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Puck's Green England and the Professor of English: Post-Colonial Fantasies at the University of British Columbia

As everyone who has worked in university departments knows, the terse documents listing courses and publications cover an almost-forgotten underlay of gossip, rumour, and recollection filtered through friendship, rivalry, enmity, ego, and who knows what else. If even autobiography is a fictive shaping of a lived life, how can I capture anything of Garnett Gladwin Sedgewick (1882–1949), even though I work in the department he founded in 1918 at the University of British Columbia? Thus the title. The post-colonial fantasies I speak of there are three, primarily: mine; those of the students, colleagues, and successors who wrote about him; and his. In other words, although I have tried to learn as much of the facts of his life as I can, I am more interested in the sites where the comparison of various texts reveals fantasies about him, about Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, about English professors, about English literature, and about England.

Jill Ker Conway remarks of her approach to history: 'Our department [at the University of Sydney] was strong on techniques of research, but no one could understand the kinds of cultural documents I wanted to study. They weren't in archives, but in peoples' minds and imaginations' (Conway, 215). As a result of my interest in such cultural documents, this paper leaves the traditional focus on a particular figure somewhat in the shade. This analysis is more literary than historical, one that permits the examination of recurring themes, characterizations, and tropes in the collective account and foregrounds how literary and narrative devices and allusions are used to structure people's political and social roles.

As Leigh Dale notes, for the British at least, in the colonies 'the main function of the teaching of literature was the interpellation of the "uncivilized" (colonial) subject' (Dale, 16): almost all the subjects examined here, including Sedgewick and me, have been 'hailed' by our literary studies as colonial. Or, as Louis Althusser argues, those destined to be workers (or colonials) learn 'submission to the ruling ideology' and those destined for more powerful roles, 'the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly ... so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class "in words"' (Althusser, 128). The process of interpellation, or the inscription of social roles by social institutions, always becomes complicated in specific cases, particularly given that the

colonial elite learn how to manipulate words in ways that do not necessarily support imperial domination. In other words, all are called, but few respond to the call in completely predictable ways. Take the case of Sedgewick. First, although of English descent, he never went to England and, to understate it, did not like the English very much. Still, he deployed the English literary canon, not only to consolidate his own cultural authority, but also to underwrite his liberal (occasionally quite radical) political views in British Columbia. Further, Sedgewick, a Shakespeare scholar, produced Elizabethan fantasies that shifted Shakespeare to the New World, reconfiguring old texts for new purposes. His 'alternative Shakespeare' was Canadian.

I begin, however, with my own rather dull fantasies, leaving his more theatrical ones until later. I am (to reduce a complicated history) the product of an ideological clash between my undergraduate education at Glendon College, York University, where I was hailed as a bilingual Canadian nationalist, and my doctoral education at the University of Toronto, where I was hailed as colonial. My resistance to the latter is doubtless obvious in this paper, where I am trying to ground my intellectual history in Canada. Neither institution let me forget that I was female and, therefore, even when my marks were high, I knew I did not quite match the scholarly norm. As a result, writing about professors, I try to clear a space to write myself *as* a professor: thus my focus on gender politics.

Further, as a post-colonial critic, I find my area of specialization almost requires a focus on nation and gender. Jonathan Dollimore recently made the point that contemporary postmodern critics have turned 'the misogynist, the racist, and the homophobe, locked into a fear of their own others' into 'the negative others of the post-modern' (Dollimore, 331). This point is equally valid if one substitutes 'post-colonial' for 'postmodern' and adds 'imperialist' to the list of negative labels. Because post-colonial criticism focuses on the power relations manifested in texts, it is easy for classes and analyses to turn into exercises in condemnation that lead to a suspect glow of superiority in those doing the condemnation. This is to fall into the trap of progressivism, assuming that contemporary theoretical and political positions are necessarily the most enlightened ones. Benita Parry has recently warned against this 'tendency to disown work done within radical traditions other than the most recently enunciated heterodoxies, as necessarily less subversive of the established order' (Parry 27). My anxiety that I teach my students to describe and explain rather than simply to condemn also underlies this project. Fortunately, it is difficult for me to issue a blanket condemnation of Garnett Sedgewick's attitudes.

Sedgewick was consistently on the left in British Columbia politics, and at times, far to the left. He was, unlike his more radical student Earle

Birney, no Marxist (or to be accurate, no Trotskyite) but a Fabian socialist (apRoberts). Ultimately, he shifted the rhetoric of imperialism to new territory, rather than attempting to dismantle it. Part of his strength came from his belief that he was bringing culture from a civilized east – Halifax and Harvard – to a crude and marginal western wilderness. Parry points out that the critique of empire that comes from within is disrupted by ‘ambiguities, doubts, anxieties, and alienations,’ but that this critique is still part of a coherent field of discourse:

That the language of ascendancy in these virtuoso texts [of late nineteenth-century imperialism] was shared by the spokesmen of empire and their ‘critics’ suggests its hegemony; where the utterances of the first declaimed racial power, a conquering nation and a belligerent civilization, the apologias of the liberal anti-imperialists deplored the linguistic excesses of their opponents while conceding that because of its progressive culture, the West was indeed able to offer the colonized the benefits of its industrial skills and its moral and intellectual qualities. (Parry, 54)

Although a liberal anti-imperialist, Sedgewick certainly conformed in many ways to an idealized model of professor as cultural missionary. In his tweed suits, perfect haircut, and trademark bow tie, he promoted theatre, the art gallery, and the symphony and agitated for the teaching of fine arts at the university. He was ‘the absolute autocrat of the English Department’ (Akrigg Papers). He entered his lectures to a respectful hush, tolerated no latecomers, and was sarcastic about those who could not answer his questions. He had his BA in Classics and English from Dalhousie (1903), and his MA (1911) and PhD (1913) from Harvard. He was asked by A.S.P. Woodhouse to deliver the Alexander Lectures at Toronto (1934), was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (1946), and was granted the honorary degree of doctor of laws from Dalhousie (1948). However, in other ways he deviated from the conservative stereotype. He was not homophobic (he was clearly homosexual in orientation),¹ or racist (for example, he spoke out publicly and at some personal risk against the internment and forced relocation of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War). Claims that he was imperialist and misogynist, although less easily refuted, are based on far from overwhelming evidence.

Because I began my study with memories of what I had discovered about the conservative attitudes of other heads of English in Canada, I was somewhat taken aback by one of the first items in Sedgewick’s papers. It was a transcript of a letter to the editor of the Vancouver newspaper the *Province*, by W.M. Duke, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Vancouver. Duke was responding to a letter to the editor by Sedgewick about the Quebec ‘Padlock Act’ dated 22 April 1938. (The act in question, passed in 1937 and repealed in 1957, allowed the attorney-general to

imprison anyone propagating communism or bolshevism [undefined] for a year without appeal.) Duke accused Sedgewick himself of being a communist and suggested that he should not be allowed to continue to teach at UBC, because 'Christian parents [will] fear such radical influence on youthful students who come under his teaching' (Sedgewick Papers, box 1). The claim that Sedgewick was a communist was based on his active role in the Canadian League for Peace and Democracy and the Canadian Civil Liberties Union. And this reaction against professorial involvement in politics extended to the government itself. The Canon Joshua Hinchcliffe (Anglican), who became the Conservative minister of education in the early 1930s, criticized Sedgewick's defence of a student 'who had objected to a British lecturer's dismissal of Canadian valour in the First World War' (Stewart, 51-2). In 1931, Hinchcliffe, in a meeting with the university president, complained about a comment on an English essay entitled 'Conservatism and Its Influence in Society.' The professor had written 'This essay, in my opinion, is full of "hokum" but it is about as good a case as can be made for a very bad cause.' Michiel Horn notes that the minister was apparently galled by signs of 'rampant Liberalism' at UBC (Horn, 54). Whether the comment was Sedgewick's (as seems likely) or that of a colleague, this sort of intervention could well have resulted in pressure from the university to keep out of politics. Either it did not (Horn found no signs that the president pursued the issue), or Sedgewick paid no attention; he certainly continued writing and speaking publicly on political issues until his death.

His reputation as a willing and excellent speaker and writer on both political and cultural topics, combined with his status as professor of English, gave him access to a wide public and allowed him to defy the Dukes and the Hinchcliffes. He had a huge constituency, since almost every university graduate in the province went through his department. And he spoke to dozens of groups, including the Rotary Club, the Sikh Society, the YMCA, the Vancouver International League for Peace and Freedom, and the University Women's Club. He organized the Gandhi memorial and was chosen to deliver the address welcoming King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to Vancouver in May 1939. In his twice-weekly columns for the *Vancouver Sun* (he wrote a total of 126), in which he discussed politics, education, culture – indeed, clearly anything he wanted to discuss – he pointed out the merits of the architecture of the new Anglican cathedral and supported the fight to bring health insurance to British Columbia. In the late 1930s he began giving radio broadcasts, both local and national, which continued until his death. One of his obituaries puts it this way: 'Though he was steeped in the writings of Shakespeare and Chaucer he did not let the world go by. He turned his brilliant, penetrating mind equally to the pursuit of his liberal political and sociological ideas' (Anon, 'Famed'). The implicit contrast between the

professor lost in the past and the political activist working in the present is widespread in discourses that try to normalize the professor as properly isolated from the public sphere, safely contained by the ivory tower. Fortunately, given the unusually high level of direct political interference in and control over his university (see Horn), Sedgewick was able to use the weapons of polemic and debate to reach a wide public. His involvement with civil liberties, one might speculate, may in part have been derived from his recognition of how seriously his own were at risk, but in part he was simply carrying on in the footsteps of his predecessors on both sides of his family, which had produced well-known ministers of religion, lawyers, and politicians.

Despite Elspeth Cameron's characterization of him as 'Anglophile' (Cameron, 49),² Sedgewick was clearly not an imperialist of any stripe. In discussing Empire, as he did on several occasions, Sedgewick was careful to distinguish what he called 'honour to Empire Day' and 'Imperialism, a word which inevitably carries with it the sense of one man's subjection to another' ([This being the evening of Empire Day'] Sedgewick Papers, box 1). In a memoir of his early life written in 1937 he comments on how his attitudes to Empire had changed. In his youth, he notes, Imperialism 'was of two kinds – the British, which was ordained by God, and the other sort, that wasn't.' The Boer War, he recalls 'sounded a death-warning to the old Imperialistic spirit,' at least for him ('A Late Victorian,' Sedgewick Papers, box 1). In 'A Note on Anglo-Canadian Relations,' which appeared in 1938 in *United Empire*, the journal of the Royal Empire Society, he warns the British against assuming too much: 'Perhaps the hardest thing for a Canadian to bear ... was the supreme compliment – "One would almost mistake you for an Englishman"' (60), and goes on to discuss various constitutional irritants. In 'Of Disillusionment in Freshmen,' he praises his students, who are, as he quotes one, 'sick of all flag-waving,' and continues

Twentieth century politics and business may be heavily afflicted with the nationalistic disease, but twentieth century art is not. Contemporary artists are doing their best to bring to pass Arnold's dream that the whole western world should one day become one great spiritual confederacy ... (708)

His involvement with various groups that saw the only route to world peace in anti-nationalist and anti-imperialist struggle makes his lukewarm response both to condescending Englishmen and to fervent Canadian nationalists explicable. He certainly raised nationalist hackles on occasion, as several accounts point out: 'Now and then he stirs up a hornet's nest of indignant boosters of things Canadian by such statement as the well-known one of some years ago, to the effect that no artist may be expected to live and produce a great work in Vancouver, or for that matter in

Canada' (A.M.). He is also said to have denied Canadian literature a place on the university curriculum. Roger Bishop remembers

He never offered a course in Canadian literature at UBC. Once he said 'The teachers say to me we must have a course in Canadian Literature. I say to them "Show me the Canadian literature which is worth teaching and we'll have a course. Would you suggest we teach Heavysesge?"' (Akrigg Papers)

However, this comment does not give the whole picture. Sedgewick did not show much enthusiasm for Canadian literature, but among heads of English in Canada this was not unusual. As in many other Canadian English departments (Fee, 35n6), Canadian literature first appeared on the curriculum at UBC in the 1920s along with American literature. In 1925–6, 'American Literature: A Survey of the principal writers of this continent during the Nineteenth Century' was offered, to be taught by the newly hired Frank H. Wilcox (*UBC Calendar*). One of the two textbooks was E.K. Broadus's *A Book of Canadian Prose and Verse*, the other an equivalent American anthology. When Wilcox left in 1932, the course was no longer taught. In 1946–7, with the arrival of Reginald Watters, Canadian literature returned to the curriculum in much the same form. Granted, it was not until 1956–7 that UBC offered a full undergraduate course completely devoted to Canadian literature, but other universities did not do much better. Although Sedgewick's own professor at Dalhousie, Archibald MacMechan, had introduced a full course there in 1923, most universities did not provide full courses until the 1960s. At the University of Toronto, for example, Canadian literature was first introduced in 1934–5 as only six lectures at the end of a course on American literature (Harris, 85). A full course in Canadian literature was offered to students in English only in 1964–5 (Harris, 154).

Sedgewick cannot easily be forced into the position of the racist, imperialist, or homophobic other of the post-colonial critic. The oral tradition in the department certainly has it, however, not only that Sedgewick 'preferred boys,' but also that he was misogynist. Two accounts note what appears to be clearcut discrimination: 'he refused to lecture to women' (McKenzie) and 'he excluded women from his classes' (Cameron, 46). These rather sweeping statements can quickly be disproved. Women did attend his lectures and, indeed, can be quoted on the subject, reminiscing about his 'lilting, breath-taking, quiet voice' (Moloney), and occasionally, if they were 'co-eds of the "Oh, Dr. Sedgewick" type,' reported as 'on several occasions reduced to tears' (A.M.). Although this last does not sound good, he was hard on the men, too: 'he could freeze a football giant with one sarcastic barb' (Anon, 'Famed'). He certainly did not exclude women from his first-year lectures in Arts 100, which regularly drew over two hundred listeners (McDougall, 4). And he

certainly taught women Honours students in the third and fourth years, since, if he had not, they could not have met the requirements for the degree. However, he did appear to avoid teaching English to all-women sections in first and second years.

Lee Stewart writes in *'It's Up to You': Women at UBC in the Early Years* that the hiring of Mary L. Bollert, BA, MA (Toronto), AM (Columbia) as assistant professor of English and dean of women in 1922 was linked to the separation of men and women in first- and second-year English sections. Bollert's teaching duties were limited to the all-women sections in these two years. Dorothy Mawdsley, BA (McGill), MA (UBC), PhD (Chicago) was hired as an assistant professor of English in 1941–2; the following year she succeeded Bollert as dean of women. She said that 'male professors who did not want to teach women gave these sections to junior female assistants' and she 'thought it unfair that male professors organized the courses and set the exams, and that female instructors never saw them before they were given' (Stewart, 76). When Dorothy Blakey Smith, who was taken on to the faculty in 1935–6, was first hired as an assistant in English by Sedgewick in 1922, he told her she could do the teaching and 'get on with her own work.' She had two first-year sections of sixty and was expected to do all the marking for Sedgewick and another senior professor. She also remembers that Dean Buchanan once gave her a correspondence course (by-passing Sedgewick) and said there was to be \$200 for books. She was astonished, because 'she had never been able to get library money since any to spare went to G.G.S.'s young men' (Akrigg Papers). G.P.V. Akrigg, first a student, later a colleague, recalls that Sedgewick, 'with his picked section containing all the brightest scholarship boys, was limited neither by syllabus nor reading list, and took off into the bright blue with his class, doing whatever he pleased' (Akrigg, *Sedgewick*, 4). Robert apRoberts writes 'G.G. did enjoy teaching men more – he found them more resistant but more interesting. But he wasn't a misogynist.' And perhaps, given that the hiring of the dean of women and the assignment of her teaching duties was not something Sedgewick could have carried through by himself, apRoberts is right. According to Stewart, at UBC, 'Men remained the natural heirs to a tradition in an institution that accepted them without question. Women gained admission but not necessarily acceptance' (Stewart, 7).

If Sedgewick had been truly misogynist, it seems likely that he would have discouraged women from taking his special Honours program (which survives today), about which he speaks proudly in 'The Unity of the Humanities,' an invited address to the first meeting of what later became the Association of Canadian College and University Professors of English (ACCUTE). The plan released fourth-year students from six of the required fifteen credits to undertake their own reading in a specialized area. An examination of the calendars reveals that between 1919–20 and

1948–9 more women (54) than men (51) received the BA Honours degree in English, that more women (42) than men (32) received first-class honours in this degree, and that more women (20) than men (11) received the MA degree in English.

Akrigg, in conducting research for the lecture he delivered on Sedgewick in 1980, wrote many of Sedgewick's former students for their memories, and he asked about the 'woman question.' The typed response of Jean Campbell Butler (Honours English and History, 1938) to Akrigg's questions illuminates the numbers. Butler wrote with obvious precision, trying to pin down what made Sedgewick pivotal to her intellectual life. She unhesitatingly calls him great. She spent two years in his honours English program, was a teaching assistant, and later, a frequent visitor to his home. Yet consider her description of her first encounter with Sedgewick:

When I presented myself at eighteen years of age for English Honours (third year) at U.B.C., he looked from my written academic record to my earnest face, sensible brogues, and mannish tweeds, looked from such a distance and with such condescension that I might as well have been blushing there, slate in hand, with bare feet and clad in a gunnysack. 'And why,' he inquired, 'do *you* wish to take English Honours?'

This is the kind of behaviour that contributes to what is now called 'a chilly climate' in which one is tolerated, but not welcomed. Was he like this with men too? Possibly, but if so, his subsequent behaviour would have overcome first impressions. Butler comments, 'I struggled for many years to hold simultaneously in the mind my absolute conviction concerning his greatness and my half ashamed, half defiant sense that whereas I should put aside a mistaken loyalty to a concept of my own worth, I merited more encouragement than I got.' He supervised her graduating essay, praised it highly, and then gave her a bare first, her lowest mark. Butler is unwilling to generalize: 'Does this shed light on his attitude to female students? Or was his judgement in his own view, fair?' Despite her first-class results, he did not encourage her to go to graduate school, and when she went to Toronto, she found that he had forgotten to send the promised letter of recommendation, so that she 'arrived in Toronto ... like an upstairs maid without a reference' (Akrigg Papers). Only after she had won fellowships at Toronto did he show any special interest in her. The point here is that he treated her, not with hostility, but as if her work, however good, could be of no real significance. Misogyny entails overt hatred and obstruction. This is merely indifference, something that Sedgewick's bright male students did not experience.

Even after leaving UBC, many received regular letters filled with love and wise counsel and often more concrete financial support and men-

toring, and remember Sedgewick's kindness warmly. Earle Birney writes, for example, that Sedgewick was 'the man of all men who has stood nearest in the role of father to me' (Cameron, 313). The point is not that this mentoring is wrong. Certainly Sedgewick may well have spent more time and energy even on his women students than most professors spend on any student. The point is that the huge gap between the love and attention he displayed for the bright men and his relative uninterest in the bright women was hurtfully obvious in an institution that ostensibly ranks people by academic merit rather than by gender.

Yet Butler clearly believed that the indifference of a brilliant teacher was better than the kindness of a mediocre one, and her detailed accounts of Sedgewick's lectures are the ones that most convincingly explain why students flocked to hear him: 'It was as it must be for a blind person at last to see, physically through the eyes of another for the first time. I have come dazed out of a lecture hall, thinking concerning a familiar text, "My God, why did I never see before."' Students repeatedly refer to his ability to act out passages or to read poems, but Butler makes it clear that his lectures were more than that. Once, he replaced her Romantics professor at short notice, arrived in the lecture hall in a rather stiff mood, asked the students what poet they were doing, borrowed a text and produced an impromptu lecture on 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' that ranged over the matter of England, courtly love, beliefs about fairy mistresses, comparable passages in Chaucer, and the poem's relationship to other Romantic poems such as Coleridge's 'Christabel.' She notes that when he taught Chaucer

There were sly allusions to draw us into the range of Chaucer's fire. If one of the men in class had long lank pale hair, at the Pardoner's portrait he could not but feel the pinch. If one of us was a verbose, self-important busy-body, a cool derisive eye flicked over him as we heard of the Man of Lawe that 'yet he seemed bisier than he was.' I have felt myself the butt of Chaucer's barbs on the Prioress, the childless female academic, provincial in knowledge and accent, sentimental about small animals, ever so ladylike, and more than a little boring. (Akrigg Papers)

Other women remember him less ambiguously than Butler. Blakey Smith says that he gave her 'every encouragement' as a student and remarks that there was no discrimination evident in class: 'We were all just minds to him. Male or female didn't matter' (Akrigg Papers). But apparently you had to have a mind, or something, to get over the gender disadvantage: Jean Skelton McLeod, for whom he found two graduate scholarships, remarks '*once accepted*, a woman became a person as far as he was concerned – there was no hostility or coldness' (emphasis added; Akrigg Papers).

Sedgewick does not seem to have actively excluded women from his department or from subsequent promotion. One could discount the presence of Bollert and Mawdsley (who was promoted to professor four years after her arrival) because they spared him contact with women or because they were essentially university-level appointments. Blakey Smith was, however, outside of Nursing, the fourth woman faculty member to be hired at UBC after Isobel MacInnes (Modern Languages), Bollert, and Mawdsley, although Sylvia Thrupp arrived in History in 1936 (Stewart, 77). Blakey Smith received her honours BA in 1919 and her MA in 1921 from UBC, and in 1922 appeared on the roster as assistant in English. She did another master's degree at the University of Toronto in 1926 (Akrigg Papers). In 1935–6 she became an instructor. The following year, she received her doctorate from the University of London, and in 1938–9 she became an assistant professor. In 1947 she was promoted to associate. This may seem somewhat pitiful evidence of Sedgewick's acceptance of women as colleagues, but the department had only eleven full-time members in 1944–5. At the University of Toronto the faculty at the four colleges – Trinity, Victoria, St Michael's, and University College – numbered twenty-one in 1944: only two of this number were women, Mossie May Kirkwood (née Waddington) and Kathleen Coburn (Harris, 78–9). Neither of these women had an easy time. In 1931 Kirkwood's job had been threatened because her husband also had a full-time position with the university (Harris, 78), and Coburn was blocked from the tenure stream for fourteen years by the then-principal of Victoria College, Dr Brown (Coburn, 58–9). These numbers, however, are so small that this comparison can only be suggestive, proving only that the UBC English department was not *unusually* bad.

Nonetheless, if this is misogyny, it is pretty ineffectual misogyny. Clearly UBC as an institution was not welcoming women, nor were English professors elsewhere (few of whom immediately elicit the label 'misogynist') treating their male and female students and colleagues equally, or preferring women. Indeed, it is possible that the accusation is linked not so much to Sedgewick's actions as to his sexual orientation, which is often stereotyped as invariably misogynist. Further, some of those who use the label now are, consciously or not, conveying the hope that the department has definitively left the bad old days behind. (Thirty-five per cent of the tenured and tenure-stream faculty members now are women.) Still, I wonder if my attempt to defend him is motivated by a wish to feel I belong in 'his' department, even in the face of clear evidence that Sedgewick wouldn't like the thought of 'his' department being overrun (relatively speaking) by women. I realize that I cannot accept him as point of origin, as founder of any tradition that has me in it, because he wouldn't have accepted me as its proper inheritor. My resistance to him comes from my literary specialization, from feminist and post-

colonial theory, just as his resistance to accepting England and the English as point of origin came, oddly, from his literary specialization in Shakespeare.

As Alan Sinfield has noted, Shakespeare is at the top in the popular and professional hierarchy of the canon:

For literary criticism, Shakespeare is the keystone which guarantees the ultimate stability and rightness of the category 'Literature.' The status of other authors may be disputed – indeed, one of the ways criticism offers itself as serious and discriminating is by engaging in such disputes, policing its boundaries. But Shakespeare is always there as the final instance of the validity of Literature. (Sinfield, 135)

Tony Dawson has remarked on the frequent deployment of 'an identification ... of "Shakespeare" with the critic ... that is old as the hills and that functions mainly to empower the critical position' (Dawson, 71). Sedgewick deployed this identification to the hilt. Several accounts of his life, including one entitled 'Little Hamlet of UBC' (A.M.), recalled not only that he said in lectures that he should have lived in Elizabethan England, but also that he 'dramatized everything, himself, his lectures' (McKenzie) and 'When he crossed the campus with his overcoat worn as a cape, it was sometimes ... because he liked posing as Doc Sedgewick ... and sometimes because he really imagined he was wearing a purple silken cloak with a crimson lining and the hilt of a rapier poking out from beneath its left side' (Brock, 8). Akrigg refers to 'the famous Sedgewick Act,' noting that

for university purposes the Act rested upon two premises. One, mockingly suggested by its principal, was that Garnett was a great-souled scholar of quite incredible distinction, totally eclipsing everybody else at U.B.C. ... The other premise was that his students were barbarians, almost invincibly ignorant, who might just possibly be saved from complete mental darkness by the ill-rewarded labours of the same great G.G.S. This was a game in which professor and students gaily conspired. (*Sedgewick*, 4-5)

Akrigg does admit, however, that 'some students were so fascinated by the Act that they never saw beyond it' (4). It is not irrelevant that Sedgewick's major scholarly work was on irony, and that he notes that the term originally described 'not so much a mode of speech ... [as] a general mode of behaviour' (*Of Irony*, 6; see also 9, 14).

He worked his life history into a story that grounded his cultural authority. His depiction of his birthplace, the wonderfully named Middle Musquodoboit, thirty miles north of Halifax, dwells on its 'medieval independence' – when he 'first came across Juliet's nurse, I felt that

Shakespeare hadn't much that was new to tell me, for I observed that she had come to life again in the person of my great-grand aunt Eliza' ('Musquodoboit,' 470). As Roy Daniells, his student and successor as head, recalls, Musquodoboit became Athens, 'the Athens of Nova Scotia, ... it lay in the woods near Halifax, but it was vastly larger, more venerable and more important' (Daniells Papers, 'Garnett Sedgewick,' 2). British Columbia was the margin, his campus only recently clearcut, his university 'poverty-stricken and provincial' ('Unity,' 366), but he used his connections with Nova Scotia and New England, famed still for the age and excellence of their universities, to repel imperializing moves by his colleagues from Ontario. He related this anecdote to a meeting of Canadian English professors:

A friendly colleague was warning our faculty ... against running after strange gods, insisting that we stand fast by tried models of culture. Someone inquired what these were. The answer was immediate and confident and explicit: 'What was done,' he said, 'at Queen's and Toronto.' Our hosts will pardon me – a narrow and unrepentant Maritimer – for revealing the fact that he is a professor of palaeontology. ('Unity,' 367)

Sedgewick and Shakespeare are always connected in both sober and irreverent accounts. Daniells writes of Sedgewick in the *Encyclopedia Canadiana*: 'He is best remembered for his humane and witty conversation and for his brilliant interpretations of Shakespeare in the classroom' (266). At his retirement party, friends sang 'Garnett, Garnett, give us your blessing do! / Linked with Shakespeare, heavenly twins are you' – and when he died a year later (he had continued his lectures) one headline read 'Loss of Sedgewick Stills Bard at UBC' (Anon), as if, at least in Vancouver, the two had lived and died together. His obituaries variously rated him on Shakespeare as a 'nationally renowned authority' (Anon, 'Loss'), 'one of the chief authorities in Canada and the U.S.' (McKenzie), and 'internationally recognized as one of the greatest authorities on Shakespeare in this or any other age' (Philpott). Sedgewick had won the Bowdoin Medal at Harvard in 1913 for the best doctoral dissertation in English, 'Dramatic Irony: Studies in Its History, Its Definition, and Its Use, Especially in Shakspeare and Sophocles,' written under the supervision of George Lyman Kittredge. His only book, published in 1935, was *Of Irony Especially in Drama*, the text of the four Alexander lectures he delivered at the University of Toronto (second edition, 1948). It seems fair to say that he was widely known as an authority on Shakespeare, but clearly the connection was one with which obituary writers were prepared to conjure greatness.

Of Kittredge, Sedgewick writes 'A great scholar is sometimes said to wear his learning lightly. As for Kittredge, he wore his variously. He

could, and often did, wear it as Sinai wore clouds. He could, and often did, put it on as if it were motley' ('Kittredge,' 84). Sedgewick was similar, veering from aristocratic hauteur to lugging ears, seizing freshmen's ties, and, in mock despair at their obtuseness, banging his head against the wall (Akrigg, *Sedgewick*, 5–6). As his former student David Brock wrote:

One day a disgruntled student said 'Who does he think he is? God's brother Archibald?' And another said, 'No, he thinks he's Peter Pan. And by gum, he may be right.' If he wasn't that rather sentimental little growth, P. Pan, at least he may have been Puck, a better Pan than Peter. (Anon [Brock], 13)

Sedgewick's 'Puckish humour' is mentioned elsewhere (Anon, 'Dr. G.G. Sedgewick') and his colleague from History, Walter N. Sage, in the obituary for the Royal Society of Canada writes, 'In a sense he was a combination of Puck and Ariel.' Here in the fantasies of his students and admirers, Sedgewick is produced in a colonial reading of his self-production that sees him as powerful because able to mimic a powerful imperial text convincingly.

Sedgewick, I think, used Shakespeare somewhat more flexibly. Although these references may allude both to his height (5'4") and to his sexuality, Sedgewick may not necessarily have repudiated the identification with a figure who can be argued to be a sort of cultural impresario. For example, in a radio broadcast on 23 May 1943, Sedgewick discussed Kipling's version of Shakespeare's Puck on the anniversary of Empire Day. After pointing out that Kipling had 'in his worse and weaker moment [sic] ... champion[ed] a blatant and ugly imperialism' (['This being'], 1), he continues, to posit that Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910) are more than children's literature, in that they 'make an addition to the mythology of mankind.' Their main purpose, he says, is to outline 'the fundamental virtue of the British race – their peculiar and enduring contribution to the world's goodness' (3). Thus, well into the war, Sedgewick produced a reassuring image of Britishness for Canadians, figured as the inheritors of this virtue.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has been frequently analysed as an allegory of Empire, one that post-colonial writers have used to figure their resistance through identification with Caliban.³ Few have examined the impact of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a play that hooks into post-colonial as well as imperial fantasies. It is susceptible to readings that produce England as a pastoral garden, an image that has been deployed in ways that either obliterate the colonial landscape or permit it to be seen only as chaotic or exotic fallen wilderness. Sedgewick, in a radio broadcast about Emily Carr (9 March 1945), notes how she had changed the way he saw British Columbia, transforming a colonial wilderness into a site of post-colonial power:

The West Coast landscape is not ... suave and gracious, and neatly trimmed. Its forests of 200-foot firs and cedars, ten feet through at the ground, are not at all like the park at Windsor. ... As for totem-poles, how the deuce would they look in a canvas by Sir John Millais or Sir Edward Burne-Jones. ([‘You may’], 2–3)

He adds: ‘it may seem strange that we British Columbians didn’t see all this without being told [by Carr’s paintings]. But we didn’t’ (3). Derek Walcott reveals a much stronger sense of disillusionment with the British pastoral. Not only did it render him incapable of seeing his own country properly, blinded as he was by ‘Green England,’ but the idealized English culture he grew to love and identify with as a schoolboy in St Lucia does not appear to have made its nominal ‘owners’ less racist. He writes of his reaction to the Brixton riots:

for me, that closes
the child’s fairy tale of an antic England – fairy rings,
thatched cottages fenced with dog roses ...

I was there to add some colour to the British theatre.
‘But the blacks can’t do Shakespeare, they have no experience.’
This was true. Their thick skulls bled with rancour
when the riot police and the skinheads exchanged quips
you could trace to the Sonnets, or the Moor’s eclipse. (Walcott, xxiii)

Here Walcott – in a collection entitled *Midsummer* – sarcastically points out that to be English does not automatically confer the ability to quote Shakespeare, something most colonials were forced to learn to do. Walcott has as good a claim to be considered Shakespeare’s heir as any other writer in English, but for the shock that this proposal causes, a shock that reveals the systemic racism that naturalizes the familial and biological assumptions latent in the words ‘tradition’ and ‘heir.’ This is what forces many post-colonial writers of colour, however reluctantly, to take up the role of Caliban. Like the many West Indians encouraged to go ‘home’ to help Britain reconstruct after the war, such post-colonial writers are hailed as British, but then refused true citizenship.

European-descended post-colonials have used *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to produce a more ambiguous model of Empire than the one posited by *The Tempest*. Kipling transformed the dream of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* into a dream of the imperial centre that emphasized its dependence on those from outside it. Significantly, Kipling’s *Dream* was written by a man who, as Zohreh T. Sullivan remarks, ‘at the age of six felt he had been expelled from the Edenic bliss of his first home in India’ to the alien world of school in England (Sullivan, 2). As a result, ‘his fiction negotiates an uneasy series of truces between the resistance of the self to the authority of empire, and ... the antithetical longings for empire,

England and India to be his source of origin, his "very-own" home' (1). Thus his picture of the centre often focuses on those who came to it from elsewhere, including the fairies, all, except Puck, immigrants who left when Henry VIII abolished the Roman Catholic religion (when presumably all superstitions about any divine or magical figures other than God also became obsolete). The most compelling episodes in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies* are tales of those who cross borders: for example, the Normans, who first conquer and then settle England, or the Roman Parnesius, who is 'one of a good few thousands who have never seen Rome except in a picture. My people have lived at Vectis [the Isle of Wight] for generations' (*Puck*, 143). Parnesius spends his life in the army on Hadrian's Wall, negotiating an uneasy truce between the Norsemen and the Picts. Thus Kipling creates a space where those like him, born at the margins of Empire, could identify with Parnesius, who, paradoxically, is at the edge in Roman terms, but at the centre in British terms.

Just as English has become englishes, quite detached from British cultural affiliation (Ashcroft et al, 38–77), Shakespeare is now a world text. Sedgewick, it can be argued, is part of a post-colonial discursive project working on what Barbara Hodgdon has described as the 'contamination of the social space described by John of Gaunt as "This other Eden, demi-paradise, / This fortress built by Nature for herself ... / This precious stone set in the silver sea"' (Hodgdon, 35). Hodgdon writes an account of Québécois producer Robert Lepage's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at London's Royal National Theatre from 9 July 1992 to 6 January 1993. The 'contamination' of this production was literal, as the stage was filled with a sea of real mud. The actors in this production were, apart from a Québécoise Puck, British. However, as Hodgdon notes, 'Many of Dream's major performers ... had their passports revoked and were constructed as colonials' by reviewers who saw 'an American Bottom, an Asian Hippolyta (Lolita Chakrabarti), an African Oberon (Jeffrey Kissoon)' (34). Hodgdon notes that this production in many ways clears a space for Lepage to construct himself, to find 'a space outside of either British or French Empire that represented an Archimedean point from which to critique the insularity of British "Shakespeare culture"' (36–7). Certainly Sedgewick, faced with Englishmen who 'doubted if anyone could possibly learn to read Chaucer at Harvard' ('A Note,' 61), felt the need to clear a space for himself and, like Lepage, chose Shakespeare as the tool with which to do it.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, especially as rewritten by Kipling, permits a way into the mythology of empire that is more acceptable to the white post-colonial than is *The Tempest*, where the resistant position, figured as monstrous and slavish, is unacceptable to those who wish to identify with Shakespeare's magical and magisterial powers. Although both *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* show rulers assisted by magic, Prospero

forces Ariel and Caliban to do his bidding, while Puck willingly obeys Oberon, and his magic eventually produces harmony among the Athenian lovers. *Dream* represses those memories of the exploited slave and the dispossessed indigene stirred up by *Tempest*, and is therefore more palatable to those born at the margins, like Sedgewick and Kipling. Englishness, 'the fundamental virtue of the English race,' thus becomes portable, detachable virtue, just like the canon – it can be read anywhere, even far from England. Near Athens, the symbolic originary point of Western culture, yet possibly just a fantasy, the wood provides a site for transformation of the margin – any margin. Sedgewick mapped the distance from Middle Musquodoboit to Vancouver as the distance from Athens to the woods, from culture to barbarity, and then fashioned himself as a combination of Shakespeare, Hamlet, and Puck, a self-fashioning that gave him the power to transform the raw provincial margin into a centre.

As Louis Montrose has argued, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play about cultural power and how it can be exerted, about how the theatre and life interact, and this is precisely the location in which Sedgewick operated. He was able to position himself as a Canadian heir of one of the most powerful cultural icons of the West. Women have more difficulty taking this position, because, just as Walcott's right to the English-language poetic mantle is complicated by racism, so their connection to the tradition is complicated by sexism. Should we produce black Shakespeares? female Shakespeares? Perhaps a better technique is to disrupt the power of the idea of tradition and inheritance (sometimes amounting to apostolic succession) that hovers over departments. Heirs, given the rule of primogeniture, are male members of a biologically related family. Following Donna Haraway, perhaps we should produce Shakespeare, or at least heads of English departments in Canada, as Canadian-made cyborgs. A cyborg 'does not expect its father to save it' (Haraway, 192) and dreams 'not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia' (223), not of Green England or gardens, but of using transitional 'monstrous and illegitimate' unities to 'disarm the state' (196) – or the state of things.

NOTES

I would like to thank several colleagues at UBC for their suggestions and assistance: Richard Cavell, Tony Dawson, Jane Flick, Patricia Merivale, Nikki Strong-Boag, and Paul Yachnin. G.P.V. Akrigg kindly gave me permission to quote his research notes. Chris Hicks, the University Archivist, and his staff facilitated my work. Its fantasies are my own.

- 1 Cameron writes: 'Some of Sedgewick's students realize with hindsight that his emotional orientation was homosexual, though there is no evidence that

- he was involved in anything more than close friendships with his protégés' (50).
- 2 For descriptions of the varieties of imperialism popular in Canada, see Eddy and Schreuder, and Berger.
 - 3 See Vaughan and Vaughan for more on Caliban.

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