches Suzanne about the meaning of the past through her analysis of the Deerfoot-Stokes race of 1886. As she tells it, the question of who won and who lost is irresolvable, but she is not interested in that; rather, "I want to know how [the race] was run, and how it was judged, and why" (229). The meaning of the past and the value of 'history' derive from the act of interpretation, the imagining of history into story. Asp's inter-

pretation that "'The race was only an excuse . . . They just had to keep trying. They didn't have any meaning without each other'" (232), makes her account of the race into a parable. The identities of winner and loser are not as important as understanding the relationship between them, especially the paradox that the winner's identity is defined and determined by the loser; the survivor is not visible apart from the shadow of the victim. Suzanne, who describes herself upon her return to Calgary as "*undefined*" (11), comes to fill her own presence and achieve definition, only as she encounters her shadow in Rosalie; definition and presence are the consequence of the present being connected to the past, complemented, tragically, heroically, in the act of willed imagination which her historical writing becomes. Suzanne's research is recovery, revisiting the "'forgotten'" (229), in Asp's terms, or the repressed, as Govier ultimately shows it to be for Suzanne.

The Metafictive Braid: "Causing it all, then writing about it"

The braid is a major symbol in the novel. First, it is associated with Rosalie and symbolizes her vitality, violation, and death (51). At the end of the novel, the image links Rosalie to Suzanne when she goes to the riverbank where she thinks Rosalie was buried: "Strands of windblown white cloud drifted together over her head. It looked like braid. Rosalie's braid"; then, "Staring at the cloud, Suzanne remembered standing before a mirror, behind her mother, braiding her mother's hair. . . . Suzanne held three long strands of heavy brown hair" (277). Association leads to memory, which opens into dream:

She had to be very careful to keep these strands separate, not to weave them together, otherwise she would not have this beautiful thing she was creating. She pulled and wove and admired what she had done and all of a sudden she tugged too hard and the hair came off the bowed head in front of her and the face lifted into the mirror, and it was not Suzanne's mother sitting there, it was an old woman, with dark eye sockets and collapsed cheeks, bald. (277-78)

The braid image links Rosalie and Suzanne in a symbolic mother-daughter relationship, but the old woman is and is not Suzanne's mother, Rosalie, and Suzanne herself. She is all of these, and all the other women in the novel as well, but also Suzanne's last guide.

This mirror scene recalls the climactic scene in *Mrs Dalloway*

where Clarissa looks out her window and sees the old woman, her neighbour, looking back; that simple sight provides the vision necessary for her to triumph over her fears (see Woolf 164-65). Govier's scene is similarly climactic: "The progress of life had stopped for Suzanne. Her life was like the braid that she was making. One strand was herself, the familiar. Another was Simon, the stranger. The last was Rosalie" (278). When Suzanne recognizes that her relationship with Simon has come to an end, she panics: "Now that Simon was gone, the others could not hold their shape. There was nothing to define one strand against another" (278); but then she realizes that there is, that though "You, Simon, are over. The story is not" (278). Suzanne recognizes that Simon is only a part of her story, and that the story is larger, more than its parts. The strand that centres the braid, that the other two are woven around, is that of the story itself: "this beautiful thing she was creating" (277), her own life-story. Braiding is a metafictional metaphor for story-making.¹¹

Because of the intertwined narrative lines, the tensions that drive Govier's main character determine her narrative form. Suzanne's need to discover *the* truth about Rosalie's death leads ultimately to her narration of a truth, a narrative that makes sense. In this, Suzanne is something of a modernist character in a post-modernist narrative as *Between Men* comes to incorporate the polarities of modernist and postmodernist narrative teloi. She tells Simon, "I'm only interested in laying out a pattern" (84), and Rosalie's story, the story-within-the-story, is brought to a form of modernist closure—symbolic and summary. But at the same time, while Suzanne's story teases the reader with a quasi-symbolic image—Suzanne immersed in what seems like the amniotic fluid of the hot springs, Ace moving towards her, "the perfect innocent, a first man" (310)—her vision of the "final scene" is an ironic coda to both narratives. The ending of *Between Men* does not resolve these contrary epistemologies so much as hold them in solution.

The end-symbol that undercuts closure and accentuates the open-endedness of her own story is the "illumination" of Calgary—the turning-on of the first electric lights—which Suzanne imagines as the "final scene" (310) of the nineteenth-century narrative. But this modern light, paradoxically, is also the source of a new darkness: "Murphy thought the strange thing about the light was the way it made night blacker than ever. He looked beyond the lighted grid of streets to the fringes where darkness had been chased. There he thought he could see the banished and the dead:

the giant blacksmith . . . and beside him the Indian girl . . . Now because they could not be seen they would be there always" (312). If history is the darkness of the past which only story can light sufficiently for us to recognize how we are connected to it, that story-light is *made*, and what it illumines it reveals at the expense of casting or leaving other stories in the shadows, untold. All telling is selection.

When Murphy leaves the riverbank at the end of Chapter 19, he tells us: "How weak I had become! How ancient! . . . Without turning my back on her, I backed away towards town" (275). What is really "ancient" here is how the language recalls another departure and separation, that of Orpheus and Eurydice. In the myth, Orpheus is told that he may lead his wife out of the world of death only if he does not turn to look at her before they reach the world of light; he disobeys, of course, and as he turns he sees her vanish forever back to the world of the lost. Suzanne, it is now clear, has been on an Orphic quest herself, and has appropriated Murphy as her male surrogate. She revises the myth, however, to serve her own rather than patriarchal needs because Suzanne is her own Eurydice. She has made the journey back into her own past to recover a dead self, a self she aborted years before. That self, that un-lived life, is projected into Rosalie New Grass. When Murphy, "Without turning [his] back on her . . . backed away towards town," he enacts Suzanne's revision of Orphic failure as woman's victory: Murphy backs toward the future, toward and into Suzanne, as he/she looks to the past.

What Govier's novel shows is a contemporary woman acting as both Orpheus and Eurydice to herself, containing that myth within her even as she revises it into a story of self-recovery rather than self-loss. The men in Suzanne's life represent figures of life and death, creative possibility and fatal danger. As such they are the poles she must journey between. Govier's novel is a complex feminist work which may disappoint some because of its configuration of her protagonist's life-journey in precisely these terms, as one travelled between men. But in this she should not be considered hopelessly or anachronistically heterosexual, so much as a convincingly realistic and subtle historian of how the way forward for both women and men is not only connected to the past, but will not open out to any really new horizons until women's lives emerge from between men.

NOTES

¹ See her "Canadian Historiographic Metafiction"; historiographic metafiction as a form of postmodern fiction is discussed as well in Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*; *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*; and *The Politics of Postmodernism*.

² Parallels with another work of this kind, Graham Swift's *Waterland*, are also significant: in both works, the protagonists are historians; history is represented as 'mystery'; the mysteries have to do with sex, pregnancy, abortion, and manslaughter, and are 'solved' when the reader discovers the narrator-historians' complicity in the deaths; both novels also move from the metafiction to the mythological, as the mysteries within the histories come to be understood as 'curses' upon the land, which needs to be 'cleansed,' and the protagonist-historians are seen to be seeking 'redemption.'

³ Suzanne encodes elements of Ace's character in Murphy when he returns to Rosalie's grave on the riverbank and tries to absolve himself of his guilt because "I was hurt, too" (274); this is an explicit echo of Ace's excuse to Suzanne after he hit her at the Stampede party (135). Murphy's guilty reaction to Father Andre's testimony (214) recalls Ace's mother's dying wish that he acquire a conscience (198). Also, Murphy's wife has left him for another man who is always out of town, which reprises Ace's situation when Suzanne divorces him in order to marry, more than likely, the ever in-transit Simon. The latter begins to show through in Murphy when Murphy tries to evade his wife Evangeline's challenge with "You imagine I have such powers. I am flattered" (177); two chapters before this, Suzanne has argued with Simon about the nature of power (150-55). When Murphy refers to Evangeline's "infuriating instincts" (177), he echoes Simon's advice to Suzanne (167); similarly, when he chides Evangeline, "You never did understand how the world works" (179), he echoes Simon's description of Suzanne as a naive westerner (150); furthermore, in this exchange, Evangeline sounds like Suzanne when she counters with "Perhaps I understand something more important" (179) and calls him "My sad old man" (180).

⁴ With this, Suzanne also signals her turn away from this guide to another, his wife, Evangeline, whom she will use *against* Murphy.

⁵ Her question to Rosalie, "Why did you not defend yourself?" (281-82), elicits a response that comes from within Suzanne herself: "Oh, our father, our father! Fathers in heaven teach meekness. Obedience. They teach their daughters to be good. Rosalie was 'good' but Rosalie was dead. Rosalie was not in heaven. She was in limbo, like Suzanne. For the *sake* of love. For the *sake* of our father" (282). This echoes her friend Jennifer's earlier diagnosis of their problems as deriving from their relationships with their fathers (238).

⁶ Even here, as moved as she is by Simon's 'kindness,' she immediately rejects his metaphor:

Drive, he called it. Drive was a gross motor activity, something you

did in a truck. What she did was not driving but exploration, a progress with tentacles. Perhaps she had no will to impose, but she had the strength of the vine which, growing on rock, gently, relentlessly probes and may, after many long years, crack open a boulder. (85-86)

As before, Suzanne's imagery here has perhaps been planted in her mind by Simon's earlier description of her legs "'Like the tendrils of a vine'" (76); but what's important is how she is adapting it to her own developing self-image. The imagery here also recalls the strategy of another heroine caught between men; see I.V. Crawford's Malcolm's Katie: A Love Story, I. 20-23.

⁷ See Alex Pett's review for a recognition of the possible mythological density of Simon's character.

⁸ Suzanne's sense of Simon's threat to her unconscious is made explicit when she awakens from her nightmare in Chapter 16, unsure if the man in her bed is Simon or Ace and, like Murphy, finds herself having to conceal her thoughts and feelings: "She had to be on guard; she had to keep her subconscious under lock and key as she did her writing, in the other room, since he [i.e. Simon] had threatened to take that over too. . . . 'I am a prisoner,' she said to herself. 'A prisoner of my own deceit, and of my submission to Simon. I thought I was choosing freedom. Why can I not stop putting myself in jail?' And it came to her how very unhappy she was" (227).

⁹ Rosalie's physical mutilation itself seems to revise through inversion (perversion?) the patriarchal horror of horrors. In the myth, Osiris is dismembered and his body parts scattered, but Set gives special attention to his brother's genitals, which are the only parts the sister-wife Isis fails to recover. What Murphy describes Fisk doing to Rosalie (303) is a brutal projection of this male nightmare upon a female body, whereas Suzanne's dream—the dream of an Isis—will make her and Rosalie whole again.

¹⁰ See her "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography."

¹¹ Daphne Marlatt uses the braid image in this way as epigraph in *Ana Historic: A Novel*; for a brief reference to a similar use of the braid metaphor by two Native women writers, see Emberley, *Thresholds of Difference*, 93.

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