“Two Attitudes to Two Solitudes,” presented by Anne Showalter.

Author Hugh MacLennan’s fictional character Father Beaubien, priest of the tiny village of St. Marc, fears that if men like English mogul McQueen get their hands on French land, the province’s “pure laine” French race will become a tribe of employees who work, sweat and die to pad already fat English bank accounts. Sixty years later, Eric Canuel’s filmic character in Bon Cop Bad Cop, the reckless yet effective French-Canadian detective David Bouchard, makes a point of letting his colleagues on both sides of the Ontario-Quebec border know that he is the boss – even though they are actually partners. Despite the distance in time, the narrative of these two texts is haunted by a power struggle that crosses time, narrative mediums and genres. While not produced in connection with one another, the two works from which these characters sprout, MacLennan’s novel Two Solitudes (1945) and Canuel’s film Bon Cop Bad Cop (2006) are palimpsestuous. That is to say, the texts haunt one another by engaging the same themes. Watching Bon Cop Bad Cop, a viewer aware of Two Solitudes will recall the text and its treatment of the divide, and vice versa when reading the book. As both texts have been quite successful – the novel won a Governor General’s award and was recently foregrounded as the runner-up in CBC’s Canada Reads 2013, and Canuel’s film holds the position of highest-grossing Canadian film and received a Golden Reel award for Best Picture (Hays 20) – this relationship is more firmly cemented through their mutual popularity and visibility.
My goal in this paper is to treat these thematically linked texts to what Genette terms a trans-textual analysis (Stam 27). This framework allows me to examine texts that are not necessarily direct adaptations, but are linked and can be placed on a level continuum for productive examination. Using this adaptation framework I will further engage Robert Stam’s process of comparative narratology to look at changes in the relationship between English and French Canadians across the 60 years as seen only through these two texts. The areas that I will examine include changes in language relations, areas of the narrative that illustrate a bridging across the divide as well as areas that further distance these two groups. What this examination reveals is that the later text shows quite a shift in the power dynamics between English and French Canadians, in favour of a move towards greater equality, even if that equality is still very much haunted by the power imbalance apparent in the older novel.

First, here is some background about the two texts. *Two Solitudes* is an epic novel about several families living in and near Montreal from 1917-39. It follows the Tallard family, a prominent ancestral French-Canadian seigneur family whose last heir has two sons: Marius, with his first wife, a pious French-Canadian woman, and Paul, with his second wife, an Irish Canadian. Tallard Senior gets involved in building a power plant with English McQueen to the detriment of himself, his home, community, wife and sons. The second part of the book follows the fate of Tallard’s younger son in light of his father’s financial and social failure. Paul, who is both French and English, represents the future of Canada, combining both traditions with a global experience in one young writer. In writing his first novel, Paul notes that he could not use Canada for the setting of his novel without explaining the French-English divide (MacLennan 418). Interestingly, this is exactly what Paul’s author is doing. MacLennan even adds his hopes, through Paul, for what a harmonious French and English coexistence might be.
Bon Cop Bad Cop is far from didactic. It is a blow-em-up cop comedy thriller revolving around a rule-defying French-Canadian police detective (David Bouchard) and an uptight English-Canadian police detective (Martin Ward). Both are on the case (and each other’s cases) to investigate the murder of a hockey lawyer whose body was found slumped over the border sign between Ontario and Quebec, with “his heart in Quebec” and “Ontario up his ass”. Bon Cop Bad Cop as a comedy is able to play off the audiences’ knowledge and understanding of “Canada’s two solitudes” to achieve its laughs rather than explaining them, which was MacLennan’s process. The film’s goal, according to Matthew Hays, is to “bring the country’s official linguistic cultures – or Two Solitudes – together” so that both audiences will enjoy it (21).

At the outset of the DVD version of the film, Canuel speaks about just how much people enjoy his film. Both texts begin with a direct address to the audience from the writer and director about the language of their production, and it is here that I will begin my comparative narratology analysis. Canuel explains that there are three versions included on the DVD: English with French subtitles, French with English subtitles, and what he calls the “perfect bilingual version” with no subtitles at all. Canuel has taken his tag line of “shoot first, translate later” and has done just that, shooting the film bilingually and then making it linguistically accessible later through subtitling. MacLennan, on the other hand, opens his text with an explanation that “some of the characters in this book are presumed to speak only English; others only French, while many are bilingual” (Foreword). From there the book proceeds completely in English, with only a few mentions of language: on the shop signs at Drouin’s general store, reference to Paul’s
bilingualism (17) or Katherine’s (Tallard’s Irish wife) poor French skills (105). Who is speaking what language and when is otherwise left unsaid, leaving the introduction as a disclaimer for proceeding in one language alone. Instead, the major delineator of the two solitudes in the book is religion, where French Canadians are staunch Catholics – a practice ridiculed by the English characters.

_Bon Cop Bad Cop_ proceeds with only one mention of religion, when suspect Therrien comments on Ward’s ultra-conservative attire by calling him “father”. Language is the major divisor, but as the film progresses it becomes a measure of the growing degree of respect and camaraderie between the two officers. When the two cops meet for the first time at the crime scene, Bouchard immediately takes the opportunity to make fun of Ward’s French accent for the SQ crowd watching and laughing at the encounter. This moment sets the stage for ongoing jokes about Ward’s French skills, not to mention, Bouchard’s boss’ English skills. His efforts are strained and leave him sweaty. In his second scene of yelling at his two detectives, he amusingly tells them “you’re off the suitcase”. While Le Boeuf’s English does not improve, Ward’s and Bouchard’s language skills become much more fluent and natural as their relationship progresses. After a tense scene apprehending Therrien, in which both pretend not to understand the other’s language and consequently do not help their partner out of a violent situation, they bond over a discussion about the conjugation of French swearwords. Having agreed to speak French in Quebec and English in the rest of Canada, they both proceed to slip on the agreement. When Bouchard’s car explodes with a suspect inside the trunk, they communicate in their respective languages, but when they realize they are in this mess together, both with their jobs on the line, they slip, with Ward swearing in French and Bouchard
explaining that working together is “the only way out” in English. They are a team and will now communicate with each other in a mix of both.

United in the face of the tattoo killer, the two cops take up their own version of Frenglish. This is not the only sign of co-operation between the divided groups. In both texts, issues of economics, international forces, hockey as well as love and family serve to bring the French and English characters together. However, using a comparative analysis, it becomes apparent that unity finds greater success in the more recent text.

Issues of economics unite across the border. In Bon Cop Bad Cop, despite the fact that they rip the victim’s body in two when their weight causes the provincial border sign to act as a giant cleaver, their respective bosses insist that the two must work together. They want to show the RCMP that these provincial forces are still capable of policing their border and deserving of federal funding. Similarly, Tallard’s relationship with English financier McQueen is about economics. McQueen explains to Tallard that “if French Canada doesn’t develop her own resources, someone else is bound to do it for her” (20). Tallard proceeds to put all of his money and property on McQueen’s scheme to build a power plant and factories in St. Marc. He believes that he will become a hero for providing jobs and a future for its residents, despite the dire warnings of the town priest. The partnership is an abysmal failure from both Tallard’s and St. Marc’s perspective (a point I will return to in the next section); however, for a time the two sides work together.

Tallard should have focussed on hockey. Paul does. As a fatherless and fortuneless adult, Paul plays hockey on a multilingual team in order to pay his way through university. On
the ice, Paul’s language and religion are irrelevant. In *Bon Cop Bad Cop* the goal of the murderer in is to seek out, tattoo and kill members of the Canadian hockey scene who have been involved with the sale of Canadian players and teams to America. In uniting to seek out this killer, the two cops engage their own mutual knowledge of hockey history, sharing their love of the game in their quest of its killer. In the final scenes, both cops agree to use team owner Harry Buttman as bait to free Bouchard’s young daughter, who is being held captive by the tattoo killer. While this is poor treatment of a civilian, the two cops disregard it, as they have discovered that Buttman was planning on selling and moving yet another team south, this time to Texas.

The kidnapping of Bouchard’s 12-year-old daughter Gabrielle is a terrifying situation that both detectives, being fathers, can relate to. In both texts, children serve to unite the two solitudes. Finding common ground through parenting is established early in the film. Just after they apprehend their first suspect, Therrien, Ward and Bouchard have a conversation about parenthood. Bouchard, late for his daughter’s ballet recital, and despite the fact that the suspect is locked in the trunk of his car, drives recklessly and parks illegally to make it just in time for her performance. As Bouchard cheers on his daughter with a lot of noise and movement, Ward watches with interest and amusement that this other cop too can understand the need to support one’s children. In MacLennan’s novel, children themselves reach across the divide. Yardley, an eccentric retired English sailor and Tallard’s neighbour, takes his two English granddaughters fishing with Tallard’s son Paul. The children play together happily, forming a bond that eventually results in the marriage of Paul to Heather, the younger of Yardley’s granddaughters. While they are children, even openly racist Janet Methuen, Yardley’s daughter, is able to see past
what she perceives to be wrong in all French-Canadian Catholics and find worth in young Paul, something she will fail to do more than a decade later.

The production of these children is also a unifying factor in the book. Paul is the result of an interlingual and intercultural relationship, and he goes on to be one half of yet another interlingual and intercultural relationship when he marries Heather. While Gabrielle Bouchard and Jonathan Ward are both the children of unilingual and unicultural parents, once divorced, their fathers do not seem to mind being attracted to women of the opposite side of the divide. In the film, Bouchard is quite irritated by Ward’s flirtations with his ex-wife Suzie and her reciprocation in English. Similarly, Ward is quite taken aback to find Bouchard dressed in costume after having sex with Ward’s sister Iris. The sex scene that precedes this encounter is also of interest. As Iris engages with Bouchard, he teaches her to speak French, culminating in Iris yelling “Vive le Québec libre” over and over again.

When Ward enters Iris’s apartment after the sex scene has ended, Iris is holding handcuffs. While there is a great deal of movement towards equality for the solitudes in this film, there are historic ghosts hiding in the dark corners of this relationship, ghosts of powerful English factory bosses, culturally insensitive comments and derogatory name-calling. In the aforementioned sex scene Iris, an English woman, is dominating this French-Canadian man - what Marius from Two Solitudes would call another conquest of Quebec.

While the effect is subtler in Canuel’s film, both texts illustrate ways in which French and English Canadians’ relations are exacerbated. The texts show this through a racially driven imbalance of power in the workplace, the use of derogatory names and negative assumptions.
Marius says that the second conquest of Quebec was through factories (51). The partnership between McQueen and junior partner Tallard in the power plant venture is not equal, and the fear of the resulting factory town is quite sound. Tallard’s argument, that the power and factory would bring much-needed jobs to St. Marc, is fulfilled, but so too is the priest’s fear that these jobs will be at the will of the English. Even as McQueen completes his survey of the land, Katherine comments that no one in St. Marc is clever enough to run a factory (51). Father Beaubien cautions that the profits of the factory will flow back to the English, as was his experience in the previous town in which he was stationed where “no-one owned anything but the English bosses” (188). This is of course the result of the venture between Tallard and McQueen: an English boss benefitting financially from Quebec workers who scrape by in perpetual poverty.

This English boss and French-Canadian worker trope plays out more subtly in Canuel’s film. As I mentioned, Bouchard finds it necessary to let his ex-wife and colleagues know that he is the boss in his partnership with Ward. While this is not true in either case, his statement hearkens back to the English boss, French-Canadian employee situation illustrated in *Two Solitudes*. Bouchard must not appear to be under Ward’s leadership, as this would repeat the conquest Marius feared over again.

Words like “boss” have great divisive power in both texts. In the film, insults and nasty comments are foregrounded. Bouchard makes fun of Ward’s accent for the amusement of his colleagues, and Ward tells his colleagues of referring to Bouchard, that “he’s French” as if cultural background explains a great deal. Escalating the essentialization of cultures, Toronto sports newscaster Tom Berry calls Bouchard a racist name. After butchering Bouchard’s name on air, he ridicules the cop’s pronunciation habits and says “watch it, frog”. While Berry also
calls the makeup artist a “fruit,” this derogatory term for a French Canadian is not balanced with an equally nasty comment towards Ward.

Similarly, in *Two Solitudes*, the English soldier who follows Marius after his pro-Quebec anti-conscription speech calls him a “Pea soup” (62). Again, there are no equivalent nasty names for the English characters in the novel. The English in MacLennan’s book also speak and think ill of French Canadians. Both McQueen and the powerful Methuens believe that French Canadians are inferior, in part due to their religion, and even Tallard himself finds his people to be backward as they refuse modernization and scientific advancement (90). Interesting, then, that Tallard thought that the divide between the French and the English could be surpassed if Ontarians merely showed faith and understanding towards the Québécois (88). It seems Tallard himself failed at this.

Just before concluding, I would like to make one final comment about language and subtle divisions. Throughout the film, the two police officers swear profusely, even engaging in the aforementioned discussion of the conjugation of French swear words. It is obvious, then, that the killer’s last words, before he blows up, include some swearing. Earlier in the film, when on the phone with the tattoo killer, Bouchard comments that he has no accent in either official language. But when he does finally swear, with his last breath, it is in English. Is the killer then presumed to be English?

To end my analysis I will compare the end of the texts. *Two Solitudes* ends on a hopeful note at least for French-English relations. In the last paragraph MacLennan writes of the sun rising on both races as they face another war, with the knowledge that they faced the last one
together and won. The hope that war will unite the two races is darkened by the fact that the only reason many Quebecois fought in the last war was because they were forced to through government-sanctioned conscription – not to mention that people will also die for this uniting. Nonetheless, MacLennan’s novel does a very elaborate job of explaining the divide between French and English Canada, and points to some ways in which it might be bridged; however, it falls short of making a complete connection. Bon Cop Bad Cop, on the other hand, sets out to unite both cops and audiences alike. It does so blatantly, with only a few cracks and moments that show that even though the two detectives may work on a level playing field, it has not always been that way, and Bouchard has not completely forgotten his ‘souviens’. Examined trans-textually using comparative narratology, these texts illustrate quite a shift in ideas, most notably the changing power dynamics, from an English authority taken for granted in MacLennan’s text to a tolerant and mostly mutually respectful equality in Canuel’s film.
Works Cited

*Bon Cop, Bad Cop*. Dir. Erik Canuel, 2006.DVD.

