

# A Retrospective Futurity: Daniel MacIvor's *Marion Bridge*

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**R**ECENT THEORIZING ABOUT DIASPORA focuses on the etymology of the word (to scatter; to sow; to inseminate) and on the biological, reproductive Oedipal logic that inevitably shapes the core of its conventional formation. For example, Julia Emberley's analysis of archetypal blood-and-belonging literary diasporas as patrilineal accounts of father/son inheritances provides a standard of how maleness and heterosexuality function in many texts.<sup>1</sup> Kinship and belonging are also central themes in Daniel MacIvor's *Marion Bridge*, but his drama about three complex women has nothing to do with their relationships with men. Instead, MacIvor's play challenges the heterosexuality of the family tree that typically structures diasporic narratives, and it proposes alternatives based not only on the mother/daughter line but also on sexual diversities and diverse identities.

A two-act play produced in 1998, then published and nominated for a Governor General's Award in 1999, *Marion Bridge*<sup>2</sup> consists of a series

1 Emberley, "Institutional Genealogies." See also Sugars and Turcotte, "Introduction" xiv; Bowering Delisle 69; Fortier 410; Madden 174; Gunew 9; and O'Toole 6.

2 Originally developed for Mulgrave Road Theatre, a one-night-stand touring company based in Guysborough, Nova Scotia, this popular play became a catalyst for the company, leading to longer runs and more venues (see Alcorn 108).

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of short, chronologically ordered scenes, each containing a monologue delivered by one of the three main characters. The MacKeigan sisters, all in their thirties, have gathered in the family home to be with their gravely ill mother. Agnes, the eldest hard-living sibling, has left a faltering acting career in Toronto to come back to Sydney, Nova Scotia; Theresa, a cloistered nun, has taken a leave of absence from a religious community in New Brunswick; and Louise, the unemployed perennial "outsider," has never ventured beyond Cape Breton. They fall into familiar patterns of behaviour: Agnes and Theresa argue and bicker while Louise watches television. As they all act out, their dying mother (unseen throughout the play) is upstairs, still exerting her will. Eventually, she commands her daughters to visit their neglectful father. This stirs up more resentment, for he represents the dangers of the past. While they are making that call to him, their mother dies. Each sister grieves the mother's passing in her own fashion, then, in a plot twist worthy of Louise's favourite soaps, find ways to reconnect with Joanie, the daughter Agnes placed for adoption fifteen years before. By the end of the play, the sisters have decided to bring Joanie "home." En route, they also find a way to honour the memory of their deceased mother by detouring to a place she had loved: Marion Bridge.<sup>3</sup>

Because their mother had loved it so well, Marion Bridge holds a mythic place in the imaginations of the three main protagonists. Their stories about how they remember a family trip to this small community about twenty kilometres from Sydney invoke what Stuart Hall calls "a narrative of displacement" that recreates "the endless desire to return to lost origins" (402). Further, for Igor Maver, Marion Bridge would stand in for the MacKeigan's nostalgically invested and contested "home," and,

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Eventually, the play was performed across Canada, and in October 2005 it had a five-week run on a New York stage. During that period, the play was reviewed twice in the *New York Times* (see Jefferson and Zinoman). MacIvor went on to adapt the play into a script, which was published in 2002 and produced as a motion picture by Idlewild Films/Sienna Films. The movie version of Marion Bridge won the Best Canadian First Feature Film award at the Toronto International Festival in 2002. Both the play and the screenplay of *Marion Bridge* were published together by Talonbooks in 2006. In this article, all references to *MB* are to the revised 2008 edition.

3 The small community of Marion Bridge is located between two other river crossings (Albert Bridge and Victoria Bridge) on the famed Mira River in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The word "Mira" is a reference to the Gaelic mire, meaning "a playing, sporting, diversion [or] frolic" (*Dictionary Gaelic* 658). This is what the place "means" for the characters in *Marion Bridge* too, especially in the film version which features Allister MacGillivray's summertime tune "Song for the Mira."

paradoxically, it would be “a place of no return” (“Introduction” x). In the play, glimpses into how the three sisters reimagine Marion Bridge map an intense longing for events that have been lost, perhaps not even experienced. What this “homeplace” comes to represent is a profound state of turning backward in time, of being temporarily en route to a displaced self and destination.

All of this resonates with the diasporic condition as it is theorized by Smaro Kamboureli. Like Hall and Maver, Kamboureli analyzes the diasporic state as a journey toward an origin that one is “never destined to return to ...” (132). Kamboureli also notes that a shift or change often occurs during a subject’s “becoming” diasporic, specifically at the moment of realizing that the “otherness” of identity is defined by something “foreign” or outside the self. Kamboureli calls this a “self-identification by negation” and postulates that this process sets up a binary of the “I” and “not-I” selves. Within that paradigm, the subject realizes identity cannot be found through a relation to some remote place that s/he is attached to, but it must be discovered in the context of self-negation in present place and time (139).

This essay examines each sister’s individual and collective journey back through memory to show how identity and desire are routed/rooted in the play. As I address the inward contestations of Agnes, Theresa, and Louise (through Kamboureli’s paradigm of the “I” and “not-I” selves) I also “queer” the concept of diaspora, in particular its dependence on a genealogical, heteronormative, reproductive logic.<sup>4</sup> This framework of “queer diaspora,” based on the criticism of Johanna X. K. Garvey and Meg Wesling, articulates other forms of subjectivity, kinship, and community that are not visible or audible within standard mappings of diaspora.<sup>5</sup> My use of the critical language of queer diaspora, therefore, refers to a range of dissident and non-heteronormative practices and desires that are (often) incommensurate with the identity categories of gay and lesbian. Further, this reading of queerness sees the characters in *Marion Bridge* accommodate multiple desirings and states of (un)belonging to ultimately reorient the traditionally backward-looking glance of diaspora.

While MacIvor’s setting (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada) may stand at a distance from more recent “third”/developing world queer diasporic

4 I am not using “queer” as an equation for same-sex desire/identity. Rather, it is a praxis of resistance or a disruption of “normal” and the heteropatriarchy. See Corr 2 and Garvey 762.

5 The other queer diaspora critics that influenced my reading include Hayes, Sinfield, and Bolaki.

studies, the play does focus on similar strategies of queer representation, non-heteronormativity, and female subjectivity. One could look at an article by Gayatri Gopinath for other scholarly comparisons. Although Gopinath focuses on South Asia, and the film *Fire* by the Indian Canadian director Deepa Mehta in particular, her application provides useful scaffolding for this project. Of course, my paper works with different sources (both primary and secondary), but it does follow three of Gopinath's queer diasporic "positionalities," each of which I relate to a sister in *Marion Bridge*. Gopinath's first level "situates the formation of sexual subjectivity within transnational flows of culture, capital, bodies, desire, and labor" ("Local Sites" 150). This fits well with Agnes, the "straight" sister, who troubles the sexual ideologies of "home" and seeks the individual freedom offered through out-migration. The second category of Gopinath's queer diaspora "contests the logic that situates the terms 'queer' and 'diaspora' as dependent on the originality and authenticity of 'heterosexuality' and 'nation'" ("Local Sites" 150). Middle sister Theresa's immersion in the homosociality of religious disciplinship works well here, as her positionality contests the logic of blood and patrilineal descent that situates diaspora within heterosexuality and reproduction. Lastly, Gopinath's third level "disorganizes the dominant categories ... for sexual variance, namely, 'gay and lesbian,' and it marks a different economy of desire that escapes legibility within both normative Indian contexts and homonormative white Euro-American contexts" ("Local Sites" 150–51). When applied to the youngest sibling Louise, this lens reveals a queerer type of desiring, one that escapes both normative (Cape Breton/Catholic/Canadian) contexts and homonormative (gay/lesbian) Eurocentric contexts.

Finally, my title "Retrospective Futurity" borrows from the politics of queer temporalities and potentialities as they are theorized by Anne-Marie Fortier, Nishant Shahani, and Jose Esteban Munoz. Charting queer migrations as "movement out of place" (Fortier 406), "at odds with time" (Shanhani 4), and "not-yet-here" (Esteban Munoz 1), these critics offer an additional alternative hermeneutic for the "strange" character Louise. What follows, then, is an examination of each sister's monologue to one, locate the "I" versus "not-I" binary and re-map identity; two, deconstruct the diasporic "positionality" and reconstitute memory; and three, decode the queer (un)belonging and re-situate "home." Emerging from all this is a linked, rather than divided, family and a glimpse, at the end, of their eminent "futurity" together.

## Agnes's shifting selves

Agnes MacKeigan, the eldest sister home from eking out a living in Toronto, is the most cosmopolitan of the three. This character also represents a variation of a Maritime staple: the prodigal child returning, but not going back, to the big city. However, MacIvor has brought tensions into her characterization to make Agnes unique within this “type.” She is not an “economic exile” like those individuals described by Herb Wylie in his recent study of Atlantic-Canadian diasporas, nor is she forced by circumstance to work outside of the region (61). Because she does not pine for home or act homesick for Cape Breton at all, this character also fails to fit the extended definition of the out-migrating diaspora as it is argued by Jennifer Bowering Delisle (65). A hard-living actress still getting second- or third-string roles, Agnes's faltering career sees her taking on the personalities of others. Throughout the play, she has more trouble keeping an identity as opposed to searching for one. She never abandons “herself” outright, but, as Kamboureli would put it, “slowly reshapes ... in terms of [a] changing understanding of self” (36). Hence, we get important glimpses through this character of how MacIvor's diaspora is different—Agnes has an agonized relationship to her past and with each and every one of her “homes” (including Toronto). This seems to engender in her a perpetual sense of not quite having left Cape Breton and not quite having arrived anywhere else.<sup>6</sup>

Agnes's estrangement from home is not the result but the reason for leaving. Home became “ruptured” for her when she gave birth to an illegitimate daughter: “But Mother and the bloody Church. No—I won't even blame the Church—because it was really just all about what would the neighbours think—all about bloody appearances. And I can't forgive her for that” (*MB* 45). Because “home” has no place for a woman like her, she alternates between the desire to flee Cape Breton again and the need to find her long-lost daughter and remain nearby.

The tension between escape and rescue is apparent in the monologue that opens the play. It begins with the line: “In the dream I'm drowning”

<sup>6</sup> The playwright's life story reads like a journeying back home. The MacIvors are from the Boisdale area of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. The youngest of five children of Buster MacIvor, a housepainter, and Lillian MacIvor, a waitress, Daniel was born on 3 July 1962. After attending Sydney Academy in Cape Breton, he studied at Dalhousie University in Halifax from 1980 to 1982, moved briefly to Newfoundland and then to Toronto, where he finished his theatre studies at George Brown College (from 1983 to 1985). After a long stay in Toronto where he wrote, directed, and acted in plays and films and on television, he now resides in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley. Biographical details about the author from Moser, Knowles, Morden, Quint, Wasserman, Borody, Sponagle, and Burns.

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(*MB* 15). MacIvor has worked with this trope before in *Never Swim Alone* (produced and nominated for the Chalmers New Canadian Play Award in 1991, published in 1993). In *Never Swim Alone*, a girl in a bathing suit and two male characters, Frank and Bill, engage in a competitive swim to an island during which the girl drowns. With that in mind, a close reading of *Marion Bridge's* opening monologue reveals that Agnes's swimming dream is more than a competitive display: it produces inward contestations that Kamboureli refers to as the "I" and "not-I" selves. In the midst of going under, Agnes describes, in dreamlike fashion, a family gathered for a picnic on the distant shore. The drowning dreamer makes a gesture toward them: "And with all my strength—if you can call strength that strange, desperate, exhausted panic—I wave. My right arm. High. So they'll be sure to see" (*MB* 16). The dream family on the beach notices Agnes out in the water and responds to her presence, bringing to the fore a sense of the forgotten and unacknowledged, the repressed and the denied: "And then all of them, standing in a perfect line, they all wave back" (*MB* 16). This gesture—the wave—becomes a symbol of the precarious state in which Agnes often finds herself: that moment of drowning because she can't face her past; that moment of rescue because she needs to find "family."

The threshold state between drowning and rescue illustrates the main tenets of the diasporic condition: anxiety, self-exile, misalignment. There are many boundaries that separate Agnes from feeling "at home," and this reinforces her anxious exilic state of mind. As we see in the opening of act 1, scene 2, she is both intimate with, and in opposition to, the people, culture, and rituals of Toronto and Cape Breton. This point is brought into relief in the episode of the cut flowers, when Agnes marches all over Sydney trying to find a fresh bouquet for her dying mother. She compares the offerings in Sydney with "home" (meaning in this instance Toronto) where "there are flower shops on every block, and tulips with heads as big as your fist" (*MB* 32). Here, Agnes's adopted place—Toronto—is presented as a positive, progressive metropolis. It also illustrates Johanna X. K. Garvey's claim that "queer" (un)belonging, a "praxis of resistance," signals how the migrant must "accommodate multiple identities" to respond to "normative attitudes" (758). In this instance, the sense of not-belonging in Sydney and the negative feeling that engenders and perpetuates it get diluted in a diasporic nostalgia. Toronto is merely the symbolic space through which that process is realized. However, one scene later, the equation shifts and Toronto becomes the specific location of her undoing. Agnes shapes a different relation of self and place the moment she confesses to Theresa: "My acting [in Toronto] is turning out to be a very expensive, time-consuming

and demoralizing hobby ... My friends are all alcoholics and drug addicts to whom I owe money" (*MB* 42). This acknowledged binary between her "I" self at home in the metropolis versus her "not-I" self as career and relationship disaster represents a shift toward Kamboureli's small "i" identity (149).

The rejection of diasporic nostalgia and the embrace of the reality of life in Toronto helps shape a new kind of belonging for Agnes, which does not demand conformity to prescribed identities and dreams of an elsewhere. It also signals how Agnes's "I" and "not-I" selves, initially depicted as selfishly self-absorbed, seek new definitions in the diaspora as she slowly comes to terms with the vestiges of her Cape Breton past. In the first instance, she seeks out her estranged daughter Joanie, who is now a teenager. Interestingly, Agnes talks to Joanie but does not identify herself as her biological mother: this slippage suggests Agnes envisions a different way of being "family" that does not invariably replicate heteronormative structures. It also represents a re-scripting into a smaller "i" identity, underscoring a shift in Agnes's eternal point of reference from herself to her daughter. In the second instance, Agnes is persuaded by Theresa's humane vision of rescuing Joanie and bringing her "home." This leads all of them toward a new way of remembering the past, of being in the present, and of envisioning the future.

### Theresa's blood logic

If queer is, on one level, a "reading and citational practice" (Gopinath, *Impossible Desires* 22), then a critique of the middle sister's monologue, symbolically located at act 2, scene 2 or the middle section of the play, reveals the dichotomies through which the drama is structured, including the strange versus the normal, Cape Breton versus the rest of Canada, Sydney versus Marion Bridge, and heterosexuality versus non-normativity.

Theresa MacKeigan's role as a cloistered Catholic nun implicates her in a familiar Cape Breton script and makes her the most traditional heroine in the play. According to Cynthia Sugar's theories about Canada's "ancestral impulse," Theresa represents a "founder-figure" ("(Dis)inheriting" 179). An individual amongst "Sisters [who] believe that it's best to use living things to make living things," Theresa is involved in building a New World community from "the blood of the earth" (*MB* 65). Additionally, Herb Wylie would call her part of the "Folk paradigm,"<sup>7</sup> "romantic, pre-modern, rural, and small-m Maritime ... thoroughly associated with a life of resource extraction [that is, farming] and proximity to the natural

7 The term "Folk paradigm" and the activities associated with the "Folk" are from/described by Ian McKay (308).



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elements” (22). However, the link between the community and continuity is undercut if this character adheres to vows of chastity because Theresa will not leave behind a genealogical connection through descendants or offspring. Therefore, this chaste nun makes problematic the inherited link between people and land/place that is part of the conventional way of reading Maritime characters (and the diaspora). In other words, with Theresa, the playwright both creates a symbolic foremother type and disavows or cancels her out.

Throughout the play, Theresa, the self-confessed “good one, the peacemaker” (*MB* 66), is also the character who is the most obsessed with social cohesion and integration. She seeks to enforce her own version of a unified family, which is based on the omission of certain realities, such as Agnes’s estranged daughter Joanie and Louise’s “queer” relationship with Dory Ferguson. A divided being, Theresa seems to live alongside others, but in a cloistered way, until she pulls back from the precipice of cynicism and willed ignorance through her “I” versus “not-I” diasporic struggle.

One of the main messages of the play is the tension between different meanings ascribed to rootedness and belonging. With Agnes, an uprooted state of mind divides her between home and host land; until she finds resolution, she is unable to belong in either. Using Kamboureli’s paradigm, we can locate a similar shift with Theresa. It occurs during her monologue when she acknowledges “And that’s really all I’ve got: the farm, the animals, the earth. And my faith. But lately I’ve been wondering if I’m there more for the farm than the faith” (*MB* 65–66). Realizing that her role as a nun is separate from the place to which she is attached (the farm in New Brunswick) and knowing that she is there more for Mother Nature than Mother Superior brings Theresa to her “I” “not-I” crossroads. Following that, her resolution into a small “i” identity takes place in three separate phases. First, she makes an effort to connect with her own estranged family by journeying to Cape North and meeting Joanie; then, she acknowledges that something is going on between Louise and Dory; and, finally, she decides to leave the nunnery, the Sisters, and the New Brunswick farm.

My argument thus far has suggested a range and complexity of non-heteronormative identities and allegiances as they emerge within the very fissures of heteropatriarchal Catholic Cape Breton. Agnes, the unwed teenage mother, confronts notions of proper Catholic womanhood upon which Cape Breton’s patriarchal ideology depends. Theresa, the celibate nun who escaped the strictures of conjugal heterosexual domesticity to live with like-minded women, subsequently rejects the nunnery, which further challenges Catholic ideology’s reliance on the devout woman as



a means of ensuring religious community. Finally, the “strange” Louise, who also resists conventional gender and sexual identities, is extricated from patriarchal heteronormativity not only through her connection to Dory but also through her alternative circuits of pleasure and fantasy. As we shall see, Louise’s “queer” desire ends up grounding the family in an ideality distilled from the past yet looking toward the future.

### Louise’s queer desiring

Youngest sibling Louise, a laid-off bar waitress, represents the modern workforce reliant on an unstable service economy.<sup>8</sup> While Louise’s inheritance of role and of place seems the most legitimate because she has remained to do the eldercare, she also represents a site of resistance in regards to the re/productive imperative. Through Louise, “queerness” manifests itself in her unproductive use of time, in imaginative relationships to alternative worlds and non-heteronormative sexualities, and in alienation within the home/from society.

For Agnes, specifically, home is a place to leave behind. Similarly, Theresa emerges from home into another more liberatory space. Louise is the only one to stay put, to remain in Cape Breton. So why is she such an “alien,” perennially “outside” the family/home? In the play, Louise complains: “I never get to be part of nothing ... Always always ‘cause I’m strange or something” (*MB* 72). Elsewhere in the drama, Agnes and Theresa also label her “strange” (*MB* 22, 23). The emphasis on Louise’s “strangeness” delineates how her day-to-day experience is distinct from that of both Agnes and Theresa. She appears to live for, and through, the sitcom world—a soap opera called “Ryan’s Cove.” By playing up the everyday and typically mundane world of small town “anywhere” with its inquisitive neighbours, archetypal heterosexual nuclear families (in which many female characters are “confused and [have] trouble with men” [*MB* 30]), MacIvor uses the television soap to critique heteronormativity. Despite the fact that the weirdness on the television screen gradually disintegrates into an elaborate simulacrum of aliens, werewolves, and the “identical cousin thing” (*MB* 54), it pre-empts, for a while, the MacKeigan family’s own story of death, teenage pregnancy, illicit offspring, unemployment, inertia, and alcoholism. Louise’s decision to stop watching (act 1, scene 5—the scene when she dons a skirt) marks an implicit moment in the play when she decides to switch off the television world that has created some of her internal exile.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel MacIvor’s mother Lillian was a waitress in Sydney during the time he was growing up (1960s and 1970s). See Moser 2.

She may be called strange, but no one would claim she is alienated from Cape Breton ways. Like her sister Agnes, Louise seems to have not quite arrived anywhere. A different sort of diasporizing is at work here, and a close reading of Louise's monologue traces how the "I" in her driving narrative serves as an allegory for her vexed position within the heterosexual matrix. Ultimately, this passage is one of movement and relation, involving the "stranger," her trips, and the audience in a transcendent journey that resists teleology as it also defies categories and boundaries.

The highway monologue begins with Louise positing a vision of driving as a metaphysical act: "it's like the road is steering the machine, and then it's like you're steering the road, and then it's like the road is coming in through the front of the machine and moving right through your body and shooting out the back" (*MB* 88). This represents Louise's moment of "becoming" diasporic, realizing that the "otherness" of identity is defined by something "foreign" or outside the self (Kamboureli 139). In this instance, it is the machine and the road that create, and negate, the character's "I" self. Louise relates how her consciousness opens up so much she speaks of herself as "you." This point of reference accommodates multiple identities: "and you are the machine you're in and you are the road under you, and you are the wind and the air and the light and the music and the empty mirror" (*MB* 88). It is not clear if the small-"you" pronoun is singular or plural; in any case, it helps bring the reader(s) along for the ride too. At the endpoint, Louise's "I" identity is no longer there: not even her reflection shows in that "empty mirror." Instead, she is a consciousness "moving, still, moving, still, both exactly perfectly, moving, still, both at the same time, and everything is you and you are everything" (*MB* 88). Drawing on Anne-Marie Fortier's analysis of "queer time," I read this stillness and motion, self-consciousness and obliviousness as "sexuality on the move" (406).

The activity of timelessness and its relation to sex/motion indicates that Louise has the potential to shift beyond the linearity of presentness as she rewrites her map of everyday life. Her diaspora does not mean she needs to out-migrate or in some way leave the Maritimes; rather, the transformative change is an escape from her own internalized self-exile. This is made more obvious in the final few lines of the monologue, when she directly addresses the audience with a plea to try and understand this "strangeness": "You might think that'd be strange to think that way but that's okay because people think I'm strange anyway. And maybe I am some ways" (*MB* 88).<sup>9</sup> Without saying so, Louise tells us her sexuality/

<sup>9</sup> The use of the direct address to the audience to acknowledge, surprise, challenge, or entertain is standard fare in MacIvor plays. For examples, see *Wild Abandon*

identity is “queer.” Her escapes (through television sitcoms or “riding” her own machine) provide a means of feeling more comfortable within her own skin. More importantly, she’s also leading into a confession about what she most wants—a prize possession, Dory Ferguson’s red pick-up truck (*MB* 96).

I am trying to argue that the complex relations between Louise, the truck, and Dory form a queer model of “being” beyond the specific conditions of lesbianism; nevertheless, the fact remains that Louise is brought out of her “cloister” through her connection to Dory. Agnes describes Dory as “kind of a little ... butch” (*MB* 48), and fact-restricted Theresa acknowledges, “I wasn’t born yesterday. I hear what people say about Dory Ferguson” (*MB* 71). While MacIvor resists naming the relationship between the decidedly unaware Louise and the butch Dory with prescribed frameworks such as lesbian or homosexual or gay, queer theorist Nishant Shahani would argue the “hermeneutics of suspicion that mark queer epistemologies” surround these characters (10). Here, we might argue that both Dory’s and Louise’s sexual identities seem almost inarticulable, signifying the failure of Cape Breton to progress toward the organization of sexuality and gender prevalent in the rest of Canada.<sup>10</sup> Since the text refuses to name their sexuality, then, the concept of “strangeness” functions allegorically and represents the “illegibility and unrepresentability” (Gopinath, *Impossible Desires* 16) of being queer within Cape Breton’s patriarchal and heterosexual configurations.

While Louise’s “strangeness” is being expressed as just one of the many non-normative sexualities/subjectivities in the play, she knows she’s “queerer” than most: “But see for me it’s like everybody’s strange, it’s just that some people show it more than other people do” (*MB* 88). Interestingly, Louise uses her uniquely queer insights to decode a vision that appears in the sky over Marion Bridge. When Theresa joins in and grapples with its meaning too, the various interpretations of the sky vision enable Agnes to disentangle the “dreamed-up” family from her real one.

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*Abandon* (performed 1988, published 1990) and *2-2 Tango* (produced 1991, published 1992).

<sup>10</sup> See also Anne-Marie MacDonald’s Cape Breton novel *Fall on Your Knees* (1996), a story about unacknowledged lesbian desire that haunts the characters who consistently ignore it and displace it (similar to the way they fail to face other transgressions such as incest and miscegenation). For more on the connections between taboos, homosexuality, and Cape Breton, see Parro 189.

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### Marion Bridge: past and present

In advance of the closing scene, the three sisters, who are now grieving their mother’s death, contemplate a detour to Marion Bridge on their way to rescuing Joanie. Throughout the play, Marion Bridge operates as a blueprint and schemata of an ideal past; at the end, it functions as a kind of “wish-landscape” similar to the queer utopias posited by Jose Esteban Munoz (5). We see this potential emerge in a conversation between the siblings as they hash out the reasons why Louise failed to make that long-ago family trek. Louise believes that “It was supposed to be all special and that and then I had the chicken pox and Mother said we’d wait ‘til next week but Dad said no you were going anyway and you two made egg salad sandwiches and went off [to Marion Bridge] without me” (*MB* 72). Agnes questions: “You weren’t there?” (*MB* 72). Louise goes on to explain: “That’s what I’m saying and I had to stay here with Deena Jessome babysitting me with all them boys around who I hated” (*MB* 72). This exchange illustrates how two siblings can entertain different remembered versions of the past. It also makes Louise’s “strangeness” evident (again), as her reason for not joining the family involves a complicated, non-normative arrangement of desire. This becomes more obvious a few scenes later when Theresa, intervening in the remembering, recalls the fact that Louise’s chicken pox occurred “Two weeks before. You were fine. You just wanted to stay home because Deena Jessome was coming over to babysit you” (*MB* 100). As much as these scenes serve as collective reconstructions through memory, remembrance, and storytelling, they also destabilize concepts of reality as objective and of “home” as a site of compulsory heterosexuality.

Once Louise gets the story “straight,” she is given the mental equilibrium to step out of the linearity of “presentness” and see a queerness that registers on the horizon of existence by the river at Marion Bridge. Similar to the way she processed reality in her highway monologue, Louise looks beyond the wind, air, and light, sees clouds and then “a girl ... With her arm up” (*MB* 101). This sky girl, who appears to be waving at the trio on the beach, represents Joanie, the “future” family member they are about to bring home. However, when Agnes looks at the same cloud formation, she interprets the girl’s gesture differently: instead of waving, “She’s swimming” (*MB* 101). Within the context of Agnes’s dreamscape, this is not a future welcoming them; rather, it is a past haunting her. The arm raised to the people on the seashore would be a sign she’s going under—a desperate signal for help, for rescue. Louise continues to decode the puzzle though. She corrects Agnes’s interpretation of a swimmer, insisting, “No she’s riding a horse” (*MB* 101). Agnes interrupts with “I don’t see the horse

... Where's the horse?" (*MB* 101). She needs help pinpointing the details, so Theresa jumps in with—"Right under her—see that big piece is the head and—" (*MB* 101). After Agnes admits, "Oh yes I see it" (*MB* 101), Theresa declares, "She's flying" (*MB* 101).

From this passage, it is not clear whether the sky girl is swimming, riding a horse, or flying. Obviously, we can conclude that, in MacIvor's world, there is no one way of interpretation and that all subjective points of view can exist simultaneously. However, through the optic of Louise, who always sees otherwise, the girl in the clouds has her arm up and is smiling, happy, riding a steed. When that image is connected to Agnes's dream, the spectre (of drowning, diaspora, death) is acknowledged and a reconciliation, a settling, can occur. The waving girl in the clouds achieves it through a process of bringing what Estaban Munoz calls, "the no-longer conscious" into the "not-yet-here"; the trope of the sky girl eclipses the older trope of Agnes drowning in her dream and points toward a "collective futurity" with Joanie (12, 26, 83). That done, Agnes's "homing desire" can shift from her own unease and thoughts of death and ground itself in her "floating" daughter (Hassan 163).

The revisit to Marion Bridge ends with the family connected (instead of another family disconnect). The final stage directions read: "The three women ... stand [on the shoreline] each with an arm above their head" (*MB* 102). We are left with a vision of the MacKeigans on a beach, waving back at us. This echoes the dream family who also stood in a row on a shoreline, waving at the drowning swimmer. The dramaturgy of those gestures brings us full circle, creating a syncretic, unified ending that also includes an anticipatory illumination of their new reality. This is obvious in the sisters' subjective interpretations, which see the sky girl vacillate from a past incarnation (drowning) into a future actuality (swimming/riding/flying). Like the mythic Marion Bridge, this aerial avatar is treated with an almost mystical aura of reverence, confirming how the adopted-out Joanie represents an ideality beyond herself.

### **The retrospective futurity of Joanie**

Throughout the play, Joanie is described as troubled and "unconventional" (*MB* 94). When Theresa finds out Joanie is three months pregnant, she tells Agnes "And that that ... arse of a boyfriend he's just left her high and dry" (*MB* 94). Now facing parenthood on her own, Joanie serves as another example of how patriarchy is disrupted. She also becomes key in two diasporic struggles, giving Theresa a purpose—"She needs some help. We have no choice but to do it" (*MB* 94)—and Agnes a blood tie, "Oh my

God, a grandmother. I'm not even used to being a mother yet" (*MB* 94). Joanie is the missing link who helps them articulate and accept their own "not-I" selves against which (and through which) they find their new small "i" identities. In her, I would argue, can be seen the "interstitial future" described by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (219). In that text, Bhabha is referring to something that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present. Further, using the theorizing of Esteban Munoz, Joanie also represents the family's "collective futurity" (26).

At Marion Bridge, they collectively reach some kind of "home" en route to a future destination (Joanie). It has been a challenging process, and they are all changed by the journey. Theresa has decided to homestead not with nuns but with her sisters and niece. Louise has understood that the woman riding her own steed in the clouds or rig on the road can also be connected to others. While she is still marked by the affective disjunction of being "queer" in Cape Breton—she is able to say she wants Dory's truck but not able to say she wants Dory—there's a lot of optimism and a slight tone of comedy to this situation, giving the audience the sense that Louise might not even know she desires Dory (yet). And, finally, prodigal daughter Agnes gets saved by the family she rejected. The dramatic dream at the beginning of the play allows Agnes to work through her trauma (about losing her way, giving up Joanie). As a result, instead of experiencing yet another diasporic disunity with the "I" "not-I" paradigm, she shifts away from the oppositional binary toward an entirely different small "i" resolution and sets out to bring Joanie home.

The circular ending enables all three sisters to construct another fantasy at Marion Bridge. This one concludes with a "retrospective futurity" that depends upon Agnes bringing the "illegitimate" past back into the family fold. In this new scenario, everyone gets an identity—mother, grandmother, aunts—vis-à-vis the homeless, single, pregnant Joanie. They needed Joanie's crisis, their mother's death, and a visit to their father to redefine family and find their new selves. The message that can be drawn suggests we must strive, in the here and now, to bridge the gap between rootedness and (un)belonging, as family/home awaits in that in-between, retrospectively eminent, but not yet there.

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