Setting, self, and the feminine other in Monica Hughes's adolescent fiction

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Hunter in the dark, Monica Hughes's award-winning novel about an adolescent's struggle with leukemia, tells its story by examining the relationship of self to setting. From the opening paragraphs when seventeen-year-old Mike Rankin drives into Barrhead, Alberta, to the final page when he comes to terms with his situation by revising his relationship to place, setting is the key to the novel. Diagnosed to be suffering from acute lymphocytic leukemia, (its acronym ALL suggesting the inevitable doom leukemia poses), Mike has been running away from his disease. Angry with his parents for not being honest with him, he has been equally guilty, for he has used the dream of a hunting trip to bag his deer as his secret weapon against terror. He has clung to the dream to endure the horrors of chemotherapy and at the beginning of the novel has just begun the secret hunting trip, diverting his usual fear of mortality into the more mundane fear that his parents will discover his absence and send the RCMP after him:

> For a moment the fear had jolted him into that other world, the one most people lived in, but soon the familiar feeling of separateness was back. It gave him a comfortable feeling of invisibility. So long as he didn't feel part of their world, he wasn't.[1] (*HD,* p. 1)

This relationship to place, place as "other," is a structural and thematic device that dominates Monica Hughes's adolescent fiction. With a dozen novels published in the last decade, winner of the 1982 Canada Council Children's Literature Prize and several other awards, Hughes has become a phenomenon in Canadian children's literature. Although she is best known for her science fiction, I propose to examine her science fiction in conjunction with the realistic *Hunter in the dark* as explorations of the relationship of self and the feminine other. Whatever narrative form she uses, this is Hughes's most compelling subject, a subject that she frequently develops through character's relationship to place. It is a pattern obvious in *Hunter in the dark,* in her post-nuclear fantasy, *Beyond the dark river,* and equally evident in three of her best science fiction works, *The tomorrow city, Ring-rise ring-set,* and *The keeper of the Isis light.* Through this pattern Hughes offers a vision of maturity, establishes herself as a feminist,and inadvertently raises troubling questions about the very legitimacy of the theory she is offering. She argues that maturity lies in assimilating the feminine other, in rejecting simply binary opposites such as self and other. Her

heroines struggle to achieve this quest; her narrative techniques indicate the impossibility of doing so.

In *Hunter in the dark,* death is initially seen as the other. When Mike finally learns that he has leukemia, he thinks, "He knew all about leukemia. That was what Ali McGraw had in *Love story" (HD,* p. 74). When the family doctor first telephones with the bad news, he thinks that his mother must have one of those weird female diseases, or that his fortyish father has had a heart attack. When death happens only to other people, the mind constructs further oppositions of the powerful versus the weak: man versus animal; man versus woman; the healthy versus the sick; God versus man. Mike initially subscribes to all of these oppositions and consequently sees setting in the same antagonistic terms. His parents' perfect, elegant, and cold house is contrasted with the chaos and warmth of his friend Doug O'Reilly's home. Mike, a single child, lives in a home where a bowl of fresh flowers is always present to make the house look lived in; Doug, oldest of seven children, lives in a house that needs no expensive, imported symbols to show that it is truly lived in. The cold and subdued atmosphere of Mike's home accompanies him to the hospital where his parents not only refuse to tell him the nature of his disease, but forbid the visits of Doug. Just as it is Doug alone who gives him hope, it is Doug whose hunting trophy first gives Mike the dream of conquering his own deer. He encourages Mike to see the wilderness around Swan Hills and the Freeman River as a place where he can temporarily forget his disease, a place where the unspoken fears of his family do not belong.

Surely, the Freeman River is an appropriately ironic name for the freedom Mike is seeking from self. The world of Nature initially seems perfect, an escape from the dying self to the other of health and adventure, the pollution that fouls the town a metaphor for the disease polluting Mike's body. Upon first arriving in the wilderness, Mike feels a relief and joy that momentarily blind him to his situation. He has arrived in the "other" place: "Mike felt like yelling out loud with triumph. He'd done it! He'd got clean away" (*HD,* p. 3). The rest of the narrative reveals how Mike's personal crisis drives him to reject place as other, to see that the opposition make no sense, that his self is already in the world of the other, the animal, the sick, the human.

At first he thinks of Swan Hills as "Bear country, not people country" (*HD,* p. 2). The land itself resembles a "great sleeping animal" (*HD,* p. 3). But instead of escape, the hunting weekend recreates symbolically the crisis Mike thought he had left behind in the city. Suddenly trapped in the snow, he faces the difficulties of survival, formerly associated only with the hospital. When the wind suddenly blows out the fire, he views it as one more example of cruel fate, of how Nature, the other, refuses to help him in his fear of dying. By using a flashback technique, Hughes can juxtapose Mike's experiences in two places, home-hospital versus wilderness, and gradually bring him and the reader to see that dying is not other, it is self.

In so doing, her main symbol is the deer that Mike dreams of killing. Significantly, when he first receives a gun, he regards it in terms of woman as sexual object: "Mike ran his hand over the stock, smooth, with a finish like silk, like Gloria's hair" (*HD*, p. 17). Similarly, he sees the deer as an object, something to be neatly cut up, consumed, displayed. Even though the deer is male, shooting it becomes a symbol of manhood, like losing his virginity. He imagines his epitaph: "Michael Rankin, aged sixteen. He never got to vote or drive a car and he died a virgin" (*HD*, p. 96). Yet even as he fantasizes during his hospital treatments, Hughes's metaphors indicate that Mike cannot be the hunter, because he is the other, the deer: "That night the dark was worse than it had ever been. It crept up on him and savaged him like a bear at a deer's throat" (*HD*, p. 90). As Mike comes closer to shooting his deer, he recognizes the advantage of acting like an animal:

> Man was always in a hurry. Always on the way from somewhere to somewhere else. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line — to a man. To an animal there is no real destination, just a present leading slowly towards another present. (*HD*, p. 108)

This animal knowledge, that does not oppose life and death, is the real trophy that Mike carries home with him. In hunting his deer, he thinks of meeting his destiny, but what he meets is his true destiny, an acceptance of his own mortality. His qualms about killing, his discovery of himself in the role of other, are triggered by his recognition of the similarity between the metal authorization tag that he will fasten around the deer's antlers and his own hospital wrist tag. He does not want to admit that in shooting the deer he is trying to revenge his own situation. If life is unfair, why should the deer be treated more fairly than he has been? "'You're mine,' he told his trophy deer, 'you're all mine. And for today I'm God'" (*HD*, p. 129). And then he makes his decision and chooses not to shoot. He identifies with the deer, and this rejection of the deer as other is his salvation. When he drinks from the stream, the water from the Freeman River tastes "as new as Paradise" (*HD*, p. 129). The road to salvation lies through the acceptance of other as self; the road of existence leads "*through* life towards death" (*HD*, p. 130). The novel concludes by rejecting the other-self dichotomy: "Face to face he had recognized it, and known that the enemy from whom he had been running for so long was in fact his friend" (*HD*, p. 131).

As moving as this ending is, its triumph is deceptive. Regardless of the words he uses to name death, Mike will still die. While maturity may demand that we come to terms with the other, we cannot simply abolish it, for in so doing we come close to the immature power fantasies of early childhood in which the ego is all. Hughes may want to deny the other and her treatment of death may seem both challenging and appropriate to children's literature, but her romantic desires contradict the very essence of her own stories. Deny the other

and we are left with no story. Hughes's unhappy endings are ambivalent, for they both deny the other and allow it to persist. Hughes may see herself as a realist giving children the unhappy endings life demands; her genuine realism comes through artifice, the narrative's rejection of her romantic view of otherness. Death, the other, still exists.

Readers familiar with Margaret Atwood's *Survival: a thematic guide to Canadian literature* may recognize the pattern that I have been describing. In *Survival,* Atwood argues that the realistic animal story is "a *genre* which provides a key to an important facet of the Canadian psyche."[2] Unlike American or British animal stories, in the Canadian animal story, there is "a recurring moment. . . in it the hunter identifies with his prey *as suffering victim.*"[3] Even if Atwood is too simplistic and reductionist in her analysis of the Canadian psyche, her thesis certainly fits not only *Hunter in the dark,* but Hughes's science fiction and fantasy as well. The identification that occurs, however, is not so much between hunter and victim as between self and other. In *Beyond the dark river,* the Hutterite colony must lose its fear of the other in order to accept the superior medical knowledge of the Indian culture. True to the pattern I am tracing, this culture is represented by a female, Daughter-of-She-Who-Came-After. In its concern with shifting perspectives and adolescent problems of identity, Hughes's fiction constantly explores the concept of the alien, particularly as female. It is this interest in the alien, the other, that may explain her reliance on science fiction.

However, in the science fiction the pattern is never straightforward, and is further complicated by Hughes's feminist consciousness. Nearly all the protagonists in her recent science fiction are female. In *The tomorrow city,* fourteen-year-old Caro follows a tragic movement from self to other, a seeming reversal of the pattern in *Hunter in the dark.* A computer controlling the city functions as the central source of otherness, yet the computer is a projection of Caro's own fantasy of perfection. Caro saves her town and by implication the world, but at great cost to herself. Her father, possessed by the "dream of a perfect city"[4] (*TC,* p. 4), has invented a computer, C-Three, to handle all the problems of Thompsonville. Caro has shared his fascination with the computer, and inadvertently is responsible for the computer's change from servant to master of the city after the computer takes seriously her adolescent dream of order: "'If it were *my* city,' said Caro dreamily, 'I'd *make* people be sensible and want the right things'" (*TC,* p. 19). Since the computer has already been programmed to see children as the city's future, and Caro's father says he has programmed her needs into C-Three, making Caro truly the computer's caro or dear, C-Three very quickly overreacts to Caro's first statement and then turns to mind-control after Caro tries to rectify the situation: "You've got to *make* people want the things that are good for them. . . Please, C-Three, hurry up and modify yourself before Father decides that you've gone too far, and starts pulling out your circuits" (*TC,* p. 26). Her speech suggests a child's

words to a wayward pet. In identifying with the novelty and youthful promise of the computer, Caro fails to see the limits of her adolescent dream.

In its naive attempt to improve the city, the computer imposes a concept of otherness. Only when it seems too late, when old people disappear and derelicts are run out of town, when there are no longer cigarettes and candy in the stores, when examples of mind control are everywhere, does Caro acknowledge the threatening, repressive nature of C-Three. With the adults all hypnotized, she is alone except for one friend, David Sullivan, and blames her childish enthusiastic identification with C-Three for what has happened. Her sense of responsibility leads her to seek another opportunity to speak to C-Three, only this time aware that the computer must be seen as what it has become, the other. To break into C-Three, Caro needs the help of David in making sense of the computer blueprints (the protagonist may be female, but the male is still better at science). The scheme involves breaking into her father's safe, easy work since the combination is Caro's birthdate, a further detail linking Caro's maturity with the computer's. Her only hope lies in fooling C-Three into maintaining the Caro-C-Three identity: "'So you see, if I'm Caroline and the city is really mine, that's a strength for our side and a weakness in C-Three;'" (*TC,* p. 107). She later suggests that what C-Three really needs is a frontal lobotomy, an image grotesquely close to what actually happens.

But in Hughes's world, to think in terms of other is dangerous even if the other is an enemy. The cost of deceiving and destroying C-Three is the wounding of Caro. While David attempts to dismantle the computer, Caro distracts C-Three with an argument about the necessity of human freedom. The computer sees all humans in a state of perpetual childhood in need of constant protection. Caro argues that children learn only from experience: "'If they never see anything sad or ugly or dirty how are they going to learn compassion?'" (*TC,* p. 131). Her words lie at the heart of Hughes's theory of fiction for children, and further explain why there are so many harsh endings in her books, mutilations, threats of starvation, exile, and death. When C-Three responds with a metaphor of self in which it is the brain, and the city its body, Caro argues that the metaphor is not applicable, that there is more to man than the body and the brain. This idea bewilders the computer programmed to see its prime function as the best preservation of its body. But Caro demonstrates that the self is more than body and brain when she leaps between the computer and David to defend him from C-Three's laser beam and in the process is blinded. Her instinctive compassionate choice to save her friend provokes the self-destruction of the computer. Having failed to protect Caro — its self — C-Three destroys itself. As David tells Caro, "'When C-Three thought it had killed you it must have blown itself up, or short-circuited itself'" (*TC,* p. 135). With the death of the computer, the force-field that has excluded Nature's storms vanishes and Caro feels the rain, as "sweet and icy cold" (*TC,* p. 137) as the water Mike Rankin drinks at the end of *Hunter in the dark.* In killing her

childhood fantasy of perfection, which through C-Three created a world of otherness, a world based on exclusion, Caro has painfully earned her adult self. Nevertheless once again the underlying narrative contradicts Hughes's thesis. C-Three may be damaged, but Caro's painful fall into adulthood does not imply a return to the simple all encompassing self of childhood. Surely maturity does not mean regression. Even as Caro copes with her new blindness, she recognizes that otherness still exists in the still sleeping inhabitants of the city who may not appreciate their new freedom.

A more recent fiction novel, *Ring-rise ring-set,* utilizes a double pattern of movement from other to self. The story once again reflects Hughes's concern for the environment, for the correct relationship between science and nature. There are two settings in *Ring-rise ring-set,* the City in the Hill and the Outside. Set in Western Canada after the detritus of a meteor threatens another ice age, the novel describes two contrasting approaches to the ecological crisis. When winter approaches, the people of the City put up shutters to block out the cold. A few male scientists venture out to learn more about conditions, and find a solution to the spreading ice and snow. Eventually they stumble upon a temporary solution, a by-product of the yeast cultures that they use for growing food. The substance unfortunately has its own deadly by-product. Although very effective in turning the snow black and hence speeding up its melting time, the mould also kills the caribou, the main source of food for the Ekoes.

To the City, the Ekoes are other. To the female protagonist, fifteen-year-old Liza they are mythical beings: "The legends about the savage hairy creatures, who could talk to animals and who lived under the snow, was one of the exciting things about Outside"[5] (*RR,* p. 16). When Liza first sees an Eko, she faints. Yet the Ekoes, whose name suggests both Eskimo and ecology, do exist and offer an alternate approach to the crisis. Instead of trying to control the environment and discover its mysteries, they respect and accept those mysteries. The change in climate they explain through myth, the story of the Mouth of Paija which illustrates the evil consequences of selfishness. The male city dwellers consider science a tool to master the accidents of Nature; the contrasting Eko culture seeks survival on a warmer, more personal level, reflecting what we might call feminine values. The Ekoes do not see the land as other, to be manipulated and raped.

Liza's experiences follow a double movement from other to self. Bored by the male city's interpretation of what she as a girl should do, she is nevertheless conditioned by her cultural values and sees the Outside as barren. Yet in putting up the shutters, she senses that she is denying life and limiting herself: "Now she felt as if she were slowly blinding the City. First one eye. Then the next" (*RR,* p. 1). Alienated, feeling that neither the City nor the Outside is her home, she resents her culture's traditional sex roles, but when she requests a scientific job, her pitifully low grades are thrown back at her. Culturally

discouraged from becoming scientifically skilled, she seems destined for the typical drudgery of women. Hughes's work implies that no matter how high the scientific level of a society, in a social crisis, women are delegated traditional subservient roles.

Even though City women view the Outside as a cold empty place, Liza is bored and foolish enough to stow away on a scientific expedition. To gain her objective, she has to flirt, and Hughes shows how Liza resists the pleasures of romance by reminding herself that she does not want its reward, the traditional female role. The male misinterprets her scientific inquiries as typical female romantic ploys. Clearly, within the City each sex regards the other as other. When Liza does escape the City and is accidentally abandoned by the City scientists, she gets her first view of the winter Outside. It is the ultimate other; she cannot make sense of the landscape and as an unscientific girl she has no way of relating to it. At this point she is captured by an Eko, Namoonie, who mistakes her for his missing fiancée, Iriook. In order to survive, Liza becomes her double, Iriook; she becomes the other and the structure of Otherness doubles, for just as Liza views the Ekoes and Outside as a horrifying other, the Ekoes fear and mythologize the City.

Her assumption of Iriook's identity is at first a deliberate choice, but in this role, she soon sees as Iriook does. The Outside landscape makes more sense; the Eko stories become her stories, and she finds herself listening to the stories about Iriook with a radical shift in perspective. It is the City now that is the other. The alternation of identities is indicated through the use of double names: "I must be Iriook, she thought. Liza was the dream, for if I were Liza I would go mad living like this" (*RR*, p. 53). With the eyes of Iriook she sees three enormous blackbirds fill the air; as Liza she recognizes that they are airplanes. Only Iriook's father continues to see Liza as other, and when the caribou begin to die, he blames her and tries to kill her. The shock of this attempted murder returns her to her Liza self, for she no longer finds safety in the role of Iriook. Once again the Ekoes are other to her, and she is revolted by the smell of meat and rancid fat.

But her experience as other has changed her from the careless, selfish, bored adolescent to a caring individual, and with Namoonie she journeys back to the City to discover the cause of the blackening snow and dying caribou. Although she now knows herself as Liza, she still sees as an Eko and her first view of the City's solar collectors strikes her with fear: "But now, ahead of them, there stood four strange trees on the crest of a low hill. They were leafless and were twisted into unnatural tortured shapes, perhaps by the wind" (*RR*, p. 72).

Back in the City, it is Namoonie who is seen as the other, a wild animal. Even to Liza, he looks more like a wolf than a human. What saves him is Liza's memory of otherness: "I looked like that too, she thought, and looked down at her clean short nails. I lived that way too, not washing, drinking blood. . . like an animal" (*RR*, p. 79). Tormented by this dual perspective, she cannot remain

content in the City, and think of the doomed Ekoes and caribou as irrelevant, primitive others. She returns to the Ekoes and says that she returns because of love, but a more important reason is her decision to reject the concept of otherness and in that choice become an example to the City. Only by choosing to become Iriook again, not this time for selfish reasons of safety but with the altruistic hope of saving the Ekoes, can Liza attempt to challenge the City scientists' perception of the Outside as other. Her uncertain fate is another example of how exceptional the rejection of otherness is.

My final example, *The keeper of the Isis light,* is perhaps the most interesting exploration of the feminine other in its relation to setting. *The keeper of the Isis light* is the introductory novel of the Isis trilogy in which Hughes traces several generations of a new colony on the planet, Isis. To enter Isis is to alter perspective. Years are not the same, days are broken into twenty units, the colours are different. In earth years, Olwen Pendennis has just celebrated her sixteenth birthday when the first party of Earth colonists arrive. How will the two alien cultures perceive each other? From one point of view, Olwen is repulsive; from another she is an exotic goddess. She even has two names: Olwen Pendennis, her Welsh birth name, and another, a priestess-like title, the keeper of the Isis Light. With such details, Hughes underlines her theme of perspective. Although resentful that her happy life on Isis is about to be disturbed, Olwen looks forward to meeting the colonists, for her parents were also from Earth. Since their deaths, she has been alone with Guardian, a robot, programmed by Olwen's mother to put the safety and happiness of her daughter first. Since she has no one to compare Guardian with, Olwen never thinks about his robot nature. He is not other, just Guardian, unimaginable in any other form.

Similarly Olwen sees the planet as self. To her it is a joyful place where she has been the Adam naming the animals and features of the landscape. She does not understand why the new settlers stay in the thick air of the valley and seem to fear the rest of Isis: "The new settlers had been warned to stay in the valleys and not to attempt to climb even the lower slopes of the mountains without oxygen equipment and ultra-violet opaque suits. It was ridiculous!"[6] (*KI,* p. 15). Olwen rationalizes that she must be acclimatized to Isis since she has no problems even sunbathing naked on the highest slopes of the planet. When Guardian insists that she be protected from the colonists' germs by wearing a protective suit and face mask, she cannot understand the necessity but obeys. In her mask she resembles the goddess Isis, represented by Egyptian art with the head veiled, a symbol of mystery.

In this costume she meets the settlers, and falls in love with seventeen-year-old Mark London, his name symbolic of his formerly dwelling in Earth's crowded cities. When she first meets him, Olwen thinks how funny his pale freckled skin is and how odd are his eyes with their dilating pupils, but in her innocence she accepts his appearance. Hughes is not suggesting any superiority of female perception over male; Olwen simply has no concept of other, for she has no

narrow concept of self. She has never seen herself in a mirror. Guardian later explains that he gave her no mirror because a mirror might have made her frightened of the settlers. When she first sees herself in a mirror, she too sees herself as other: "Halfway across the room she understood. This was a mirror. The Other, the intruder, was herself" (*KI*, p. 84). Mark, comparable to Mike Rankin in his immature fantasies of female beauty, falls in love with his private conception of Olwen. When he comes upon her in her normal clothing, he sees her from the back. From that perspective, in her long silver dress and coppery red hair, she is a sexual stereotype, the most beautiful woman that he has ever seen. He identifies her with the planet: "She was like Isis as she stood there. She was alien, like the wonderful tangy drink, like the scented golden flower, like the rolling mountains" (*KI*, p. 58). But when she turns around and he sees her features and skin colour genetically and surgically altered by Guardian to help her adapt to Isis, he is so horrified that he nearly falls to his death down the mountainside.

Olwen has become the other and this vision determines the rest of Mark London's life as well as the future of the colony. (In the sequel, *The Guardian of Isis*, Mark, still embittered by his youthful shock, has become the leader of the settlers and ensured that they adopt an anti-female, primitive culture.) Already guilty of slaying Olwen's pet, Hobbit, the settlers quickly respond to Mark's fear of the other. The entire planet becomes menacing. Because of Mark's anger over Guardian's alteration of Olwen's features, science too is mistrusted and forgotten. Divinity becomes male, the Guardian of Isis, the Shining One; and the memory of Olwen is transformed into the bringer of death, That Old Woman, the Ugly One. In seeing her as other, Mark perverts the true nature of Isis, and forgets how Olwen helped save him from death. The Egyptian goddess was associated with death, but essentially as a restorer of the dead. Olwen is seen in this role when she rescues the youngest colonist during a vicious wind storm. The child is the only colonist who does not fear her thick green skin and extra eyelid. It comes as no surprise that the child is black, clearly a comment on our own racist perceptions of otherness.

There are numerous clues throughout the novel that Olwen and the planet are identical. Once aware of Olwen's green skin and red hair, readers will recall the numerous introductory references to the green skies and red mountains of Isis. Olwen with her thick skin is also continually identified with the cactus flower that blooms on the higher elevations. After Mark's rejection of her, she hates its smell, but later comes to accept the cactus as an aspect of herself. The return of her repressed childhood memories is even presented as a cactus flower blooming. Upset by Mark's rejection of her, Olwen develops a sensitivity for predicting the planet's storms, and even fears that the increased frequency of storms is directly linked to her own feelings: "It was almost as if Isis itself was angry at the invasion of the colonists. She felt a twinge of guilt, as it it were her fault. As if her anger and resentment had somehow proved

contagious..." (*KI*, p. 114). In the face of Mark's rejection, Olwen retreats with Guardian to a higher valley of Isis. This exile still gives her the freedom of the planet which she prefers over any attempted surgical compromise with Mark's stereotype of female beauty. The settlers are culturally stuck at the level of other, doomed to remain primitive so long as they see the land as foreign, frightening, and female. Mark London's inability to move beyond other epitomizes his society's failure to mature.

Despite her retreat, Olwen's story is still one of adolescent maturing. Beginning on her sixteenth birthday, it traces the growth from happy almost mindless innocence (her lack of childhood memories) to painful maturity. Initially Olwen has no true sense of self; the absence of mirrors is a good symbol of this lack, and in her innocence she does not know what she is missing. When she first hears of the settlers, she has a childish temper tantrum, even stamping her foot and selfishly protesting that she does not want them to come. The birthday becomes symbolic of the end of childhood:

> When she looked back she could see all the days before that day as a time of carefree childhood, culminating in Guardian's beautiful gift. Then had come the message from Pegasus Two, and nothing had been the same since, nor could it be. (*K1*, p. 127)

Only now does she begin to cry, and the song of the lark becomes a motif reminding her of what she does not know she is missing. That the lark's song symbolizes sexual love is made evident when Olwen first sees the video of her parents. Their obvious and mutual affection instantly reminds Olwen of the lark song and her own isolation.

As a novel of adolescence, *The keeper of the Isis light* explores Olwen's awakening sexuality. She instinctively, albeit unwillingly, responds to the masculinity of the space captain's voice. When she first sees Captain Tryon, her heart thuds. Is it because he is the first human she has seen or the first man? Waiting for Mark on the mesa, her body is caressed by the wind while Mark, seeking her out, fights an impulse to fall on her bed. The heightened awareness of our bodies that accompanies adolescence becomes the tragic rejection of the body as other when Mark sees Olwen as a deformed human, a monster. Olwen is able to move beyond this stage, but her end is tragic since Mark cannot. She can progress from temporarily rejecting herself to seeing her body as beautiful in it suitability to Isis; Mark remains trapped by his own sexual guilt. Ashamed of his sexual response, he projects his self-hatred upon her body and rejects it as monstrous. Ironically, the settlers' very rejection of Olwen's humanness makes her human.

In Monica Hughes's fiction, the road to maturity, whether for society or the individual, lies through an acceptance of the female other. In all four books, an aspect of self, (disease, a fantasy of perfection, fear of the unknown, sexual guilt), is projected outward on to place and becomes an expression of otherness. Salvation comes through subsuming the other, an attempt that is necessary but impossible. This may explain why Hughes's most powerful novels have

unhappy endings. Denying the other leaves us without definition. If Mark accepts Olwen will not their sexuality still involve concepts of otherness? If the City saves the Ekoes, will their success not depend on a triumph of culture over nature? Can we tell stories or use language at all without concepts of otherness? In the end the existence of the other seems inevitable. To deny it is a romantic concept whose optimism Hughes tempers by emphasizing the isolation and sacrifice of her maturing heroines. The ending of *Hunter in the dark* is ironically perhaps the most hopeful as Mike Rankin accepts death as part of himself. But this is a private victory. In Hughes's science fiction, those protagonists who do achieve the assimilation of the other do so only by turning away from the dominant tendencies of their societies. The romantic and feminist view of the other involves a quest few can fulfill.

NOTES

[1]Monica Hughes, *Hunter in the dark* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1982), p. 1. All further references are given in the text in the form: (*HD*, p. 1).
[2]Margaret Atwood, *Survival: a thematic guide to Canadian literature*, (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 73.
[3]Atwood, p. 80.
[4]Monica Hughes, *The tomorrow city* (1978; rpt. London: Magnet, 1982), p. 4. All further references are given in the text in the form: (*TC*, p. 4).
[5]Monica Hughes, *Ring-rise ring-set* (1982; rpt. London: Magnet, 1983), p. 16. All further references are given in the text in the form: (*RR*, p. 16).
[6]Moncia Hughes, *The keeper of the Isis light* (1980; rpt. London: Magnet, 1982), p. 15. All further references are given in the text in the form: (*KI*, p. 15).

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