

# TROPICAL ESCAPES: CANADIAN TRAVELLERS, LATIN AMERICA, AND SEX

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“What have I been proudest of my life? That I have been,  
I believe, one of what the French term ‘les libérateurs de l’amour.’”

—Scott Symons

In his play *Rose*, Tomson Highway has a character state that one of the “basics” of contemporary Canadian life is “winter holidays in Mexico” (103) and, presumably, other tropical countries. Most Canadians who travel south do so in search of sun, sand, and that prized but elusive winter tan, and do not necessarily have much contact with the local people and their cultures. However, this is not the case for a significant number of travellers whose journeys are motivated by the pursuit of more carnal desires. Focusing on a series of texts, from short fiction to film, memoirs, plays, and poems, this essay examines the representation of the sexual adventures of Canadians in Latin America, a subject that is largely ignored in Canadian letters. More precisely, it shows how the erotics of sexual emancipation is seldom untined by the politics of race, gender, and particularly class; yet, it can still lead to cultural encounters in which the traveller is transformed by his/her interactions with members of what are initially deemed foreign cultures, not the least by gaining an appreciation of the value of those cultures.

Foreign travel necessarily reflects a certain openness to the world, since it entails journeying beyond one’s national borders. At the same time, it is an activity marked by such social and economic disparities that equitable exchanges seem unlikely. This is very much the case for Canadian tropical tourism. As one character in Linda Griffiths and Patrick Brymer’s play *O.D. on Paradise* remarks during a Jamaican trip, “I can’t help feeling weird. We spend all this money to do nothing and they’re out there hustling for a few dollars just to stay alive” (42). The ubiquity of Canadian tropi-

cal tourism may actually challenge some of the dominant myths about Canadian identity. To begin with, it is difficult to accept the surprisingly popular idea of Canada as a victim the moment one contrasts the privileges of Canadian tourists who travel south with those of southerners who come to Canada to labour as temporary workers, some of whom purportedly arrive and depart from “the cargo terminal” at Canadian airports (Urquhart 29; cf. 243). No less significant, considering the prominence of Canadians among sex tourists in the Americas (Curtis 7; Cribb et al.) and elsewhere, tropical tourism may also problematize that most cherished of Canadian myths, the peaceable kingdom. Indeed, it could be argued that one of the reasons Canada is able to maintain its image as an amiable society is precisely that it exports a good portion of its “sinful” activities offshore.

Tropical tourism certainly appears to give Canadians licence to engage in behaviour with which most of them probably would avoid being associated at home. For instance, in her short story “The Resplendent Quetzal,” Margaret Atwood notes that her protagonist, Sarah, “liked it” when Mexican “men smiled at her or even when they made those juicy sucking noises with their mouths as they walked behind her on the street; so long as they didn’t touch” (155). Carmen Aguirre, in contrast, is definitely interested in physical contact. In her autobiographical one-character play *Blue Box*, the Chilean-born Aguirre has her protagonist, also named Carmen, lament the fact that she has “chosen to live in a [Nordic] country where cobwebs grow on your cunt” (6) and “getting laid is tantamount to reaching the summit of Mount Everest” (7). She attempts to bring an end to her involuntary sexual asceticism by escaping mentally to sultrier climes through songs such as “Amor a la mexicana,” which she translates as “Love, the Mexican Way,” but perhaps would be better rendered as “Love, Mexican Style,” as sung by the Mexican singer Thalía:

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*Love, the Mexican way.  
Horse, boot, and sombrero.  
Tequila, tobacco, and rum.  
Love, the Mexican way.  
Hot, to the rhythm of the sun.  
Go slow and then kill me. Macho, from the heart.  
Love, the Mexican way. (7-8)*

Amor a la mexicana...  
Caballo, bota y sombrero,  
Tequilla, tabaco y ron.  
Amor a la mexicana.  
Caliente al ritmo del sol.  
Despacio, y luego me mata,  
Mi macho de corazón  
Amor a la Mexicana. (Pupparo n.p.)

Even if Carmen is only speaking metaphorically when she expresses the desire for her would-be Mexican lover to “kill” her in the ecstasy of their sexual encounter, she

leaves little doubt that what makes love Mexican-style appealing to her is that it is rough, lustful, and respects no “civilized” boundaries.

Fantasies about real and imagined sexual affairs with Latin Americans are also at the heart of Highway’s one-woman musical *The (Post) Mistress*. Set on the outskirts of a fictitious northern Ontario city that closely resembles Sudbury, the play makes considerable use of both samba and tango and is seemingly informed by Highway’s tour of South America with his cabaret show in 2007-08, which gave him a firsthand experience of the region’s cultures (Cunha 49, 53). One of the main characters, whose letters are accessed by the (Post) Mistress of the title, is a female municipal tax officer who “collects hot men like some people collect those cute little teaspoons” (8) and is planning to visit her Brazilian lover in “Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the sexiest city in the world” (4), despite knowing that he is married and has children. Another character, a funeral director, becomes romantically involved with an Argentinian man during a holiday in Buenos Aires, the “city of legend, city of love, *la ciudad del amor*” (39).

**302** They spend passionate nights dining al fresco and dancing the tango, until she has to leave to “see a man—another man—in Rio de Janeiro” (44). Even the play’s only actual personage, the (Post) Mistress Marie-Louise Painchaud, who is terrified of flying and has never travelled farther afield than Ottawa, is affected by the Latin America fever. As she covertly becomes privy to the southern experiences of her neighbours by reading their letters, she starts to fantasize about overcoming her phobia so that she can “fly down to Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Rio de Janeiro, and Lake Titicaca and have adventures” like theirs, “without [...] without my husband knowing,” of course. Although Painchaud considers herself socially conservative, she dreams of becoming “Maria Luisa Pan-Caliente [...] , a real postmistress, a hot postmistress, a scandalous, sinful, smouldering postmistress!” (45). She thus underscores the extent to which even Canadians who have never travelled beyond their country’s own borders have come to identify the southern half of the continent as a place where they can satisfy sexual desires that apparently are not being satiated at home.

Moreover, such carnal appetites are not confined to literary embodiments of Canadians. In her study of transnational travel sex on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, involving primarily North American and European women and local men, cultural anthropologist Susan Frohlick quotes a thirty-year-old Canadian woman she calls Carolyn, who openly admits that what attracts her to “rasta” men is their physicality. A resident of a metropolitan but unidentified Canadian city, Carolyn works as a yoga teacher at a resort and finds Caribbean Costa Rican men “really amazing in bed,” compared to their presumably less vigorous Canadian counterparts: “They’re in really good shape, most of them,” she states. “A lot of them surf so they’re strong through the middle. Powerful, passionate, crazy sex. Crazy wild jungle sex” (145). As Carolyn elaborates, “A lot of women don’t like to admit it, but I think they like to be manhandled, not have to be in charge, not have to initiate things. It’s macho....The two that I had sex with, they’re just powerful. More animalistic. None of this, ‘are you okay?’ None of them are ever going to give you a massage. None of them are going

to give you oral sex. It's just powerful" (144; ellipsis in original). In other words, the reason that such sexual relations are so alluring is that the men do not treat their female partners in "a giving way at all" (145), as befits "real men" (Sanchez Taylor 49). There is not even a pretense that they perceive the women as intellectual beings, much less as ladies, and apparently that is how both parties like it.

A similar worldview is articulated in *Give Sorrow Words: Maryse Holder's Letters from Mexico*. A French-born New Yorker, Holder may seem an unlikely addition to a study of the sexual activities of Canadians in Latin America, but I believe that her inclusion is justifiable for at least two different reasons. First, Holder's book was the source text for the Canadian film *A Winter Tan*, which stars the late Jackie Burroughs as Holder and will be discussed below. Perhaps more germane, the volume is replete with often acerbic sketches of Canadian tourists, showing them boldly pursuing sexual gratification with an explicitness that one seldom encounters in the work of Canadian writers. These include what Holder terms "Awful old Canadians who are always off like mad hatters to the red light district, afraid to pause for fear you'll exploit a cigarette off them, looking backwards at you with a snicker" (84). Again, sex tourism is not restricted to the young. When North Americans travel to tropical countries, even old ones can entertain the illusion that they are sexually attractive, so long as they have money. As a Dominican man explained the tourist-local amorous dynamic to the sociologist Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor, "sex is not for pleasure but a business, I don't care if the woman is beautiful or not. I'd rather go out with someone ugly if she's got money" (qtd. in Sanchez Taylor 51). It is no wonder that many tourists, particularly women, make such valiant efforts to frame those relationships as romantic rather than merely sexual (Sanchez Taylor 43).

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Published posthumously in 1979, *Give Sorrow Words* is the epistolary narrative of two extended trips that Holder took to Mexico in 1976 and 1977. The daughter of Jewish members of the French Resistance, Holder was a complex figure. She contracted mastoiditis as a child and, because of the scarcity of medication during the war, "[h]er face was paralyzed on one side and slightly distorted" (Yampolsky 299; see also Holder 260). As a consequence, she became painfully self-conscious about her physical appearance, particularly what she calls her "deformada face" (260), which was the impetus for her Mexican travels. Holder confides to the recipient of her letters, her close friend Edith Jones, "I don't feel ugly in Mexico—men don't seem interested in pointing out my flaw" (Holder 9). She does not feel short either, which is also extremely important to her. Indeed, Holder informs Jones that this is why she is "never coming (going?) 'home.' Home is where the height is" (10) and, initially at least, this would appear to be Mexico.

Whereas Holder characterizes her Mexican sojourn as a "vacation from feminism" (86), the feminist icon Kate Millett is less euphemistic. Millett, who comments that "Maryse's is the most authentic voice in sheer language, that I have heard off a page since the new consciousness hit women," asserts that Holder travels to Mexico "not once, but twice [...] in order to meet, pick up, get fucked and fucked over by ever

younger Mexican toughs, hoods, gigolos" (i). Culminating in what has been seen as a willed death, Holder's tropical journey ended when one (or two) of her lovers "smashed her into silence" and dropped "her body by the side of a road" (Yampolsky 306). During her trips, though, Holder runs into a multitude of Canadians, whose activities she tends to describe in detail but seldom charitably. Holder has a love-hate relationship with Canadians and Canada, as her frequent comments on her northern neighbours demonstrate: "How to explain wit and power playfulness to Canadians," she asks rhetorically. "They are a prim lot" (14); or, "The Canadians I can't tackle except to be amazed that they exist at all. Met someone who actually majored in Canadian history" (31). Early in the book, Holder notes that "[a]pocryphal stories of canny women who attach themselves to rich Canadians abound but...dónde?" (20; ellipsis in original). Soon afterwards she meets "the girls supposedly riding" one of those rich Canadians and learns that "he stayed on with them on their lease after his expired and stole their clothes and jewelry, les joies du sexisme" (24). Holder also

**304** remarks that Canadian men are "the world's biggest bores" (20); however, this is clearly not how she feels about Canadian women, whom she transparently envies.

Holder describes a "tall" twenty-year-old Canadian named Carol as having "a superb naturally athletic body [...] Long lean muscled thighs, broad shoulders, flat stomach [...] Like many Canadian women she has a man's absolute freedom, shocking to me" (22). Holder points out that Carol "works just enough to afford travel, hitches everywhere. In a few weeks she's going back to hit the fishing season when she can make two thou in six weeks packing sardines" (22). Yet, as she watches Carol being "pursued by every stud in town," Holder comes to realize that what she calls the latter's "virginal passivity, her seeming lack of awareness of her own attractiveness [...], was another illusion" (23). Holder is equally confounded by another Canadian, a "blond boutique owner from Toronto" named Sheila. When the Mexican man who is with Holder asks Sheila, "Do you have a girlfriend for me? [...] This woman isn't good enough?" Holder is mortified that Sheila is "outraged on my behalf" and publicly chastises the man for daring "to be rude to her friend" (13). Much of Holder's animus toward Canadians seems to arise from her realization that they are more successful in the sex chase than she is, such as when "three Canadian women looked right through me to flirt" with her male companion (31). Yet Holder hints that there may be a personal reason why she "loathe[s] those dreary Canadians, ungenerous to a fault. So wary and dull and stolidly vulgar and totally invulnerable," which is that "Mexicans adore them, prefer them to us! Fifteen Canadians to one American here, they say. Qué lástima!" (85). She further complicates matters when she confesses that the main reason she is "furious at awful Canadians [...] must be partly because I am using them as a scapegoat for Mexico which I can't bear to hate" (89). In other words, the Canada she constructs in her letters may not have much to do with Canada at all, although the behaviour of the Canadian tourists she meets does not seem noticeably different from hers.

The apparent affinities between Canadians and Americans regarding transnational

travel sex seem to be reinforced by the fact that in 1987, a collective of Canadian artists produced a film adaptation of *Give Sorrow Words* called *A Winter Tan*. Directed by Jackie Burroughs, Louise Clark, John Frizzell, John Walker, and Aerlyn Weissman, the film stars Burroughs as Holder, as noted earlier. *A Winter Tan*, which received mixed reviews from critics (Bailey 26-27; Rickey; Weinstock 137-40), is not fully successful either as a film or as an adaptation of a literary text. Part of the reason for this has to do with the casting of Burroughs as Holder. Burroughs, who also co-wrote the screenplay with Frizzell, was deeply engaged with the project; yet, by the time the film was shot, she was in her late forties, over a decade older than Holder at the time of her trips to Mexico. Burroughs was also extremely thin, almost emaciated. This is a combination that makes her character's obsession with old age more logical; as she exclaims at one point, "It's too bad you can't vomit up age" (*Winter Tan*). This age differential also introduces a whole new dynamic to her sexual relationships with her young male lovers, one quite different from Holder's facial disfigurement. Indeed, considering that, like her real-life model, Burroughs's Holder does not have much money to shower on her would-be conquests, one of the puzzles in the film is what attracts Mexican men to her, beyond her easy sexual availability.

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Another problematic aspect of *A Winter Tan* is its formal translation of Holder's book. As a collection of letters, *Give Sorrow Words* is necessarily monologic, being designed to convey the author's personal view of the world, notably her impressions of Mexican men and Mexico. The film adopts an identical structure. Framed by interviews with the recipient (and editor) of the letters, Holder's friend Edith [Jones], who has relocated from New York to Toronto, it revisits the letters in an attempt to determine if there is something in them that foreshadows Holder's ultimate fate. As the co-director Walker explains, "The camera is playing the role of Edith—what would she be thinking now?" ("Location Notes" 131; cf. "Big Deal" 20). However, since film is a visual medium, the form becomes quite artificial. This is particularly evident due to the propensity of the directors to have Burroughs's Holder relate what transpires between her and her lovers instead of dramatizing the episodes. Most conspicuously, she even describes what her most important paramour, Miguel, calls her, rather than showing him doing so. Similarly, the camera often fails to capture the eroticism that the protagonist claims characterizes her sexual relationships. Despite its extensive and arresting shots of Mexico's urban and rural landscape, not the least its beaches, *A Winter Tan* often looks, and sounds, like a stage play. Perhaps reflecting Burroughs's theatre background, the film tends to feel like a series of monologues in which the protagonist soliloquizes about incidents that the viewers do not see. Tellingly, Walker relates that there is so much talk in the film that during the Acapulco shoot he awakens from a dream in which "Maryse's monologue's suffocating me" and that the local crew has "already chosen the [movie's] working title, *Shut Up*" ("Location Notes" 133; cf. 135).

*A Winter Tan* remains very close to Holder's source text, aiming to capture the odyssey of a woman who travels from New York to Mexico in an attempt to write a

novel out of what she terms her “banal sexual encounters,” hoping “to wring a masterpiece out of my life” (*Winter Tan*). Yet given that the subject is explicit that her southern journeys have a single objective: “I only wanna fuck,” one cannot help but wonder what might have compelled a group of Canadian artists to make a film about her. There are signs that the filmmakers at times resist Holder and her narrative, reflected in Walker’s admission that Holder “has no sense of place. Edith/Camera must fill in the social context” (“Location Notes” 133). While there is considerable talk in the film deploring the violence of Mexican machismo—including the protagonist’s observation during a bullfight that the matador treats the bull the way men treat women, teasing the animal and then walking away—she appears to pose a greater danger to herself than do any Mexicans. Burroughs portrays Holder as a woman on the edge of a nervous breakdown, someone being driven insane by her compulsive desire to be desired by Mexico and Mexicans. She is a self-conscious feminist who is obsessed with the opposite sex and eventually concludes that “I’m finally being punished for desiring men” (*Winter Tan*). Toward the end, she also concedes that “you can’t force a country to love you.” But it is not apparent how the filmmakers expect viewers to interpret the protagonist’s relations with Mexican men, since she even boasts about having sex with a fourteen-year-old, whom she describes as a “lovely child,” and technically is not a man. In fact, the film’s form seems to echo its subject’s inability to engage intimately with a country she professes to love. As the German writer Ria Endres perceptively notes, “Maryse Holder is fascinated by the power that lies in sexuality. She expects liberation. The Mexican men are intended only as instruments for her liberation.” Because of its focus on her inner battles, *A Winter Tan* fails to show Holder’s interactions with Mexicans, turning what must have been dialogues into monological confessions. Whether intended or not, this is of course also a rhetorical strategy that conveys the discursive imbalance between North and South. It is quite revealing that the film incorporates a significant amount of popular Spanish-language music. Among the songs is one sung by Miguel, to which the protagonist sings along, but later candidly admits that she did not understand “a single word.” Again, she is in Mexico but does not truly interact with Mexican society.

Both *Give Sorrow Words* and *A Winter Tan* are accounts of an educated white woman’s methodical sexual pursuit of mixed-race (and lower-class) men, and thus it may not come as a complete surprise that “the charge of racism” or “unthinking racism” has been levelled against the book (Jones xi) as well as the film (Bailey 26). I would not discount the view that race plays a major role in the way Holder perceives herself and the world, as evident in her remark that the reason a “tall blond blue-eyed Canadian of kraut origin” elects to spend a day with her when she feels particularly depressed is that “who else would find nigger me attractive?” (Holder 82). At the same time, it is worth noting that there are asymmetries at work here other than race or class. After all, it is not Holder that kills her lovers, like a modern-day female Bluebeard. Rather, she is the one who ends up being killed by one (or more) of her pickups, giving credence to her contention that “[t]he male contempt for

loose women is their fear that we find more than one of them attractive" (229). Or, as Dennis Gruending writes of another "Gringa," she travels to Latin America "to squander her inheritance / on leering boys who call her *puta*" (18). Still, one cannot help but notice that, like most of her Canadian acquaintances, Holder functions largely in English and has few interactions with Mexicans beyond sex. Her lack of engagement with Mexican culture in general and literature in particular is curious, since she was a literary comparatist who pursued a PhD in the field first at Cornell University and then at the City University of New York. Yet she does not make much effort to learn Spanish, as she often acknowledges, something that sets her apart from Edward Lacey.

One of the "*monstres sacrés*" of Canadian culture (Young 34), Edward Allan Lacey was born into a prominent family in Lindsay, Ontario, in 1937—he was the only child of a judge—and "died penniless in Toronto in 1995" after what his friend and literary executor Fraser Sutherland calls "a lifetime of travelling, teaching, poetry-writing, translating, and getting into trouble" ("How"). Like Holder, Lacey travels primarily to pursue his sexual adventures. Also like her, he is very much a Peter Pan figure who, in his thirties, fears he is becoming old, since "nobody looks at a man of thirty-eight" (*Collected Poems* 180). Besides gender, there are two crucial differences between the two writers. To begin with, Lacey is not interested in heterosexual relationships but homosexual ones; importantly, his 1964 "poetry chapbook *The Forms of Loss* became the first openly gay book published in Canada" (Young 14) and he is considered "Canada's first significant gay poet" (Fetherling 33), if not "the best [...] of all Canadian poets" (Gilbert, "Greatness"). In addition, Lacey was a polyglot who not only had an uncanny facility with languages but also possessed an inveterate fascination with other cultures. Almost everywhere he travelled around the globe, which included most tropical countries, he translated. He became especially renowned for his renditions of gay or gay-themed writings for San Francisco's pioneering Gay Sunshine Press, being one of the key translators of Latin American literature in both Spanish and Portuguese. While he translated the work of numerous Latin American poets, his most influential translations are arguably those of Luis Zapata's popular gay novel *El vampiro de la colonia Roma* (*Adonis García*) and Adolfo Caminha's *Bom-Crioulo* (Braz 120; cf. Balderston and Quiroga 89, 106), an 1895 classic about race and homosexuality in the Brazilian Navy.

Lacey, however, is equally celebrated for what George Fetherling terms his "wonderful travel poems" (53). Lacey's poetry about Latin America covers the whole continent and a variety of cultural, political, and social situations, such as the death of Chile's fabled president-doctor Salvador Allende:

All doctors are failures, for all their patients die.  
This time the patient lived, but the doctor died.  
Small countries that propose to be independent;  
good men who try to do good and do evil. It's an old story. *Le faux monnayeur*.

Salvador. Too easy a name. The pun too easy.

*He saved others, himself he cannot save. (Collected Poems 119)*

In contrast, Lacey describes the historic Mexican colonial city of San Cristóbal de las Casas as a place “where the townspeople do not stare at the Indians and the Indians do not / stare at the townspeople.” He further adds, “Extremes here touch, but do not meet, and there is no understanding. / We co-exist, they seem to say, but do not choose to interpenetrate,” which he interprets as signs of a “coming storm” (115). The designed Brazilian capital Brasília, the project of President Juscelino Kubitschek, to whom Lacey taught English after Kubitschek fell from power, is the “City of the future. City of the dead” (69). Finally, in “El Salvador,” Lacey tells of a former lover named Daniel, who was “found last night. Garroted. Castrated. / His penis stuffed in his ass.” Moreover, he says that he remembers more about the small Central American country: “Bishops murdered at altars. Raped nuns. El Salvador” (547). In other words, even though Lacey hails from elsewhere, not all the people he memorializes are strangers about whom he only reads.

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Sky Gilbert, who in the early 1980s adapted some of Lacey’s writings for the stage under the title *Lacey or Tropic Snows: Theatrical Tales of a Canadian Exile in Brazil* (Sutherland, “Introduction” xv), asserts that Lacey’s “poetry romanticizes promiscuity” (Gilbert, “Testament” 112) and that “what is radical about his work is his unapologetic sexuality” (114). Lacey himself remarks that one of the things that appeals to him about tropical lands such as Brazil is that there “[e]ven a poor man [...] can afford the simple pleasures of food & drink & beach & promiscuous sex” (*Magic Prison* 64). Thus, I would like to conclude this essay with two of his poems that are dominated by one of those pleasures: sexual desire. The first of these, “Cearense,” or a resident of Ceará, a state in northeastern Brazil, chronicles a one-night stand that the poet has with a fisherman from Fortaleza, Ceará’s capital. Yet Lacey does not camouflage the reasons that the young man gives him “a body / straight as a palm” and “sweet like the *caju*,” or cashew tree:

you had three children,  
a teen-aged wife;  
you needed money;  
all I know of your life. (*Collected Poems* 492)

Lacey unequivocally shows that his sexual encounter with the fisherman is also a financial transaction, in which the Brazilian may have engaged for purely material motives. Consequently, it is not even clear if the fisherman shares his sexual orientation or was affected by the night they spent together. There is no question, however, that Lacey was profoundly touched by the tryst, as he devotes more than half of the poem to imagining what the individual he calls “my man” would experience if one day he were lost at sea (493). Would he “tremble and remember / the strange lusts of [the fertility goddess] Iemanjá” or would he be thinking of “the children” that he will “never see again”? The poet seems quite certain of one thing about the man from

Fortaleza, that “you will not remember me” (493), implying that he was less important to the fisherman than the Cearense was to him.

The second poem also explores the possibility of communion with another man, but a much more complicated one. “Carlos Eduardo Robledo Puch” is named after a twenty-year-old Argentinian serial killer who, along with two school friends, “all of good suburban Buenos Aires families,” murdered at least eleven people and raped and robbed many others in the early 1970s (96; cf. Locker). Lacey presents the naturally-blond Latin American Paul Bernardo as totally amoral, someone who boasts that he did his victims “a favour, and/ killing one or fifty is the same thing. You just keep pulling the trigger” (96). The Argentinian “Angel of Death” (Locker) also brags that, even though girls “come running” to him, he “like[s] to rape them, feel them struggle, hear them scream” (Lacey, *Collected Poems* 97). Nonetheless, Lacey closes his poem by acknowledging that he is attracted to Robledo Puch:

These are the matters in life I cannot  
understand or approve or even make sense of.  
And yet, despite my codes, restraints and scruples,  
I have begun to dream at night of Robledo Puch,  
and I cannot  
cannot suppress the urge toward masturbation  
when his face from tabloids stares out at me. (97-98)

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In short, Lacey transforms a documentary poem about a serial killer, a text in which reportedly all “the details [...] are rigorously factual” (154), into an examination of the poet’s own complicity. Or, to phrase it differently, it is not apparent that the poet feels he has the moral authority to judge even someone that he portrays as evil.

In her poem “The Permanent Tourists,” P.K. Page castigates those “terrible tourists with their empty eyes” who long “to be filled with monuments” (113). However, writings about Canadian tourists in Latin America suggests that some Canadian travellers who head south desire to be filled, not with monuments, but with people. It is not self-evident that they are any less dreadful than the more orthodox tourists, even if some of them, like that other sacred monster of Canadian letters, Scott Symons, are convinced that they are among the great “libérateurs de l’amour” (7). Still, while it may be a “fable / that travel is broadening” (Page, “Permanent Tourists” 113), perhaps one ought to differentiate between travellers and tourists. Since travellers often have to work in the countries they are visiting in order to support their peregrinations, they come in contact with a much larger cross section of the local population than merely those involved with the hospitality industry. For instance, Lacey’s tutoring in English of Juscelino Kubitschek, which required that he visit the latter’s residence several times a week while the former Brazilian president was “under house arrest,” resulted in his being “tailed by police agents” around Rio de Janeiro. Typically, the mischievous Lacey sometimes would lead the officers to “nightclubs & red-light districts” in gay-cruising areas (*Magic Prison* 50), exposing them to a part of their own culture with which they may not be all that familiar.

Page distinguishes between tourists and travellers, clearly favouring the latter, as she says of her own artistic practice: “I am a traveller. I have a destination but no maps. Others perhaps have reached that destination already, still others are on their way. But none has had to go from here before—nor will again. One’s route is one’s own. One’s journey is unique. What I will find at the end I can barely guess. What lies on the way is unknown” (“Traveller” 44). Yet her writings indicate that her response to foreign landscapes and peoples is not uniform. Page wrote book-length travel-ogues about Brazil and Mexico, two countries in which she lived in the late 1950s and early 1960s as the wife of the Canadian ambassador W. Arthur Irwin. Significantly, in Brazil, she engaged actively with Brazilian society, although largely with the upper classes, as reflected in her observation that after being in the country for more than six months she had “never met a Negro [guest] at a party” (*Brazilian* 76). In contrast, in Mexico, she socialized mainly with other members of the English-speaking expatriate community, devoting herself not to Mexican art or religion but to an esoteric version of Sufism, which she believed offered “the Fourth Way” (*Mexican* 255). That is, she has rather dissimilar relations to her hosts and their cultures in the two countries. Or, to phrase it differently, in Brazil she acts like a traveller, whereas in Mexico she is very much a tourist, seeking solace among what she considers her own (foreign) kind.

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Travellers, of course, remain privileged figures, not the least because of their mobility. In a short poem appended to one of his Rio letters in the early 1970s, Lacey states that he is not in a hurry to reach his destination, since “No-one is waiting for me. / I am a leaf on the stream” (*Magic Prison* 64). But in another poem, entitled “Travel Empts Unease,” Lacey writes:

The charm of travel is, you cannot stay.  
 You turn like pages cities, countries, races,  
 look for one moment, and go on your way.  
  
 Suppose you had to live here every day.  
 To eat this dull food, greet the same aging faces  
 the charm of travel is? You cannot stay! (*Collected Poems* 161)

This is an idea that he repeats several times throughout the poem, underlining both the fact that to travel you cannot stay in one place, however idyllic, and that you must have the financial resources to pursue your journey.

That said, the main reason for not conflating travellers with tourists, particularly sex tourists, is that, as the novelist and travel writer Ronald Wright asserts, sex tourism, like political tourism, has “an alluring *frisson* but it [makes] you feel shabby” (145). Moreover, whether they are tourists or travellers, Canadians necessarily take some risks when they become intimately involved with strangers during their travels in tropical countries. This is certainly true of Lacey, with his penchant for adolescent lovers (*Collected Poems* 161). In fact, considering the behaviour of some Canadians in Latin America, it is easy to understand Don Starkell’s sex interdiction during his epic

canoe journey from Winnipeg to Belém, at the mouth of the Amazon River. When Starkell and his two sons were preparing for their 12,000 mile [19,312 km] trip, he persuaded them that if they were going to succeed, they “needed singleness of mind, not options” (21). The three of them “even agreed to give up all but the most casual involvement with women for the duration of the venture.” As Starkell underscores, “To do otherwise, I felt, would compromise our sense of purpose, and would risk alienating communities in 13 countries, each with different ideas of proper romantic behaviour” (21; cf. 135). The question here is what sort of interchanges they missed. After all, as the writings of Edward Lacey in particular demonstrate, potentially, it is not only the outsider who is transformed by his experiences through foreign lands; the people he encounters can be equally affected.

Rudy Wiebe has charged that it is because of the failure to understand “our own *nordicity*, that we are a northern nation,” that Canadians “go whoring after the mocking palm trees and beaches” (111) of southern climes. Yet, thanks to his Latin American travels, usually driven by his libido, Lacey not only acquires much knowl- 311  
edge about other peoples and their cultures, but a kind of knowledge that complicates the very North-South juxtaposition that dominates discourse in the so-called Western Hemisphere. Lacey comes to see Latin America as “a distinct and important region of the world and of the imagination” (“Latin America” 481), a continent comprising societies that “are no more similar one to another than are the nations of Europe or the Arab states, probably a good deal less so” (484). It is his fascination with a region in which “a mediaeval or pre-Columbian world, a mediaeval European world,” and “a modern occidental one” coexist (483) that impels him to share its literary achievements with the outside world via his translations. Moreover, by virtue of his perambulations, Lacey discovers that Latin America’s diversity is not only cultural and political but also geographic. His poem “Puerto Montt” points out that the Chilean city “at the world’s end,” over 1000 kilometres south of Santiago, is located “so far south that south becomes north and begins to look like Canada” (*Collected Poems* 98). Despite his well-publicized antagonism toward his native land, Lacey develops such a fondness for Puerto Montt that he admits he “might have lived a life” in the city “where south turns north and there are no palm/ trees” (101). To be fair, he underscores that the most appealing aspect of Puerto Montt is that, while it evokes Canada, it is “without Canadians, fortunately” (98). Yet Lacey’s acknowledgement that he is attracted to the “northern” character of the southern tip of Latin America suggests that one of the things he apprehends during his travels through tropical lands is that he may not yet be free of that from which he is been trying to escape, notably the land and people that produced him.

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