Language, Identity and Social Change in a Newfoundland Novel: Percy Janes' *House of Hate*

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The task of the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of formation, is to trace the development of an individual from childhood to maturity. As Franco Moretti suggests, this literary genre typically dramatizes the tensions and contradictions of modernity, among which the conflict of self-determination and socialization looms large: on the one hand, the genre plots the formation of the individual as a rational, autonomous subject, possessed of will and particular life amibitions. On the other, it elaborates the social norms and institutions to which the individual must conform, through which he or she necessarily realizes a destiny and finds a place in the world. Along the way, this European genre -- whose representive practitioners include Goethe, Austen, Eliot, Stendahl, Balzac and Dickens -- innovates new symbolizations, themes, and literary forms around the experience of modern life: youth assumes priority over maturity and comes to stand for the restlessness of modernity itself; and, possessing new hopes and desires, youth adds psychological depth to the novel, hitherto unknown (Moretti 4). Postcolonial narratives of formation replay this drama with a number of variations: New World adventurers escape the constraints of civilized life; settlers struggle to transplant and legitimate the institutions of metropolitan culture; immigrants start anew, erasing their pasts, if need be; while belatedness, isolation, and alienation are possible fates of both New World and colonized artist, adding an even wider range of thematic and formal dimensions to the novel of formation.

Such stories of individual development, it has been longed noted, encourage allegorical readings: allegories of gender, generation, class, or nation. Individual life histories, even blatantly autobiographical ones, are read beyond their confines, becoming narratives of social advancement or national development. After all, such successful individuals, happily integrated at story's end with the institutional structures of marriage, profession, and community are model, modern national subjects. *House of Hate* (1970) by Newfoundland writer Percy Janes (1922-2000) is an I-narrative of individual development that chronicles the growing alienation of its educated hero from family, communal culture, and society at large. At the same time, it undertakes an investigation of how a particularly oppressive patriarchal family has stunted the development of the younger generation in an era of renewed prosper-

ity and optimism for the former colony of Newfoundland.

In focusing on the stifling effects of family life on individual quests for independence and identity, Percy Janes invites us to entertain an allegorical historical narrative of Newfoundland's desperate and ill-conceived bid for self-sufficiency through modernization, its dashed hopes for nationhood betrayed, according to Newfoundland nationalists of the day, by its opting for material security and middle-class comfort. Ceded by France almost in its entirety to England under the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Newfoundland won responsible government in 1832 and achieved full colonial status in 1855. It overwhelmingly rejected joining Canada in 1869. Yet with a mid-nineteenth-century population of about 160,000 scattered in small communities, or outports, 89% of whom were engaged in the fishery, high rates of illiteracy, sectarian divisions, and a powerful conservative merchant elite, the colony was unsuited to the independence it had resolved to pursue. It exported almost all that it produced and imported most all that it needed. Aside from sea products, which accounted for 95% of exports, subsistence farming, logging, and mining were prosecuted. Yet money was scarce as the mercantile economy consisted of an exploitative system of seasonally advanced and redeemed credit, keeping working people near the brink of poverty. Development schemes -- especially railway access begun in 1882 to an island interior believed to hold mineral wealth -- diverted energy from much-needed reform in the fishery at a time of declining prices and increased foreign competition, and along with the First World War and the Great Depression, contributed to the collapse of the colony's economy in the 1930s. London interceded, suspending responsible government and appointing a Commission of Government to return the colony to financial stability. Yet despite the promise of large-scale development, such as pulp and paper manufacturing at Grand Falls and Corner Brook, and the full employment delivered during World War Ⅱ, London was led to conclude that Confederation with Canada was the key to sustained prosperity. J.R. Smallwood advocated Canadian union, holding up the promises of modern social welfare -- pensions, family allowance and unemployment insurance. Coupled with the fact of the colony's increased cultural and economic links to Canada since 1869, pro-Confederation forces carried the day, and on March 31st, 1949, Newfoundland became the tenth province of Canada.

Born in the colonial capital, St. John's, in 1922, Percy Janes experienced many of the changes sweeping Newfoundland during the twentieth century. At the age of seven, he moved with his family to Corner Brook, drawn by work in the newly constructed pulpmill. Attending Memorial University in St. John's for two years before enlisting in the Canadian navy, he resumed his studies at the University of Toronto earning a BA. He worked as a correspondence clerk, a private school teacher, and held a number of labouring jobs, before moving himself to London, England, where he lived for 10 ten years, in conditions of abject poverty, travelling widely, and returning to Newfoundland and Toronto, before finally set-

tling in St. John's. *House of Hate*, his second novel, was written during his stay in England, over a four-year period, and was published by McClelland and Stewart in 1970, when Janes was 48.

Janes' working-class origins, his determination to gain a university education, his years of service in the navy and subsequent acculturation outside Newfoundland find echo in the novel. Its hero and narrator, Juju, the fourth son of Saul and Gertrude Stone, views family and community with an outsider's eyes; and the chronicle he presents is starkly thematized around the encroachment of new social and economic bonds on family and community, and the development of Newfoundland as a whole. The narrative spans the colonial period of the late 19th century, recounting Newfoundland's entry into confederation in 1949, and ending with the death of the family patriarch, Saul Stone, in 1963. The maturation of the six Stone children, five boys and one girl, parallels and overlaps with the opening of the space of personal ambition, desire, and commercial exchange. While the Stone children enter this space through an education sufficient to inculcate the desire for monetary independence and marriage, Juju, the narrator of their stories, chooses another path: that of a freedom born of reading and intellectual pursuits. He travels widely and returns on a number of occasions, becoming acutely aware of the rapid changes in his family and in Newfoundland. Consequently, Juju resolves to locate the origins of the scars that his siblings have carried into their mature lives.

Language assumes central importance in the novel, registering the effects of education and acculturation abroad in the artist-hero as well as the social and economic changes that are, for Juju's siblings, opening avenues of escape or offering means of resisting the patriarch's dominance of the household. Language change driven by social and economic factors is also contributing to the decline of the native variety of speech. Linguists recognize Newfoundland English as "a distinct variety of North American English." With its immigrant population drawn from two regions in Britain -- the counties of Dorset, Devon, Somerset and Hampshire in England, and Waterford, Wexford, Kilkenny, Tipperary and Cork in Ireland -- the region is regarded as "a linguistic relic area" (Clarke, 1991, 108), in which features of both the Irish and West Country dialects have been preserved.

Another important sociolinguistic feature of the novel is nicknames. Nicknames signify familial and class power relations in the crucible of social change, and provide clues to questions of personal and communal identity. Despite limited sociolingusitic study, personal names constitute an important aspect of the language-identity nexus. The name, insists Joseph (2004), is the "primary text of personal identity" (12), and merits greater attention from linguists at "the anthropological end of linguistics" where it would figure "on a par with kinship terms, deferential address and other phenomena in which culture is directly encoded into the language system" (12). On one level, names merely identify an individual, yet

on another names reveal "deeply felt narratives" of personal history and asiprations as well as group belonging. They therefore reveal a good about "ethnicity, religion and family history, as well as personal identity" (177).

"Hate is the child of fear, and Saul Stone had been afraid of one thing or another all his life" (9), Juju the artist narrator tells us at the very beginning of the novel. This suspended syllogism articulates the determining force of economic hardship and uncertainty in generating the family violence on which the novel dwells. It also symbolizes the educated consciousness that can distill and articulate their origins in a metaphorical and logical formulation. This detached perspective is entwined with his scorn of the pursuits of practical life, allowing him from the very beginning of the novel, to marshal certain knowledge of the forces that have shaped the development of his family and its members: sociological, linguistic, geographical, and economic knowledge. Juju's rejection of materialism and his possession of knowledge will become, in the course of the novel, only a mark of further alienation from his family.

House of Hate is divided into two parts: the first chronicles the maturation of the family members, each chapter focusing on moments of crisis in the lives of the children and their struggles for independence in a home marked by physical and verbal violence. Ank, the eldest son is the first to rebel against the father's brutal authority; "entirely permeated by the local conviction that money, and not learning, made a full man" (42), he leaves school, finds a job, acquires "a girl friend in addition to his taste for beer and a certain amount of independence" (45). Racer follows a path toward greater economic success. His physical resemblance to the "Anglo-Saxon" ideal and his charisma allow him almost effortlessly to escape the troubles in which he finds himself. His fervid interest in earning money, his courting a minister's daughter, and his attention to fashion mark him for success. But his status and precociousness bring him into conflict with his father; only his enlistment in the army earns him some measure of acknowledgment and respect. Rapid social change brings difference and conflict among the children themselves. When Crawfie matures, Juju notes a certain "decadence" in the life of the Stone family. Ank, now thoroughly assimilated to a family culture of violence and masculine brutishness, deems him unworthy. "[S]oft as shit" is the family verdict on him (101). Marked by physical weakness, he takes shelter in his school work, ultimately choosing a career as a teacher. Timid, prurient, religious, he is reviled by his brothers, not least for the act of deference implied by using the word 'father' instead of the customary 'Old Man' (105) and his attempt to win spiritual capital through evangelical fervour. His pretensions and ambitions are cruelly criticized, and his religious uprightness is challenged by the brothers (110). For Crawfie, marriage and employment offer escape, but little happiness. Fudge, the youngest of the Stone children, becomes the most dependent on the routines and rituals of the family circle. Withdrawn, almost autistic,

he is smothered by Gertrude, his mother. The narrator, returning home after eight years abroad attempts to socialize Fudge through conversation and reading, with limited success. For Juju, it becomes clear that greater opportunity and greater economic prosperity do not bring happiness; the Stone children win independence but descend into despair, alcoholism and violence.

Hilda, the only girl, also leaves school like many of her brothers, only to assume the drudgery of domestic life. She works in the parents' home "seven days and five or six nights a week without pay and never a word of praise or appreciation to lighten her burdens" (61). She is sacrificed to the home, an exigency that saves school fees and expensive clothes (61). But when the Depression brings further cuts in Saul's wages, she is forced to seek outside employment. This necessity turns to her advantage as a personal income protects her somewhat from the hectoring of her mother and the cruelty of her brothers. Financial independence brings a taste for being in style, and her entry into this social space earns her the nickname "Flinsky," or "Wild One" (64).

Names have a particular importance in the Stone family, imposing an essential character and situating each in the family hierarchy (35). Yet if they are expressive of essential qualities, their gradual deformation through use suggests a process of disintegration and decay beyond the linguistic realm. The name of the first son declines from "Henry to Hank to Anky to Ank," becoming "the flat monosyllable" by which this "square-cut, stubby fellow" is known to family and friends alike (35). Racer acquires his name both because of his poor finishing in a road race and because of being the son "most likely to forge ahead and win some coveted prize in the race of life" (75). The narrator himself is nicknamed "Jewish" by the family because "Jews had tempers that blew hot and cold at a moment's notice or over the least trifle" (136). His name is later modified to Juju and then to "pore Juju" because of "the girlish, brahminical slenderness" of his frame (136). The otherwise noble given name of the fifth son of the family, Frederick, is reduced to "one syllable -- Fudge" (165).

If the names acquired and employed in the family circle reveal a process of degeneration, the sociological, linguistic, historical, and literary terms derived from education, names of another sort, have importance for Juju. These intellectual tools help Juju understand and articulate the forces that have shaped his family and region. Education confers on Juju the ability to understand the common traits and class position of the family: "within our means as common people" (74); "*Among people like us*, the private law was to take whatever came with marriage" (Emphasis added, 91); "Ank's better-educated children were veering away from the traditional *patois* of our class" (Author's emphasis, 199). Juju also identifies family idioms, noting such examples with asides such as "our phrase for moderation" (202). At times, these terms are evidence of Juju's desire merely to translate the idiom of class and family for the reader, but later in the novel they become the means of reduction and abuse

that are as essentializing and violent as the family nicknames. Juju tell us that his family illustrate "various forms of abnormality" (318). Racer is categorized as a "disillusioned bourgeois of forty-three" (222); Ank possesses "an insensitivity amounting to brutishness; Fudge is deemed to display "a pathological immaturity" (318); and Juju construes himself to bear the marks of "a savage misanthropy" (318). Another sign of Juju's learning is his use of foreign words: *gauche* (72); *contretemps* (81, 192); prognathous (187); *bonhomie* (209); *purée* (211); and *déclassée* (240) indicate this verbal sophistication. As well, he often employs literary and historical allusions: Saul's face is deemed to betray a "Mephistophelan acuteness" (37), and his exercise of power is seen as "feudal domination" (42).

Juju's power of articulation presents a sharp contrast with the texture, form, and limited expressive power of local Newfoundland speech. And through the course of his chronicle, he pays particular attention to the ways in which the abandonment of local speech patterns for standardized English, as well as the heteroglossia of a colony marked by immigration and mobility, point up social change in Newfoundland. Gertrude Yeovil, Juju's mother, moves from the hinterland outport of Haystack, where her ancestors came as "fishing servants," to the colonial entrepot of St. John's. Here, she lands a servant's job at Government House and meets her future husband. Escaping from the primitive merchant capitalism of outport life, she adapts to the bourgeois social order: "[F]riends noticed that her manner gradually took on ease and confidence. Even her speech changed somewhat. The drawling, word-champing dialect that came to her naturally from dim origins in Somerset, with modifications added by the isolation and local conditions of Haystack, now became overlaid with the colonial Irish spoken by nearly everyone in St. John's" (17).

Such a process of adaptation and socialization, with its family and generational tensions, is also traced in the maturation of the Stone children. Juju tells us that Ank, the eldest of the Stone children, "would growl in the local *patois* which our family speech had hammered down from the Irish and West Country of our heritage and the gobbled syntax of unlettered Newfoundlanders" (36). The standardization of speech patterns, inculcated in education, breaks down the "gobbled syntax" of traditional oral communication: "Racer's academic progress to Grade X had softened and toned down the more grotesque of the errors and crudities of speech habitual with us, but by no means removed them entirely" (86). With schooling, the differences of speech that regulated reading, writing, and standardized pronunciation produce open up avenues by which familial and paternal authority can be contested or ridiculed. In the case of the cunning and profit-seeking Racer, rebellion is signified through mimicry. Imitation and mockery delegitimize Saul's authority: "[Racer's] imitations of him in a sour or violent mood were quite hilarious, as were also his take-offs on the language and idiom the Old Man used on the frequent occasions when savagery possessed his mind and ruled his body" (77). Saul recognizes the challenge that his children's

education poses to his authority and castigates his children for their rebelliousness: "'Just 'cause ye got a bit o' education ye t'inks yere shit don't stink'" (87).

The first challenges to paternal authority, however, occur in other sites of exchange: in manifestations of individual intelligence and the domains of domestic work. The narrator tells us that "[l]ike most Newfoundland children, we could all play cards before we could read..." (49). Playing cards is a means of demonstrating one is "smart" (50), and the ritual of card-playing stands for the social game itself, one in which the father, dominating the family, holds all the trumps. When Ank wins one such game, and when Saul charges that his son has cheated, the other family members successfully champion Ank in the argument that ensues. The outcome represents a symbolic victory against the father's power: "The crisis of Ank's fight for freedom had been passed, not through the game of cards itself but in the secondary or symbolic meaning that these contests of will and skill in our family bore" (55). The pattern of conflict changes little. Some twenty years later, during a family reunion, a game of cards is played and Saul's declining faculties present an opportunity for the now mature offspring to torment their father: "We would not allow him to change or take back his bid, and we kept to the ancient practice of showing no mercy at all in a game of cards" (193). Similar struggles are waged in the sphere of domestic work. Saul's obsessive repairs of the home, in which the male children are forced to participate, become the site of a struggle to break free from the "feudal domination" he exercises in the family. Marriage and earning money are easy and acceptable means of escape.

Reading, by contrast, Juju notes early in the novel, is a respite from the harshness of paternal authority and the grind of physical work: "we had domestic peace for a few hours, with all serious work put aside and each of us able to give a little time to his heart's desire: Flinsky reading *True Romance*; Racer, *Gone With the Wind*" (92). Juju also reads as an activity of leisure, but this he acquires by "bullying" his mother into releasing him from household duties (154). When modern conveniences such as a bath are installed in the house, Juju retreats from family conflict: "in [the tub] I wallowed for hours on end with a book propped up in front of my eyes and the knots in my nerves gradually untying themselves in the delicious warmth and silence of the tiny bathroom" (180). But for Juju, reading and writing as well as success at school also provide independence, self-respect, and discipline: "I began to feel that I had at least some small measure of control over the things that happened to me in a violent and bewildering world. By close attention and diligence I could influence and therefore predict my rulers' behaviour toward me -- a refreshing contrast to the arbitrary government and frequently shattering chaos of our home life, and one that gradually gave me a sense of power and even security within myself" (140). Winning a scholarship not only brings success in his competitions with Crawfie but also causes "local people to take notice of [Juju] as an individual, with the result that [he begins] to take a sharper

and more appraising notice of [himself]" (150). This discipline and self-respect Juju carries with him in his travels. When, during the family reunion, Juju witnesses Ank's descent into alcoholism and violence, he tells of how, during his exile, educated reason imposed order on his own rootless and alcoholic life (209). Moreover, Juju thinks that the imaginative escape offered by reading may ease the hardships of his youngest sibling Fudge (175-6).

If reading and writing foster, self-discipline or provide imaginative nourishment, those who lack access to literacy are increasingly marginalized as modern education transforms the family hierarchy and the world outside it. The revelation that Saul cannot read marks another symbolic shift of power relations. When Juju brings his report card home, his father pays no attention to it, which leads Juju to suspect that his father cannot read: "When later this suspicion became a confirmed fact, I needed a good deal of time and pondering to get used to the idea that in one way at least I had power over him, or a skill and a means of dealing with the world in which my father not only did not surpass me but in which he had no share at all" (141). This shift of power is reflected in the way the children address their father: "Though my physical fear of him remained, I already felt more liberated from my childish helplessness and the over-all atmosphere of constraint and subjection in our home. Shortly after this revelation of his ignorance, Crawfie and I began, like all the others, to refer to dad as the Old Man" (141). Education, as Juju later reflects, was instrumental in eroding the family hierarchy: "Was there any truth in his frequent accusation, in later years, that we all 't'ought nutting about him' and looked down on him because he had no education? My private experience seems to have borne him out" (141).

After some eight years abroad, Juju returns to Newfoundland on the occasion of the birth of the youngest son, Fudge. Old patterns of family behaviour re-emerge. He tells us that despite the fact of "maturity" and "superior education," "I had not been in the house five minutes nor spoken a dozen words before [my mother] was at me, more or less in the old style, about my peculiarities," by which he means, his horn-rimmed glasses and "that foreign way" (167). Juju has acquired an accent, something which marks him as a stranger. His mother tells him, "You got that real Canadian twang. Some words you say I can't hardly understand you a-tall. I s'pose Newfoundland talk is not good enough for you now, after bein' away for so long" (167-8). On subsequent returns to the family, Juju finds himself considered "not only a suspicious but also a foreign character, and one who might be secretly inclined to look down on them" (192). As the children once mocked the father, so Ank now mocks Juju's speech manners: "'Pawss,'" he kept saying, imitating the way I pronounced the word 'pass,' with a sarcastic grin and mocking inflection about as subtle as a fist in the face" (192).

The growing sense of alienation from the ways of his family only strengthens Juju's sense of self. He seeks privacy while in the home, broods over their fates and his own, and

combats family pressures, especially the ridicule he faces for not turning his intelligence and education to practical ends, to making money and becoming financially independent: "I could sense their wonder and their secret amusement at my style of speech, my mainland clothes, and my air of genteel prosperity as against the general family knowledge that I had no money to speak of" (201). Juju's defense of his lifestyle is a refusal of practical life oriented toward making money and acquiring commodities: "I began to answer that if I was waiting for anything, it was for something worth doing and not just a blind accumulation of money and clutching at power; that I preferred poverty in freedom to wealth in business, leisure to luxury" (221). Indeed, when Racer criticizes him for not making more of himself, Juju rejects the implication that getting ahead is matter of acquiring things, a declaration made in full recognition that such idealism is neither understood or respected in his family (227). But such talk is rejected by Racer as merely "fancy words": Juju understands his difference from the rest of his family as the investment of his life in a search for an alternative to money and consumption (228).

Returns home increasingly become 'field trips,' the occasions of Juju's search for clues to the secret causes of decline in each of the Stone children. Juju's quest constitutes and gives purpose to his intellectual life, his identity becoming invested in the language he uses to analyze their lives: "By this time I had come to think of each of my family visits as a kind of quest, a search for the child I had known in my brothers and sister" (250). He searches for "clues" (229), some knowledge of Racer's "inner life" (222), and confesses "an eagerness to solve the mystery of [his brother's] decline" (223): "Hours and hours I spent as the days passed and the total picture of Racer's development was revealed to my mind, contemplating its strangeness and seeking the reasons for his failure as a man" (229). Crawfie's failures also constitute a "puzzle" (245, 248) to be solved; and Juju becomes preoccupied "with the mystery of [his marriage] and above all by its duration" (245).

In moments of estrangement from the family, Juju's naming power itself turns into a kind of violent reduction, sometimes in sophisticated terms, at others, in the mockery and violence endemic to the family. Becoming an "amused spectator" (231) of family interaction, he is all too ready to use verbal violence against them. Racer, for example, is dismissed as "a pop-eyed, tub-of-guts, oafish nincompoop" (230). Indeed, as Juju's sense of alienation from family life grows, he avoids possible entanglements and retreats into himself, obsessed with his intellectual quest and intensifying his categorical reductions of their lives. Against their sordid and menial existence he poses his own sense of freedom constituted by his capacity for detached analysis: "I myself could hardly imagine happiness for anyone who had lived her narrow and strenuous life and seemed incapable of imagining, much less appreciating, a wider and more varied and spiritually richer view of things" (261).

Despite the analytical sophistication and intelligence Juju brings to his search for origins,

the riddles presented by the lives of his brothers and sister seem finally insoluble. It is a telling indication of the failure of the quest for determinative origins that Juju lapses more and more into colloquial language. Such phrases as "chilled in childhood," the root of failure and despair, and the "village virus," the stifling atmosphere of Milltown, jar against the psychological and sociological vocabulary which Juju elsewhere employs in his quest to undertand his family. Reflective of the analytical impasse also is Juju's compassionate eulogy of Saul Stone, displaying a sympathy that he does not evince elsewhere in the novel. The fiat of ritual seems to foreclose the possibility of change and healing through self-knowledge. Indeed, the eulogy can only mark the passing of a brutal and stifling period in the history of a family and a region.

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