

A CATALOGUE OF CULTURAL REFERENCES IN ELIZABETH HAY'S *Late Nights on Air*

## INTRODUCTION:

Elizabeth Hay's novel is set according to precise physical geography: its major characters are always located and positioned with an exacting cartographer's spirit. Less exacting, however, is the cultural geography that influences these characters, evident in the great many references they make (from popular culture as well as elite culture) to actual poems, non-fictional and fictional prose texts, passages from the Bible, Shakespearean plays, newspapers/magazines, comic strips, radio broadcasts, music, and films. Clearly, the most important of these are products of George Whalley's imagination: *The Legend of John Hornby* (1962) and its counterpart CBC radio broadcast, *Death in the Barren Ground: a Narrative of John Hornby's Last Journey* (1966), both of which are mentioned by Hay in her "Acknowledgements" at the end of the novel. Indeed, John Hornby haunts the North, ultimately inspiring the canoe adventure to the so-called "Barrens" that changes the lives of the story's major characters. Hay credits Ken Puley of the CBC archives, presumably for assistance in allowing her to quote from the Whalley broadcast. The writing of two poets, Alden Nowlan and Margaret Avison, are also formally acknowledged as are three additional texts (presumably that helped shape Hay's understanding of the North as a physical, imaginative, and spiritual place). Although not formally acknowledged, Justice Thomas Berger (most probably through Hay's recall of first hand or radio experience), several recordings of interviews he did for the CBC in the 1970s (available through CBC archives on the Internet), and his two-volume Commissioner's Report into the feasibility of a Mackenzie Valley pipeline (1977) are resources that Hay more than likely relied upon to create a second major plotline for the novel. Interestingly, this plot is not unlike that of Hornby (as presented by George Whalley) since all three men (Berger, Hornby and Whalley) are described as taking "wandering route[s]" toward their desired goals (232). In Berger's case, he refused to be "pushed" and took the time necessary to secure an environmental and cultural future protected from the incursions of corporate Canada for First Nations people in the North. The various hearings of the Berger Commission, and the characters' reflections on them and on the man himself, create the highly charged political and philosophical atmosphere that makes *Late Nights on Air* a fascinating sociological study as well. No less fascinating are the numerous cultural references threaded throughout the novel that not only are used as vehicles through which the main characters communicate as well as show off for one another, but also provide bridges to transport these characters in time and space to lives lived before and apart from where they now find themselves. These references are categorized below under their genres, and the level of detail for each is either drawn from Hay's novel or provided [see square brackets]. This catalogue illustrates the extensive inter-textuality of *Late Nights on Air* as an artefact of late twentieth-century (North)American life.

(Note: references to Berger and the Inquiry will be included in Saturday's panel presentation: "Thomas Berger: Real and Imagined").

Compiled and annotated by Avril Torrence, January 2009

## POETRY:

- Dorothy Parker's "men don't make passes at girls who wear glasses" (4) [Parker's witticism from the *Algonquin Round Table* of authors in 1920s New York]
- Eleanor reading Milton
- Alden Nowlan's "Broadcaster's Poem" (quoted 8-9) [see "Acknowledgements"]
- Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" (31)
- Ezra Pound's *Cathay* (34) [19 poems published in 1915]
- F. T. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Poems [Best Songs and Lyrical Poems]* (53) [first published 1861 and reprinted, rereleased numerous times]
- James McIntyre's ode to the Ingersoll cheese & Walter de la Mare, Tennyson, Christina Rossetti, Shakespeare (54) [Ingersoll, Ont., celebrates their (cheese) poet laureate through a yearly contest; McIntyre (1827-1906) wrote poetry on "dairy" themes]
- Mr Funk (55) [of Funk and Wagnall's dictionary]
- Shakespeare's sonnets (78)
- Allusion to Margaret Avison's *A Kind of Perseverance* re: robin's egg (260) [see "Acknowledgements"]
- Limerick of Adam and Eve (267)

## NON-FICTIVE PROSE:

- *The Legend of John Hornby* (20, 27, 43, 229-32, 246, 295-6, 298-99, 310)
- Eleanor's father's "books about the Far North": Franklin, Ross, Peary, Cook, Rasmussen, Stefansson, Samuel Hearne, David Thompson, John Hornby (54) [All of these explorers of the North have either written texts and/or have had books written about them; Franklin is also mentioned on 156.]
- William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (64, 275) [1902, early psychologizing of science and religion; see Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/621>]
- Agnes Dean Cameron's "book about her travels to the Arctic in 1908" (92) [Cameron (1863-1912) was British Columbia's first woman school principal who wrote The New North: Being Some Account of a Woman's Journey through Canada to the Arctic (1909) see e-book at <http://greynose.net/genes/public/ebooks/12874-h/12874-h.htm>]
- Edgar Christian's diary: *Unflinching* (1937) (122, 361) [In 1980, George Whalley reissued Christian's diary as *Death in the Barren Ground*]
- Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* (123) [pub. In 1971]
- Edith Hamilton [1867-1963] on Hercules, Iole, Deianara (132) [see her *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* (1942)]
- Rasmussen's *Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou Eskimos* (150-51) [another name for the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition* – see "Acknowledgements"]
- *The Diary of Anne Frank* [1929-45] 198) [diary produced by Anne in Amsterdam while her Jewish family was in hiding from the Nazis; first published after her death by her father in Dutch in 1947; later translated into English]

- “Ralph’s northern books” and the phrase “to have felt snow and ice forever, and nothing forever but snow and ice” (212)
- Farley Mowat’s *Tundra* (251, 278-9 (Mallet’s recounting of starving Eskimos) [“The Trader Speaks”]) [1973 collection of “chronicles of high endeavour” (12): see especially Mowat’s “The Spring that Never Came” a reading of John Hornby and Edgar Christian through excerpts from Christian’s diary.]
- Words from an “old botanist”: “One day something relaxed inside and I saw things in a new way” (282)

#### FICTION:

- French professor’s choice of Stendahl’s *Scarlet and Black* for Comor’s “Hermit’s Choice” radio program (38) [*Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830)]
- Montreal poet, Louis Dudek [1918-2001], chooses Joyce’s *Ulysses* (38) [1922 “stream of consciousness” novel known for its difficult style]
- Work of Ring Lardner (55) [American short story writer and sports columnist of the “ink-stained wretch” variety [1885-1933]
- “like a lost wave seeking a forgotten shore” Eleanor claims as a line without a source quoted by her father (56, 236). [Dido later (357) attributes the line to A.E. Coppard (1878-1857) an English short story writer]
- *La fille qui était laide* a “picture book” (57, 132)
- Allusion to *Old Yeller* (75) [animal novel (1956) by Fred Gipson]
- Eddy carrying a “pocket Faulkner” (97) [William Faulkner – a fiction writer of the American South (1897-1962)]
- Allusion to Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* (113) [*À la recherche du temps perdu* (7 vols 1913-27, semi-autobiographical novel, with the instant link to the past produced by the *madeleine* often cited]
- Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (120)[1939 hardboiled detective novel]
- George Orwell’s *Down and Out in Paris and London* (128) [1933 semi-autobiographical novel of being “working poor”]
- Dogrib and Raven Tales (217) [part of indigenous oral culture and connected to the preservation of the Dogrib language; see <http://www.native-languages.org/dogrib-legends.htm> ]
- *Cinderella* (272) [a classic fairytale made famous by the Grimm Brothers]
- Virgil’s account of Dido and Iris (285) [See Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Book 4]
- A.E. Coppard’s story of two women and a “long-lost man” (357)

#### BIBLE:

- Reference to George Whalley’s use of the bible, ex: Exekiel (131-2)
- Phrase – “the kingdom of God” (236)
- Eleanor’s recalling of Absalom caught by his hair (285) [see the Book of Samuel]
- Psalm 23 (319)

- Psalm 90 (324-5)

#### SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS:

- “time may not be out of joint” (18) [allusion to *Hamlet* (end of Act 1 Scene 5)]
- “In such a night stood Dido with a willow in her hand” (33) [from *Merchant of Venice*, Act 5 Scene 1]
- *Othello* and *Macbeth* (54)
- Reference to Iago from *Othello* (158)
- “Sweet are the uses of adversity . . . Which like the toad, ugly and venomous . . . wears yet a precious jewel in his head” (258) [Duke Senior in Act 2, Scene 1 of *As You Like It*]

#### NEWSPAPERS/MAGAZINES:

- *The London Free Press* (42 & 43) [the daily newspaper of London, Ontario]
- *Blackwood’s Magazine* article about Dickens’s son, Frank (120) [*Blackwood’s Magazine* published 1817-1980; Dickens’s son, Francis Jeffrey Dickens (1844-1886) served in India for the Bengal Mounted Police and then later was a member of the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police.]
- *News of the North* (335) [Yellowknife weekly newspaper edited by Peter Gorrie in the late 1970s; in 1980 it became *News/North* which, in 2003, became *Northwest Territories news/North*.]

#### COMIC STRIPS/BOOKS:

- *Johnny Q* and *On Stage* (Mary Perkins & Pete Fletcher) (19, 36, 43, 199, 204) [*On Stage* was an American newspaper comic strip by Leonard Starr, running 1957-1979, featuring the backstage life of actress Mary Perkins.]
- Ronny Ferguson reading Marvel comics (153)

#### RADIO BROADCASTS:

- “London Calling” BBC Radio (3, 60) [the BBC’s World Service had for 75 years (1922-2007) been teaching the English language to people around the world; in particular, “London Calling” was influential in central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War; hear audio documentary with archive material at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1340\\_ws\\_75/page5.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1340_ws_75/page5.shtml) ]
- Margaret Leighton reading Noel Coward (3) [British stage actress and famous British actor/writer/singer during the 1920-40s; to hear what came to be known as the Coward and Leighton “duologues” listen to the Caedmon Treasury (audio) of Sir Noel Coward and Margaret Leighton performing Coward's adaptation of his "Brief Encounter," scenes from "Blithe Spirit" and "Present Laughter," the interlude from Bernard Shaw's "The Apple Cart," concluding with the duo reading more from Coward's *Collected Verse*.]

- John Hornby, Edgar Christian, Harold Adlard in radio drama , *Death in the Barren Ground* (20-21, 25,121,124-28)
- Allusion to “one of [Pound’s] fascist broadcasts for Radio Rome (34) [Twice-weekly from 1940-43, these broadcasts, in English, were directed at the UK and the US and show an anti-semitic, pro-fascist side to this highly acclaimed American poet; see [http://yamaguchy.netfirms.com/7897401/pound\\_ezra/radioPound.html](http://yamaguchy.netfirms.com/7897401/pound_ezra/radioPound.html) for text copy of the first five.]
- Henry Comor and “Hermit’s Choice” Saturday nights (37) [a CBC radio program, 1963-68, written and hosted by Henry Comor]
- J.Frank Willis reporting on the 1936 Moose River mine disaster (38) [The news story and CBC archives of Willis broadcasting from the site itself are available from [http://archives.cbc.ca/economy\\_business/natural\\_resources/clips/3860/](http://archives.cbc.ca/economy_business/natural_resources/clips/3860/) ]
- The Archers, John Drainie (story reader), Max Ferguson (Rawhide), weather, farm broadcast (42-43) [Archers was/is a BBC radio soap opera set in the midlands of England; John Drainie (1916-66) was a famous Canadian radio actor, especially as Jake in CBC’s radio series of W.O. Mitchell’s *Jake and the Kid*: see/hear <http://www.broadcasting-history.ca/personalities/personalities.php?id=204>; Max Ferguson’s Rawhide – political satire – broadcast from 1946-63 on the CBC radio; see/hear <http://archives.cbc.ca/programs/611/> ]
- Playing of Kathleen Ferrier singing Brahms (199) [Johanes Brahms (1833-97) possibly heard on CBC radio two in the 1960s?; Kathleen Ferrier (1912-53) was a popular English contralto concert singer]
- George Whalley’s own voice as “cultured” the type “that used to be the only voice on CBC radio” (231) [reference continues to Whalley’s 1953 radio play (broadcast in 1954—provider unknown?) of Edgar Christian’s diary, *Death in the Barren Ground* that later expanded into the 1962 book *The Legend of John Hornby*, and the 1966 CBC broadcast: *Death in the Barren Ground*]
- “Blue Suede Shoes” on the radio (304) [Carl Perkins’s famous tune, recorded in 1956, that gradually changed radio from talk to rock]

#### MUSIC:

- Mrs Dargabbe’s request for Mozart (9) [Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart 1756-91]
- Lucia Popp singing “Queen of the Night” (10) [Soprano aria from Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*]
- Gershwin as J.Frank Willis’s choice for “Hermit’s Choice” (38) [1898-1937, very popular American composer who collaborated with his brother and lyricist, Ira Gershwin: jazz, Broadway, and classical]
- Berlioz’s *Les Troyens* , opera of Dido’s and Aeneas’s tragic passion, founding of Rome and fall of Carthage (78-9, 166, 280) [an 1858 opera based on Virgil’s *Aeneid* tracing the Trojans and the Trojan war]
- Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash and Conway Twitty instead of opera (79) [country and western singers, most famous in the mid 20th century]

- “Helpless” record (96, 166) [Neil Young’s tune that starts “There is a town in North Ontario . . .”, best produced on Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young’s 1970 album *Déjà Vu*]
- Eddy’s selections: Lester Young, Dexter Gordon, John Fahey, Sarah Vaughn (98) [a collection of jazz and blues music artists from early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century]
- Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blue* (99) [immensely polished and popular 1959 jazz recording that includes additional jazz greats such as John Coltrane and Bill Evans]
- Emmy Lou Harris (103) [pop, folk, country singer b. 1947; in 1975 she had a major debut album, *Pieces of the Sky*]
- “My Fair Lady” (166) [Broadway musical (1956) based on George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* with signature song, “Wouldn’t it Be Lovely.”]
- “Harold in Italy” (166) [Berlioz’s 1834 symphony based on his 1831-2 experiences in Italy; Berlioz later claimed that he “wanted to make the viola a kind of melancholy dreamer in the manner of Byron’s Childe-Harold” (see <http://www.hberlioz.com/Scores/sharold.htm>).]
- “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face” (167) [also from *My Fair Lady*]
- Joan Sutherland singing an aria from *Norma* (168) [Australian soprano, Joan Sutherland (b. 1926), is thought to be among the twentieth-century’s best opera singers; *Norma* (1831) is Vincenzo Bellini’s tragedy in the bel canto tradition.]
- Irving Berlin’s “What’ll I Do?” (199) [Irving Berlin (1888-1989) wrote this popular lyric in 1923, a tune that was re-recorded numerous times throughout the twentieth century.]
- Kathleen Ferrier singing Brahms -- “Alto Rhapsody” or “Rhapsody for Dark Voice” (199-200) [see above under radio; in 1861 Brahms wrote “Alto Rhapsody” as a wedding gift for Clara Schuman’s daughter Julie; much speculation derived from the music’s passion centres on Brahms’s possible love for Julie.]
- Kathleen Ferrier singing “Blow the Wind Southerly” (200) [a simple folk song from Noerth East England beautifully recorded by Kathleen Ferrier: see/hear her at <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=LF7ibuEpx5s> ]
- “Autumn Leaves” (200-201) [a pop/jazz standard developed out a 1945 tune, *Les Feuilles Mortes*, by Jacques Prévert in France; changed significantly into English by Johnny Mercer (1949), but really popularized as a lyric by pianist Roger Williams in 1955.]
- “Buddhist singing bowls vibrating at their lowest octave” (309) [Bowls developed like inverted bells as much as 4000 years ago in the Himalayas; they create a humming music when struck or stroked on their rims.]
- Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata”, a Brahms waltz, Mozart’s Eine Kleine Nachtmusik – “musical warhorses” (344); [Moonlight Sonata, #14 for piano (1801); Brahms’s waltzes (not a common form for him) are thought to be more romantic than those of Strauss (a popular waltz composer) in the nineteenth century; Mozart’s “A Little Night Music” (1787) is a serenade for the nighttime, originally written for strings.]
- Composer Harry Somers and Newfoundland folk songs, “She’s Like a Swallow” – “the long and the sudden of it” (345) [Harry Somers (1925-99) was one of Canada’s best known composers; he often was commissioned to create scores for various organizations/purposes; “She’s Like a [the] Swallow” is among those Newfoundland folk songs (in this case a real tear jerker) that Somers arranged for choral performance; the origin of the additional phrase is not clear.]

## FILM:

- *The Romance of Transportation* -- “animated film about a northern country” (53) [an 11 minute, 1952 production of Canada’s National Film Board entitled *The Romance of Transportation in Canada*: to watch the film go to the NFB website: [http://beta.nfb.ca/film/romance\\_of\\_transportation\\_canada/](http://beta.nfb.ca/film/romance_of_transportation_canada/); the film was nominated for an Oscar in 1953]
- “Marilyn Monroe nights, they were so blond and sleepless” (63) [possibly an allusion to the hit film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) starring Jane Russell and Marilyn Monroe]
- *Shampoo* (103) [1975 film starring Warren Beatty as a late 1960s Beverly Hills hairdresser involved with at least three different women: Julie Christie, Lee Grant and Goldie Hawn]
- *Last Tango in Paris* (109-10) [a 1973 film of an ex-patriot American (Marlon Brando) who engages in a sexually crazed relationship with a young Parisian woman (Maria Schneider).]
- *The Godfather Part II* (156) [Following from *The Godfather* (1972), *The Godfather Part II* (1974) explores the early life of Vito Corleone (Robert de Niro) who would eventually become the great mafia leader known as the Godfather (Marlon Brando).]
- *Teahouse of the August Moon* (269) [a 1956 comedy starring Marlon Brandon as Sakini, an interpreter for Captain Fisby (Glenn Ford), who’s supposed to introduce “American” methods in a post-WWII Japanese village.]