



# THE SHEILA WATSON ARCHIVES

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO*

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I pray to be kept from  
saying: I have known  
and lived with  
artists and writers.  
I saw a dictionary of  
"argot", but Mme. G.  
laid a warning  
hand on my shoulder  
Sometime I shall go  
back for it.

This morning in  
the metro station I saw  
a cure in a black  
shovel hat standing  
under the sign "arrivée"  
Direction —

September 18.

There are things I have  
wanted to note but I  
haven't had the heart to  
write — an old man  
dressed like Van Gough's  
le Facteur Roulin

*Cover: Sheila Watson in apartment in Paris, [1955 - 1956?].*  
*Previous page: excerpt from diary, Paris, [17 September 1955].*

# THE SHEILA WATSON ARCHIVES

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BY ANNA ST. ONGE

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*JOHN M. KELLY LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF  
ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO*



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Text by Anna St. Onge

Design and Layout by Renée Jackson

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Special Collections and Archives of the John M. Kelly Library  
at the University of St. Michael's College.

Joseph Sablé Centre for 19th Century French Studies,  
Department of French Studies, University of Toronto, 2009.

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*Portrait of Sheila Watson, [1968-1969?].*

# INTRODUCTION

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In the early to mid-nineteen nineties Sheila Watson decided to send me her papers — as well as books she considered of particular significance to her interests and in her life — and she said to me at the time that she was sending me her life. I never for a moment saw this gesture — that extended over three or four years — as anything but an attempt to preserve what she believed might otherwise end in countless green garbage bags, or later still, in recycle bins. It was a determined gesture. In her final years, Sheila had come to recognize an obligation to herself and to those who valued what she had done. But she also realized an obligation to those who, by nature or by happenstance, had come to be a part of the fabric of her life.

“I’ll make a pineapple upside-down cake for you as long as I have the strength to flip this cast iron frying pan,” she promised me one day in the eighties. The strength to wield the frying pan declined some time before the will to send banker’s boxes of papers and books. With these, however, she still needed help, and her friend Linda Shannon provided this.

I had spoken often to Sheila about what she should do with her papers. Many of the places where I had suggested they might be deposited - the National Library in Ottawa, the University of Alberta, for example — had already made overtures to her. But she remained unwilling or unable to commit this part of herself to any place, or more precisely, to any institution. When I mentioned St. Michael’s College as a possible repository, she was less dismissive — more comfortable with the idea. An aunt, her father’s sister, had, after all, been a school nurse here in the twenties when the College and the College School had shared the same space. And she had worked with Marshall McLuhan, who was her thesis supervisor and friend, and here she had taught with him a course in modern poetry in the year 1968-69, when she and her husband, Wilfred, had come from Edmonton to work with him, at a time when he was recovering from surgery for a brain tumour. And she had other friends here as well; Father Charles Leland, for one, who said Mass for her every intention.

Sheila did not consult with me about sending me her papers and books. I suspect that hers was less a decision in a deliberate sense than an impulse to act without having to involve herself in any formal negotiations or transactions. It remained a personal gesture - passing the buck perhaps, or possibly even a kind of pineapple upside-down cake after her hand and wrist had become too weak for the real thing.

The last of the boxes arrived a week after Sheila’s death on February 1st 1998. By then, I had had an office built in my basement to house them — some eighty boxes in all. I still had no clear sense of what I was going to do with them, other than record their contents. This I did over the next few years; admittedly, in a primitive and unsophisticated way — pen or pencil on 3x5 index cards. I also transcribed journal entries I discovered scattered throughout twenty-seven notebooks, which were otherwise filled with notes she had made of her reading.

The basement of what had once been a Victorian workman’s row house in mid-town Toronto is, admittedly, a far cry from any peak in Darien. But that’s where I found myself; in reading Sheila Watson’s journals, experiencing a world which until then only its author had known, a world new for me in the clarity, the honesty, the selflessness with which she wrote of pain and beauty and wonder and ordinary things. And there were also drafts of published and unpublished works — an intractable story and an unfinished novel, for example — hundreds of letters, and the inevitable debris of bills and receipts and contracts and tax returns that attach to any life. It was indeed her life she had sent me - and in her journals, its soul.

The establishment of the Sheila Watson Archives in the John M. Kelly Library at St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto, represents the penultimate stage in Sheila fulfilling her obligation to those who succeed her. Theirs in turn is the responsibility for the final stage.

E.T. Flahiff

# A LETTER FROM JONATHAN BENGTON

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The John M. Kelly Library in the University of St. Michael's College is delighted to be the depository of the archives of Sheila Watson. The Library is particularly indebted to two individuals, Dr. Fred Flahiff, Watson's friend and executor of her estate, who has taken an active interest in the housing and long-term preservation of the physical content of Watson's literary legacy, and Anna St. Onge, the author of this publication, who sorted and described Watson's archive in preparation for opening it to scholars.

The English writer and vicar, Charles Caleb Colton (1780-1832) once noted: "Many books require no thought from those who read them, and for a very simple reason. They made no such demand upon those who wrote them." Applied to Watson, one must assume she wrote with a certain amount of intellectual ague. Watson is not the easiest of writers to penetrate — as some of the potential publishers of her work testify to in the pages that follow. Yet a little persistence yields rich and varied rewards that belie any assessment of her based solely on the volume of her published material. *The Double Hook*, in particular, challenged convention and the status quo, thus creating new creative spaces for those who followed. Now that Sheila Watson's papers are available for study it seems rather likely that this unique voice in 20th century Canadian literature will continue, ever so subtly, to inculcate future generations of writers.

Jonathan Bengtson  
Director of Library and Archives  
University of St. Michael's College

# A LETTER FROM GEORGE BOWERING

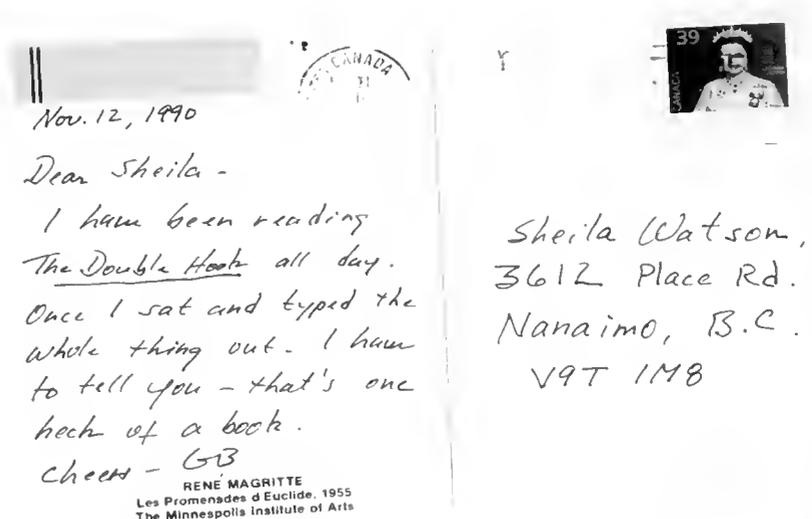
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I have twice in my life uttered an imprecation and hurled the book I was reading across the room. The second was D. H. Lawrence's *Twilight in Italy*. The first was *The Double Hook*. It had been my first try at reading the book. At the time I was both a fan of naturalism and an ignorant pup. I had a lot to learn, and much of what I have learned in the years since has come from my twenty or so readings of this great work. *The Double Hook* was the product of a literary mind and imagination that were leagues ahead of any others in the Canada of the late fifties.

Sheila Watson had unusual knowledge and sophisticated opinions about the entire course of international writings, arts and philosophy in the twentieth century. Anyone lucky enough to hear one of her addresses at a conference listened to an elaborate extemporized argument that illuminated the connectives in twentieth century thought and art. Thus the puzzlement and disappointment over the most obvious feature of her career—the long silence after *The Double Hook*. Her devotees, though, reason that as that novel is the high point of Canadian literature, its 116 pages are the equal to any other writer's two dozen volumes.

*The Double Hook* has since its publication been an icon for other writers who do not fit easily into the realist tradition. In fact it makes an appearance in the novels and poems of writers such as Robert Kroetsch, Rudy Wiebe, Michael Ondaatje, bp Nichol and your lucky and obedient servant.

George Bowering



Letter from George Bowering, 12 November 1990.



*Portrait of Sheila Watson as a young woman, [193-?].*

# FOREWORD BY ANNA ST. ONGE

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When I was hired to arrange and describe the records of Sheila Watson, I had no inkling of who she was, her significance in Canadian literature, or why the papers of a British Columbia-born, University of Alberta professor of English were being donated to a Ontario university. The night before the interview, I read what I believed to be a simple novella, *The Double Hook*. A little over a hundred pages? Easily done. How wrong I was, on so many fronts. The longer I work as an archivist, the more I appreciate my year spent with Sheila Watson's papers. I will probably never again be given the time and encouragement to focus on a single *fonds d'archive*. That said, I do not believe I will ever know the real Sheila, by all accounts a remarkable mind, generous teacher and devoted friend and spouse.

I was charged to identify or impose some semblance of order and make Watson's documents accessible to researchers. I struggled with this paradox throughout my work; that I was to set order to the life's work of a woman I had never known and who had spent most of her professional life attempting to de-personalize the act of writing. Sheila's papers had arrived without any clear evidence of original order. They had, however, been carefully preserved by her biographer and loyal friend Fred Flahiff before arriving one day in 2006. I set about my work: documents were removed from original boxes; letters were dated and sorted; and, manuscripts poured over to determine date and purpose. Questions were posed and eventually decisions made: keep scraps of notes and citations? Remove financial records? Keep correspondence with editors together with the manuscripts under discussion?

The Sheila I glimpsed was in moments of documented time: a shopping list scrawled on the back of a cigarette package; small, sepia photographs taken in Dog Creek in the 1930s; a carefully worded, perhaps deliberately obtuse, letter to a confidante; a raw diary entry on betrayal; and, meticulous typescripts for issues of *White Pelican*.

The archivist operates as a sort of mediator of an archival fonds, appraising the whole and then moving down to smaller divisions of records based on function; and through description communicates the importance and usefulness of the records to users who will be removed from the physical item, albeit through distance or time. The often silent and nameless hand of the archivist through arrangement and description seeks out order and logic in the activities of a creator and in doing so can affect how an individual is interpreted and contextualized by future users. As a professional archivist I attempted to arrange Sheila Watson's records transparently, to document my choices and order records as neutrally and mechanically as possible based on date, alphabetization and function. Archival theory is based on an idea of a detached, dispassionate appraisal of records, but in practice, especially with private papers, archival work can be an emotional activity. I worried about my choices. How would I do well by Sheila — and *which* Sheila should I emphasize? Sheila the teacher? Sheila the writer? Sheila the Lewis scholar? Would my choices assist or inhibit? Clarify or confuse?

Mid-way through the project, I came across a small blurry photograph of Sheila Doherty. It was most likely taken in the early 1930s, about the time when Sheila was graduating from the University of British Columbia. Blurry and out of focus, Sheila's features are ghostly and frozen in time. I scanned the image and printed it out on an oversized scale, keeping it by my desk as I worked through my descriptions as a reminder. I will never know the real Sheila Watson, but I have caught glimpses of her ghosts. And I hope I have done them justice.

What follows are a selection of documents from Sheila Watson's life that aim to illustrate her activities as a writer, teacher, editor, mentor and friend.

Anna St. Onge



# CHILDHOOD REMNANTS

Sheila Martin Doherty was born on the 24th of October 1909 in New Westminster, British Columbia. She and her two brothers William and Kelly were born and spent their early childhood living in a building on the grounds of the New Westminster Public Hospital for the Insane, where their father, Dr. Charles Edward Doherty, was medical superintendant. When Dr. Doherty died in 1920, he left his wife, Ida Mary Elwena Martin and their four children (Sheila's sister Norah was born in 1919) with limited means of support. The family moved into town, where Sheila attended St. Ann's Academy and later The Sacred Heart Convent School in Vancouver. The archives contain few traces of Sheila Doherty's childhood and adolescence: family portraits; Sheila playing on the hospital grounds with her brothers and cousins; a demure Sheila posing for a school portrait, visiting cousins at a summer cottage; and, a metal trinket won for demonstrating sound fire safety.



*Blue Goose Fire Prevention Prize, black bead rosary, crest-shaped pendant, 1924.*

*Sheila Doherty as a toddler with brother William and nanny Mrs. Stewart, [ca. 1911?].*

*Portrait of Sheila Doherty as a toddler wearing bracelet and white puff sleeved dress, [ca. 1911?].*

*Sheila Doherty as a child with brothers William and Kelly and cousins Dorothy and Jean McKay, [ca. 1913?].*

*Portrait of Sheila Doherty as young woman in sleeveless flapper dress with pearl and chain necklace, [ca. 1925?].*

*Portrait of theatre group in costume with Sheila Doherty as a young woman, [192-?].*

# AS MUCH A PART OF MY LIFE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA AS ENCOUNTERING A BUFFLEHEAD...

Sheila continued her education at the University of British Columbia, acquiring her B.A. in English in 1932, and a year later her teaching certificate and her Masters of English, her thesis concerning Addison and Steele, editors of the eighteenth century periodical *The Spectator*. Sheila Doherty graduated at the height of the Great Depression. In the autumn she was to see her first work of creative writing published, a poem entitled "The Barren Lands", with the unfortunate detail that it was published under the name Theila Martin Doherty. The archives do not contain any early manuscript material from this period, nor do any early journals or correspondence survive from Sheila's time as a young teacher and graduate. However, the Watson library includes volumes acquired at this time that she kept over her lifetime.

In 1981 she reflected on her time at University of British Columbia, remarking that "all the young revolutionaries were going around with bootleg copies of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* under one arm, and Hemingway under the other, and going down to the Hotel Europe, thinking we had to kill our man, or catch our prostitute, or do some ineffable deed before we could write [...] Part of my experience of B.C. was reading Pound when he was just writing the *Cantos*, reading Eliot before he wrote the *Four Quartets*, reading Faulkner, reading Dos Passos, reading Hemingway. And that was as much a part of my life in British Columbia as encountering a bufflehead on one of the lagoons on Vancouver Island."

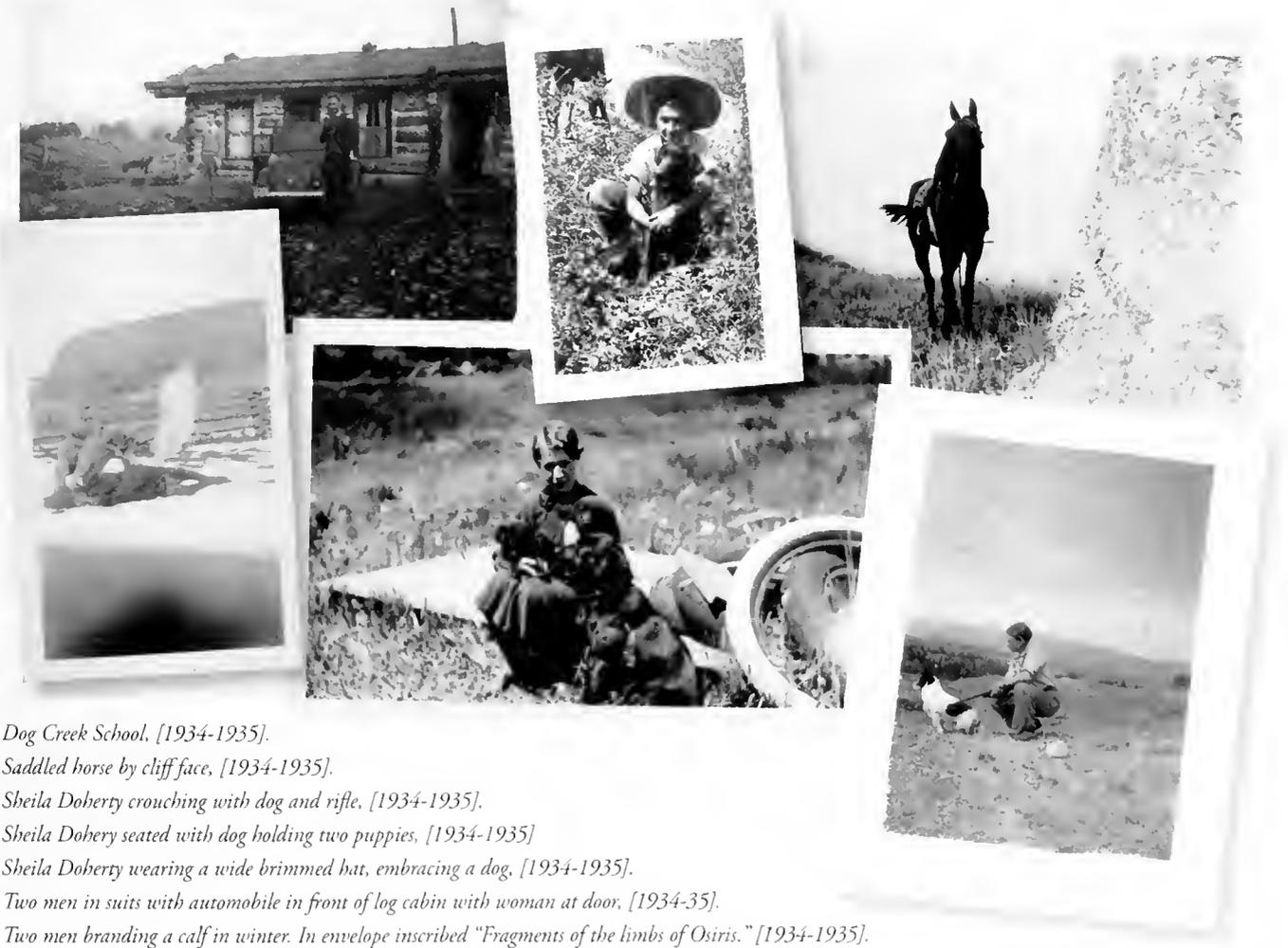


Photograph of Sheila Doherty (seated second from left) with fellow university students, April 1933. Inscribed copies of *Jane Eyre* and *Dubliners* from the Watson Library Collection.

# DOG CREEK, CARIBOO REGION, BRITISH COLUMBIA



In later reflections of her teaching in the Cariboo, Sheila wrote that “I didn’t go there to write about this part of the country. I went there to teach, and that’s where I happened to be. I didn’t choose it, it chose me. It was the only place in 1934 that said, ‘Come, and teach our children.’ I had no idea where it was when I left by train in Vancouver, except somewhere *there*.” Sheila taught in the community, in a single-room school house from 1934 to the fall of 1935. In later reflections, Sheila claimed that she did not produce any relevant writing when she lived in Dog Creek, although she took and preserved a collection of photographs of her life there. “I’d been away for a long time before I realized that if I had something I wanted to say, it was going to be said in these images.” It was not until she was walking to work in post-war Toronto, that the voices and images of the Cariboo would begin to reveal themselves.



*Dog Creek School, [1934-1935].*

*Saddled horse by cliff face, [1934-1935].*

*Sheila Doherty crouching with dog and rifle, [1934-1935].*

*Sheila Doherty seated with dog holding two puppies, [1934-1935]*

*Sheila Doherty wearing a wide brimmed hat, embracing a dog, [1934-1935].*

*Two men in suits with automobile in front of log cabin with woman at door, [1934-35].*

*Two men branding a calf in winter. In envelope inscribed “Fragments of the limbs of Osiris.” [1934-1935].*

# THE DOUBLE HOOK

*The Double Hook* follows the course of several days in a small isolated community in the Cariboo region of the British Columbia interior. Although Sheila drew on her two years teaching in Dog Creek as visual inspiration for the novella (complete with the hotel's alcoholic parrot), it was not until she and Wilfred were living in Toronto that she first began to hear the whispers of the characters that would emerge in the story.

I also wish to tell you that I am leaving McClelland & Stewart as quickly as I can arrange to. I do this with a certain regret, because I felt that while we might have done much more, each year we were able to do even a few worthwhile books. But now young Jack McClelland wishes to be the editor. (Jack graduated with some difficulty in *pass arts* and wrote *suppe* in English). I don't know what his editorial policy will be, but the disturbing thing about him, to date, is that his policy fluctuates from minute to minute.

1

McCLELLAND & STEWART LIMITED  
Publishers  
25 HOLLINGER ROAD  
TORONTO, CANADA

August 8, 1958

Mrs. Sheila Watson,  
Banff School of Fine Arts,  
Banff, Alta.

Dear Mrs. Watson:

I am sorry that it has taken us so very long to reach a decision concerning *DOUBLE HOOK*. As I told Kay Mathers some time ago, I should not have asked you to put up with this intolerable delay had I not had some confidence that we should decide to publish. At long last we are prepared to do just that.

We think very highly of your book. It is an outstanding piece of writing and there has never been any doubt in our mind as to whether or not it deserved publication. It's the sort of thing that makes a publisher feel it must be published. Unfortunately, it has been a general consensus of opinion that it is not a sound commercial publishing risk. You may or may not agree with this. I hope, in fact, that you don't agree and you do think that it is a good publishing risk. Don't let that statement alarm you because I am not going to ask you to take or share that risk, or forego royalties or anything of that sort.

The fact of the matter is that we have been trying to evolve a means of publishing *DOUBLE HOOK* that would enable us to at least have a fighting chance of success. We think we have found it and we hope you will agree. We want to publish *DOUBLE HOOK* in our New Canadian Library paper-back series (I hope you are familiar with it). It is what we call in the trade a "quality" paper-back line designed to sell at \$1.00. The series has thus far concerned itself only with Canadian "classics". We have done four books, with four more coming this fall.

*DOUBLE HOOK* would become a new division or branch of the N.C.L. devoted to new or contemporary writing.

McCLELLAND & STEWART LIMITED  
Publishers  
25 HOLLINGER ROAD  
TORONTO, CANADA

Mrs. Sheila Watson

-2-

August 8, 1958

The advantage of publishing this particular book in this particular way is (a) that it would get rather wider critical attention than the average first novel (this is just a guess but the New Canadian Library seems to appeal to critics and reviewers); (b) that it would be displayed far more widely; (c) that the price would put it within the reach of the undergraduate market who are likely to be most interested (and good readers generally); and (d) that it is rather a novel idea in this country at least and for that reason is likely to get considerable attention.

There are some drawbacks. Firstly, the libraries don't much like paper-backs. Secondly, your chance of making any money out of the original publication, at least, would be non-existent. The maximum royalty that we can pay is seven per cent, and seven per cent of \$1.00 isn't very much. We would be very lucky to sell 3000 copies. Naturally, I hope that the book would catch on in a spectacular way and sell 25,000, but this is highly unlikely.

Well, that is about the story. If you are interested on this basis we will send you a contract. We would propose to publish in the early spring. We don't want to suggest any changes in the text. (There are a few slips that copy editing will eliminate but nothing beyond that.) We are not yet certain whether Salter's foreword should be included or not. A difference of opinion exists on this. Do you want to make any changes in the text?

I shall look forward most eagerly to your views on this proposal. Once again my sincere apologies for the lengthy delay, and do give my very best regards to your husband.

Yours sincerely,

J. G. McClelland

JGM:ctc

Let me call your attention to the publication on May 16th of a new Canadian novel — *THE DOUBLE HOOK* by Sheila Watson — which we believe to be one of the most exciting Canadian literary discoveries in years. Sheila Watson has a remarkable talent, and we are happy to introduce her work to the Canadian public.

The publication of *THE DOUBLE HOOK* also marks our first venture into the field of original publishing in paper covers. We hope that this will open a new market for Canadian writing, since it offers to Canadians in all walks of life a chance to read and to own new Canadian books in attractive but inexpensive editions. Our books in this group will be designed by Frank Newfeld, one of Canada's foremost typographical artists. The jacket of *THE DOUBLE HOOK* on which this note is written will give you some idea of the striking quality of his work.

*THE DOUBLE HOOK* will be followed shortly by *A RED CARPET FOR THE SUN*, the Collected Works of Irving Layton, and thereafter by other books which we feel merit this type of publication.

I hope that you will watch for *THE DOUBLE HOOK*. I am sure that you will find in it a remarkable and rewarding reading experience.

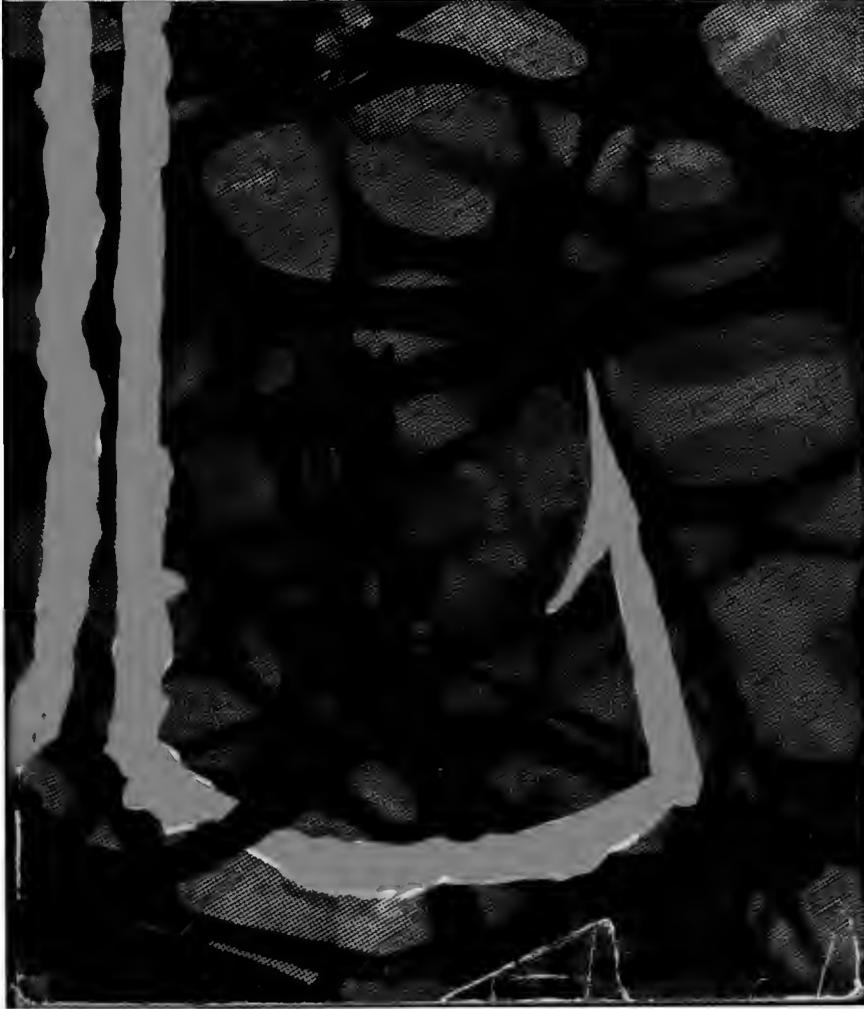


McCLELLAND & STEWART LIMITED  
25 Hollinger Road  
Toronto 16, Canada

Excerpt of letter from McClelland and Stewart, 26 January 1949. • Letter from Jack McClelland, 8 August 1953.  
Promotional flyer of cover design by Frank Newfeld, [ca. 1959].

SHEILA  
WATSON

## the Double Hook



Sheila worked on the manuscript over several years, revising phrasing and simplifying form and sentence. She would attempt to get the work published in the United States and England during her year spent in Paris, but with no success. Even in later years when she had the support of such patrons as Marshall McLuhan the work was judged too risky.

C. Day Lewis admitted that he himself admired it, "...but found it difficult to get clear in my mind the characters and their responses to one another and to their situation" and that commercially "the book would stand no chance in the British market." Another British publisher was ruthless, calling it "an extremely interesting experiment, which fails, not by dropping into the ridiculous, but largely because of the oblique style in which most of it is written." In one rejection letter, the editor concluded that his company could not make a success of the book, that "the novel will never be accepted by a committee, but it might achieve publication wherever the decision depends on the judgment of one man."

It was Jack McClelland, the new upstart publisher at his father's firm, who decided to take a risk on what he believed to be "an outstanding piece of writing." He remarked with humour: "It's the sort of thing that makes a publisher feel it must be published. Unfortunately, it has been a general consensus of opinion that it is not a sound commercial publishing risk. You may or may not agree with this." With *The Double Hook* McClelland & Stewart would experiment with new publishing strategies to get titles considered 'high risk' out into the Canadian market.

# WILFRED WATSON



While teaching in Duncan on Vancouver Island between 1940-41, Sheila met Wilfred Watson, a former lumber mill worker who was studying for his B.A. in English at the University of British Columbia. The reality of academic marriage is documented in Sheila's correspondence with her husband Wilfred. Married on the 29th of December 1941, the couple lived apart, with Sheila teaching in Mission City while Wilfred finished his undergraduate degree in Vancouver. With conscription, Wilfred spent the remainder of the war serving in the navy. It was not until 1945 that the

couple were reunited in Toronto, where Wilfred pursued his Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. Later the couple would be separated by the realities of academic appointments and their research, resulting in a rich documentation of correspondence, often several letters posted in a day in which the couple discuss their reading, teaching and writing. Sheila was Wilfred's best agent, mounting a successful campaign on behalf of his first collection of poetry, *Friday's Child*, which resulted in an offer to publish in a 1955 letter from Faber & Faber's editor, T.S. Eliot. It received the Governor General's Award for poetry the same year.

I do look forward to  
seeing you. Absence  
doesn't make love, or make  
it fonder, but it does  
dramatize the experience.  
Not that I recommend <sup>absence</sup> ~~love~~  
as a condiment essential  
to love; in paradise there  
is no (nor need of any)  
poetry, letters, nor declarations  
future; nor need of such  
consolations. Amor paradiso;  
paradiso est amor;  
Wfs.

Calgary, 12, 21. 41

Darling, Your picture of Swje  
queering up for me wrongs me  
to the heart. I think of my defaults -  
when there is no letter - and of the  
scraps of letters - not worth the wait -  
I write so often. See Swje - cross  
my heart - I will reform - I will.  
The thought enters my mind (but  
it is not one that speaks for my resolve  
to reform) that I might try addressing  
my letters to the school. I note the

Dearest Sheersways, I do  
love you.  
Wfs.



Student photograph of Wilfred Watson. [between 1941 and 1942?].

Wilfred Watson in grass. [after 1941?].

Letters from Wilfred Watson. 1951.







# JOURNALS



Sheila had started her journals soon after the arrival of a letter on the 14th of March 1955 from one of Wilfred's 'friends'. Subsequent letters in early April led to Sheila's departure for Calgary, then Vancouver, where she stayed with Ruth Humphrey. She struggled with the schism, trying to reconcile Wilfred's fractious words with happier memories:

"...molded into the perfect chrysolite that I would hold as something not to be set down for Helen, or Heloise, or Eve — or Stella... So one joins the furious tribe."

Following the success of *Friday's Child*, Wilfred applied for and received a Royal Society of Canada fellowship to study for a year in Paris. When his 'friend' declined to accompany him, he invited his wife. In Paris, Sheila achieved something significant in the genre, tracing her emotional turmoil about her marriage and her own literary ambitions, and documenting her immediate experiences and surroundings, replete with ink and pencil sketches.

The journals, at their most clear and reflective, span the years of 1954 to 1957, beginning with the crisis and separation between the couple. The entries take on different themes and preoccupations after her return to Canada.



Picture of Sheila Watson looking out window of Paris flat, [1955-1956?].

April 16.  
I try to understand. W. said  
10-nights I stopped loving you  
when there was a stronger  
bond between me and some  
one else - whatever I try to think  
I cannot help feeling the  
malicious time element -  
How is it that I suddenly  
become cruel, lacking in  
understanding pusillanimous

I can understand the falling  
in love but not the endless  
hours - the cabin outside  
Calgary -  
turning things over like  
fallen leaves -

Excerpts from Paris journals, 1955-1956.

# MARSHALL McLUHAN

Upon the couple's return from France, Sheila went to Toronto, while Wilfred traveled on to Edmonton. For the next five years the couple again lived apart during the academic year, maintaining a vigorous correspondence. In Toronto, Watson began her Ph.D. about the artist and writer Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), who had long been a figure of interest to her. Studying under the controversial St. Michael's College professor of English, Marshall McLuhan, Sheila began the research that would result in a remarkable thesis simply titled *Wyndham Lewis and Expressionism*. Sheila struggled with her subject, a frustrating and problematic figure in the Modernist and Vorticist movements in England,



and wrote of her loneliness at the University of Toronto in her journals, "with only Lewis for company," and related in a letter to Wilfred "I groan under the weight of the material where every detail is an issue [...] Wyndham Lewis immerses me in a confusion worse than my own." She remarks in her journals how Lewis "taxes every nerve," but later reflected in March 1958 that the writer "is at his best when he talks of lions and tigers and bees — and the warm parts of pigeons' wings."

During her time in Toronto, Sheila became a close friend to Marshall McLuhan, his wife Corinne and their children. In 1969 she and Wilfred lived in Toronto as visiting scholars, where Sheila assisted McLuhan in the classroom following his surgery for the removal of a brain tumour.

University of Toronto  
Toronto 6, Canada  
**CENTRE FOR CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY**  
Marshall McLuhan, Director  
October 3, 1965

Dear Sheila:

I found the Oliver and Boyd reply most encouraging. Don't you think it would be quite easy to prune merely to allow your own voice to come through more strongly? That is clearly what they wish. Much of your citational erudition was, after all, for the benefit of the Ph.D. committee. (Please send me a brief memo about the recently devised Ph.D. procedures at Alberta. Because of the sudden jump from ten Ph.D. candidates for the Generals to thirty-four this year, a great light has dawned. Serious steps are under way to reduce the Generals so as to stress the thesis itself. Panic has enabled us to see the folly of written exams.)

I think I had already mentioned Elissett's backing down on Pound in favour of diverting Pound material to the Canadian Forum.

Ellul is a practical Catholic, a Professor of Law at the University of Bordeaux. I doubt that he has any zeitgeist ideas in mind whatever. He would be more inclined to regard man as participating in an on-going creation that extends him physically into the universe. Of course, you are right so far as the Spenglers are concerned, but for that camp there can be no special meaning in human identity. Was Yeats in this position when he spoke of art and technology as "self-born mockers of man's enterprise?"

Shall keep your South African matter in mind. I know of no native South African literature whatever. It is the sort of item that Ted Carpenter would leap at.

Thanks for the point about thunder and Donner. In Finnegans, page 18, line 23, there is a marvellous gradatio that begins: "The ignorance that implies impression". It concerns the thunder directly



as setting up a chain reaction of closure that results in existentiality.

Again, congratulations on the wonderful letter from Oliver and Boyd. Wish I could be around to help you hook and slash the mms.!

Fondly  
Marshall

*Illustrated letter from Wilfred Watson, [c.1961].*

*Letter from Marshall McLuhan, 1965.*

*Sheila Watson with Corinne and Marshall McLuhan, [between 1970 and 1980?].*

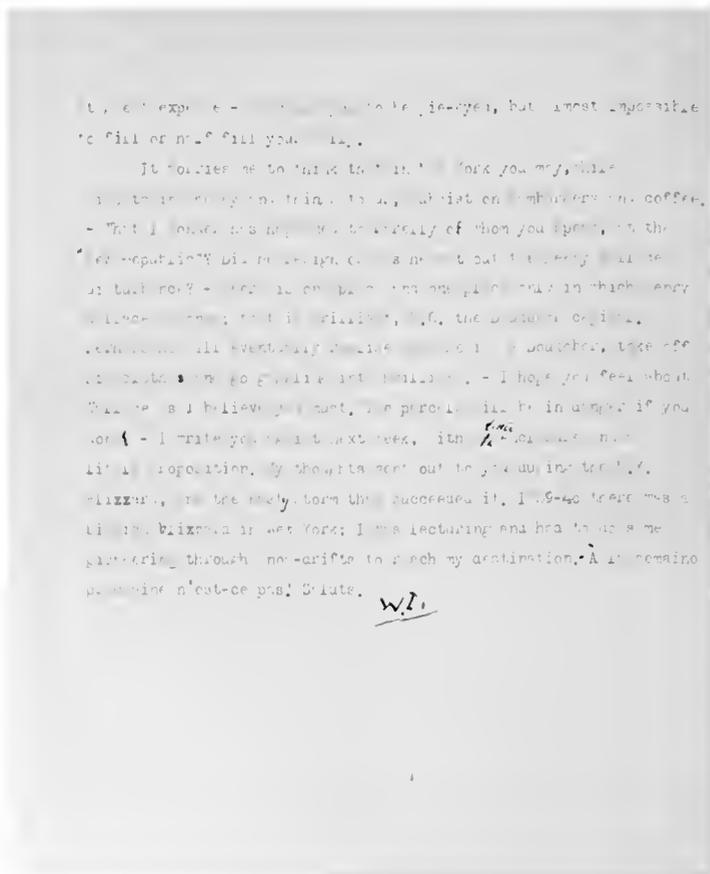
# WYNDHAM LEWIS

Sheila Watson's thesis on Wyndham Lewis was well received by McLuhan and her examiners and there was encouragement to publish. She even travelled to England in June 1961 to explore the possibility of writing Lewis' biography.

In the course of her research, Sheila acquired numerous reproductions of Lewis family photographs and works of art and an impressive collection of Lewis first editions (now part of the University of St. Michael's College's Special Collections). She also acquired two small collections of original letters: a small batch of correspondence by Vorticist artists and others belonging to the English sculptor Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939); and, a sustained correspondence between Lewis himself and Felix Giovanelli, an American doctor, admirer, sometime agent of Lewis' and a friend of McLuhan.



Portrait of WL by George Charles Beresford, [ca. 1913?].



Letter to Felix Giovanelli, 14 January 1948.

In this letter Wyndham Lewis is disparaging Henry Wallace, a former editor of *The New Republic*, turned Progressive Party candidate for President during the 1948 election. Lewis' jibe regarding the Doukhobors may be an allusion to Wallace's opposition to the Cold War, advocacy for full voting rights for blacks and universal health insurance, and rumoured affiliation with communists. The parcels which Lewis is so concerned about are care packages sent by Giovanelli to supplement Lewis' post-war English diet.



# THE PROFESSOR

"In the winter, on very cold days, you can see her small figure, wrapped up in a huge, yellowish fur coat of indeterminate ancestry, walking across the snow-covered campus of the University of Alberta. She seems vulnerable, fragile almost. A strong gust of wind might blow her away. But that's an illusion. The small figure creates a space of its own, asserts itself, and yet seems an integral part of the landscape..."

Henry Kreisel. "Sheila Watson in Edmonton". *Sheila Watson and the Double Hook*. ed. George Bowering. *Critical Views on Canadian Writers*. Ottawa: The Golden Dog, 1985: 7.

Sheila was hired to teach in the Department of English at the University of Alberta in 1961. She remained at the university in Edmonton until her retirement in 1975, supervising many thesis candidates, not without some controversy along the way. Here is a collection of increasingly formal correspondence from fellow professor of English, Dorothy Livesay regarding her opinions, both professional and personal, of a student of Sheila's and the suspicious nature of his master's manuscript.

April 13/70

Dear Sheila:

It seems I still have reservations about that novel as thesis. Not for the writing in it, but I wonder when it was written, and where? The typing paper is British, so is the type. And if you say you never saw any of it as work-in-progress, how then was it written here, in one academic year?

In view of the hard going that people doing the academic thesis have to face--with a plan, an abstract and usually a chapter by chapter unethical to let a student do and simply present work done

Now this may not at all approve of the rigid it Yet I feel it would have to be is to present work in creative that done in academic writing

One way out that students I know who want to offer a graduate course in (s) would combine the writing with temporary poetry and fiction and discussion. I suggested it it would be too much like "it do not myself thinks so, as it submissions and a complete of the Fifties and Sixties. How

The alternative if to audit 407 or 408 and submit in-progress if he so wished.. with the person who was his: him more closely to the patte

I hope you don't of mine?

Dear Sheila:

I read this between 7 and 9 a.m...so some skimming.

I think I know this Anne, one of my poet-students? several ways (he eats women?) which he showed me when he first

The novel is full of observed detail. One sense Knut and DR L over the other..but an There's too much obsessiveness at philodophizing..but that could be was presented for publication.

Because of the beautiful not because of the hair-shitted this for an M.A. thesis.

April 12/70



Dear Sheila

I read this in the morning

But my personal view is

guy was out to Kill

To Female Principal

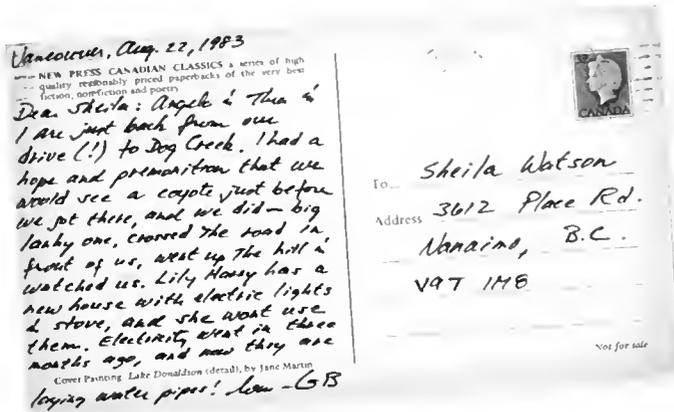
He takes more so he is not human

Dorothy

"Gulliver and Glumdalelitch" caricature by Juliet Sutton, n.d. Three letters from Dorothy Livesay, 12-13 April, 1970.



# MIGRATION WEST



“Are you more or less settled yet? I dream of you settled on the coast-line of Vancouver Island — even you Sheila — a small, brown sea-gull sitting on a rock writing telegrams to Ottawa on a tiny typewriter perched on the rocks next to you.”

— Letter from Miriam Mandel. — August 1980.

In 1980, Wilfred and Sheila moved back to British Columbia, settling in Nanaimo, on the east coast of Vancouver Island, on a stretch that separated the Gulf of Georgia from the lagoon on their property, affectionately known as The Spit. Although retired, the couple continued to work within the creative com-

munity, as readers for Canadian publishers, jurists on award panels, and encouraging active artists, poets and writers.

Through correspondence and indeed the household’s extensive phone bills, Sheila’s continued advice and encouragement to writers and poets and fellow scholars is documented. A whole network of Canadian scholars and writers can be traced through her incoming correspondence: Timothy Findley wrote her in his capacity as a fellow jurist for the Governor General’s Awards; the Bowerings as colleagues and concerned friends; while Daphne Marlatt and Michael Ondaatje wrote as writers seeking reactions to works-in-progress.

I don't know if I explained to you when I saw you in the spring that I was working on a book that had two stories (with no connection) that I hoped to interweave together. When I started ~~work~~ <sup>working</sup> on them in earnest in May however I realised that they were two totally separate books and they couldn't really go together without ~~xxx~~ taking away from each other and forcing me into an A-Z plot line. This is the one that got finished. I'm going to need longer and more thought for the Ambrose book and right now I'm exhausted.

2  
impunity. Once she/he is aboard, however ..... My favorite character, in terms of the written exploration process, is - second to Mottyl the cat - Mrs Noah. I've found the most wonderful things about her and through her, if I can just write them. The old bugbear: the vision frustrating the act - eluding the act - the dreadful inability to do - to make - to say what you hear, what you see, what you know. Still - this is what writing is: an attempt on Everest every morning before breakfast !

o have time, I would like to get some reactions from criticisms, advice, would be truly appreciated. I'm ack in Toronto on the 1st of September so if you could be best. Also, I am going on this North West Territories 12th. I think I will be stopping in Edmonton on probably stay with the Harbours that night -- if I get can get together that afternoon and talk?

Apparently i visited you & Wilfred last night in a dream, so i thought it time to write you. The dream was very much an overlay of different times/ periods (you had dark hair) but i remember Wilfred showing me photographs he'd taken in the 60's, vision-photographs -- the people in them were either blurred or unrecognizable but the cliff-faces, the rocks, the trees all had remarkably clear human masks (actually human-image masks, like native masks of animal faces) & he showed me the special camera he'd used, a most extraordinary contraption with a shutter like a beak that opened and closed. The masks were part of the actual grain of the rock or wood but had been seen very clearly.

Letter from George Bowering, 22 August 1983.

Letter from Michael Ondaatje, 21 August 1975.

Letter from Timothy Findley, 1 November 1983.

Letter from Daphne Marlatt, 8 April 1988.

# DEEP HOLLOW CREEK – COMING FULL CIRCLE

*Deep Hollow Creek* was one of Sheila's first creative efforts. Written around 1938, she revised elements of the manuscript in the early 1950s while working in Mission City, British Columbia, and Calgary. The rejection of the novel for publication was difficult, and in part led to Watson's ruthless elimination of a narrative personality in *The Double Hook*.

Dear Mrs. Watson:

Under separate cover, registered mail, I am returning to you *Deep Hollow Creek* and the excerpt of the new novel. I finally heard from Falcon & Grey Walls Press, and they felt that they could not place the *Deep Hollow Creek* in England. Then, in the meantime, I was trying CBC on some of this material, thinking that if it were well enough read it might make an excellent Wed. Night programme. They felt that the new (excerpt) was excellent, but a little <sup>in</sup>substantial as it now stands. I would be very much interested to see this completed, myself.

The editor of Clarke, Irwin & Co. on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 1951 ultimately declined *Deep Hollow Creek*. "Up to a point we all liked your story tremendously," he opened. "Your theme transcended a region and was universal in its scope. Your people and your places were written of with sympathy and perceptiveness. Your theme was highly original and the style effective. It was, all in all, a very remarkable effort for a first novel, which I presumed this to be. What bothered us all, then, was our feeling that the story started on one theme and that half way through it switched over to another." The editor suggested revisions, to either emphasize the story of Mamie Flower or Stella.

  
McCLELLAND and STEWART  
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PUBLISHERS

sh-b

January 26, 1949

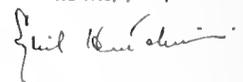
Dear Mrs. Watson:

I enjoyed very much reading your manuscript *Deep Hollow Creek*. It is the sort of manuscript which I like myself, but which doesn't sell well here in Canada. I have written to Morpurgo of Falcon & Grey Walls Press, England, about it, asking if he would like to see it. He told me in the fall that he was interested in not too long manuscripts of non-fiction, Canadian settings. I have not heard from him yet.

Then, it occurred to me that CBC use short stories both in the Fri. night programme and on Wed. night. I let Mr. Weaver of CBC Talks Dept. see your manuscript. He thinks, like I do, that the transitions are too sharp, etc., but he would be interested in talking over the possibility of a radio script to be done from this with you. He has the manuscript at present, but I wish to see it again myself. Perhaps you would call him at M1\_5481?

I will let you know when I hear from Morpurgo. But I think you should expend this manuscript, eventually, and simplify its style. That could be done without sacrificing good writing, surely. It reads very authentically and the idiom is excellent. However, if Mrs. Edicott had not told me the circumstances of the experience I think I would have been confused in many places. There is very little about the school in it for a person who went there to be the teacher. There is a curious contrast between this manuscript and that of *Child for Cleone* (Christine van der Mark). Miss van der Mark taught in the NW, all Bree Indian children. She travelled 75 miles in a wagon to Peace River, to come 'Outside'. But she had loved those little Indian children and the manuscript was very sympathetic. I am not meaning by this that people should write in the same way, nor be impressed by the same things. I was only impressed, as I always continue to be, with the differences in people. Somewhat, the manuscript was loaned to Mr. Weaver, who is a very discreet person, and it is to be returned to me by him.

Sincerely yours,



Letter from Sybil Hutchinson, 26 January 1949.

I hadn't gone to the Cariboo especially to write about it and at that particular time I wasn't really writing. I was thinking about it. But I did <sup>eventually</sup> write ~~this~~ novel called Deep The Hollow Creek and sent it to Macmillan and it came back, and I was glad it came back because I realized there was something wrong with it and felt that somehow or other I had to get the authorial voice out of the novel. [ So many Canadian novels were always somebody writing about Indians or somebody going into a village, somebody recalling their own ethnic past. ] I wanted the

Despite repeated solicitations from various publishers for new material following the publication of *The Double Hook*, Sheila allowed her first novel to languish for almost fifty years. Encouragement from Fred T. Flahiff led to McClelland and Stewart editor Ellen Seligman taking a second look. The role of editors in the publishing history of *Deep Hollow Creek* is key: initially with the encouragement and criticism of Sybil Hutchinson in 1949 and 1950, and ending with Ellen Seligman in 1990, who shepherded the manuscript to its final publishing in 1992.

*Deep Hollow Creek* was published in 1993, resulting in considerable critical acclaim. It was nominated for a Governor General's Award for fiction but lost out to Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*.

creek is alive, but none of us to  
thank you for Deep Hollow Creek itself.

The book is a wonder. Every sentence kept me on my toes, and swarmed me all over the place with its fresh verbs. I love the story and the people, and the landscape - which has never, I think, been drawn this way before. The land translated with a new way of drawing.

Manuscript of unpublished interview of Watson by Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, 1984.

Vancouver  
Aug. 17, 1993

Dear Sheila -

I am writing by hand because my other hand, being broken, is in a cast. But I hear that's nothing. I hope to heaven that you are keeping out of pain as much as possible. I presume that this means that I shouldn't ask you to try out for my position on my ball team? We're going to the Okanagan for my brother's wedding, but will try to get to Nanaimo to steal your candies and flowers next week. I reviewed your novel for Canadian Literature and shamelessly praised it. How you can outstrip us all, no matter how early it is!

John - G.S.

Manuscript of unpublished interview of Watson by Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, 1984.

Letter from George Bowering, 17 August 1993.

Letter from Michael Ondaatje, June 1992.

# THE EYE CLOSED. IT OPENED AND CLOSED AGAIN.

"And the Four Animals..." was published as part of Coach House Press' Manuscripts Series in 1980. The series was promoted by the press as 'works in progress' by various Canadian authors. The content and material evidence of the typed manuscripts of Sheila's work infer that the story was composed at a much earlier date. This story is very similar in tone and subject matter to the Dog Creek material and the paper and type similar to the *Deep Hollow Creek* manuscript of the late 1940s. It seems fitting that one of Sheila's final published works was most likely one of her first.

Sheila Watson died on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1998 at the age of 88.



the distant rock. Each time they reached the height of lead with more difficulty. At last all three lay pressing thin bellies and jaws against the unyielding earth. 3.

Now when the eye opened there were four dogs and a man and the eye belonged to the man and stared from the hill of his head along the slope of his arm on which the four dogs lay. And the fourth which he had whistled up from his own depths was glossy and fat as the other had been. But this, too, he knew in the end would clink lack-lustre as the rest.

So he opened his volcanic ridged jaws and bit the tail from each dog and stood with the four tails in his hand and the dogs fawned graciously before him begging decorously for food. And he fed the tail of the first dog to the fourth and the tail of the fourth to the first. In the same way he disposed of the tails of the second and the third. And the dogs eat their eyes on his mouth.

Then he bit the off-hind leg from each and offered it to the other; then the near-hind leg and the dogs grew plump and shone in the down light of his glance. The jaw opened and closed on the two fore legs and on the left haunch and the right and each dog bowed and elevated and ate what was offered.

Soon four fanged jaws lay on the hill and before them the man stood holding the amber eyes in his hands and these he tossed impartially to the waiting jaws. Then he fed the bone of the first jaw to the fourth and the bone of the second to the third. And taking the two jaws that lay before him he fed tooth to tooth until one tooth remained and this he hid in his belly.

*Excerpt from "And the Four Animals..." [before 1980].  
Sheila Watson, [199-?].*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The author acknowledges the following:

Fred T. Flahiff, Estate of Sheila Watson

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Jay Stewart, Estate of Dorothy Livesay

Suzanne Drinkwater, Estate of Jack McClelland

McClelland & Stewart Ltd.

Michael McLuhan, Estate of Marshall McLuhan

Rowland and Juliet McMaster

Evie and Charles Mandel, Estate of Miriam Mandel

Daphne Marlatt

Eleanor Nichol, Estate of bpNichol

Michael Ondaatje

Shirley Neuman, Estate of Wilfred Watson

*Efforts were made to contact the executors of Anne Angus (who passed away in 1991) without success. It is hoped that the family will not object to the brief quotation from one of her many letters to her friend.*



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*Sheila Watson, [199-?].*

*Opposite Page: Selection of ephemera from Paris, [1955-1956?].*

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 Prénoms Sheila -  
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 et de Mary -  
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 (trayer les mentions inutiles)  
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 Durée de séjour interrompu en France  
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CARTE VALABLE  
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 Prénoms Wilfred -  
 Né le 1.5.1911 -  
 à ROCHESTER -  
 de Frederick -  
 et de Louisa -  
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