

**GREENING THE MAPLE:
CANADIAN ECOCRITICISM IN CONTEXT**
edited by Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley

ISBN 978-1-55238-548-7

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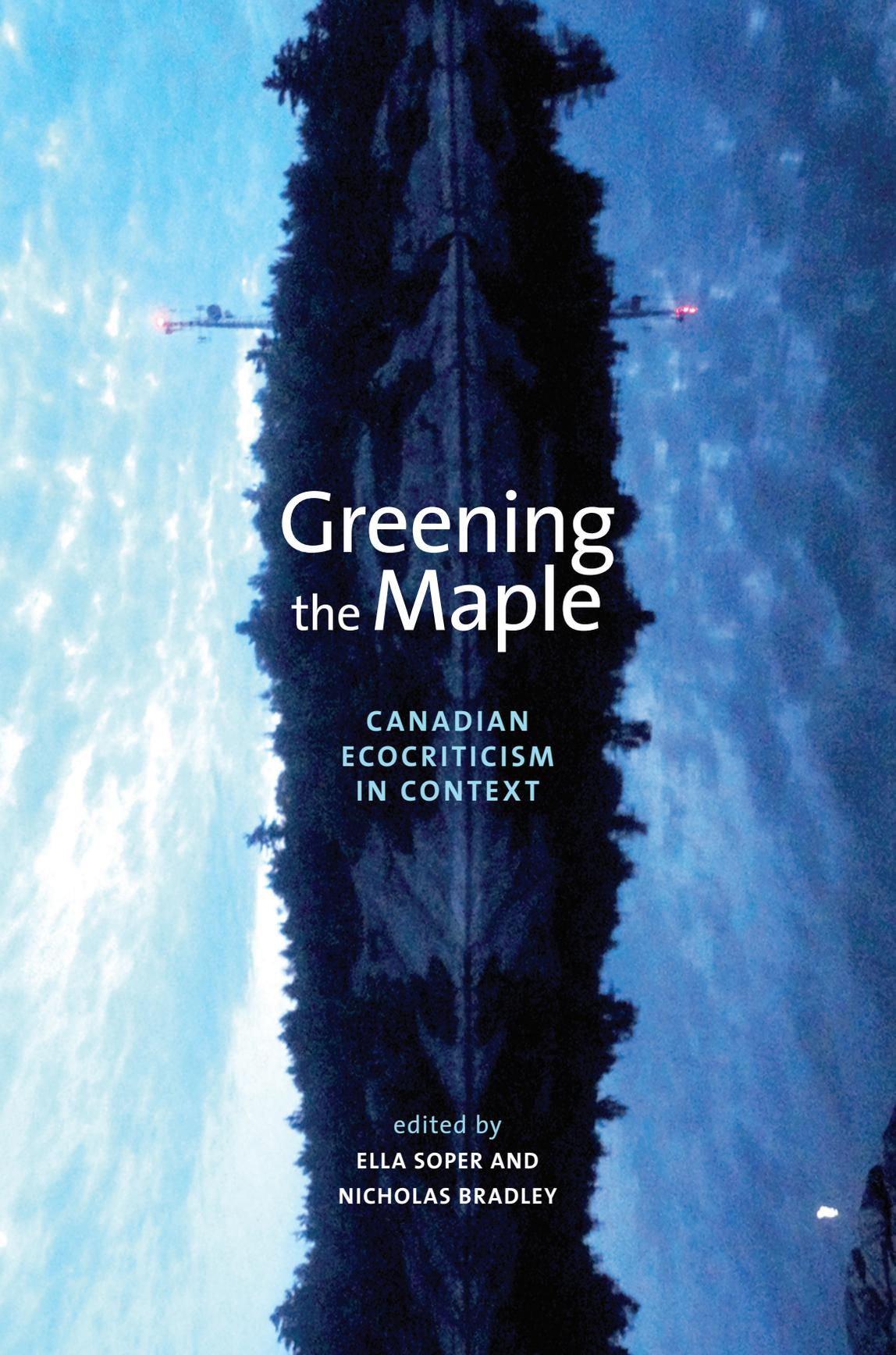
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Greening the **Maple**

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ELLA SOPER AND
NICHOLAS BRADLEY

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ENERGY, ECOLOGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT SERIES

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UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY
PRESS

ENERGY, ECOLOGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT SERIES
ISSN 1919-7144 (Print) ISSN 1925-2935 (Online)

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University of Calgary Press
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, Alberta
Canada T2N 1N4
www.uofcpress.com

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LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Greening the maple : Canadian ecocriticism in context / edited by Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley.

(Energy, ecology, and the environment series, 1919-7144 ; no. 7)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-55238-546-3 (pbk.).—ISBN 978-1-55238-547-0 (pdf).—

ISBN 978-1-55238-548-7 (pdf).—ISBN 978-1-55238-549-4 (html).—

ISBN 978-1-55238-734-4 (mobi)

1. Canadian literature (English)—History and criticism. 2. Ecocriticism—Canada. 3. Nature in literature. 4. Ecology in literature. 5. Landscapes in literature. 6. Animals in literature. I. Soper, Ella, 1972-, writer of introduction, editor of compilation II. Bradley, Nicholas, 1978-, writer of introduction, editor of compilation III. Series: Energy, ecology, and the environment series ; no. 7

PS8101.N3G74 2013

C810.9'36

C2013-904267-9

C2013-904268-7

The University of Calgary Press acknowledges the support of the Government of Alberta through the Alberta Multimedia Development Fund for our publications. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund for our publishing activities. We acknowledge the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts for our publishing program.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Front cover image by Gene Mastrangeli, *Landscape* as portrait, 2013

Cover design, page design, and typesetting by Melina Cusano

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Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the contributors to this volume for their enthusiasm for the project and their patience during the lengthy and complicated preparation of the book. The editors are also grateful to the staff of the University of Calgary Press for invaluable support and practical assistance. Pamela Banting and Catriona Sandilands (especially in her capacity as Canada Research Chair in York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies) provided essential guidance. The index was prepared by Christina Francisco. At the University of Victoria, Jenny Jessa, Melanie Hibi, and Katharine Waring provided administrative assistance. The editors also thank the following for permission to republish material: *Canadian Literature*, *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews*, *Dalhousie Review*, ECW Press, House of Anansi Press (where Matt Williams has been most helpful), *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, NeWest Press, Rodopi, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, and the University of Tennessee Press.

PUBLICATION INFORMATION FOR REPUBLISHED ESSAYS

Atwood, Margaret. Selections from *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.

Bentley, D.M.R. "Along the Line of Smoky Hills': Further Steps towards an Ecological Poetics." *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 26 (spring–summer 1990): v–xix.

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Introduction: Ecocriticism North of the Forty-ninth Parallel

Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley

1. FAMILIAR TERRAIN? A RETROSPECTIVE APPRAISAL

The advent of ecocriticism has been hailed as one of the most timely and provocative developments in literary and cultural studies in recent decades. Ecocriticism has also been greeted with bewilderment or skepticism by critics, theorists, and students for whom its aims and methods are unclear. A sense of uncertainty sometimes attends discussions of ecocriticism even today, when it has become a relatively institutionalized part of academic life; an ever-growing array of publications, conferences, and classes are devoted to the subject. Ecocriticism has sought since its inception to make the study of literature (and other cultural manifestations) relevant to the innumerable environmental crises, local and global, that characterized the end of the twentieth century and that threaten to define the twenty-first. The powerful appeal of ecocriticism derives in

part from its longstanding commitment to interdisciplinarity and pragmatism. It claims for the analysis of literary and other cultural works a prominent role in addressing some of the most pressing matters of the day, and it aims to inflect conventional approaches to humanistic inquiry with scientific knowledge and an activist commitment to the protection or amelioration of the world's environmental health. Ecocriticism seeks as well to address the social issues that are concomitant with environmental issues. But the precise ways in which literary studies bear on the material world remain perpetual subjects of debate, as do the most appropriate methods and most pertinent topics of ecocritical investigation. Ecocriticism aspires to understand and often to celebrate the natural world, yet it does so indirectly, by focussing primarily on written texts. The critic in the library may seem engaged in a project altogether different from those of scientists in the field or the laboratory. Practitioners of ecocriticism seldom agree even on definitions of foundational terms, "nature" and "environment" foremost among them. ("Literature," too, is often a contested category.) Ecocriticism continues to be shaped by perennial disagreements about its scope and purpose; such tensions reflect its mutability and suggest that it is an area of inquiry distinguished by vibrant debate and great potential for expansion.

By all the measures of scholarly consensus, ecocriticism is now an established – and perhaps even familiar – part of the academy. But for readers of this book who are new to the field, questions may persist. What exactly *is* ecocriticism? What do ecocritical scholars do, and what shapes do their efforts take? Readers who are already engaged in ecocriticism as scholars, teachers, and students may have questions of their own. What is particularly Canadian about ecocriticism, its intellectual energy, and its internal quarrels? How can a retrospective, curatorial account of the field shape future approaches to the environmental humanities? To these important questions may be added another: *Where* is ecocriticism? That riddle and the manifold answers to which it may lead are the subjects of this book, which attempts to bring into view the development of ecocriticism in the context of studies of Canadian literature. One response is that ecocriticism is *here* – in Canada, in Canadian studies – and has been

for some time. The slippery, almost intractable meaning of *here*, moreover, has wielded a significant influence on the concerns and conclusions of environmentally oriented scholars of Canadian literature. Despite the global scale of environmental phenomena and the increasingly international character of the environmental humanities, the emergence of ecocriticism has followed different trajectories in various regional, national, cultural, and linguistic settings. The aim of *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* is to track the past and present of Canadian ecocriticism. Revisiting recent critical history may well permit a richer sense of the directions in which environmental approaches to Canadian literature may lead.

Ecocriticism can be described in very general terms as the investigation of the many ways in which culture and the environment – the realm that both includes and exceeds the human – are interrelated and conceptualized. It has tended, especially at its outset, to focus on literary representations of the natural world, concentrating for understandable reasons on the works of writers, such as Wordsworth and Thoreau, for whom nature is a central and beloved subject. But increasingly ecocriticism is diverse in its concerns and techniques, and in the intellectual traditions that it claims. As Lawrence Buell writes, ecocriticism “has a history *both* of strong position-taking by individual spokespersons *and* of reluctance to insist on a single normative, programmatic definition of its rightful scope, method, and stakes.”¹ Representation as such has largely receded into the background as a subject of examination; “nature,” “wilderness,” “environment,” and their cognates have become highly disputed, and in some cases eviscerated, terms and concepts. And it has become a widely accepted view that all texts have an environmental dimension, not only those that are self-evidently about nature. A corollary of this view is the conviction that any text may be illuminated by critical attention to its environmental aspects.

The essays collected in this volume together demonstrate that, although “ecocriticism” is a broad and somewhat vague if now generally accepted term, studies of Canadian literature have long made relations between people and environments a topic of primary importance.

("Eco-" suggests "ecology," which has a range of scientific, political, and philosophical connotations. Is the ecology of ecocriticism a metaphor? A biological concept? A statement of political orientation? These are vital questions.) The chapters create a dialogue among literary studies of nature in Canada that predate, coincide with, participate in, and follow the rise of ecocriticism proper. The sweeping statements about nature and Canadian identity made by critics in the era of Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden* and Margaret Atwood's *Survival* will probably strike readers today as naïve,² but contemporary ecocritical approaches to Canadian literature and culture are not wholly separate from earlier critical and cultural fascinations with nature. If Frye and Atwood are not strictly ecological thinkers, their works nonetheless helped establish a context for later ecological criticism. The continuities and ruptures alike in Canadian studies show "nature" to be a pivotal yet shifting and unstable concept and site of investigation.

An enduring stereotype holds that Canadian literature revolves around descriptions of nature: in novel after novel, and poem after poem, rugged mountains, whirling snowstorms, and desolate prairies torment hapless characters. There may be some truth to the stereotype, but Canadian writers have long tried to understand the nature of nature – the constitution and character of wilderness and countryside – as well as to represent its effects, harmful or otherwise, on people. In 1903 the poet Bliss Carman asked "who shall prove that nature is not a metaphor?" thus associating the non-human world ("nature") with literary language ("metaphor") and suggesting that what seems real is in fact the product of discourse.³ Carman's reputation as poet and critic is at present fairly low; even if his historical importance is assumed, he has few champions today. But his rhetorical question provides an example to counter the view that Canadian writers have been oblivious to the complexity of nature as both fact and fiction, and it allows a connection, faint perhaps but nevertheless discernible, between his conception of an illusory nature and contemporary understandings of nature's discursive existence. Recent critical propositions that "nature" is an ideological construction rather than a tangible, material reality remain divisive in the world of

ecocriticism. As the provocative cases of Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature* (2007) and *The Ecological Thought* (2010) illustrate,⁴ describing "nature" as a socially and linguistically determined category invites a defensive response from some quarters of the ecocritical community, in which sophisticated theory is perceived to be inimical to environmentalist praxis.⁵ Morton's opposition to "nature" – taken as a reified, politically suspect idea – may seem counterintuitive in a field that is committed to understanding and improving human relations with the natural realm, and his ideas have been both acclaimed and reviled. His support of object-oriented ontology as a philosophical alternative to what he describes as "theistic" responses to environmental crisis extends his advocacy of "a ruthless rejection of the concept of Nature."⁶ Morton's polemical (but playful) style and the challenging substance of his ideas have made him a polarizing figure – so, too, have been other writers who have questioned the conceptual validity of "nature" and "wilderness."⁷ The gulf between poets such as Carman and critics such as Morton is undoubtedly wide. But the congruence of such distant views as theirs suggests the extent to which the subject that ecocriticism purports to examine – nature – has always been contentious.

In Canadian literature and literary criticism, theoretical reflection upon the natural world and upon the role of language and literature in describing, imagining, and constituting nature has a lengthy past. Carman's speculation is merely an example; the essays gathered in this volume indicate repeatedly that "nature" has frequently been a troubled term in Canadian letters and that "theory" in some form has rarely, if ever, been far removed from literary encounters with nature. Virtually from the inception of the notion of a Canadian national literature, nature has occupied a central place in critical conversations. As Laurie Ricou suggests, "Canadian literary studies, with their long-standing interest in nature, wilderness, and landscape, might be said to have always been ecocritical."⁸ The essays in this book suggest the accuracy of Ricou's somewhat tentative claim, showing that venerable critical interests contextualize and inform current ecocritical models. For Canadian writers at least since the Confederation period, for regionalist and thematic

critics, and, most recently, for ecocritics, the value, symbolism, integrity, and ontology of nature were and remain fundamental matters. (Which is not to say that such subjects have not also been found trite: Canadian writing about nature has always had detractors.) In his “Conclusion” to the *Literary History of Canada* (1965), a landmark essay, Frye several times suggests that an agonistic relation to the landscape defines Canadian culture; he notes that a characteristic of Canadian poetry is a predominant “tone of deep terror in regard to nature.”⁹ This hypothesis, surely one of Frye’s most notorious observations about Canadian writing, epitomizes the centrality of nature in Canadian cultural discourse, albeit in negative terms. The idea of a “garrison mentality,” probably his most familiar single phrase about Canadian society, likewise captures the sense of hostility to the environment that ostensibly defines the Canadian psyche.¹⁰ Frye’s writing on Canadian literature and culture continues to be a critical touchstone, despite the strenuous efforts of waves of critics who have resisted the emphasis on literary theme and overarching claims about the country, which inevitably seem inadequate when examined closely.

Critical treatments of nature in Canadian literature from Frye’s era, a heyday of literary nationalism in Canada and of thematic criticism (on which more below), may appear thoroughly outmoded. The literature about which Frye wrote so persuasively may also seem outdated. Ideas of Canadian literary history and traditions have been transformed since his day; the explosion of literary activity in Canada since the 1960s, the resultant range of literary subjects and forms, and the diversification of authorship have made comprehensive descriptions of Canadian writing virtually impossible. But aesthetic and conceptual complexities exist even in apparently familiar territory, and connections may be found between past critical models and current intellectual fashions. This anthology attempts to survey the intricacies of Canadian environmental criticism, and to emphasize both continuity and change. It provides a narrative of the emergence of Canadian ecocritical discourse. Taking seriously the challenge implicit in Susie O’Brien’s question of whether there is “a substantial body of what might be called ‘Canadian ecocriticism’ lurking

under names other than ‘Canadian’ or ‘ecocritical,’” it collects significant statements on Canadian literature from 1965 onward (with one earlier exception).¹¹ The anthology is necessarily selective and provisional, but it seeks to exemplify attributes of the large and varied body of environmental approaches to Canadian writing. The chapters that follow demonstrate that “Canadian ecocriticism” is a capacious term. Just as Canadian literature is amorphous – multilingual, multicultural, multi-regional – Canadian criticism has investigated the representation and discursive production of natural environments in a panoply of ways. The maple leaf at the centre of the Canadian flag is, of course, red. The essays herein together suggest that the maple’s green leaves are a fitting symbol of a dimension of Canadian criticism.

2. ECOCRITICISM: THEN, NOW, HERE

Ecocriticism still has a relatively short official history – “official” in contrast to the protracted history of critical interest in nature and related concepts, such as the pastoral mode. In the early 1990s, some literary critics felt it imperative to respond to environmental crises: ecocriticism emerged from this moment, its beginnings reflective of the perceived immediacy and severity of environmental change, and of what was thought to be the need for scholars in humanistic disciplines to make the environment the prime object of study. Thus an activist impulse has informed ecocritical practice from the outset. By the end of the 1990s, ecocriticism had achieved some prominence as a distinct approach to literary studies, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, even as it had clear ties to other forms of green cultural studies. In its early stages, ecocriticism was strongly shaped by accounts of British Romantic poetry – notably Jonathan Bate’s *Romantic Ecology* and Karl Kroeber’s *Ecological Literary Criticism*¹² – and of American literature in a vein that encompasses the Transcendentalist writers of the nineteenth century and the writers of the twentieth century who follow paths established by Emerson and Thoreau. The development and institutionalization of

ecocriticism were closely tied to American literature and the American academy – or at least to its periphery. The Western Literature Association, a respected but specialized scholarly body, gave rise to the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), which was established in 1992. The nascent ecocritical project, in this manifestation, made central the Transcendentalist legacy, contemporary American essayists, and, for evident reasons, American environments. The nearly overwhelming influence of Thoreau as a literary and philosophical point of reference made Walden Pond one of the sacred locations of the new field, just as Wordsworth's Lake District was fundamentally important to an emergent ecocriticism that took British forms of Romanticism as points of departure. As Lawrence Buell has observed, early ecocriticism claimed “two semi-coordinated and interpenetrating epicenters: British romanticism, with a genre focus especially on poetry in that tradition (including its twentieth-century Anglo-American filiations), and U.S. nature writing (ditto), with a genre focus especially on the Thoreauvian imprint,” even if “few ecocritics, if pressed about the matter, would have claimed that these particular generic and historical foci were to be considered the sole rightful provinces for ecocritical work.”¹³ Buell's second point is especially significant. The “epicenters” may never have been understood to define ecocriticism – to establish its lexicon, to provide the solitary models of environmentally astute and relevant literature, to create a normative vision of nature, and so on – yet their importance to the developing field can hardly be overstated. Many studies that anticipated and thus shaped ecocriticism in its later forms, especially in the United States, emerged from American literary scholarship, such as Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*, Joseph W. Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival*, and William Rueckert's “Literature and Ecology.” Perhaps the most important of such works is Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*, which tied historical approaches to Thoreau to the burgeoning literary interest in contemporary environmentalism.¹⁴ Its publication in 1995 provided American ecocriticism with an anchoring critical study, one that cast Thoreau as a focal figure in environmental literature and philosophy and that, in turn, placed environmental concerns at the heart of an Ameri-

can literary tradition. While early ecocritics may not have intended their thematic, generic, and authorial emphases to become rigid paradigms – Buell notes that “the initial de facto concentration on selected literary genres within the long Anglo-American nineteenth century was contingent rather than inherent”¹⁵ – they have nonetheless exerted considerable influence on the field at large, even as ecocriticism has become planetary in scope and practice.

The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology, published the year after *The Environmental Imagination*, is commonly understood to mark the culmination of ecocriticism’s first phase. The anthology demonstrated the existence of a coherent body of environmentally oriented criticism and provided templates for further studies.¹⁶ The editors, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, gave a succinct definition of the field that their book would, at least for a time, represent: ecocriticism is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.”¹⁷ This description is broad – each of its chief terms is open to interpretation – yet powerful in its simply phrased suggestion that relations between literature and the environment form the basis of ecocriticism, whatever shapes it may take. *The Ecocriticism Reader* revisited and revised the literary canon, proposing the significance of often-overlooked writers belonging to various traditions understood to have environmental (and environmentalist) resonance. The anthology confirmed (to ecocritics) and asserted (to other readers) that ecocriticism was a viable mode of inquiry with a constituency of practitioners, with clear aims and interpretative strategies, and with institutional authority. Subsequent accounts of ecocriticism’s history have almost uniformly pointed to the publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader* as the moment of the field’s arrival.¹⁸ The book’s importance and continued relevance are undeniable, but from a specifically Canadianist perspective, its lack of attention to Canadian literature is notable: the anthology does not examine Canadian writers and their works.¹⁹ Its essays focus almost exclusively on American writers and representations of American locations; the impression is created, however inadvertently, that ecocriticism is (or was) principally an American enterprise. (Ecocriticism has since the mid-1990s generally

become international in scope.²⁰) A Canadian equivalent of *The Ecocriticism Reader* could serve as a belated corrective, concentrating on the Canadian literature that the anthology appeared to overlook. Perhaps more significant than a remedial or additive approach, however, would be an investigation of the particularities of Canadian approaches to the study of literature and the environment, which intersect with, as well as differ from, environmental criticism as understood and practised elsewhere. The present volume attempts to provide some evidence for such an investigation. *Greening the Maple* seeks to suggest that environmental approaches to Canadian literature represent not merely a branch of the American or the British tree, but instead, to shift metaphors, a different but related species. Canadian ecocriticism has, it may be said, a somewhat ironic relation to its American and British equivalents: it is as Canadian as possible, under the circumstances.²¹

The internationalization of ecocriticism since the 1990s has made it evident that ecocritical practices are not the same the world over, and that not all literatures – national, regional, local – adhere to or accord with theories derived from British, American, or indeed other literary traditions. Environmental approaches to Canadian literature may, in short, be considered independently of other nationally inflected versions of ecocriticism. The purported “topocentrism” of Canadian literature²² and the unmistakable emphasis on wilderness in Canadian iconography²³ – the myriad representations of nature that circulate in Canadian arts, letters, politics, and other envisionings of the nation – have influenced, often strongly, studies of environment in Canadian writing. The persistent conception in political rhetoric and popular culture of Canada as the True North, strong and free, suggests the close relation of nature and nation. Canadian ecocriticism, guided by the many distinctive features of Canadian cultures and places, has tended to be pluralist. It has demonstrated strong connections to British and American ideas, but it has also attended closely to Canadian cultural traditions of imagining the natural world. It has acknowledged, too, the existence of a domestic ecocriticism *avant la lettre*. Among its notable characteristics may be counted a distinct emphasis on poetry as well as on non-fictional nature

writing (the journal *Canadian Poetry* has been an especially important ecocritical forum²⁴); the existence of both ecocriticism and *l'écocritique* (sometimes interconnected, sometimes two solitudes); a longstanding fascination with animals that differs from, yet complements, the critical turn to “the question of the animal” in posthumanist studies²⁵; and a continual interest in the intersections of political theories and environmental politics. Such characteristics neither define Canadian ecocriticism exhaustively nor mark its absolute distinction from ecocriticism elsewhere. They suggest, however, some of the topics to which conversations about literature and environment in Canada have often returned.

It may seem parochial to focus on a national variation of ecocriticism when the field has largely moved beyond the concerns of its first inceptions. The interconnectedness of environments and economies is, after all, an inescapable aspect of life in the twenty-first century – global climate change and global capitalism are ineluctable and interrelated phenomena. Images of the planet at risk make narrowly conceived understandings of nature seem irrelevant or untenable.²⁶ Locally focussed critical models can, however, coexist with forms of “eco-cosmopolitan”²⁷ inquiry: authors, texts, environments, and even readers can be illuminated by a variety of interpretative paradigms. In other words, national (but neither essentialist nor isolationist) approaches to the study of literature and the environment can complement (rather than preclude) other approaches in a constellation of ecocritical modes. The “transnational turn”²⁸ in ecocritical scholarship, as Scott Slovic has suggested,²⁹ shows that a comparative paradigm is a powerful means of conceiving of ecocriticism as the sum of its various national strains.³⁰ The proliferation of various national affiliates of the U.S.-based ASLE suggests further that ecocriticism has become at once global and local, simultaneously cosmopolitan, national, regional, and local in its manifestations.³¹ Ursula K. Heise suggested some years ago that ecocriticism had become sufficiently complex that it required “book-length introductions.”³² This observation becomes ever more apt as time passes. The history of environmental approaches to Canadian literature has, however, scarcely been examined, even as the existence of lively ecocritical debates and

of an established community of scholars has been noted. As a result, valuable contributions have at times been insufficiently recognized. The older essays in this volume will be familiar to some readers and new to others; their presence in the book is based on a belief in their continued relevance.

3. CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL WRITING: SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Canadian landscapes and their apparent distinctiveness (whether understood in positive or negative terms) have fascinated writers and critics throughout the history of literature in Canada, before as well as after Confederation. A preoccupation with nature is a widely acknowledged (and, yes, somewhat stereotypical) characteristic of Canadian literature. Celebrations and condemnations of natural settings, and evocations of the spirits of places appear frequently in Canadian letters, as critics have on occasion lamented. The recurring, if not constant, attention to nature has, of course, salient historical and political dimensions. The dread of nature and the reverence for it that are both evident in Canadian literature can be understood in terms of Canada's relations to Britain, France, and the United States, and to a degree to other countries as well. In Canadian literature in English and French, aesthetic conventions "imported" from beyond the national borders have had remarkable staying power.³³ As Susan Glickman demonstrates in *The Picturesque and the Sublime*,³⁴ a fascinating account of the roles that the titular aesthetic categories have played in Canadian writing, traditional European philosophies and styles, and especially notions of nature's beauty and terror, have had far-reaching and multifarious effects on the literature of this country. But such perspectives – neoclassical, Romantic, colonial, and so on – coexist, in Canadian literary history, with both older and more recent attitudes toward the natural world. Don McKay, a highly influential poet and essayist, suggests in a powerful account of Canadian nature poetry, for instance, that environmental contrasts between

the Old World and the New World created an aesthetic challenge for early Canadian writers in particular: “Neither the Enlightenment values of rational order nor the Romantic ideal of a humane and humanizing nature easily applies to the country which greeted – if that’s the word – the pioneers.”³⁵ In the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first, writers have become highly aware of dramatic environmental changes and crises both local and global, and often self-conscious about their apparent belatedness as “nature writers” or “nature poets” in a seemingly post-natural age. Yet conventional ways of seeing the natural world have remained influential. (McKay’s own writing is an apposite example: it engages the legacy of Romantic nature poetry while savvily demonstrating its author’s knowledge of twentieth-century philosophy.)

Canadian literary responses to the natural world have sometimes, but not always, yoked together a sense of novelty with familiar modes of expression, using received forms to describe “new” places, flora and fauna, climates, and, to be sure, peoples. Before and after Confederation, Canadian writers have evoked local conditions in a literary climate in which generic and formal models established elsewhere have held sway. Many writers have found such models suitable for their purposes; others have chafed at the apparent contradictions between aesthetic conventions and the seeming newness or unfamiliarity of Canadian landscapes. Literary respondents to Canadian environments have attempted to discover or invent vocabularies and literary forms appropriate to the scale and the particularities of the country.³⁶ This dynamic of simultaneous literary adaptation and invention, with a discordant variety of results, is perhaps inevitable whenever languages and ideas are highly mobile – that is, whenever historical and political circumstances allow or cause their movement. Historical differences between Canada and other settler-invader countries (including the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa) nonetheless bear upon the distinctions that may be observed between Canadian environmental writing and commentary and other related ecological traditions, including those of the United States, Canada’s neighbour and perpetual point of comparison. As W. H. New suggests, the “verbal trope” of “land” enjoys a paradoxical

quality in Canadian culture, functioning “both as an icon of stability and as a medium of change.”³⁷ Much the same can be said of “nature” in Canada, which has been perceived as both terrifyingly different and reassuringly familiar. (Among other things, as the chapters in this book demonstrate.)

Linda Hutcheon has suggested that “Canada has been – has had to be – sensitive to issues of difference and exploitation: it defined itself as a nation (a bilingual and bicultural one) in 1867, but it continued to be a colony of Britain until, some would say, it graduated to being a colony of the United States.”³⁸ Canadian writers have frequently attended to cultural, linguistic, and idiomatic variations in their efforts to express Canadian sensibilities in light of the country’s colonial and postcolonial history. They have struggled to decide on appropriate subjects and on the appropriate language with which to convey them: literary languages in Canada include English and French, in various registers, as well as many indigenous and “foreign” languages. The names of places illustrate the important difference that language makes in relation to physical space. Think of “the Queen Charlotte Islands” and “Haida Gwaii,” or “the Strait of Georgia” and “the Salish Sea”: these are and are not the same places. The tremendous “transnational and global currency”³⁹ of Canada’s diasporic literature provides another context for the study of Canadian environments. The formal and idiomatic strategies used by Canadian writers of non-European origins to represent Canada, and notably its urban spaces, link the cultural dimensions of diasporic experiences to ecological dimensions, as Canadian locations are imagined in relation to homelands, places of exile, and other sites of memory, identity, presence, and absence.⁴⁰

4. TROPES IN THIS COLLECTION

It has been suggested that thematic criticism, predominant in the 1960s and especially in the 1970s, may have hindered the expression of a Canadian ecological sensibility.⁴¹ Canadian thematic criticism, which identi-

fied overarching and distinguishing motifs and concerns in the national literature, claimed that a fearful response to nature was an essential aspect of Canadian cultural identity. Its contribution to Canadian ecocriticism, however, has perhaps been misunderstood. The national myth that thematic criticism promoted was one of withstanding conflict with nature: the hostile Canadian wilderness was so uninhabitable, as Frye, Atwood, and others posited in their surveys of Canadian writing, that settlement and ultimately nationhood occurred only despite it. Frye's and Atwood's characterizations of Canadian environments as deeply vexed and thoroughly ambivalent are markedly different from American literary traditions of writing that celebrate nature as a foundational element of the nation, including the Thoreauvian and Emersonian traditions that have been so important to (American) ecocriticism. (In the United States, rough equivalents to Canadian thematic criticism have not always been seen as antithetical to ecocriticism. For instance, Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* is recognized as a proto-ecocritical study of the links between pastoral and industrial tropes in American literature and culture.) Despite its totalizing claims, which tend to overlook environmental and literary diversity, thematic criticism marks a contribution to an important tradition of theorizing representations of the Canadian wilderness in literature, one distinguished further by its postcolonial and comparatist orientation. It seems possible that skepticism about the merits of thematic approaches to Canadian literary criticism served to inhibit the emergence of an ecocritical tradition in Canada, whereas thematic criticism itself pointed, it appears in retrospect, in that direction. *Greening the Maple* foregrounds thematic criticism because this historical moment in Canadian criticism represents a contradictory (and notoriously contentious) reckoning of nature's importance to Canadian culture.

Thematic criticism's brief but influential "flowering"⁴² gave rise to a strong backlash instigated by critics including Frank Davey, Barry Cameron, Michael Dixon, W. J. Keith, and Russell Brown,⁴³ who viewed the thematic approach as "extra-literary," "reductive,"⁴⁴ and ultimately "dismissible."⁴⁵ These charges effectively build upon A.J.M. Smith's denigration in 1943 of provincialism in the works of the Confederation Poets

– their representations of “nature humanised, endowed with feeling, and made sentimental”⁴⁶ – and his promotion of cosmopolitan sophistication in those he heralded as the country’s most promising modernist poets:

Whether this new poetry is distinctively national is a question that our writers are not much concerned with. It is not that they have recoiled from the somewhat blatant nationalism of the 1900’s into a disillusioned indifference but that they have grown interested in the world-wide revolutionary movement of modern times.... They are Canadian poets because they are importing something very much needed in their homeland. They are no longer in the exporting business, for maple sugar is a sickly and cloying commodity.⁴⁷

Anti-thematicist critics urged commentators on Canadian literature to move “beyond thematics”; much earlier Smith had, in light of the similarly dim view he took of literary nationalism, urged writers and critics to move “beyond nature.” Like Smith’s critique of the parochialism of “native” literature, the anti-thematic backlash – and the cosmopolitan bias evinced by the Continental critical theory that, T. D. MacLulich argues, came to supplant thematic criticism⁴⁸ – had a measurable impact on the production, publication, and practice of literary criticism with a nationalist focus. The charge mounted by Davey and others informed the official editorial policy at the *University of Toronto Quarterly*,⁴⁹ and the more informal publication decisions of the editorial boards of *Essays on Canadian Writing* and ECW Press, the latter of which, as Brown argues, was “for some time ... the chief publisher of book-length Canadian criticism.”⁵⁰ This bias undoubtedly precluded publications by would-be thematicist critics. If there is a rupture, then, in the articulation of pro-to-ecocritical discourse in Canada, perhaps it is less a product of the pernicious effect of Frye’s theory of Canada’s “garrison mentality,” or of Atwood’s theory of Canadian survivalism, than it is a product of the anti-thematic mood that affected Canadian literary criticism for the better part of two and a half decades.⁵¹

Whether ecocriticism is partly a reinvention of thematic criticism is a provocative question, one that warrants sustained consideration.⁵² Much work remains to be done in terms of theorizing the correspondences and differences between the two discourses; a thematic “retrospective” is overdue. Indeed, as Margery Fee argues, “to turn our backs on thematic criticism . . . is to fall into an even more treacherous swamp. . . . [I]f we can’t clearly distinguish Canadian literature from other literatures, especially American and British, then it vanishes as a subject.”⁵³ Thematic criticism – “the only clearly defined critical school to emerge in Canadian criticism,” it has been claimed⁵⁴ – undoubtedly belongs in a historical continuum of nature-oriented criticism in Canada. This conviction is reflected in the structure of *Greening the Maple*, which follows a roughly (but not exclusively) chronological order.

“Nature and Nation: Before and Beyond Thematic Criticism” suggests a starting point for Canadian ecocriticism, and features excerpts from signal books by Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, in addition to essays by Rosemary Sullivan, Sherrill E. Grace, and Heather Murray. Many of the chapters in this anthology concern aesthetic and cultural influence as they pertain to “Canadian” ways of seeing and writing nature; the selections from Frye, Atwood, and Sullivan are representative of the manner in which thematic criticism tied representations of the natural world to efforts to discern a national identity. (Atwood in particular tackles her subject with a dry sense of humour.) Like Atwood and Frye, Sullivan invokes a comparatist paradigm, contrasting what she deems the function of “*La forêt*” / “the wilderness” in selected works by John Richardson, Susanna Moodie, and Archibald Belaney (a.k.a. Grey Owl) with forest symbolism in American mythology. Sullivan invokes both thematic criticism and psychoanalytic theory in her exploration of these tropes and of ways in which Canadian literature is engaged in “an ongoing dialogue with the wilderness, an obsessive, repetitive effort to relive (and perhaps reframe) that moment of original encounter.” In her proto-ecofeminist essay, Grace suggests that the works of Canadian writers generally – and those of Gabrielle Roy, Margaret Laurence, and Atwood in particular – evince a pastoral sensibility that codifies

rural virtues (also seen as natural and female) in opposition to the dehumanizing aspects of the urban world (understood as cultural and male). Although her claim that Canada lacks “major urban literature” could today be contested, since an urban literature has flourished, with many important works by women and diasporic writers, the concerns that gave rise to Grace’s study of the gendered representation of “natural” and “man-made” landscapes still resonate with ecofeminist scholars.⁵⁵ In her essay, Murray asks whether a distinct tradition of wilderness writing by Canadian women exists, and, if so, how its predominant forms and tropes can be characterized. She concludes, with reference to thematic and poststructuralist criticism, that Canadian women authors writing “wilderness” have been at once canonized and marginalized, a paradox founded on a deeper cultural ambivalence towards nature and towards those who, by the logic of essentialism, are considered closer to it.

“The Emergence of Ecocriticism in Canada” includes editorials and articles by critics who began in the 1990s to consider, in light of literary criticism’s environmental turn in the United States and the United Kingdom, how Canadian literature could, as D.M.R. Bentley puts it, “confirm or assist the reintegration of humanity and nature.” Adopting an evaluative approach, Bentley proposes an “ecological poetics” based on principles of interdependence and diversity: he devises a method of assessment that addresses such questions as whether a poem’s “formal and typographical configuration is fitting or suited to its subject,” and “whether it shows contempt or respect for the natural and human world.” Bentley’s material and pragmatic preoccupations announce themselves in his concern with poem as artefact (“Where and on what kind of paper was this poem printed?”), in his emphasis on mimesis (“How effectively does it communicate a sense of place?”), and on the production of affect (“How effectively does it communicate an emotion by generating ... a feeling analogous to the one that it purports to express?”). Linda Hutcherson evaluates Frye’s legacy in light of what she posits as a contradiction between his evident dismay at the exploitation of nature and the role that “systematic,” “totalizing” theories such as his own play in the facilitation of such destruction. She concludes that Frye maintained an uneasy “*both/*

and” relation to the discourses of modernism and colonialism, and, thus, to the subjugation and exploitation of nature that they are considered to have enabled. In a pair of “green” editorials, Laurie Ricou reflects (with some skepticism at first) on what the emergence of “ecocriticism” means for Canadian literary studies. He observes that, while “Canadian critics have been loud ... on landscape (whether to emphasize its literary prominence or to lament its obsessiveness as theme),” they “lag behind” their American counterparts in the “closely related matter of environmentalism.” Surveying ecocritical methods in use at the time, Ricou identifies approaches (ecofeminism and environmental justice among them) that appear to him to be full of potential for Canadian critics. In the course of his review of *The Ecocriticism Reader* (in which he notes, with something like Susie O’Brien’s “twinge of patriotic crankiness” [see below], that the anthology is almost exclusively American in focus), Ricou urges would-be environmental critics in Canada to ground themselves in the science of ecology. More particularly, he encourages an “open[ing] [of] the creative irrational un-mind,” so that we may more keenly experience biological interrelatedness.

Successive early Canadian ecocritics build upon the insights of these proponents of environmentally oriented criticism in their efforts to theorize and apply ecocriticism in Canadian literary contexts, frequently with a greater emphasis on discourses of environmental politics and social justice. Claiming a disconnection between the lack of ecocritical interest shown by Canadian literary scholarship and the efforts of contemporary poets “to redefine their relationship with the environment by using a holistic approach that recognizes both human and non-human life forms as equal and interdependent,” Gabriele Helms advocates a “shift from an intellectual anorexia and complacency” to an active engagement with environmental politics. Adapting Bentley’s model of evaluative environmental poetics, Helms analyzes poems by Anne Campbell and Fred Wah – examples, she argues, of “complex ... environmental visions in contemporary Canadian poetry.” She concludes (citing Saroj Chawla) in defence of the efficacy of poetry in times of ecological crisis: “If a change in the approach to nature is to come about in our society, it will have to

be at the level of perception, and at the linguistic level such a perception can be reflected in the language of poetry.” Building upon Carl Berger’s insights into Victorian-Canadian naturalism,⁵⁶ Susie O’Brien provides a wide-ranging inquiry into ways in which the nationalist mythology of the United States as “nature’s nation” contributes to the impression that the American cultural context nurtures ecocritical thinking to a greater extent than does the Canadian, with its ostensibly more conservative and colonial sensibility. O’Brien concludes that, whereas American mythology promised an “unmediated relationship” between nature and nation, the Canadian equivalent has been “plagued by an awareness of mediation, of the presence of language as language, a structure through which nature – and nation – can never be directly experienced but must always be translated.”

“Reading Canadian Landscapes” suggests further intersections of regionalist, bioregional, and ecocritical discourses, but the essays in this section take a wide view of the subject, frequently unsettling assumptions about natural boundaries and the potential limitations of place-based critical approaches. In “Nature Trafficking: Writing and Environment in the Western Canada–U.S. Borderlands,” Jenny Kerber prompts a critical re-examination of the cultural construction of border issues. Borderlands are inherently dynamic, she argues; they belie and resist the oversimplification foisted upon them by political, economic, and historical ideologies. Kerber examines the “mediating function” of borders, “both in terms of cultural difference and conflict, and in terms of how nature itself is altered and experienced on either side of surveyed lines.” Ultimately she calls for “a more thorough consideration of the ‘border effect’ on literary discourses of nation and nature,” and a “richer understanding of borderlands as places of conflict, refuge, and cooperation.” In “Calypso Trails: Botanizing on the Bruce Peninsula,” Catriona Sandilands describes in anecdote her encounters with orchids, and queries the veracity of claims that John Muir, the celebrated American naturalist, travelled the Bruce Peninsula, in order to examine the effects of interpretive programming in parks. Sandilands takes a skeptical view of Parks Canada’s “tripartite mandate of preservation, education, and recreation” in light of the threats

posed to the survival of endangered native flora such as the *Calypso bulbosa*. She concludes wryly that the “neoliberal orchid reality” is that their “conservation is [ultimately] tied to their commodification.” Sandilands has suggested in discussion that her essay is not ecocriticism per se but rather a form of nature writing; readers will doubtless perceive the continuities between her approach and others, as well as the insights that it affords.⁵⁷ Cheryl Lousley’s essay reconsiders “place, rurality, and region” in Canadian literature and repurposes Georg Lukács’s analysis of realist fiction and Raymond Williams’s Marxist critique of urban–rural relations in order to develop an ecocritical method that foregrounds “the politics of knowledge” in relation to discourses of risk and environmental justice. Lousley analyzes novels by Matt Cohen and David Adams Richards that represent the environmental degradation of landscapes of rural Ontario and New Brunswick, respectively; she maintains that “a key task for ecocriticism is to consider how knowledge of environmental ills and risks – or the very lack or limitations of environmental knowledge – is staged in contemporary literature.”

“Environments and Cross-Cultural Encounters” suggests points of entry for a postcolonial ecocritical practice in the Canadian context. Linda Morra’s essay considers, in light of Jonathan Bordo’s theory of the “wilderness sublime” in Canadian landscape art,⁵⁸ the charge that Group of Seven artists and Emily Carr were complicit “in the perpetuation of a homogenous national identity that often elided difference and effectively erased First Nations presence from artistic representations, or appropriated First Nations cultural production.” Morra argues that such cultural criticism “imposes expectations ... that are part of our own ideological inheritance, and, in so doing, dismisses Carr’s remarkable artistic precociousness, her sense of self-agency in relation to the dominant ideology of the period, and the rather innovative ways in which she was interacting with First Nations communities and depicting their cultural artefacts when her own peers would not have considered the subject worthwhile.” Morra shows that Carr urged Canadian artists “to forge an indigenous artistic language and expression that reflected national concerns,” “to search as the Indian did, amid our own surroundings and material, for

something of our own through which to express ourselves, and make for ourselves garments of our own spinning to fit our needs.” Morra concludes that Carr’s treatment of indigeneity is vexed and contradictory: although she resisted “her own imperial ideological inheritance,” her art and writing also reflect “fantasies of colonial fulfillment” in the incorporation of First Nations artefacts (in her early works) and in their elision (in the landscape paintings of her later years). Morra is intent on salvaging Carr’s artistic and literary legacy from a hostile critical practice that would catch her in this “cultural double bind.”

The essay by Stephanie Posthumus and Élise Salaün offers a narrative of ecocritical thought in Quebec. Salaün provides a historical overview of representations of nature in Québécois literature; Posthumus, in a more theoretical vein, “attempts to define [contemporary] ecocritical thought in Quebec based on a larger set of disciplines and more general questions of space and place.” Salaün’s identification of recurrent tropes and motifs in the Québécois tradition perceptively suggests grounds for comparison with the anglophone tradition of thematic criticism; in this regard, she in effect critiques Caroline Bayard’s assertion that “Historical criticism in Quebec knew no such temptations” as those evinced by English-Canadian fiction in its “preoccupation ... with environmental hypotheses ... and the triumph of myth – be it a garrison or wilderness – over history.”⁵⁹ Salaün proposes, in fact, that “centrifugal temptations”⁶⁰ such as those demonstrated by Frye and Atwood have a long history in Québécois literature, one that she traces back to efforts in the mid-nineteenth century to preserve the character, language, and religion of French-Canadian identity through agrarian imagery, and that she traces forward, through discussions of the urban novel and nature poetry in the wake of the Quiet Revolution, into the representation of ecological concerns in works by contemporary Québécois writers. Posthumus considers the implications of O’Brien’s discussion of linguistic mediation in the experience of nature for a comparatist practice based on the differences between francophone and anglophone ecocritical thought. Posthumus observes that, although “Ecocritical thinking is alive and well in Quebec ... [it] exists ... not as a literal ‘translation’ of North American

ecocriticism. At the same time ... Québécois ecocritical thinking is not bound by local or provincial interests." She concludes that, although "language continues to present an undeniable barrier to the exchange of ideas between Quebec and the rest of North America ... this situation also presents a uniquely creative environment": it is "multilingual and multicultural, built on a self-reflexive model, caught up in language and its multiple possibilities (and difficulties)."

In "Decoloniasian: Reading Asian and First Nations Relations in Literature," Rita Wong analyzes the intersections of community and environmental concerns in a range of literary works. Wong's critical method is distinctly activist and anti-colonial. She concludes her essay by suggesting that "building alliances that respect First Nations values of interdependency and land stewardship is an urgent focus if we are to foster ethical ways of long-term survival on this Earth." In her political focus and in her attention to Asian Canadian writing, Wong's criticism provides a vision of contemporary Canada that is different from (and less sanguine than) those in other chapters; its urgency is a challenge to critical complacency.

In its allusion to Charles G. D. Roberts, "Neighbours Unknown: Animals in Canadian Literature" announces its interest in the tradition of the wild animal story, "the only literary genre for which a specifically Canadian origin has been claimed."⁶¹ The selection reprinted from Atwood's "Animal Victims" (after "Survival," perhaps the most notorious of the theses advanced in her eponymous "guide") develops her comparative study of American, British, and Canadian literary themes through an allegorical reading of the representation of animals in the three traditions. Her contentions that the animals in British literature are little more than "Englishmen in furry zippered suits, often with a layer of human clothing added on top"; that those in American literature are prey that "comment on the general imperialism of the American cast of mind"; and that those in Canadian literature are more commonly victims with which the Canadian subject identifies have something akin to a camp currency in contemporary discussions of Canadian literature. Atwood's more measured analyses of a range of canonical Canadian works

about animals (no less than her critical swipes at Alec Lucas's premature declaration of the demise of the animal story) have been largely overshadowed by the sensationalism of her claims about Canadians' "victim mentality." Misao Dean's essay offers a feminist critique of the biases of a critical tradition that continues to analyze Roberts's animal stories according to their verisimilitude;⁶² she suggests that "The stories demand analysis ... as attempts to create an illusion of reality." She finds that, "Far from 'reflecting' reality, Roberts's stories create as reality a natural world which is inflected with assumptions about ... the masculinist discourse of the early twentieth century in which the 'primal' experiences of hunting, scouting, and woodcraft serve as an antidote for the feminized life of the industrial city dweller." Linking the stories to influential cultural trends of Roberts's era such as the American "Nature Movement" and the attendant "crisis of masculinity" that is seen to have inspired it, Dean concludes that Roberts's "(m)animal 'biographies'" "[do] the work of ideology" "by constructing the reader as subject, 'naturally' predatory, material, and male."

Carrie Dawson's "The 'I' in Beaver: Sympathetic Identification and Self-Representation in Grey Owl's *Pilgrims of the Wild*" "extends and interrogates" Atwood's theory of the Canadian subject's identification with victimized animals. Dawson suggests that we pay "close attention to the imaginative, rhetorical and otherwise *literary* dimensions of animal stories," which in Grey Owl's case, "involves foregoing sensational accounts of assumed identity, and replacing them with more provocative questions about the relationship between sympathetic identification and strategic self-representation in a genre of writing where the former has been consistently over-determined and the latter has been typically under-emphasized." Pamela Banting's essay considers how Karsten Heuer's account of his and Leanne Allison's trek to film the Porcupine caribou migration might "extend epistemology" in the manner of avant-garde performance art and other artistic and philosophical collaborations of an interspecies kind. Banting notes a "distinct paucity of work on ... texts about wild animals in the wild" and of work on herd animals more particularly – an absence that she attributes to, among other factors, the

dearth of criticism about non-fiction in Canada; the general dismissal of animal literature; and the “Western tendency to categorize thought in terms of interiority.” Banting argues that the ambulation that Heuer and Allison adopt has a profound potential to “lead ... to forms of insight that extend beyond the parameters of normative scientific and behaviourist approaches to animals other than ourselves.”

“In Full Bloom: New Directions in Canadian Theory” suggests promising lines of Canadian theoretical inquiry. In “Poetics of the Semiosphere,” Adam Dickinson offers a sophisticated discussion of the potential for pataphysics – “the science of imaginary solutions” – to transform the discourse of postmodern ecocriticism through its emphasis on “the contingencies and interconnections in the overlapping worlds of signification that constitute cultural and biological environments.” Dickinson’s essay focusses on poetic works by Erin Mouré and Lisa Robertson, both of whom “imagine scientific research into the urban environment and its membranes of alternative civic memory and natural history” by way of questioning the impact of realist and scientific epistemologies on the manifestation of urban “nature” in Toronto and Vancouver, respectively. Dickinson frames a specific challenge to ecocriticism’s traditional appeals to science and to “the resources of scientific analysis in interpreting texts,” which a postmodern critique exposes as constrained by mimetic and reductivist approaches. The ecopoetic sensibilities of Mouré and Robertson, by contrast, suggest to Dickinson productive grounds for a biosemiotic inquiry into the *Umwelten* of the poets as they engage the histories and surfaces of their urban environments. Travis V. Mason’s “Literature and Geology: An Experiment in Interdisciplinary, Comparative Ecocriticism” explores the intersections of literature and geology, fields united in a selection of lyric poems by Don McKay, W. H. New, and Dan Wylie. Drawing on McKay’s notion of “geopoetry,” Mason suggests that representations of geology and geologic time in the works of the three poets “provide impetus for thinking about a human (and poetic) relation to the temporal and phenomenal world,” and thus prompt a corrective attitude of wonder inspired by the recognition of humanity’s “incidental” relation to evolutionary processes.

Nelson Gray's "The Dwelling Perspective in English-Canadian Drama" shifts the focus onto another genre and takes a historical view of Canadian theatre, demonstrating that environment and indigeneity have been longstanding and intertwined dramatic concerns. Although the works that he analyzes may not all be well known, his discussion of (sometimes problematic) cultural and environmental representations resonates with other chapters in this volume.

In the appendix Lisa Szabo-Jones surveys the emergence and development of ecocritical scholarship in Canada. She documents the formation of the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada / Association pour la littérature, l'environnement et la culture au Canada (ALECC), and theorizes, with reference to New and Ricou, why a seeming myopia in ecocritical scholarship south of the forty-ninth parallel suggested a need to establish a Canadian chapter of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). As co-founder and editorial board member of *The Goose* (ALECC's newsletter-cum-journal), Szabo-Jones has unique insights into the publication's mandate. ALECC is not synonymous with Canadian ecocriticism, but its activities provide one measure of the state of the field. As an organization, ALECC is relatively multidisciplinary, despite the "Literature" in its name; its members are academics from various fields and writers and artists who work in a range of forms and mediums. As ALECC and other groups develop, and as ecocriticism continues to become an institutionally established field, the central place of literary studies will likely change as a greater diversity of texts and cultural forms come under environmental scrutiny and as environmental scholarship, teaching, and professional organizations fulfil their multidisciplinary potential. It remains to be seen, therefore, how the genealogies discernible within literary studies will bear on a future ecocriticism that encompasses a range of disciplines.

The essays in this volume concentrate to a great extent on lyric poetry and realist fiction, as these genres have been privileged by Canadianist ecocriticism. But other literary modes are receiving increased critical attention, expanding the purview of ecocriticism beyond the

forms most closely linked to Romantic literature. New developments in environmental criticism will certainly emerge in response to the plethora of innovative, experimental, and accomplished literary works that depart from and extend traditions of Canadian writing, and that seem to demand sophisticated environmental analysis: how will ecocriticism engage Christian Bök's *Xenotext Experiment*, for example, which links poetry and genetic manipulation?⁶³ Relatively understudied literary forms (children's literature, genre fiction, early colonial writing) await examination. Drama has assumed a more visible place in Canadian ecocriticism, as Gray's chapter demonstrates. In 2010, a special issue of *Canadian Theatre Review* was devoted to theatre and ecology. In their introduction, Gray and Sheila Rabillard write that "Ecologically informed discourse about theatre and performance has, with only a few exceptions, been strangely absent in Canada."⁶⁴ Gray and Rabillard draw a contrast between the relative absence of ecocritical attention to drama in Canada and the many environmentally oriented studies of other genres. The issue of *Canadian Theatre Review*, however, seeks to link theatre studies to ecocriticism as practised elsewhere in Canadian literary studies: "Theatre has never shied away from difficult topics; and despite the harrowing conditions of our age ... theatre artists and producers are responding to such conditions in ways that are original, life-affirming and, in some cases, downright celebratory."⁶⁵ An emphasis on "the work of ... Métis and First Nations playwrights in Canada" represents an expansion of the cultural scope of Canadian ecocriticism, in addition to the generic expansion that Gray and Rabillard suggest is overdue.⁶⁶ In her discussion of an American production of the Métis playwright Marie Clements' *Burning Vision*, Theresa J. May proposes the term "ecodramaturgy" to describe "play-making ... that puts ecological reciprocity and community at the centre of its theatrical and thematic intent."⁶⁷ The conjunction of community and performance promises to be a rich site of inquiry for Canadian ecocriticism. Indeed, because performances are site-specific, the connection between text and location is especially significant in theatre; ecocriticism and theatre are a natural fit. Eco-theatrical studies introduce a new vocabulary to Canadian ecocriticism and, perhaps

more significantly, indicate that the conventional literary foundations of ecocriticism will ultimately be displaced by an environmental cultural studies that includes a multitude of literary and non-literary modes and genres. Innovative literary ecocriticism is thriving, but in coming years, it is to be expected, environmental literary studies will increasingly take part in conversations with other branches of the environmental humanities.⁶⁸

5. CONCLUSIONS

The essays in *Greening the Maple* illustrate some of the patterns and tensions in ecocritical studies of Canadian literature. As with any such collection, pragmatic concerns have affected the contents, and so the history that the book traces has been shaped, to a degree, by incidental matters. The aim has been to prepare an anthology that is representative, yet relatively concise (or at least not infinite), affordable, and useful to critics and students alike. The resultant collection is not, of course, definitive, and it is the nature of anthologies that their contents will be debated. Several significant contributions to Canadian ecocriticism could not, because of length and cost, be included. In general, essays that concentrate on several authors were chosen over essays on single authors, in order to provide a broader view of Canadian writing. The selection has also favoured essays that highlight or theorize the distinctiveness of Canadian ecocriticism, and that bring ecocriticism into dialogue with other approaches to Canadian literature and culture. The chapters focus on works of Canadian literature; not included are studies by Canadian critics that address issues of more general ecocritical concern without sustained consideration of Canadian writing. (Examples of such essays include Sylvia Bowerbank's "Towards the Greening of Literary Studies,"⁶⁹ Neil Evernden's "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy,"⁷⁰ and Simon Estok's "A Report Card on Ecocriticism," among many others.)

The place in this anthology of scholarship about indigenous literatures and by indigenous critics has posed an acute challenge. Because the book represents a historical account of Canadian criticism, and unavoidably a partial survey at that, it focusses primarily on texts that examine works of Canadian literature and that theorize Canadian literary studies as conventionally understood. As a consequence, writing by indigenous authors and critics who engage with questions of environmental politics or indigenous knowledge more generally has, regrettably, fallen outside this purview. (The same is true of important ethnographically oriented studies with an environmental dimension.)⁷¹ Canadian literary studies have traditionally ignored or marginalized indigenous cultures, and Canadian ecocriticism to date has not focussed sufficiently on indigenous texts and contexts, which adds to the difficulty of providing a comprehensive account of ecocritical responses to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit literatures.⁷² In addition, the relations to each other of Canadian literature and indigenous writing from Canada remain problematic at best, and the risks of critical appropriation and assimilation are great. Yet indigenous literary and other cultural traditions contain a vast amount of ecological knowledge, and an inclusive portrayal of the intersections of cultures and places in North America should surely be grounded in indigenous perspectives. This volume consequently proceeds from the recognition that a full consideration of connections between literature and the environment in North America is a multilingual, multicultural endeavour – and one unfortunately far beyond the scope available here. There is no disputing that literary works by indigenous authors; paradigms of indigenous literary criticism, philosophy, and history; and traditional and contemporary relations to land all have enormous bearing on understandings of environment and culture in Canada. This anthology, in some ways preliminary by design, will take its place in a broadening critical field.

Also largely absent from this book are examples of environmental criticism from literary writers themselves. (Atwood is the chief exception.) In the Canadian literary world, the divide between writers and critics has often been narrow, if present at all, with many poets and

novelists among the most prominent commentators on Canadian literature. Canadian writers of environmentally oriented literature are no different. Don McKay is perhaps the most influential contemporary ecological writer in Canada. His essay “Baler Twine: Thoughts on Ravens, Home and Nature Poetry” established particular critical topics (anthropomorphism, poetic attention) and philosophers (Levinas, Heidegger) as recurring concerns in discussions of contemporary nature poetry, including McKay’s own.⁷³ The essay also includes his now-familiar definition of wilderness as “not just a set of endangered spaces, but the capacity of all things to elude the mind’s appropriations.”⁷⁴ Other poets who share McKay’s interests have also written extensively about ecological matters: Robert Bringhurst on ecology, linguistics, and indigenous literatures; Jan Zwicky on ecology and lyric form; Tim Lilburn on prairie landscapes and religious and philosophical traditions. If this anthology were to have a second installment, it could well include essays by Dennis Lee, Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Rudy Wiebe, Sharon Butala, Anne Simpson, and Di Brandt, to cite only a few names among the many that deserve mention. Canadian ecocriticism as practised by academic critics should be recognized, then, as only one element of a wider and ongoing Canadian literary-ecological conversation.

The chapters in *Greening the Maple* do not represent the only important studies of nature in Canadian literature – far from it. Nor do they form a perfectly coherent narrative. They instead suggest the longevity of the conviction that Canadian writing and the natural world warrant consideration together. They offer ways of thinking about the history of Canadian literary criticism and about further directions for the ecocritical study of Canadian literature. Whether national (and sometimes nationalist) concerns will engage critics beyond Canada is an open question. Some readers perhaps will enjoy learning of authors who are new to them, but who are highly regarded by some Canadianist critics. Other readers may find the peculiarities of debates in Canadian literary studies a salutary reminder of the contextual specificity of all critical practices. Above all, the essays in this volume attest to the diversity of environmental criticism. In recent years, ecocriticism has both achieved considerable

institutional stability and reached a transitional state. ASLE's biennial conference is now a major, even mainstream, academic conference, attracting hundreds of participants and enjoying the support of major universities and funding organizations. (The 2009 edition of the conference, hosted by the University of Victoria, was the first held outside the United States.) Handbooks such as Garrard's *Ecocriticism* indicate the legitimacy and currency of environmental approaches. (The book was published in 2004 by Routledge in the New Critical Idiom series, reprinted in 2005 and 2007, and issued in a new edition in 2011; its success is evidence of great interest in the field.) Garrard's overview, moreover, suggests how widely encompassing ecocriticism has become: his topics include animal studies, apocalyptic discourse, traditional and contemporary pastoral, and cyborgs, among many others, such that no Wordsworth or Thoreau (or Archibald Lampman, for that matter) appears as a singular, centripetal figure. A host of critical-theoretical concerns has shaped and revised ecocriticism since its emergence, making the field now more nuanced and variegated than ever before. Such diversification promises to continue. The essays in this volume, old and new, are presented in the spirit of complexity and variety, even as they sometimes assert the importance of the particular and the bounded. They occupy a niche in the broad world of the environmental humanities. They look backwards as well as forwards, inwards as well as out – but the expectation is that they will provoke vigorous responses that add to the already sizeable body of writing on Canadian literature and the environment.

This introduction concludes with an acknowledgment of ecocriticism's activist dimensions and of the political impulse that runs through many ecocritical studies, including chapters in the present volume. The field from its beginnings has attempted to transform critical and pedagogical practices, making scholarship and teaching socially and ecologically responsible and relevant. The liveliness of ecocriticism's debates, its institutional successes, and its popularity with students indicate that, in some measure, such transformation has been achieved. Many ecocritical articles and books are published each year, courses in the environmental humanities are taught the world over, and ecocriticism's professional

organizations are flourishing. Ecocriticism's place in the academy is secure for now, although as with all scholarly fields it continues to change. Environmental concerns are nonetheless at least as pressing today as they were at ecocriticism's inauguration in the 1990s. Consequently, ecocriticism must retain its political edge and desire for social change if it is to have more than narrowly academic significance. The essays in this book are scholarly and highly specialized, to be sure. But they evince a profound concern for the state of the environment, and a belief that critical inquiry matters in view of environmental concerns. We hope that the chapters serve to spark scholarship, teaching, and study that extend understandings of cultures and environments in bracing and compelling ways.

6. EDITORIAL NOTE

Previously published essays have been left largely unchanged. Minor clarifications and omissions are indicated by square brackets and ellipses, respectively. Some changes have been made silently in the interests of clarity and consistency. Lengthy quotations and footnotes have sometimes been trimmed for reasons of space, especially in older essays when, for example, recommendations for further reading are no longer current. Lists of sources or works cited are provided for all chapters save the first, in which Frye's own writing is the primary concern.

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NOTES

- 1 Lawrence Buell, “Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends,” *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (2011): 88. The italics are Buell’s.
- 2 Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971; Concord, ON: Anansi, 1995); Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).
- 3 Bliss Carman, “Miracles and Metaphors,” in *The Kinship of Nature*, by Bliss Carman (London: John Murray, 1904), 39.
- 4 Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) and *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
- 5 See, for example, S. K. Robisch, “The Woodshed: A Response to ‘Ecocriticism and Ecophobia,’” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16, no. 4 (2009): 697–708.
- 6 Timothy Morton, “Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology,” *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (2011): 163, 164.
- 7 Notable in this regard are William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: Norton, 1995) and Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Essays in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, the principal ecocritical forum, are increasingly diverse in subject and method; the journal is characterized by a multiplicity of critical perspectives rather than by a dominant approach. In addition, a special issue of the theoretically oriented journal *Qui Parle* (19, no. 2, 2011) showcases intersections of ecocriticism and critical theory.
- 8 Laurie Ricou, “Ecocriticism,” in *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, ed. William H. New (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 324. Technically, of course, this claim is anachronistic, since critical writing about Canadian literature precedes either William Rueckert’s coining of the term “ecocriticism” in “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (*Iowa Review* 9, no. 1

- [1978]: 71–86) or the emergence in the 1990s of ecocriticism.
- 9 Northrop Frye, "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*," *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (1965, 1971; Concord, ON: Anansi, 1995), 227. When it was first published in 1965, the essay was simply titled "Conclusion"; in *The Bush Garden* it is retitled.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, 227.
 - 11 Susie O'Brien, "Nature's Nation, National Natures? Reading Ecocriticism in a Canadian Context," *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 42 (spring–summer 1998): 18; see chap. 11.
 - 12 Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991); Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Morton's *Ecology without Nature* is placed in contrast to these studies but retains an emphasis on Romantic literature. See also Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 3.
 - 13 Buell, "Ecocriticism," 89.
 - 14 Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Joseph W. Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (New York: Scribner's, 1974; republished as *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic* [Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997]); Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). Rueckert: see note 8.
 - 15 Buell, "Ecocriticism," 89.
 - 16 Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996).
 - 17 Cheryll Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xvii.
 - 18 On the book's continued importance, see Buell, "Ecocriticism," 96.
 - 19 The apparent omission of Canadian content was reproduced in *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*, ed. Annie Merrill Ingram, et al. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), a collection of essays intended to reflect the arrival of ecocriticism as a mature endeavour, "a little surer of itself" and "less marginalized" (14). None of the essays treated Canadian literature and only one contributor, Angela Waldie, was based at a Canadian university. *Coming into Contact* largely minds, however, Ursula K. Heise's insistence that "ecocriticism has nothing specifically to do with American literature" (in Jean Arnold et al., "Forum on Literatures of the Environment," *PMLA* 114, no. 5 [1999]: 1097); it certainly addresses non-American writers, including Wordsworth, Darwin, J. M. Coetzee, Ishimure Michiko, Arundhati Roy, and others. Yet the book's "snapshot" of ecocriticism leaves Canadian contributions somewhere outside the camera's frame.
 - 20 See, for example, Patrick D. Murphy, ed., *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998).
 - 21 See Linda Hutcheon, *As Canadian as ... Possible ... under the Circumstances!* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1990).

- 22 Smaro Kamboureli identifies topocentrism alongside Canadian literature's "uneasy relationships with ... British, ... Commonwealth, and ... American [literatures]; its uneven responses to the (post)colonial and its so-called minority literatures; its desire to accommodate global cultural contexts; its obsessiveness with identity; and its institutionalization and celebration through cultural, social, and trade policies" as characteristic of "the complexities – even nervousness – associated with its own history and location"; see Smaro Kamboureli, Preface to *Trans.Can.Lit.: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*, ed. Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), viii.
- 23 John O'Brian characterizes this iconographic tendency as "wildercentric"; see John O'Brian, "Wild Art History," in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art*, ed. John O'Brian and Peter White (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 21.
- 24 See especially the ecocritical issue (55, fall–winter 2004), edited by Deborah Bowen.
- 25 See, e.g., Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
- 26 See Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (Abingdon [London]: Routledge, 2004); Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 27 Heise, *Sense of Place*, 10.
- 28 Ursula K. Heise, "Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies," *American Literary History* 20, no. 1–2 (spring–summer 2008): 381–404.
- 29 Scott Slovic, "Teaching United States Environmental Literature in a World Comparatist Context," in *Teaching North American Environmental Literature*, ed. Laird Christensen, Mark C. Long, and Fred Waage (New York: Modern Language Association, 2008), 205.
- 30 In turn, a diversity of perspectives makes up each national strain of ecocritical discourse. As this introduction suggests, the multilingual and postcolonial context of Canadian ecocriticism evokes the difficulty of describing nationally inflected discourses as singular phenomena.
- 31 There are at present chapters representing Canada, Australia and New Zealand, India, Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom and Ireland, Europe, and Taiwan.
- 32 Ursula K. Heise, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism," *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (Mar. 2006): 506.
- 33 Canadian literary studies have traditionally focussed on the impact of such conventions upon the colonial imagination, but studies of Romanticism that draw on transatlantic theory – e.g., Alan Bewell's *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), James C. McKusick's *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), and Kevin Hutchings's *Romantic Ecologies and Colonial Cultures in the British Atlantic World, 1770–1850* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009) – examine the decidedly reciprocal intercultural exchanges between New World and Old that characterized colonial encounters and informed early discourses of nature and ecology.

- 34 Susan Glickman, *The Picturesque and the Sublime: A Poetics of the Canadian Landscape* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).
- 35 Don McKay, "Great Flint Singing," in *Open Wide a Wilderness: Canadian Nature Poems*, ed. Nancy Holmes (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 6.
- 36 Responses to this challenge have been varied, ranging from the adoption of "new" terms (e.g., "muskeg") to the use of forms deemed appropriate to Canadian environments. For example, the long poem, in various incarnations, has been understood as a form well suited to Canadian environmental history; for nineteenth-century examples, see Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* and Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*, and for contemporary examples, see Don McKay's *Long Sault* and *Lependu*, Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston*, and Dionne Brand's *Inventory*.
- 37 W. H. New, *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 5, 6.
- 38 Linda Hutcheon, "Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 51–52 (winter 1993–spring 1994): 147. See chap. 9.
- 39 Kamboureli, Preface, vii.
- 40 Cheryl Lousley's "Witness to the Body Count: Planetary Ethics in Dionne Brand's *Inventory*" (*Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 63 [fall–winter 2008]: 37–58) is a notable example of Canadian ecocriticism that considers both the cultural and the environmental aspects of diasporic Canadian writing.
- 41 This argument is proposed by Ricou in chap. 7; Helms takes it up in chap. 10.
- 42 T. D. MacLulich, "Thematic Criticism, Literary Nationalism, and the Critic's New Clothes," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 35 (winter 1987): 17.
- 43 See Frank Davey, "Surviving the Paraphrase," *Canadian Literature* 70 (autumn 1976): 5–13. Rpt. in *Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature*, by Frank Davey (Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1983): 1–12; Barry Cameron and Michael Dixon, "Mandatory Subversive Manifesto: Canadian Criticism vs. Literary Criticism," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 2, no. 2 (1977): 137–45; W. J. Keith, "The Thematic Approach to Canadian Fiction," in *Taking Stock: The Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel*, ed. Charles R. Steele (Downsview, ON: ECW Press, 1982), 71–91; and Russell Morton Brown, "Critic, Culture, Text: Beyond Thematics," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 11 (summer 1978): 151–83.
- 44 Davey, *Surviving the Paraphrase*, 2, 3.
- 45 Robert Lecker and Jack David, qtd. in Russell M. Brown, "The Practice and Theory of Canadian Thematic Criticism: A Reconsideration," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2001): 664.
- 46 A.J.M. Smith, "A Rejected Preface to *New Provinces*," in *Selected Writings*, by A.J.M. Smith, ed. Michael Gnarowski (Toronto: Dundurn, 2006), 144.
- 47 A.J.M. Smith, "Excerpt from the Introduction to *The Book of Canadian Poetry: A Critical and Historical Anthology*," in *Selected Writings*, by A.J.M. Smith, ed. Michael Gnarowski (Toronto: Dundurn, 2006), 151–52.
- 48 MacLulich, "Thematic Criticism," 18.
- 49 "In my capacity as editor of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*," Keith admits, "I had, in self-defence and with something approaching desperation, penned a statement on editorial policy that insisted: 'The Journal does not normally print thematically oriented criticism.' And only a week or so before, while setting essay

- topics in my undergraduate course on Canadian fiction, I had appended ... the following instructions: 'You are expected in each case to concentrate on the novels as *works of art*; it is not sufficient merely to compare and contrast themes.' See Keith, "Thematic," 71.
- 50 Brown, "Practice and Theory," 664.
- 51 This bias was corrected to some extent by critics such as Laurie Ricou, W. H. New, and D.M.R. Bentley, all of whom have contributed substantially to environmentally oriented criticism in Canada, and especially by the journals under their editorial stewardship – *Canadian Literature* and *Canadian Poetry*, which continued to publish thematically focussed criticism and which have come to be significant ecocritical venues.
- 52 In a widely cited essay, Simon C. Estok situates ecocriticism somewhere between theory and thematic criticism; he states that "ecocriticism has had problems ... getting its theoretical footing.... but some kind of terminology and theorization is necessary; otherwise, ecocriticism risks becoming just an empty buzzword" (a fate, he implies, that would attend an over-reliance on the thematic approach); see "A Report Card on Ecocriticism," *AUMLA* 96 (Nov. 2001): 225.
- 53 Margery Fee, qtd. in Brown, "Practice and Theory," 666. See Margery Fee, "Retrieving the Canadian Critical Tradition as Poetry: Eli Mandel and Northrop Frye," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 45–46 (winter–spring 1991–92): 235–53.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 See, for example, Catriona Sandilands's "Queering Ecocultural Studies," which examines the heteronormative ideologies that inform the codification of natural and urban spaces in Jane Rule's writing. (Catriona Mortimer-
- Sandilands, "Queering Ecocultural Studies," *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 3–4 [2008]: 455–76.)
- 56 Carl Berger's *Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983) considers the theistic tone of natural history in Victorian Canada and examines the influence of Victorian naturalism on Philip Henry Gosse's *The Canadian Naturalist* and Catharine Parr Traill's *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* [Philip Henry Gosse, *The Canadian Naturalist: A Series of Conversations on the Natural History of Lower Canada* (London: Van Voorst, 1840); Catharine Parr Traill, *Studies of Plant Life in Canada: or, Gleanings from Forest, Lake and Plain* (Ottawa: Woodburn, 1885)]. His study offers an implicit challenge to Frye in its suggestion that Victorian-Canadian naturalists directed their attention to adaptation and interrelationships in nature, finding in such phenomena spiritual comfort and evidence of divine contrivance.
- 57 Sandilands's groundbreaking work on the intersections of queer theory, lesbian feminism, and ecocriticism will be of particular interest to readers of this anthology; see, e.g., Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, eds., *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).
- 58 Jonathan Bordo, "Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (2000): 224–47.
- 59 Caroline Bayard, "The Languages of Critical Discourse in Canada and Quebec 1880–1980," in *100 Years of Critical Solitudes: Canadian and Québécois Criticism from the 1880s to the 1980s*, ed. Caroline Bayard (Toronto: ECW Press, 1992), 11.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 T. D. MacLulich, "The Animal Story and the 'Nature Faker' Controversy," in *Selected Animal Stories*, by Charles G.

- D. Roberts, ed. Terry Whalen (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 2005), 288.
- 62 For example, W. J. Keith lauds as the most distinctive aspect of Roberts's animal stories the "detached inevitability" of their conclusions: "Absence of emotion is an essential part of Roberts's effect; Nature, he is saying with a brutal simplicity, is like that"; see W. J. Keith, "Stories of the Wild," in *Charles G. D. Roberts*, by W. J. Keith (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), 2.
- 63 See Stephen Voyce and Christian Bök, "The Xenotext Experiment: An Interview with Christian Bök," *Postmodern Culture* 17, no. 2 (2007). Web.
- 64 Nelson Gray and Sheila Rabillard, "Theatre in an Age of Eco-Crisis," *Canadian Theatre Review* 144 (fall 2010): 3.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Theresa J. May, "Kneading Marie Clements' *Burning Vision*," *Canadian Theatre Review* 144 (fall 2010): 6.
- 68 On the broadening of ecocriticism's generic scope, see Buell, "Ecocriticism," 91–92.
- 69 Sylvia Bowerbank, "Towards the Greening of Literary Studies," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue canadienne de littérature comparée* 22, no. 3–4 (1995): 443–53.
- 70 Neil Evernden, "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 92–104.
- 71 Julie Cruikshank's *Do Glaciers Listen?*, for instance, is an admired anthropological and historical study of the Saint Elias mountains, on the border of British Columbia, the Yukon, and Alaska (*Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* [Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005]). Cruikshank examines competing (and sometimes complementary) understandings of environment as they consist in explorers' narratives, geological and glaciological science, and elders' traditional stories. *Do Glaciers Listen?* is not literary criticism per se and not explicitly environmentalist in orientation, but it is nonetheless a model for ecocritics. Likewise, Deborah McGregor's provocative explorations of Anishnaabe traditional knowledge and environmental justice could be considered ecocriticism under another name; see "Linking Traditional Knowledge and Environmental Practice in Ontario," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 3 (2009): 69–100.
- 72 At the same time, there is evidence of a *rapprochement* between environmental approaches to Canadian literature and indigenous literature. In part, it has been driven by scholarship that emphasizes connections among traditional storytelling, land claims, and environmental preservation, and between ecological and linguistic diversity. See, for example, Robert Bringhurst, *The Tree of Meaning: Thirteen Talks* (Kentville, NS: Gaspereau, 2006) and *Everywhere Being Is Dancing: Twenty Pieces of Thinking* (Kentville, NS: Gaspereau, 2007) and J. Edward Chamberlin, *Living Language and Dead Reckoning: Navigating Oral and Written Traditions* (Vancouver: Ronsdale, 2006). And in part it has been driven by many contemporary indigenous writers whose works have strong ecological dimensions.
- 73 Don McKay, "Baler Twine: Thoughts on Ravens, Home and Nature Poetry," in *Vis à Vis: Field Notes on Poetry and Wilderness*, by Don McKay (Wolfville, NS: Gaspereau, 2001), 11–33.
- 74 Ibid., 21.

SECTION 1

**NATURE AND NATION:
BEFORE AND BEYOND THEMATIC CRITICISM**

CHAPTER 1

Selections from *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (1971)

*Northrop Frye*¹

From “Canada and Its Poetry” (1943), an essay in review of *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943), edited by A.J.M. Smith:

... [A]ccording to Mr. Smith’s book, the outstanding achievement of Canadian poetry is in the evocation of stark terror. Not a coward’s terror, of course; but a controlled vision of the causes of cowardice. The immediate source of this is obviously the frightening loneliness of a huge and thinly settled country. When all the intelligence, morality, reverence, and simian cunning of man confronts a sphinx-like riddle of the indefinite like the Canadian winter, the man seems as helpless as a trapped mink and as lonely as a loon. His thrifty little heaps of civilized values look pitiful beside nature’s apparently meaningless power to waste and destroy on a superhuman scale, and such a nature suggests an equally ruthless and subconscious God, or else no God. In Wilfred Campbell,

for instance, the Canadian winter expands into a kind of frozen hell of utter moral nihilism:

Lands that loom like spectres, whited regions of winter,
Wastes of desolate woods, deserts of water and shore;
A world of winter and death, within these regions who enter,
Lost to summer and life, go to return no more.
[“The Winter Lakes”]

And the winter is only one symbol, though a very obvious one, of the central theme of Canadian poetry: the riddle of what a character in [Charles] Mair’s *Tecumseh* calls “inexplicable life.” It is really a riddle of inexplicable death: the fact that life struggles and suffers in a nature which is blankly indifferent to it. Human beings set a high value on their own lives which is obviously not accepted in the world beyond their palisades. They may become hurt and whimper that nature is cruel to them; but the honest poet does not see cruelty: he sees only a stolid unconsciousness. The human demands that Patrick Anderson’s Joe [in “Summer’s Joe”] hurls at nature are answered by “a feast of no”; a negation with neither sympathy nor malice in it. In [Earle] Birney’s “David” a terrible tragedy of wasted life and blasted youth is enacted on a glacier, but there is no “pathetic fallacy” about the cruelty of the glacier or of whatever gods may be in charge of it. It is just a glacier. D. C. Scott’s “The Piper of Arll” is located in an elusive fairyland, but the riddle of inexplicable death is still at the heart of the poem. The same theme is of course clearer still in [E. J.] Pratt’s sea narratives, especially *The Titanic*....

To sum up. Canadian poetry is at its best a poetry of incubus and *cauchemar*, the source of which is the unusually exposed contact of the poet with nature which Canada provides. Nature is seen by the poet, first as unconsciousness, then as a kind of existence which is cruel and meaningless, then as the source of the cruelty and subconscious stampedings within the human mind. As compared with American poets, there has been comparatively little, outside [Bliss] Carman, of the cult of the rug-

ged outdoor life which idealizes nature and tries to accept it. Nature is consistently sinister and menacing in Canadian poetry...

...

From "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*" (1965):

Canada began as an obstacle, blocking the way to the treasures of the East, to be explored only in the hope of finding a passage through it. English Canada continued to be that long after what is now the United States had become a defined part of the Western world. One reason for this is obvious from the map. American culture was, down to about 1900, mainly a culture of the Atlantic seaboard, with a western frontier that moved irregularly but steadily back until it reached the other coast. The Revolution did not essentially change the cultural unity of the English-speaking community of the North Atlantic that had London and Edinburgh on one side of it and Boston and Philadelphia on the other. But Canada has, for all practical purposes, no Atlantic seaboard. The traveller from Europe edges into it like a tiny Jonah entering an inconceivably large whale, slipping past the Straits of Belle Isle into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where five Canadian provinces surround him, for the most part invisible. Then he goes up the St. Lawrence and the inhabited country comes into view, mainly a French-speaking country, with its own cultural traditions. To enter the United States is a matter of crossing an ocean; to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent.

It is an unforgettable and intimidating experience to enter Canada in this way. But the experience initiates one into that gigantic east-to-west thrust which historians regard as the axis of Canadian development, the "Laurentian" movement that makes the growth of Canada geographically credible. This drive to the west has attracted to itself nearly everything that is heroic and romantic in the Canadian tradition. The original impetus begins in Europe, for English Canada in the British Isles, hence though adventurous it is also a conservative force, and naturally tends

to preserve its colonial link with its starting-point. Once the Canadian has settled down in the country, however, he then becomes aware of the longitudinal dimension, the southward pull toward the richer and more glamorous American cities, some of which, such as Boston for the Maritimes and Minneapolis for the eastern prairies, are almost Canadian capitals. This is the axis of another kind of Canadian mentality, more critical and analytic, more inclined to see Canada as an unnatural and politically quixotic aggregate of disparate northern extensions of American culture – “seven fishing-rods tied together by the ends,” as Goldwin Smith put it.

The simultaneous influence of two larger nations speaking the same language has been practically beneficial to English Canada, but theoretically confusing. It is often suggested that Canada’s identity is to be found in some *via media*, or *via mediocris*, between the other two. This has the disadvantage that the British and American cultures have to be defined as extremes. [Thomas Chandler] Haliburton seems to have believed that the ideal for Nova Scotia would be a combination of American energy and British social structure, but such a chimera, or synthetic monster, is hard to achieve in practice. It is simpler merely to notice the alternating current in the Canadian mind, as reflected in its writing, between two moods, one romantic, traditional, and idealistic, the other shrewd, observant, and humorous. Canada in its attitude to Britain tends to be more royalist than the Queen, in the sense that it is more attracted to it as a symbol of tradition than as a fellow-nation. The Canadian attitude to the United States is typically that of a smaller country to a much bigger neighbour, sharing in its material civilization but anxious to keep clear of the huge mass movements that drive a great imperial power. The United States, being founded on a revolution and a written constitution, has introduced a deductive or *a priori* pattern into its cultural life that tends to define an American way of life and mark it off from anti-American heresies. Canada, having a seat on the sidelines of the American Revolution, adheres more to the inductive and the expedient. The Canadian genius for compromise is reflected in the existence of Canada itself.

...

Cultural history ... has its own rhythms. It is possible that one of these rhythms is very like an organic rhythm: that there must be a period, of a certain magnitude, as Aristotle would say, in which a social imagination can take root and establish a tradition. American literature had this period, in the northeastern part of the country, between the Revolution and the Civil War. Canada has never had it. English Canada was first a part of the wilderness, then a part of North America and the British Empire, then a part of the world. But it has gone through these revolutions too quickly for a tradition of writing to be founded on any one of them. Canadian writers are, even now, still trying to assimilate a Canadian environment at a time when new techniques of communication, many of which, like television, constitute a verbal market, are annihilating the boundaries of that environment. This foreshortening of Canadian history, if it really does have any relevance to Canadian culture, would account for many features of it: its fixation on its own past, its penchant for old-fashioned literary techniques, its preoccupation with the theme of strangled articulateness. It seems to me that Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity, important as that is, as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity. It is less perplexed by the question "Who am I?" than by some such riddle as "Where is here?"

We are obviously not to read the mystique of Canadianism back into the pre-Confederation period. Haliburton, for instance, was a Nova Scotian, a Bluenose: the word "Canadian" to him would have summoned up the figure of someone who spoke mainly French and whose enthusiasm for Haliburton's own political ideals would have been extremely tepid. The mystique of Canadianism was specifically the cultural accompaniment of Confederation and the imperialistic mood that followed it. But it came so suddenly after the pioneer period that it was still full of wilderness. To feel "Canadian" was to feel part of a no-man's-land with huge rivers, lakes, and islands that very few Canadians had ever seen. "From sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" [Psalm

72:8] – if Canada is not an island, the phrasing is still in the etymological sense isolating. One wonders if any other national consciousness has had so large an amount of the unknown, the unrealized, the humanly undigested, so built into it. Rupert Brooke speaks [in *Letters from America*] of the “unseizable virginity” of the Canadian landscape. What is important here, for our purposes, is the position of the frontier in the Canadian imagination. In the United States one could choose to move out to the frontier or to retreat from it back to the seaboard. The tensions built up by such migrations have fascinated many American novelists and historians. In the Canadas, even in the Maritimes, the frontier was all around one, a part and a condition of one’s whole imaginative being. The frontier was primarily what separated the Canadian, physically or mentally, from Great Britain, from the United States, and even more important, from other Canadian communities. Such a frontier was the immediate datum of his imagination, the thing that had to be dealt with first.

After the Northwest Passage failed to materialize, Canada became a colony in the mercantilist sense, treated by others less like a society than as a place to look for things. French, English, Americans plunged into it to carry off its supplies of furs, minerals, and pulpwood, aware only of their immediate objectives. From time to time recruiting officers searched the farms and villages to carry young men off to death in a European dynastic quarrel. Travellers visit Canada much as they would visit a zoo: even when their eyes momentarily focus on the natives they are still thinking primarily of how their own sensibility is going to react to what it sees. A feature of Canadian life that has been noted by writers from Susanna Moodie onward is the paradox of vast empty spaces and lack of privacy, with no defences against the prying or avaricious eye. The resentment expressed against this in Canada seems to have taken political rather than literary forms: this may be partly because Canadians have learned from their imaginative experience to look at each other in much the same way: “as objects, even as obstacles,” as one writer [Jay Macpherson] says.

...

A vast country sparsely inhabited naturally depends on its modes of transportation, whether canoe, railway, or the driving and riding “circuits” of the judge, the Methodist preacher, or the Yankee peddler. The feeling of nomadic movement over great distances persists even into the age of the aeroplane, in a country where writers can hardly meet one another without a social organization that provides travel grants. Pratt’s poetry is full of his fascination with means of communication, not simply the physical means of great ships and locomotives, though he is one of the best of all poets on such subjects, but with communication as message, with radar and asdic and wireless signals, and, in his war poems, with the power of rhetoric over fighting men. What is perhaps the most comprehensive structure of ideas yet made by a Canadian thinker, the structure embodied in [Harold] Innis’s *Bias of Communication*, is concerned with the same theme, and a disciple of Innis, Marshall McLuhan, continues to emphasize the unity of communication, as a complex containing both verbal and non-verbal factors, and warns us against making unreal divisions within it. Perhaps it is not too fanciful to see this need for continuity in the Canadian attitude to time as well as space, in its preoccupation with its own history, its relentless cultural stock-takings and self-inventories. The [Edmund] Burke sense of society as a continuum – consistent with the pragmatic and conservative outlook of Canadians – is strong and begins early....

Civilization in Canada, as elsewhere, has advanced geometrically across the country, throwing down the long parallel lines of the railways, dividing up the farm lands into chessboards of square-mile sections and concession-line roads. There is little adaptation to nature: in both architecture and arrangement, Canadian cities and villages express rather an arrogant abstraction, the conquest of nature by an intelligence that does not love it. The word “conquest” suggests something military, as it should – one thinks of General [Edward] Braddock, preferring to have his army annihilated rather than fight the natural man on his own asymmetrical ground. There are some features of this generally North

American phenomenon that have a particular emphasis in Canada. It has often been remarked that Canadian expansion westward had a tight grip of authority over it that American expansion, with its outlaws and sheriffs and vigilantes and the like, did not have in the same measure. America moved from the back country to the wild west; Canada moved from a New France held down by British military occupation to a north-west patrolled by mounted police. Canada has not had, strictly speaking, an Indian war: there has been much less of the “another redskin bit the dust” feeling in our historical imagination, and only [Louis] Riel remains to haunt the later period of it, though he is a formidable figure enough, rather like what a combination of John Brown and [Bartolomeo] Vanzetti would be in the American conscience. Otherwise, the conquest, for the last two centuries, has been mainly of the unconscious forces of nature, personified by the dragon of the Lake Superior rocks in Pratt’s *Towards the Last Spike*: “On the North Shore a reptile lay asleep – / A hybrid that the myths might have conceived, / But not delivered.”

Yet the conquest of nature has its own perils for the imagination, in a country where the winters are so cold and where conditions of life have so often been bleak and comfortless, where even the mosquitoes have been described, Mr. [Carl F.] Klinck tells us, as “mementoes of the fall.” I have long been impressed in Canadian poetry by a tone of deep terror in regard to nature.... It is not a terror of the dangers or discomforts or even the mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest. The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values. A sharp-witted Methodist circuit rider speaks of the “shutting out of the whole moral creation” in the loneliness of the forests.

If we put together a few of these impressions, we may get some approach to characterizing the way in which the Canadian imagination has developed in its literature. Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological “frontier,” separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that

provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting – such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality. In the earliest maps of the country the only inhabited centres are forts, and that remains true of the cultural maps for a much later time. Frances Brooke, in her eighteenth-century *Emily Montague*, wrote of what was literally a garrison; novelists of our day studying the impact of Montreal on Westmount write of a psychological one.

A garrison is a closely knit and beleaguered society, and its moral and social values are unquestionable. In a perilous enterprise one does not discuss causes or motives: one is either a fighter or a deserter. Here again we may turn to Pratt, with his infallible instinct for what is central in the Canadian imagination. The societies in Pratt's poems are always tense and tight groups engaged in war, rescue, martyrdom, or crisis, and the moral values expressed are simply those of that group. In such a society the terror is not for the common enemy, even when the enemy is or seems victorious, as in the extermination of the Jesuit missionaries or the crew of [Sir John] Franklin (a great Canadian theme that Pratt pondered but never completed). The real terror comes when the individual feels himself becoming an individual, pulling away from the group, losing the sense of driving power that the group gives him, aware of a conflict within himself far subtler than the struggle of morality against evil. It is much easier to multiply garrisons, and when that happens, something anti-cultural comes into Canadian life, a dominating herd-mind in which nothing original can grow. The intensity of the sectarian divisiveness in Canadian towns, both religious and political, is an example: what such groups represent, of course, vis-à-vis one another, is "two solitudes," the death of communication and dialogue. Separatism, whether English or French, is culturally the most sterile of all creeds. But at present I am concerned rather with a more creative side of the garrison mentality, one that has had positive effects on our intellectual life.

...

As the centre of Canadian life moves from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality changes correspondingly. It begins as an expression of the moral values generally accepted in the group as a whole, and then, as society gets more complicated and more in control of its environment, it becomes more of a revolutionary garrison within a metropolitan society. But though it changes from a defence of to an attack on what society accepts as conventional standards, the literature it produces, at every stage, tends to be rhetorical, an illustration or allegory of certain social attitudes.

...

NOTE

- 1 The excerpts from *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* are copyright 1971 by Northrop Frye and are reproduced with permission from House of Anansi Press, www.houseofanansi.com.

CHAPTER 2

Selections from *Survival*: *A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (1972)*

Margaret Atwood¹

To say that you must read your own literature to know who you are, to avoid being a sort of cultural moron, is not the same as saying that you should read nothing else, though the “internationalist” or Canada Last opponents of this notion sometimes think it is. A reader cannot live by Canlit alone, and it is a disservice to Canlit to try it. If a man from outer space were to be dropped on an island and supplied with all of Canadian literature and nothing else, he would be rendered completely incapable of deducing anything meaningful about *Canadian* literature because he would have nothing to compare it with; he would take it to be human literature *in toto*. The study of Canadian literature ought to be comparative, as should the study of any literature; it is by contrast that distinctive patterns show up most strongly. To know ourselves, we must know our own literature; to know ourselves accurately, we need to know it as part of literature as a whole.

But in Canada, as [Northrop] Frye suggests, the answer to the question “Who am I?” is at least partly the same as the answer to another question: “Where is here?” “Who am I?” is a question appropriate in countries where the environment, the “here,” is already well defined, so well defined in fact that it may threaten to overwhelm the individual. In societies where everyone and everything has its place a person may have to struggle to separate himself from his social background, in order to keep from being just a function of the structure.

“Where is here?” is a different kind of question. It is what a man asks when he finds himself in unknown territory, and it implies several other questions. Where is this place in relation to other places? How do I find my way around in it? If the man is really lost he may also wonder how he got “here” to begin with, hoping he may be able to find the right path or possibly the way out by retracing his steps. If he is unable to do this he will have to take stock of what “here” has to offer in the way of support for human life and decide how he should go about remaining alive. Whether he survives or not will depend partly on what “here” really contains – whether it is too hot, too cold, too wet, or too dry for him – and partly on his own desires and skills – whether he can utilize the resources available, adapt to what he can’t change, and keep from going crazy. There may be other people “here” already, natives who are cooperative, indifferent, or hostile. There may be animals, to be tamed, killed, and eaten, or avoided. If, however, there is too large a gap between our hero’s expectations and his environment he may develop culture shock or commit suicide.

...

What a lost person needs is a map of the territory, with his own position marked on it so he can see where he is in relation to everything else. Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as *our* literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here, because here is where we live.

For the members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive.

* * *

I'd like to begin with a sweeping generalization and argue that every country or culture has a single unifying and informing symbol at its core. (Please don't take any of my oversimplifications as articles of dogma which allow of no exceptions; they are proposed simply to create vantage points from which the literature may be viewed.) The symbol, then – be it word, phrase, idea, image, or all of these – functions like a system of beliefs (it *is* a system of beliefs, though not always a formal one) which holds the country together and helps the people in it to cooperate for common ends. Possibly the symbol for America is the Frontier, a flexible idea that contains many elements dear to the American heart: it suggests a place that is *new*, where the old order can be discarded (as it was when America was instituted by a crop of disaffected Protestants, and later at the time of the Revolution); a line that is always expanding, taking in or “conquering” ever-fresh virgin territory (be it the West, the rest of the world, outer space, Poverty, or the Regions of the Mind); it holds out a hope, never fulfilled but always promised, of Utopia, the perfect human society. Most twentieth-century American literature is about the gap between the promise and the actuality, between the imagined ideal Golden West or City Upon a Hill, the model for all the world postulated by the Puritans, and the actual squalid materialism, dotty small town, nasty city, or redneck-filled outback. Some Americans have even confused the actuality with the promise: in that case Heaven is a Hilton hotel with a Coke machine in it.

The corresponding symbol for England is perhaps the Island, convenient for obvious reasons. In the seventeenth century a poet called Phineas Fletcher wrote a long poem called *The Purple Island*, which is based on an extended body-as-island metaphor, and, dreadful though the poem is, that's the kind of island I mean: island-as-body, self-contained, a Body Politic, evolving organically, with a hierarchical structure in which the King is the Head, the statesmen the hands, the peasants

or farmers or workers the feet, and so on. The Englishman's home as his castle is the popular form of this symbol, the feudal castle being not only an insular structure but a self-contained microcosm of the entire Body Politic.

The central symbol for Canada – and this is based on numerous instances of its occurrence in both English- and French-Canadian literature – is undoubtedly Survival, *la Survivance*. Like the Frontier and the Island, it is a multifaceted and adaptable idea. For early explorers and settlers, it meant bare survival in the face of “hostile” elements and/or natives: carving out a place and a way of keeping alive. But the word can also suggest survival of a crisis or disaster, like a hurricane or a wreck, and many Canadian poems have this kind of survival as a theme; what you might call “grim” survival as opposed to “bare” survival. For French Canada after the English took over it became cultural survival, hanging on as a people, retaining a religion and a language under an alien government. And in English Canada now while the Americans are taking over it is acquiring a similar meaning. There is another use of the word as well: a survival can be a vestige of a vanished order which has managed to persist after its time is past, like a primitive reptile. This version crops up in Canadian thinking too, usually among those who believe that Canada is obsolete.

But the main idea is the first one: hanging on, staying alive. Canadians are forever taking the national pulse like doctors at a sickbed: the aim is not to see whether the patient will live well but simply whether he will live at all. Our central idea is one which generates, not the excitement and sense of adventure or danger which the Frontier holds out, not the smugness and/or sense of security, of everything in its place, which the Island can offer, but an almost intolerable anxiety. Our stories are likely to be tales not of those who made it but of those who made it back from the awful experience – the North, the snowstorm, the sinking ship – that killed everyone else. The survivor has no triumph or victory but the fact of his survival; he has little after his ordeal that he did not have before, except gratitude for having escaped with his life.

A preoccupation with one's survival is necessarily also a preoccupation with the obstacles to that survival. In earlier writers these obstacles are external – the land, the climate, and so forth. In later writers the obstacles tend to become both harder to identify and more internal; they are no longer obstacles to physical survival but obstacles to what we may call spiritual survival, to life as anything more than a minimally human being. Sometimes fear of these obstacles becomes itself the obstacle, and a character is paralyzed by terror (either of what he thinks is threatening him from the outside, or of elements in his own nature that threaten him from within). It may even be life itself that he fears; and when life becomes a threat to life, you have a moderately vicious circle. If a man feels he can survive only by amputating himself, turning himself into a cripple or a eunuch, what price survival?

* * *

Poems which contain descriptions of landscapes and natural objects are often dismissed as being mere Nature poetry. But Nature poetry is seldom just about Nature; it is usually about the poet's *attitude* towards the external natural universe. That is, landscapes in poems are often interior landscapes; they are maps of a state of mind. Sometimes the poem conceals this fact and purports to be objective description, sometimes the poem acknowledges and explores the interior landscape it presents. The same tendencies can be present in the descriptive passages of novels or stories with natural settings....

Not surprisingly in a country with such a high ratio of trees, lakes, and rocks to people, images from Nature are almost everywhere. Added up, they depict a Nature that is often dead and unanswering or actively hostile to man; or, seen in its gentler spring and summer aspects, unreal. There is a sense in Canadian literature that the true and only season here is winter: the others are either preludes to it or mirages concealing it. There is a three-line poem by Alden Nowlan called "April in New Brunswick" which puts this case perfectly:

Spring is distrusted here, for it deceives –
snow melts upon the lawns, uncovering
last fall's dead leaves.

The key word is “distrusted”; Canadian writers as a whole do not trust Nature, they are always suspecting some dirty trick. An often-encountered sentiment is that Nature has betrayed expectation, it was supposed to be different.

This distrust, this sense of betrayal, may be traced in part to expectations which were literary in origin. English Canada was settled first, but sparsely, in the eighteenth century; a larger influx of immigrants from England arrived during the first half of the nineteenth century. The prevailing literary mode in Nature poetry in the late eighteenth century as derived from Edmund Burke was the cult of the sublime and the picturesque, featuring views and inspirational scenery. In the first half of the nineteenth century this shifted to Wordsworthian Romanticism. What you were “supposed” to feel about Nature under the first mode was awe at the grandeur of Nature; under the second, you were supposed to feel that Nature was a kind Mother or Nurse who would guide man if he would only listen to her. In the popular mind, the two modes often combined; in any case, Nature was “good” and cities were “evil.” Nature the kind Mother on Earth had joined and in some cases replaced God the severe Father in Heaven who had been around for some time previously. In the United States, Emerson and his disciples Thoreau and Whitman are certainly later tributaries of this stream.

Towards the middle of the century Nature's personality underwent a change; she remained a female deity, but she became redder in tooth and claw as Darwinism infiltrated literature. However, most of the English immigrants were by that time safely in Canada, their heads filled with diluted Burke and Wordsworth, encountering lots and lots of Nature. If Wordsworth was right, Canada ought to have been the Great Good Place. At first, complaining about the bogs and mosquitoes must have been like criticizing the authority of the Bible.

Susanna Moodie's description of the "surpassing grandeur" of the view near Grosse Isle reads like a dictionary of early nineteenth-century Nature adjectives:

The previous day had been dark and stormy, and a heavy fog had concealed the mountain chain, which forms the stupendous background to this sublime view, entirely from our sight. As the clouds rolled away from their grey bald brows, and cast into denser shadows the vast forest belts that girdled them round, they loomed out like mighty giants – Titans of the earth, in all their rugged and awful beauty – a thrill of wonder and delight pervaded my mind. The spectacle floated dimly on my sight – my eyes were blinded with tears – blinded by the excess of beauty. I turned to the right and to the left, I looked up and down the glorious river; never had I beheld so many striking objects blended into one mighty whole! Nature had lavished all her noblest features in producing that enchanting scene.

But the tension between what you were officially supposed to feel and what you actually encountered when you got here – and the resultant sense of being gypped – is much in evidence.

In *Roughing It in the Bush*, Mrs. Moodie's determination to preserve her Wordsworthian faith collides with the difficulty she has in doing so when Nature fails time and time again to come through for her. The result is a markedly double-minded attitude towards Canada:

... The aspect of Nature ever did, and I hope ever will, continue: "*To shoot marvellous strength into my heart.*" As long as we remain true to the Divine Mother, so long will she remain faithful to her suffering children.

At that period my love for Canada was a feeling very nearly allied to that which the condemned criminal entertains for his cell – his only hope of escape being through the portals of the grave.

Those two emotions – faith in the Divine Mother and a feeling of hopeless imprisonment – follow each other on the page without break or explanation. If the Divine Mother is all that faithful, we may ask, why are her children suffering? Moodie copes with the contradiction by dividing Nature itself in two, reserving the splendid adjectives and the Divine-Mother attributes for the half that she approves of and failing to account for the hostile activities of the other half.

Again and again we find her gazing at the sublime natural goings-on in the misty distance – sunsets, mountains, spectacular views – only to be brought up short by disagreeable things in her immediate foreground, such as bugs, swamps, tree roots, and other immigrants. Nature the Sublime can be approached but never reached, and Nature the Divine Mother hardly functions at all; like God she may be believed in but not experienced directly, and she's not much help with the vegetable garden. Unfortunately it's the swamps, bugs, tree roots, and other immigrants that form the texture of daily life.

This tension between expectation and actuality was not confined to Mrs. Moodie. It's there as a sense of something missing in the almost surreal interlude in Alexander McLachlan's *The Emigrant*, where a labyrinthine journey through a forest, "Through morasses, over bogs, / Wading rivers, crossing logs," ends in a forest glade filled with unknown and nameless coloured birds, none of which has any "song." (The birds lack songs not because they are mute but because the sounds they make are not like the sounds the emigrant McLachlan is *accustomed* to hearing birds make. It's like a North American listening to Oriental music and hearing only cacophony.) The tension creeps also into Charles Sangster's attempt to cram Canadian scenery into a Nature poem of the saccharine or Leigh Hunt variety. "The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay" oozes along for the most part like this:

Here Nature, lavish of her wealth, did strew
Her flocks of panting islets on the breast
Of the admiring River, where they grew

Like shapes of Beauty, formed to give a zest
To the charmed mind, like waking Visions of the Blest.

But then comes this curious stanza:

Here Nature holds her Carnival of Isles.
Steeped in warm sunlight all the merry day,
Each nodding tree and floating greenwood smiles,
And moss-crowned monsters move in grim array.
All night the Fisher spears his finny prey;
The piney flambeaux reddening the deep,
Past the dim shores, or up some mimic bay:
Like grotesque banditti they boldly sweep
Upon the startled prey, and stab them while they sleep.

Some carnival. The lavishness, panting, merriment, and Beauty hardly account for the “moss-crowned monsters,” nor for that really unexpected stab in the dark. In any other country this kind of unexplained inconsistency of image might be just bad poetry; here it’s bad poetry *plus*, and the plus is the doubtless unintended revelation of a split attitude.

That this kind of tension or split is not just a characteristic of the nineteenth century is demonstrated in Douglas LePan’s important poem, “A Country Without a Mythology,” where the pattern is almost intact. In it, someone called “the stranger” is travelling towards no discernible goal through a land without “monuments or landmarks,” among “a savage people” who are silent and moody or, when they speak, incomprehensible. “The stranger” must live off the land on berries and fish, snatching what he can get and “forgetting every grace and ceremony.” What is missing for him in this alien land are the emblems of tradition-saturated European civilization:

The abbey clock, the dial in the garden,
Fade like saints’ days and festivals.
Months, years, are here unbroken virgin forests.
There is no law...

The landscape itself is harsh, “violent,” sharp, and jagged, bitter cold in winter and burning hot in summer. But the traveller retains his desire for a Wordsworthian experience of Nature as divine and kindly:

Sometimes – perhaps at the tentative fall of twilight –
A belief will settle that waiting around the bend
Are sanctities of childhood, that melting birds
Will sing him into a limpid gracious Presence.

The hills will fall in folds, the wilderness
Will be a garment innocent and lustrous
To wear upon a birthday, under a light
That curls and smiles, a golden-haired Archangel.

But somehow this never happens; he continues his journey, but the landscape does not grant him the vision he requires:

And now the channel opens. But nothing alters.
Mile after mile of tangled struggling roots,
Wild-rice, stumps, weeds, that clutch at the canoe,
Wild birds hysterical in tangled trees.

And not a sign, no emblem in the sky
Or boughs to friend him as he goes; for who
Will stop where, clumsily constructed, daubed
With war-paint, teeters some lust-red manitou?

There is, of course, more than one possible interpretation for the ending of this poem. We can believe with “the stranger” that Nature has withheld all revelation, or indeed that Nature is empty, has no revelation to give, no “sign” or “emblem.” Or we can take the hint that the poet gives us: perhaps the stranger has been given a revelation but has not been able to recognize it. There *is* an image of the divine present in the landscape – the “manitou” which the Indians have carved – but since the traveller is

looking where he has been taught to look, up towards the sky, and since he is demanding that any revelation shall arrive in his terms – terms he has learned in Europe – he misses the real revelation which is there on the ground, and which takes a shape appropriate to the landscape itself, not to his ideas of what it ought to be. Because the mythic figure, “the manitou,” is not a “golden-haired Archangel” it is dismissed as clumsy and perhaps even rejected as impure or dangerous – it is, after all, “lusted.” The real point of the manitou may be that, whatever it is, it is *here*, it is actual and possible, whereas the traveller’s Wordsworthian and European Christian fantasies are only wishful thinking, and of a destructive kind: they prevent him from making meaningful contact with his actual environment. Perhaps this is why he remains a stranger: he’s looking for the wrong thing in the wrong place.

If the Divine Mother is conspicuous by her absence and the vision of a “gracious Presence” steadfastly refuses to manifest itself, the person who demands Divine Mothers and Presences may conclude that Nature is dead (as the late nineteenth century in Europe concluded that God was dead, since He was no longer producing miracles and chariots of fire). Nature seen as dead, or alive but indifferent, or alive and actively hostile towards man is a common image in Canadian literature. The result of a dead or indifferent Nature is an isolated or “alienated” man; the result of an actively hostile Nature is usually a dead man, and certainly a threatened one.

Death by Nature – not to be confused with “natural deaths” such as heart attacks – is an event of startling frequency in Canadian literature; in fact it seems to polish off far more people in literature than it does in real life. In Death by Nature, something in the natural environment murders the individual, though the author – who is of course the real guilty party, since it is he who has arranged the murder – often disguises the foul deed to make it look like an accident.

The Canadian author’s two favourite “natural” methods for dispatching his victims are drowning and freezing, drowning being preferred by poets – probably because it can be used as a metaphor for a descent into the unconscious – and freezing by prose writers. Why this should be so

is evident if you think about the other methods made available by the actual environment. There is lots of water and snow in Canada, and both are good murder weapons; but other plausible weapons are few. There are no deserts and no jungles. You could kill a man by having a rock fall on him, or having him fall off one (and that's been done, by Earle Birney in "David"). You can squash him under a tree, as Isabella Crawford does in *Malcolm's Katie*, but that's not too effective: the victim recovers. Trees piled in log jams work better as squashing devices, as in Duncan Campbell Scott's poem "At the Cedars." There aren't many venomous reptiles or vermin in Canada, though rattlesnakes are on the increase; I once read a mystery story in which one of the victims was murdered by being tied to a tree in the blackfly season, but I don't believe it was Canadian. For reasons which have to do with the profundities of the Canadian psyche, Death by Wild Animal is infrequent.[...] Death by Indian has something to do with Death by Nature, but it is not quite the same thing.[...] It would be possible to have someone burn up in a forest fire, but I can't think of any author who's tried this. Death by Nature can also come in the form of suicide, and again drowning and freezing are favourite methods; for the latter, see Sinclair Ross's story "The Painted Door" and (more or less) Duncan Campbell Scott's poem "The Forsaken."

Water and snow, then, are the usual implements, though there's another, more indirect way of doing in a character: Death by Bushing, in which a character isolated in Nature goes crazy. Legends of the Wendigo get connected with this one – the character sees too much of the wilderness, and in a sense becomes it, leaving his humanity behind.

...

The attitudes towards Death by Nature vary, as do the amounts of guilt or responsibility ascribed to Nature. At one end of the spectrum is the fatalism displayed in F. P. Grove's story "Snow." The story is simple to the point of aridity: a man living at the edge of civilization is missing in the snow and some other men set out to find him. They discover his

dead body frozen stiff. They announce the news to his wife, who is left destitute with six children, and to his parents. His mother-in-law, collapsing into tears, says “God’s will be done.” The death is presented as a fact, as the kind of thing that happens; no attempt is made to explain it or soften it and the woman’s exclamation is, in context, ironic. Here Nature is dead or indifferent rather than actively hostile: it is a condition, not a person.

Death by Nature has a somewhat different aspect in Earle Birney’s long poem “David” [1941]. On the surface the poem is about two young men who go mountain-climbing. They want to try a peak, called “the Finger,” which they’ve never climbed before. When they reach the top the narrator slips and his friend David reaches to steady him, but falls to a ledge. The narrator climbs down to him, finds him crushed but still alive, and at David’s insistence pushes him over the ledge to smash on the ice six hundred feet below. The death of David is ostensibly a kind of accident, and any guilt for it belongs to the narrator, who caused David’s fall by his carelessness (he didn’t test his footholds) and, more directly, by pushing him over.

But the imagery of the poem casts a different light on the story. The Finger itself is an anthropomorphic form: it is at first “an overhang / Crooked like a talon.” This could be the talon of a bird, but later it is overtly humanoid: after the accident the narrator says, “Above us climbed the last joint of the Finger / Beckoning bleakly the wide indifferent sky.” The sky may be indifferent, but the Finger isn’t: it beckons, and in a sense it is the beckoning of the Finger that has lured David to his death. It isn’t the only giant hand present: in the second section, another peak is “like a fist in a frozen ocean of rock...” The Divine Mother’s hands are scarcely extended in blessing.

An interesting thing about the images in “David” is the way they change from Nature-is-indifferent images before David’s fall to Nature-is-hostile images after it. Before the fall, there is a whole group of images that connect mountains with ocean: there’s the “frozen ocean of rock” just mentioned, “a long green surf of junipers,” the “ice in the morning thaw” that is “a gurgling world of crystal and cold blue chasms,

/ And seracs that shone like frozen saltgreen waves.” More explicitly, there is David’s knowledge of geology, which reveals that the mountains *were* an ocean once: the fossils of coral and trilobites are “Letters delivered to man from the Cambrian waves.” Ice, ocean, and rock are pulled together by these images; the total picture is of a Nature which is huge and “unknowing” but not actively trying to destroy. It is the narrator’s innocence which makes such a vision possible; had he been more suspicious of the Divine Mother he would have paid more attention to the mangled bodies of her children which the two climbers encounter: the skeleton of a mountain goat that has slipped, and a maimed robin.

After David’s fall, which is also a fall from grace – from a vision of Nature as at least indifferent and sometimes beautiful, a Nature that man may exist in and enjoy if he is strong and careful – the images change. David is found with “a cruel fang” of stone poking into him; his blood is being drunk by “thirsting lichens.” The landscape the narrator has passed through earlier on the way to the Finger is crossed by him again on his way back, but this time the chimney he must descend is “an empty horror,” the snow is “sun-cankered,” the crevasses are “gaping” and “greenthroated,” the seracs are “fanged,” the glacier has a “snout.” Even on more solid ground the swamp that had earlier “quivered with frogsong” is now “ragged”; it reeks, and its toadstools are “obscene.” The landscape has come alive; it is no longer an ocean but a body, the body of a vampire or cannibal or ghoul, with its fangs and bloodthirsty lichens and its stench of decay. David’s fall into death is the narrator’s fall into a vision of Nature as a destructive and hideous monster.

David’s name is suggestive: where there is a David in Canadian literature there is usually a Goliath, and the Goliath, the evil giant (or giantess) is, of course, Nature herself. David has been challenging it to combat by fighting his way up the mountains, but as in many Canadian David-and-Goliath stories, Goliath wins.

Goliath wins again, and even more tellingly, in E. J. Pratt’s long poem *The Titanic* [1935]: and with these winning-and-losing metaphors it’s obvious that we have left behind the fatalistic attitude that goes with

“Nature is dead or indifferent” and are dealing with a war-with-Nature or let’s-fight attitude that goes with “Nature is hostile.”

The *Titanic* itself – as its name implies – is a giant created by man as a challenge to Nature; this is made obvious by Pratt in the second section of the poem, in which the ship is spoken of as having “lungs” and a “heart,” and in which the belief in her indestructability is seen as yet another example of man’s attempt to defy the universe:

And this belief had reached its climax when,
Through wireless waves as yet unstaled by use,
The wonder of the ether had begun
To fold the heavens up and reinduce
That ancient *hubris* in the hearts of men,
Which would have slain the cattle of the sun,
And filched the lightnings from the fist of Zeus.

The *Titanic* is also a kind of Noah’s Ark, carrying a microcosm of the society that has created it, from the rich on the upper decks to the immigrants in the steerage. It is human civilization in miniature, setting out to conquer Goliath; but instead of saving its passengers from the Flood it drowns them in it.

The description of the iceberg that sinks the *Titanic* is worth some attention. It is not alive (though at the moment of collision there is “No shock! No more than if something alive / had brushed her...”), it is a “thing” with the blind, uncaring motions and attributes of a thing; and as “thing” it embodies the three elements of the physical universe we found also in “David”: ice or snow, ocean and rock. (Here the ice of the berg is seen as rock, whereas in “David” mountain rock was seen as ocean.) Yet it is given two metaphorical identities. The first, with its images of European church architecture, suggests the wish for the “gracious Presence” version of Nature longed for in LePan’s poem:

Pressure and glacial time had stratified
The berg to the consistency of flint,

And kept inviolate, through clash of tide
And gale, façade and columns with their hint
Of inward altars and of steepled bells....

But this identity is only external; the berg erodes until “the last temple touch of grace” is gone, and under its façade are no “inward altars” but only “the brute / And paleolithic outline of a face.” The face is that of a monster, half shambling beast, half human; the monster has a claw, and it is this claw that rips open the *Titanic*. Nature’s Goliath proves much bigger and stronger than the puny David which has been sent against it; at the end of the poem, when the moments of human courage or panic have come and gone on the sinking ship, the ice titan remains, virtually unmoved:

And out there in the starlight, with no trace
Upon it of its deed but the last wave
From the *Titanic* fretting at its base,
Silent, composed, ringed by its icy broods,
The grey shape with the paleolithic face
Was still the master of the longitudes.

...

A curious thing starts happening in Canadian literature once man starts winning, once evidence starts piling up of what Frye in *The Bush Garden* calls “the conquest of nature by an intelligence that does not love it.” Sympathy begins to shift from the victorious hero to the defeated giant-ess, and the problem is no longer how to avoid being swallowed up by a cannibalistic Nature but how to avoid destroying her.

The war against Nature assumed that Nature was hostile to begin with; man could fight and lose, or he could fight and win. If he won he would be rewarded: he could conquer and enslave Nature, and, in practical terms, exploit her resources. But it is increasingly obvious to some writers that man is now more destructive towards Nature than

Nature can be towards man; and, furthermore, that the destruction of Nature is equivalent to self-destruction on the part of man. Earle Birney has a poem dating from 1945 called “Transcontinental,” which is a sort of *Towards the Last Spike* [by Pratt] revisited. In it the narrator is going across Canada in a plushy train, “crawling across this sometime garden,” surrounded by colourful tourist folders; when he looks out the window he sees “this great green girl grown sick / with man sick with the likes of us...” The land is a woman again, but this time a “girl,” not a monster; human beings are parasites on her body, and she is covered with scars, scum, and other evidences of disease. Birney’s conclusion is not that the Divine Mother will forgive, but that man will have to clean up the mess he has made:

It is true she is too big and strong to die
of this disease but she grows quickly old
this lady old with us –
nor have we any antibodies for her aid
except her own.

You may not like the disease-and-cure terminology, but at least it’s revealing; the power is no longer with Nature, Birney indicates, it’s with man.

...

Dennis Lee goes even further in *Civil Elegies*. He implies that the result of the North American war on Nature is not an enhancing of human civilization but a stunting of it – and that the ripoff policies towards the land, which have gone hand-in-hand with the Nature-is-hostile stance, issue eventually in the death of cities as well....

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NOTE

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CHAPTER 3

La forêt or the Wilderness as Myth (1987)

*Rosemary Sullivan*¹

Last summer I stayed in a log cabin on the Otonabee River in the Kawarthas, three hours by car north of Toronto. Though the cabin had running water and a septic tank, it was isolated. From its windows I could see nothing but wilderness. If I went east, I could canoe on the river for at least fifteen minutes without encountering another human being. For those fifteen minutes, going down the thin blue ribbon of river with the fir trees rising to a height of sixty feet of impenetrable bush on either side, I was an original explorer, the first white mind confronting the wilderness. *La forêt* – the wilderness – is an idea we now search for nostalgically; it is something that existed in the past and, like intellectual tourists, we are still trying to recover the impact of that original encounter. Why? Because the forest is a symbol in our minds. It represents the border between nature (writ large, as Charles Olson used to say) and culture. The Western imagination has made its commitment to culture, to civilizing nature, turning it into raw material for technological

exploitation, and yet we suspect we may have made a terrible mistake. By putting nature and culture in opposition, we begin to recognize that we may have brought ourselves to a terrible cul-de-sac.

After looking at the symbol of the forest in the works of a few Canadian authors, I've come to believe that one way of looking at Canadian literature is to see it as an ongoing dialogue with the wilderness, an obsessive, repetitive effort to relive (and perhaps reframe) that moment of original encounter.

I think it's always essential to begin with the premise that North American literature is a New World literature: its first authors were transplanted European colonials who carried with them their European cultural assumptions. In early nineteenth-century literature, the New World was synonymous with the forest, and the forest was an ambiguous place whose meaning derived from the cultural projections of those who entered it.

The great nineteenth-century American romancer of the wilderness was, of course, James Fenimore Cooper with his *Leatherstocking* novels. For him, the forest is the frontier, and the great American errand into the wilderness is a remote one. R.W.B. Lewis had it exactly, I think, when he described Cooper's myth as that of the American Adam, "an individual emancipated from history happily bereft of ancestry ... standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling."² With his Indian friend, Cooper's hero enters the forest where he will learn the features of his own distinctive character: isolated, heroic, innocent in a world that is free and uncluttered by culture and family, the world of the perpetual territory ahead. The utilitarian conquest of nature is henceforth described in visions of sublimity as an epic adventure.

I remind you of the American myth only to emphasize by contrast how different is the Canadian experience. The writer who best captures the symbol of the forest in early nineteenth-century Canadian literature is Major John Richardson, a contemporary of Cooper's, born in 1796 on the Niagara frontier. (It's amusing to think of Niagara Falls as the frontier.) At fifteen, Richardson fought with the British army against the Americans in the War of 1812; he was captured and imprisoned for two

years in Kentucky. Richardson's novel of the wilderness is called *Wacousta, or the Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas* (1832). It is a Gothic extravaganza, a historical romance set in the previous century (in 1763), and purports to describe the last of the Indian uprisings led by the famous chief Pontiac against the British forts of Detroit and Michilimackinac.

It is a wonderful portrait of the colonial Canadas, with their commitment to the British connection in defiance of American republicanism to the south. The two forts Richardson describes are outposts of civilization lost in a terrifying and alien wilderness, desperately defending the rituals of British culture. The pioneer settlements surrounding the forts are Habitant, the enemy Indian, and the only project seems to be to hold the fort, the symbol of British conquest in the New World. The most powerful agent in the novel is the forest: it is a psychological space that is unmitigatedly terrifying. Nature is in total opposition to culture and holds no possibility except nightmare. This is Richardson:

When the eye turned woodward it fell heavily and without interest upon a dim and dusky point known to enter upon savage scenes and unexplored countries, whereas whenever it reposed upon the lake it was with an eagerness and energy that embraced the most vivid recollections of the past, and led the imagination buoyantly over every well-remembered scene that had previously been traversed, and which must be traversed again before the land of the European could be pressed once more. The forest, in a word, formed, as it were, the gloomy and impenetrable walls of the prison-house, and the bright lake that lay before it the only portal through which happiness and liberty could be again secured.³

Happiness and liberty, civilization itself, embodied in England and preserved nostalgically within the safe walls of the fort, surrounded by a huge, unthinking, menacing and formidable wilderness – what Northrop Frye has called the garrison mentality that characterizes nineteenth-century Canadian literature. This description makes brutally

clear how fragile and precarious is the human, balanced against a vast, unexplored hinterland. The forest here has no identity in its own right; it is pure projection – a psychological space that reflects the dark fears of the human mind.

The plot of *Wacousta* is fascinating. It's not what it should be: a story about British soldiers fighting the savage Iroquois. In fact, the Indians are being led in their attack on the fort not by the historical Pontiac, but by a white man who has turned Indian and assumed the name Wacousta, a character entirely invented by Richardson. Wacousta is infinitely more dangerous than the Indians, because he uses all his intellectual powers to destroy the civilization he has abandoned. What is Richardson getting at? It is a wonderful symbolic paradigm: two aspects of the white mind at war; two mental forces pitted against each other in deadly combat. The superego (authoritarian, repressive, militaristic) committed to an ideal of order which willingly sacrifices personal feeling and the unconscious passionate mind rising in nightmare violence against all that constrains it. The novel's Gothicism easily turns the forest into a dream landscape.

Richardson has done something extraordinary in this novel. He has assigned Wacousta a just motive for attacking the English fort. In his symbolic allegory he has made Wacousta a child of nature and the commander of the fort, Colonel de Haldimar, a product of civilization and its corruptions. We learn that Wacousta's motive for leading the Indians against the whites is personal revenge. In Britain he had been deeply wronged by de Haldimar. The two were fellow soldiers and friends in Scotland, though they are identified as opposites. De Haldimar is officious, snobbish, tight-lipped, and ambitious. Wacousta is a child of nature, a free-spirited man capable of extremes of feeling. He falls desperately in love with a young woman. When de Haldimar steals his fiancée, Wacousta's love turns to diabolical revenge, and he follows de Haldimar to the New World, committed to his destruction and that of all he represents.

Richardson's criticisms of British values are embodied in de Haldimar – his complacent assumptions of class privilege and hierarchy,

his tight-lipped propriety masking hypocrisy, his ruthless ambition disguised as law and order. It becomes difficult to decide who is the villain and who the tormented victim. Yet it is clear that Richardson sides with de Haldimar against Wacousta because Wacousta represents the greater danger. While his revenge is just, he has carried his rebellion far beyond the constraints of reason into a demonic compulsion. His rape and murder of the innocent daughter of de Haldimar are the sign of his degradation and demonstrate the danger of freeing the mind of social convention. Richardson, essentially pessimistic, is terrorized by a fear of human evil. He offers a drama of the human mind in a wilderness context, loosed from its moral faculties and capable of diabolism.

At the end of his novel, Richardson kills off both his main characters in a kind of expiatory sacrifice, as if to purge an ancient evil. De Haldimar's son, an idealized Englishman, with his equally stereotypical bride, carries on the burden of the imperial mission and makes peace with the Indians. It is as if Richardson cannot decide. He wants it both ways. He sees the potential for ruthless authoritarianism implicit in British imperialism but he values stability. He recognizes the power of romantic individualism, but also its potential for monomania, for chaos. Canadian by birth, he makes an ironic compromise: fearing the wilderness and its dangerous freedoms, he picks the garrison with its ideals of law and order and hopes to humanize it. Finally, he can only see nature as alien territory that must be dominated, just as man's passionate self must be constrained.

Until it is civilized, the wilderness is the enemy. Why? Because the virgin wilderness seems to negate man's perception of his own value. No one has caught this better than Susanna Moodie in her famous *Roughing It in the Bush*. She has understood that it is not just that life in the Canadian bush is hard, or even dangerous. It is more devastating than that. The most compelling chapter of *Roughing It in the Bush* is the one called "Brian, the Still-Hunter." Brian is a neighbour who walks into Moodie's shanty one day with his dogs, Music and Chance, and sits at her fire, smoking in silence. She describes him as "hawk-eyed, sorrowful, and

taciturn.” After an hour he leaves without having spoken a word. Each day he returns with milk for her child.

She learns his bizarre history. He had come from England twenty years previously, a man of some wealth, education, and enterprise. However, life in the woods proved a dangerous liberation. No Daniel Boone of pristine virtue, he turned to drinking and rampaging until finally, reduced to a moping melancholy, he slit his own throat. After his attempted suicide he became a solitary wanderer in the woods. He describes to Mrs. Moodie his passion for hunting: “’Tis the excitement. It drowns thought and I love to be alone. I’m sorry for the creatures too, for they are free and happy; yet I am led by an instinct I cannot restrain to kill them.” He describes his first sad and gloomy hunt – watching wolves, like black devils, devour a deer, despite its courageous efforts for self-preservation. “Is God just to his creatures?” he asks. Examining the beauty of flowers, which he describes as God’s pictures hidden away in the wilderness from human eyes, he asks: “Is His benevolence gratified by the admiration of animals whom we have been taught to consider as having neither thought nor reflection?”⁴ What Brian embodies is the feeling that, in the forest, the human moves as an alien and invader. All his cultural and metaphysical assumptions about the value of the human are undermined. The wilderness invades the mind and can reduce it to madness. To Mrs. Moodie, who wants to cling to her civilized distinctions, the wilderness is a deluge. As Frye says, “It is not a terror of the dangers or discomforts or even the mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest. The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values.”⁵ Mrs. Moodie flees back to “civilization.” Her portrait of life in the bush is one of aching loneliness, disorientation, culture shock, and the headstrong will to impose a human order on a recalcitrant environment.

By the early twentieth century, the terror of the wilderness has already turned into a nostalgia for the same wilderness as technology makes its inroads. What was once the godforsaken wilderness becomes

an object of longing. One of the most fascinating figures in Canadian literature is Archibald Belaney, alias Grey Owl, a young Brit who came to Canada at eighteen and within two years had gone Indian. He deconstructed his English past and invented an Indian heritage for himself, a hoax which lasted until after his death. With the publication of his famous *Pilgrims of the Wild* in 1935, he became a sensation on the European lecture circuit.⁶ Clad in buckskin jacket and leather pants, wearing moccasins, and his long black hair hanging in plaits to his shoulders, he presented himself as a “half-breed” born in Mexico and brought up in the Canadian wilderness. Grey Owl seems to have awakened a nostalgia for the sanity of the primitive wilderness in Europeans who were stumbling towards another war. Most marvellous is that no one knew that this articulate “half-breed” who captured their imaginations was really Archie Belaney from Hastings.

Yet Grey Owl was no phony. He did become as much Indian as it is possible to be without being born one. He describes it thus:

The Indian is a harmonious element of the landscape. He never dominates it as does the European his environment, but belongs there as do the mesas, skies, sunshine, spaces, and other living creatures. He takes his part in it with the clouds, wind, rocks, plants, birds and beasts, with drum beat and chant and symbolic gesture, keeping time with the seasons, moving in orderly procession with nature, holding to the unity of life in all things, seeking no superior place for himself but merely a state of harmony with all created things, the most rhythmic life that is lived among the race of men.

Of course, everyone can't put on moccasins and follow Archie Belaney in his transformation. But modern writers have sought to understand the myth he was trying to offer. In fact, so persistent is this effort to rethink our attitude to nature that a colleague of mine, Mark Levene, calls it the theme of evolutionary regression in Canadian literature.

In the wilderness, which seems to be symbolically co-extensive with the dark side of the mind, the unconscious, an understanding is buried. We flee from it because it seems terrifying. But we are equally hypnotized by it and return to its puzzle. Margaret Atwood's novel *Surfacing* describes the journey into the wilderness as a voyage of evolutionary regression, during which the very idea of the human must be reinvented. By now the plot of *Surfacing* is familiar. An unnamed narrator searches the wilderness of northern Quebec for the father, a botanist, who has been reported missing. In the process she must come to terms with a failed love affair and an abortion; she must reevaluate all her cultural assumptions. I think Atwood's underlying intention in this novel is to challenge our way of relating to nature. Atwood's subject is the polarization of man and nature that results from our compulsion to explain and master nature. Language is one of the tools we use to achieve this mastery; we set ourselves, the perceiving subjects, apart from nature, the perceived object. The Cartesian logic of our language dictates not only a split between subject and object but the superior position of the subject. Nature, in other words, is acted upon; it is our colony. Atwood's persona intuitively seeks another mode of vision, another code of language. It is natural that she should turn to North American Indian culture to contrast technological man's alienation from nature with the Indian's mystical participation in nature. You will remember that the narrator, in searching for clues as to the whereabouts of her missing father, finds his sketches of Indian rock paintings. Following his map, she retraces his archaeological explorations, overwhelmed that her scientific, rationalist father seems to have been hunting for another code of meaning. It is while diving in the lake, looking for the underwater rock paintings, that she finds her father's bloated corpse. Drifting in its watery element, the corpse reminds her of another dead thing, the foetus she aborted. The shock dispels the amnesiac fog she has hidden in, exploding her carefully contrived rationalizations. For the first time she acknowledges her responsibility for the death of something that was living. The lake is a fluid, silent world. Language sets up no barriers here, and it seems to her that her father has offered her a message. He has led her towards a vision

bequeathed by gods “unacknowledged or forgotten,” shown her a way of seeing the world after the failure of logic.

Breaking with logic means being invaded by chaos and terror: “Logic is a wall, I built it: on the other side is terror,” she says. But if you survive the experience of psychic chaos, the gods of the underworld may admit you to their sacred order. The narrator prepares herself by destroying all the objects associated with her past: “Everything from history must be eliminated.”⁷ Her ritual preparation, whether by coincidence or intention, corresponds with the stages of shamanistic initiation outlined by Mircea Eliade.⁸ Shamanism, as described by Eliade, is a process of induction into the sacred. Whoever aspires to be the shaman must go through a period of psychic isolation in which the mind swings between extremes of ecstasy and madness and the aim of which is transformation of the human state. The prescribed ritual follows a precise psychological order: retreat to the bush to a kind of larval existence; prohibitions as to food, with certain objects and actions taboo; hypnotic sleeping; secret language; dismemberment or cleansing of the body in ritual death; spirit guides who assist the aspirant. These states Atwood follows precisely. The other side of the narrator’s madness is a mystic initiation ritual that simulates the process of death and resurrection. The goal is perfect communion with the wilderness. And Atwood’s narrator has her visions: “I lean against a tree. I am a tree leaning. I am not an animal or a tree. I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place.”

When the wilderness at last reveals itself to Atwood’s heroine, it has the shape of a wolf: “It gazes at me for a time with its yellow eyes, wolf’s eyes, deathless but lambent as the eyes of animals seen in car headlights.” She expected a message, some revelation to take back with her, but the wolf’s eyes are reflectors, they reveal nothing: “It tells me it does not approve of me or disapprove of me, it tells me it has nothing to tell me, only the fact of itself.”⁹

Having waited so anxiously for Atwood’s vision of the wilderness, this seems a deflation. For a long time I did not understand what Atwood was getting at. Now I think her perception is brilliant. We demand that the wilderness serve us, either as raw material for our technologies or as

a romantic projection (it must approve or disapprove). At the end of her experiment in evolutionary regression, Atwood instead finds nature as *the fact of itself*, which makes us fact too. It is our place. We are in it. This is Archie Belaney's vision: of a world in which man does not dominate his environment (or as Atwood puts it, the only relation some humans can have to nature is to kill it). Man belongs in nature as do the skies, sunshine, the trees. He takes his part in the symbolic relationship, seeking no superior place; rather, recognizing nature's power to overwhelm him. Atwood sends her character back to her anaesthetized urban environment where nature is paved over. The gods have receded to the back of her skull, theoretical again. "No total salvation. Resurrection." The wilderness she has lived in will soon be flooded to make a power dam; the violation continues. But she has learned one small thing: to resist the anthropocentric death drive of her culture. "To prefer life, I owe them that."¹⁰

Atwood has brought us full circle, back to the first encounter with the wilderness, "before the trees were cut." She would warn us. As we enter the wilderness, it is ourselves we enter. The dark pines of our minds are rooted in the wilderness; it is our balance, our ground zero, our place. Objectifying it, destroying it, we turn ourselves into object. We destroy ourselves.

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NOTES

- 1 “*La forêt* or the Wilderness as Myth” was written to be delivered at a conference called “Le Canada et *la forêt*,” held at the University of Dijon, France, in October 1986. It was published in *Brick: A Literary Journal* 29 (winter 1987): 43–46, under the title “Margaret Atwood and Wacousta [The Forest and the Trees]” and as “The Wilderness as Symbol in Canadian Fiction,” in *Subjects Worthy Fame: Essays on Commonwealth Literature in Honour of H. H. Anniah Gowda*, ed. A. L. MacLeod (New Delhi: Sterling, 1989), 114–22. It has been slightly revised by the author for the present volume.
- 2 R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 5.
- 3 John Richardson, *Wacousta* (Toronto: Historical, 1906), 248.
- 4 Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush*, ed. Michael A. Peterman (New York: Norton, 2007), 121.
- 5 Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), 225.
- 6 Grey Owl (Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin), *Pilgrims of the Wild* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1935).
- 7 Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), 174.
- 8 Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. William Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964). In a memorable conference at ACUTE [the Association of Canadian University Teachers of English] in 1975, Canadian scholar Germaine Warkentin was the first to point out the relevance of Eliade to *Surfacing*, suggesting that language metaphors be explored.
- 9 Atwood, *Surfacing*, 181–87.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 188.

CHAPTER 4

Quest for the Peaceable Kingdom: Urban/Rural Codes in Roy, Laurence, and Atwood (1984)

*Sherrill E. Grace*¹

Discussing the characteristics of pastoral myth in his “Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*,” Northrop Frye argues that “the nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found today, is particularly strong in Canada.”² If Frye is correct, as I think there is little doubt he is, then one would expect Canadian literature to be dominated by natural or small-town settings, by images of the wilderness or rural life, and by a consciousness shaped by an experience of the land. Such a literature is not, at first glance, a likely place to find strong city portraits or powerful urban settings, let alone metaphors of cities as consciousness. Indeed, our major writers create out of a profound and pervasive awareness of the natural landscape – prairie, Northern Shield, mountain, seashore. In Robert Kroetsch’s words, “we seem most drawn imaginatively by the great, silent, unstructured spaces surrounding us.”³

When human habitations appear in the literature, they are more often small towns than large cities. Whatever the reason for this predilection, whether the topographical fact that the largest cities – Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver – are stretched along a three-thousand-mile latitude with vast, sparsely populated areas between them, or because these cities are relatively new and raw, ungraced by the centuries of tradition that inspire poets, or because there is something in the Canadian psyche that finds the city an uncongenial metaphor or landscape – it is a rural, rather than an urban, perspective that governs much of our best writing.

I say rural *perspective* because this preference for nature or small towns is part of an old and complex convention that functions by oppositions: adoption of a rural perspective assumes rejection (at least, conventionally) of an urban perspective.⁴ Arising from this basic opposition, with its shifting parameters that are as old as pastoral myth itself, is a set of expectations and values, which are represented by the semantic codes governing a particular literary system.⁵ To the degree that nature and the small community are peaceful, the city is not; to the degree that the natural wilderness stimulates the imagination, the urban wilderness does not. But this constant opposition between city and country is not a simplistic matter of good and bad, positive and negative. Concepts of human identity and community, and the nature of both, are defined by the articulation of these codes.

In part as a result of the fact that the three writers to be examined are women, a further aspect of these codes warrants attention. Sexual stereotyping of city and nature, whether obvious or implied, has long been an element in literature, myth, and thought; hence, the city, like nature, is usually viewed as female. According to Jung, “the city is a maternal symbol, a woman who harbours the inhabitants in herself like children.... The Old Testament treats the cities of Jerusalem, Babylon, etc. just as if they were women.”⁶ Certainly, cities are often spoken of as female, or described in terms used for women, by male writers, especially when the city represents a negative, threatening presence. Striking instances of this can be seen, for example, in Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*, Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*, and in much American literature,

notably [Thomas] Pynchon's *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*.⁷ The question to be asked here is whether or not the three women writers under discussion – Gabrielle Roy, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood – adhere to this sexual stereotyping, and it would appear that they do not. Consistent with the *opposition* of urban/rural codes, as outlined below, is the designation of the city as male in opposition to a female nature – implicitly in Roy and Laurence, explicitly in Atwood.⁸

In the following discussion of these three Canadian writers, I hope to illustrate the significance of urban/rural codes by examining their portrayal of the three largest Canadian cities. In doing so, it should be clear not only how these women perceive cities and nature as women, but also how they express a Canadian sensibility. As female writers, and as Canadians, they seem doubly drawn to the natural world, expressing through that affinity their resentment and fear of a perceived patriarchal civilization, symbolized so well by the city, that conquers the landscape “by imposing an alien and abstract pattern upon it.”⁹ Furthermore, Roy, Laurence, and Atwood, like the majority of Canadian writers, male or female, “tend increasingly,” as Frye suggests, “to see much of this [civilizing] process as something that is human but still dehumanized, leaving man’s real humanity a part of the nature that he continually violates.”¹⁰

In 1945, when Gabrielle Roy published her first novel, *Bonheur d'occasion*, translated as *The Tin Flute*, she was immediately acclaimed as a striking new Canadian voice for two reasons: first, because the novel embodied an unrelenting social realism and, second, because of its urban setting, both of which were uncommon in Canadian literature at the time. *Bonheur d'occasion* is set in a poor *quartier* of Montreal, and the desperate lives of its characters are seen not only against, but also in terms of, St. Henri’s dirt and imprisoning boundaries. As Roy herself has said, however, *Bonheur d'occasion* is not simply social documentary about the French-Canadian urban poor; it is “the study of the human condition as well.”¹¹

Implicit in the setting and in the fates of the characters, Florentine Lacasse, her mother Rose-Anna, Jean Lévesque, and Emmanuel

Létourneau, are the larger questions of the nature and value of human relationships and the possibilities for human happiness – questions largely explored in terms of urban/rural codes. An emphatic polarity of setting is, in fact, characteristic of Roy's writing. Thus, after writing *Bonheur d'occasion*, Roy turned to an idyllic natural world for her next work, *La Petite poule d'eau* (1950) (translated as *Where Nests the Water Hen*), while her third novel, *Alexandre Chenevert* (1955) (translated as *The Cashier*), involves a return to an especially grim, annihilating Montreal.¹² She has felt compelled to look separately and in turn at the rural and urban worlds because, as both *Bonheur d'occasion* and *Alexandre Chenevert* make clear, a harmonious combination of the two worlds seems impossible.

St. Henri in *Bonheur d'occasion* is a slum, a low-lying area of stone, cellars, and tenements hemmed in by factories and a walled canal, and crisscrossed by wires and railway tracks. To further emphasize the hopelessness of the place, the narrator explains that,

Autrefois, c'étaient ici les confins du faubourg; les dernières maisons de Saint-Henri apparaissaient là, face à des champs vagues; un air presque limpide, presque agreste flottait autour de leurs pignons simples et de leurs jardinets. De ce bon temps, il n'est resté à la rue Saint-Ambroise que deux ou trois grands arbres poussant encore leurs racines sous le ciment du trottoir.

In other days this was where the suburb stopped. St. Henri's last houses had stood there facing waste fields, and an almost limpid, rustic air hung about their simple gables and tiny gardens. From those better days St. Ambroise now has no more than two or three great trees, their roots still digging in beneath the concrete of the sidewalk.¹³

If one looks up the mountain, slightly to the northwest of St. Henri, one can easily see the prosperous urban domain of the wealthy Montreal English in Westmount. Within this almost allegorical urban world,

young Florentine Lacasse and her family struggle to survive. Florentine, frivolous and shallow as she is, is frantic to escape the poverty and degradation of St. Henri personified in her mother, Rose-Anna, who every May 1st is pregnant and moving from one cramped lodging to a still smaller one. Like Crane's Maggie, Florentine places her hopes for escape in lipstick, silk stockings, flimsy garments, and a young man, Jean Lévesque. Jean, however, is also intent upon escaping St. Henri for the promising sphere of Westmount, and after seducing Florentine, he rejects her in the ruthless understanding that he can move on more quickly without her and all she represents.

More important for my purposes than the bald facts of the plot are the terms in which Roy presents this tawdry drama. All the characters in the novel spend much of their time walking the city streets, either in the restless movements of the unemployed or in the purposeful search for new lodgings. The relationship between Jean or Florentine and the streets they walk is sharply contrasted, however. Jean knows this urban world for what it is – “les ruelles sombre [et les] impasses obscures”¹⁴ (“dark, narrow streets [and] obscurity between houses”¹⁵). He knows that spring in this city is a “saison de pauvres illusions”¹⁶ (“season of thin illusions”¹⁷), and he is determined not to wander like so many in this limbo. Quite simply, Jean Lévesque is in control of this world, and it is a control he gains at the sacrifice of his heart, of his gentler nature and, as Roy implies, of his humanity. On the night of his decision to abandon Florentine, we see Jean discarding the last elements of this humanity, “son ancienne et sterile pitié”¹⁸ (“his old and sterile pity”¹⁹), as he determines to become like the mechanical amoral city he goes forth to conquer:

Tout lui était devenu odieux dans ce quartier, et plus encore que le souvenir d'une jeune fille délaissée la pensée que pendant une soirée entière il avait été occupé au fond à se justifier. Comme s'il avait à se justifier! Au delà de son départ, il voyait déjà ce que les êtres ambitieux d'une grande ville, à l'affût d'un hasard propice, aperçoivent tout d'abord dans la fuite: un terrain neuf à exploiter.²⁰

The whole place had become hateful to him. Not just the memory of a jilted girl, but worse: the thought that he had spent the whole evening justifying himself. What did he have to justify? Already, beyond his departure he could glimpse what the ambitious ones in a big city see in their onward flight: new lands to conquer!²¹

Florentine, however, is always lost, confused, or frightened by the streets of St. Henri. As Jean realizes, she is like her name: “Florentine ... Florentine Lacasse ... moitié peuple, moitié chanson, moitié printemps, moitié misère ... Ces petites filles-là ... doivent être ainsi; elles vont, viennent et courent, aveuglées, à leur perte”²² (“Florentine ... Florentine Lacasse ... half song, half squalor, half springtime, half misery...’ Those girls are like that, I suppose, he thought. They run this way and that like blind things, to their own ruin”²³). In order to control the city, one must become like it by denying one’s own springtime, one’s connections with the organic, physical world and with one’s own nature. This Jean, the male, can do at a price, but the pregnant Florentine cannot. Despite her relative good fortune in finally marrying the gentle Emmanuel Létourneau before he leaves for the war, Florentine will most likely become like her mother, a prisoner of this alien, urban wilderness, ruined by her own vulnerability as much as by Jean Lévesque.

That Florentine is ruined in the largest sense seems clear in the final scenes of the book. By accepting Emmanuel’s love under false pretences, she has acquiesced in the destruction of her own humanity. Roy holds out little hope for human beings trapped in the urban chains of their own devising. Emmanuel’s parting view of St. Henri is of “un arbre, dans un fond de cour, qui poussait ses branches tordues entre les fils électriques et un réseau de cordes à linge. Ses feuilles dures et ratatinées semblaient à demimortes de fatigue avant même de s’être pleinement ouvertes”²⁴ (“a tree in a backyard, its branches tortured among electric wires and clotheslines, its leaves dry and shrivelled before they were fully out”²⁵). Like the tree, a crucial image in the urban/rural codes of

the text, Florentine and by extension human nature are blighted in the springtime of life by the imposition and encroachment of the unnatural urban world.

Most of Margaret Laurence's Canadian fiction is set in or against the small prairie town of Manawaka as either the immediate or remembered place of essential human values and communal heritage. Only one of these novels, *The Fire-Dwellers*, is set in a big city, and the title alone suggests the central metaphor of the book: the city, here Vancouver, is a hell; its inhabitants are the damned. Laurence's articulation of urban/rural codes shares much with Roy, but she differs in the greater specificity of her metaphors and in the narrative techniques employed to suggest both the intensity of the destructive modern world and the contrast between city and country.

The Fire-Dwellers is presented entirely from the point of view of its middle-aged heroine and mother of four, Stacey MacAindra (formerly Stacey Cameron of Manawaka), either through first-person voice, limited third-person, or interior monologue. The result is a strong and immediate sense of what it means to live in a modern city bombarded by constant news of death and destruction, surrounded by lonely, hostile people, by concrete, and by car accidents, and cut off from your own inner nature as well as from the earth. It is the violent, purposeless life of fire-dwellers, those who live in constant fear for themselves and their children, alienated not only from their families but also from themselves. One night, with husband and children asleep, Stacey looks from the window at the city lights, the lights that "flash and shift like the prairie northern lights in the winter sky, here captured and bound."²⁶ She envisions the city in apocalyptic terms of legions and "skeletal horsemen" and then wonders desperately: "No other facet to the city-face? There must be. There has to be."²⁷ She cannot, however, balance this vision of destruction with a convincing, positive image of the city.

This description of the city – set in italics to emphasize its terrifying position *within* Stacey's imagination – is reinforced by related narrative techniques. For example, the screaming voice of the radio or the images

on the television, which is called the “EVER-OPEN EYE,” are set in boldface capitals in order to stress Stacey’s sensation of being surrounded and bombarded with violence. Punctuating a conversation with her sons is her awareness of its persistence: “POLICE TURN HOSES ONTO RIOTING NEGROES IN A CITY’S STREETS CLOSEUP OF A BOY’S FACE ANGER PAIN RAW THE WATER BLAST HITS HIM WITH THE FORCE OF WHIPS HE CRIES OUT AND CRUMPLES.”²⁸ Although they impinge less stridently, even the newspapers remind her that this “place is a prison” and “there is nowhere to go but here.”²⁹ Stacey’s increasing hysteria and self-alienation climax in an italicized nightmare in which she stumbles through a forest carrying her severed head.³⁰ Shortly after this she will act out the symbolism of the dream by escaping from the city to the British Columbian shore of saltwater, evergreens, and mountains, where she will try to heal her wounds sufficiently to keep functioning.

Two elements of the narrative provide a crucial contrast to the fiery prison of the city-self. One is this flight into nature and a brief affair with a younger man living in a cabin near the beach. Despite the comfort Stacey derives from these moments, the sense of well-being resulting from spontaneous communication with another human being, she realizes that complete withdrawal is impossible. This knowledge leaves her with only one alternate route to psychic wholeness, her memories. At isolated points Stacey’s recollections interrupt the narrative in an indented passage offset visually on the page. These happy memories are invariably of herself or of the family by a lake surrounded by trees and berry bushes. But just as the escape into nature is a temporary thing, a gesture, so these memories of “the green world” are slim defences against the facts of her urban existence – or, more accurately, they are little more than the murmurings of a remembered natural self within a vulnerable being who is controlled and dominated by dehumanizing forces. At the most, Stacey will endure by shoring up the fragments of herself against complete ruin. As the final lines of the book make clear, the future of this self, city, or world, is precarious: “She feels the city receding as she slides into sleep. Will it return tomorrow?”

In many ways, Laurence offers a more optimistic vision in the last book of the Manawaka cycle, *The Diviners*. There the heroine, Morag Gunn, has rejected existence in four cities – Winnipeg, Toronto, Vancouver, and London, England. Although Laurence by no means glosses over the ironies and inconsistencies of living a country life in a modern technological society – indeed, Morag wryly mocks her efforts at pioneer life in her imaginary conversations with the indomitable Canadian pioneer Catherine Parr Traill – she places her heroine in the congenial, almost magic, surroundings of a farmstead beyond a small village. While Morag may ironically call her rustic home “Beulah Land,” her log house and neglected acres fronted by the river are nevertheless her home. The first novel she writes there is called *Shadow of Eden*; the second is *The Diviners* itself, and the creative springs within her are released by the landscape she inhabits. The profound contrast between *The Fire-Dwellers* and *The Diviners*, inherent as it is in the titles of each work, extends beyond superficial questions of setting or even image because it arises from the increased foregrounding of urban/rural codes within the Manawaka cycle.³¹ In the city, one is consumed by spiritual fires that are denied meaningful expression or else one simply extinguishes those fires, thereby submitting to the dehumanizing forces symbolized by the city; one accepts an urban consciousness. In the country, one is able to live creatively as part of the flow of time and nature. Neither is easy; ease or simplicity is not Laurence’s ambition. But the latter existence, informed by a rural consciousness, is better because natural and therefore more human.

The articulation of semantic codes expressing urban/rural polarities which we have seen in terms largely of background and setting in Roy or setting and metaphor for self in Laurence are defined with a new clarity, energy, and self-consciousness in the work of Margaret Atwood. Atwood’s vision and poetics rest in her concept of “violent duality” and “duplicity,” but this essential duality can, of course, be approached in a number of different ways – perceptual, aesthetic, ethical, or thematic.³² Because of the coherence of her vision, of the system informing her work, attention to one aspect of a text necessitates an awareness of oth-

ers; therefore, it is useful to think of urban/rural polarities in terms of the following codes for “City” and “Land” which together describe the world of objective reality, as well as generating metaphors for the self:

WORLD	
<i>City</i>	<i>Land</i>
civilization	nature
European culture	North American culture
eye of reason (“Cyclops”)	eye of senses (“wolves’ eyes”)
straight lines	curved space
vertical	horizontal
external (surfaces)	internal (interiors)
superimposition	subversive resistance
stasis	growth
head	body
male	female
SELF	

These configurations occur in several of her novels, most notably in the dehumanizing, mechanical technocracy of Toronto in *The Edible Woman* (1969) or in the narrator’s need, in *Surfacing* (1972), to leave this alien world and return to nature in order to rediscover herself. In *Life Before Man* (1979), Atwood employs a comparison between the green swamps of the dinosaurs and the grey aridity of contemporary Toronto in order to expose the sterility of urban lives. Many of Atwood’s poems also focus upon this basic polarity. Thus, the “City Planners ... each in his own private blizzard / ... sketch / transitory lines rigid as wooden borders” while the insane pioneer in “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,” like “The Planters” in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, imposes himself upon the land “with shovels,” refusing to accept its “ordered absence.”³³ Perhaps more frightening is the image of the self in “A Fortification” as armoured, with body a metal space suit, “barriered from leaves and blood,” which

catch[es] sight of the other creature,

the one that has real skin, real hair,
vanishing down to the line of cells
back to the lost forest of being vulnerable.³⁴

This daily subjection of the self to the mechanics of civilization echoes Frye's words quoted above – that “man's real humanity [is] a part of the nature that he continually violates.”

But the codes which I have outlined are most dramatically realized in Atwood's superb *Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Journal I opens with Moodie's arrival in Canada from England complete with European eyes, manners, and “incongruous pink” shawl. She immediately realizes, however, that she is “a word / in a foreign language,” and despite her increasing terror, this initial understanding sets her apart from the men who “deny the ground they stand on.”³⁵ Piece by piece she discards her false perceptions and expectations, and adopts the language and consciousness of this land until, like an ark, the animals arrive to inhabit her. When she leaves the wilderness for the city, it is with profound regret: “There was something they almost taught me / I came away not having learned.”³⁶

In the second Journal she remembers the wilderness. “The Bush Garden” haunts her dreams until, in the poem “The Double Voice,” she recognizes and accepts what Atwood describes as “the inescapable doubleness of her own vision.”³⁷ Journal III brings Mrs. Moodie, like her historical model, through illness and old age to death. It is in the last four poems, after her death, that we hear most decisively from Moodie. In “Thoughts from Underground” and “Alternate Thoughts from Underground,” she offers a devastating summary of our civilization of “highway billboards” and “glib superstructures,” and prays for our destruction:

O topple this glass pride, fireless
riveted babylon, prays
through subsoil
to my wooden fossil God.³⁸

Atwood's collage, the last of the six prepared for the *Journals*, faces "Alternate Thoughts from Underground" and serves as symbol, both in composition and contrasting images, of her protest.

The final poem, "A Bus Along St. Clair: December," gives us Moodie in present-day Toronto. Significantly, she has "turned herself inside out, and has become the spirit of the land she once hated."³⁹ This is Mrs. Moodie at her peak of mythic force as she comes, not only to make us see the city as "an unexplored / wilderness of wires," but to destroy it. As land, nature, curved space, inside turned out, above all as woman, she mocks the city, that male dream of monuments, concrete slabs, silver paradise built with a bulldozer, imposed upon the land:

it shows how little they know
about vanishing: I have
my ways of getting through.⁴⁰

Here Atwood has made explicit the urban/rural codes underlying her work and that of Roy and Laurence, and in the process she has reversed the usual sexual stereotype of the city as female, whether virgin, harlot, or mother. When she returns to these codes (from a slightly different perspective) in "Marrying the Hangman," from *Two-Headed Poems*, the speaker emphasizes this sexual polarity:

He said: foot, boot, order, city, fist, roads, time,
knife.

She said: water, night, willow, rope hair, earth belly,
cave, meat, shroud, open, blood.⁴¹

Where Florentine in *Bonheur d'occasion* submits to her destruction in an environment manipulated by the male, and Stacey in *The Fire-Dwellers* acknowledges that she can neither escape nor control the dehumanizing violence of her urban existence nor reclaim those natural aspects of herself which are violated and diminished by her daily life, Atwood

resurrects Mrs. Moodie in direct challenge to the masculine imposition of abstract pattern and technology. Although it would be simplistic to reduce rural/urban polarity to a question of sexual stereotypes – the codes outlined above make that clear – the land, traditionally viewed by men as female, is well championed in the person of Mrs. Moodie. It may be difficult to perceive the great white goddess, or even Demeter, in “the old woman / sitting across from you on the bus,”⁴² but her message is unmistakable:

It would take more than that to banish
me: this is my kingdom still.

Turn, look up
through the gritty window: an unexplored
wilderness of wires ...

Turn, look down:
there is no city;
this is the centre of a forest

your place is empty.⁴³

In conclusion, it would seem that the strong and usually positive identification with nature voiced by many Canadian writers results in the absence, to date, of much major urban literature.⁴⁴ But while this tendency to write about small towns and country or natural environments is often remarked by readers, it is seldom queried. Perhaps in the case of male authors, such as F. P. Grove, Sinclair Ross, Robert Kroetsch, or Jack Hodgins, the choice of setting and the frequent identification of nature with woman are unremarkable, but the comparable, and very positive, identification by female authors – especially by one as aware of feminist concerns as is Atwood – is noteworthy. From Simone de Beauvoir on, feminists have criticized the tendency in Western culture to limit and

define woman by equating her with nature; too often, they argue, the woman/nature equation becomes a patriarchal trap excluding women from a full and active role in cultural endeavour. There is, however, a profound emotional ambivalence toward nature apparent in Canadian literature that leads writers to both fear and value the power and/or vulnerability of the nonurban world. Moreover, for many Canadian writers, including the three under discussion, this ambivalence is not narrowly moral because the better, more human qualities are seen as “a part of the nature” which man, especially the male, exploits, violates, and destroys. By identifying woman with nature so emphatically, Roy, Laurence, and Atwood should be seen as reclaiming the potential of that equation, as reasserting the values of nature through the rural code, as refusing to depict their links with nature as merely biological or patriarchal traps.

In their quest for the peaceable kingdom these writers reject the dominance of urban over rural codes. In doing so they demonstrate their belief in the necessity for rediscovering “the lost forest of being vulnerable” and in the consequent possibility for a natural and fully human rebirth. Theirs is not a simplistic vision of a withdrawal into nature, but a plea for a fresh understanding of a ravished and misunderstood human landscape. The quest for the peaceable kingdom, as it gradually emerges in the works of Roy, Laurence, and Atwood, is a quest for a holistic vision of man-within-environment which transforms the opposed urban/rural codes into a new system of dynamic interrelatedness.⁴⁵ But the first step must be the recognition, rehabilitation, and renewed appreciation of what we have lost, a task that female writers, by the very fact of their culturally determined position, may be best fitted to undertake.

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NOTES

- 1 "Quest for the Peaceable Kingdom: Urban/Rural Codes in Roy, Laurence, and Atwood" originally appeared in *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Susan Merrill Squier. Copyright 1984 by the University of Tennessee Press. Used with permission.
- 2 Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), 239.
- 3 Robert Kroetsch, "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition," *English Quarterly* 4 (summer 1971): 46. Canada's finest early modern painters, such as Tom Thomson, A. Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, and Emily Carr, are primarily landscape painters. In fact, one of the distinctive features of Canadian art in general is its preoccupation with the immense, silent, and rugged northern landscape.
- 4 Raymond Williams points out that satire of corrupt city life, assuming the innocence of rural existence, goes back at least as far as Juvenal. See *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 47.
- 5 The term "code" is used here to describe an aspect of the system of signification created through linguistic patterns, images, settings, characters, and so on, which structures the meaning of a single text or of a group of texts.
- 6 Jung discusses the role of the city as woman at some length in *Symbols of Transformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 207-18.
- 7 In the case of American fiction, I suspect that the negative feminization of the city is part of the larger pattern of solitary male flight from the restrictions of civilization that characterizes novels from Cooper and Twain to Kesey, Dickey, West, and Pynchon. In Jungian terms, this pattern represents a flight from the mother, with associated fears of incest and death, to the so-called virgin land which appears to offer fresh opportunities for male conquest, without involving more complex, ambiguous relationships.
- 8 Work in the area of the city as portrayed in fiction by women ... would suggest that whether or not the city is perceived as specifically male, it is seen as hostile, degrading, and destructive for women, a place in which the female is powerless and abused. A consequent turning-away from the city to the land is a potentially regressive and self-defeating posture, however, because it implies a rejection of the human culture and civilization in urban centres. In none of the three authors examined here is such a simplistic rejection endorsed; furthermore, for Laurence and Atwood, at least, the articulation of urban/rural codes, in addition to embodying a set of matched opposites, implies a necessary dialectic, an acceptance and balancing of polarities.
- 9 Frye, *Bush Garden*, 246.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Donald Cameron, ed., *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), 131.
- 12 *Alexandre Chenevert* is the story of a bank clerk, besieged by news of worldwide disaster and surrounded by the chrome prison of Montreal, who is dying of cancer. He leaves the city for a brief rest in the country at Lac Vert, only to learn that he is too much an alien to stay there or change his ways. Return to the green peace of paradise is an illusion for urban man.

- 13 Gabrielle Roy, *Bonheur d'occasion* (Montréal: Éditions Beauchemin, 1966), 28. The novel was first published in 1945, but all references are to this edition. English translations are from *The Tin Flute*, trans. Alan Brown (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980), 29.
- 14 Roy, *Bonheur d'occasion*, 189.
- 15 Roy, *Tin Flute*, 212.
- 16 Roy, *Bonheur d'occasion*, 188.
- 17 Roy, *Tin Flute*, 211.
- 18 Roy, *Bonheur d'occasion*, 191.
- 19 Roy, *Tin Flute*, 214.
- 20 Roy, *Bonheur d'occasion*, 190–91.
- 21 Roy, *Tin Flute*, 214.
- 22 Roy, *Bonheur d'occasion*, 26–27.
- 23 Roy, *Tin Flute*, 27.
- 24 Roy, *Bonheur d'occasion*, 345.
- 25 Roy, *Tin Flute*, 383.
- 26 Margaret Laurence, *The Fire-Dwellers* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973), 89. The novel was first published in 1969, but all references are to this edition.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 90.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 243.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 258–59.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 124. In an earlier dream, Stacey is only allowed to rescue one of her children from the fire and go “away from the crackling smoke, back to the green world” (29).
- 31 A discussion of urban/rural codes in Laurence’s fiction could easily be extended to include her organization of characters throughout the Manawaka cycle.
- 32 I discuss this point at length in *Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret Atwood* (Montréal: Véhicule, 1980), and “Margaret Atwood and the Poetics of Duplicity,” in *The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Arnold E. Davidson and Cathy N. Davidson, (Toronto: Anansi, 1980), 55–68.
- 33 “The City Planners” appears in *The Circle Game* (Toronto: Anansi, 1966), 27, and “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer” in *The Animals in That Country* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 36. “Cyclops” and “Comic Books vs. History,” from *Procedures for Underground* (1970), many poems in *Power Politics* (1971), and “Note from an Italian Postcard Factory” and “Marrying the Hangman,” from *Two-Headed Poems* (1978), also deal with these polarities.
- 34 Atwood, *Animals in That Country*, 16.
- 35 Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970), 11, 16. In *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (Toronto: Anansi, 1977), Dennis Lee develops a fascinating model, which he calls “savage fields,” in order to examine the efforts by certain Canadian writers to explore destructive dualisms; Lee considers *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* as literature of the savage field.... Although Lee’s phenomenological and structuralist argument is too complex to summarize here, it is worthwhile to note that Canadian critics, philosophers, and historians, as well as artists, seem peculiarly attracted by the effort to describe and overcome dualities.
- 36 Atwood, *Journals*, 27.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 63.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 64.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 41 Margaret Atwood, *Two-Headed Poems* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978), 51.
- 42 Atwood, *Journals*, 61.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 60–61.

- 44 There are, of course, exceptions to this, such as the novels of Hugh MacLennan and Mordecai Richler set in Montreal or those of Hugh Garner and Morley Callaghan set in Toronto. The claim to major importance by any of these writers, however, is at least debatable. Recent work by Hugh Hood and Dennis Lee, among others, suggests that Canadian writers are continuing to grapple with the city as setting or subject.
- 45 In her review essay, "Breaking through Patriarchal Nets to the Peaceable Kingdom" (*West Coast Review* 8, no. 3 [Jan. 1974]: 43–50), Gloria Onley argues convincingly for a growing trend in Canadian literature and art away from "dualism [which] is a pathogenic defense mechanism evolved by culture-bound man; for mind is immanent in the ecosystem it 'beholds'" (47).

CHAPTER 5

Women in the Wilderness (1986)

*Heather Murray*¹

Is there an English-Canadian women's wilderness writing? If so, what forms might it take, and where is it to be found? If it exists, what pre-suppositions about Canadian literature occlude its presence; and what do such writing and theory tell us about the position of women within English-Canadian literary culture and culture in the wider sense?

This chapter begins with recent discussion over the place of women in wilderness writing, a genre often thought minor or marginal but which is central to the English-Canadian literary sensibility and myths of national development.² The positions vary widely: that there is a women's wilderness writing, although buried or lost to us; that women have been denied the experiences on which such writing would be grounded; that the writing is existent, different, and unacknowledged. Here I will pursue that third option, and suggest that women's wilderness writing forces a redefinition of the larger category; for although the national myths, especially the political myths, of both English Canada and Quebec refer us to a West or a far North, the literatures themselves are flexible in the situation of "wilderness."³ Common in both cultures are rural

or cottage or near-woods settings seen as substitutive for the wilderness. Here, I postulate an alternative model for “land” as it is construed in English-Canadian fiction (querying the common critical notions of “nature/culture” and the “garrison”) and attempt to show how this system accommodates women authors. Then, using Susanna Moodie as a focus, I survey the situation of women authors in the English-Canadian critical discourse and a seeming paradox at its heart, the simultaneous canonization and marginalization of women authors. This paradox is founded in a deeper cultural contradiction, in a valorization of “nature” and natural values in art which ultimately (in a turn whose twists I will detail) privileges “culture” and disenfranchises those who are seen as being actually close to nature – women, women authors by extension, and Native people, for example. The problematic is one which contemporary Canadian women authors increasingly explore. Iconoclastic writing is breaking these land patterns and calling for a redefinition of the “natural” itself; it engages current controversies over women’s place and language and the possibility of an *écriture féminine*. The situation of the woman author in English Canada is paradigmatic of woman’s place – both within, and without, the symbolic order.

Wilderness in Canada is where you make it, or where you imagine it to be. It is not a place, but a category, defined as much by absences and contrasts as by positives and characteristics. Clearly there is a strong inheritance of what would normally be considered women’s wilderness writing: fictional or semi-fictional accounts of bush travel or experience, in letter or diary form, frequently unpublished or not republished from an original periodical appearance. Less recognized is an equally strong tradition of *wilderness* writing in fiction. I italicize “wilderness” here because frequently the locale is not a deep bush or far north country but a “pseudo-wilderness” such as a rural area or camp. In this respect women’s writing is characteristic of English-Canadian fiction in which, as Robert Kroetsch has observed, stories of unalloyed wilderness experience are surprisingly rare; it is, instead, a “literature of dangerous middles.”⁴ But we need to further unpack that “characteristic” and ask how, and in what ways, English-Canadian women authors may be seen as mainstream

writers. It is the notion of the “pseudo-wilderness” in both literature and popular belief, and the resultant ways of viewing the land and its values, that have facilitated the acceptance of women authors insofar as their works display themes and scenes seen as distinctively Canadian. (This “allowance” has, of course, not been unproblematic.)

A pseudo-wilderness location occupies the literal and figurative centre of the English-Canadian novel: the cottage of Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* and the fishing lodge of Ethel Wilson’s *Swamp Angel*, for example. The fictional terrain is a continuum of land and land values ranging from the city to a “real” wilderness which may exist only as an imaginative possibility or as a place to be briefly visited and for which the pseudo-wilderness (as the name I have given it indicates) frequently substitutes. This continuum is overlaid by parallel clines of values – ethical, moral, religious, aesthetic, sometimes political. Of particular importance is a linguistic system relating different types of language to different states of land.

This is not, however, a simplistic correspondence (city is “bad,” for example, while wilderness is “good” and pseudo-wilderness is “schizophrenic”), but is rather a complex interrelationship between place and quality, where a multiplicity of conditions of land is available and where a variety of values may be attributed to any one point. *Surfacing* takes place in a “civilized” cottage country which retains frightening and potentially liberating wilderness elements.⁵ While the novel ironizes the notion of communing with nature at the cottage, it also offers a real underwater wilderness which the heroine must confront. The cabin pseudo-wilderness at midpoint mediates between the human and non-human worlds, as in the scenes at the close of the novel where the principal character comes to a radical self-knowledge in the cottage’s tangled garden. The first-person novel itself may be read as an attempt to span the distance between the inherently inexpressible (“silent” nature) and the demands of published fiction (the city as the site of literary production). This is accomplished in *Surfacing* by the development of the pseudo-wilderness as the location of myth, tale, oral narrative, and the poetic. And this

pseudo-wilderness may function as a ground for transcendental experience even when a true wilderness is available or accessible.

In other fictions the pseudo-wilderness is more urban; for example, in the many novels detailing the consequences of a small town's denial of the natural world around it. Alternatively, the pseudo-wilderness may have a double allegiance, both to the city and to the surrounding countryside, and any individual orientation is then a matter of age, race, class, gender, or character. In the Manawaka world of Margaret Laurence the process of female coming-of-age is seen as a weaning from childhood's natural realm. (*Anne of Green Gables* provides another, especially poignant, detailing of this process of acculturation.) Over a span of Alice Munro's stories the principal character moves from the scrubland of the Flats Road, to a house on a tree-lined street in Jubilee, to the city where she will attend university. In both Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and Laurence's *A Bird in the House* the question of how and where to live is also a choice of literary style and voice, when the writer-heroines must decide between an acquired diction or a local language, and between inherited or indigenous literary forms. A novel may also have several pseudo-wilderness locations, as in *Swamp Angel* where Maggie leaves the city, restores her strength at a pastoral motel, and moves on to a fishing camp in the woods. Here, as with Laurence, Munro, and Atwood, the physical journey is paralleled by a quest for truer speech and more direct communication. These are works by women writers, but male-authored novels show an equal tendency to pseudo-wilderness location, whether a farm (Raymond Knister, Ernest Buckler), prairie homestead or ranch (F. P. Grove, Robert Stead, W. O. Mitchell, Robert Kroetsch), or small town (Sinclair Ross, Stephen Leacock), to take some well-known examples.

I would argue, then, that the basic framework underlying English-Canadian fiction is this city/pseudo-wilderness/wilderness continuum. The city is often the eventual (or inevitable) end for the characters, and those characters may briefly visit or contact the wilderness proper, but the action takes place most frequently on that motivating and mediating middle ground which often substitutes for the wilderness itself.

The following is a well-established pattern: the city is the location of a debased society, the pseudo-wilderness is a ground for redemption, and the wilderness is inspirational evidence of God's creation. Recast in secular terms, the city is a place of bound possibility, the pseudo-wilderness provides a field for transition and change, and the wilderness itself is a place of freedom. The pattern may also be reversed. In this case the wilderness is chaos, the City of God is our final end, and in the intervening time and in that middle place our duty is to create a garden. Or, again in secular terms, when the wilderness is barren and silencing, life and art must be rooted in a civilized but not denatured community.

While the first framework predominates, especially in twentieth-century fiction, rarely do these patterns stand completely alone. For example, the two often interact in the novel of artistic growth, where the principal character must choose among a stifling small town, a lonely wilderness, or an alienating city. For the artist, the wilderness is variously inspirational and silencing; and when that real or fictional author is a woman, for whom the "civilization" of the city offers further restraints to expression, the difficulty of choice is compounded. And further variations and combinations are possible. The social-realist novel, for example, attempts to reconcile work and wilderness with the agency of the georgic pastoral, a process which informs Stead's *Grain* and which significantly fails in Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage*, whose characters cannot realize their Depression homesteading fantasies. Urban fiction brings nature to the city through the mediation of myth (the autochthonous hero in Hugh MacLennan's works) or symbol (the snow and mountain of Morley Callaghan's Montreal cityscape). Authors who try to escape from a white or Eurocentric perspective (Howard O'Hagan in *Tay John*, Laurence in *The Diviners*) query the traditional equation of "city" with "civilization." But whether these permutations and combinations are the result of vacillation in point of view, whether they lend the work a rich complexity, or whether they are a product of that ambivalence frequently seen as characteristic of English-Canadian fiction, the sets of values are laid on the city/pseudo-wilderness/wilderness continuum, a base pattern deep and persistent enough to be labelled a "myth" at the heart

of the literature of English Canada and perhaps its cultural and public life.⁶ Central to this myth, I would emphasize, is the belief that the pseudo-wilderness will not only mediate between civilization and wilderness, but may substitute in both experiential and imaginative senses for that wilderness, and may facilitate the introduction of revitalizing natural ways and values to the community.

The implications of this emerge when we consider how the land patterns and myths of the United States exclude women authors and women's works. Recent feminist criticism demonstrates how women authors are first discouraged and then displaced by American ideology and later discounted by American criticism. Annette Kolodny, in the aptly titled *The Lay of the Land*, has examined the consequences for women of a literary and popular tradition that sees the land as "she" or "other" (virgin, bride, mother) to be tamed, mastered, raped, fertilized, or destroyed by a solitary male hero who has escaped from a civilization seen as emasculating and, again, feminine.⁷ More recently Nina Baym has shown that this pattern is so integral to American ideology that it is used by critics as a touchstone in the assessment of American literature.⁸ When the quality of American literature is judged mainly by its "American-ness," then women are doubly excluded from the mainstream: the controlling myth of a nation denies or is denied to them, and recourse to alternatives excludes them from the canon and from serious consideration.

The metaphor of the "frontier" underpins these mechanisms of exclusion by reinforcing a nature/culture dichotomy which casts woman as either nature (land) or culture (society) but invariably constitutes her as other, as a part of either force against which the lone hero must set himself. Both women authors and characters are excluded, for the frontier is by definition the place which is far enough away to leave women behind. On the other hand, the English-Canadian myth (in which the wilderness and its attendant freedoms are connected, however tenuously, to the civilized) asserts the ultimate accessibility of the wilderness state of mind. It is a myth of community, and ostensibly radically democratic. But insofar as it is a myth, and further, a myth which suggests that we may enact imaginatively those experiences we are prohibited in actuality,

we must ask to what extent it is liberating and integrative in its utopianism, to what degree co-optive and deceptive in its glossing of real oppressions and contradictions.

It would be possible to ask such questions on behalf of many racial or linguistic or other minority groups, and most especially for Native people, who are treated in white literature primarily as symbols of the land they have lost. Here I will address myself to the issue of how the pseudo-wilderness functions as a site for women and women's fiction: a ground for liberation, or a ghetto? A useful point of departure is Northrop Frye's well-known formulation of the "garrison":

Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological "frontier," separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting – such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality.⁹

The pithiness and quotability of Frye's observation obscure the fact that, in its context in the "Conclusion" to the original *Literary History of Canada*, it is less an attempt to arrive at a formula for Canadian literature than an effort to come to terms with a myriad of impressions about it: the "sense of probing into the distance"; the vastness of the nation and its "geometrical" scatter of development; the resultant drive to unity manifested variously in impulses to communicate or to control; and, most famously, what Frye detects in Canadian poetry as a "tone of deep terror in regard to nature." Frye goes on to mention "a more creative side of the garrison mentality, one that has had positive effects on our intellectual life." But the handiness of the "garrison mentality" as a formula, both for the summation of texts and the drawing of analogies between mind-scape and landscape, becomes apparent within his own argument, where

“Susanna Moodie in the Peterborough bush ... is a British army of occupation in herself, a one-woman garrison.”¹⁰ These have been founding statements for Canadian criticism, and most particularly have set the tone for subsequent treatments of Moodie. D. G. Jones, for example, has seen Moodie as a combatant in a holy war against nature, while Marcia Kline concludes, through her reading of that author, that there is “no-where ... a joyful affirmation of wild nature.” W. D. Gairdner has stated that, in such a schizophrenic situation, Moodie could only escape madness by compartmentalizing her beliefs. Most influential, of course, has been Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, so seriously controlling our contemporary view that the question has been put of whether we can any longer read Moodie herself, or only Atwood’s Moodie. All these interpretations are informed by the garrison and nature/culture models.¹¹

But the frequent attempts to “re-read” Moodie, creatively or critically, indicate our sense that there is something still to be discovered in her work.¹² This search may begin with the text itself, for strikingly missing from the New Canadian Library edition (the most widely used and available) are the lengthy sections devoted to life in the pseudo-wilderness community and to Moodie’s more positive experiences with the deeper wilderness. The full text, on the other hand, provides an early example of the city/pseudo-wilderness/wilderness continuum and indicates some reasons for that pattern’s development.

Edward H. Dahl’s study of Susanna Moodie and her contemporaries outlines their simultaneous aversion and attraction to the wilderness.¹³ In brief, the wilderness is loathed for concrete reasons, for its danger, hardship, and solitude; it is seen as useless in its raw state; it is aesthetically displeasing; it is inherently anti-literary. Moreover, from this perspective, society in the wilderness displays the same characteristics as the wilderness. On the other hand, the wilderness is seen as beautiful, and inspirational in that beauty; it offers possibilities for independence; it may be cultivated, civilized, and rendered valuable; and it is the eventual location of right living and worship. If we locate this complex as the product of a pseudo-wilderness view, looking both into the wilderness (as site of the primitive and the progressive) and to the city (location

of both the decent and the decadent) we have the land continuum of *Roughing It in the Bush*.¹⁴

In her search for home Moodie ranges actually and imaginatively from her early life in England, to a first Canadian location on a settlement farm, to a clearing in the Peterborough bush, and last to the town of Belleville. The book begins with the opposition of old and new worlds, but the first sights of Grosse Isle and Quebec initiate an expansion of this dichotomy, with reflections on the variety, breadth, and potential of the land. England comes to represent the urban or civilized generally; the settlements along the St. Lawrence take on what I have characterized as pseudo-wilderness aspects; and the wilderness of water, forest, and mountain lies beyond. Moodie frequently tracks a scene from a near object to a farther field and then reverses the process, in a characteristic movement from observation to inspiration to meditation. Describing the prospect of Grosse Isle, she moves from farmhouses to the tents for cholera victims in the middle distance (her comment that they add to the “picturesque effect” is notorious), and then uses the widening river to expand our field of view. Similarly, describing the south shore, she turns the nearby white houses and neat churches into a less-differentiated “line of white buildings” which extends along the bank and leads us to the “purple hue of the dense, interminable forest.”¹⁵ The eastern view provides a neat return to the observer.

Your eye follows the long range of mountains until their blue summits are blended and lost in the blue of the sky. Some of these, partially cleared round the base, are sprinkled over with neat cottages, and the green slopes that spread around them are covered with flocks and herds. The surface of the splendid river is diversified with islands of every size and shape.... As the early sun streamed upon the most prominent of these, leaving the others in deep shade, the effect was strangely novel and imposing. In more remote regions, where the forest has never yet echoed to the woodsman’s axe, or received the

impress of civilization, the first approach to the shore inspires a melancholy awe which becomes painful in its intensity.¹⁶

The passage ends with a verse on the inspirational effects of silence and solitude, and by the breaking of this “daydream” and a return to the everyday.

Such descriptions show the land continuum in formation and indicate that the idea of a spectrum of land and land values enters early into the literature because it grows from contemporary views and models of nature to which writers such as Moodie adhered: the importance of multiplicity, variety, and contrast; the attachment of values to nature’s several states, depending on the mood and placement of the viewer; and, most important, notions of the scenic and picturesque, and especially the division of an apprehended landscape into near, middle, and further grounds. The land continuum shifts throughout the book with Moodie’s removals and residencies, and her years there are characterized by an increasing understanding of the wilderness and numerous forays into it. At the close of *Roughing It in the Bush*, the urban end of the axis shifts to Belleville, and the continuum is contained within eastern Canada. In the 1871 preface, “Canada: A Contrast,” the wilderness is again relocated, now to the west, and the eastern areas are considered tamed: “The country is the same only in name.... The rough has become smooth, the crooked has been made straight, the forests have been converted into fruitful fields, the rude log cabin of the woodsman has been replaced by the handsome, well-appointed homestead, and large populous cities have pushed the small clap-boarded village into the shade.”¹⁷

Moodie is a chronicler of sights, sensations, and transition. But we tend to acknowledge only a narrow band of her experience. Further, unless they are seen as situated on the centre point, her observations seem confused and unmediated. She does appear a “one-woman garrison” when run-ins and routs with neighbours are presented, at the expense of tales of cooperative community life. When only incidents of hardship are offered, her view of nature as inspirational seems a fantasy. “Burning the Fallow,” “The Whirlwind,” “The Walk to Dummer,” and

the sketch “Phoebe R – ” give events in the neighbourhood (the term is Moodie’s) where the family lived. “On a Journey to the Woods,” “A Trip to Stony Lake,” and the lengthy and important half-chapter “Our Indian Friends” detail expeditions into the bush and the lessons Moodie learned there. “Canada: A Contrast” contextualizes her work as well as the earlier, disenchanting introduction to it. These are absent from the most widely used edition.

I am not, of course, implying that Frye or later critics worked without knowledge of the original text, nor should my comments be read as criticism of Carl F. Klinck’s editorial practices. But I do suggest that such theory and editing are symptomatic of a cultural system in which the nature/culture notion persists at the expense of patterns basic to English-Canadian literature, although the history of such criticism has yet to be thoroughly documented. It may be tentatively suggested that the nature/culture model initially was received as part of a colonial intellectual inheritance, and that it gained reinforcement from American ideas of the frontier (a model in many ways complementary) and from the Laurentian model of development.¹⁸ In addition, thematic criticism, until recently preponderant, has stressed the content of literary works rather than the discourse which constitutes them. Jones notes a puzzle about Canadian literature, when he states that while there are “many negative characteristics,” nonetheless the literature overall “has a basically positive character”¹⁹; and this is because, while the ostensible theme of a work, for example, may be the nature/culture split, the garrison mentality, or the reasoning individual versus the undifferentiated whole, the text itself opens up these dichotomies. What the nature/culture critical model blinds us to is the ways in which English-Canadian fiction, over its span and currently, has expanded and queried that model.

I have used Atwood’s *Surfacing* as one example of this expansion of the nature/culture dichotomy. But recent English-Canadian women’s writing gives many examples of works which address themselves to the sort of questions I have outlined here. Wilson’s *Swamp Angel*, for example, as its title indicates, shuttles back and forth from the material to the immaterial or spiritual poles of experience.²⁰ Wilson interplays

two well-developed “philosophies” – the day-to-day sense and sensibility of the principal character, the “orientalism”/transcendentalism of the narrator – and links each with a different level of the narration and a different style. The two are not always easily distinguishable, however; and metonymic and metaphoric figures and modes of narration are used in surprising ways, both to intermingle the idealized and the everyday, and to toy with the conventions of realist fiction. (Especially innovative is the increase in metonymic figure in the description of wilderness experience, where typically metaphoric or “poetic” language becomes more dense.) Maggie’s eventual refusal of the lure of water and wilderness is a shocking break with myth convention: “The drops of water rain off her and she feels very fine but she is not a god any more. She is earthbound and is Maggie Lloyd who must get the fire going and put the potatoes in the oven.”²¹

The title of Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel* shows us that it shares with *Swamp Angel* both a structure of experience and a focus on woman’s role as mediator.²² Laurence denies the traditional opposition of “nature” and “culture” and instead establishes a complex system of the tame and the wild, domestic and undomesticated, fruitful and barren, productive and unproductive, all of which are seen as essentially “natural.” Of particular importance are images of produce and products and their rule over the book’s figurative language: “wallpaper pink,” “bland as egg custard,” “common as bottled beer,” to take only a few of many hundreds of such examples. These are an important element of Hagar’s idiolect; further, Laurence reverses here the standard metaphoric pattern of analogizing the familiar with the strange or the wild. Throughout *The Stone Angel* elements of the non-human are related to the human – the world of people, food, clothing, objects, the homely, and the everyday – in an elaborate game of animal, vegetable, or mineral.

In such ways has women’s writing in English Canada been iconoclastic and experimental. “Canada has produced an unusual, even a predominant, number of women writers,” Rosemary Sullivan notes. “The study of women’s writing is too new to have taken us far in examining why this is so.”²³ One reason may be that women are particularly

socially placed to examine the problems of nature/culture mediation, which seems to characterize the literatures of both French Canada/Quebec and English Canada. But to note the prominence of contemporary women authors and the revived interest in their predecessors is not to ignore the ways in which the production of women authors is, and has been, devalued. The nature/culture dichotomy is again a deciding factor, this time not as it occludes patterns inherent to English-Canadian literature but as it deprivileges women generally, and women authors specifically. For Anglo-American critical models deeded to woman a double colonial status. Canadian authors have typically not been read on their own ground under a criticism which often is incognizant of, even hostile to, the queryings, fragmentations, and contradictions of a literature of colonial space.²⁴ But male authors, as representative of “culture” of whatever kind, have generally been taken more seriously. The nature/culture dichotomy values nature as the subject of books, and “organic” styles and structures, while devaluing authors and literary modes seen as being themselves in some way inherently natural. Nature then may be lauded (as women are) in the realms of the symbolic or the literary or the religious, but overall eminence is given to the “culture” which produces these symbols, stories, sermons. (As Sherry Ortner notes, the nature/culture distinction “is itself a product of culture, culture being minimally defined as the transcendence, by means of systems of thought and technology, of the natural givens of existence.”)²⁵ To this culture, of course, woman’s relation is marginal. Thus the privileging of “culture” (which translates always into the privileging of *a* culture) is made to appear “natural”; under it, woman may be seen as both natural being and art object, but not as an artist herself. We may see this representation of woman in concrete terms in Canadian criticism, from the trouncing of Marjorie Pickthall to the dismissal of Isabella Valancy Crawford, from the biographical-biological treatment of major figures to, most noxiously, the debates over who is the best-looking of Canada’s women authors. Women have been both misrepresented and under-represented, and only recently has there been general correction of imbalances in reprint series and reading lists.²⁶

In addition, certain genres, both because of their inherent qualities and because they have often been practised by women, have been discounted. The discreditation of the Canadian romance, for example, has been well documented.²⁷ Recent attempts to set “quality” criteria for Canadian literature continue to privilege coherence, realism, discipline, technical advance, and the mimetic over questing, questioning, fragmentation of the dominant discourse, and the utopian – characteristics of a “colonial” literature which will be colonial no longer.²⁸ The fact that English-Canadian literature holds that nature overarches culture, that there is a power about the land, is one reason for the often-awkward fit of text and commentary.

The city/pseudo-wilderness/wilderness continuum confronts the nature/culture dichotomy. But it does not operate unproblematically. It furthers, first of all, a liberal humanist point of view that permits the projection and attribution of qualities onto the non-human.²⁹ And its very “allowance” of women raises questions. At what cost do we substitute imaginative for real expeditions and experience? At what point does participation in the dominant discourse, the use of its myths, become a collusion in ideals of liberal humanism and a blocking of alternative modes of perception and expression? And finally, has this pattern accommodated women writers *because* it reinforces dominant ideas about women’s gender, roles, and literature?

In her paper “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” Ortner outlines the social placement of woman: seen, in short, as being closer to nature than is man, while still fulfilling necessary social roles. This has several implications, the first and most obvious being that woman’s place is the lower since culture inevitably and invariably is viewed as superior no matter how that culture may idealize or value “nature.” Second, when woman is placed “between” nature and culture, then she is deeded a mediating function, “performing some sort of synthesizing or converting function between nature and culture, here seen (by culture) not as two ends of a continuum but as two radically different sorts of processes in the world.” From this comes a third repercussion, a resultant symbolic ambiguity:

Shifting our image of the culture/nature relationship once again, we may envision culture in this case as a small clearing within the forest of the larger natural system. From this point of view, that which is intermediate between culture and nature is located on the continuous periphery of culture's clearing; and though it may thus appear to stand both above and below (and beside) culture, it is simply outside and around it. We can begin to understand then how a single system of cultural thought can often assign to woman completely polarized and apparently contradictory meanings, since extremes, as we say, meet.³⁰

Ortner's reference to a "continuum" of nature and culture, and her figure of the "small clearing within the forest," alert us to the correspondence between the intermediacy of woman and the intermediacy of the pseudo-wilderness. And this notion of the symbolic ambiguity of the middle ground helps us to see how representation of woman is always double: for while woman is viewed as an element of nature, so too is she seen as an element of culture, an object, a "good" in the sexual economy (to use Luce Irigaray's term).³¹ To return to earlier examples, this is illustrated by her placement in American mythology as the embodiment of both land and constricting society; and by the double-edged treatment of Canadian women authors. "If we think in terms of the production of culture, she is an art object," Susan Gubar states.³² Woman is *already* a poem, a painting, a statue; the equation between female sexuality and textuality is fully drawn; and thus woman as artist is often seen as a "natural" – intuitive, in touch, but never fully in control of her own artistic endeavour.³³

Woman, and woman as author, therefore, may be valued for her mediating function – and mediation, as I have tried to show, is at the heart of English-Canadian literature – but this mediation is not necessarily seen as artistic per se.³⁴ In its simultaneous centrality and marginalization, the situation of the woman author in Canada clearly displays the

position of woman, within and without culture, within and without discourse.

In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Elaine Showalter maps this woman's realm, using a model developed by Shirley and Edwin Ardener which diagrams the relationship of "dominant" and "muted" social groups as two circles which overlap for the most part but not entirely:

Unlike the Victorian model of complementary spheres, Ardener's groups are represented by intersecting circles. Much of muted circle *Y* falls within the boundaries of dominant circle *X*; there is also a crescent of *Y* which is outside the dominant boundary and therefore (in Ardener's terminology) "wild." We can think of the "wild zone" of women's culture spatially, experientially, or metaphysically. Spatially it stands for an area which is literally no-man's-land, a place forbidden to men, which corresponds to the zone in *X* which is off-limits to women. Experientially it stands for the aspects of the female life-style which are outside of and unlike those of men; again, there is a corresponding zone of male experience alien to women. But if we think of the wild zone metaphysically, or in terms of consciousness, it has no corresponding male space since all of male consciousness is within the circle of the dominant structure and thus accessible to or structured by language. In this sense, the "wild" is always imaginary; from the male point of view, it may simply be the projection of the unconscious. In terms of cultural anthropology, women know what the male crescent is like, even if they have never seen it, because it becomes the subject of legend (like the wilderness). But men do not know what is in the wild.³⁵

Does this wilderness of woman's independent and undetermined space really exist? According to Showalter, it is "always imaginary"; it is the country of utopian dreams, the land of feminist mythology, the construct of metaphysical speculation. Thus, the "concept of a woman's text

in the wild zone is a playful abstraction: in the reality to which we must address ourselves as critics, women's writing is a 'double-voiced discourse' that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant."³⁶ Ardener's model seems to account, therefore, both for how the representation of woman is ambiguous and for how the language of woman is double; and the same would be true for any other muted or colonized group. Thus rather than asking how great is the subversive or liberating potential of the fantastic or the unconscious, we may now put the question more specifically, and attempt to discover whether it is the very doubleness of language that permits knowledge and perhaps transformation, through comparison and the resultant recognition of contradiction.³⁷

Contemporary English-Canadian women's writing, [...] in the knowledge of the innovations of Québécoises and lesbian writers; in the formation of sympathies and alliances with the trebly colonized, both within and without this country, may become less "English," possibly even less "Canadian," may continue to develop to the full its potential as a literature of dangerous middles.

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NOTES

- 1 *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing*, ed. Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli (Edmonton: Longspoon/NeWest, 1986), 74–83.
- 2 Especially discussion of T. D. MacLulich's paper "Reading the Land: The Wilderness Tradition," Association of Canadian University Teachers of English, University of Guelph, June 1984. MacLulich usefully points out that "wilderness" writing often has a locale close to cities; more controversial was his opinion that few women writers have the "true ecological awareness" distinguishing, for example, Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*.
- 3 In developing the idea of a "pseudo-wilderness," I have drawn on the concept of a "pseudo-North" in the literature of French Canada/Quebec as proposed by Jack Warwick, *The Long Journey: Literary Themes of French Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 41–44. The idea of a "spectrum" of environments is also developed by Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).
- 4 Robert Kroetsch, Introduction to *Beyond Nationalism: The Canadian Literary Scene in Global Perspective*, spec. iss. of *Mosaic* (14, no. 2 [1981]): xi.
- 5 Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972).
- 6 On ambivalence, see Margot Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).
- 7 Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).
- 8 Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors," *American Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (summer 1981): 123–39.
- 9 Northrop Frye, "Conclusion" to *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), vol. 2, 342. Selections rpt. this volume.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 340, 342, 343, 351.
- 11 D. G. Jones, *Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature* (Toronto: University of

- Toronto Press, 1970), 61. Marcia B. Kline, *Beyond the Land Itself: Views of Nature in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 53. William D. Gairdner, "Traill and Moodie: The Two Realities," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 1, no. 2 (1972): 40. Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970). On the effect of Atwood's reading, see Laura Groening, "The Journals of Susanna Moodie: A Twentieth-Century Look at a Nineteenth-Century Life," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 8, no. 2 (1983): 166–80.
- 12 In addition to Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Carol Shields's *Small Ceremonies* (1976) and the play *Daughter by Adoption* (1981) by Beth Hopkins and Anne Joyce, are notable creative "re-readings." See also Eva-Marie Kröller, "Resurrections: Susanna Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill and Emily Carr in Contemporary Canadian Literature," *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no. 3 (1981): 39–46.
- 13 Edward H. Dahl, "Mid Forests Wild": *A Study of the Concept of Wilderness in the Writings of Susanna Moodie, J.W.D. Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill and Samuel Strickland, c. 1830–1835* (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1973).
- 14 Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush: Or, Forest Life in Canada* (Toronto: Bell and Cockburn, 1913). Page references are to this edition. Later edition by Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, New Canadian Library, 1964).
- 15 *Ibid.*, 27–28.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 28–29.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 18 See, especially, Wilfrid Eggleston, *The Frontier and Canadian Letters* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1957).
- 19 Jones, *Butterfly on Rock*, 14–15.
- 20 Ethel Wilson, *Swamp Angel* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1954).
- 21 *Ibid.*, 130.
- 22 Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964).
- 23 Rosemary Sullivan, Introduction to *Stories by Canadian Women*, ed. Rosemary Sullivan (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1984), ix. The extent of this predominance in the mainstream is catalogued by Susan Swan, "Why Women Write the Most Interesting Books: The Astonishing Matriarchy in Canadian Letters," *Saturday Night* (Nov. 1978): 22–23.
- 24 On the literature of colonial space, see Dennis Lee, "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space," *boundary 2* 3, no. 1 (1974): 151–68.
- 25 Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 84.
- 26 Jean S. Mullen found the proportion of women writers in American college textbooks to be 7% in the early seventies; in "Part 1: Women Writers in Freshman Textbooks," *College English* 34, no. 1 (1972): 79–84. Joanna Russ, in a later count of English literature anthologies, also found the 7% solution to the problem of women's writing; in *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983). A rough Canadian count may be provided by some indexes of the "CanLit" canon. The controversial ballot from the 1978 Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel offered voters a slate with 24% women authors and 30% women-authored works. Fifteen of the 58 elected authors were women (26%), and 26 of the top 100 works were written by women (with nine of those by Laurence

- and Roy). (See Malcolm Ross, "The Ballot," in *Taking Stock: The Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel*, ed. Charles Steele [Downsview, ON: ECW Press, 1982], 136–50.) The 1985 McClelland & Stewart New Canadian Library list has roughly 37% women authors. Anthology representation is sometimes strikingly lower, sometimes proportionately higher.
- 27 T. D. MacLulich, "Novel and Romance," *Canadian Literature* 70 (autumn 1976): 42–50.
- 28 See especially Wilfred Cude, *A Due Sense of Differences: An Evaluative Approach to Canadian Literature* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980), and Paul Stuewe, *Clearing the Ground: English–Canadian Literature after Survival* (Toronto: Proper Tales, 1984).
- 29 On projection and attribution, see Dennis Lee, *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (Toronto: Anansi, 1977).
- 30 Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?," 84, 85.
- 31 Luce Irigaray, "When the Goods Get Together," trans. Claudia Reeder, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken, 1981), 107–10.
- 32 Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 74.
- 33 "Denial of agency" is one of the more insidious methods of suppressing women's writing, according to Russ's sharply humorous taxonomy: "she didn't write it," "her husband wrote it," or (most applicable here), "it wrote itself" (Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, 21–22).
- 34 Jones notes how it is common in Canadian literature to work out the "quarrel between nature and culture" via women or members of other marginal groups (*Butterfly on Rock*, 43).
- 35 Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, 30.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 37 To Althusser's concept of scientific knowledge Catherine Belsey applies Lacan's theory of the split subjectivity, to form a useful account of how a "space" may be created within ideology even when escape from it is impossible; see *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), esp. 56–67, 85–87.

SECTION 2

THE EMERGENCE OF ECOCRITICISM IN CANADA

CHAPTER 6

“Along the Line of Smoky Hills”: Further Steps towards an Ecological Poetics (1990)

*D.M.R. Bentley*¹

By most of the best accounts, it was at the time of the Renaissance that attitudes to nature in western Europe took a turn for the worse. “In the period roughly from the end of the fifteenth until the end of the seventeenth century one sees ideas of man as a controller of nature beginning to crystallize, along more modern lines,” writes Clarence J. Glacken in *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*:

It is in the thought of this period (not the commands of God in Genesis to have dominion over nature ...) that there begins a unique formulation of Western thought, marking itself off from the other great traditions, such as the Indian and the Chinese, which are also concerned with the relationship of man to nature. This awareness of man’s power increases greatly in the eighteenth century.... It increases even more dramatically in the nineteenth century ..., while in the twentieth,

Western man has attained a breathtaking anthropocentrism, based on his power over nature.²

John Rodman agrees, finding in the rejection of animal rights evident in Samuel von Pufendorf's *De Jure Naturae et Gentium* (1642) "a turning point in the history of thought."³ So, too, does Roderick Frazier Nash, who points out in *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* that Descartes' mind/body dualism entailed the conviction that animals "were insensible and irrational machines ... [which] could not feel pain. ... [and] did not suffer."⁴ In effect, the emergence at the Renaissance of the heady combination of scientific rationalism, Protestantism, and capitalism that is known today as modernity resulted in a reconceptualization of man and nature to the immense detriment of both; henceforth – which is to say, during most of the five centuries that took the American continents from their discovery by Europeans to their present dismal and worsening state – nature was alien, insensible, despiritualized: fodder for subjugation and commodification.⁵

But, as Stephen Toulmin has recently argued in *Cosmopolis*, there have for some time been signs that the "scaffolding" of modernity which was erected by Descartes and others during and following the Renaissance has begun to collapse. "[N]ow ... the last timbers of that scaffolding – the separation of humanity from nature, and the distrust of emotion – have lost their credibility," writes Toulmin in 1990, and "no obstacle remains to studying nature however our experience requires."⁶ In its very optimism, this apocalyptic analysis is salutary, for it encourages a focus on *methods* of study in all fields, including literature, that are either consistent with the utter collapse of the obstacles erected at the Renaissance between man and nature or – to take a somewhat less optimistic view – the quickening diminution and perhaps eventual eradication of these obstacles. How, then, can literary criticism confirm or assist the reintegration of humanity and nature and the rehabilitation of emotion? How can critics of Canadian poetry participate in undoing the erosion of people's sense of their integrity and interconnectedness with nature that began with the Renaissance?

The answer proposed here can be described as an ecological poetics – a poetics, that is, which elaborates on two key ecological assumptions – the assumption that man and nature are a “community of interdependent parts”⁷ and the assumption that “diversity” in the human and natural world must be safeguarded and fostered⁸ – to generate a method of reading which diminishes the gaps among people, their world, and their feelings while also emphasizing the uniqueness of all things, be they people or plants or poems, in face of the forces that would grind them down into a denatured uniformity. At the heart of the method of reading being proposed is an insistence on the mimetic and affective aspects of poetry, a resolve to examine the ways in which poems seek to recreate in the reader a sense of the world and the emotions that generated them, a conviction that many poems, especially when seen in the right light, act to bridge the gaps within and among things human and non-human that were opened by modernity. Of necessity, an ecological approach to Canadian poetry offers resistance to any and all forces that participate or cooperate in disprizing environments, people, and poems of their diversity by threatening to obliterate their unique, local, regional, and national characteristics. Of necessity – for what is at stake is nothing less than the survival of terrestrial life – an ecological poetics is opposed to any system, be it multinational capitalism, architectural postmodernism, or deconstruction, insofar as that system contributes to the homogenization of nature and its creations, be they physical or linguistic. Since its aims are preservative and restorative, an ecological poetics unites conservation and conservatism in a search for manifestations in Canadian poetry of the feelings of responsibility, respect, duty, and interdependence that constitute the core of any bonded community worth imagining, from the feudal society of Coleridge and his fellow Romantic Tories⁹ to the Gaian world of J. E. Lovelock and other contemporary ecologists.¹⁰ Aldo Leopold’s description of his “land ethic” as an enlargement of “the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land”¹¹ succinctly describes the step necessary to arrive at the Tory conservationism¹² in which lie the moral and political roots of the ecological approach to Canadian poetry being proposed here.

Because language is the medium of poetry whether written or spoken, the contributions of recent critical theorists and applied theorists cannot be ignored in the formulation and practice of an ecological poetics. On the contrary, the insights of deconstruction, for example, are useful to an approach that seeks, among other things, to destabilize false hierarchies and to resist abstracting and totalitarian systems (including deconstruction itself, in its high-flying generalizations and its insistence that all words always obey the same rules).¹³ Yet insofar as certain strains of critical theory have stressed the importance of language to the exclusion or near-exclusion of other matters, they have done literature a disservice by placing it in a realm remote from its physical, emotional, and moral contexts. Poems may be part of a verbal universe but not one that is independent of the physical world. The eye that reads, the voice that speaks, the ear that hears, the brain that perceives, comprehends, interprets, and remembers: all are physical, as, of course, are books, and pages, and print. For corrective purposes or in the interests of balance (another Tory-conservationist ideal), an ecological approach may emphasize the physical over the verbal aspects of poetry, but, ideally, its aim is to stress and examine their interdependence. In practice, this usually means approaching a poem with a view to discovering whether its formal and typographical configuration is fitting or suited to its subject. Has the form been chosen with care by the poet? Has it been adapted to the needs of the subject? Particularly when the subject is a human or natural one, positive answers to these questions can be indicative, not merely of the poet's competent matching of manner to matter, but also, in the first instance, of respect for the subject at hand and, in the second, of flexibility in negotiating a relationship between the artefacts of human civilization and their surroundings. A poet who simply impresses a given form on a subject is unlikely to be someone who – to quote Jeremy Swift's characterization of an "ecological conservati[ve]" – "respects and protects the biological needs of people, for stimulation, flexibility, diversity of life and surroundings, and is careful about altering community bonds or interfering with man's relationship to nature and to other men."¹⁴ Nor is he or she likely to foster the kind of hyphenation of

civilization-and-environment which, from an ecological perspective, is essential to the survival of both. Only when the “flexibility of the civilization ... match[es] that of the environment,” Gregory Bateson has said, will there be “a healthy ecology of human civilization.”¹⁵

To many people the moral dimension of an ecological approach to Canadian poetry will doubtless be distasteful. But it is essential for the practice of an ecological poetic that it be accompanied by a moral awareness born of sensitivity to the grave danger that post-Renaissance man has come to pose to himself and other living things. It is essential that we ask of any poem whether it shows contempt or respect for the natural and human world. It is essential that, with an awakened ecological sensibility, we ask what is appealing and admirable in a poem and what repulsive and despicable. It is essential that we look to aspects of poems that we are used to passing over in our search for the issues and themes which have been raised to prominence by the anthropocentric, intellectual, abstracting, and unnatural movement that began with the Renaissance and climaxed with high Modernism. It is essential that we ask spatial and sensual as well as intellectual and temporal questions about the poems that we read. Ideas and dates, metaphysics and literary periods, will remain important, but they must be accompanied by other matters bearing on the place of poems and people in the world. Where and on what kind of paper was this poem printed? Was it directed towards a personal, local, regional, national, or multinational audience (or none, several, or all of these)? What does it look like on the page or sound like in the ear? How effectively does it communicate a sense of place? How effectively does it communicate an emotion by generating in the reader or hearer a feeling analogous to the one that it purports to express? Does its speaker position him or herself above, below, or on a level with the external world? If above, does the poem convey a sense of respect or responsibility for what is looked over or, on the contrary, a sense of overlooking? If below, or even on a level, is the human devalued or scanted? Is respect for living things in evidence? Does the poem tend towards the abstract or attempt to ground itself in particularities?

And so – in the ecological direction indicated by this last question especially – to specifics and instances: to examples of the ecological poetic at work in the field of Canadian poetry.

1. “Indian Summer” by William Wilfred Campbell is surely one of the best-known, most-anthologized, and least-discussed Canadian poems. Written in the early 1880s and published by Campbell in various places – *Poems!* (c. 1881), the Toronto *Varsity* magazine (1881) and *Varsity Book* (1885), *Snowflakes and Sunbeams* (1888), *Lake Lyrics* (1889), and *Collected Poems* (1905)¹⁶ – all of them Canadian, “Indian Summer” is unequivocally a poem by a Canadian for Canadians. This helps to account for its matter-of-fact quality, its simple and direct¹⁷ presentation of a series of natural images and events – the call of “the blue jay,” “the sumachs on the hills,” “[w]ild birds flying south”¹⁸ – which Campbell clearly assumes will be familiar to his central and eastern Canadian audience.¹⁹ At the emotional core of the poem is the anticipation of seasonal change which, as much as seasonal change itself, characterizes life in a northern climate. Especially before and during the transitional seasons of spring and fall, Canadians are likely to feel the kinds of longings and regrets that bring to mind momentous thoughts of life and death, birth, regeneration, and, perhaps, even resurrection. In its two preliminary appearances in *Poems!* and *Varsity*, “Indian Summer” contained two stanzas that made elaborately and unnecessarily explicit the spiritual implications of its natural images and events:

And mists come up at golden dawn
From the still lake beneath,
And fold their tents upon the hills
Like the white camp of death.

Then steal away at even’s hour
Like hosts with banners furled,
When the great purple sun hath set
Along the murmur’ing world.

Without these stanzas, “Indian Summer” invites rather than tells the reader to “dwell upon ... nature as affecting the human” and unisistently communicates its “impressive sense of the majesty of life and death”:²⁰

Along the line of smoky hills
 The crimson forest stands,
And all the day the blue jay calls
 Throughout the autumn lands.

Now by the brook the maple leans
 With all his glory spread,
And all the sumachs on the hills
 Have turned their green to red.

Now by great marshes wrapt in mist,
 Or past some river’s mouth,
Throughout the long, still autumn day
 Wild birds are flying south.

In the *Sand County Almanac*, Leopold borrows from P. D. Ouspensky’s *Tertium Organum* the term “*numenon*”²¹ to describe moments like those depicted in “Indian Summer” when we sense the “imponderable essence ... of material things.” “Everyone knows,” he writes, “that the autumn landscape in the north woods is the land, plus a red maple, plus a ruffled grouse. In terms of conventional physics, the grouse represents only a millionth of either the mass or the energy of an acre. Yet subtract the grouse and the whole thing is dead.... The grouse is the *numenon* of the north woods, the blue jay of the hickory groves.”²² Leopold’s hermetic notion of the “*numenon*” refers, of course, to the spirit that he believes inheres in all living things and, thus, has limited value from an eco-poetical perspective. More useful to describe the three-stanza version of “Indian Summer” might be the term “vital moment,” defined as the record of an intense awareness of living things in which the urge to abstraction has been kept to a minimum. Such moments are far from rare in Canadian

poetry and prose, but they usually go unremarked and undiscussed for the very reason that, lacking abstract elements, they give little purchase to criticism in the modern mode. It is one aim of an ecological approach to spot vital moments and to exfoliate them, preferably less towards abstraction (or even Leopoldian hermeticism) than in close relation to the physical and emotional realm in which poems come into being.

In the opening line of “Indian Summer” – “Along the line of smoky hills” – the word “line” itself suggests an analogy between the words on the page and the contours of the landscape. Indeed, a few moments in the presence of the line will reveal that it replicates not only the horizontality of a distant “line of ... hills” in, say, Ontario, but also, in the rising and falling of its lilting metre and lower and upper case letters, something of the hills’ spatial rhythms and contours. With the second and third lines of the stanza, the words “crimson” and “blue” indicate the mimetic limitations of the black (or grey) and white format of traditional poetry and demand the mnemonic participation of the reader or listener in the process of recreating a sense of the “autumn lands.” Yet the phrase “all dáy the blúe jáy calls,” with its internal rhyme and irregular emphasis, unobtrusively mimics the cry of the bird whose name itself derives from its raucous cry of “jay, jay.” There is also more to the second and third stanzas of “Indian Summer” than may meet the careless eye and ear, for notice how the word “leans” hangs at the end of the first line of the second stanza to suggest the pendant aspect of the maple and listen to the mimetic qualities of the long vowels in the first line of the third stanza:

Now by the brook the maple leans
With all his glory spread. ...

Now by great marshes wrapt in mist,
Or past some river’s mouth,

Throughout the long, still autumn day
Wild birds are flying south.

Finally, observe the way in which the only caesura in the poem – the comma between “long” and “still” in the penultimate line – conveys a sense of the silence and motionlessness of the landscape being overflowed by the migratory birds.

A good deal more could be said about “Indian Summer,” particularly about its technical and formal properties. Certainly worth noticing is Campbell’s use of affective devices such as assonance and sibilance to guide the reader towards feelings of gentle melancholy and wistfulness. So also worth noticing is his use in the final version of the poem of the three-part structure that underlies much popular music – music which is popular because emotionally stimulating. But perhaps enough has been heard and seen to establish that Campbell’s short poem is an effective evocation of some of the sights, sounds, and moods of Indian Summer as they are observed and experienced in central and eastern Canada, a vital moment that succeeds well in putting its readers and listeners in touch with the natural world and their emotional life.

2. Despite the cosmopolitan and abstracting tendencies of high Modernism, the writers of the so-called McGill Movement and their successors did produce some poems and portions of poems that are ecological in their emphasis on the local and the particular. These range from A.J.M. Smith’s skilful recreation of the call of a “wild duck” in “The Lonely Land”²³ to Anne Marriott’s *The Wind Our Enemy*, a well-grounded treatment of rural Saskatchewan during the dust-bowl years of the 1930s. Let us look for a moment, however, at a poem that falls in length and complexity somewhere between these examples, A. M. Klein’s “The Cripples,” first published in Toronto in *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems* (1948). (That Klein published his work in Montreal, Philadelphia, and New York as well as Toronto is consistent with his negotiation in other areas of local, national, and transnational loyalties.) Subtitled “*Oratoire de St. Joseph*”²⁴ in reference to the huge Roman Catholic church of that name in Montreal, “The Cripples” is written in *terza rima*, a form that is ecologically fitting for two reasons: because it is reminiscent of Catholicism’s greatest poem, Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (as well as of the

Stabat Mater and *Dies Irae*) and because its architectural appearance and mounting rhymes (*aba, bcb, cdc*, and so on) reflect the purgatorial “mountain of stairs” by which the cripples ascend towards St. Joseph’s. In the opening line of the poem – “Bundled their bones, upon the ninety-nine stairs” – two remarkable mimetic effects are observable: the use of alliteration and long vowels to slow the pace of reading towards the slow and painful progress of the cripples, and the occurrence of the word “ninety-nine” which, besides alluding to the biblical story of the ninety-nine and the one (Luke 15:7–10), was intended by Klein to “simulate steps: n-i: n-e: n-i: n-e: treads and risers.”²⁵ So mimetic are many of the visual and aural features of “The Cripples” that it seems more than likely that the curved brackets that enclose its subtitle are a reflection of the “dome” of the “(*Oratoire de St. Joseph*),” which is described in the second stanza as “[t]he gourd of Brother André! His sweet days / rounded!”

As the cripples ascend the stairs of St. Joseph’s towards the promise of healing through faith in Brother André, the poet condescends to chronicle their movements and imagine their motivation. In doing so he indulges increasingly in a humour born of detachment, progressing from reductive wit – “the knobs of penance ... / the folded cripples” – through rollicking syllepsis – “They know, they know, that suddenly their cares / and orthopedics will fall from them” – to surrealistic *grotesquerie* – “*Roll empty away, wheelchairs, / and crutches, without armpits, hop away!*” But the tendency towards callous laughter is balanced in “The Cripples” by, among other things, a series of empathetic allusions to New Testament texts (Matthew 10:29, as well as Luke 15:7–10) which indicates Klein’s willingness to think himself outside the Jewish framework of his own ideas and into the mental landscape of his Christian subjects. Out of this willingness to understand the “hope” of “the lame, / the unsymmetrical, the dead-limbed,” to appreciate that “Yes, to their faith this mountain of stairs, is not!” comes the poem’s final, Hardyian lament: “And I who in my own faith once had faith like this, / but have not now, am crippled more than they.” It is a token of the poet’s movement from condescension to sympathy and self-knowledge that the one polysyllabic word in these lines – “crippled” – is applied by Klein to himself.

Although the focus of “The Cripples” is on shared humanity alone, its likening of the “palsied” to “aspen” trees and its allusion to Matthew 10:29, where Christ says that not “one [sparrow] ... shall fall on the ground without ... [the] Father,” are ecologically engaging because they extend sympathy outwards from the human beings in the poem to other living things. In so doing, they recall Glacken’s contention that blame for the idea of “man as a controller of nature” should not be laid simply on the shoulders of the Judeo-Christian tradition or, more specifically, on the notorious Genesis 1:28, where God tells Adam and Eve to “subdue” the “earth ... and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” Since the bulk of the poetry written in Canada to date has to some extent been shaped by Judeo-Christian assumptions, it is as well to remember that, according to this tradition, it was a love of the world, not simply man, that brought about the incarnation. Could this be why there are sheep and cattle as well as shepherds and wise men in the Christmas story? Tangential as it is to “The Cripples,” this question has the salutary effect of bringing to the foreground once again the religious and ethical dimensions that come with an ecological approach to poetry. Nor – to bring these dimensions to bear on the author of “The Cripples” – was Klein unsympathetic to the view that man shares with other living things a divine and unifying spirit. “Thou art everywhere,” he has a very hermetic Spinoza tell God in “Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens,” “a pillar to thy sanctuary is every blade of grass.... The flowers of the field, they are kith and kin to me.”²⁶ Provided always that it does not elide genuine differences of belief, an ecological approach to Canadian poetry can and must be as ecumenical as its subject requires.

3. In several ways, the work of Canada’s low modernists, particularly certain members of the *Tish* group such as George Bowering and Daphne Marlatt, comes close to being the kind of Canadian poetry that would be written out of a full ecological awareness. Following in the footsteps of the Black Mountain poets (most notably, Charles Olson) and their American precursors and successors, the *Tish* poets held in the 1960s

(do you see the shadow of charred stilts
on cool water? do you see enigmatic chance standing
just under the beam?³³)

Provided that the reader adds his or her own imaginative energy to the promptings provided by the poet, the answer to Marlatt's last two questions is yes: there do appear in the mind's eye images of the phenomena that we are invited to envisage. Assisting the reader in envisaging the stasis and movement described in the lines are the present participles ("running," "burning," "standing") that are repeatedly placed in terminal positions. Like the use in the passage of brackets that are opened but not closed, these kinetic and centrifugal participles are consistent with the low-modern view of reality as an ongoing, open-ended, and unpredictable happening – hence the "enigmatic" figure of "chance standing / just under a beam," beneath a structure which, in falling, will reveal the vanity of human aspirations to order.

As perhaps already gathered, a key word for the low modernists and their successors is "open," and for quite obvious reasons. If reality is a free-flowing process (as Alfred North Whitehead seminally suggested in *Process and Reality* and as the Fraser River in *Steveston* continually insists), then writers who would be true to nature, be it internal or external, must be the open-minded conduits of open-ended poems. Temperamentally and philosophically hostile to enclosures, especially those originating in European culture, the *Tish* writers have been consistent to a fault in their attempts to subvert conventional patterns in life and art, frequently forgetting to remember that conventions and patterns are as much an aspect of natural and human life as are chance and process (an error that has become increasingly apparent in the last few years with the disclosure by scientists such as Benoit Mandelbrot that even so-called "chaos" is "stable" and "structured" as well as "ubiquitous").³⁴ Moreover, the energetic, liberating, and ecologically attractive amalgam of projectivism and phenomenology among Canadian low modernists in the 'sixties and 'seventies was to decompose in two directions that have moved writing in Canada away from the ecological ideals of interdependence

and diversity. The first of these is towards a concentration on the experiencing mind that has led many writers into a self-centredness that is, by turns, banal, solipsistic, and aesthetic – disconcertingly oblivious to large moral, social, and political issues in its heavy emphasis on the subjective and personal. The second is towards a concentration on language as an isolated and uniform system that is not continuous with life but, as some literary theorists would have it, constitutive of a reality that has no meaningful existence outside of words and texts. To accept that the world does not exist and therefore cannot be changed except in our perceptions is to accede to fatalism. To think of language as a system that dictates individual utterances is to deny responsibility for one's own words. To rest in the open, the relative, the ambiguous, the indeterminate, the game-like is, like the archetypal liberal of F. R. Scott's "W.L.M.K.," to refuse to take a firm position, to deny the presence of real conflicts, to cheat the reader of authentic options, and, thus, to threaten the purposeful existence of a great many Canadians and their culture. It goes without saying that multinational consumer capitalism has everything to gain from such undecidedness, and the distinct social and physical environments of this country a very great deal to lose. That writers associated with and influenced by the *Tish* group are among the poets and critics who are becoming aware of the ideological implications of critical theory and postmodernism will surprise no one who has perceived the ecological thrust of much of the original *Tish* work. Nor is it surprising that such poets as Don McKay, Andrew Suknaski, Anne Szumigalski, and Brian Dedora, whose roots lie in the same Black Mountain soil as *Tish*, are responsible for some of the most ecologically sound poetry being written in Canada today.

4. *the year in pictures* by Barbara Carey was published in 1989 by the Quarry Press in Kingston, Ontario. Modestly and attractively printed and bound by Hignell Printing of Winnipeg, it is a fine example of the kind of poetry that we need if we are to see a diminution and disappearance of the effects of modernity in Canada. Intensely engaged with the world in which we live (the title refers to those annual gatherings of

significant photographs in *Time* and *Life* magazines and elsewhere), it is also extremely engaging emotionally and thoroughly down-to-earth – indeed, ecological – in its refusal of the abstractions and simplifications of multinational consumer culture. “The year in pictures,” begins the title poem,

is usually big on war, disasters
political tricks & men
kissing trophies, many sizes
& shapes, some
women too
but no potatoes ...³⁵

As even these few lines indicate, *the year in pictures* is aligned with the Greenham Women’s Peace Movement in its opposition to militarism, masculine priorities, and the oppression of women from a position grounded in ecological and feminist awareness.³⁶ In the body of the title-poem Carey wittily uses a commodity that is at once artificial and suggestively male – “golf balls” – as an emblem of a patriarchal order which, as seen in the poem’s conclusion, devalues individual human lives and denatures earth’s living things:

sometimes my life feels
like what got left out
of the year in pictures

sometimes it’s like potatoes
scrubbed bald & glossy
as golf balls, so consumers
in Ontario aren’t reminded
that potatoes come from the ground

sometimes I feel like kissing
potatoes, for their calm & solid
taste of hugging earth,

for their plainness
of shovels & boots
& dishes & other things
no one takes pictures of

As witness the unobtrusive but evident complexity of the phrase “bald & glossy,” Carey’s poetry is both highly intelligent and – unlike much postmodern writing – very friendly to the ordinary reader. Since the audience that it seeks – “consumers / in Ontario” (and elsewhere) – includes everyone here (there), it is down-to-earth in manner as well as matter. Repetitive, colloquial, and emotional in a way that recalls popular songs and ballads, it also, and of necessity (for this again is its theme and message) uses everyday images – “potatoes,” “shovels & boots / & dishes & other things” – to celebrate the mundane world in which nature and mankind have their unglamorous but interdependent existence.

Put quite simply (as we have just seen that it is), the argument directed by Carey towards the readers of *the year in pictures* is that there are ways to resist and dismantle the world view which has since the Renaissance led increasingly to the domination and homogenization of nature, be it human or non-human. The choice is between “golf balls” and “potatoes,” between playing power games with artificial toys and taking good care of earthly life, between the imposed uniformities of a system that attempts to place itself above nature and the irregular shapes of the particular, the local, the female, the natural. “[W]hy should power / mean looking down” concludes “why it takes that shape,” a meditation on the forms of power that advances various alternatives to the aggressively masculine “shape ... / & trajectory” of “rockets.” These include “the corkscrew / twist of how life’s / coiled into the cells,” “the / intimation of heart / in an artichoke’s outer leaves,” and various objects in the everyday world especially (but not exclusively) of women, such as an “apron” or “a wooden / spoon”:

why not something
comfortable in the hand

as an apple or a doorknob,
as sturdy to the foot
as a floor...³⁷

The man-made structures in these lines are acceptable from Carey's ecofeminist perspective because they have equivalents and parallels in the natural world and thus suggest the harmony that can and must exist between nature and humanity. A similar point is made more explicitly and joyfully in "breasts are so beautiful," which makes good use of *enjambement* reinforced by initiative and terminal verbs to mimic the shapes and movements being described:

breasts are so beautiful
it's no wonder
the wheel was invented
to honour their roundness,
rolling history forward;
& sundials were made
circular, to hold time
& light together, the way
breasts do the unpredictable
physics of need and desire...³⁸

Of course, an "unpredictable / physics" was not the physics dreamed by post-Renaissance science, and breasts in themselves accord not at all with the value placed on technology, power, and the transcendence of nature by modern man; indeed, it is because of "their absence of technique, / because they aren't muscle, / because they change / in cycles like the seasons ..." that breasts are an epitome of the moral-aesthetic of ecofeminism and a reminder, too, that in its unpredictable and diverse forms terrestrial life preceded the modern era and has partly survived its onslaughts. "[T]hey have been with us / from the beginning," the poem concludes, and "we are beginning / to realize / how much of the world / that isn't flat / there is."

A recognition of the integrity and interdependence of all life forms leads Carey in several poems in *the year in pictures* to regret and question the separation of mind from body and words from things which began to be taken for granted at the Renaissance and thereafter became a rarely examined assumption of modernity. The opening and concluding lines of “if the brain were closer,” for example, describe the barriers to communication and understanding that might fall with the abolition or narrowing of the gaps assumed by rational dualism:

if this sentence had a throat
like a bird's
you could touch it, feel
warm life near
the surface, so almost-
exposed & close to being
opened, lost

* * *

if the brain were closer
to the surface of the body
would it be less confused
would words

mean closer to some
real shape we could be
less afraid of seeing
opened, lost³⁹

“[A]lmost-/ exposed ... words // mean closer”: the aural and visible gaps in these phrases indicate the impossibility of fully overcoming the barriers to intersubjectivity that exist in the nature of things. But they also replicate these same gaps, and, with the hint of direct communication sounded by “you could touch it” and the touch of wistful emotion conveyed by the repeated “opened, lost,” suggest that poems can at least di-

minish barriers and bring people and things towards each other, and in ways that respect the integrity and rights of each. “[R]emember the divisions / are thin, there are / other lives below” writes Carey in “universal time” and her advice holds good for any ecological approach, including the one suggested here to Canadian poetry.

What has been urged here is not a new way of theorizing poems away into abstraction. It is not one more mill for grinding Canadian poetry and Canadian trees into the pulp upon which essays and articles are written and printed. It is instead a personal and “sub-theoretical”⁴⁰ attempt to reintegrate literature, criticism, and the world by examining a few poems in their environments and from a perspective born of ecological awareness. It is a record of what can happen when we take more account in our reading than is currently fashionable in Canada of such matters as the origin of the book to hand, the shape of a poem on the page, the effect of its words on our emotions, the feel of its syllables on our tongues and in our ears. Where generalizations have been offered, they have been directed either towards locating poems in the natural scheme of things or towards identifying some broad principles that might assist us in engaging specific poems by individual authors in particular places. When ungrateful words have been written about the systems that militate against what Michael Baxandall calls the “peculiarities of particulars,”⁴¹ this has been done in the conviction that, as we near the close of the so-called modern century, it is critically important to think in terms of the ecologically bad and the ecologically good. For life’s sake, we must try to be past-modern.

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NOTES

- 1 From *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 26 (spring–summer 1990): v–xix. The chapter's point of departure is my "A New Dimension: Notes on the Ecology of Canadian Poetry," which was published the fall–winter 1980 number of *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* and elaborated in several articles in *Contemporary Verse II* and *Studies in Canadian Literature* in 1981–83, as well as in several pieces on individual writers in *Open Letter, Essays on Canadian Writing*, and elsewhere in the same and subsequent years.
- 2 Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 494. See also Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1972), and Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper, 1980), *passim*, and Jeremy Swift, *The Other Eden: A New Approach to Man, Nature and Society* (London: Dent, 1974), 16: "the Genesis notion of man above and against nature was first formulated into a philosophy of science and progress in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."
- 3 John Rodman, "Animal Justice: The Counter-Revolution in Natural Right and Law," *Inquiry* 22, no. 1–2 (summer 1979): 9. See also Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
- 4 Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 17–18.
- 5 See William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (Garden

- City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1958), 20ff.
- 6 Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 168.
 - 7 Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (1949; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 203.
 - 8 See Swift, *The Other Eden*, 138.
 - 9 See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State* (London: Chance, 1830), 124, for the Romantic-Tory definition of the ideal "State" as one in which "the integral parts, classes, or orders are so balanced, or interdependent, as to constitute, more or less, a moral unit, an organic whole." Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* (1843) is another case in point, as is Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912); see Gerald Lynch, *Stephen Leacock: Humour and Humanity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988).
 - 10 See J. E. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
 - 11 Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, 204. "A land ethic," Leopold continues, "changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such."
 - 12 Tory as opposed to neo-conservative. See F. Fraser Darling, "Man's Responsibility for the Environment," in *Biology and Ethics*, ed. F. J. Ebling, Symposia of the Institute of Biology, No. 18 (London: Academic Press, 1969), 117–122, for a discussion of man's role as a biological "aristocrat" with the privileges and responsibilities that accompany his position of "dominion over the creatures, the plant cover, and the very landscape of his planet."
 - 13 See Wendell V. Harris, "Towards an Ecological Criticism: Contextual versus Unconditional Literary Theory," *College English* 48 (Feb. 1986): 117, for deconstruction as an "ultimately absolutist" and "totalizing" approach and David Solway, "The Pursuit of Absence, or Culling and Dereading," *Antigonish Review* 77–78 (spring–summer 1989): 57–67, for "Structuralism Inc. or Deconstruction Fiduciaire" as "global" or "multi-national" movements towards "sameness."
 - 14 Swift, *The Other Eden*, 153–54.
 - 15 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), 494.
 - 16 See William Wilfred Campbell, *William Wilfred Campbell: Selected Poetry and Essays*, ed. Laurel Boone (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987), 208.
 - 17 See Campbell, *Selected Poetry and Essays*, 179, for his attribution of "simplicity and directness," as well as "naturalness," to the greatest writers. The echoes of Wordsworth in Campbell's poems and critical writings align his practice with the determination of the early Romantics to use the common language of men as a corrective to neo-classicism, which was the multinational language of the day.
 - 18 Ibid., 20–21. All quotations of "Indian Summer" are from Boone's edition, as is the quotation of the three cancelled stanzas (179).
 - 19 See Harris, "Towards an Ecological Criticism," 123, and Marilyn M. Cooper, "The Ecology of Writing," *College English* 48 (April 1986): 364–75, on shared knowledge and specific audience as aspects of communication. Also pertinent here are several essays in Donald Davidson's *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon,

- 1984) which argue for a “social theory of interpretation” based on a “Principle of Charity” in regard to the beliefs and consistency of others.
- 20 Campbell, *Selected Poetry and Essays*, 180. These quotations are from Campbell’s “Introduction” to his *Collected Poems* (1905).
- 21 See Nash, *Rights of Nature*, 65–68.
- 22 Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, 137–38.
- 23 A.J.M. Smith, *Poems New and Collected* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), 50: “the ragged / and passionate tones / stagger and fall, / and recover, / and stagger and fall....”
- 24 This and subsequent quotations from “The Cripples” are taken from the text in *The Collected Poems of A. M. Klein*, comp. Miriam Waddington (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974), 298–99.
- 25 Letter of 6 Mar. 1948 to Frank Flemington, kindly supplied to me by Zailig Pollock.
- 26 Klein, *Collected Poems*, 132.
- 27 See Olson’s seminal essays, “Projective Verse” and “Proprioception,” in, respectively, *Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966) and *Additional Prose*, ed. George F. Butterick (Bollinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1974).
- 28 George Bowering, “The Most Remarkable Thing about Tish,” *Tish* 20 (Aug. 1963): 2. Bowering is differentiating the *Tish* poets from “young romantics,” who rely on “some intensity of feeling” in the hope of “inundat[ing] the reader with expressions of their own superhuman soul....”
- 29 John Robert Colombo, *Rhymes and Reasons: Nine Canadian Poets Discuss Their Work* (Toronto: Holt, 1971), 10–11.
- 30 See “Ghost, ...” in Marlatt’s *Steveston* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974), 83–84.
- 31 “Or there is love,” in Marlatt, *Steveston*, 86.
- 32 In *At the Mermaid Inn: Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott in the Globe 1892–93*, ed. Barrie Davies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 335. “Anyone who loves the earth and the things that grow and move upon it will love these two or three sonnet-landscapes, and feel them in some sort as he would feel the originals,” continues Lampman about works by J. F. Herbin.
- 33 Marlatt, *Steveston*, 43.
- 34 James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 76.
- 35 This and the subsequent quotation from “the year in pictures” are taken from Barbara Carey, *the year in pictures* (Kingston: Quarry, 1989), 9–10.
- 36 See Alice Cook and Gwyn Kirk, *Greenham Women Everywhere: Dreams, Ideas and Actions from the Women’s Peace Movement* (London: Pluto Press, 1983) and *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. Judith Plant (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1989).
- 37 Carey, *year in pictures*, 29.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 48
- 39 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 40 Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 14.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 13.

CHAPTER 7

So Big about Green (1991)

Laurie Ricou¹

The current clamour to be “green,” as with most mass trends, mixes (and blurs the line between) ethical commitment and cynical exploitation. Almost every disposable container that we guiltily, or carelessly, buy boasts a symbol indicating it is recyclable (i.e., *somewhere*, it *might* be if the facilities to do so were available). Your neighbours are concerned. We are all using our blue boxes. Even a national trust company has somehow found a way to “green” its *accounts*.

Given the hype, something called ecocriticism should prompt as much skepticism as fervour. Literary critics and teachers of literature are rushing to green their accounts. Well, *rushing* is surely an exaggeration. It’s a here-and-there, almost underground phenomenon: in the big picture, the ecocritics thrum like some scattered little grey birds among a flock of cranes beating their way into motion. But I have recently noticed a new poet introduced first as an eco-activist; some sense of spreading interest also appears in *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* (since 1989). And when the giant canonizer takes notice, with the 921 pages of the *Norton Book of Nature Writing* (1990), then surely something has changed. The Norton anthology includes one Canadian writer – Farley

Mowat. Nothing surprising there. Yet readers of this journal [*Canadian Literature*] will know that nature has loomed large in the Canadian consciousness. Canadian critics have been loud (if they are ever loud about anything) on landscape (whether to emphasize its literary prominence or to lament its obsessiveness as theme). But in the apparently closely related matter of environmentalism, critics on Canadian literature lag behind, despite the odd blip, such as Aritha van Herk's *Places Far from Ellesmere* (1990). Perhaps Canadians are naturally wary of another U.S. academic fashion. Perhaps Canadians' writing of the land as adversary inhibits ecocriticism.

I thought of these things while looking at the latest New Canadian Library reissue of Fred Bodsworth's *Last of the Curlews* (1955), which according to Graeme Gibson's Afterword "ha[s] sold more than three million copies in fourteen languages."² Bodsworth's book – we might now call it an eco-novel – has elicited virtually no response in the critical community. As W. J. Keith notes in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, the novel has been of more interest to readers than to critics.³ Yet as one important point in Gibson's tribute indicates, Canadian literature provides fertile ground for ecocriticism: "those who worry about anthropomorphism have got it arsy-versy: perhaps it is because we are animals ourselves that we recognize and partake of the curlew's biological faith and longing."⁴ Another version of a nascent Canadian ecocriticism appears in the enthusiastic essays of Don Gayton's *The Wheatgrass Mechanism: Science and Imagination in the Western Canadian Landscape* (1990). Gayton, like many nature writers, looks for the world in a grain of sand. To discover the mathematics of the prairie you have to look up close, through a microscope at "the stuff of vegetable life, swirl[ing] in a slow, clockwise motion" in a single "intact phloem stand."⁵ Yes, and the writer and critic need to learn, and teach, words like "phloem" (which is not in the "standard" dictionary in the *Canadian Literature* office).

We grew up, most of us, still learning what William Kittredge calls the pastoral story of agricultural ownership [see *Owning It All*, 1987]. It instructed us as to what was valuable and how to conduct ourselves. Ecocriticism has a lot to do with this myth and its replacement. To

own the land and its creatures *absolutely* will not do, and we look now to a myth that explains a different connection, not of possession but of communication, certainly, and respect. Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1974) seems best to mark the beginning of the contemporary literary/critical version of this process. And as with much else in contemporary criticism, feminism is shaping (in the work of Annette Kolodny and Susan Griffin, for example) some of the most promising approaches in the field.

Ecofeminism resists the inherent sentimentalism of environmental trendiness by recognizing political implications and relevant power structures. Russel Barsh takes the relationship of nationalism, regionalism, and environmentalism in a different direction by trenchantly defining "environmental racism." Ecocriticism in this form takes responsibility for examining the connection between indigenous peoples and Eurocentric environmental movements. Barsh, for example, bluntly describes the conflict between Quebec Hydro and the Cree:

Quebec's conservative leadership depicts the Crees and other northern indigenous peoples, who form the majority in the mineral-rich northern half of the province, as standing in the way of Québécois aspirations for independence from Canada. Indeed there is little realistic hope for an independent Quebec unless the natural resources can be exploited.

Québécois nationalists have a choice between sharing power with indigenous people – the foundation of a future bi-national state like New Zealand – or simply taking what they want because they are white. Bourassa's show of military force against the Mohawk village of Kanesatake last August provides the answer, and is a deliberate warning to all indigenous people in Quebec who might suppose that their aspirations are as important as those of Franco-Canadians. The issue at Kanesatake was not over a few acres of land slated for development as a golf course, but over making indigenous

people pay, ecologically and economically, to realize other people's dreams.

The point here is that, today as in the heyday of classic colonialism, environmental racism is associated with the more virulent forms of national and racial chauvinism.⁶

The very coinage "ecocriticism" implies politics, but not always the overt politics of literature in the service of environmental activism. A new anthology, *Sisters of the Earth: Women's Prose and Poetry about Nature* (1991, edited by Lorraine Anderson), might suggest that the exclamation mark, and its echo in overstated language, is often a marker of nature writing: "the land, for me, is a wellspring of delight..." Not to dismiss, but to analyze this feature is part of the project of ecocriticism. One version of such analysis, albeit in a more conventional form and style than Gayton's, is Frederic S. Colwell's *Rivermen: A Romantic Iconography of the River and the Source* (1989), which, although it restricts itself to capital-R Romantic writers, provides a crucial history of ideas for one of the central metaphors of nature writing. Less conventionally, Erika Smilowitz's recent article on botanical metaphor in Caribbean literature demonstrates the contrasting political connotations of "plants grown for the profit of others" and plants "grown for one's own consumption."⁷ So, sugar cane in Caribbean literature invariably invokes slavery and exploitation – a bitterness about sweetness – whereas bananas, plantains, and root vegetables carry positive associations with farmer and the fertility of the land. Smilowitz notes the gendered resonances of such imagery and the ecocritical dimension of two words used to refer to the same plant – "cypress" to the outsider is "casuarina" to the West Indian.

These examples suggest some directions in which Canadian writers, Canadian critics, and students of Canadian literature might take environmental criticism. Other questions we might try to grapple with: What is the Canadian history of ecological change as documented in imaginative literature? The process has begun with Ramsay Cook's article, "Cabbages Not Kings: Towards an Ecological Interpretation of Early Canadian History."⁸ More fundamentally, how new is the approach

labelled by the new term “ecocriticism”? How and where does it connect to concepts of “wilderness” and “native,” to the intellectual history and pre-history of the northern half of North America? Can the infinite deferrals of a poststructuralist view of language engage the infinite interdependencies of an ecological system? Or is a philosophy of language as a referential system essential to ecocriticism? What are the ecological visions in F. P. Grove’s *Over Prairie Trails*? in Ringuet’s *Trentes Arpents*? in Charles G. D. Roberts’s poems? in Victor-Lévy Beaulieu’s *Monsieur Melville*? Is writing about work, which often touches so close to the land, inevitably at odds with environmentally responsible writing? Is environmentally responsible writing, or criticism, something to be wished for?

The challenge for ecocriticism, as for all criticism, is to relate form to language. It’s not sufficient to write *about* the environment, or to write about *writing* about the environment – although both these obligations are part of what describes ecocriticism. And it’s not sufficient to go on a search to say there’s another spotted owl in so-and-so’s poem, or novel. Nor is it satisfactory to avoid connections by retreating into the metaphor that language is its own ecology. What aspiring ecocritics clearly must do, at the very least, is to learn the language, the other languages, of science. A poetics of ecocriticism demands a “scientific” understanding of the subject.

Environmentally oriented critics need to study, at an advanced level, geography, biology, genetics, and anthropology in order to do *literary* scholarship. They have to find a way to do so that can be responsibly tied to departments of literature, to their undisciplining perhaps. Ecocritics have to learn several new languages, to learn species and subspecies, to learn the languages of other cultures (especially indigenous cultures), with their alternate taxonomies, and to learn the stories within the stories of each word. They will have to learn the word “phloem.” As Don Gayton enthuses: “what language! *Geological loading. Feedback inhibition. Gravitrophic movements. Fire disclimax. Edge effects.* What Great Basins of new metaphor, what ranges for personal exploration!”⁹

Perhaps both Gayton and I are caught in the green hype. Henry David Thoreau, whom, it seems, every writer on the environment must

cite, offers in his journals this wise caution about such ambition: “For our aspirations there is no expression as yet, but if we obey steadily, by another year we shall have learned the language of last year’s aspirations.”¹⁰

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NOTES

- 1 From *Canadian Literature* 130 (autumn 1991): 3–6.
- 2 Graeme Gibson, Afterword to *Last of the Curlews*, by Fred Bodsworth (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), 131.
- 3 W. J. Keith, “Fred Bodsworth,” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 68: Canadian Writers, 1920–1959, First Series*, ed. W. H. New (Detroit: Gale, 1988), 22–26.
- 4 Gibson, Afterword, 131.
- 5 Don Gayton, *The Wheatgrass Mechanism: Science and Imagination in the Western Canadian Landscape*, 2nd ed. (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1992), 30.
- 6 Russel Barsh, “Indigenous Peoples, Racism and the Environment,” in *Violence and Its Alternatives: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, ed. Manfred B. Stegner and Nancy S. Lind (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 192.
- 7 Erika J. Smilowitz, “Fruits of the Soil: Botanical Metaphors in Caribbean

- Literature," *World Literature Written in English* 30, no. 1 (spring 1990): 31.
- 8 Ramsay Cook, "Cabbages Not Kings: Towards an Ecological Interpretation of Early Canadian History," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 25, no. 4 (1990–91): 5–16.
- 9 Gayton, *Wheatgrass Mechanism*, 312.
- 10 Henry David Thoreau, *Winter: From the Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. H.G.O. Blake (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1887), 310.

CHAPTER 8

So Unwise about Green (1996)

Laurie Ricou¹

Recognition that we do not in fact create the wilderness, but that it makes and remakes itself, is the first step toward learning to read nature's text as something other than fiction.
– *Alison Byerly*

In learning to read land, one can't just name objects but [must] point to what they do: pines live in sandy soil, oaks in clay, and thus their rates of water absorption differ. – *William Howarth*

Nature, as revealed by evolutionary biology, paleobiology, and geology, is violent, unbalanced, improvisatory, dynamic.
– *Frederick Turner*

A thought may have no weight and take up no space, but it exists as part of a stream of consciousness that is made possible by food, air, and water. – *Harold Fromm²*

In sketching the eclectic history of ecology, William Howarth discovers “what amounts to a vernacular and democratic science.”³ That such science, undisciplined in its promiscuous receptivity to varied fields and methodologies, has “earn[ed] the hostility of classical science” should make ecology especially interesting to students of literature, themselves as a group (I include myself) in turn ignorant of, if not hostile to, classical science.⁴ Ecology might just be the science most open to literary scholars.

Indeed, the collection in which I read Howarth’s “Some Principles of Ecocriticism” amounts to a sustained argument that students of literature must be governed by Barry Commoner’s first Law of Ecology: “Everything is connected to everything else.”⁵ *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, is the first anthology to attempt to assemble the defining documents of this emergent sub-field.⁶ For these editors, those documents are almost exclusively U.S. American, both in origin and focus – a profound irony given the a-national movements of wind, water, and even eagles. But in proposing a second volume, they acknowledge this paradox. And, certainly, this *Reader* can and should be a great stimulus to students of Canadian literature, whose project, as I noted in a related editorial in *Canadian Literature*, has so often featured land, landscape, climate, wilderness, animals, and region.⁷

Glotfelty and Fromm collect twenty-five essays, organized in sections devoted to theory, criticism of fiction and drama, and studies of environmental literature, in which these terms and concepts constantly circulate and revise one another (although “region” is not listed in the generally helpful index). An annotated list of recommended reading and of relevant journals and organizations is appended. Glotfelty’s own Introduction develops “the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it.”⁸ “Simply put,” she writes, “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.”⁹ The deliberate naïveté of this definition enables (as does the recklessness of ecology itself) a challenging undefining of what literary scholars do.

The name of this *re-placing* is implied by the epigraphs to this review, all selected from essays in *The Ecocriticism Reader*. They propose a program for becoming un-wise, a notion most entertainingly presented in this astonishing tidbit from Frederick Turner's "Cultivating the American Garden":

... consider the courtship ritual of the blue satin bowerbird, which, convinced that its own color is the most beautiful in the world, builds the bluest nest it can to attract its mate, painting it with chewed-up blueberries and decorating it with blue flowers, bits of blue paper, and its own feathers; a nest which, since it is on the ground and vulnerable to predators, is never used by the lucky bride. (She later builds a sensible little nest in a tree.) This charming un wisdom is more attractive, perhaps, than wisdom. Wisdom sits still and doesn't make a fool of itself. Nature sends in the clowns.¹⁰

A little study, Turner notes, will unsettle any assumption that nature is inherently wise, at least, by any analogy to *human* wisdom. The mime of the clowns (they are likely to be mute) enacts ecocriticism's greatest challenge to be unwise, to abandon (somehow, however paradoxically) our anthropocentric view, so beloved, especially perhaps, of humanists and social scientists, for a biocentric view in which all organisms have equal status. This approach would have us getting our literature classes outside of buildings to taste the needles of the jack pine, and finding out more about [Charles G. D.] Roberts's animals than we can pick up from a dictionary or encyclopedia, and reaching, in some impossibly implausible yet necessary way, to learn the *language* of animals.

And, conversely, being un-wise also means attending to a different principle than utility. Even as we try to find the way out of an anthropocentric approach, we, in the "humanities," find ourselves essential to this awkwardly sprawling muddle of ecology. In this collection, this proposition finds its best expression in Canadian Neil Evernden's "Beyond Ecology":

The subversive nature of Ecology rests on its assumption of literal interrelatedness, not just interdependence. Ecology as a discipline has been called upon to ignore the former and deal with the latter, on the assumption that the patterns of dependence can be shifted, whereas relatedness cannot. It seems to me that an involvement by the arts is vitally needed to emphasize that relatedness, and the intimate and vital involvement of self with place. Ultimately, preservation of the non-human is a very personal crusade, a rejection of the homogenization of the world that threatens to diminish all, including the self. There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place.¹¹

To become less linear, to open the creative irrational un-mind which will discover relatedness, Evernden celebrates the possibilities of the un-modish (for science) concepts of metaphor and pathetic fallacy. Through them, he urges, we can imagine the world – even as we distrust our social constructs – from a non-human perspective. In elaborating and demonstrating the connectedness of Howarth and Evernden, the essays in *The Ecocriticism Reader* provide a compact, provocative program for a genuinely reciprocal study of literature – environment.

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NOTES

- 1 From *Canadian Literature* 150 (autumn 1996): 4–6.
- 2 Alison Byerly, "The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System," 64; William Howarth, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism," 80; Frederick Turner, "Cultivating the American Garden," 43; Harold Fromm, "From Transcendence to Obsolescence: A Route Map," 38. All selections appear in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996).
- 3 Howarth, "Some Principles," 73.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Qtd. in Cheryll Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xix.
- 6 Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996).
- 7 The "related editorial" was in issue 130 of *Canadian Literature*; it appears as Chapter 7 of the present volume. (Ed.)
- 8 Glotfelty, "Introduction," xix.
- 9 Ibid., xviii.
- 10 Turner, "Cultivating the American Garden," 45.
- 11 Neil Evernden, "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 102–3.

CHAPTER 9

Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological (1993)

*Linda Hutcheon*¹

The 1990s have brought with them more than a global recession: we cannot turn on our televisions or radios or read our newspapers without being made aware of the consequences of the end of the Cold War and the strangely simultaneous disintegration and reintegration of what was once called the “Old World.” We cannot help noticing that we are living on a planet where ethnic conflict, ecological disaster, and economic and social inequality are more the rule than the exception.

WELCOME TO POSTMODERNITY.

But perhaps we should try to keep some perspective: it is not as if modernity had not offered us a few devastating world wars and, in fact, engineered, over two centuries, our present fiscal and physical situation. As postmodern sociologist Zygmunt Bauman puts it,

The kind of society that, retrospectively, came to be called modern, emerged out of the discovery that human order is vulnerable, contingent and devoid of reliable foundations. That discovery was shocking. The response to the shock was a dream and an effort to make order solid, obligatory and reliably founded. This response problematized contingency as an enemy and order as a task. It devalued and demonized the “raw” human condition. It prompted an incessant drive to eliminate the haphazard and annihilate the spontaneous.²

So, modernity gave us Cartesian rationality and Enlightenment ideals of liberty, but it also engendered things such as the Industrial Revolution and European imperialism.

The consequences of these last two attempts to “eliminate the haphazard” are what we live with today, each in our own way. “Postmodernity” – the shorthand term for the latest major shift in paradigm (or condition or episteme – whatever term we choose to use) – can be seen as a response to modernity’s rage for order and its consequences. Of course, from the perspective of modernity’s faith in system and reason, in universal truth, beauty, and goodness, the postmodern is a scandalous (and literally unthinkable) response because it challenges precisely those modern foundational discourses in the name of contingency, provisionality, and the “situatedness” of both knowledge and morality. It is also a potentially liberating response, though never an easy one. In Bauman’s terms, the “ethical paradox of the postmodern condition is that it restores to agents the fullness of moral choice and responsibility while simultaneously depriving them of the comfort of the universal guidance that modern self-confidence once promised.”³

Rejecting such illusory comfort, women and blacks were among the first whom I recall in my lifetime to challenge modernity’s claims of emancipatory universality. The drive to political agency that characterized the civil-rights and women’s movements in North America may indeed have taught *me*, at least, more about postmodernity than all

the books by philosophers and sociologists. It also made possible other challenges, two of which have come to prominence in the early 1990s, though their roots are much older. That we have labels for these oppositional stances is, in fact, the sign of an already rich discourse around them: the labels are “postcolonial” and “ecological.” In 1992, as much of Europe unselfconsciously celebrated its “discovery” of what it called the “New World,” North and South Americans – even those, like me, of recent and direct European ancestry – felt uneasy: the Native peoples and the natural resources of the Americas still bear witness to the less noble and ideal aspects of modernity’s rational and rationalizing order.

This unease is something that Canadians share with those living in the rest of the Americas: Native demands for self-government and land rights have been an important part of our recent constitutional deliberations, and the fate of Canada’s forests and water, oil reserves and fisheries, has been transmuted from an economic to a moral issue in national debates. Historically, Canada has been – has had to be – sensitive to issues of difference and exploitation: it defined itself as a nation (a bilingual and bicultural one) in 1867, but it continued to be a colony of Britain until, some would say, it graduated to being a colony of the United States. Today, with the repatriation of the constitution, the “imagined community”⁴ that some of us call Canada is more likely to think of itself in postcolonial than colonial terms, though the continuing economic and cultural hegemony of the U.S.A. over the continent cannot be ignored.

Today the postcolonial and the ecological perspectives come together in their common challenge to what I have been referring to here, in a kind of gross historical shorthand, as “modernity.” In order to move my focus from these general philosophical, economic, and political contexts to the cultural and, specifically, the literary, and to study the complexities of interconnection, I will turn to the writings about Canada by the man who has been characterized, on the one hand, as having brilliantly defined the Canadian imagination for this century,⁵ and on the other, in terms of his reactionary attitudes, elitism, and “colonial-mindedness.”⁶ Adulated and despised in such extreme terms is Northrop Frye, the teacher and critic who gave us archetypal criticism and its “voraciously

totalizing poetics.”⁷ Canadians are fond of reminding the rest of the world that Frye was born and, despite many a lure, worked his entire professional life in Canada. From the 1950s onward, he was also a timely and influential commentator on the fledgling, self-consciously independent culture of our country. He admitted that his writing career had been “mainly concerned with world literature” and had addressed an “international reading public”; yet he asserted that it had “always been rooted in Canada” and had “drawn its essential characteristics from there.”⁸ There is, I would argue, a defining tension in Frye’s work between, on one side, a modernist theory of the autonomy of art combined with a humanist belief in the universality of the mythic patterns that he discerned and, on the other side, an unwillingness to ignore the specific geographical, historical, and social context of the writing and reading of literature. As he put it, “Poets do not live on Mount Parnassus, but in their own environments ...”; so, too, do readers.⁹

The tension between these seeming opposites is, I think, most evident in Frye’s writings about Canadian literature and culture. While these are largely occasional pieces (reviews, introductions to books, lectures), the two well-known conclusions that he wrote to the first two editions (1965 and 1976) of the *Literary History of Canada* have had a great impact on how Canadians think about their culture. Here the tensions between autonomy and context, reflexivity and worldliness, play themselves out against a background of the two contemporary concerns with which I began: the postcolonial definition of Canada and its literature, and the Canadian people’s relationship to the natural environment of the Americas. For Frye, this latter point was the most significant and, indeed, determining factor of Canadian life and letters.

Commentators on Frye’s work have suggested that his modernist interest in what he called a “disinterested structure of words,”¹⁰ combined with a kind of transnational literary cosmopolitanism (what he referred to, echoing modernist architecture, as the “international style”), was, in fact, a way out of “the divisive, stifling heritage of colonialism.”¹¹ If this were so, then he would not have been alone in Canada: the influential poet and anthologist A.J.M. Smith shared such a modernist

internationalism earlier in the century. But that view of Frye as modernist ignores half of that defining tension in his work, which is most evident in his Canadian writing: between that cosmopolitanism and his roots in the specifically Canadian context. It seems that this split could have made the existing domain of what was called “Commonwealth” literary studies attractive to Frye,¹² but, to my knowledge, he never moved in that direction, though he wrote much about the colonial condition of Canada as part of the British Commonwealth and, before that, the British Empire: I am not sure that he ever thought that Canada had ceased to be a colony. The controlling “mercantilist assumptions” that made Canadians into the producers of raw materials for imperial powers merely switched from being those of Britain to being those of the United States.¹³ However, I do not think that it is accidental that much of the new and provocative work in postcolonial studies today is done in places such as Canada and Australia. While these “settler” colonies (as they are known) certainly have a less oppressive history than, say, India, Africa, the West Indies, or South America, they also have a less easily definable (that is, different) identity vis-à-vis British imperial power. As Frye and others have noted, to English-speaking Canadians in the last century, British culture was “culture” (period). Was it only in the last century, though, that this was the case? Or are there structural and systemic continuities between the historical experience of colonialism and the intellectual and cultural situation of Canada today? And what role did Frye, such an influential commentator on that situation, play in the development of the recent ecological and postcolonial thinking in Canada – that is, on what I will argue to be the sites of the eruption of postmodernity into the imperial order of modernity?

Stephen Slemon has defined the “discourse of colonialism” as “the name for that system of signifying practices whose work it is to *produce and naturalise* the hierarchical power structures of the imperial enterprise, and to mobilise those power structures in the management of both colonial and neo-colonial cross-cultural relationships.”¹⁴ Developing Gayatri Spivak’s notion of “othering,” Slemon sees colonialism as the “projection of one’s own systematic codes onto the ‘vacant’ or ‘uninscribed’ territory

of the other.”¹⁵ As one of the “systematic” discourses of modernity, colonialism shared its “continuous and uncompromising effort to fill or to cover up the void”¹⁶ – even when there really was no void, no vacancy: the land and the peoples of the so-called “New World” were only invisible, not named because their inscription was not European. The “unknowable becomes known,” as Slemon argues, by the recuperation of the other “by reference to one’s own systems of cultural recognition.”¹⁷ As postcolonial critics such as Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and, more recently, Homi Bhabha have suggested, this modern recuperation does not just describe the effect of armies and colonists on subjugated lands and peoples; it is also the effect of intellectual structures and strictures: liberal humanist universalism, for all its admitted (and admirable) idealism, shares a modern, totalizing elision of differences that has direct structural parallels with the imperialist desire, in Slemon’s terms, to fix “the limits of value and signification of the Other to that which takes place within the projected system, and arrogates to [it]self sole purchase on the possibility of organic wholeness.”¹⁸ In what follows, I will bring together these three related discourses – the colonialist, the “mercantilist,” and the humanist – within Frye’s work (to begin with) in order to sketch a possible postcolonialist, ecological, and postmodern perspective on the literary production of Canada today.

My reason for putting Frye at the centre of my discussion is that he was both part of the problem and part of the solution; he participated in what Slemon calls the “discourse of colonialism” yet was one of its most powerful deconstructors. If ever there was a typically Canadian postmodern position, it may be exemplified in this particular *both/and* inclusive paradox. The issue of colonialism in Canada became more and more a focus of Frye’s Canadian writing over the years.¹⁹ In 1971 he wrote that Canada was “practically the only country left in the world which is a pure colony, colonial in psychology as well as in mercantile economics.”²⁰ He parodied our national anthem by calling the “true north strong and free” more a “sham south weak and occupied.”²¹ Calling the colonial position “a frostbite at the roots of the Canadian imagination,”²² he saw its mix of the imperial and the regional as “inherently anti-poetic.”²³ Lacking

the American revolutionary tradition, Canada had gone, he said, from “a pre-national to a post-national phase without ever having become a nation.”²⁴

The metaphor that Frye most often used to describe Canadian culture before 1960 was one of immaturity, and the colonial condition was always its cause.²⁵ As less a society than “a place to look for things” – furs, minerals, pulpwood – Canada can be forgiven, Frye said, if it “developed with the bewilderment of a neglected child, preoccupied with trying to define its own identity.”²⁶ Like the nation itself, however, Canadian literature and scholarship, he felt, had gradually *developed*, moving from articulating an *imagination* that was imitative and colonial²⁷ to one that is “matured and disciplined.”²⁸ In its correlation of the individual and the national, this image suggests a move toward “individualization” and differentiation that is a current *topos* of much postcolonial thinking.²⁹ But Frye’s other metaphors for the “Canadian imagination” seem to go in another direction. For instance, starting with the figurative premise that the “social *imagination* explores and settles,”³⁰ Frye appeared to offer a historical version of the maturity image in his notion that, by the 1960s, the “Canadian imagination has passed the stage of exploration and has embarked, on that of settlement.”³¹ The “heroic explorers”³² of Canadian letters were writers who “identified the habits and attitudes of the country, as Fraser and Mackenzie have identified its rivers.”³³

In 1965, Frye could still write unselfconsciously about the romance and heroism of exploration and settlement as maturity; since the consciousness-raising around the 1992 anniversary, if not before, many others might not.³⁴ The imperial assumptions evident in the notion of humanity’s right to “identify” and name rivers and peoples are ones to which I will return in my discussion of Leonard Cohen’s novel of those years, *Beautiful Losers*, but it is important to keep in mind that the ecological and postcolonial critiques of such assumptions are part of our critical discourse today in a way that they were not in the 1960s. Among the many reasons for this in Canada are not only the recent theorizing of imperial and colonial positions, but also certain feminist challenges to the patriarchal ideology of exploring, charting, and mastering (as in

novels such as Audrey Thomas's *Intertidal Life* or Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic: A Novel*), not to mention the feminist reappropriation of cartography, of mapmaking as an imaginative representation of nature³⁵ rather than as a colonizing act (as in the writing of Aritha van Herk).

In the 1970s, a decade after Frye could so unproblematically invoke these images of exploration and settlement, English Canadians awoke to a powerful discourse of postcoloniality through the Quiet Revolution in Quebec and the literary explosion there of the energies of decolonization. Frye also felt that the "decisive cultural event in English Canada" during the sixties and seventies was "the impact of French Canada and its new sense of identity."³⁶ But the difference was that Quebec saw itself not only as France's former colony but as English Canada's current one, and it theorized its position through the writings of Jacques Berque, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Memmi – who had all dealt with French imperialism. But, as Clément Moisan noted in the late 1960s, French and English Canada shared many problems inherent to their (in many ways) equally marginal and colonial conditions.³⁷

Frye's thoughts on those problems were initially focussed on the Anglo-Canadian relationship with Britain, but, over the years, it was the United States that increasingly became his concern. Between 1867 and the First World War, he felt, Britain's cultural impact had been enormous because the community offered by the Empire (and then the Commonwealth) was appealing:³⁸ British institutions acted as a protecting wall to the "garrison" of colonial culture.³⁹ But not even that wall was able to protect Canada from the "immense power of American [economic and cultural] penetration into Canada," to use Frye's revealingly gendered image.⁴⁰ He wrote much about the differences between American and Canadian culture and about the historical as well as geographical reasons for what are, to Canadians at least, real differences between the two countries.⁴¹ An immature colonial Canada might once have seen Britain as the "mother" country, but it has never viewed the United States parentally: the usual image that it has constructed for its historically expansionist and often aggressive neighbour has been an imperial one.⁴²

Frye's way of describing the difference between Canada and the "far more integrated and revolutionary American" tradition⁴³ is one that returns us to that broader context of imperialism – modernity – for the U.S.A. is the modern political product of eighteenth-century rationalism and the Enlightenment; Canada, on the contrary, may be the post-modern nation *par excellence* given its "pragmatic, compromising, ad hoc, ramshackle" tradition.⁴⁴ Nothing in Canada, Frye pointed out, has ever been a truth held to be "self-evident."⁴⁵ Writing in the mid-seventies, from the perspective of the Vietnam War and Watergate, he even suggested that maybe the "American empire, like the British empire before it, [had] simply passed its climacteric."⁴⁶ Today, with the dismantling of the communist "second" world and the revived imperialism of the "New World Order," I (for one) am considerably less sanguine than Frye about the "decline of the American empire" (to use Québécois filmmaker Denys Arcand's phrase) and about the possibility of the United States becoming (as Frye put it) "Canadianized"⁴⁷ – or (as I would put it) post-modernized. Canada may be, in his words, "traditionally so diffident, introverted, past-and-future fixated, incoherent, inarticulate, proceeding by hunch and feeling,"⁴⁸ that it could never be imperialistic; it seeks only the "peaceable kingdom."⁴⁹ But is that really the case?

We should not forget the source of this image of Canada's search for the "peaceable kingdom": it comes from an early nineteenth-century American painting of that name by Edward Hicks. In the background, Frye says, "is a treaty between the Indians and the Quaker settlers under Penn. In the foreground is a group of animals ... illustrating the prophecy of Isaiah about the recovery of innocence in nature." It is a symbol of "the reconciliation of man with man and of man with nature."⁵⁰ The use of an American painting to figure Canadian aspirations finds its ironic echo, for me, in the representation of the native and the natural: both named and tamed, they are defined in terms of the settlers' (European) relation to them. As I mentioned earlier, Canada's colonial identity was not separable from the riches of its physical environment, its beaver pelts and softwood forests. The United States may have been defined as a *nation* in the eighteenth century, but in those years, Canada was defined

then as a *colony*; in other words, instead of articulating a manifesto of independence and a written constitution that would have defined Canada as a nation, it participated in the rationalism of the Enlightenment's "project of modernity"⁵¹ by incarnating the Cartesian split between consciousness and nature in its imposition of the geographical patterns of human design – roads and railways, streets and concession lines – on the land. For Frye, this was "a symbol of aggressiveness, of imperialistic domination."⁵² The Cartesian view that the non-human felt no pain is what Frye sees in the "attitude of the Canadian fur trade, spreading traps over the north to catch animals": "for it, the mink, the beaver, and the silver fox were not living creatures but only potential fur coats."⁵³

The "relentless plundering of ... nature" in our current "economy of waste"⁵⁴ is, in many ways, the consequence of that impulse in modernity with which I began, the "obsessively legislating, defining, structuring, segregating, classifying, recording and universalizing"⁵⁵ impulse that William Blake – the poet who most influenced Frye's view of culture – articulated as "Where man is not, nature is barren."⁵⁶ Think of the implications of Blake's statement – in terms of Slemon's theory of the politics of colonial discourse, of making the unknown known. Frye's (modern) humanism derives from the same impulse, as one of his critics has implied: "Culture is a reflexive symbolic medium that man [*sic*] produces to feel at home in the universe. It makes him feel as if he were its center, even though he knows he is actually on the periphery being driven by forces he ultimately cannot control."⁵⁷ In all his work, both theoretical and Canadian, Frye separated the world that we construct – which is "human in shape" – from the world of nature.⁵⁸ These recurrent humanist testimonials to the visionary power of imagination, however, might be seen to partake structurally and ideologically of the logic of colonialism, not to say imperialism. When I began by suggesting that Frye was both part of the problem of, and part of the solution to, Canada's colonial identity, this is what I had in mind.

For Canadian studies, this structural connection has particular implications – mostly because of the enormous influence of what has been called Frye's "topocentrism,"⁵⁹ his consistent connecting of Canadian

identity to “the imminence of the natural world”⁶⁰: think of Margaret Atwood, D. G. Jones, John Moss, Gaile McGregor, and a host of other identifiers of the distinctiveness of Canadian culture in these or closely related terms. The historical and physical reality of a “vast country sparsely inhabited”⁶¹ meant, according to Frye, a “national consciousness” with an immense amount of “the unknown, the unrealized, the humanly undigested” built into it.⁶² But there is a real tension in Frye’s account of Canadian culture between, on the one hand, his negative evaluation of the “conquest of nature by an intelligence that does not love it” via the “arrogant abstraction”⁶³ of railways and street grids and, on the other, his positive reading of the visionary power of the imagination to make sense and order of the “riddle of unconsciousness” that is nature.⁶⁴

In nineteenth-century writing, Frye argued, the Canadian physical environment was seen as “terrifyingly cold, empty and vast”; it was morally inexplicable, massively indifferent to human suffering.⁶⁵ The “mindless hostility of nature”⁶⁶ provoked what Frye called the “garrison” mentality as humans grouped together to confront “a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting.”⁶⁷ The idyllic, pastoral vision of our “real humanity” being a part of the nature that we continually violate but that “is still inviolate”⁶⁸ is countered by its other pole: “the identity of the sinister and terrible elements in nature with the death-wish in man.”⁶⁹ As Frye wrote, “Canadians were held by the land before they emerged as a people on it.”⁷⁰ But how do they emerge “as a people” on the land? At whose expense is their emergence? To whose benefit? In short, how does one deal with what Frye himself called “the tension between the mind and a surrounding not integrated with it” without that act of integration being considered a violation, an imposition, a colonization of nature?⁷¹

In his visionary poem “America: A Prophecy,” Blake pictures the “Canadian wilds” in terms of Orc’s struggle with the powers of nature.⁷² David Cook has argued that Frye also saw nature as violent, erotic, and in need of being “absorbed by the modern consciousness”; that moment of absorption is, he says, a “civilizing moment”⁷³ – but it is also, in true modern fashion, a moment of betrayal of nature’s autonomy, a moment

of the imposition of human control and order. Frye's writings about Canada constantly reaffirm the "unhumanized isolation"⁷⁴ of nature here, the "indifference of nature to human values,"⁷⁵ the "overwhelming of human values by an indifferent and wasteful nature."⁷⁶ This indifference, he felt, conditioned, indeed determined, the shape of the Canadian imagination. The humanization of nature through the "educated imagination" was not, to the humanist Frye, a negative; it was simply what the synthesizing and creative powers of the human mind did when confronted with the non-human.⁷⁷

However, the humanization of nature through technology and rationalist mathematics (such as the geometry of railway lines) was, as we have seen, quite another matter for Frye. The negative consequences of this kind of technological imposition on nature are the topic of much of his later writings, where he called for "a détente with an outraged nature"⁷⁸ in order to solve the "major social problems" in Canada, which he listed as "ecology, the extinction of animal species, the plundering of forests and mines, the pollution of water."⁷⁹ He often wrote in strong terms of "The despoiling of nature [that] has now reached the point at which the white settlement of America begins to look like a very clear example of what Pynchon means [in his novel *Gravity's Rainbow*] by his death-wish paranoia, a destructiveness increasing in efficiency and ferocity until it finally began to turn on itself."⁸⁰ Frye suggested that the feelings of Canadians toward nature changed over time from terror to guilt as we "polluted and imprisoned and violated" but "never really lived with" nature.⁸¹ But he continued to exempt the imagination's humanizing imposition of order from such criticism, implicitly allying such creativity with the organic and the natural.

By way of contrast, in the ecologically aware art produced today by Canadian groups such as Fastwürms, there is the same sense – less a fear *of* nature than a fear *for* nature at the exploiting hands of humanity; but their art, unlike Frye's theory of the imagination, enacts a reflexive response to that exploitation and waste in its materials and themes. I would not deny that one can find in Frye's writing what one reviewer called "the articulation of a passionately felt organic unity embracing ecological,

economic and spiritual values,”⁸² but I also do not see any awareness of the structural similarities between the humanizing of nature by technology and that by the imagination, yet both partake of modernity’s impulse to authorize, legislate, systematize, totalize, and synthesize. Cook does make this connection, though, when he explicitly links Frye’s humanist thinking to the “technological will” that conquered nature through railways and roads: Frye, too, he argues, is one of Canada’s “taciturn beaver[s],” an engineer of order.⁸³ However, Frye continued to separate the technological/rational from the creative/imaginative realms, just as he separated the rhetorical from the poetic uses of language.

This “taciturn beaver” saw myth, of course, as what humanized nature,⁸⁴ and his neo-Kantian, modern myth theory has been described in terms that make evident its structural links with that other technological/geometrical order of modernity. Frank Lentricchia has called Frye’s theoretical conceptions “unremittingly spatial, ... closed, coherent, and self-contained”;⁸⁵ they form a “system impervious to the movements of unritualized time.”⁸⁶ So, too, do the other constructs of modernity in their eliding of temporal difference in the name of commonalities – be they liberal humanist universals, colonialist namings, or mercantile assumptions about the land. One reason that such structural similarities are more visible to us today is the existence of that different conceptual paradigm of postmodernity, one that transforms these overarching modern meta-narratives of control and order into simply a few of the many possible narratives that we have constructed for ourselves throughout history.

The consequences of this delegitimizing of the hierarchical, the single, and the authoritative came home to me personally when I reread something that I had written twenty years ago. This exercise in masochism was directly related to my topic, though, because what I reread was a paper that I had written in 1972 for Northrop Frye’s graduate course on archetypal criticism.⁸⁷ Caught in the throes of the heady Canadian nationalism of the early seventies, I had chosen to write not on Blake or Joyce or Yeats but on Leonard Cohen, who was already famous as a songwriter, poet, and novelist. Taking my cue from Frye’s positive

interest⁸⁸ in Cohen's first book of poetry, *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, I thought that *Beautiful Losers*, his 1966 novel, might also provide rich grounds for tracing mythological structures and formal patterns. Not surprisingly, perhaps, I found that to be the case, and I dutifully traced all the biblical imagery through this powerful and provocative novel, concluding that it offered a demonic, ironic parody of biblical structures. The poet and critic Doug Jones had just published his reading of the novel as illustrating Frye's "garrison culture" (and its "overly mechanical rationalism") under attack by irrationality, verbal obscenity, and sexual transgression.⁸⁹

However, in rereading this paper recently, I discovered a line of argument that did not quite fit my topic, though (as a diligent student) I (of course) *made* it fit by working it into a theory of the highly schematized nature of the novel's structure. I had made the rash statement at the beginning of my paper that *Beautiful Losers* was "the most challenging and perceptive novel about Canada and her people yet written"⁹⁰ because I believed that it had offered a new and complex figuration of a historically validated pattern of political power, indeed, of victimization. The novel had suggested that each of the victimizing powers – what we now call imperial or colonialist powers – became, in turn, the victim of those whom it had once oppressed. So, the first European imperial forces, the French, victimized the Native peoples, in Cohen's view, through the imposition of Christianity and by military force. The Native peoples then turned on – tortured and killed – the French missionaries. The next colonial power, the British, was victorious over the French on the Plains of Abraham, and Canada's Anglo-dominated destiny was determined – at least until the FLQ terrorist bombs announced the beginning of the (not so) Quiet Revolution in Quebec. The novel then went on to show how the once victimizing British were subsequently being made into the colonized minions of American economic and cultural forces. Like Atwood's theory of "victim positions" a few years later,⁹¹ Cohen's novel offered a vision of what (twenty-five years later) postcolonial theorists call the complexities of the interdependence of colonizer and colonized. But, wearing Frye-coloured lenses at the time, all that I could see as significant was the

pattern, the system that Cohen had set up, the formal parallels between the victim roles. A true child of modernity, like my teacher, I looked for – or made – synthesizing structures and totalizing order.

Today, working in what has been described in those twenty years as the postmodern paradigm, that is, working in a context that values difference, not similarity, contingency more than order, I ask myself what I would be enabled to see in this novel. Certainly, feminist analysis might suggest to me new ways to investigate the relationship between gender and race in the novel's representation of its two major women characters, Catherine and Edith – both Native and both dead. A postcolonial theory of imperialist discourse might offer a means of teasing out the complexities of what I once reduced to a simple formal pattern of victimizers turned victims. I might be able to examine, to use Slemon's definition of the discourse of colonialism again, the "projection of [my] own systematic codes onto the 'vacant' or 'uninscribed' territory of the other."⁹²

Of course, the inexorable march of history has also brought major changes in context that would inevitably condition my reading today. Could I really discuss the narrator – a white, male historian of Native peoples – without raising issues of the appropriation of voice and of the situatedness of knowledge that have provoked major rethinking today in our general culture as well as within disciplines such as history and anthropology? As the novel cogently puts it, "The French gave the Iroquois their name. Naming food is one thing, naming a people is another."⁹³ Could I talk about the novel's problematizing of the French Jesuit missionaries' representation of the "Iroquois Virgin,"⁹⁴ Catherine Tekakwitha, from Caughnawaga without problematizing even that problematization – in the light of events in the summer of 1990 when again, in the same area of the country, conflict between the French and the First Nations peoples captured national and international attention as television cameras recorded both the armed standoff at Oka and the demands of Mohawk spokespersons – who were all women? Could I avoid reading *Beautiful Losers* in the light of the studies that came out in and around 1992⁹⁵ about the richness and sophistication of the Native societies of the Americas that were destroyed by imperial military might, disease,

Christianization, alcohol, or the hegemony of European Enlightenment values of individualism over Native traditions of collective rights?

Frye, were he still alive, would also read Canadian culture in these new contexts. I do not think that he would write as unselfconsciously as he did in the 1960s about Indian primitivism,⁹⁶ brutality, and ferocity.⁹⁷ In fact, over the next two decades, he frequently protested the stereotyping of Natives⁹⁸ and Canada's history of destroying, not preserving, indigenous cultures.⁹⁹ I suspect, too, that Frye might no longer be able to characterize the historical drive westward in North American settlement as romantic and heroic with the confidence that he did in 1965¹⁰⁰ – not after the postcolonial rewriting of that drive by Native writers or even by novels such as Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*. In 1977, Frye wrote about the guilt that Canadians felt vis-à-vis their history in relation to the Native peoples (about the destruction of their cultures and religion). He linked this guilt to the ecological guilt that was another product of the "colonial mentality" that allowed the exploitation of nature in Canada.¹⁰¹ Then he cited a passage from *Beautiful Losers* on the connection between the mutilation of Quebec forests and the sellout to the Americans. Cohen's novel had indeed made the connection between the people and the land, as well as among the various peoples of Canada.

Frye, too, was brought to think in similar relational ways not only by his reading but also by his time spent as a member of the Canadian Radio and Television Commission, listening to complaints and deciding on licences for stations. He once compared a protest by the Cree and Inuit peoples of the North (against the destruction of their cultures by southern Canadian mass-media intrusion) to English Canadians' similar protest against American mass-media intrusion.¹⁰² He again articulated a distinction between the (negative) political/economic realm of technological uniformity and the (positive) cultural realm of decentralized, regional distinctiveness.¹⁰³ In suggesting that the negative should not be allowed to triumph, Frye was not naïve enough to think that the totalizing worlds of politics and economics were going to cease to exert their power over the cultural; but he was, arguably, again setting up a version of the "garrison" culture, this time with a beleaguered Canada trying to

keep out the forces, not of an indifferent nature, but of equally indifferent American imperial forces. The parallel that he had drawn with the Native peoples of the North, however, cast the rest of Canada in the role of indifferent imperialists, and so – sadly – the victim/victimizer pattern in Cohen’s novel makes another appearance.

Despite the relative generosity of Frye’s grading, my paper was not a very good one, and I only now see why that was so: the postmodern had erupted into my modern reading of *Beautiful Losers*, a reading that (for obvious reasons) had been inspired by my teacher’s systematic, totalizing vision of art. The main eruption occurred at the end of my essay when I tried to decide how Cohen resolved (for, tellingly, I began by assuming that he had to resolve) the various polarities or ambiguities that he had set up in the novel. (I had *found* a long list of them, including victim and victimizer, nature and technology, identity and alienation.) Deciding that the title of the novel must be emblematic, I found myself describing a text in which, as far as I could see, both extremes stubbornly coexisted – unsynthesized, unresolved. That is what it meant to be a “beautiful loser”: I had to accept what today would be called postmodern *both/and* thinking, instead of wanting those modern *either/or* binaries. Somehow Cohen’s novel had forced me to think not within a modern but within a postmodern paradigm.

I think that this minor example of an enactment of the paradigm shift into postmodernity might have some heuristic value for others, or so I hope. I do not think, in other words, that the events of the last twenty years would alone force me to read the novel differently today, even if I were not writing about it for Frye. I think that this example of a shift from the ordering impulse of rationality, the totalizing power of system, and the universalizing drive of liberal humanism toward an acceptance of provisionality, contingency, heterogeneity, and difference is more than just an accident of personal biography while writing one particular paper for one particular professor. The move within literary studies in general to theorize gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual choice, and other variables has brought about a new awareness of the power of both making and denying difference, of both positing and challenging identity. Like

feminist, Marxist, Native, African-American, gay, and lesbian theory, too, the postcolonial and ecological critiques being articulated so powerfully in the 1990s represent exemplary postmodern moments in the “crisis of modernity” by challenging that paradigm’s “supra-communal, ‘extraterritorial’ grounds of truth and meaning.”¹⁰⁴ That so acute and influential a commentator on the Canadian scene as Frye should glimpse yet not always grasp the importance of these challenges is in no way something to decry or lament; it simply illustrates what we are – at this (postmodern) moment – always, inescapably, living ourselves.

Welcome to postmodernity.

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NOTES

- 1 From *Essays on Canadian Writing* 51–52 (winter 1993–spring 1994): 146–63.
- 2 Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), xi.
- 3 *Ibid.*, xxii.
- 4 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
- 5 B.A. St. Andrews, “The Canadian Connection: Frye/Atwood,” *World Literature Today* 60, no. 1 (1986): 47.
- 6 Robin Mathews, *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution*, ed. Gail Dexter (Toronto: Steel Rail, 1978), 137.
- 7 A. C. Hamilton, *Northrop Frye: Anatomy of His Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 6.
- 8 Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), i.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 10 Northrop Frye, “Conclusion,” in *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, vol. 2, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 344. For ease of reference, I will refer to the conclusion to the first edition of the *Literary History of Canada* as “Conclusion I” and the second edition’s as “Conclusion II,” but I will retain the 1976 (2nd ed.) pagination for both. “Conclusion II” is found in vol. 3 of the 1976 edition, 318–32.
- 11 Anne Paolucci and Henry Paolucci, “Canada’s ‘Two Solitudes’: Foci of a National Ellipse,” in *Review of National Literatures: Canada*, vol. 7, ed. Richard J. Schoeck (New York: Griffon, 1976), 49.
- 12 R. T. Robertson, “Another Preface to an Uncollected Anthology: Canadian Criticism in a Commonwealth Context,” *ARIEL* 4, no. 3 (1973): 80–81.
- 13 Northrop Frye, *Divisions on a Ground: Essays on Canadian Culture*, ed. James Polk (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), 17.
- 14 Stephen Slemon, “Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing,” *Kunapipi* 9, no. 3 (1987): 6.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 16 Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, xvii.
- 17 Slemon, “Monuments of Empire,” 7.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 19 Russell Brown, “Mythic Patterns,” *Canadian Forum* (Dec. 1982–Jan. 1983): 39.
- 20 Frye, *Bush Garden*, iii.
- 21 *Ibid.*, x.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 134.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 133.
- 24 Frye, *Divisions on a Ground*, 15.
- 25 E.g., *ibid.*, 61.
- 26 Frye, “Conclusion I,” 339.
- 27 Frye, *Divisions on a Ground*, 22–23, 32.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 70.
- 29 Frye, “Conclusion I,” 350.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 334.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 349.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 348.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 361.
- 34 “Anniversary”: i.e., of Columbus’s voyage of 1492, but also of Confederation. (Ed.)
- 35 See Marlene Goldman, “No Man’s Land: Re-Charting the Territory of Female Identity in Selected Fictions by Contemporary Canadian Women Writers” (Diss., University of Toronto, 1992).

- 36 Frye, "Conclusion II," 320.
- 37 Clément Moisan, *L'Âge de la littérature canadienne: Essai*, Collection Constantes 19 (Montréal: HMH, 1969), 87.
- 38 Frye, *Divisions on a Ground*, 43.
- 39 Frye, "Conclusion I," 342.
- 40 Ibid., 320.
- 41 See, for example, Frye, *Divisions on a Ground*, 45–49; Frye, "Conclusion II."
- 42 Frye, "Conclusion II," 321.
- 43 Ibid., 320.
- 44 Ibid., 321.
- 45 Ibid., 323.
- 46 Ibid., 327.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Frye, "Conclusion I," 360.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity – An Incomplete Project," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay, 1983), 8.
- 52 Frye, *Divisions on a Ground*, 168.
- 53 Northrop Frye, "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts: Some Patterns in the Imagery of Canadian Poetry," in *The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture*, ed. David Staines (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 27–28.
- 54 Ibid., 29.
- 55 Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, xiv.
- 56 Qtd. in Daniel T. O'Hara, *The Romance of Interpretation: Visionary Criticism from Pater to de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 147.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Toronto: CBC, 1963), 8.
- 59 Leon Surette, "Here Is Us: The Topocentrism of Canadian Literary Criticism," *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 10 (spring–summer 1982): 49.
- 60 Frye, "Conclusion I," 358.
- 61 Ibid., 340.
- 62 Ibid., 338.
- 63 Ibid., 342.
- 64 Ibid., 355.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid., 356.
- 67 Ibid., 342.
- 68 Ibid., 358.
- 69 Ibid., 357.
- 70 Frye, "Conclusion II," 324.
- 71 Frye, *Bush Garden*, 200.
- 72 Qtd. in David Cook, *Northrop Frye: A Vision of the New World* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1985), 86.
- 73 Ibid., 87.
- 74 Frye, *Bush Garden*, 164.
- 75 Ibid., 171.
- 76 Ibid., 10–11.
- 77 See Frye, *Educated Imagination*.
- 78 Frye, *Divisions on a Ground*, 70.
- 79 Ibid., 167.
- 80 Ibid., 20. The square brackets in the quotation are Hutcheon's. (Ed.)
- 81 Ibid., 68.
- 82 Mark Czarnecki, "Reflections of a Radical Tory," *Maclean's* (21 June 1982): 50.
- 83 Cook, *Northrop Frye*, 91.
- 84 Frye, "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts," 33.
- 85 Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 15.
- 86 Ibid., 16.
- 87 A version of this essay was subsequently published as Linda Hutcheon,

- "*Beautiful Losers: All the Polarities*," *Canadian Literature* 59 (winter 1974): 42–56.
- 88 Frye, *Bush Garden*, 66–68.
- 89 D. G. Jones, *Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 81.
- 90 Hutcheon, "Beautiful Losers," 42.
- 91 See Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).
- 92 Slemmon, "Monuments of Empire," 7.
- 93 Leonard Cohen, *Beautiful Losers* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966), 6.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 95 See, for example, Thomas R. Berger, *A Long and Terrible Shadow: White Values, Native Rights in the Americas: 1492–1992* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1991); Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The "New World" through Indian Eyes since 1492* (Toronto: Viking, 1992).
- 96 Frye, "Conclusion I," 337.
- 97 See Frye, "Conclusion I," 343, 355, 357–58.
- 98 Frye, "Conclusion II," 329.
- 99 Frye, *Divisions on a Ground*, 169.
- 100 Frye, "Conclusion I," 336.
- 101 Frye, "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts," 28.
- 102 Frye, *Divisions on a Ground*, 41–42.
- 103 *Ibid.*, 43, 62–63.
- 104 Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 35.

CHAPTER 10

Contemporary Canadian Poetry from the Edge: An Exploration of Literary Ecocriticism (1995)

Gabriele Helms¹

To indicate our awareness of environmental issues today, it would be easy to compile a list of the organizations devoted to environmental education and activism or to draw attention to the words in our everyday vocabulary that used to be part of ecological jargon. But it is our *lack* of interest in or awareness of environmental advocacy that I am concerned with here. Why, for example, have critics of Canadian literature and poetry in particular shown so little interest in ecocriticism? How can we explain this when we hear, read, and think daily about humanity's future in the light of accelerating industrialization, widespread malnutrition, rapid population growth, depletion of nonrenewable resources, and the ozone layer? It is not difficult to find environmentally conscious poetry in Canada today, but critics of Canadian literature seem to lag behind in its analysis.² It seems as if critics still have difficulty in letting go of those thematically oriented analyses that regard nature and landscape as

adversaries. In much recent Canadian poetry, nature is no longer seen merely as what Northrop Frye once called “a kind of existence which is cruel and meaningless ... the source of the cruelty and subconscious stampings within the human mind.”³ Many writers are attempting to redefine their relationship with the environment by using a holistic approach that recognizes both human and non-human life forms as equal and interdependent.

1. Ecologically informed poetry develops in a space where writers and their environments meet.⁴ In ecological terminology, such boundary or transition areas between two or more diverse communities are called ecotones,⁵ the ecotone or edge between these communities being perceived as a zone or band of varying width rather than a sharp line.⁶ Within this space, the ecotonal community commonly contains organisms of each community and other organisms called edge species that are characteristic of and often restricted to the ecotone.⁷ Using this ecological concept analogically, I suggest that poetry from the ecotone or edge is ecologically informed poetry that is the result and expression of a mutual relationship between writer and his/her environment.⁸ Thus, metaphorically speaking, environmentally sound poems constitute an edge species that is the product of the meeting and reciprocal influence of writers and nature in the ecotone. Poetry of this sort is the place where “new combinations of the mind’s life and the world’s emerge, where a new language of balance and discovery finds itself.”⁹ Ecocriticism can help to analyze the idiosyncrasies of these poems by drawing attention to the understanding of ecological relationships on which they are based. In this chapter I will outline a framework for literary ecocriticism and discuss a few selected poems, focussing on those of Anne Campbell and Fred Wah as two complex examples of environmental visions in contemporary Canadian poetry.

Literary ecocriticism is a critical perspective informed by and focussing on environmental concerns, at the centre of which reside the relationships between wo/man and nature, both in the poetry and in the context out of which the poetry emerges. Moreover, in searching for, in

D.M.R. Bentley's words, "manifestations ... of the feelings of responsibility, respect, duty, and interdependence" in particular poems, literary criticism can "participate in undoing the erosion of people's sense of their integrity and interconnectedness with nature."¹⁰ But the need and desire to redefine the terms of human–nature interaction and to develop another mode of human behaviour do not have to result in ecological readings that insist primarily "on the mimetic and affective aspects of poetry."¹¹ To insist on mimetic readings will make it difficult to avoid essentialist notions of such ordering categories as gender. From a constructivist point of view, I do not deny the existence of an ontological, non-textual reality; what I deny is the possibility of making a statement about its "real" nature. We cannot perceive anything that lies outside our own subjective experience; insofar as we know reality, it is a model that we have constructed. If "the reality" and "the value" are not accessible to us, we have even more responsibility to develop and realize consensual truths and human values. A constructivist approach allows me to avoid what Patrick D. Murphy has called the "critical maladies of enervated humanism, solipsistic skepticism, and paralytic undecidability" and to strive for an affirmative praxis.¹² It enables me to combine the call for ecological commitment and responsibility with a belief in the constructed nature of our subjective reality and the crucial role that language plays in these constructions.

Literary ecocriticism is, of course, in no way restricted to contemporary writing. Indeed, attempts to conceptualize ecological relations differently, for example more holistically, can be identified in poetry from various historical contexts.¹³ To facilitate my own theorizing of ecocriticism, I have focussed on contemporary writers who have explicitly written against prescriptive and limiting notions of human–nature interactions. Thus, my use of the prefix "eco" in "ecocriticism" foregrounds a sense of environmental advocacy – in the poetry and the critical approach – that is the result of today's increased understanding of the problems involved in dealing with nature and the environment, and of their broader social and cultural context. An ecologically informed critical approach will help to place contemporary poetry in relation to traditions of nature

and topographical writing, exploring where and how these traditions are challenged, expanded, or deliberately subverted. Ecocriticism thus draws attention to the ideological implications of nature descriptions and the relationships that people understand themselves to have with nature.

Ecofeminism is a particularly important movement because it draws attention to the connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. Neither feminism nor ecofeminism is monolithic, however, though most varieties of ecofeminism do call for a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of our society. As Karen J. Warren points out: “Eco-feminism, therefore, encourages us to think ourselves out of ‘patriarchal conceptual traps,’ by *reconceptualizing* ourselves and our relation to the nonhuman world in nonpatriarchal ways.”¹⁴ Ecofeminist approaches and their critiques can be immediately relevant to literary studies. Murphy has explored how ecofeminism can turn the dialogic methods of discourse and critique into “a livable critical theory, rather than a merely usable one,”¹⁵ and how in turn dialogics can provide ecofeminism with a method that allows it to remain “an active, developing critique guiding praxis.”¹⁶ Moreover, ecofeminist concepts can inspire and support studies that challenge the marginalization and patriarchal definition of nature writing or that focus on writers who are (re-)gendering landscapes and nature. The “feminine” stereotyping of our planet in terms of Gaia imagery (“Mother Earth”), for instance, or the continuous reliance on metaphors that associate women with non-human nature, ultimately reinforce the oppressive hierarchical and homogenizing patterns of patriarchal gender stereotypes they oppose.¹⁷

An ecocritical approach to a poem will explore the specific methods a writer employs to express her/his environmental vision. The concept of “*ecolect*” as a language “variation peculiar to a particular household, or kin group” has been introduced to literary studies by Hugh Sykes Davies¹⁸ and has been slightly revised and expanded by James McKusick who, in a more global sense, considers the whole earth as the household or home.¹⁹ In McKusick’s expansion of the term, *ecolect* functions as a

form of language that creates a linguistic analogue to the natural world and, in doing so, conveys a sense of locality and describes the interaction of writer and nature. The *ecolect* can thus capture a distinctive form of expression related to the conceptual paradigm of ecology. Detailed analyses of poems will be necessary to explore the specifics of a writer's/poem's *ecolect*, since *ecolect* not only implies subject matter but also particular uses of language. Such studies may include the analysis of explicit statements that establish an ecological subject matter; they may focus on the implicit subversion of language habits that have been recognized as reinforcing a fragmentary and hierarchical view of the environment; or they may analyze the use of rhetorical devices, blurring of semantic fields, re-rendering of the landscape, and use of typography, to name only a few.

2. The kinds of environmental psychologies that poems from the edge convey depend on how their authors conceptualize their interactions with nature. Alden Nowlan's "St. John River" is a poem that explicitly states its environmental subject matter – the water pollution of the St. John River.²⁰ The poem is less concerned with the reciprocal interaction between speaker and environment but focusses instead on showing the result of one-sided, destructive action. The speaker who describes the river's pollution can only be inferred indirectly. No pronouns reveal his/her existence; it is only from comparisons, similes, and an evaluative statement – "what most astonishes" – that a perceiver can be presumed. Nowlan's *ecolect* employs both explicit and implicit strategies to convey his awareness of environmental destruction and human compliance in it. Together with the use of contrasts and his own undermining strategies, they create what Fred Cogswell calls "the wonderfully bitter-sweet texture" of Nowlan's work.²¹

"St. John River" draws the reader's attention to the human horror of destruction. With the exception of a reference to "some thirty towns," however, Nowlan's description of the water pollution avoids the assignment of agents. This non-confrontational stance is achieved partly through the use of past participles such as "strewn," "torn loose," and

“driven south,” which reinforce the focus on the *fact* and *effects* of pollution. Only indirectly does the poem introduce agency when the river’s colour is compared in the first line to that of a bayonet. Since the bayonet is a man-made weapon, this comparison not only introduces the colour “blue” but also the concept of human destruction. If one recognizes the equal value of the natural environment and our dependence on it, killing others with bayonets is in the end no different from killing the river through water pollution. By repeating the comparison “as blue as steel” at the end of the poem, Nowlan emphasizes that it is crucial to recognize the destruction of nature, thus immediately undermining the preceding affirmative statement “that the real river is beautiful.”

Nowlan makes an astute point when he suggests that the remarkable human ability to hide what is unpleasant is at its most convincing in tourist brochures where the river “glitters blue and solid on the page.” But in “St. John River” the “river bottom” where the pollution is claiming its victims is also hidden or framed by the poem’s positive and affirmative statements about the river’s beauty. What “the real river” at the end of the poem is remains unclear. Is it the river’s deceptive surface or wishful thinking on the part of the speaker? While Nowlan is less concerned with taking action or directly assigning blame for the pollution, he shows that mere visual perception implies the danger of distancing us from the environment. The poem plays with the notion of false objectivity, indicating the superficial and often dangerously delusive nature of our perceptions.

One of the most striking differences between Pat Lowther’s “Coast Range” and Nowlan’s “St. John River” is Lowther’s attempt to expand our senses of perception,²² most notably in the semantic field of verbs indicating speech and sound. As J. Douglas Porteous has pointed out, “hearing greatly enhances our perception of environment because it is a multidimensional sense, sounds being evaluated on magnitude, clarity, aesthetic, relaxation, familiarity, and mood dimensions.”²³ Unlike the visual observer, the speaker in the poem does not even have to be close to the object of her/his perception, because sound is omnipresent and fills all space. Thus, the sphere described in “Coast Range” seems to be one

without fixed boundaries; it can be “heard” from any direction or distance. Moreover, the personifications of the mountains assigning them speech abilities indicate more than mere human projections; they blur the distinction between humans and non-humans in the environment, thus avoiding the concept of hierarchical relationships in the environment on which humans for so long have based their “right” to dominate nature.²⁴

In “Coast Range” it is wo/man’s impact on the environment that is seen as destructive and hostile, not nature’s effect on humankind.²⁵ The speaker’s reverence for nature, the duty s/he feels to show respect for the mountains’ humility, dignity, and rights, finds expression in an ecolect that is dominated by personifications of nature and a view of the landscape as self-sufficient, peaceful, and interactive as long as it is not disturbed by human forces. Lowther’s attempt to give voice to nature by emphasizing the auditory senses is a call for feelings of responsibility and respect towards nature, but her final lines render this viewpoint rather problematic. If it is good enough that “the shapes they’ve made in the sky,” the shapes of the mountains, that is, cannot be destroyed, if it is good enough that they will remain to exist as ideas in human minds, then there would be no reason to stop environmental destruction – a turn in the argument that seems hardly compatible with the display of respect and admiration in the rest of the poem.

3. An analysis of the ecolects employed by Anne Campbell and Fred Wah shows these poets to be more interested in capturing the reciprocal relationship between writer and nature; their poems are also more complex than Nowlan’s and Lowther’s because they are self-reflexive of their own status as poetry. Campbell’s and Wah’s poems indicate through their poetic forms and language use that they are the result of the tensions that characterize the edge in which they have been created. To refer to these poems as ecologically informed poems indicates that they not only do not deal with nature in an objectifying manner but that they have grown out of and reflect a more holistic concept of ecological life. Campbell’s “Echo Lake, Saskatchewan” (from her collection *No Memory*

of a Move) takes the characterization of Echo Lake itself as the starting-point for further contemplations of the landscape by the speaker:²⁶

Glacier made
inland lake
far way from sea with
no where to go
(how fitting for me
to notice)

The first few lines of the poem define Echo Lake as an “inland lake” made by a glacier, thus locating it both spatially in the interior of the country, “far way from sea,” and temporally as something created a long time ago by the slowly moving masses of ice. The following rather discouraged statement – “with / no where to go” – can also be read in a matrix of both place and time: the lake is an expanse of water that is surrounded by land and thus unable to move like a stream. Although the lake’s creation has a long history, in its stillness it cannot anticipate any more future changes. The first-person pronoun then introduces a parenthetical statement of the speaking persona about her/himself: “(how fitting for me / to notice).” Since the use of the parentheses indicates a confidential aside, the ironical tone indicates the speaker’s critical view of her/himself. The self-irony suggests that the lake’s lack of perspective may coincide with the speaker’s feeling about her/his own situation.

The second stanza introduces the idea of writing: “I plan to write / a memory of hot / Qu’Appelle Valley.” The desire to write and the poem itself are generated by a memory of the lake, rather than by the immediate experience of overlooking the lake from an elevated viewpoint. The poem does not present a survey of the landscape of the sort that we find in such topographical poems as John Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill” or John Mackay’s *Quebec Hill*,²⁷ but a selective memory of a previous encounter with the landscape. The speaker’s reason for writing is the wish “to give expression to grace” that s/he perceives in the existence of Qu’Appelle Valley, the sun, the time of evening, and the stillness of the water.

However, the deep respect for the beauty and elegance of the landscape cannot be expressed and the desire to write is frustrated. The contrastive conjunction “but,” placed on its own in the middle of a line, breaks the poem into halves. It is one of many examples that indicate the crucial role typography plays in Campbell’s ecolect, for it creates a visual correlation to the shift in the poem’s mood and argument and consciously works with the materiality of the page. After the break, the speaker recognizes that s/he is not “working out that way,” a failure owing partly to feelings of entrapment and suffocation as well as restriction: “evening is too tight and / this lake is crowded with / no where to go.” The repetition of the earlier phrase “no where to go” is particularly effective in reinforcing the distressing feeling of stasis.

The outlook of the speaker changes, however, when s/he is able to remind her/himself of something s/he already knows but may have forgotten, namely that “[t]his lake is a metaphor.” After all, the lake does not denote the speaker her/himself, but only implies a resemblance. The poem may not give expression to grace, it may not be the memory the speaker had intended to write, but instead it opens up something new. It leads to a different conceptualization of her/his own identity and her/his relationship to the environment:

I am earth
lake is river
 breaking through me is resolution
at hand.

As the speaker recognizes her/himself to be earth, as s/he blurs the boundaries in the edge, s/he also comes to understand that the lake is not confined or static, that it is a river as much as it is a lake. The interconnectedness of all the environment, of the human and the non-human worlds, their interdependence and mutual implication, make it possible for the speaker to come to an answer to her/his own impatience and frustration: “breaking through me is resolution / at hand.” In his recent study of prairie landscapes, Don Gayton comes to the conclusion that

“new bonds with the earth can now only be forged by personal explorations that go far beyond simple analysis and concern, into realms of imagination and myth.”²⁸ For Campbell’s persona, the poem is a personal exploration that redefines her/his relationship with the landscape. The plan to write a memory of the valley would have implied the objectification of the land; instead, its failure leads to a new sense of participation in and identification with the natural world.

Campbell’s “Land Song,” from the same collection, explicitly describes and expands this changed understanding of the self in relation to the environment:²⁹

No longer
 an observer
part of the land
 I belong
my difference unique
the grass and me
 equal

The position of the viewer who stands aloof is given up in order to participate in nature. To be “part of the land” means to belong to nature. Not only is the line “I belong” crucial because it includes the only verb in the poem and describes the main experience of the speaker, but the phrase is also placed both in the middle of the poem and is centred within the line, which typographically reinforces the notion of balance and centredness especially in contrast to the first two lines. While the sense of belonging and inclusion is similar to the feeling Campbell expresses at the end of “Echo Lake,” the speaker in “Land Song” also recognizes the difference between her/himself and the surroundings. To be part of nature does not imply being the same as nature; rather, diversity characterizes the environment. And this multiplicity is not based on hierarchies but on equality. Hierarchy is revealed to be an illusion, a concept that can only exist in connection with a privileged observer. With the elimination of the observer’s superior position in the landscape, hierarchy can dissolve.

When hierarchical relationships in the environment are eliminated, they can be replaced by heterarchical ones that accept “subset plurality within a system without dominant/subordinate ranking,”³⁰ a possibility that finds expression in Campbell’s ecolect. The concept of heterarchical relations is further supported by Campbell’s avoidance of sex-typing of the earth and nature.³¹ She uses imagery in a way that refrains from inscribing a dualistic conception of humanity and earth which would inadvertently evoke hierarchical gender stereotypes.

In her work on Isabella Valancy Crawford, Diana M. A. Relke has suggested that such an ecological model of the relationship between humankind and nature transcends conventional Romantic conceptions of man’s reconciliation with nature and the dualism which reconciliation implies; instead, it critiques hierarchical and dualistic ways of perceiving reality and suggests an alternative epistemology of knowledge based on equality and multiplicity.³² Reconciliation is not the goal of Campbell’s poem; rather, she explores the interdependence of all parts of the environment. The abandonment of the position as observer is the speaker’s initial step towards a sense of belonging that renounces domination and homogenization of and within nature and humanity. The stasis/motion and space/time conflation and its implication of an eternal, dynamic present are part of Campbell’s attempt to redefine relationships with the environment. This attempt informs her use of language and her notation, as she seeks an ecolect that can convey her understanding of the diverse ecosystems and their meeting in the edge. Writing, the poem itself, becomes the space in which writer and nature meet but also the product of that meeting and mutual influence.

Like Campbell’s collection *No Memory of a Move*, Fred Wah’s *So Far* contains many poems to which an ecocritical approach seems appropriate. These include, for example, “What Prevails,” “Spring Geography,” “Anthropomorphia,” “White Lake” and “How to Get Across the River / Any River,” which is the poem I want to focus on in this discussion.³³ Ed Dyck has said of Wah that he “is one of the most de-deconstructive poets writing in Canada today,”³⁴ and it is on his unconventional use of language and notation that most of the critical studies on his work have

focussed. But surely, Pamela Banting overrates this aspect of Wah's work when she says that "while the content of his work is intriguing and its 'themes' heartfelt and important, it is his notation that not only makes his work new and exciting but in some respects precedes the development of the content."³⁵ In my own reading of Wah's poetry, to insist on precedence relationships would be a self-defeating project. Wah's commitment to the local and his poetics of place are of central importance and are inseparable from his style of writing.

The structure of "How to Get Across the River / Any River" is similar to Wah's "How-to" poems in his earlier collection *Owners Manual*:

Drive northeast to a point on the old road
where you join a cortex of scars left by loggers.

After the container stop and look north
below the ridge the mouths of two small caves.

The veins are filled with words, stories really,
and the further away they extend, the more striated.

The first two couplets consist of straightforward instructions that tell an unspecified "you" how to get to a certain place. The landscape evoked in this poem is one that is embedded with previous information:³⁶ as the directions to "Drive northeast" indicate, the territory has been mapped before. That the landscape is filled with history is further indicated by the reference to "the old road" along which the drive will take the persona to a place where s/he is going to "join" a well-known place, an area of land showing "a cortex of scars left by loggers." Thus, by moving to a specific place in the landscape just "after the container" and locating her/himself spatially, the persona is also located temporally in the flow of history when/where logging has already occurred. Here, as in Campbell's poem, a matrix of both place and time is established right from the beginning of the poem. From the first few lines, explicit statements about the state of the environment characterize this poem's ecolect. What the persona

is going to see at the designated place are the openings of two caves described as “mouths.” But the underground watercourses, “the veins,” will not be filled with water as may be expected but with “words, stories.” Two semantic fields are blurred in these first three couplets of the poem: one refers to sites of the landscape (ridge, caves, road, striae) and one describes humanity, the human body and its language capacity (scars, veins, mouths, words, stories).

The poem shifts from the instructive and then descriptive mode to a more contemplative one that addresses the situation of the speaker. The coincidence of couplet and sentence closure that organized the first six lines of the poem is abandoned:

Just our luck to live here on this side of the valley
on a hill with a perfect view

and a garden. Has the gutter on this
page, this old paper bridge, washed out

yet?

The move from the impersonal instruction to the personal statement coincides with a less restrictive formal structure, while it (paradoxically) moves from an open, although not uncharted, landscape to a more controllable “perfect view” and “garden.” It creates a (false?) dualism between “here on this side” where the speaker is located and somewhere else on the other side.

The content of the final question – “Has the gutter on this / page, this old paper bridge, washed out // yet?” – moves the personal location from the outside landscape to the page itself and to the materiality of the poem. The multiple semantic implications of “gutter” open up a number of different readings of the question, indeed of the whole poem. If “gutter” is read as referring to a channel for rainwater, it reinforces the geological meaning of washout – that is, the erosion of earth by running water. While this reading seems coherent with the depiction

of landscape in the poem, it does not sit easily with the reference to the page. However, the previous blending of semantic fields has prepared the reader for this shift: mouths, words, and stories now connect with page, paper, and gutter because in the context of printing “gutter” can indicate the white space between facing pages of an open book. The apposition that modifies the phrase “this page” further attributes to the page the function of a bridge. Thus, the connection is established to the title of the poem, “How to Get Across the River / Any River.” If, literally speaking, the bridge is a means to cross a river in the landscape, then what kind of metaphorical river or gutter can occur on the page that needs to be bridged?

The poem suggests that in the landscape space and time are inseparable. The flow of history, the positioning not only in space but also in time, the connection between past and present, may be experienced by the speaker as a river or divide that needs to be bridged. And the writing on the same page, language itself, may be able to provide that connection. The perfect tense of the verb reinforces the connection between past and present. The sense of indefiniteness is carried beyond the last line because the final question leaves the poem open-ended, waiting for answers. Moreover, the last word of the question, “yet,” intensifies the sense of duration and openness. The question calls for a moment of assessment, a temporary stop in the continuous flow of experience and language. As Dyck has noted, the mind in process indicates a process that, paradoxically, is full of stops and unstable moments of stasis.³⁷ Consequently, this final “yet” cannot really be final; rather, it already looks ahead to the next move. The word “yet” in the poem reiterates the temporal aspect of the book’s title, *So Far*, and is an excellent example of Wah’s interest in the matrix of experiencing time, space, and language as interrelated.

Critics have repeatedly pointed out that geographical places are often used by Wah to generate his poems.³⁸ The ultimate place, however, towards which his poems tend to move seems to be language itself. Experience for Wah is only possible “*through* language, with no separation of language from experience.”³⁹ Wah’s experience of his environment and

his attempt to create poetry that reflects his own interrelation with lived geographies are informed by the Olsonian concept of proprioception. He does not describe nature, as George Bowering has rightfully pointed out, because that would render nature passive;⁴⁰ rather, his experience of the land is a dynamic, holistic experience that finds expression in a holistic concept of language that resists our unconscious habit of fragmenting the natural world of which we are a part.⁴¹ For Wah, the interaction and oscillation between writer and environment, the experience in the edge, or what he has called “pulse and flow, from inside to outside to inside,”⁴² the within and the without of a chiasm, two moments of one process or unity,⁴³ can find expression in poetry itself.

Both Campbell’s and Wah’s poems reflect on their own status as writing. They are the results of the interaction between Campbell/Wah and nature in the edge, but they also contemplate the role writing can play as a mediator in that interactive and exploratory process. In “Echo Lake, Saskatchewan” Campbell develops a new relationship with the environment, a relationship in which hierarchical binaries disappear with the elimination of the privileged outside observer. She expresses an identification with and inclusion in the landscape that makes her poetry especially interesting in the context of ecofeminism, which emphasizes the concepts of diversity, interrelationship, and heterarchy. Because for Wah the experience of nature and language are inseparable, his poem “How to Get Across the River / Any River” finally equates the two, the implication being that if places and landscapes are perceived holistically, then the underlying concept of the language through which this happens may be holistic as well. As Andrew McLaughlin has explained, “the images we have of nature are not reflections of the reality of nature” but represent fundamental choices of how we choose to look at it.⁴⁴ Wah points to the further implications of this realization: the way we will perceive and talk about nature will determine the way we treat it.

The readings that I have presented could be expanded into discussions of many other Canadian poets including – to name but a few – Lorna Crozier, Roo Borson, Dale Zieroth, Paulette Jiles, Don McKay, and Mi-

chael Turner. The theoretical framework of literary ecocriticism could prove an appropriate means to explore the environmentally relevant relationships and issues that these poets address. Certainly, the study of ecolects has provided a focal point in my own readings of contemporary Canadian poetry and has revealed a general move away from the sense of locality found in much earlier Canadian poetry to a new understanding of place. Place is no longer only surveyed from an outside point of view, but it has become an opportunity, a means for redefining one's own relationship with the ecosystems of the environment. Since literary studies have only recently begun to be concerned with ecological criticism, further explorations are needed. It seems crucial not to insist on containing this exploratory discussion but instead to provide a space where we can encourage the voicing of another kind of human–nature interaction and learn the means to generate a form of literary criticism that can listen to such voicing.⁴⁵ If a change in the approach to nature is to come about in our society, it will have to be at the level of perception,⁴⁶ and at the linguistic level such a perception can be reflected in the language of poetry (and its criticism). To view ecologically aware poetry as created in an edge under the influence of both writers and their environments opens a way for writers and readers to advance the shift from an intellectual anorexia and complacency that prevent holistic views to an increasing awareness of the importance of our environment.⁴⁷

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NOTES

- 1 “Contemporary Canadian Poetry from the Edge: An Exploration of Literary Eco-criticism” originally appeared in *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 36 (spring–summer 1995): 44–61. Used with permission.
- 2 Laurie Ricou, “So Big about Green,” *Canadian Literature* 130 (autumn 1991): 3.
- 3 Northrop Frye, “Canada and Its Poetry,” in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), 141–42.
- 4 It is important to emphasize that my general understanding of literary ecocriticism is not exclusive to poetry. It could actually prove immensely valuable in a study of Canadian fiction or drama. My focus on *Canadian* poetry results from my particular fascination with how preoccupied many Canadian writers are with nature and how their critics’ analyses have been almost dogmatic in reinforcing the idea of nature as adversary.
- 5 Eugene P. Odum, *Fundamentals of Ecology*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1971), 157.
- 6 William Ashworth, *The Encyclopedia of Environmental Studies* (New York: Facts on File, 1991), 116. I would like to thank Kerry A. Dawson for sharing her knowledge of ecology and her environmental awareness with me.
- 7 Odum, *Fundamentals of Ecology*, 157–58. The effect exerted by adjoining communities on the organism structure of the ecotone, i.e., the tendency for increased variety and density, is known as the edge effect and the ecotone itself is therefore often referred to as an edge (*ibid.*, 157). See also R. J. Lincoln et al., *A Dictionary of Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 76–77.
- 8 My approach here follows D.M.R. Bentley who has pointed out that an “ecological perspective that insists on the interdependence of all things and their environments or contexts” includes “not merely plants and animals ... but also human creatures and their cultural artefacts,” “imaginative constructs – the stories, the myths, the poems – whereby men and women make themselves at home in their surroundings” (D.M.R. Bentley, *The Gay]Grey Moose: Essays on Ecologies and Mythologies of Canadian Poetry, 1690–1990* [Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1992], 2).
- 9 John Elder, *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 193. Elder also uses the ecological concept of edge, but he considers poetry itself as the edge and refers to poetry’s landscape as an ecotone (210).
- 10 D.M.R. Bentley, “Along the Line of Smoky Hills: Further Steps towards an Ecological Poetics,” *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 26 (spring–summer 1990): v–xix.
- 11 *Ibid.*, vi.
- 12 Patrick D. Murphy, “Prolegomenon for an Ecofeminist Dialogics,” in *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, ed. Dale M. Bauer and Susan Janet McKinstry (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 39.
- 13 Actually, most of the studies in the Canadian context that use ecocriticism as their theoretical framework have not focussed on contemporary texts; see for instance Bentley and Relke. See also Cook on the writing of environmental history. The situation is notably different in the American context where ecocritical studies of Gary Snyder and Robinson Jeffers, for

- example, are numerous. (Information is provided in the list of Works Cited.)
- 14 Karen J. Warren, "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections," *Environmental Ethics* 9, no. 1 (1987): 7. For other useful introductions to ecofeminism see King, Monk, Cheney, Zimmerman, Plant, Diamond and Orenstein, and Merchant. See also Biehl for a negative critique of ecofeminism. (Information is provided in the list of Works Cited.)
 - 15 Murphy, "Prolegomenon," 40.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, 44.
 - 17 For an excellent discussion of Gaia imagery and the need for alternate image systems see Patrick D. Murphy, "Sex-Typing the Planet: Gaia Imagery and the Problem of Subverting Patriarchy," *Environmental Ethics* 10, no. 2 (1988).
 - 18 Hugh Sykes Davies, *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 274, 319 n.8.
 - 19 James C. McKusick, "'A language that is ever green': The Ecological Vision of John Clare," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (1991–92): 243.
 - 20 Alden Nowlan, *Under the Ice* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1961), 43.
 - 21 Fred Cogswell, "Alden Nowlan as Regional Atavist," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 11, no. 2 (1986): 206.
 - 22 Pat Lowther, *A Stone Diary* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), 35–37.
 - 23 J. Douglas Porteous, *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 6.
 - 24 A more detailed analysis of "Coast Range" may have to grapple with the issue of anthropomorphism, placing it in a broader context of Lowther's work. Could Lowther's attempt to render landscape in human terms be said to reinforce the separation between wo/man and the land as other, what Murphy has described as "humanity's false egotism fed by anthropocentrism" ("Sex-Typing the Planet," 162)?
 - 25 Compare Ramsay Cook's comment on the writing of environmental history: "More recent environmental historians have a different focus. They are no longer much concerned with explaining the impact of the environment on man [*sic*]; it is the impact of man on nature that is at the centre of their work" ("Cabbages Not Kings: Towards an Ecological Interpretation of Early Canadian History," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 25, no. 4 [winter 1990–91]: 7).
 - 26 Anne Campbell, *No Memory of a Move* (Edmonton: Longspoon, 1983), 91.
 - 27 Susan Glickman, "Canadian Prospects: Abram's Plains in Context," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (1990): 507.
 - 28 Don Gayton, *The Wheatgrass Mechanism: Science and Imagination in the Western Canadian Landscape* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1990), 146.
 - 29 Campbell, *No Memory of a Move*, 95.
 - 30 Murphy, "Sex-Typing the Planet," 165.
 - 31 Campbell assigns gender only to one natural phenomenon in "Echo Lake." Syntactically, the referent of the present participle phrase "pulling evening around himself" is "sun" in the preceding line, but it could also be "lake." In my initial reading, I referred "himself" to "lake," which coincides with the gender assignments in German, which is my first language ("die Sonne" [sun] is feminine but "der See" [lake] is masculine). Native speakers of English seem to be more likely to choose "sun" as the referent.
 - 32 Diana M. A. Relke, "The Ecological Vision of Isabella Valancy Crawford: A Reading of 'Malcolm's Katie,'" *ARIEL* 22, no. 3 (1991): 52.
 - 33 Fred Wah, *So Far* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), 62.

- 34 Ed Dyck, "Rhetoric and Poetry and Fred Wah," in *Beyond Tish*, ed. Douglas Barbour (Edmonton: NeWest, 1991), 197.
- 35 Pamela Banting, "Fred Wah's Syntax: a Genealogy, a Translation," *Sagetrieb* 7, no. 1 (1988): 100.
- 36 Jeff Derksen, "Torquing Time," in *Beyond Tish*, ed. Douglas Barbour (Edmonton: NeWest, 1991), 163.
- 37 Dyck, "Rhetoric and Poetry and Fred Wah," 200.
- 38 George Bowering, "The Poems of Fred Wah," in *Loki Is Buried at Smoky Creek: Selected Poems*, by Fred Wah, ed. George Bowering (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980), 19–21; Dyck, "Rhetoric and Poetry and Fred Wah," 200; Laurie Ricou, "Fred Wah," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 60: Canadian Writers Since 1960, Second Series*, ed. W. H. New (Detroit: Gale Research, 1987), 370.
- 39 Derksen, "Torquing Time," 161.
- 40 Bowering, "Poems of Fred Wah," 12.
- 41 Saroj Chawla, "Linguistics and Philosophical Roots of Our Environmental Crisis," *Environmental Ethics* 13, no. 3 (1991): 254.
- 42 Fred Wah, "Subjective as Objective: The Lyric Poetry of Sharon Thesen," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 32 (summer 1986): 118.
- 43 Hwa Yol Jung and Petee Jung, "Gary Snyder's Ecopiety," *Environmental History Review* 14, no. 3 (1990): 78.
- 44 Andrew McLaughlin, "Images and Ethics of Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 7, no. 4 (1985): 318.
- 45 Here I echo the words of Patrick D. Murphy, "Voicing Another Nature," in *A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin*, ed. Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 78.
- 46 Chawla, "Linguistics and Philosophical Roots of Our Environmental Crisis," 262.
- 47 I would like to thank Janice Fiamengo and especially Laurie Ricou for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this paper.

Nature's Nation, National Natures? Reading Ecocriticism in a Canadian Context (1998)

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According to the contemporary code in humanities publishing that measures the viability of a new critical area by the production of a reader, 1996 marked the coming-of-age of the field of ecocriticism, with the publication of a collection of essays edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, entitled, simply, *The Ecocriticism Reader*. Like its predecessors in such areas as cultural studies and postcolonialism, *The Ecocriticism Reader* offers a representative survey of the field's achievement to date, attempting to provide an answer to the question "what is ecocriticism?" by defining its "history and scope," introducing its "leading scholars," and presenting "seminal and representative essays" – the essays "with which anyone wishing to undertake ecocritical scholarship ought to be familiar."² Reading through the collection, the aspiring ecocritical scholar could quickly form a number of general conclusions about the field of ecocriticism: it has a long history; it is eclectic in subject matter; its prac-

tioners come from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines. And it is primarily American. This last conclusion may be drawn from the observation that, with one (Canadian) exception, all of the essays come from the United States, whether explicitly, in terms of subject matter, or implicitly, in terms of the affiliation of the writer. This limited geopolitical focus might not strike the reader as remarkable were it not for the editors' claim that ecocriticism is a way of making literary criticism more responsive to "the global environmental crisis."³ The inconsistency is neither explained nor justified by Glotfelty's acknowledgment of the collection's limited geographical range and her confident prediction that the next one will be more international in scope.⁴

The present essay, it must be acknowledged at the outset, is grounded in a similar inconsistency. My first reaction to the American focus of *The Ecocriticism Reader* was a twinge of patriotic crankiness, which was not mollified by Glotfelty's reassuring conviction that *in the future* the ecocritical field would become more international – nor, it must be acknowledged, by my inability to think of more than a handful of Canadian essays in ecocriticism which might contribute to such an endeavour.⁵ It is one thing to suffer the indignity of being overlooked, and quite another to be forced to admit that you might actually be invisible. The question, then, is why this should be so: is it the case that American critics are not aware of relevant Canadian ecocritical texts, or do those texts simply not exist? And if they do not exist, why do they not exist? Is it that the Americans are at the cutting edge of literary criticism and we just have not arrived there yet? Or is there a substantial body of what might be called "Canadian ecocriticism" lurking under names other than "Canadian" or "ecocritical"? Or might there be something peculiarly American about ecocriticism, something that, for all its globalist connotations, cannot survive north of the forty-ninth parallel?

While this issue [42] of *Canadian Poetry* should provide the answers to some of those questions, by demonstrating that there is indeed a healthy ecocritical tradition thriving in this country, I want to pose one more: why should it matter? Since questions of ecology transcend traditional geopolitical borders, what is the difference whether ecocritical writing

comes from Canada, or the United States, or any other nation? This essay is an attempt to offer some suggestions of what that “difference” might constitute, in the limited comparative context of Canada and the United States. Without seeking to refute the argument convincingly mounted by critics such as Thom Kuehls that the principles of ecology and national sovereignty are, or should be, mutually exclusive, this essay takes a different tack, working from the premise that the everyday practices of ecocriticism and nationalism are radically conjoined and often difficult to separate. By exploring this conjunction in a comparative framework it is possible to consider, not just why some nationalist mythologies nurture ecocritical thinking more effectively than others, but also how the principles of ecocriticism might be adapted to reflect the importance of cultural context.

1. Defined in the Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” ecocriticism is a hybrid form, combining the theories and methodologies of ecology and literary criticism.⁶ To make sense of it, then, it is necessary to approach it from two sides, to trace the intellectual and institutional lineages of its ecological, as well as its literary-critical, forebears. Ecology today tends to carry the sense, if not the precise theoretical origins, of the popular label drawn from the title of Paul Shepard’s 1969 book, *The Subversive Science*. That is, it has come to be seen less as a descriptive study of relations between organisms and their environments than as a prescriptive doctrine about the importance of conserving a balance of those relations in specific environments or bioregions. The scope of this doctrine is theoretically global; that its practical application is frequently inflected by national concerns is evident from looking at contemporary environmental issues and politics. One recent Canadian example of the entanglement of national and environmental issues is the controversy over logging of old-growth forests in British Columbia, a controversy which, in the summer of 1997, swerved away from ecological and towards economic concerns. Notwithstanding the multinational credentials of many of the logging companies involved, the issue came to be represent-

ed by their PR departments, as by most mainstream media, as a contest between the interests of Canadian forestry workers and those of environmentalists from the “Amsterdam-based” group, Greenpeace.⁷ Obviously calculated to evoke public outrage, this representation could arguably be seen to play on sentiments stirred up by the more spectacular collision of nationalist and environmentalist interests that occurred several years previously, when Robert Kennedy, Jr., waded into the debate about the expansion of the Great Whale hydroelectric project in James Bay.

With Kennedy’s arrival, the site of Great Whale – a site already overwritten with the mythological lines dividing nature and technology, Native and white, Quebec and English Canada, and even, in the context of sovereignty debates, nature and culture – became a symbol of Canada’s fundamental separateness from its more powerful southern neighbour. The significance of Kennedy’s nationality was arguably heightened, rather than diminished, by his claim, in defence of his involvement in Canadian domestic politics, that “ecological threats such as acid rain, toxic waste, and a depleting ozone layer, don’t respect borders.”⁸ This statement, which implies, by way of natural corollary, that ecologists should not respect borders either, is on the one hand a truism of environmentalist politics.⁹ Though Kennedy technically had no jurisdiction over the disputed territory, he mobilized a rhetoric of justice – a kind of supernatural law – in the face of whose authority mere questions of jurisdiction would appear to fade away. On the other hand, Kennedy’s credibility as a spokesperson for natural justice derives at least in part from his affiliation with a particular *national* jurisdiction – the U.S.A. The strength of that affiliation is confirmed by the authority, both symbolic and material, vested not so much in Kennedy as an individual, as in the whole Kennedy family,¹⁰ and in that family’s emblematic association with the United States and the values for which that nation stands. Kennedy claims to have inherited his concern for the natural world from his father, who “had a very, very strong interest in protecting the environment.... He saw it as a vital part of the American identity ... and a place also of spiritual renewal and challenge.”¹¹ Robert Kennedy, Jr.’s contemporary activism is thus legitimated by its roots in both conceptions of

environment – as part of an American identity, and as a place of spiritual renewal, conceptions which have frequently merged into one another in accordance with the mythology of America as “Nature’s Nation.”¹²

From a contemporary Canadian perspective, it is easy to translate that mythology into a history of American self-aggrandizement. Accordingly, for many critics, Kennedy’s arrival on the scene of the Great Whale debate could be read as part of a continuing story of Canada’s victimization at the hands of a nation whose attitude has been by turns bullying and blandly indifferent. Reed Scowen, Quebec’s delegate-general in New York, dismissed Kennedy as belonging to “an elite in the U.S. Northeast that has always seen Quebec as a nice playground.”¹³ While Kennedy denied this charge, he did little to refute it in his criticism of “U.S. consumer practices [which] are driving environmental destruction” in a country which he describes as “one of the prettiest and wildest on Earth.”¹⁴ The construction of a depopulated Canada as a natural resource, outside (but available to) the practices of American consumers works as a variation on a familiar imperialist trope – one that has a well-established place in the history of Canadian–American relations.¹⁵ This trope supports a reading of Kennedy’s forays into Canadian environmental politics as merely the latest outrage in a long relationship that has frequently – and justifiably – been described as colonial.

But the situation is complicated and the strength of the metaphor diminished by the position of the one group of human players who have been, it might be argued, affected most substantially by colonialism – the Natives. While white environmentalists frequently argue for the preservation of Natives’ traditional relationships with the land – relationships they cite as a model for their own practice – the working relationship between Natives and environmentalists is often rocky. Just as Kennedy’s representation of Canada as “one of the prettiest and wildest [places] on Earth” fails to take into account the places where most Canadians live, urban environmentalists can be accused of constructing an idealistic view of native existence which ignores Natives’ necessary implication in the dominant economy. In the context of these conflicted relationships it is somewhat surprising, perhaps, that when, in 1993, Kennedy waded

into an acrimonious debate between Natives and environmentalists in Clayoquot Sound, he quickly won the support of the Natives.¹⁶ The symbolic alliance was to be cemented in a trip planned for the following summer, in which Kennedy and a group of Natives would travel down the coast from Clayoquot Sound to Los Angeles in a 52-foot dugout canoe called *The Spirit of Unity* – a pointed reminder, presumably, that, where ecology is concerned, national borders are quite simply irrelevant.

The conflicts just described indicate otherwise, however, suggesting that while the laws of ecology may transcend borders, the *territories* they define are circumscribed – practically and discursively – by the political bodies that claim sovereignty over them. That the politics of ecology should be both shaped and constrained by practical issues of sovereignty is not surprising; less obvious but equally important to acknowledge is the extent to which ecology as a *science* has, since its inception, been framed by these issues.

2. To understand the national significance of ecology in Canadian and U.S. American contexts, it is necessary briefly to review the institutional roots of science – and in particular, of natural history, ecology’s most direct forerunner – in the two countries. For pragmatic, as well as more complex cultural reasons, interest in natural history, which peaked in England around the middle of the nineteenth century, spread quickly to the New World. On the level of practical utility, the study of their natural environment was of paramount importance for settlers in largely uncharted territory. Natural history promoted the gathering of vital information about the kind of plant life sustained in different climatic regions, the location of ore bodies, and the prevalence of crop-destroying insects, at the same time as it facilitated the dissemination of that information abroad, thus advertising the wealth of New World resources on an international scale. In this last regard especially, science aided, not only in the economic, but also in the imaginative transformation of colony into nation. In British North America, as Suzanne Zeller has convincingly demonstrated, “inventory science,” or the mapping and cataloguing of natural phenomena, yielded fuel for a vision of territorial

integrity and diversity that informed the development of Canada as a transcontinental nation. The marvellous revelations of natural history would, it was believed, inspire collective enthusiasm for a national project that transcended the limited interests of culture or class. As a review in the *Canadian Naturalist and Geologist* (1858) put it:

Physically considered, British America is a noble territory, grand in its natural features, rich in its varied resources. Politically, it is a loosely united aggregate of petty states, separated by barriers of race, creed, local interest, distance, and insufficient means of communication. As naturalists, we hold to its natural features as fixing its future destiny, and indicating its present interests, and regard its local subdivisions as arbitrary and artificial.¹⁷

Unconsciously, or perhaps strategically, the reviewer does not acknowledge the extent to which “local subdivisions” and other “artificial” political factors were already defining the growth of natural history in British America.

Prominent among these factors was the clash of English- and French-Canadian attitudes towards scientific research. Though expressed most overtly in the conflict between Anglo-Protestantism – which tended to support the study of natural history as an extension of natural theology – and French ultramontanist – which viewed the study of nature as a dangerous diversion from the proper subject of worship (that is, God) – this clash had political as well as cultural dimensions. While English-Canadian support for such government-funded ventures as Sir William Logan’s Geological Survey of Canada grew steadily throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, French Canadians tended to view such projects with wariness, directed not so much at the advancement of science, as at the involvement of government. To radical *Patriotes*, the whole English-Canadian notion of progress was suspect, its aggressively capitalist thrust an undisguised threat to the dominance of agriculture in Lower Canada.¹⁸ It is perhaps not surprising, then, that

French-Canadian involvement in scientific institutions such as the Royal Society was disproportionately low.¹⁹ One prominent exception was the renowned naturalist l'Abbé Léon Provancher, who called for greater participation of French Canadians in science, proficiency in which he took as "the measure of the state of civilization of a people."²⁰ A similar view was adopted by William Dawson, the nation's pre-eminent natural historian, who refused a position at Princeton in 1878 on the grounds that his help was urgently required in Quebec to fight against the onslaught of ultramontanism, which threatened to overwhelm "the cause of liberal education and science as well as religion ... and with it all reasonable chance of the permanent success of our Canadian Dominion."²¹ Thus an explicit connection was drawn by Dawson, and reinforced by the Marquis of Lorne, the Governor General who founded Canada's Royal Society, between the development of science and the growth of the nation. The persistence of French-English conflict, however, made it difficult to concur with the above-cited *Canadian Naturalist and Geologist* review in its determined separation of "natural" history from "artificial" politics.

Canadian arguments about the relationship between scientific and national development in many ways echoed those advanced earlier – and, arguably, with greater success – by American naturalists such as William Bartram and John James Audubon. As Michael Branch has shown, the classification of native flora and fauna was seen to constitute an indexing of American potential – "a contribution not only to science, but to the cultural identity of the nation."²² This process of national consolidation was contingent upon the capacity of the nation, not only to generate knowledge, but also to house that knowledge within national institutions. To this end, as Branch has noted, from the early nineteenth century onwards, a concerted effort was made in the United States to nationalize research funding, to publish research findings in American journals, and to create permanent museum collections to prevent specimens from being sent outside the country.²³ Victorian Canada did not possess this level of autonomous infrastructure. As might be expected, early Canadian natural historians deferred to imperial authority, shipping their data off to British experts for classification. By the middle

of the nineteenth century, however, this professional attachment had switched from Britain to the United States. Not only did Canadians look to the more numerous and prestigious American journals for publication, but many conducted field work at the behest of American researchers, sending specimens back to the United States for classification and display. With respect to the extensive involvement of the Smithsonian Institution in Canadian research, Carl Berger muses: "one must wonder what the members of the Natural History Society of Montreal felt when they learned that the best specimens collected in the northwest were retained in Washington and that unwanted duplicates were sent on to them."²⁴ If natural history could be seen to work in the United States as, in Branch's words, "a kind of artistic and scientific correlative to the idea of manifest destiny,"²⁵ it functioned in Canada to highlight the legacies of colonialism, both internally, in the conflict between French and English Canadians, and externally, in the nation's deference to the imperial authority, first of England, then of the United States.

Though practically constrained by Canada's colonial status, the study of natural history was, in a *formal* sense, peculiarly congenial to it. From both its early scientific foundations in Linnaean classification and its more popular grounding in William Paley's natural theology, natural history supported an essentially conservative world view, defined by an emphasis on stability and harmony, and framed in hierarchical terms: for Linnaeus, nature was an "empire," composed of kingdoms and regiments of plant and animal life. For writers such as Paley, and Gilbert White, whose *Natural History of Selborne* offered a practical demonstration of natural theology, nature was the manifestation of God's divine order, with each new species identified offering further evidence of the subtlety and complexity of his plan. Natural historians took special delight in noting how each species was ideally adapted to its surroundings, where it coexisted in harmony with other species: everything had its place in a universal, unchanging order. For settlers in a territory which seemed in other ways so remote from familiar structures of signification, this doctrine was a source of comfort. Natural history might serve, moreover, to compensate for a perceived lack of *cultural* history in the new land: by

Catharine Parr Traill's familiar reckoning, "if its volume of history is yet a blank, that of Nature is open, and eloquently marked by the finger of God; and from its pages I can extract a thousand sources of amusement and interest whenever I take my walks in the forest or by the borders of the lakes."²⁶ Traill's choice of metaphor here is instructive: by framing nature, along with history, within the pages of a book, she emphasizes, not only its signficatory function as a cipher for an unseen order, but also its location within a closed structure: the story of nature is already written, and not subject to change.

The theory of evolution, brought to public attention with the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, signalled the end of natural history as it had been understood by writers such as Traill, while it paved the way for the new understanding of nature represented by ecology. While the response of the Canadian scientific community to Darwin's conclusions was on the whole fairly subdued, the disproportionate authority wielded by conservative scientists such as Dawson, and the influence of the church over scientific academic appointments, arguably stifled the debate that might otherwise have taken place – and which did take place elsewhere.²⁷ While Darwinism met with more vociferous opposition in the United States, by 1875 most American scientists had accepted the principal tenets of evolutionism.²⁸ While some critics have emphasized the amenability of the idea of competition – particularly its extension into social theory – to a culture enamoured of capitalism, this argument overlooks the countervailing focus in Darwin on interdependency: the idea that the life of the individual organism is defined by its place in a complex biotic community. This idea had repercussions far beyond the realm of science, as it came to shape such literary and philosophical movements as naturalism and pragmatism.²⁹ As a scientific theory, it was vital to the development of ecology.

Though the word "ecology" (or *Oekologie*) was coined in 1866 by Ernst Haeckel as a description of the science of relations between organisms and their environments, the label did not so much mark the birth of a movement as offer a loose container for a number of different scientific approaches, which had in common a rejection of traditional,

mechanistic views of science in favour of an emphasis on organicism. While it had a clear scientific basis, this emphasis was informed, sometimes explicitly, by the echoes of a Romanticist critique of the excessive rationalism of the Enlightenment. Thus ecology from its beginnings was an anti-scientific science, defined, in the words of Barrington Moore, the first editor of the journal *Ecology*, not so much by a specific methodology or field of inquiry as by a special “point of view.”³⁰ The philosophical underpinnings of ecology made it – like natural history before it – accessible to amateurs; it was, as William Howarth put it, “a vernacular and democratic science.”³¹ This anti-academic emphasis, combined with its focus on field rather than laboratory work, enhanced the perception of ecology as a subversive pursuit whose practitioners were rugged individualists and iconoclasts.³² This perception persisted in spite of the increasing professionalization of the field of ecology during the early twentieth century, as evidenced by the funding of research and the appointment of academic chairs.

It may be argued that it was because of, rather than in spite of, its apparently contradictory emphases – on professionalism and democratic appeal, interdependence and individualism – that ecology proved particularly congenial to American society. On the most obvious level, some of the very aspects of evolutionism which had most offended colonial sensibilities in Canada – its emphasis on radical change, its destabilization of hierarchy – had lent weight, at least metaphorically, to the revolutionist ideology of America. More specifically, the Darwinist premise of a human character inspired by the same genetically programmed instincts that motivate animals – a premise that offended conservative political beliefs in the importance of culture and tradition for the preservation and transmission of human values – could be taken to support a republican argument, not for the rejection of culture, but for the generation of a new culture, based on nature. Thus Darwinism, and later, and to an even greater extent, ecology, offered scientific credibility to the much older idea of the United States as “nature’s nation,” a country whose rapid economic growth bore witness not so much to its adoption of a particular ethic of development as to its obedience to natural law.

For writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, the connection between the economy of the nation and the biology of its individual citizens was not merely a rhetorical figure, but an expression of the Transcendentalist principle of correspondence, whereby every living thing expressed the spirit of the whole. This expression, Emerson believed, would be most clearly realized in the American republic, a place where “a nation of men [would] for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.”³³ While the science of ecology could not countenance the concept of the Divine Soul, the Transcendentalist doctrine of holistic correspondence found a credible echo in the famous dictum advanced by Haeckel, that phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny³⁴ – that the development of the individual reiterates all the stages in the evolution of the species. This principle could provide a scientific correlative to the concept of *E pluribus unum*, according to which the American people are joined, by natural law and voluntary agreement, into a single body. While this analogical appropriation of ecological principles might seem suspect from a purely scientific perspective, it is sanctioned from a discursive perspective by the form of ecology itself. For if the language of traditional biology is characterized by linear precision, ecology introduces the more wayward – more literary – significations of metaphor and homology. This figural shift may be read, Howarth has suggested, within the context of the larger grammatical shift that occurred when the noun-based Linnaean system of classification was replaced by the Darwinian concept of evolution, whose emphasis on change and variation demanded the dynamic force of the verb.³⁵ This shift in grammatical focus, combined with its appropriation of the literary figures of metaphor and analogy, goes some way towards explaining the force of ecology as narrative.³⁶

What the grammar of ecology does not explain is why or how that narrative could be appropriated to nationalist ends; after all, one of the politically subversive implications of ecology is its implicit rejection of mere political boundaries in favour of the bioregions that sustain *all* life, human and otherwise. If, in ecology, “there is to be no interposing mechanism between man and man, man and thing and man and

nature,” Anna Bramwell reasons, “neither must there be any wasteful, artificial state mechanisms, no bureaucracy, no unproductive ‘Thing’ in [William] Cobbett’s words.”³⁷ Paradoxically, it is in its very hostility towards artificial political mechanisms that ecology – the anti-scientific science – resonates so strongly with the cultural mythology of the anti-state state of America. This affinity is not, clearly, based on logically congruent visions of “nature”; neither, however, can it be put down to ideological coincidence. I would suggest, rather, that the compatibility of the discourse of ecology with that of an American national mythology is tied to the question of representation. This question leads into the realm of language and literature, without departing from the realm of politics. The connection between those realms is particularly evident in the context of postcolonial cultures such as Canada and the United States, where defining a sense of relationship to place is explicitly predicated on the negotiation of questions of symbolic and political representation.³⁸ That is to say, “representation” mediates the individual’s relationship to place both in the sense of the linguistic structure through which s/he symbolically knows it, and in the sense of the political structure through which s/he materially possesses it. In both senses, representation has carried a different meaning in Canada than it has in the United States.

Since John Cotton reminded the Puritan emigrants from England of God’s covenant with his chosen people – “I will plant them, and what follows from thence? They shall dwell in their own place”³⁹ – Americans’ mythological relationship to the land has been structured around the idea of promise: the continent of North America will be the site of the fulfilment of God’s word. Inherent in the meaning of the promise is, not only a guarantee of some form of material reward, but also the assurance that language will deliver, that words will issue in meaning, or truth. These ideas come together in the mythology of America as the apocalyptic culmination of Old World history. The land, in this mythology, is not merely the site on which the Christian promise of revelation and the political promise of emancipation are played out, but is, rather, the literal embodiment of divine and, by extension, natural law. Myra Jehlen suggests that this concept of “American incarnation,” elaborated

in her book of that title, is predicated on the myth of discovery, according to which the contingencies of history are resolved in the solidity of geography – Old World quest narratives realized as empirical fact. As Jehlen puts it, “when the liberal ideal fused with the material landscape, it produced an ‘America’ that was not an allegory, for its meaning was not detachable, but symbol, its meaning inherent in its matter.”⁴⁰ The “promise” of America was thus in one sense the promise of an unmediated possession of place – a possession confirmed with the signing of the Declaration of Independence, which fulfilled in symbolic and material terms the guarantee of direct representation.⁴¹ American history, then, in Jehlen’s terms, was “from the start an inspirational story whose fairytale beginning, once upon a time, promised a transcendent resolution.”⁴²

The rhetoric of ecology can be enlisted in the construction of an equally inspirational story. As Bramwell has noted, ecology as a normative doctrine is predicated on the possibility, and the desirability, of dismantling the unproductive “Thing” that separates humanity from the natural world; the consequence will be the revelation of truth and the attainment of sustainable harmony. In that sense, it is potentially, if not inherently, an apocalyptic doctrine, explaining the paradox observed by Bramwell, that ecologists are “optimistic, in the sense that there is no original sin and nature is harmonious,” and also “pessimistic, fearing waste, irreversible decline, and the ruin of the environment.”⁴³ This paradox, which is evident in such ecological classics as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), also informs a long tradition of American apocalyptic writing.⁴⁴

That English Canada does not have a strong tradition of apocalyptic writing is partly attributable to a history of settlement which was not informed by the powerful impetus of the promise. While early Canadian settlers, like their American counterparts, emigrated in hopes of improving their circumstances, most sought to enhance, not to transcend, their position within a pre-existing cultural structure. Their more conservative dreams were supported by social realities in British North America, where, by the time most settlers arrived, the illusion of a “virgin” land had long ago been compromised by the presence of European

economic and political infrastructure. Thus, where, in the United States, the westward movement of settlement could be read as an expansion consistent with the progressive revelation of national identity, most Canadian settlers' relationship to place was mediated by an already-existing structure of British law. Where the American settler could legitimate his position as being "at home," in the sense of claiming a prelapsarian connection to his environment, sanctified by natural law, the Canadian was always already subject to another body, of local, and by extension, of imperial government. With the arrival of Loyalists following the American Revolution, that fact of subjection was turned, for reasons that were only partly strategic, into a virtue to be defended.

According to its very definition as a British colony, then, Canada was governed by an extrinsic law – a law whose non-organic relationship to its subjects was highlighted by its conveyance through a language that was manifestly not grounded in Canadian experience. This condition of linguistic alienation was compounded, in the wake of American independence, by proximity to a nation in which the English language had become to a large extent (and in more than one sense) naturalized. Dennis Lee describes the Canadian discursive situation metaphorically, in terms of the silence, or otherness, that always inhabits speech or writing in English in Canada. E. D. Blodgett extends this argument, enlisting the somewhat unlikely aid of Schiller to suggest that the difference between American and Canadian literary attitudes is analogous to the difference between naïve and sentimental poetry. "The poet," Schiller asserts, "either *is* nature or he will *seek* it. The former constitutes the naïve, the second the sentimental poet."⁴⁵ While the naïve (or classical) poet enjoys the position of a direct and unmediated relationship with his subject, the overwhelming experience for the sentimental poet is one of loss and disjunction: the sentimental poet writes from the awareness of a split between reality and his own awareness: "the naïve is perceived in unity, a lack of differentiation, a possession of 'the pure unity of origin.' The sentimental is perceived in conflict, infinite elaboration, a sense of alienation, and an impulsion, if I might be forgiven the apparent anachronism, to unhide the hidden."⁴⁶ Blodgett extends his clearly telegraphed

conclusion, that we might associate the naïve with an American foundationalism, the sentimental, with a Canadian anti-foundationalism, one step further (for some perhaps one step too far) with his observation that “naïve” is derived from the Latin *nativus*, “what is native or inborn and cognate with nation.”⁴⁷ The American, by implication, is characterized by an unmediated relationship – or at least the belief in the possibility of an unmediated relationship – not just with nature, but also with nation, and with nature *through* nation. The Canadian, by contrast, is plagued by an awareness of mediation, of the presence of language as language, a structure through which nature – and nation – can never be directly experienced but must always be translated.⁴⁸ This has not stopped English Canadians from writing about nature. It does, however, mitigate against imagining a relationship with nature that is coextensive with the political bonds of national citizenship.⁴⁹ To suggest that nature, in Canadian nature writing, is incommensurate with nation is not to suggest that all, or even most, American nature writers are explicitly nationalist. It is a peculiarity of the official narrative of America, however, that it is those writers who endorse civil disobedience – Thoreau and, latterly, Edward Abbey – who, in one sense, appear most thoroughly American. And it is those writers whose works have helped to inspire the development of ecocriticism in the United States.

3. This brings us, finally, to the principal question that this essay seeks to address: why has ecocriticism burgeoned in the American literary academy, but not in the Canadian? This question is partly answered by the foregoing discussion about the history of ecology in Canada and the United States; a more complete picture can be gained by considering ecocriticism in the context of literary criticism. In arguing for a significant relationship between ecocriticism and American literary criticism, I do not mean to suggest that it has radically shaped critical practice in the United States, that ecocritics have successfully stormed the barricades of the Modern Language Association and forced the environment onto curricula across the country. At the present time, there is a handful of professors of literature and the environment teaching in the

United States, and “nature writing” is still fairly marginal, remaining, as one critic puts it, “more of an enclave than, for example, the canons of American ethnic literatures.”⁵⁰ For all its marginality, however, and even specifically *in* its marginality, ecocriticism in the United States reflects the broader critical tradition in ways that few of its practitioners have acknowledged.

Some of the reasons for this relative inattention to critical environment are grounded in the logical (or ideological) premises of a criticism that explicitly focusses its attention on the *natural* environment. The focus extends to the rhetoric of ecocriticism, which tends to have an organicist focus: thus the “field” of environmental literary studies was “planted” in the mid-1980s, and in the early 1990s it “grew.”⁵¹ Later in the Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty acknowledges the many kinds of studies that “huddle under the spreading tree of ecological literary criticism,” and, at the risk of mixing (cross-breeding?) metaphors, writes of her unsuccessful attempt to “devise a branding system that would make sense of this mixed herd.”⁵² The use of organicist metaphors reflects an acknowledged frustration on the part of many ecocritics with the remoteness of the academy from the beauty and, more significantly, the fragility, of the physical world. “Given the fact that most of us in the profession of English would be offended at not being considered environmentally conscious and environmentally aware,” as Glen A. Love remarks, “how are we to account for our general failure to apply any sense of this awareness to our daily work?”⁵³ In some ecocritical writing, this failure is represented in the form of a split within the critics themselves, who seek to reconcile the difficulty of living in the “two very different worlds” of critical theory and deep ecology.⁵⁴ The belief that “there must be some way to bridge the gap”⁵⁵ is informed by a faith in the possibility and the desirability of becoming, quite literally, organic intellectuals, whose connection to the world around them is unmediated by institutional structure or political contradictions. The tendency to downplay academic affiliations in favour of an emphasis on the integrated citizen/scholar whose life/work is grounded in the wider community, however that may be envisioned, is part of a longstanding

tradition in the American academy, beginning with Emerson's American Scholar, and extending to the contemporary scholarship of the so-called New Americanists.⁵⁶

For some ecocritics, the problem is not so much the institutional context as the literally ungrounded content of contemporary literary criticism. Noting the tendency of critics to turn all literary subjects – including nature – into discursive constructs, Lawrence Buell asks the question that implicitly motivates much ecocriticism: “must literature always lead us away from the physical world, never back to it?”⁵⁷ SueEllen Campbell highlights the abstruse character of contemporary theory by imagining what eco-activist Abbey's response might be to the writing of Jacques Derrida: “that arrogant, incomprehensible, disembodied lump of brain... He's more convoluted than the Grand Canyon. That deconstructive gibberish, it's so *French* – pretentious and citified and elitist and esoteric. It's about as clear as smog. I bet the closest he ever gets to the real world is a glass of Perrier and a bottle of artificial mesquite smoke.”⁵⁸ On its own, this obviously exaggerated image of the opposition between ecology and deconstruction gives the impression of ecocriticism as founded on a slightly paranoid defence of American authenticity against the denaturing threat of Continental theory. Most contemporary ecocriticism is, however, on the contrary, theoretically engaged almost by definition.

While some early ecocritical writing may have constituted little more than appreciative studies of nature writing, contemporary ecocriticism is acutely sensitive to the way nature is constructed in that writing. “What separates *traditional* from *contemporary* ecocritics,” suggests Paul Tidwell, “is the attention paid [by the latter] to the ‘frame’ of human consciousness”;⁵⁹ this “frame” is acknowledged by Buell and by Campbell, who follows her hypothetical critique of Derrida by Abbey with a hypothetical critique of Abbey by Derrida. While she considers some of the ways in which theory and ecology contradict each other, Campbell also identifies important commonalities in their critical stance: first, “both theorists and ecologists ... are at core revolutionary. They stand in opposition to traditional authority, which they question and then reject”;⁶⁰ and second,

“theory and ecology agree that there’s no such thing as a self-enclosed, private piece of property, neither a deer nor a person nor a text nor a piece of land.”⁶¹ Here Campbell invokes the paradox of ecology noted above: it focusses on interdependency from the autonomous perspective of the romantic individual. Like ecologists before them, ecocritics are “voice[s] crying in the wilderness,”⁶² speaking natural truth (and the truth of nature) to institutional power. What has changed is the composition of the “truth”; as Campbell’s second point suggests: where meaning was once absolute and singular, it is now contingent and multivocal. Though most ecocritics would accept this premise, Campbell’s formulation of it reads a little strangely, perhaps intentionally so. The list of “deer,” “person,” and “text” suggests that these phenomena all resist self-enclosure in the same way, such that the interdependency of the deer with its ecosystem is analogous to the interdependency of signifiers within a sign system. This superficial comparison of ecology and poststructuralism masks the threat posed by poststructuralism to the self-evidence not just of the “deer,” but also of the model of organic interdependence represented by “ecology.” While Campbell comes close to acknowledging this threat in her conclusion, she does not abandon the attempt to hold ecology and poststructuralism together in dialectical tension, resolved through the synthesizing activity of the ecocritic. If, following Blodgett, it is possible to argue that the American identification with nature was predicated on a “naïve” conception of language, then the slippage from “deer” to “text” can be construed as a kind of (un)fortunate fall into poststructuralist knowledge. By a peculiar coincidence of logic, the ecologist’s concern for a vanishing nature can be made to seem consonant with the critic’s recognition of poststructuralist challenges to the natural ground of meaning. For all its embrace of theory, Campbell’s argument carries longing for lost wholeness that is only possible in a cultural context that once believed it had access to such plenitude.

To the English-Canadian critic, nature was neither so accessible nor its reduction to “text” so unambiguous. Since Northrop Frye’s famous observation, in his *Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada* (1965), that Canadian poets approach nature with an attitude of “deep terror,”⁶³

the image of nature in Canadian criticism has been refracted by symbolic tensions. In Frye's formulation, the threat of nature derived largely from its unassimilability to the structures – social and linguistic – of colonial culture. Margaret Atwood extends Frye's theme in her discussion in *Survival* (1972) of nature as an agent operating within the dynamics of power: either nature is an overwhelming force, betraying, when it does not actually kill, the characters in Canadian literature, or it is itself a victim, embodied in the figures of animals hunted down by rapacious humans. Nature, that is, can be understood in the framework of national politics, of Canada's conception of its own "victimhood," at the hands first of England, then the United States.⁶⁴ With its thematic emphasis, Atwood's thesis might be seen to fit into what Glotfelty describes as the "first phase" in the development of ecocriticism, which analyzes "images of nature" in literature.⁶⁵ The political lens through which those images are viewed, however, anticipates the development not of ecocriticism but of postcolonialism, whose development in Canada might be said to not only parallel but actually oppose the development of ecocriticism in the United States.⁶⁶

Seen in a postcolonial critical context, nature could never be read as natural; neither is it simply translatable into language, or "text." Rather, it is always framed within multiple discourses of unequal power. Nature, that is, is subject, not only to representation, but to an ongoing contest over representation. This contest is barely acknowledged in *The Ecocriticism Reader's* easy movement between America and the world. An ungenerous reading of Glotfelty's prediction that "the next collection may well be an international one, for environmental problems are now global in scale and their solution will require worldwide collaboration"⁶⁷ might note that it mirrors, on a textual level, the environmentalist trajectory outlined by Robert Kennedy: "we've managed to keep the Hudson River clean ... now we can go around the world and say: 'Look, this is a way to do it.'"⁶⁸ Having developed a critical model that works in an American context, experts then solicit help for disseminating that model throughout the world. To note the imperialist bias implied in this formulation is not to impute to the collection an agenda which is clearly not evident,

nor to argue against the possibility – or the desirability – of ecocriticism becoming “ever more interdisciplinary, multicultural, and international.”⁶⁹ But it is to suggest that if ecocriticism is to become more relevant outside the borders of the United States, it needs to become more attentive to the political issues for which those borders serve as signposts.

For clear historical reasons, English-Canadian critics have been particularly sensitive to the issues surrounding national borders, and many have chosen to pursue postcolonial criticism as a means of addressing them. Like ecocriticism, however, postcolonialism has some significant limitations.⁷⁰ Though it has worked effectively to theorize the ways in which language and culture serve as vehicles for power in relationships between and within different human groups, postcolonial criticism has yet to address adequately the relationship between human and non-human worlds – a relationship which is of vital importance to many of the indigenous groups whose voices postcolonial critics claim to heed. Alone, neither ecocriticism nor postcolonial criticism possesses the theoretical apparatus necessary to address the position of the Cree in the Great Whale controversy that is represented in their saying: “when you destroy the land, you destroy the animals. When you destroy the animals, you destroy the people.” It is to be hoped that, as ecocriticism develops in Canada, it will take on the issues raised by such positions, and by the literary and non-literary questions surrounding them. To do so, it will need to look to the significant ecocritical work that has already been done in the United States, and which is, through the initiative of critics such as Fromm and Glotfelty, beginning to develop into an increasingly powerful, increasingly well-recognized body of work. At the same time, a Canadian ecocriticism will not abandon the insights of postcolonialism but will rather deploy them to gain a clearer understanding of the way human cultures have shaped, as they are in turn shaped by, the non-human world.

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NOTES

- 1 “Nature’s Nation, National Natures? Reading Ecocriticism in a Canadian Context” originally appeared in *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 42 (spring–summer 1998): 17–41. Used with permission.
- 2 Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xxvi.
- 3 *Ibid.*, xv.
- 4 *Ibid.*, xxv.
- 5 While calls for an ecocritical approach to Canadian writing were made in the early 1980s by critics such as D.M.R. Bentley (“A New Dimension”) and Laurie Ricou, the response has been fairly modest. Beyond a few ecocritical readings of individual works (see, for example, Relke and Jaeger), very few works have attempted to address broad ecological questions in a literary context. Important exceptions are Bentley (see, for example, *The Gay] Grey Moose*), Bowerbank, Helms, and Raglon. Ecology has made more substantial inroads into the humanities in Canada via the growing field of environmental history; see for example Gaffield and Gaffield. (Publication details are provided in the list of Works Cited.)
- 6 Glotfelty, “Introduction,” xvii.
- 7 Robert Matas, “Greenpeace Loses Support for Logging Protests in B.C.,” *Globe and Mail* (23 June 1997): A3. British Columbian Premier Glen Clark raised the rhetorical stakes with dark warnings about the “enemies of B.C.” – environmentalists who chose to “work with American interests against our own industry and jobs in B.C.” (Miro Cernetig, “Enviro-Wars Heat Up on West Coast,” *Globe and Mail* [9 June 1997]: A11).
- 8 Qtd. in Jacquie McNish, “When Stars Speak Out: Why a Kennedy Is Making Waves for a Neighbour,” *Globe and Mail* (6 Nov. 1993): A6.
- 9 Invoked as a first premise of the United Nations World Commission of Environment and Development, the argument that ecological issues exceed considerations of national sovereignty has been defended and extended in a politico-philosophical context by theorists such as Thom Kuehls.
- 10 Indeed, the *Globe and Mail* article that details Kennedy’s role in the Great Whale and Clayoquot Sound conflicts includes an appended list of Kennedys and their careers.
- 11 Qtd. in McNish, “When Stars Speak Out,” A6.
- 12 See Perry Miller, *Nature’s Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).
- 13 Qtd. in McNish, “When Stars Speak Out,” A6.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 See James Doyle, “The Post-Ultimate Frontier: American Authors in the Canadian West, 1885–1990,” *Essays in Canadian Writing* 22 (summer 1981): 14–26.
- 16 “You wouldn’t believe the following Kennedys have in our community,” says Francis Frank, chief of the Tla-o-qui-at First Nations. The community’s respect was shown on Kennedy’s arrival with his father by canoe at Meares Island, where their boat was lifted from the water in a ceremony performed only four times since the turn of the century. Kennedy reciprocated the Natives’ hospitality by inviting them back to the United States several months later,

- for what some of the chiefs describe as “the most exciting week in their lives.” The trip culminated in a night at Hickory Hill, Ethel Kennedy’s home in northern Virginia, where, Frank recalls “We were up until 2 a.m. in awe with the history and importance of the house.” While the awe of many Canadians might be diminished by cynical awareness of the national boundary demarcating that history and importance, Frank and the other chiefs are clearly concerned with different markers of territory, different spheres of allegiance. (Quotations are from McNish, “When Stars Speak Out,” A6.)
- 17 Though the review was submitted anonymously, evidence points to W. J. Dawson as the likely source (Suzanne Zeller, *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987], 277 n.12). The quotation is found on pp. 392–93 of vol. 3 of the *Canadian Naturalist and Geologist* (Montreal, 1858); see “Rev.” in the list of Works Cited.
 - 18 Zeller, *Inventing Canada*, 34.
 - 19 While French Canadians constituted one-third of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec in the 1830s, involvement dropped during and following the 1837 rebellion. Of the first twenty members of the geology and biology section of the Royal Society, only two were French Canadians; eight years later, membership had jumped to twenty-seven, with the addition of only a single French Canadian (Carl Berger, *Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983], 20).
 - 20 *Ibid.*, 21.
 - 21 Qtd. in *ibid.*, 64.
 - 22 Michael Branch, “Indexing American Possibilities: The Natural History Writing of Bartram, Wilson, and Audubon,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 290–91.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, 285.
 - 24 Berger, *Science, God, and Nature*, 23–24.
 - 25 Branch, “Indexing American Possibilities,” 285.
 - 26 Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836), ed. Edward S. Caswell (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1929), 65.
 - 27 In 1893 Queen’s University president George Monro Grant was still able to assure the Canadian public that their spiritual values had been “but faintly affected by the spirit of historical enquiry under the dominant principle of evolution” (qtd. in P. Roome, “The Darwin Debate in Canada: 1860–1880,” in *Science, Technology, and Culture in Historical Perspective*, ed. Louis A. Knafla, Martin S. Staum, and T.H.E. Travers [Calgary: University of Calgary, 1976], 199). For further discussion of Canadian reactions to Darwin, see A. B. McKillop, *Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979), 100–103.
 - 28 See Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Darwin in America: The Intellectual Response, 1865–1912* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1976), 27–29.
 - 29 For discussion of the connection between pragmatism and ecology, see Andrew Light and Eric Katz, eds., *Environmental Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 1996).
 - 30 Qtd. in Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: The Roots of Ecology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 203.

- 31 William Howarth, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 73. Even its expert practitioners were wary of over-academicization and railed against what one ecologist described as "the bright high school boys now bombinating in the biological laboratories of our universities" (William Morton Wheeler, qtd. in Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 325).
- 32 Branch has noted the tendency for American naturalists of the early nineteenth century to adopt the persona of romantic hero. Audubon, for example, "was the romantic type of the solitary wanderer – the lonely figure who carried a higher vision of nature on his pilgrimage into the wilderness" (Branch, "Indexing American Possibilities," 294). The lineaments of this image are detectable in the naturalists' ecological descendants, among whom Henry David Thoreau is only the most prominent.
- 33 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar" (1837), in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 115.
- 34 Ernst Haeckel, *The Wonders of Life*, trans. Joseph McCabe (New York: Harper, 1905), 326.
- 35 Howarth, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism," 72.
- 36 While conservatism might have prevented Canadians from seizing on the revolutionary significance of ecology, their insistence on inductive exactitude did allow them to launch valid critiques of its tendency towards flowery speculation. In 1904, the Canadian ecologist W. F. Ganong (who actually worked in the United States) complained that "ecological publications in America are too often characterized by a vast prolixity in comparison with their real additions to knowledge, by a pretentiousness of statement and terminology unjustified by their real merits, and by a weakness of logic deserving of the disrespect they receive. The subject suffers, I fear, from a phase of the 'get-rich-quick-spirit'" (W. F. Ganong, "The Cardinal Principles of Ecology," *Science* 19, no. 482 [25 Mar. 1904]: 493).
- 37 Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 17.
- 38 I use the term "postcolonial" advisedly here, with the awareness that for many, it is an inaccurate description for nations such as Canada and the United States, whose majority populations are descended from colonizing settlers. It is precisely the phenomenon of settlement I am interested in, however, for it foregrounds the problem of a felt discrepancy between language and belonging.
- 39 John Cotton, "Gods Promise to His Plantations" (1630), *Old South Leaflets* 3, no. 53 (1896): 13.
- 40 Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 9.
- 41 This guarantee is confirmed (at least in theory) each time an American president invokes the constitution, a document whose putatively organic expression of the nation's will – captured in the words "we the people" – legitimates the role of the president as a synecdochic voice of the nation. It is perhaps in the context of this authority – an authority that transcends mere politics – that national leaders from Thomas Jefferson through Theodore Roosevelt to (Vice-President) Al Gore have come, in different professional capacities, to speak convincingly for nature. Roosevelt's conflict with Canadian nature writers Charles G. D. Roberts and Ernest Thompson Seton

- over their unrealistic depiction of animals (extensively detailed by Ralph Lutts) provides an interesting gloss on the American notion of “direct representation.”
- 42 Jehlen, *American Incarnation*, 6. Jehlen goes on to note that “by comparison with this intentional plot, the histories of most other nations seem to have just grown ... through multiple incomplete versions whose coherence and meanings are produced afterward, by retrospective interpretations” (ibid.). Her comparative analysis of sections from Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush* and Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (34–40) offers an excellent illustration of the way in which different conceptions of national incarnation affect representations of nature.
- 43 Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, 17.
- 44 For a discussion of the apocalyptic tradition of environmentalist writing in the United States, see Michael Emsley, “The Evolution and Imminent Extinction of an Avaricious Species,” in *The Apocalyptic Vision in America*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982), 183–205.
- 45 Friedrich Schiller, *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry, and On the Sublime: Two Essays*, trans. Julius A. Elias (New York: Ungar, 1967), 38.
- 46 E. D. Blodgett, “Canada if Necessary...,” in *Context North America: Canada/U.S. Literary Relations*, ed. Camille R. La Bossière (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994), 147.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 See Sylvia Söderlind, *Margin/Alias: Language and Colonization in Canadian and Québécois Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 9–33, for an extended discussion of deterritorialization in the language and literature of English- and French-Canadian culture.
- 49 Indeed, it could be argued that it is partly out of a sense of alienation from those political bonds of *nation*, that nature writing has emerged so strongly as a voice for *region* – particularly in the Canadian West.
- 50 Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 8.
- 51 Glotfelty, “Introduction,” xvii.
- 52 Ibid., xxii.
- 53 Glen A. Love, “Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 227.
- 54 SueEllen Campbell, “The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 125.
- 55 Ibid., 126.
- 56 According to one formulation, the exemplary New Americanist scholar is one who “never identifies with any of the disciplinary practices ... developing within the field of Literary Studies” and who therefore “can discern the historicity of these developments as the basis for the discovery of his own imaginative agency” (Donald Pease, “National Identities, Postmodern Artifacts, and Postnational Narratives,” *boundary 2* 19, no. 1 [1992]: 13).
- 57 Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 11.
- 58 Campbell, “Land and Language of Desire,” 125.
- 59 Paul L. Tidwell, “Academic Campfire Stories: Thoreau, Ecocriticism and the

- Fetishism of Nature," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 2, no. 1 (1994): 53.
- 60 Campbell, "Land and Language of Desire," 127.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 133.
- 62 Glotfelty, "Introduction," xvii.
- 63 Northrop Frye, "Conclusion," in *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 830.
- 64 While Marcia B. Kline and Gaile McGregor, each of whom comes to similar conclusions about the ambiguity of nature in Canadian literature, do not translate nature into political terms, their comparative approaches, which define the negativity of Canadian representations of nature in contrast to the American tradition of wilderness romance, reflect a general tendency to situate Canadian nature within a broader political context.
- 65 Glotfelty, "Introduction," xxii.
- 66 In setting up a distinction between Canadian postcolonialism and American ecocriticism, I am certainly not suggesting that postcolonial criticism does not exist in the United States: it does, but has not, until recently, been seen as particularly relevant to American literature. One critic who has begun to read American literature through a combination of ecocritical and postcolonial approaches is Lawrence Buell, who suggests that American pastoral may be read as merely "one avatar of a pluriform new world naturism" to be found in many postcolonial cultures, including Canada (Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 61). Buell's argument – that postcolonial pastoral worked to counter imperialist myths of a New World Acadia with representations of "actual physical environments" (*ibid.*, 54) – dispenses with the issue of representation too quickly, and thus fails to account for the significant differences in how "nature" signifies in different postcolonial cultures.
- 67 Glotfelty, "Introduction," xxv.
- 68 Qtd. in McNish, "When Stars Speak Out," A6.
- 69 Glotfelty, "Introduction," xxv.
- 70 These limitations are evident in Linda Hutcheon's recent article, "Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological" [rpt. this volume], in which "the ecological" is framed almost entirely within a discussion of the discursive construction of place.

SECTION 3

READING CANADIAN LANDSCAPES

Nature Trafficking: Writing and Environment in the Western Canada–U.S. Borderlands

Jenny Kerber

As winter releases its grip on the Rocky Mountains, an annual experiment in cross-border trafficking takes root in Glacier National Park, located immediately south of the forty-ninth parallel in Montana. In the warmth of the U.S. National Park Service's greenhouse, seeds gathered from native species across the border in Canada sprout into plants that will eventually be taken back to southwestern Alberta to be used in the restoration of disturbed sites and in support of an educational native plant garden in Waterton National Park.¹ These botanical specimens may be "born in the U.S.A.," but they are destined to play a key role in the Canadian struggle against invasives. While the events of September 11, 2001, led to a proliferation of discourses associating borders with separation and exclusion, the success of the vegetation restoration program that has operated in Waterton-Glacier since 2002 reminds us that cross-border regions can also be sites of mediation and cooperation.

This kind of environmental cross-border relationship – and the potent metaphors of porosity, invasiveness, and boundary maintenance it invites us to consider – complicates any attempt to draw tidy divisions between “us” and “them.”

In recent years, we have seen the Canada–U.S. border play an important role in the discursive framing of environmental issues – examples range from concerns about the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, to the fight against zebra mussels in the Great Lakes, to Canadian fears about mass water diversions to the United States, to cross-border cooperation in battling forest fires in the Canadian and American Wests.² Such events are usually analyzed in political, economic, and historical terms, yet I would argue that this picture is incomplete without a consideration of the ways in which cultural works reflect, shape, and challenge national and environmental convictions. The complexity of border environments – and the various ways we write about them – resist oversimplification when it comes to analyzing similarities and differences between the two nations. In what follows I want to sketch some of the key issues at play in discussions of transnationalism, regionalism, and nature and will consider how depictions of cross-border environmental traffic at a couple of points along the forty-ninth parallel can help us critically engage with *Canadian* literary discourses about nature.

The significance of any border is always, to some extent, a matter of perspective. While many scholars of Canadian literature and culture have argued that the border between the United States and Canada is of central importance to the historical, political, and imaginative life of Canadians, it has also conversely been noted that this same border has historically held much less symbolic significance for Americans.³ The role of the border in shaping national identities has been the subject of particularly longstanding and lively debate among North American historians, for where iconic Canadian figures such as Harold Innis and Donald Creighton espoused theories of regional development based on east-west forms of exploration, trade, and settlement, continentalists such as J. B. Brebner and M. L. Hansen (both American residents, though Brebner was born in Canada) tended to emphasize the

north-south intermingling of Canadian and American populations over time.⁴ Although Innis's and Creighton's "Laurentian thesis" went on to exercise enormous influence in Canadian academic circles throughout much of the twentieth century, continentalist ideas never entirely faded from the scene, and by the late 1980s the latter began to find renewed popularity among scholars advocating a borderlands approach to Canadian–American relations. For example, The Borderlands Project, a series of publications that emerged in the early 1990s under the editorship of Lauren McKinsey and Victor Konrad, was based on the premise that "North America runs more *naturally* north and south than east and west as specified by national boundaries, and that modern communication and efficient transportation help to blur distinctions between regional neighbors" (emphasis added).⁵ Rather than assigning the nation-state primary authority in the shaping of regional economic, political, and cultural development, McKinsey and Konrad suggested that patterns of migration, capitalist forces, and geographical similarities might lead residents of border regions to identify more closely with their immediate cross-border counterparts than with members of their respective dominant cultures.⁶ Other early borderlands studies, such as Patricia Nelson Limerick's *Legacy of Conquest*,⁷ similarly emphasized historical and cultural continuity in border regions, in turn downplaying moments of rupture associated with the rise and fall of European powers and the struggles between emergent nation-states.⁸ As historian Benjamin Johnson has recently observed, a lot of subsequent borderlands scholarship has tended to take a fairly dim view of the modern state, viewing it as an external, coercive force whose arrival ends the autonomy and mobility of peoples who once lived beyond its control.⁹

In literary studies, as in the field of history, it has generally been American-based critics who have prioritized shared physical geography and historical experience over differences between Canada and the United States.¹⁰ That such a view tends to emerge more strongly from south of the border makes sense when one considers that the economic, political, and cultural dominance of the United States has rarely been threatened by its northern neighbour, whereas Canadians have historically been

much more sensitive to the implications of, to borrow former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's metaphor, sleeping with an elephant.¹¹ A representative example illustrating the American critical emphasis on commonality is Robert Thacker's study of prairie literature, *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination*;¹² in this text, Thacker downplays the significance of the Canada–U.S. border in favour of treating the Canadian Prairies–U.S. Great Plains as a single ecological region.¹³ In his view, the forty-ninth parallel has tended to serve more as a symbolic dividing line between different *critical practices* than an actually meaningful line for the study of cross-border regional literatures.¹⁴ The Canadian literary-critical tradition of claiming the prairies as distinctly Canadian space, Thacker maintains, begins to fall apart if one accepts the premise that Canadians writing about the prairies in the 1920s knew and were influenced by earlier American counterparts such as James Fenimore Cooper, Hamlin Garland, and Willa Cather.¹⁵ While he acknowledges that the border “is of great cultural concern to Canadians,” he also argues that it may be time for Canadian critics to surrender some of their nationalist attachments to border divisions in favour of emphasizing literary and ecological continuities within cross-border regions.¹⁶

More recently, the question of whether cross-border continuities have been unfairly overshadowed by national divisions surfaced at a 2005 meeting I attended during the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment's biennial conference in Eugene, Oregon. When the proposition of creating a distinctly Canadian wing of the organization was brought to the floor, one American participant worried that nationalism might unnecessarily divide people who otherwise shared continuities of language, culture, and above all, nature. If one of the most exciting aspects of environmental criticism is the way its emphasis on ecological phenomena can unsettle the naturalness of national canons, then my American colleague's concerns forced me to re-examine whether my desire for a national affiliate actually promised to bring a new level of diversity to the field, or whether it merely marked a conservative retreat to old categories.

Ultimately, the meeting in Eugene did lead to the creation of a Canadian organization devoted to literary–environmental study (today, the organization is known as the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada [ALECC], a title whose acronym translates smoothly between English and French),¹⁷ but the concerns raised there nonetheless prompted Canadians and Americans alike to consider the sometimes uneasy relationship between nationalism and transnational environmental issues. Although arguments for ecological continuity between the two nations can be compelling, Canadians have tended to regard them with suspicion, either because they threaten to open the door to American appropriation of Canada’s natural resources – especially fresh water, for example – or because they idealize Canada as a more innocent, less ecologically compromised world that offers intrepid travellers a route “back to nature.”¹⁸ In response to these concerns, scholars working in both Canada and the United States have begun to think about how borderlands complicate exclusive emphases on *either* nation or physical geography. For example, Claudia Sadowski-Smith suggests that a cultural-nationalist focus on the border as a line of (largely cultural) distinction needs to be rethought in light of Canada’s complex position in the hemisphere under bi- and tri-lateral agreements such as NAFTA.¹⁹ Meanwhile, other critics working in the humanities and social sciences, including Sterling Evans, Randy Widdis, Ted Binnema, Laurie Ricou, Cate Sandilands, Elizabeth Jameson, and Jeremy Mouat, have called for a more nuanced understanding of borderlands, one that accounts for the international trends and dynamic socioenvironmental factors that influence practices of border-making and that considers the many links that connect communities on both sides of the border.²⁰ While integrative forces have certainly helped to shape the cultures and environments of transborder regions, so have distinctly national institutions, policies, and traditions. Borderlands scholarship today is beginning to pay closer attention to the ways in which borderlanders have periodically called upon the power of the nation-state to defend particular economic and political interests,²¹ and to question the assumption that interaction among different groups of people in borderlands regions necessarily indicates

shared views.²² As scholarly work continues to unravel the complexities of individual borderlands environments, the more difficult it has seemingly become to subject borderlands to generalizing or universal theories.

Ecocriticism has significant potential to help us reckon with the complexity of transborder environments, particularly as it engages in more extensive interdisciplinary dialogue with transnational fields such as political ecology, postcolonial studies, and diasporic studies.²³ In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*,²⁴ Lawrence Buell insists that “the new environmental writing and criticism is also always in some sense a post-nationalist persuasion.... Skepticism toward mythographies of national landscape has been intensified both by mounting critique of the perceived ethnocentricity of all such myths and by the increasing awareness that the environmental problems the world now faces ‘are quite unaware of national and cultural boundaries.’”²⁵ For some, Buell’s suggestion that contemporary environmental writing and criticism are leaving the nation behind may tread uncomfortably close to theories of globalization that celebrate the coming of a “borderless world.”²⁶ Indeed, one of the chief concerns that has been expressed about border studies as a field is that it risks legitimizing the imperial expansion of American Studies under the guise of a new, more integrative inter-American Studies.²⁷ However, within the context of ecocriticism, Buell’s call to engage with critical frameworks beyond nation-based ones has certainly helped to broaden the interests of a field many felt had been too narrowly focussed on American literature and culture, particularly in its attachments to wilderness and a specifically Anglo-American strain of nature writing.²⁸ Subsequent ecocritical theory has begun to take up Buell’s challenge; for example, Patrick D. Murphy has illustrated how allonational literary formations premised upon a shared discourse of “affectedness” stand at the forefront of a contestatory international environmental literature, offering alternatives to business-as-usual models of globalization.²⁹ In a similar vein, Ursula Heise proposes the idea of “eco-cosmopolitanism” as a conceptual countermodel to the forms of eco-localism that have heretofore dominated American environmentalism and ecocriticism.³⁰ Further, while economic globalization and increased technology flows

are usually identified as the engines driving these new literary articulations of territoriality, geographer Anssi Paasi reminds us that these same elements “can also motivate new forms of territoriality that are linked with the past,” as witnessed in First Nations groups’ assertions of rights to territory and affirmations of environmental values and cultural practices that span borders.³¹

One individual who has spent much of his career thinking about the effects of borders and boundaries on the health of specific ecosystems is Canadian writer Kevin Van Tighem. He was born and raised in Southern Alberta, trained as a plant ecologist, and has worked as an ecosystem manager and superintendent in protected areas including Jasper, Waterton Lakes, Prince Albert, and Banff National Parks. He draws upon this extensive field experience in his fiction and especially in his nonfiction writing, the latter of which includes several books on wildlife as well as the essay collections *Coming West* and *Home Range*.³² In an essay from *Coming West*, “Through a Grizzly’s Eyes: Ecosystem Thinking in a Fragmented World,” Van Tighem takes his readers into the B.C.-Alberta-Montana cross-border region, following a grizzly’s seasonal movements through the Crown of the Continent ecosystem. This travel narrative begins in southeastern B.C., where the bear can be shot as a game animal, and then follows the animal across an invisible line into Waterton National Park, where it is protected by law (but is exposed to other risks associated with higher levels of human traffic). Readers then follow the bear down a gas exploration road running into (and back out of) the Kainai (Blood) First Nation on the park’s eastern edge, amble alongside it into the Poll Haven Community Pasture in southwestern Alberta, and eventually arrive at a place just below a ridge top in northern Montana. The bear’s *final* stop is not witnessed by the reader but is foretold by the narrator using the future perfect tense: “This October, when a poacher kills him beside a gas-well road in Alberta’s Bow-Crow Forest Reserve, the grizzly will have become another victim of ecosystem fragmentation.”³³ By following the trail of an animal that requires enormous habitat range, Van Tighem’s essay encourages readers to think about – and question – why we tend to privilege some

boundaries over others.³⁴ He notes that “the Canada-U.S. border slices blindly across drainage divides and wildlife winter ranges, yet most consider this artificial line more meaningful than the watersheds it severs.”³⁵ Current legislation protecting grizzlies in Canada is in fact considerably weaker than in the United States, for while the grizzly is listed as a species of “special concern” under the Canadian Species at Risk Act (SARA), in the United States the grizzly continues to be protected under the Endangered Species Act in most eco-regions.³⁶ By showing how Canada is in some cases less of a safe haven for wildlife than its southern neighbour, Van Tighem challenges nationalist discourses that unproblematically posit Canadian space as natural space – witnessed, for example, in designations such as the “Great White North” or “Super, Natural British Columbia.” The essay in turn calls Canadians to translate their presumed environmental affinities into political action, encouraging readers to put pressure on both federal and provincial governments to take concrete steps to protect grizzlies and their habitat.

Van Tighem’s reminder about the importance of respecting natural borders is echoed by another writer well versed in the landscapes of the western United States and Canada: grasslands ecologist Don Gayton. In books ranging from *The Wheatgrass Mechanism* (1990) and *Landscapes of the Interior* (1996) to his more recent volume *Kokanee: The Redfish and the Kootenay Bioregion* (2002),³⁷ the Nelson, British Columbia-based ecosystem manager and environmental writer emerges as a strong advocate for cross-border bioregional thinking. In his introduction to *The Wheatgrass Mechanism*, Gayton expresses his reluctance to be hemmed in by political boundaries at the expense of natural ones:

The pages that follow are about Western Canada, starting with the prairie landscape and moving westward to link with the Rockies. If I sometimes slip into the frame of reference of “western North America,” it is not through any political continentalism, but because geology and vegetation and climate flow freely and gracefully over the 49th parallel. My allegiance

is to the landscape, and “Western” is perhaps my only real nationality.³⁸

This somewhat cryptic declaration of allegiance to a “Western” rather than a specifically Canadian identity may be partly explainable when one considers that Gayton was born and raised as a U.S. citizen before moving to Canada during the Vietnam War.³⁹ For Gayton, the borders and contours of watersheds constitute an alternative form of belonging, one posited on the bioregionalist idea that “places are unique and distinct, and that people are changed – uniquely and distinctly – by living in those particular places.”⁴⁰

While bioregionalism as a green movement (or ethos) has enjoyed varying degrees of popularity over the past several decades, one of its consistent goals has been to get people to recognize the interdependencies between themselves and the physical ecology of the local and regional places in which they live.⁴¹ In this respect, the bioregional movement has helped to reconnect the notion of aesthetically pleasing landscapes with the everyday environments in which people live and work, rather than confining the idea of scenic natural beauty to remote, park-enclosed “temples of nature.” From the essays of California poet, deep-ecological philosopher, and environmental activist Gary Snyder (especially “Coming Into the Watershed” and “Bioregional Perspectives”)⁴² to the recent popularity of Alisa Smith and J. B. MacKinnon’s *The 100-Mile Diet*,⁴³ bioregional practices are often presented as methods of challenging the homogenizing forces of globalization. However, while bioregionalism’s emphasis on greater regional self-sufficiency and the development of a local, place-based environmental ethic is appealing for those seeking a more sustainable way of life in the midst of global ecological crises, it is also, Gayton notes, “a messy, contradictory, and dangerous idea.”⁴⁴

In recent years, the idea of “natural boundaries” has enjoyed a renewal, likely in part because it offers a reassuring position for individuals and groups anxious about myths of a borderless world. The concept has also proven a useful rhetorical tool for natural scientists and protected area managers looking to lend political legitimacy to arguments for expanded

habitat protection in transborder areas. However, I would suggest that Gayton's caution about the messiness of bioregionalism stems in part from the way it can subordinate complex notions of space and culture to an overarching discourse of nature. While there is considerable ethical promise in a movement that seeks to root people within the boundaries of a particular ecoregion or watershed, oversimplified visions of sustainability based on natural borders can also sometimes be co-opted by a politics of exclusion. For example, under the banner of protecting diversity, right-wing ecology movements and organizations in Europe (such as the environmental think-tank the Independent Ecologists of Germany, otherwise known as the UÖD) and North America (for example, the White Aryan Resistance) have argued that "the good ecological community [which is defined as encompassing plants, animals, and humans] is one which does not permit movement across its natural borders."⁴⁵ Since protecting diversity in nature is seen as a laudable environmental goal, and since humans are also understood to be a part of nature, proponents of this line of thought proceed to argue that distinctive human communities must be protected from the foreign and the non-native in order to maintain biological and cultural diversity. Perhaps nowhere has such logic been more employed to more disturbing ends than in the "blood and soil" ideology of National Socialism, which adeptly enlisted deep-ecological ideas to legitimate a political program of extermination during the Second World War.⁴⁶ More recently, this kind of logic resurfaced in the late 1990s as anti-immigration groups external to the U.S. Sierra Club – most notably the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) – attempted to influence the organization's agenda using language that drew upon bioregionalist discourses of natural boundaries and carrying capacities.⁴⁷ In 1998, Club members were asked to vote on a mail-in ballot initiative known as Amendment A, which sought to reverse a 1996 board decision to take no position on immigration levels or policy concerning immigration in the United States. Those in favour of the measure sought to make it the Club's official position that restricting immigration was key to protecting the U.S. domestic environment.⁴⁸ The proposal was ultimately defeated, but it nonetheless demonstrated the

potential of right-wing fantasies of sequestration to infiltrate a seemingly left-wing organization by exploiting a shared discourse of rootedness.⁴⁹

Secondly, while an ethic of “staying put” can offer a means of resisting the hypermobility of global capitalism, bioregionalists also need to be careful about becoming unwitting participants in the very dynamics they seek to challenge. For example, geographer Matthew Sparke has shown how the naturalizing of the postnational eco-region of Cascadia has also been effectively used to serve neoliberal economic goals.⁵⁰ In short, borders may be bad for nature, but they are also bad for trade. Bioregionalism can consequently function as the perfect Trojan Horse for deep integration, a process by which border restrictions and regulations are gradually dismantled so that Canadian policies surrounding issues of security, trade, energy, and environmental policy come to function in harmony with American governmental and corporate interests. Bioregional visions articulated by the green movement that promote the uninhibited flow of things like watersheds and wildlife corridors thus risk being co-opted by economic discourses of the neoliberal cross-border region.⁵¹ For free-market promoters and bioregionalists alike, the border is simply “unnatural.”⁵²

Although it is tempting to view the co-optation of ecological ideals and rhetoric by free-market capitalism as an exception to the rule, in fact the assimilation of ecological concepts into discourses of “natural economy” has had a long history. As Susie O’Brien points out, the very principles that defined early theories of ecology, including the idea of the system in which everything is connected and nothing is wasted, have in many cases made a smooth transition into an economic discourse in which everything and everyone must be made to produce, and with great efficiency. The bioregional call to “get back to nature,” as though nature were a transcendent value or category which overrides divisions such as the borders of nations, is risky, O’Brien suggests, precisely because “when it comes to social justice issues [this logic] inevitably speaks in universals; it cannot recognize the operation of mediation, both in its own operation as a discourse and in the realm of culture and politics through which categories such as race are produced.”⁵³ The solution, therefore, is not

to act as though borders do not exist, but rather to examine more carefully their mediating function, both in terms of cultural difference and conflict, and in terms of how nature itself is altered and experienced on either side of surveyed lines.

Instead of too quickly declaring the cross-border eco-region “post-national,” I would like to briefly return to Van Tighem’s work to consider the way it troubles attempts to clearly divide nations from ecosystems. Van Tighem notes that, while respect for hydrological boundaries such as those separating watersheds are important, the cultural and political lines humans draw across landscapes can also *become* ecological over time. While members of plant and animal communities cross borders in ways ranging from the dispersal of seeds using wind and water to animal migration for feeding and reproduction, humans profoundly shape the movements of such biota in the form of trade agreements, restrictions, and state policies that outline the acceptability or unacceptability of different species.⁵⁴ Van Tighem explains, for example, that “on the other side of the forty-ninth parallel it is a different world. There are different . . . weed distribution patterns. There are different human attitudes, and humans are a keystone species in ecosystems now. There is [also] different animal behavior, based on a long history of different management schemes.”⁵⁵ Similarly, landscapes look markedly different on either side of the U.S.–Mexico border, in part because the United States uses up nearly all of the Colorado River’s water before it reaches its southern destination.⁵⁶ If climate-change predictions of a warmer and drier climate in the Canadian and American Wests prove accurate, we may eventually see the large-scale northward migration of species attempting to maintain their climatic comfort zone under new conditions.⁵⁷ While some of these species may be welcome and will require the protection of conduits and habitats to ensure their survival, others – such as vector-borne and other zoonotic diseases, for example – may pose unwelcome challenges to public health-care systems already under strain.⁵⁸ The meaning and desirability of a more permeable border thus shifts depending on whether a given ecological phenomenon is perceived as a boon or a threat to national interests.

Even in cases where physical landscapes and livelihoods on either side of the border appear to be remarkably similar, subjecting an entire cross-border region to uniform policies can create substantial economic disparities if such policies fail to take basic phenomena like climatic variation into account. British Columbia writer George Bowering's narrative of the decline of his province's fruit industry in the wake of free trade between Canada and the United States neatly illustrates how arguments for biological continuity are complicated by the reality of economics and politics in cross-border regions.⁵⁹ Bowering grew up close to the Canada–U.S. border in the Okanagan Valley, a semi-desert that runs roughly 160 kilometres north and south of the border. The Canadian section of the valley lies in the same eco-zone as the territory that lies to the south in the state of Washington, and in this respect also shares a fruit-growing identity. However, as Bowering explains,

... at the north end of the valley the peaches ripen a few weeks after they have ripened in the south [due to cooler climate conditions]. In my country we had a tariff forbidding the dumping of the earlier (and more cheaply produced) Washington fruit in British Columbia until it had been off the trees and vines for ninety days. Anyone can see the necessity for such a precaution. But it is the opposite with free trade. Now we have free trade, as long as the U.S. sees that free trade is to its advantage. A lot of orchards [in British Columbia] have disappeared.⁶⁰

While there are clearly many similarities in culture and agriculture on either side of the border in this region, Bowering argues that to ignore the *difference* the border makes is to put whole livelihoods and communities at risk in the name of market access and consumer choice. Although Bowering's own literary career has been characterized by frequent exchange with American writers (especially the Black Mountain School) and American culture (especially the sport of baseball), he is also under no illusion that free trade between the two countries can be fair unless

it also accounts for subtle differences in history, politics, economy, and ecology. Whether the commodity under question is a Washington apple or an American book of poetry, Bowering declares himself staunchly in favour of their accessibility within the North American marketplace, but *only* if that marketplace provides fair access to Canadian books and apples, too.

These assessments jointly suggest that the nation, and indeed also nation-based forms of environmental criticism, still have a meaningful role to play in discussions of cross-border regions. Keeping some notion of “Canada” as a literary identity is one way to keep from fooling ourselves that the “postnational” is a kind of unquestioned, natural universal.⁶¹ This seems especially important in an era wherein “integration by stealth” threatens to erode national sovereignty when it comes to decision-making about natural resources and environmental protection.⁶² Adopting a more bioregional outlook does not necessarily mean we need to reject the positive protections of the nation-state, particularly in a country that is dwarfed by the population and economic and military power of its southern neighbour. Further, for all the talk of a “borderless nature” popular among conservationists and protected-area managers, national policies continue to alter the shape of national landscapes. For example, while much official rhetoric used to present nature to visitors in Waterton National Park emphasizes close ecological and economic ties with Glacier National Park in Montana, particularly under the auspices of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, for the most part the practical, bureaucratic organization of nature management in Waterton is oriented to the forty other parks in the Canadian national park system.⁶³ Additionally, while border patrols may serve as crude tools designed to preserve homogeneity when it comes to *human* traffic (as witnessed, for example, in the vigilante Minutemen who patrol the U.S.–Mexico border looking for “illegal aliens”), when it comes to *non-human* traffic, border regulation may actually serve as a key means of preserving *heterogeneity*. Thus Waterton National Park holds an annual “knapweed rodeo” where visitors and locals are encouraged to join in a weeding bee aimed at botanical invasives, particularly the pernicious

knapweed. One goal of such efforts is to keep nature (on this side of the border, at least) a place of healthy biodiversity. The complexity of these border-crossing and border-regulating activities certainly suggests the limits of a one-size-fits-all ecocritical approach to thinking about borders and bioregions.

So where does all of this leave us with regard to cross-border literatures of the environment? One thing suggested by the growing conversation between ecocriticism, nationalism, and transnationalism is the need for a more thorough consideration of the “border effect” on literary discourses of nation and nature. A growing public awareness of the transnational character of many environmental issues points to the limits of approaching literatures of the border zone using *either* a staunchly nationalist *or* a postnationalist paradigm. While the threat of deep integration prompts Canadians to protect all that is distinctive about their culture, it is also important to remember that nationalistic categories such as Canadian Literature have never been as unified as we might assume. While metaphors such as survival or the garrison have served as helpful means of understanding some Canadian literary texts, critics point out that the reality and cultural understanding of many Canadians has repeatedly burst the seams of any unified vision.⁶⁴ As Canadian writer M. G. Vassanji notes, if some essence one could call Canadian identity exists, or were gradually to develop, he hopes that it will be “more subtle than being comprised of a mere response to nature, making a fetish out of low temperatures, or turning away and looking north out of a mule-headed defiance of the south.”⁶⁵ Words have had a long history of crossing the border – particularly in fields such as Aboriginal and diasporic writing – and today a host of emerging cross-border environmental issues are putting new pressures on the cultural seams that attempt to bind the nation into a cohesive whole. Amidst this shifting climate, regional writing and ecocriticism can introduce writers, readers, and critics to vocabularies that productively trouble the “naturalness” of national canons and remind us of longstanding ecological connections in Western North America that are not merely binational, but multinational. Gayton expresses this new form of transnational ecological sensibility

very well when he reflects on how the kokanee salmon – at once a descendant of sockeyes that range to the Aleutians, and prey of ospreys that winter in Mexico – ties his little region in the West Kootenays into a matrix of biological threads that extend all the way up and down Western North America.⁶⁶ Similarly, West Coast critic Laurie Ricou has recently taken one species native to his region – salal – and traced its many economic, cultural, and ecological routes that stretch not only across the forty-ninth parallel, but around the world.⁶⁷ By encouraging readers to think about region through and with particular species, Ricou suggests that this kind of writing “reconfigures the region and moves us out of the book to look – and look still more closely – and to touch and taste.”⁶⁸

At the same time, past and present examples of social and environmental injustice in transborder regions remind critics studying these spaces to be wary of approaches that too easily reduce politics to the unifying tropes of nature. This is why Gayton’s and Ricou’s respective attempts to read region through and with species such as kokanee salmon and salal also hold fast to representation and mediation – precisely those things that O’Brien argues the ecocritical drive to “get back to nature” has historically overlooked. As Ricou insists, “the idea of writing must also move us back into the book, into the human articulation, into the necessity of language and story.”⁶⁹ Ricou’s account of salal – his reading of native plant as text⁷⁰ – is thus made up of many (sometimes competing) voices, drawing on experiences and livelihoods connected to salal by everyone from those immigrants who go out daily to pick it in the harvested cutblocks of West Coast forests, to the European florist who relies upon its timely delivery to add it to a bouquet ordered from halfway across the world on the same day. Similarly, for Gayton, the story of the kokanee is one told by scientists, but it is also a story told in various ways by different First Nations, settler groups, and those who seek to create and recreate the regional mythologies of the future.⁷¹ This dual approach, winding together ecology and story, restores some of the “thickness” of political debate to borders that ecocritical discourse might otherwise render too permeable. At its best, environmental criticism of transborder literatures makes nature, nation, and the relationship

between them even more complicated than was previously thought; in so doing, such work might help create a richer understanding of borderlands as places of conflict, refuge, and cooperation.

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NOTES

- 1 Randy Tanner et al., "The Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park: Conservation amid Border Security," in *Peace Parks: Conservation and Conflict*, ed. Saleem Ali (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 188. Although ecological restoration is still a young field and its terms remain in flux, disturbance generally refers to the disruption of a once-intact ecosystem by external forces or activities such as resource extraction, invasions of weed species, or other forms of poor management. Restoration therefore refers to a set of practices that attempt to increase the ecological integrity of an area that has been compromised in a way that is faithful to the history of that place. For a discussion of terms related to ecological restoration, see Eric Higgs, *Nature by Design: People, Natural Processes, and Ecological Restoration* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 95, 101, and 127–28.
- 2 For further discussion of each of these respective issues, see Suzanne Moccia, "Devils Lake Diversion," in *Eau Canada: The Future of Canada's Water*, ed. Karen Bakker (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 178–79; Wayne Grady, *The Great Lakes: The Natural History of a Changing Region* (Vancouver: Greystone, 2007), 291–300; Ralph Pentland and Adèle Hurley, "Thirsty Neighbours: A Century of Canada–U.S. Transboundary Water Governance," in *Eau Canada: The Future of Canada's Water*, ed. Karen Bakker (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 166; and "Fire in Washington state burns toward B.C. border" (3 Sept. 2006. Web).
- 3 On the significance of the border to Canadians, see, for example, Eli Mandel, "The Border League: American 'West' and Canadian 'Region,'" in *Crossing Frontiers: Papers in American and Canadian Western Literature*, ed. Dick Harrison (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1979), 105; Martin Kuester, *Canadian Studies: A Literary Approach* (Bochum: Universitätsverlag N. Brockmeyer, 1995), 6; and Jody Berland, "Writing on the Border," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 1, no. 2 (2001): 141. On the topic of American indifference about the northern border, see Roger Gibbins, "Meaning and Significance of the Canadian-American Border," in *Borders and Border Politics in a Globalizing World*, ed. Paul Ganster and David E. Lorey (Oxford: SR Books, 2005), 165; and

- Cole Harris, "The Myth of the Land in Canadian Nationalism," in *Nationalism in Canada*, ed. Peter Russell (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 37.
- 4 See Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1930. Rev. ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 388–92; Donald Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence, 1760–1850* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1937), 15–16; J. B. Brebner, *Canada: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), ix–x; and M. L. Hansen, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), 2.
 - 5 Lauren McKinsey and Victor Konrad, *Borderlands Reflections: The United States and Canada* (Borderlands Monograph Ser. 1. Orono, ME: Borderlands Project, 1989), iii.
 - 6 *Ibid.*, 4.
 - 7 Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987).
 - 8 For good summaries of the relative merits and shortcomings of early borderlands approaches to North American regional development, see Randy William Widdis, "Migration, Borderlands, and National Identity: Directions for Research," in *Permeable Border: The Great Lakes Basin as Transnational Region, 1650–1990*, ed. John J. Bukowczyk et al. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 153, 158–59; and Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (1999): 814–15.
 - 9 Benjamin Johnson, "Problems and Prospects in North American Borderlands History," *History Compass* 4, no. 1 (2006): 188.
 - 10 For example, see Rosemary Sullivan's summary observations of the different prevailing viewpoints of Canadian and American scholars at a 1978 conference that brought together academics and writers to discuss the literature of the North American West: "Summing Up," in *Crossing Frontiers: Papers in American and Canadian Western Literature*, ed. Dick Harrison (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1979), 144.
 - 11 Trudeau used the analogy in an address to the National Press Club in Washington, DC, in March 1969; see *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, s.v. "Pierre Trudeau."
 - 12 Robert Thacker, *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).
 - 13 See also Robert Thacker, "Erasing the Forty-ninth Parallel: Nationalism, Prairie Criticism, and the Case of Wallace Stegner," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 61 (spring 1997): 183. Thacker did his graduate school training in Canada, but was born and raised in the United States and has spent his teaching career there.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, 181. For Canadian critical responses to Thacker, see especially Dennis Cooley, "The Real Thing: In Search of a Prairie Aesthetic," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 50 (fall 1993): 75–82.
 - 15 See Thacker's comments to this effect: Linda Warley and Shelley Hulan, "An Interview with Robert Thacker," Fall 2007, University of Waterloo, Web.
 - 16 Thacker, "Erasing the Forty-ninth Parallel," 181.
 - 17 Association pour la littérature, l'environnement, et la culture au Canada (ALECC).
 - 18 For articulations of these concerns, see Clark Blaise, *The Border as Fiction* (Borderlands Monograph Ser. 4. Orono, ME: Borderlands Project, 1990), 9; and W. H. New, *Borderlands:*

- How We Talk about Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 88.
- 19 Claudia Sadowski-Smith, "Canada—U.S. Border Narratives and U.S. Hemispheric Studies," *Comparative American Studies* 3, no. 1 (2005), 66, 73. See also Sadowski-Smith, *Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008).
- 20 Theodore Binnema, "The Case for Cross-National and Comparative History: The Northwestern Plains as Bioregion," in *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-ninth Parallel*, ed. Sterling Evans (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 38.
- 21 Johnson, "Problems and Prospects," 189.
- 22 Widdis, "Migration, Borderlands, and National Identity," 159.
- 23 For example, see Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 14, no. 1 (2007): 71–87, and Sarah Phillips Casteel, *Second Arrivals: Landscape and Belonging in Contemporary Writing of the Americas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), a study of diasporic literature's engagement with rural and wilderness spaces in the Americas.
- 24 Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005).
- 25 *Ibid.*, 81–82. Today, climate change and shrinking fish stocks in the world's oceans are just two examples that highlight the difficulty and necessity of transnational cooperation in addressing environmental challenges of planetary scope.
- 26 For example, see Kenichi Ohmae, *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1990).
- 27 For an expression of these concerns from a Canadian perspective, see Bryce Traister, "Risking Nationalism: NAFTA and the Limits of the New American Studies," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 27, no. 3 (1997): 191–204; Cynthia Sugars, "Worlding the (Postcolonial) Nation: Canada's Americas," in *Canada and Its Americas: Transnational Investigations*, ed. Winfried Siemerling and Sarah Phillips Casteel (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 31–47; and Herb Wylie, "Hemispheric Studies or Scholarly NAFTA? The Case for Canadian Literary Studies," in *Canada and Its Americas: Transnational Investigations*, ed. Winfried Siemerling and Sarah Phillips Casteel (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press 2010), 48–61. For a discussion of the potential impacts of inter-American studies on Latin American studies, see Sophia A. McClennen, "Inter-American Studies or Imperial American Studies?," *Comparative American Studies* 3, no. 4 (2005): 393–413.
- 28 See Kathleen Wallace and Karla Armbruster, "Why Go Beyond Nature Writing, and Where To?," Introduction to *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, ed. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 7; Susie O'Brien, "Nature's Nation, National Natures? Reading Ecocriticism in a Canadian Context," *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 42 (spring–summer 1998): 17; and Louise Westling, Introduction to *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, ed. John Parham (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 8. For a more skeptical appraisal of ecocriticism's

- attempts to internationalize itself, see Hannes Bergthaller, "Ecocriticism, American Studies, and the Limits of Both: A German Perspective on the Internationalization of a New Discipline," in *REAL: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 23 (2007), ed. Winfried Fluck, Stefan Brandt, and Ingrid Thaler (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2007), 275–77.
- 29 Patrick D. Murphy, "Grounding Otherness and Answerability through Allonational Ecoliterature Formations" in *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism*, ed. Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 419. Murphy's position relies on political ecologist Robyn Eckersley's argument for the supplementation of a citizenship discourse based on an idea of "belongingness" with one of "affectedness." See especially Eckersley, *The Green State* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 192–93.
- 30 Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9–10.
- 31 Anssi Paasi, "Territory," in *A Companion to Political Geography*, ed. John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and Gerard Toal (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 119–20.
- 32 Kevin Van Tighem, *Coming West: A Natural History of Home* (Canmore, AB: Altitude, 1997), and Van Tighem, *Home Range: Writings on Conservation and Restoration* (Canmore, AB: Altitude, 2000).
- 33 Van Tighem, *Coming West*, 90.
- 34 Together, Glacier National Park in Montana and Waterton National Park in Alberta enclose more than 4,625 km² of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, but Van Tighem points out that "this is still too small by grizzly bear standards"; see *Coming West*, 92.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 91.
- 36 Although the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), an advisory body to SARA, has listed the grizzly as a species of special concern, its designations do not have any binding legal force when it comes to federal legislation. In the United States, the grizzly bear was removed from the endangered species list in the Yellowstone ecosystem in 2005 but remains an endangered species in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, which includes Montana and the border region of southern Alberta. As of April 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the initiation of a five-year review of grizzly species status in the Northern Continental Divide. See U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "Grizzly Bear Recovery: Northern Continental Divide" (Mountain-Prairie Region Endangered Species Program. Web).
- 37 Don Gayton, *The Wheatgrass Mechanism: Science and Imagination in the Western Canadian Landscape*, 2nd ed. (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1992); Gayton, *Landscapes of the Interior: Re-Explorations of Nature and the Human Spirit* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society, 1996); and Gayton, *Kokanee: The Redfish and Kootenay Bioregion* (Vancouver: New Star, 2002).
- 38 Gayton, *Wheatgrass Mechanism*, 15.
- 39 For more on Gayton's personal history as a Vietnam "draft dodger," see Tomas Alex Tizon, "In Canada, Flashback to the '70s," *Los Angeles Times* (24 Mar. 2005): A1.
- 40 Gayton, *Kokanee*, 82.
- 41 See, for example, Gary Snyder, "Coming into the Watershed," in *A Place in Space* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1995), 224; Kirkpatrick

- Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1985), 56; Michael Vincent McGinnis, ed., *Bioregionalism* (London: Routledge, 1999), 4; and Paul Lindholdt, "Literary Activism and the Bioregional Agenda," in *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993–2003*, ed. Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 244.
- 42 Snyder, "Coming into the Watershed"; and Snyder, "Bioregional Perspectives," in *Home! A Bioregional Reader*, ed. Van Andruss et al. (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), 17–20.
- 43 Alisa Smith and J. B. MacKinnon, *The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating* (Toronto: Random House, 2007).
- 44 Gayton, *Kokanee*, 81.
- 45 Jonathan Olsen, "The Perils of Rootedness: On Bioregionalism and Right Wing Ecology in Germany," *Landscape Journal* 19, no. 1–2 (2000): 76. This essay features an extended discussion of the UÖD and its activities in the 1990s.
- 46 For more on how regional movements and identities run the risk of imposing a uniform notion of belonging, see also New, *Borderlands*, 10, 12. For discussions of National Socialism's connections to ecology, see Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 177–94; and Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 111–12. Garrard in particular explores the congruencies of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the ecological tenets of Nazism, with a particular focus on Heidegger's view that relationships to landscape nurtured by long inhabitation and rural labour disclose a form of understanding lost in the transition to an urban, mobile, technological society.
- 47 I do not wish to suggest here that bioregionalism is somehow inseparable from right-wing politics; rather, I seek to point out the ways in which some of the expressions and concepts of bioregionalism risk being co-opted by exclusionary social movements for ends many bioregionalists would staunchly oppose.
- 48 Rebecca Solnit, "Thirty-Nine Steps across the Border and Back," in *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 82; and Priscilla Huang, "Anchor Babies, Over-Breeders, and the Population Bomb: The Reemergence of Nativism and Population Control in Anti-Immigration Policies," *Harvard Law and Policy Review* 2, no. 2 (2008): 397.
- 49 For a similar discussion of the yoking of environmental concern to anti-immigrant sentiment, see Sarah Jaquette Ray, "Endangering the Desert: Immigration, the Environment, and Security in the Arizona-Mexico Borderland," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 17, no. 4 (2010): 709–34.
- 50 Matthew Sparke, *In the Space of Theory: Postfoundational Geographies of the Nation-State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 67. For an example of an article that anticipates the convergence of bioregional and neoliberal economic agendas, see Alan F. J. Artibise, "Cascadian Adventures: Shared Visions, Strategic Alliance, and Ingrained Barriers in a Transborder Region," in *Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World*, ed. Heather N. Nicol and Ian Townsend-Gault (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 238–67.
- 51 Sparke, *In the Space of Theory*, 69.
- 52 More recently, bioregionalists have begun to engage with these critiques, as illustrated in the collection *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature,*

- Ecology, and Place*, ed. Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012).
- 53 Susie O'Brien, "Back to the World: Reading Ecocriticism in a Postcolonial Context," in *Five Emus to the King of Siam: Environment and Empire*, ed. Helen Tiffin (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 194.
- 54 On this point, see Stanley D. Brunn et al., "Towards a Geopolitics of Life and Living: Where Boundaries Still Matter," in *Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World*, ed. Heather N. Nicol and Ian Townsend-Gault (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 383.
- 55 Kevin Van Tighem, "The Authentic Determined Optimist of Southern Alberta Literature," interview with Jeff Petersen (Course Paper for ENG 509: Studies in Canadian Literature: The Literature of Southern Alberta, University of Calgary, 2002), 11–12.
- 56 Jim Carrier, "The Colorado: A River Drained Dry," *National Geographic* 179, no. 6 (June 1991): 4.
- 57 On the potential challenges of climate change and endangered or threatened species migration in the B.C.-Montana Flathead Valley, see Jeff Hull, "A River to Ruin," *Canadian Geographic* 128, no. 3 (June 2008): 50.
- 58 On the migration of diseases across the Canadian border due to climate change, see Amy Greer, Victoria Ng, and David Fisman, "Climate Change and Infectious Diseases in North America: The Road Ahead," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 178, no. 6 (2008): 716–17.
- 59 George Bowering, "Backyard Burgers: A Letter to the U.S.A. about Transborder Culture," in *Left Hook: A Sideways Look at Canadian Writing* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 2005), 15–37.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 61 On this point in relation to the postnational impulse in American Studies, see Traister, "Risking Nationalism," 200–201. See also Sugars, "Worlding the (Postcolonial) Nation," 35, and Wylie, "Hemispheric Studies or Scholarly NAFTA?," 56–60.
- 62 John N. McDougall, *Drifting Together: The Political Economy of Canada-U.S. Integration* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2006), 25.
- 63 Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "'The Geology Recognizes No Boundaries': Shifting Borders in Waterton Lakes National Park," in *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian West: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-ninth Parallel*, ed. Sterling Evans (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 329.
- 64 Smaro Kamboureli, Introduction to *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature*, edited by Smaro Kamboureli (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1. For a similar perspective, see also Frank Davey, *Canadian Literary Power* (Edmonton: NeWest, 1994), 76.
- 65 M. G. Vassanji, Foreword to *Floating the Borders: New Contexts in Canadian Criticism*, ed. Nurjehan Aziz (Toronto: TSAR, 1999), vii.
- 66 Gayton, *Kokanee*, 73.
- 67 See Laurie Ricou, *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory* (Edmonton: NeWest, 2007).
- 68 Laurie Ricou, *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest* (Edmonton: NeWest, 2002), 184.
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 Ricou, *Salal*, 12.
- 71 Gayton, *Kokanee*, 80.

CHAPTER 13

Calypso Trails: Botanizing on the Bruce Peninsula (2010)

Catriona Sandilands¹

It seems wonderful that so frail and lovely a plant has such power over human hearts. This Calypso meeting happened some forty-five years ago, and it was more memorable and impressive than any of my meetings with human beings excepting, perhaps, Emerson and one or two others. – John Muir, “The *Calypso Borealis*”

JOHN MUIR ARRIVES AT DORCAS BAY

In 1864, John Muir embarked on a botanical expedition to Canada West and found himself in what is now Simcoe County, north of Toronto. As Donald Worster writes in his biography of Muir, the area “was then a vast – and in the eyes of the pioneers, a useless – swamp punctuated by thickets of tamarack, white cedar, balsam fir, pine, hemlock, beech, birch, and maple, crossable only by wading or by jumping from root to root.”² At the end of one especially boggy day of trekking during which

he “began to fear that [he] would not be able to reach dry ground before dark, and therefore would have to pass the night in the swamp,” he came upon a small Calypso orchid (*Calypso borealis*, *Calypso bulbosa*):³

But when the sun was getting low and everything seemed most bewildering and discouraging, I found beautiful Calypso on the mossy bank of a stream, growing not in the ground but on a bed of yellow mosses in which its small white bulb had found a soft nest and from which its one leaf and one flower sprung. The flower was white and made the impression of the utmost simple purity like a snowflower. No other bloom was near it, for the bog a short distance below the surface was still frozen, and the water was ice cold. It seemed the most spiritual of all the flower people I had ever met. I sat down beside it and fairly cried for joy.⁴

According to Worster, Muir, deeply impressed with the Calypso “and hoping that there would be many more ... kept on walking. He trudged for weeks, making a sweeping circuit through Simcoe, Dufferin, and Grey Counties,”⁵ although only the one orchid encounter made it into official history. Muir stayed in Canada for nearly two years, living largely near Meaford, Ontario, on the south shore of Georgian Bay, and working in a mill and woodworking operation owned by the Trout family. During this period, however, “he was forced to put botany aside, allowing himself only one brief excursion along Owen Sound during the duration of his contract.”⁶

For historian W. Sherwood Fox, the question of whether or not Muir travelled to the Bruce Peninsula during his stay in Ontario was a matter of some importance. Although it is unlikely, on balance of evidence, that Muir took a trip to the northern Bruce any time after his Calypso epiphany, Fox thinks he may have trod there on his way *into* Canada, as he likely crossed with his brother Dan from Michigan at Sault Ste. Marie, from there travelling to Manitoulin Island before arriving, in April, in Simcoe County. “It is absurd to think,” writes Fox, “that at

that time of the year they tramped all the way around the east side of Georgian Bay – a formidable journey of over three hundred miles – to enter the Peninsula from the south.”⁷ Still, if Muir did take that route, he did not record any orchids. Fox notes that “the label on the first plant the Muirs took on the south side of the Georgian Bay” was dated April 20 in Simcoe County,⁸ and given that the earliest-blooming orchid species in the region is the Calypso (mid-May onward), we would, I think, have heard about it if he saw one on the Bruce.⁹

But apart from the fact that it is clear that Fox really *wants* Muir to have travelled on the Bruce Peninsula, is it really important whether he spotted a Grass Pink Orchid (*Calopogon tuberosus*) on a walk north of Wiarton or east of Owen Sound? An interpretive sign in Bruce Peninsula National Park (BPNP) indicates that someone in Parks Canada might think so. Specifically, in the Singing Sands section of the park, on the shore of Lake Huron not far from the Peninsula’s northern tip, there is an interpretive plaque off the parking lot at the entrance to a small network of hiking trails into the woods and fen, dated July 18, 1992. It is titled “John Muir’s Walk on the Bruce,” and it reads:

John Muir was the father of parks in North America and one of the first naturalists to recognize the richness of the Bruce. He made several explorations here to find new plants for his studies in the two years he lived in Ontario. Inspired by these visits he wrote:

“Are not all plants beautiful? Would not the world be poorer for the banishment of a single one?”

His enthusiasm for the understanding of nature led him to realize the need for the preservation of wilderness. The parks and reserves on the Bruce were established for the same reason. The profusion of wildflowers here at Dorcas Bay lures naturalists to the Bruce today, several generations since John Muir’s visits in the 1860’s [*sic*].

Influenced by Fox's geographically optimistic account of Muir's explorations, Parks Canada stretches the evidence a bit to invoke Muir's presence at Dorcas Bay.¹⁰ It may or may not be the case that Muir botanized on the Bruce, but the "here" of his inspired prose was almost certainly somewhere considerably to the south. So the question arises: especially if the Bruce may not bear traces of Muir's actual footsteps, why go to the trouble of invoking him? First and most obviously, the idea of his appreciative presence on the Bruce Peninsula gives historical legitimacy to the preservationist intent of Singing Sands. If someone as important as Muir recognized the value of the wildflowers in 1864, and if he bothered to found entire national parks to protect them from "banishment," then there is no question of the value of Singing Sands: it becomes part of Muir's legacy even if he had nothing to do with its creation (and even if he was never actually there). Second, the invocation of Muir as the first in a long line of naturalists to appreciate the botanical value of the Bruce/Dorcas Bay positions the reader of the sign, the park visitor, as an inheritor of Muir's tradition of botanical knowledge and preservationist wisdom. In among the array of brown and yellow, overtly disciplinary Parks Canada signs with circled-and-slashed silhouettes of lady's slippers ("don't touch the orchids"), Muir becomes an added normative presence. If someone as important as Muir believed that the appropriate response to nature-inspiration was a lifetime of work toward environmental preservation, then perhaps the visitor can at least pay attention to where s/he is stepping so as not to destroy Muir's beloved flowers.

As I have described elsewhere, there is a tendency in some Canadian national park interpretation (and in the public imagination of Canadian parks more broadly) to consider park-spaces as always already permeated with preservationist or other ecological desires, despite the fact that many of the national parks were created for economic, political, and/or other reasons having almost nothing to do with the protection of habitats or species.¹¹ BPNP is no exception to this rule. In 1967, the Province of Ontario established Cyprus Lake Park (including 3.2 kilometres of spectacular Georgian Bay coastline) primarily to meet the recreational needs of Southern Ontario residents. After some intergovernmental

wrangling (in addition to negotiation with the Chippewas of Nawash and the Saugeen Ojibway Nation), that land was transferred to the federal government in 1987 to form the core of the new Bruce Peninsula National Park.¹² As was fairly common in the period, recreational and economic concerns were at least as important as preservationist ones, and although the fact of the Park's position on the Niagara Escarpment certainly contributed to its creation,¹³ the attractiveness of the Bruce Peninsula as a camping and hiking destination, conveniently close to major Southern Ontario urban centres and the ferry crossing to Manitoulin Island, was higher in the mind of Parks Canada than were its botanical treasures.

The Singing Sands portion of the park, however, physically removed from the Cyprus Lake section and on the other side of Highway 6, was created with the intent of preservation. Reserved by the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (Owen Sound Field Naturalists) in 1962, it did not become part of BPNP until 1996. And it is, as the sign tells us, a rich site for wildflowers, especially orchids. Although different species of orchid appear in different places in BPNP, depending on, among other things, the micro-habitats particular species like best, Singing Sands includes a number of spots in which some fairly beautiful orchids are easily visible in profusion from the walking trails. Perhaps the most awe-inspiring of these sites is a cluster of Ram's Head Lady's Slippers (*Cypripedium arietnum*) right on the main forest trail; visible from late May to mid-June, the flowers are protected from careless trampling by a well-signed split-rail fence. In addition, dozens if not hundreds of Rose Pogonias (*Pogonia ophioglossoides*) are visible in late June and early July along the park-constructed boardwalk into the fen. (I have not seen a *Calypso bulbosa* there – I have seen them in several other places in BPNP and on Flowerpot Island in Fathom Five National Marine Park – but I am not expert enough to know if that is a question of habitat or happenstance.)

So Singing Sands is, Muir or not, a special sort of place for orchids. And that's a good thing: the swamp where Muir actually had his Calypso epiphany is long since drained and part of the industrial agricultural plain that is Holland Marsh, now known for its immense production of

chemically exaggerated carrots rather than for the tiny, spiritual “flower people” of the “useless” swamps of the 1860s. (There is no plaque to Muir’s presence in this place where we know he really was.) As Mitchell noted as early as 1910 in Oxford County, “to look back it does not seem so long ago when ... [a portion of the county was] the ideal home of the orchids.... In the cool hemlock woods *Goodyeras* [Rattlesnake Plantains] of three species flourished, and even *Calypso borealis* could frequently be met with. And so it was with all the other native orchids; for all there was some suitable place, but axe and fire, and drainage have done their work, and now but few places remain where orchids can exist.”¹⁴ It is, of course, not only agriculture that is to blame for the destruction of orchid habitats. In particular, the Bruce Peninsula’s recreational opportunities are not limited to the park and, especially on the Lake Huron side, cottage developments have expanded rapidly since the 1960s, devouring a variety of orchid habitats in the process in those places not suitable for agriculture. *Cypripedium arietnum* should be thankful, then, for the Owen Sound Field Naturalists.

But as (now) part of the national park system, and specifically of the fairly well-touristed BPNP (at least in July and August), Dorcas Bay/Singing Sands is not only or even primarily a plant refuge. Reflecting Parks Canada’s sometimes-conflicting tripartite mandate of preservation, education, and recreation (it wasn’t until 1988 that “preservation” came first in the National Parks Act), Singing Sands includes areas that are obviously recreationally attractive, such as the eponymous beach that, as a relatively warm, shallow, and beautifully swimmable expanse of mostly weed-free lake and sand, is in high demand in the middle of the tourist season. Even the trails that lead from the beach and parking lot through the less-heavily recreational forest, fen, alvar, and dune areas of the reserve – complete with the signs that point out and identify the flora (and a few fauna) on which one should not step – lead people into human–plant relations that are, in most cases, not primarily designed to be of benefit to the orchids. It is fair to say that some species, most obviously *Cypripedium calceolus pubescens*, Large Yellow Lady’s Slipper, which also grows up and down Highway 6, clearly don’t mind the human (and

dog and stroller and camera equipment) company. It is possible that some even benefit from the soil disturbance, locally increased sunlight, and decreased competing vegetation caused by frequent pedestrian traffic: *Epipactis helleborine*, a non-native species, seems to have thus thrived. Other orchids surely do mind, however (hence the fences), and others may have minded so much that they are no longer there.¹⁵ As with all public parks, then, there is a mandate in Singing Sands with a potentially dual edge: preserve it and they will come.

CATTLEYS, COMMODITIES, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

I never intended to fall in love with orchids. I have never owned one, and I find the waxy *Phalaenopsis* hybrids on sale at Wal-Mart fairly depressing; they hint at an ancestral botanic elegance but reek of a chemically intensive global floral industry that turns plants into the living equivalent of IKEA furniture. And I have to confess: such was my ignorance that I had no idea, until I first went to Bruce Peninsula National Park in the mid-1990s, that there were native orchids to be found in Ontario. Like many Canadians, I imagine, I associated orchids with humid, tropical locales; I could not put together the overt, lush sensuality of (what I now know to be) *Cattleyas* and *Dendrobia* with the relatively barren, wind-scoured shores of the northern Great Lakes. In fact, there are about 25,000 species of orchid (they form one of the world's largest plant families), and although most of them are to be found in the tropics (like much of the world's biodiversity), they exist almost everywhere, including the Himalayas. Many orchid species are temperate and terrestrial (like all of the native Ontario ones); there are, according to the Owen Sound Field Naturalists, forty-six species and two varieties of orchid in Bruce and Grey counties alone, all but one of which are indigenous.

Orchids are fascinating creatures on several levels. Biologically, they share some distinctive characteristics, the most obvious of which is that their flowers always have three outer sepals and three inner petals, with

a pronounced median petal forming a lip or labellum – sometimes a slipper, as in the *Cypripedia* – that gives the otherwise symmetrical flower a distinctly asymmetrical, orchid-like appearance despite the enormous variations apparent within the family. In addition, orchid seeds are extremely small, with almost no stored food reserves; they rely on insects for pollination (Darwin wrote an entire book on the “almost endless variety of beautiful adaptations” through which orchids are uniquely structured to suit the physiologies of the various bees, flies, and moths on which they rely for pollen-transfer)¹⁶ and are also dependent on symbiotic fungi, mycorrhiza, to digest the stored energy in the soil and make it available to the young orchid plants.¹⁷ Orchids are, in other words, fussy: in addition to their reliance on site-specific mycorrhiza, their “germination must occur under the proper conditions of soil, moisture, temperature and light if the plant is to flourish and continue. Many orchids have very precise requirements and only a very few can thrive in diverse environments.”¹⁸ They are, as a result, almost never the dominant plant species in their chosen habitats; they are also extraordinarily difficult to transplant and especially susceptible to habitat loss.

Culturally, orchids are also more than usually interesting. As garden historian Luigi Berliocchi demonstrates, almost everywhere they grow they have been invested with larger mythical or supernatural meanings, many of which have to do with sex. The word “orchid” has at its origin the Greek Orchis, who in myth was a libidinous youth who attempted to rape a priestess and was dismembered for his crime, but whose testes were transformed into the tubers of a plant. Orchids have been used widely as aphrodisiacs, including by Europeans (the theory of signatures held that specific plants were good for the parts of the human body they resembled) and by aboriginal North Americans,¹⁹ and their appearances in Western art and literature often include overtones of decadent sexuality. The most obvious example of this sexualization is probably from Marcel Proust. In the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Swann’s first overtly erotic gesture to Odette is to rearrange the cattleyas she has pinned to her dress, and throughout the earliest days of their sexual relationship, “indulging in [his] little rearrangements” is Swann’s pretext for

his “fumblings with fingers and lips at Odette’s bosom”: thereafter, “do a cattleya” is their coy lovers’ shorthand for sex.²⁰

Not coincidentally, Proust wrote just at the end of an historic orchid mania in which the flowers’ highly perfumed aura of decadence was articulated with, and inflated by, their rarity as colonial commodities. Orchids were deeply implicated in European conquest from the mid-eighteenth century onward, hunted and hoarded from Southeast Asia to the Amazon as exotic treasures for wealthy patron/collectors. As rarities, they were status symbols, and so with the rise of a Victorian bourgeoisie eager to share in the aristocracy’s cultural capital, their rarity was soon eroded as an organized orchid industry developed to satisfy middle-class botanical demands in the latter half of the nineteenth century (which is why Odette was able to have so many cattleyas rearranged). The development of a basic understanding of orchid reproduction at the turn of the twentieth century thus led directly to industrial orchid cultivation and trade, and as orchids became increasingly mass-produced commodities, they lost some of their exotic edge. Still, orchid hunting continues, and passionate, obsessive botanical thieves – such as John Laroche, the subject of Susan Orlean’s book *The Orchid Thief* (and part of the subsequent Hollywood film *Adaptation*) – remain prominent romantic characters in popular orchid culture.²¹ But there is clearly a divide between the Wal-Mart *Phalaenopsis* and the CITES-protected ghost orchid (*Dendrophylax lindenii*) of Laroche’s now-infamous poaching and smuggling operation: some orchids are just more charismatic than others.²²

Charismatic orchids form the basis of another growing industry: orchid tourism. Advertisements for organized orchid tours to Hawaii, India, China, Nepal, Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, Mexico, and Central and South America are all over the Internet. There is a month-long orchid festival in Sikkim every March: “a great attraction for orchid lovers,” according to India Vacation Package, and even more reason to visit the orchid sanctuary in the capital city of Gangtok on a tour that can also include the “orchid paradise” of Arunachal Pradesh. NEI (UK) Tours promises that “orchids will be seen growing in the wild, in national and private collections; commercial growers will be visited where this

is possible and botanical collections made available for study.” And my favourite: for \$1,595 per person, Costa Rica Orchid Tours (“No Artificial Ingredients!”) houses its clients in four- and five-star hotels and promises eight hundred species of orchids in the University of Costa Rica Gardens as well as farm tours (“We Can Buy!”) and a “Golden Orchid Evening” at the Pre-Columbian Gold Museum, complete with a souvenir, artisan-crafted golden orchid.²³

But the poster-children of orchid mania and orchid tourism are not *Calypso bulbosa*. For one thing, small Canadian orchids are not the lush, scented creatures of extended literary metaphor. Catharine Parr Traill mentions Calypsos in her *Pearls and Pebbles* (1894), but only as part of a typically precise list of plant species in a bog near her home near Peterborough.²⁴ Marilyn Simonds has more room for botanical literariness in “Taken for Delirium,” but the single *Cypripedium acaule* (Pink Lady’s Slipper) that plays a central role in the short story is a survivor, not a seducer: it is a botanical kindred spirit to (and metaphor for) the protagonist, a woman who has weathered isolation, fire, marital separation, and degenerative disease. (When she leaves husband and home for the city, she will “remember the orchid ... [and] that I liked her so well because she survived on so little.”)²⁵ Further, as Muir’s rapturous 1864 account indicates, even though their sex organs and reproductive habits are every bit as fascinating as those of their tropical cousins, temperate orchids like *Calypso bulbosa* have often tended to signify the opposite of carnal desires: purity, frailty, and clarity. Muir’s Fairy Orchid is thus as pure as the snow out of which it has recently emerged. Indeed, fellow environmental luminary Henry David Thoreau writes that “the cool fragrance of the swamp-pink” in the valleys of Massachusetts “... restores [the woodland walker]” should he feel faint from the heat “when he is climbing the bare hills.”²⁶ No “doing a cattleya” in these woods.

Directly because of Thoreau, it is as virgins rather than whores that temperate orchids have entered into recent environmental discourses. Drawing on his extensive (1851–58) notes about the species distribution and seasonal growing habits of the plants around his home in Concord, a team of Boston University biologists has compared current species

abundance and spring flowering times to those recorded in his journals. Of the twenty-one species of native orchids recorded by Thoreau, only eight remained in the study period of 2003–07; habitat loss is a primary culprit, as orchids are profoundly dependent on very particular habitats.²⁷ In addition, the flowering time of many of the remaining orchid species is a matter of serious concern. Their dependency on particular insects for pollination means that some species, the ones that do *not* respond to temperature in their flowering times, are susceptible to serious adaptive problems in the midst of global climate change. Among other things, unchanging flowering times mean that flowers may not bloom in the presence of the necessary pollinators that *are* sensitive to temperature and therefore arrive earlier as local temperatures rise.²⁸ And so we can, perhaps, surmise some of the same for the Calypsos of the Bruce: “habitat loss due to succession and development (e.g., loss of wetlands ... and construction of homes and roads) has contributed to decreases in abundance for some species, [but] climate change may also help to explain the seemingly nonrandom pattern of species loss among certain plant groups” such as orchids.²⁹ The perceived purity of the flower may not nominate Calypso for an obvious starring role in the global orchid-sex trade, but its “spirituality” is scant protection against global warming.

THE MYSTERY OF THE PURPLE-FRINGED ORCHID³⁰

The Bruce Peninsula Orchid Festival was the brainchild of Parks Canada employee and wildlife photographer Ethan Meleg. In 2002, with the assistance of the Friends of the Bruce District Parks Association, he “started the festival to celebrate this unique and appealing natural feature of the park, in a way that would increase conservation awareness of orchid species.”³¹ Most certainly, the festival has brought the BPNP orchids into the limelight of park interpretation: issues affecting orchids and their habitats in the park and its surrounds (e.g., shoreline cottage development) are now much more visible, and conservation remains a primary message in all festival-related activities. But the Orchid Festival

is also part of a larger economic web in which national parks and adjacent communities cannot help but be enmeshed. First, in the wake of the massive cuts to national park budgets during the 1980s and 1990s, many parks were forced to take creative steps to increase their visitorship and coffers: BPNP was no exception. Second, Tobermory (to which BPNP is adjacent) has become increasingly reliant on tourism as other economic possibilities, especially commercial fishing, have dwindled to near zero. So the festival is certainly about conservation education, but in the words of Janet Johnston of the Friends, it is also about revenue: “we had two goals in establishing this event – firstly, to provide education to those seeking to find the rare and unique orchids and wildflowers of our areas; and secondly, to increase tourism in our shoulder season (spring).” The festival, although intentionally quite small, is an important source of publicity and funds both for the park and for Tobermory; as Johnston remarked, “this time of year is slow up here, so even this little bit helps quite a bit.”³² Thus the festival demonstrates a new, neoliberal orchid reality: even on this small scale, their conservation is tied to their commodification.

The festival organizers capitalized on existing circuits of global orchid tourism in their plans, and the event was designed to attract both hard-core orchid fanciers from remote locations (during one festival, I met a couple from Australia who had flown to Ontario primarily for that purpose), and nearby visitors with a general interest in natural history that might be piqued by the unusual density of species in the area (people like me). Meleg, acknowledging that orchids are the “superstars of the flower world,” is clear that there was a convenient convergence of needs involved in the germination of the festival: a themed event outside the prime July–August season made sense for both park and community, and orchids happen to bloom on the Bruce beginning in late May. But he is also clear that he thought an orchid festival would bring in tourists who were already interested in the kind of conservation message the park was trying to embody and promote. Given recent concerns in and outside Parks Canada about “flat” visitor numbers, this choice was important: “Parks Canada is ... faced with the fact that recent immigrants, an aging

population and a younger generation of people that prefer to surf the internet, play video games and have a hot shower at the end of the day are not all that interested in national parks.”³³ In the midst of pressure to re-brand the parks to appeal to a larger range of tastes, orchids were a good bet: visually charismatic, full of global attractive potential, but still part of a strong preservationist agenda.

The festival has been a definite success, drawing in an estimated one to two hundred visitors per year. Partly because the festival organizers have intentionally kept visitor numbers low in order to ensure a high-quality experience and manage potential impacts on the orchids, partly because Calypsos and Striped Coralroots (*Corallorhiza striata*) are not quite as sexy as tropical orchids, and partly because there are no five-star hotels and gold museums in Tobermory, the festival has retained much of its original character, in which orchids are, according to BPNP naturalist Scott Currie, “flagship species” that draw attention to “why habitat is important” rather than simply spectacles for photographers and other orchid-consumers.³⁴ Although Currie notes a) that several other plant species in the park are more ecologically significant than the orchids, and b) that there has been, in recent festivals, an increased tendency to focus on the superstar flowers rather than the habitats of which they are a part, he is clear that the festival “is effective at promoting habitat protection.”³⁵ Meleg concurs, and argues further that the more sustainable economy enabled by appropriate shoulder-season tourism is itself beneficial to conservation: the festival demonstrates to locals, cottagers, and tourists alike that people can get an economic return from conservation rather than resource extraction, and from preserving rather than building on orchid habitats.

One issue for the festival is, however, that even conservation-minded tourists have an impact on the natural environments to (and through) which they travel. Despite the festival’s clearly and repeatedly articulated protocols for photographers (stay on the trails, use longer lenses for distance, no ground sheets), gardeners (never transplant orchids from the wild, buy them from reputable sources that do not harvest from the wild), and everyone else (look with binoculars from a distance, do not

trample around the plant, do not touch the plant), the fact remains that some photographers ignore the rules and trample many sensitive plants in order to get the best shot (I would not want to be a Calypso growing near a marked trail), that some people still do not know better than to pick the lovely flowers that they are being encouraged to admire, and that poaching happens. Certainly, as Meleg and Currie are both quick to point out, these impacts were occurring prior to the festival and, indeed, the increased surveillance of orchid stations occasioned by festival and other attention has helped “to create a self-policing ethic among orchid enthusiasts.”³⁶ But it is still the case that Parks Canada is secretive about the locations of some of the area’s rarest orchids, including one of the last patches of the endangered Eastern Prairie White-Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*). Festival tour activities only involve easily accessible locations near roads and main trails. And although there have been discussions about increasing visitor opportunities for self-exploration, BPNP staff members are clearly aware that any published map of orchid locations could easily become a poacher’s itinerary.³⁷ Still, organizers are justifiably pleased with the result: as Meleg notes, “in terms of orchid conservation, I think the Festival helps us to gain two steps forward for every one step backward.”³⁸

A different issue for the orchids is that, festival or no festival, they are not the only attraction in the Park: the July–August tourist season is, despite an effective year-round conservation message, oriented far more to camping, scenery, and warm-weather recreation than it is to the many species of orchids that bloom in the summer months (especially July). Increased year-round attention to the orchids increases the possibility that visitors may come to the park for other reasons and discover the orchids while doing other things: certainly that is my story, and I would be a hypocrite if I didn’t point it out. But it is still the case that most visitors hiking to the Grotto – a truly remarkable geological formation on Georgian Bay that is not far from the main Cyprus Lake campground – have no idea that the unassuming spindly green plants along the path to get there are Menzies’ Rattlesnake Plantain (*Goodyera oblongifolia*); once, for example, I watched a small child, with parental consent, pick one to try

to make the sound from its thin stem that one might otherwise achieve by blowing on a blade of grass. Without a great deal of intervention from BPNP staff – and without the sort of spatial regulation and warden surveillance that, in an ideal world, wouldn't be part of an experience of walking on the Niagara Escarpment – the fact is that the orchids, as part of a place that is specifically oriented to tourism, will get overlooked and trampled, both metaphorically and physically, en route to more spectacular or recreational experiences. Parks Canada manages these visitor impacts in a variety of ways because, as Currie observes, “the risks to our natural heritage posed by visitation are outweighed by the risks of keeping people out of parks.”³⁹ But that fine balance has its casualties.

Take the story of the Small Purple-Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera psycodes*). On July 6, 2008, my partner and I took a leisurely Sunday morning walk into the woods at Singing Sands and saw a magnificent, pinky-purple cluster of orchid blooms on the top of a tall stem off to the side of the trail. According to Currie in an article published in the local paper soon after, “given the average length of time that it takes wild orchids to grow from seed to maturity, and its robust size,” the orchid was probably ten years old. We took several pictures of it and, like Currie, inhaled “a hint of its sweet fragrance, without ever leaving the path.”⁴⁰ I had never been to BPNP in July before, and had thus never seen a *Platanthera psycodes*: I was thrilled. So when I spoke to Currie later that month and he told me that the plant had been poached, completely removed, some time between July 5 (when he had last seen it) and July 7 (when he discovered its absence), I was devastated. On the very day of my moment of orchid-elation, someone had come along – come past the sign marking Muir's presence along the well-marked and frequently fenced trail, past the signs warning not to touch the plants – and taken out that entire, magnificent plant. Goodness knows what happened to it then: perhaps some collector tried to put it in her greenhouse next to the *Phalaenopsis*, or perhaps some aspiring Canadian Laroche tried to sell it to the highest bidder on eBay. As Currie wrote, “it won't survive transplanting. It was ripped out at the base of the flower stalk leaving a small, inconspicuous hole in the sphagnum. Perhaps the

most insulting thing is that the individual responsible probably thought that no one would miss it.”⁴¹

Well, I miss it.⁴² I understand Muir’s elation at seeing the *Calypso bulbosa*: I never intended to fall in love with orchids, but I did. Unfortunately, loving them doesn’t necessarily protect them. Muir’s Calypsos are gone from Simcoe County. And maybe loving them can even make it worse: the commodification of orchids through trade, mass propagation, and tourism may have increased their economic and cultural value, but the process has globally, both directly and indirectly, contributed to their destruction almost as much as it has highlighted the importance of their conservation. Despite its considerable successes at conservation and education, BPNP is part of the web of commodity relations in which orchids are thoroughly enmeshed. Meleg rightly said to me that the orchids of the Bruce Peninsula have far more to lose outside the park from the development that threatens their habitats (and now apparently also from climate change) than they do from the odd, now much-more-visibly-policed poacher inside it, but the irony remains. In this place where Muir may (or may not) have walked, this park that prides itself on the protection of orchids and their habitats facilitated the death of this one specimen by providing easy trail access, a parking lot, and a set of signs proclaiming “this way to the orchids.” There is ample reason to be enthusiastic about the Orchid Festival, and about BPNP’s larger efforts to both “protect and present” the ecosystems of which *Calypso bulbosa* and *Platanthera psycodes* are a part. But still: as far as the orchids are concerned, tourism is a mixed blessing.

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NOTES

- 1 “Calypso Trails: Botanizing on the Bruce Peninsula,” *Dalhousie Review* 90, no. 1 (2010): 5–22. Used with permission.
- 2 Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 94. See also William Frederic Badè, *The Life and Letters of John Muir* [1924] (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).
- 3 Muir, qtd. in Worster, *Passion for Nature*, 71.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Worster, *Passion for Nature*, 94.
- 6 Ibid., 97. Fox notes that this sole expedition in July 1865 may have taken Muir north of Wiarton, where he would have revelled “in the spruce and cedar jungles where the rare Alaska orchid hides; or amid the damp dark-shaded limestone cliffs that are host to the still rarer Hart’s Tongue fern” (W. Sherwood Fox, *The Bruce Beckons: The Story of Lake Huron’s Great Peninsula* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952], 142).
- 7 Fox, *The Bruce Beckons*, 137.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Fox notes that there is “no positive word ... stating that the Muirs crossed the fifteen-mile strait from Manitoulin to the northern tip of the Bruce Peninsula” (ibid.), leaving the issue of whether or not they actually *did* travel down the Peninsula on this trip a matter of conjecture. The Canadian Friends of John Muir website contains an entire essay by Scott Cameron devoted to the question of “How John Muir Got to Meaford”: www.johnmuir.org/canada/how_did_jm.html (accessed 15 Oct. 2009, 1 Mar. 2013). Fox does relate a further piece of evidence from a blend of Peter Trout’s story, “What I Know of John Muir,” and William Trout’s self-published *History of the Trout Family* (1910), which indicates that Dan had told Peter that the Muirs “had specimens from ... the peninsula between Lake Huron and the Georgian Bay” (*The Bruce Beckons*, 138).
- 10 I underline, here, that Parks Canada was neither ignorant nor deceptive in its choice to erect this sign. BPNP naturalist Scott Currie stated that “the sign ... was meant to be ambiguous. There is no official account of John Muir poking this far north on the Peninsula. However, there are many who believe that, given the unique geography and ensuing biophysical characteristics of the Peninsula, it is highly unlikely that Muir would have passed up the opportunity to come here – especially in consideration of his affinity for the Calypso orchid ... which doesn’t occur in Owen Sound, but does at the northern tip of the Bruce” (Interview with the author, 18 July 2008).
- 11 Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, “The Cultural Politics of Ecological Integrity: Nature and Nation in Canada’s National Parks, 1885–2000,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 39–40 (summer 2009): 161–89.
- 12 The islands that are now Fathom Five National Marine Park, originally protected by the province to preserve the twenty-two shipwrecks that lie within its borders, were also transferred to the federal government at that time, in addition to parcels of land at Little Cove and Cabot Head. See Gerald Killan, *Protected Places: A History of Ontario’s Provincial Park System* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1993) and Parks Canada, *Bruce Peninsula National Park Management Plan* (Hull: Department of Canadian Heritage, 1998).
- 13 Leonard Gertler’s *Niagara Escarpment Study – Conservation and Recreation Report* (Toronto: Province of Ontario, 1968) recommended preserving lands

- along the entire 500+ km length of the Escarpment in Ontario. The Bruce Trail Association, founded in 1960, also organized the construction of a public hiking trail along the full length of the Escarpment (Niagara to Tobermory, now over 800 kilometres of trail). The Niagara Escarpment was designated as a UN Biosphere Reserve in 1990, which also contributed to a wider recognition of its geological and botanical uniqueness.
- 14 Cited in R. Emerson Whiting and Paul M. Catling, *Orchids of Ontario* (Ottawa: CanaColl Foundation, 1986), 7. *Orchids of Ontario* includes mention of a report of *Calypso bulbosa* in the Don Valley in Toronto in 1894 (103). It also includes a map of stations of *Calypso bulbosa* in Southern Ontario prior to and after 1950, a predictably depressing picture of regional extirpation (9).
 - 15 According to the Owen Sound Field Naturalists, seven species and one variety of orchid on the Bruce are considered rare in Ontario. Small White Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium candidum*) is listed as endangered in both Ontario and Canada, and even its continued presence on the Bruce is doubtful as there has not been a confirmed report since 1930. See *The Orchids of Bruce and Grey* (Owen Sound, ON: Owen Sound Field Naturalists, 1999), 4.
 - 16 Charles Darwin, *The Various Contrivances by Which Orchids Are Fertilised by Insects* [1862, 1877] (London: John Murray, 1904), 282. As Berliocchi recounts, in the sixteenth century, long before Darwin's recognition of the mutual dependency between orchids and their pollinators (indeed, long before it was understood that orchids were pollinated at all as their seeds are virtually invisible), Hieronymous Tragus proposed a theory of resemblances between orchids and animals in which orchids were thought to grow in areas where, for example, the birds they resemble had mated and spilled their sperm. See Luigi Berliocchi, *The Orchid in Lore and Legend*, trans. Lenore Rosenberg and Anita Weston (Portland: Timber Press, 2000), 36.
 - 17 Joseph Arditti documents that the role of mycorrhiza in orchid propagation was not understood until Noël Bernard figured it out in 1899; see *Fundamentals of Orchid Biology* (New York: Wiley, 1992), 47. Prior to this discovery, orchid cultivation, which now includes clonal propagation as well as germination from seed and hybridization, was hit-or-miss.
 - 18 Whiting and Catling, *Orchids of Ontario*, 8.
 - 19 According to Whiting and Catling, "young girls of the Haida [Nation] ... wishing to increase their bustlines, used to eat the raw corms of the calypso ... when they found the plants in the woods" (*Orchids of Ontario*, 6).
 - 20 Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, vol. 1: Swann's Way (À la recherche du temps perdu, vol. 1: Du côté de chez Swann)*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 331. Berliocchi writes that "if orchids had not existed, one feels Marcel Proust ... would have had to invent them" (*Orchid in Lore and Legend*, 91).
 - 21 Susan Orlean, *The Orchid Thief* (New York: Ballantine, 1998); Spike Jonze, dir., *Adaptation* (Columbia Pictures, 2002).
 - 22 "Charisma" is, of course, how the botanical fetish works, as the rarer and more exotic the species, the more people will pay to have it. Berliocchi explains that orchid hunters therefore sometimes intentionally destroyed the habitats in which they found newly discovered species (*Orchid in Lore and Legend*, 79). CITES: the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna.
 - 23 India Vacation Package, "Orchid Special," www.india-vacation-

- package.com/orchid-tours.html; NEI (UK) Tours, "Orchid Tours," www.neiuk.co.uk/Orchids.html; Costa Rica Orchid Tours, "Central America Orchid Show," www.costaricaorchidtours.com/central_am.html. Accessed 15 Oct. 2009.
- 24 Catharine Parr Traill, *Pearls and Pebbles* (1894), ed. Elizabeth Thompson (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 1999), 125.
- 25 Marilyn Simonds, *The Lion in the Room Next Door* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1999), 164. According to the story, the infused root of the plant is an herbal remedy when "taken for delirium."
- 26 Henry David Thoreau, *The Natural History Essays*, ed. Robert Sattlemeyer (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1980), 38; my emphases.
- 27 Richard B. Primack, Abraham J. Miller-Rushing, and Kiruba Dharaneeswaran, "Changes in the Flora of Thoreau's Concord," *Biological Conservation* 142, no. 3 (2009): 503.
- 28 Charles G. Willis et al., "Phylogenetic Patterns of Species Loss in Thoreau's Woods Are Driven by Climate Change," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 105, no. 44 (2008): 17029.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 I am very grateful to Parks Canada's Ethan Meleg and Scott Currie, both of whom talked to me at length about the park and the orchids in the summer of 2008 and later commented very helpfully on a draft of this article. (I am also grateful to Janet Johnston for her correspondence.) I have tried to honour their justifiable enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the Orchid Festival here, but it is clear that I am more skeptical about tourism as a conservation strategy than they are.
- 31 Ethan Meleg (Parks Canada), correspondence with the author, 11 Nov. 2009.
- 32 Janet Johnston (Friends of the Bruce District Parks Association), correspondence with the author, 24–25 June 2008.
- 33 Ed Struzik, "Wardens in Arms," *Canadian Geographic* 129, no. 4 (2009): 60.
- 34 Scott Currie, interview with the author, 18 July 2008.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Meleg, correspondence, 11 Nov. 2009.
- 37 Ethan Meleg, interview with the author, 14 July 2008. As the *BPNP Management Plan* explains, "some focused-interest users [e.g., orchid fanciers] can ... have an extremely high impact on specific resources such as orchids. Publication of information on rare, endangered and sensitive species must be undertaken with caution" (29).
- 38 Meleg, correspondence, 12 Nov. 2009.
- 39 Scott Currie, correspondence with the author, 12 Nov. 2009.
- 40 Scott Currie, "Purple Fringed Orchid," *The Bruce Peninsula Press* (16 July 2009).
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 So will Currie and, judging by the BPNP staff to whom I spoke casually about it the following year (including the warden who was clearly a bit alarmed that I was taking a strong interest in what looked like another, not-quite-blooming *Platanthera psychodes* near the boardwalk in the fen at Singing Sands), so will a lot of people. Most destroyed plants are not mourned; the Calypsos that were trampled during the 2008 festival, and this particular Small Purple-Fringed Orchid, most certainly were. The fact that so many people actually care about these plants enough to miss them when they are destroyed is an ironic testament to the festival's success.

CHAPTER 14

Knowledge, Power, and Place: Environmental Politics in the Fiction of Matt Cohen and David Adams Richards (2007)

*Cheryl Lousley*¹

David Adams Richards and Matt Cohen have produced some of the most environmentally engaged fiction in contemporary Canadian literature. Richards's novels place the poverty of the Miramichi River region of New Brunswick within a socioecological context of pulp mills, polluted salmon streams, and decimated forest landscapes. *Lives of Short Duration* (1981) presents a bleak portrait of a ravaged and poisoned social and physical environment. *Mercy among the Children* (2000) pivots on water contamination from forestry pesticide and herbicide use. Ecological change also figures prominently in Cohen's celebrated Salem novels, each set near a fictional place called Salem located north of Kingston, Ontario. In *The Disinherited* (1974), Cohen focusses on marginal landscapes and rural people faced with the decline of family farming in the 1970s. His final novel, *Elizabeth and After* (1999), presents the same place

some twenty years later when creeping urban sprawl and rural gentrification have made agriculture a postmodern simulacrum.

I develop an ecocritical analysis of these novels by focussing, not on their representations of nature, but on their politics of knowledge. Cohen and Richards attribute responsibility for environmental degradation to particular social actors by showing how knowledge is socially and geographically situated. Both Cohen and Richards construct gaps and discrepancies between different subject positions in order to map power relations of class and region. However, as critics such as Frank Davey, Janice Kulyk Keefer, and Philip Milner have noted, Richards's novels often amplify and extend these gaps to include a large discrepancy between the knowledge of the characters and the reader. Richards's novels are productively read in an ecocritical context that recognizes that epistemological claims are key to the power relations, ecological crises, and ethical dilemmas of postmodernity. In depicting the Miramichi as an environmental "sacrifice zone," a region that bears the brunt of the ecological costs of late industrial society, Richards's novels mark the limits of both experiential and empirical knowledge when confronted with the increasingly complex and less visible forms of environmental risk and contamination.

POWER, PLACE, AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Discussion of place, rurality, and region in Canadian literature is haunted by the spectre of "environmental determinism," the idea that giving prominence to the physical environment in a creative text or critical perspective denies human agency and erases sociopolitical relations.² Environmentalism and ecocriticism have similarly been accused of ignoring or subsuming social inequalities and differences in the name of environmental crisis. But environmental sociologists, geographers, and political theorists argue that environmental degradation and risk are inseparable from capitalism and other structural inequalities. For example,

geographer Sharon Zukin argues that the landscape of North America in late capitalism is being reshaped into a divide between “landscapes of consumption and devastation.”³ Regional divides, especially, become more pronounced as industrial production shifts to other global locales: some areas, such as West Gull in Cohen’s *Elizabeth and After*, are remade into tourist zones; others, such as Richards’s Miramichi, become ecological wastelands.

Sociologist Ulrich Beck argues that the global production of ecological problems also levels and reconfigures inequalities. Modern ecological hazards, such as nuclear radiation, synthetic chemicals, and climate change, threaten not only the poor but also the most affluent nations and members of society. In *The Risk Society*, Beck proposes that the distribution of risk has become as important as the distribution of wealth in the industrialized societies of the post-World War II period. The significance of the “risk society” as a concept is that it calls attention to how political antagonism increasingly centres less on access to wealth and modes of industrial production and more on access to information and modes of knowledge production. The spatial, temporal, and perceptual distance between ecological hazards and everyday experience means that every individual faces uncertainty about health and security, and that every individual is cut off from knowledge about his or her world and body – indeed, the more one knows, the greater the sense of insecurity and risk.

In part, the importance of risk grows because of the global scale on which contemporary environmental hazards operate. Like the global movements of capital, resources, and people that globalization theorists track, the associated ecological hazards exceed the conventional checks and balances of the modern nation-state. But their causes and effects are much harder to map than the flows of capital. They emerge as side effects of the production not only of wealth, but also of techno-scientific knowledge, which, in turn, is required to define and identify the hazards that have been produced. Compared to nineteenth-century pollution, where hazards “assaulted the nose or the eyes and were thus perceptible to the senses ... the risks of civilization today typically *escape perception* and are

localized in the sphere of *physical and chemical formulas* (e.g., toxins in foodstuffs or the nuclear threat).⁴ To identify the presence of contaminants requires what Beck describes as “the ‘sensory organs’ of science – *theories, experiments, measuring instruments*.”⁵ And yet, the certainties once offered by scientific knowledge are no longer trusted precisely because modern science is a primary source of these hazards. Moreover, causal links between intentions, actions, and effects are notoriously difficult to establish with respect to environmental contamination.

Beck shows how environmental conditions raise a new set of questions about knowledge production that we can bring to an analysis of how literary texts engage with power and representation. Ecocritical analysis should attend not only to representations of nature or environment, but, more fundamentally, to how characters, narrators, and readers are positioned as knowing or not knowing the environments they inhabit and produce. The relationship of literary form to the production of knowledge about material conditions has, of course, been central to Marxist literary criticism. Although Marxist critics have often neglected the ecological dimension of materialism, the Marxist strategy of reading literary form in relation to subject positions and knowledge registers can be useful for ecocritical analysis. Georg Lukács’s account of realism is here taken as a starting point for understanding how novels might function to construct knowledge about socioecological relations. Lukács’s attention to historical perspective is usefully supplemented by the importance of spatial relations for Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson, because in the environmental novels of Cohen and Richards causal relations across space and time are used to provide – and distort – perspective on environmental conditions.

Cohen’s approach to environmental conditions remains firmly grounded within a realist frame, whereby the broad parameters of time, space, and ecology within which the plot unfolds are known, or can be presumed to be known. In other words, ecological relations can still be mastered by empirical knowledge, or known from the omniscient subject positions of the author and reader. Richards’s novels, by contrast, push into absurdity, tragedy, and the Gothic to challenge the complacent

middle-class, urban reader who still has faith that ecological conditions have not yet surpassed knowledge and control – that late industrial society has not yet entered ecological crisis. Despite David Creelman’s insistence that “Richards repeatedly uses realism to examine the social disruptions and the economic hardships that have plagued the Miramichi region,” I suggest, along with Justin D. Edwards, that a realist reading may miss the significance of Richards’s dark vision, fragmented narratives, and moral tone.⁶ Richards’s novels reframe ecological crisis as a moral crisis by casting doubt on the belief that there is some subject position that could render the complex socioecological relations in which we are embedded either historical or intelligible.

HISTORY, SPACE, AND REALISM

Lukács argues that realist fiction provides readers with the historical perspective that can make sense of structural relationships. When a connection is drawn between large-scale, external forces and the particular experiences of everyday life, a novel creates “the feeling first that there is such a thing as history, that it is an uninterrupted process of changes and finally that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual.”⁷ In modernist fiction, by contrast, historical perspective is absent because all is subjective: “the inner world of the subject is transformed into a sinister, inexplicable flux and acquires – paradoxically, as it may seem – a static character.”⁸ For Lukács, subjective life must be juxtaposed with objective or material conditions to show individuals to be embedded in historically specific socioeconomic relations. This claim to objectivity is precisely what renders realism politically suspect today: its seemingly transparent narrative perspective functions as an ideological cover.

Harry E. Shaw argues that while Lukács’s account of realism presumes a knowable world, it does not take that world to be transparently represented. While some aspects of the world are immediately available to the reader, the limited perspective of the character who is immersed in daily life shows that the world is not easily understood. Shaw argues that

realist fiction centrally grapples with the *difficulty* of developing accurate and usable knowledge about the world: “What is being insisted on ... is that certain aspects of external reality matter, or can be made to matter as part of a larger web of relations, if only we’ll pierce beyond the veil of the familiar – not that they are self-evidently and unproblematically present for our inspection.”⁹ In juxtaposing the partial and incomplete knowledge of the characters and the total perspective of the narrator, realist fiction stages, or performs for the reader, the gap between experience and knowledge. Revealing such gaps may be useful for environmental politics, and yet not sufficient, given Beck’s argument that it is not only the gap between experience and knowledge that broadens in the risk society, but also that, along with the increasing epistemological skepticism of postmodernity, all knowledge claims become simultaneously more important and less reliable.

However, Lukács’s discussion of history in realist novels focusses primarily on its social dimension. The material relationship between the individual and the physical environment is of no significance in his analysis, nor does nature appear as an agent of history. Raymond Williams brings environmental considerations into Marxist criticism by making land-use régimes central to his analysis of shifts in literary form and language. For some ecocritics, Williams is part of the anti-nature turn in literary criticism because of his critique of rural nostalgia.¹⁰ Williams incisively demonstrates how Renaissance and later English country-house poems construct a harmonious vision of nature by excising people, labour, and property relations. But Williams presents this critique of the naturalization of property relations to advocate for livable communities, and, in the final pages of *The Country and the City*, he emphasizes the need for critics to appreciate “the complexities of the living natural environment.”¹¹ Williams’s historicizing method does not appropriate the natural into the social, i.e., see the landscape merely as a social construction, but rather challenges the traditions in both conservative and Marxist thought that adopted an ahistorical notion of pastoral as a stable literary mode extending back through the generations. Williams argues that to read diverse literary texts from different times and places as a

common form reifies diverse settlement patterns and an integrated economy into a static division between city and country.

Williams offers two ways that we might modify Lukács's analysis for an ecocritical reading of realist fiction. First, if the importance of concrete historical context in realist fiction lies in how it makes sense of the overwhelming, trivial details of everyday life, then it may also serve to make sense of the environmental conditions of characters' lives. But to reveal the historical forces of environmental change, the landscape and not just the people must be portrayed as part of history. Without such historical perspective, the physical environment will appear to have always been as it is, rather than subject to change by natural and human forces. Second, we must recognize how spatial relations contribute to the construction and distortion of perspective. Williams proposes that it is the appearance of a spatial separation between city and country, coupled with their economic integration (e.g., on the level of goods, ownership, and travel), that has made the pastoral form appear so immutable, thereby contributing to the mystification of changing social and economic conditions. Space is also key to his analysis of class relations in realism. In dispelling the essentialist notion of the rural "knowable community," Williams notes that "neighbours for Jane Austen are not the people actually living nearby; they are the people living a little less nearby who, in social recognition, can be visited. What she sees across the land is a network of propertied houses and families, and through the holes of this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen."¹² Williams juxtaposes two spatial scales to show that Austen's "known world" is not geographically determined but socially circumscribed.

In sum, Williams's cultural-materialist method functions along two *axes* of analysis: history (the changing over time of economic relations, landscapes, and literary forms) and geography (spatial relations at a particular moment in time, e.g., between city and country, colony and metropolis, land owner and labourer). The importance of space for understanding the power relations of capitalism is given even greater emphasis by Fredric Jameson. In *Marxism and Form*, he suggests that realist fiction is no longer able to provide historical perspective in the modern

era; in *Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism*, he argues that perspective is undermined because “depth is replaced by surface”¹³: “this latest mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world.”¹⁴ An “alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment” emerges as categories of space replace categories of time in the organization of capitalism and culture.¹⁵ Jameson therefore argues that aesthetic practices oriented toward historical perspective are less useful in postmodernity than an aesthetics of “cognitive mapping,”¹⁶ a new “realism” (in the epistemological sense) that traces spatial relationships.¹⁷

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY AND *THE DISINHERITED*

Cohen’s *The Disinherited* illustrates how Lukács’s account of historical perspective in realism is useful for environmental politics when extended to include environmental history. As its title indicates, *The Disinherited* makes history a central concern. The novel situates the sell-or-stay decision faced by a postwar farm family within the historical context of patriarchy, colonialism, geology, and ecology. Inheritance, as the historical and ideological tie between the individual, the family, and the land, is the foundation for European male property rights and the exploitation of nature. In the novel, the legitimacy of this claim to the land is called into question, in part, by the legacy of environmental degradation initiated with colonial settlement. This legacy is brought into perspective by the use of multiple timescales. The history of the land is told not only from the subject position of the farmers, but also from the marks that natural forces have etched onto rock: “the earth had scraped and scarred its own skin with ice . . . made long twisted scars in the bedrock and stripped it of its covering of soil so that in places now, even millions of years later, the rock showed, or worse, was only a few inches beneath the surface waiting to greet the person who was stupid enough to try and plough it or

shape it to his needs.”¹⁸ Nature is depicted as an agent of history, making changes to the land long before the appearance of human beings. Nature thereby establishes the material conditions with which human life in this place must contend: the thin, poor soil of the Canadian Shield.

The contrast between the enduring timeframe of natural history and human folly can be read as a deterministic commentary on the hubris of people who fail to acknowledge the force of the material world. But the millennial timescale also enables the role of human action in shaping the land to become apparent:

Richard had a sudden desire to let himself be taken over completely by the land ... as if in one moment of doubt all the energy that keeps him able to impose the farm on the land might be dissipated ... as if the farm was only a thin transparency laid over it like a decal that would be blown off easily by the wind and time so that the bodies and the hours and the effort that were buried in the immense fertility of this field would finally be nothing but a brief digression in its existence as a forest and a swamp.¹⁹

Cohen’s emphasis on the “bodies,” “hours,” and “effort” of work show how the farm, though not the land, is a product of human labour. The farm can disappear because human labour is just one of the forces at work: “the swamp which he had spent a month surrounding with ditches so it would drain would reassert itself and then, in its own time, fill in and become part of a meadow which would be no pasture but ground fit only for juniper seed and sumac trees.”²⁰ The farm appears as a human artefact because history extends beyond it.

Within the time period of the novel’s events, Richard Thomas is the prime, though not sole, agent of environmental change on the farm. As property-owner and family patriarch, he enjoys the powers of a god: “Richard decided which animals would live and which would be slaughtered, which would be bred and which would be sold, which would be allowed indoors and which would have to fend for themselves, expendable

and ignored, too unimportant to be worth the effort of killing.”²¹ The narrative places moral responsibility on his land-use practices by locating the historical forces contributing to environmental change in a domain that can be known and mastered by the individual. The life-and-death decisions that Richard makes and his doubts about the legacy of settlement imply that he is the one with the power to shape the landscape. As Richard lies dying in the hospital, he recalls with ambivalence the transfer of land and authority from father to son, and the ecological ethic expressed in the passed-down journals of a settlement-era poet who “begs” the original Richard Thomas – his grandfather – “to discard his plough.”²² Whereas the timescales of geology and ecology make the environmental changes wrought by farming visible on the land, the localized frame makes Richard, his father, and his grandfather responsible.

Socioeconomic trends function in *The Disinherited* to underscore the significance of personal responsibility and historical perspective. Richard Thomas’s two sons, Brian and Erik, represent the boosterism or fatalism that come from a fixation on external forces, reducing the future of the family farm to two reactionary options: adopting new technology or selling out and moving to the city. A real-estate developer offers to buy their lakefront land for cottages but Brian throws the man off the property, believing that the answer lies in greater investment and mechanization: “Brian would fall back on the old standard, the idea of getting the machinery for corn and building a silo. ‘It’s the coming thing,’ Brian would say over and over, the exact words the milk inspector had used.”²³ By emphasizing Brian’s mindless repetition of the futuristic phrase, Cohen shows how Brian clings to the illusion of agency and rationality when in fact he acts on blind faith. The technological solution is accepted as progress on the authority of the outside “expert.” Erik’s response is equally ahistorical, presenting the decline of the family farm as an economic and technological inevitability: “In a few years only rich city people will be able to afford to live on this kind of farm. All the food will be grown on huge farms run by businessmen. Or made in factories.”²⁴ The underlying passivity of both positions stands in stark contrast with the agency assumed by Richard as family patriarch. In taking responsibility

for their actions, the sons ultimately come of age: the adopted Brian assumes control over the farm; Erik frees himself from the patriarchal legacy of ownership and control. The primary sphere of action remains the farm; and the central issue is the relationship between each man, the family, and the land.

GEOPOLITICAL SPACE: *ELIZABETH AND AFTER*

The shift from historical perspective to cognitive mapping outlined by Jameson is apparent in the contrast between Cohen's depiction of socioeconomic forces in *The Disinherited* and his portrayal of their culminating effects in *Elizabeth and After*. In *Elizabeth*, the physical environment is not primarily shaped by individuals in one place, but by economic relations across space. The novel illustrates the transition described by Marxist geographers whereby "places are local condensations and distillations of tremulous global processes that travel through them.... In the world of high modernity it has become virtually impossible to make sense of what happens in a place without looking beyond the local horizon."²⁵ In a reconstruction of the socioeconomic factors undermining the family farm, Cohen emphasizes the absurdity of focussing on the farmer as change agent: "When the milk marketing board had told the McKelveys they'd have to renovate their operation or give up their licence, William sold his quota to go into cheese instead. When shortly after the local cheese factory was put out of business by the American conglomerate that had bought all of the township's factories only to close them down, he went into beef."²⁶ William McKelvey's commodity dance is taken to extremes to underscore the limits of a belief in local autonomy. Each change is dictated from the outside: the farmer is positioned as a passive dupe who can only respond to the decisions made by others.

The reference to an "American conglomerate" reinforces the sense of William's powerlessness because decision-making power has shifted outside the country and into private hands – an even greater physical

and civic distance between the individual and the forces of change than the government-created marketing board. A similar point is made with the identification of a “Toronto consortium” as the town’s “biggest landlord and biggest employer.”²⁷ The physical distance between landlord and tenant and between employer and employee makes it more difficult for tenants and employees to confront the people making decisions about their rents, living arrangements, jobs, and paycheques. The spatial detachment also makes the agents of historical change conveniently invisible and unidentifiable as human individuals – and allows the physical consequences of their decisions to remain out of their sight. A case in point is the local elder business magnate, now a Liberal senator, who sits on the “board of directors of a company that had just landed a lucrative contract selling attack helicopters to South Africa.”²⁸ The repeated identification of historical actors and historical effects by their physical locations demonstrates, first, the nameless, abstract nature of economic forces and, second, how spatial relations buttress power differentials, with a consequent lessening of moral responsibility.

In contrast to the geological and generational perspective of the land in *The Disinherited, Elizabeth* presents a surface-level view of the land as property and image. The spatial disconnection between the places where decisions are made and the places affected by those decisions results in the homogenization of the landscape. Real-estate developers and wealthy urbanites transform bankrupt farms into country homes with “large carefully tended lawns that looked like advertisements for riding mowers.”²⁹ Physically transformed by commodity exchange, the landscape loses its historical and geographical specificity:

What rock? Didn’t Luke Richardson, the real-estate millionaire who owned a condominium in Florida, for God’s sake, know every square inch for fifty miles around? Hadn’t he offered to buy this place a dozen times? “Name your price,” he would say, as though challenging Arnie to recognize that in the modern world, the world of strip plazas and convenience stores, the world he effortlessly turned to profit and an

endless stream of new black Cadillacs, there was nothing that couldn't be given a number.³⁰

The picturesque rock where Arnie imagines building his retirement dream home is invisible to Luke because commodity exchange does not require the historical depth that knowledge of place brings. People, things, and places are interchangeable in Luke's world, acquired and disposed of as desired.

The farms' working pasts are recalled only ironically, in the name of "The Movie Barn," the video store where property-less Carl McKelvey, son of William, finds minimum-wage shift work. The gentrified landscape presents a sanitized rusticity that buries power relations under a veil of false historical continuity: "the tended streets with the expensive homes ... had amber-lit brass coach lamps showing the way for horses that would never come."³¹ The lamps allude to a life of simple means and human distances but are materially constructed and maintained through the exploitation of natural resources and manual labour displaced to other areas. Carl, for example, goes west to British Columbia to find primary-sector work in forestry, "piling underbrush and generally making things look pretty after the big chainsaws and tree cutters had done their damage."³² Carl's cosmetic job shows how the destruction of ecological systems proceeds without notice or complaint when the image is taken as reality. Similarly, the lamps' faux heritage design demonstrates how history collapses into nostalgia when the local is cast as a reprieve from the global.

The emphasis on land as image in *Elizabeth* shows that the historical knowledge that Richard has of his farm in *The Disinherited* provides insufficient context for understanding the operations of global capital accumulation and exchange. By foregrounding socioeconomic and spatial relations, the narrative implies that the continuity of natural history is no longer key to understanding the agents driving history. But the autonomy and agency of nature, appreciated on a local scale, are not relinquished. The novel reveals an ironic gap between what are shown to be *images* of rural landscapes and what remain *actual places*, such as Arnie's field,

Williams's farm, and British Columbian forests. The novel therefore reaffirms the value of a local and historical perspective of nature with which the image can be juxtaposed and found wanting. Moreover, in a form of cognitive mapping, the novel links distant places so that power relations and lines of responsibility can appear – to the reader, though not to the characters. Despite the powerlessness and limited knowledge of its characters, *Elizabeth* affirms the possibility of the realist novel to make sense of socioecological change because, for the reader, causal links are made between decision-makers, average lives, and changes in the physical environment.

HOPELESS ENVIRONMENTS: *LIVES OF SHORT DURATION*

Generally described as “bleak,” “grim,” and “dark,” David Adams Richards's fiction shows more ambivalence about the possibility of making sense and enacting change.³³ The lives of many of Richards's early characters appear hopeless because the narrative perspective does not seem to provide any historical framework for the overwhelming immediacy of day-to-day survival in a debilitating social and physical environment. By contrast with *The Disinherited's* emphasis on history and *Elizabeth's* depiction of spatial relations, *Lives of Short Duration* achieves a disorienting sense of meaninglessness by failing to construct spatial links or temporal continuity. A seemingly random barrage of environmental details confronts the morally debased members of the Terri family who live by their wits as bootleggers, drug peddlers, and petty entrepreneurs. George Terri's alcoholic haze runs one observation into another, without distinction or connection:

The wine seeped between his pantlegs and dissolved in a sweet circle in the dirt. Lester Murphy's faded sign just above the hollow read: “Atlantic Salmon Centre of the World.”

The road signs told of bends and curves and deer crossings. He stared up at Karen's legs, the rough skin about her knees, the power-lines like a crucifixion all the way to Calvin Simms' Irving garage.³⁴

Just as the road signs give equal significance to "bends" and "deer crossings," Richards's sentences provide description without perspective. The components of the physical environment seem to hold meaning – the signs "tell" – but because the powerlines and tourist signs appear on the same spatial scale as legs and knees, any sense of proportion or relative importance is impossible. In a similar way, the absence of links between sentences or plot development presents these details without the historical depth usually provided by causation. Everything is immediate.

Within the dense accumulation of detail, Richards ascribes significance through repetition and symbolism. The powerlines always run to the Irving garage "like crosses," a "crucifixion," or the "crosses of missionaries."³⁵ The repeated associating of crosses with Irving, the wealthy family corporation with a virtual monopoly on oil, gas, and timber in New Brunswick, calls attention to the double meaning of "power" as electrical energy and as influence or authority. The Christian imagery implies that the electrical lines involve sacrifice and the imposition of foreign values, justified by their seemingly good intentions. Energy production is the *sine qua non* of modernization and regional development, enabling increased resource extraction and industrial-level production as well as the expansion of consumer markets.

Richards uses repetition rather than narrative continuity to trace this history, showing capitalist development to be ideological rather than linear and progressive. Jingoistic phrases used to sell consumer items and experiences – "'Volare Volare – woa woa woa woa,' came the commercial from somewhere";³⁶ "Atlantic Salmon Centre of the World"³⁷ – are interspersed with absurdly optimistic statements that the benefits of economic development are worth the sacrifices: "When the woods were gone the river'd be gone, but there'd be iron ore, and when that was gone there was uranium also."³⁸ The flippant list shows how economic

“missionaries” conceive the region and the environment solely as a source of raw materials and a market for products. The isolation of the economic pronouncements from any specific actors or places and their random appearance, like the commercials and news reports “from somewhere,” make them appear inevitable.³⁹ The difficulty of contesting or resisting their logic is indicated by the impossibility of pinning down where they come from, much less whom. The decline of the salmon, the poisoning of the river, the incursion of multinational corporations are all events that seem to happen *to* the people of the river, who at best play bit roles trying to imitate or profit from the external forces that invisibly structure their lives. With the sacrifice of the forests and the life of the river come the fast food, cars, and consumer goods and styles that most of the novel’s characters not only accept but yearn for, making no connection between the system that produces these goods and their own cultural decline and political disenfranchisement.

The question of knowledge is raised most explicitly in the novel by the wide gap between the localized knowledge of the characters and the broader historical and geographical knowledge needed to appreciate the relations of power in which they are embedded. A woodsman for most of his eighty-two years, illiterate Old Simon has never heard of the Bay of Fundy, which forms the southern boundary of New Brunswick.⁴⁰ At the same time, the knowledge gained from his experience in the woods has become obsolete: “And what could you tell them? That you made 74¢ a day and had to walk 40 miles on snowshoes, and had built camps from cedar and skids with the bow ribs made from roots and had stayed up two months in the woods alone and could smell fourteen different kinds of snow?”⁴¹ The rhetorical question shows the depth of Simon’s localized environmental knowledge – too substantial to be easily relayed and explained – while ultimately demonstrating its tragic irrelevance in the globalized, consumer culture that dominates the river. In *The Disinherited*, Richard Thomas’s local knowledge positions him as change agent on the farm; in *Lives*, by contrast, Simon Terri’s much more intimate and less instrumental knowledge of the river is a mark of his underclass

position and his powerlessness to stop the river from being made into an environmental sacrifice zone.

In his discussion of *Nights Below Station Street*, Frank Davey interprets the gap between the knowledge of Richards's characters and narrator as "condescension."⁴² He argues that the "large superiority in linguistic power the narrator and novelist enjoy over their characters opens a wide political gap in the text.... [T]he book's characters ... are construed ... as better off leading passive, acquiescent, non-constructive, geographically limited lives."⁴³ However, Janice Kulyk Keefer, drawing explicitly on Lukács, argues that Richards's depiction of poverty involves an immediacy and totality that serve to elicit empathy for individuals and provide an understanding of the historically and regionally specific condition of their poverty: "*Lives* reveals ... the degradation of human life and the despoiling of the natural world are not mere *faits accomplis* – alternatives exist, however shakily. For the reader to merely shrug them off is to become complicit in the very degradation and despoliation this fiction represents."⁴⁴ The force of this novel lies in bringing to public light material conditions and underpinning relations that are usually discounted and invisible – and giving this knowledge moral significance. Richards's use of repetition and structural discontinuity underscores how the material relations of place and history are neither simple nor self-evident. The reader must actively work at making sense of the disjointed narrative. As Philip Milner notes, the demands placed on the reader are the focus of many of the early reviews and criticism of Richards's fiction: he cites one reviewer who asks, "Why is Richards making me *work* so hard?"⁴⁵

Richards's comparison of the Miramichi with Third World conditions, but without the TV-induced sympathy or donations, is a biting indictment of middle-class Canadian complacency and ignorance: "People with swollen bodies lay in various corners of the earth – so Anne Murray told him on television, people with their skins wracked with sores, or hungry – and he'd seen on television Begin and Sadat too, and the Palestinians – and children with flies crawling over their body, as he'd seen them crawl over Daniel Ward's children in Daniel Ward's house..."⁴⁶ In

describing the conditions on the Micmac reserve, Richards refuses the comfortable distance offered by the TV screen and a continental divide and immerses the reader in the ugliness of the region's desolation. Again and again the phrase "Now you might feel some discomfort" appears in the novel, once addressed to a nineteen-year-old girl sent for a backroom abortion, but usually repeated without any particular audience except the reader, each repetition heightening its understatement.⁴⁷ The purpose of this discomfort seems to be to elicit a recognition that the moral failing of "not giving up one ounce of human commitment" extends from the main characters to the larger world that they – and the novel's audience – inhabit.⁴⁸ The narrator's cultivation of discomfort alongside the dizzying shifts of the narrative perspective implies that knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for responsible action in the world. The reader may appear to have more worldly knowledge than the characters, as Davey argues, but is not placed in a position of moral superiority. *Lives* partakes of the "certain romanticism" that Christopher Armstrong and Herb Wyile associate with Richards's later Miramichi trilogy, where "the protagonists prevail – if not survive – under circumstances that position them as the moral superiors of their critics."⁴⁹

MORAL AGENCY: MERCY AMONG THE CHILDREN

Richards's moral tone and framework have challenged critics who try to place his work in a socially progressive context. As Armstrong and Wyile point out, Davey's reading of Richards's fiction as determinist too readily discounts the way his novels valorize a form of agency not based on rationalist enlightenment, but on "religious and moral terms."⁵⁰ *Mercy among the Children*, described by Creelman as a "moral romance,"⁵¹ even more explicitly offers a moral response to the epistemological dilemmas of environmental degradation. In contrast to the disjointed structure and perspective of *Lives*, *Mercy* features a chronological narrative and ostensibly first-person narrator. The straightforwardness of the narrative serves to highlight even more starkly the different levels of knowledge

held by the characters, narrator, and reader. Water contamination is implicated in the most serious turns of the plot but does not preoccupy the main characters, who focus their attention on day-to-day survival and social acts of injustice and intolerance. The discrepancy between presumed and actual risks, and the inability to read the environment and know the consequences of one's actions, thereby become significant.

The relationship between knowledge and power is dramatized by Sydney Henderson's antagonistic relationship with the professors at the university. As a young man, Sydney, protagonist of the novel and father of the narrator, vows to God to "never raise his hand or his voice to another soul."⁵² Remaining consistently faithful to this vow, Sydney and his family are taken advantage of and persecuted by most of the people and institutions they encounter, including several seemingly well-meaning professionals in social work, the university, the legal system, and the church. The plot reveals that there is no necessary link between knowledge and authority, or between knowledge and ethics. As a well-read, though self-taught, intellectual, Sydney is as articulate and analytical as the Marxist professor, David Scone, who patronizingly suggests that he take up a trade rather than try to enter university. Sydney's knowledge brings him scorn rather than any greater capacity to improve his life or step beyond his class origins. As his son remarks, "Those men my father had done favours for, filled out application forms for, helped with their unemployment benefits, forgot him and remembered only a man who read strange books."⁵³ The university professors, meanwhile, lack the moral courage to defend those "strange books" for fear of being associated with a man they presume to be a backward, degenerate sexual predator. They fail to wield responsibly the power they hold because of their privileged association with a social institution that lends their words and knowledge legitimacy: "a man with grade five education accused of being an elitist and *against* the working man, by Prof. David Scone, who had met the working class, not by calluses on his hands, but by reading Engels and Marx."⁵⁴

Armstrong and Wyile discuss similar depictions of "progressive liberalism" as ruthless and hypocritical in other novels by Richards.⁵⁵

They argue that the effect of this didacticism, “combined with its traditional realist aesthetic, closes the reader out of the narrative.”⁵⁶ Indeed, unlike *Lives*, which demands that the reader piece together meaning from the fragments, *Mercy* imposes a moral stance on the reader. But the hypocrisy of the university-based scholars also comments on the limits of knowledge. It shows they are blind to the class system in which they live (whether wilfully or merely through the complacency of privilege). This blindness is made apparent, as Shaw emphasizes in his description of the effect of opening a gap between the knowledge of characters and reader, by the broader perspective provided by the narrator. The academics appear hypocritical because the narrative perspective provided to the reader unequivocally shows Sydney to be innocent. The novel’s clear-cut lines of innocence and guilt are taken to such an extreme with the depiction of the more epistemologically complicated and more humanly devastating scenario of poisoned water that the novel does not merely implicitly construct a totalizing moral framework but confronts the reader with its moral stance.

The water subplot uses the epistemological crisis of the risk society, whereby causal knowledge about environmental hazards is imprecise, unpredictable, and difficult to establish with certitude, to separate knowledge production from morality. Whereas Cohen presents a spatial distance between decision-makers and victims in *Elizabeth*, Richards collapses that distance into the same locale in *Mercy*. Richards implicates most of his main characters in contaminating the water supply of the poverty-stricken, violent roadway where the novel takes place. The chemicals in the water are traced to pesticides and herbicides used on the woods and stored at the pulp mill run by local tycoon Leo McVicer, with the encouragement of provincial forestry officials and the knowledge of his workers, who themselves dump the chemicals during a raucous lock-out. Although a hidden graveyard reveals the workers who likely died prematurely due to their occupational exposure to the chemicals, the contamination is also linked to stillbirths and to childhood leukemia, albinism, and cancers. These are the workers’ children and grandchildren (and McVicer’s unacknowledged children and grandchildren), who

live on the roadway. In *Mercy*, it is primarily children who embody the “sacrifice zone” of industrial development; their innocence heightens the moral stakes of the epistemological crisis.

By tracing characters’ actions to their material effects, and especially in making children the primary victims of these actions, *Mercy* seems to condemn these men as harshly as it condemns the hypocritical academics. But their limited perspective is due less to social prejudice than to the epistemological complications of Beck’s risk society. McVicer insists that at the time none of them knew the seriousness of the risks:

Nothing made him more furious than to think that *these* men, *these* grown men, men *he* trusted, who used those chemicals to keep down budworm disease and clear roads – when everyone else was doing the *same*, back in the sixties – would stop using these chemicals the exact moment everyone else did, and charge that *he*, Leo McVicer, was guilty of knowing what they themselves, and even scientists, did not!⁵⁷

The complicit involvement of so many different individuals and institutions might show the difficulty of assigning blame for environmental health effects, especially in a culture of acquiescence, complexity, and incomplete knowledge. But McVicer’s failure to take responsibility for his actions – blaming the social climate and environmental ignorance of his time – is contrasted with Sydney’s courageous and steadfast moral convictions, sustained to the point of sacrificing his life in trying to help another. In the novel, the invisibility and long latency period of environmental contamination serve to show that ethical questions are so difficult – and so important – precisely because we lack the complete, omniscient knowledge offered by the realist novel or by an idealized notion of science. In place of enlightenment, the novel provides morality: it is Sydney’s religious vow that enables him to make choices about how to act, rather than let himself be overwhelmed by the limits of his knowledge or determined by the values of his social milieu.

The stark moral landscape of *Mercy* provokes as much discomfort as *Lives*' hopelessness does, but for different reasons. *Lives* uses spatial distance to place a moral burden on the reader whose urban comforts derive from the natural resources and labour extracted from the Miramichi rendered as "sacrifice zone." In *Mercy*, Sydney and his family seem to become willing victims, sacrificing themselves for the sake of independent thought and human compassion. While the novel might therefore be read as self-defeating environmental fatalism that closes the reader out of the narrative, it can also be read as exposing the limits of realist conventions and expectations – in both aesthetic and epistemological terms. As Justin D. Edwards notes, the children's deformed bodies function both as material traces of environmental contamination and as "grotesque markers" of "the brutal figures of power, the spectral hierarchies, that have dispossessed the poor."⁵⁸ Their Gothic presence points to what lies "under the surface of this region (that which is known but not thought)."⁵⁹ Edwards suggests that Sydney, as an innocent figure demonized as pure evil, haunts the community after his death. But his self-sacrifice also haunts the reader. Whereas Cohen's fiction seems to presume that the narrator and reader share a common moral register (the "naturalizing" tendency for which realism is often criticized), Richards's novels confront and challenge the reader to live up to a standard of duty and compassion.

CONCLUSIONS

As a fledgling field, ecocriticism is still searching for critical methodologies to illuminate the environmental implications of literary and cultural texts. In this essay, I propose that a key task for ecocriticism is to consider how knowledge of environmental ills and risks – or the very lack or limitations of environmental knowledge – is staged in contemporary literature. I draw on Marxist approaches to realism to outline an ecocritical method that foregrounds the politics of knowledge. I show how the depiction of environmental change in the novels of Cohen and

Richards depends on the construction and distortion of historical and spatial perspective. Both sets of texts map environmental degradation onto structural relationships of class and region in a globalized economy. In juxtaposing different knowledge registers, including the gap between the knowledge of the characters and narrator, they demonstrate that knowledge of causal relations across space and time is crucial for gaining perspective on environmental conditions and attributing ethical and political responsibility – but also that such knowledge is not necessarily achievable.

However, Cohen's shift from the localized domain of the farm in *The Disinherited* to the global commodity exchanges of *Elizabeth and After* seems to affirm that the realist novel can represent socioecological relations. By contrast, *Lives of Short Duration* fragments into absurdity and *Mercy among the Children* approaches Christian allegory. Richards's fiction is more ambivalent about the capacity of realist aesthetics and realist epistemologies to make sense of a socially and environmentally degraded world. Richards's depiction of environmental degradation complicates the way his novels have been read within a realist aesthetic; his novels also challenge us, like Jameson, to consider what aesthetic forms may be most appropriate for engaging with the present historical condition of ecological crisis.

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NOTES

- 1 Republished by permission of *Canadian Literature* from *Canadian Literature* 195 (winter 2007): 11–30.
- 2 For further discussion of “environmental determinism” in regional writing, see Frank Davey, “Toward the Ends of Regionalism,” in *A Sense of Place: Re-Evaluating Regionalism in Canadian and American Writing*, ed. Christian Riegel and Herb Wyile (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1997), 1–17; Deborah Keahey, *Making It Home: Place in Canadian Prairie Literature* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1998), 4–7; and Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh, “Introduction: When Is the Prairie?,” in *History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies*, ed. Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2005), 310.
- 3 Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 5.
- 4 Ulrich Beck, *The Risk Society* (London: Sage, 1992), 21 (italics in original).
- 5 *Ibid.*, 27 (italics in original).
- 6 David Creelman, *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 24.
- 7 Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin, 1962), 23.
- 8 Georg Lukács, *Realism in Our Time*, trans. John Mander and Necke Mander (New York: Harper, 1971), 39. For elaboration on how realism constructs the represented world as known and knowable, and how this shifts with modernism, see Philip Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).
- 9 Harry E. Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 51–52.
- 10 See Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 13, 432–33 n. 35, and note the absence of references to Williams in most ecocriticism. Dominic Head, however, claims Williams as an ecocritic *avant la lettre* (“Beyond 2000: Raymond Williams and the Ecocritic’s Task,” in *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, ed. John Parham [Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002], 24–36).
- 11 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 361.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 203.
- 13 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 12.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 18 Matt Cohen, *The Disinherited* (Markham, ON: Penguin, 1986), 77.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 99.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 165.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 25 Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 122.
- 26 Matt Cohen, *Elizabeth and After* (Toronto: Random House, 1999), 301.

- 27 Ibid., 63.
- 28 Ibid., 165.
- 29 Ibid., 47.
- 30 Ibid., 248.
- 31 Ibid., 8.
- 32 Ibid., 48.
- 33 See Janice Kulyk Keefer, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 170; Creelman, *Setting in the East*, 147; Philip Milner, "Structure in David Adams Richards' Unfinished Miramichi Saga," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 31 (summer 1985): 201.
- 34 David Adams Richards, *Lives of Short Duration* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981), 38–39.
- 35 Ibid., 24, 39, 167.
- 36 Ibid., 65.
- 37 Ibid., 73, 88, 161, 204, 205.
- 38 Ibid., 186.
- 39 Ibid., 14, 63, 65, 68.
- 40 Ibid., 78.
- 41 Ibid., 94.
- 42 Frank Davey, *Post-National Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel since 1967* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 78.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Kulyk Keefer, *Under Eastern Eyes*, 175.
- 45 Milner, "Structure in David Adams Richards' Unfinished Miramichi Saga," 202 (italics in original).
- 46 Richards, *Lives of Short Duration*, 145.
- 47 Ibid., 41, 160, 368.
- 48 Ibid., 149, 200, 209, 322.
- 49 Christopher Armstrong and Herb Wyile, "Firing the Regional Can(n)on: Liberal Pluralism, Social Agency, and David Adams Richards' Miramichi Trilogy," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 22, no. 1 (1997): 6.
- 50 Ibid., 7.
- 51 Creelman, *Setting in the East*, 168.
- 52 David Adams Richards, *Mercy among the Children* (Toronto: Random House, 2000), 23–24.
- 53 Ibid., 125.
- 54 Ibid., 82–83 (italics in original).
- 55 Armstrong and Wyile, "Firing the Regional Can(n)on," 11.
- 56 Ibid., 12.
- 57 Richards, *Mercy among the Children*, 82 (italics in original).
- 58 Justin D. Edwards, *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), 63.
- 59 Ibid., 63–64.

SECTION 4

ENVIRONMENTS AND CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

CHAPTER 15

Canadian Art according to Emily Carr: The Search for Indigenous Expression (2005)

*Linda Morra*¹

Although Emily Carr was initially committed to depicting First Nations cultural iconography and experiences in both her writing and what is considered to be her first of two phases of painting, she eventually focussed her attention entirely on the landscape of the West Coast. Acknowledging the importance of the West Coast to her art, contemporary cultural critics have yet to examine at length the mechanics at work behind Carr's belief in how indigenous material was formed. No sustained investigation exists that maps precisely how Carr saw the land operating in both media, her writing and her painting (which she regarded as interchangeable in her attempt to discover "just exactly *what* [she] had to say"),² and why she shifted from featuring First Nations cultural iconography and experiences to images of West Coast landscape.

For Carr, West Coast images as depicted in both media came to occupy a function that would characteristically be that of the state in

the nation-state: she regarded her subject matter and, more largely, her art as a centripetal force in the construction of what she perceived to be authentic Canadian national identity. She conceived of her images of landscape in a manner akin to a spiritual icon within a Christian religious framework – that is, as transcendent and morally uplifting. If she believed her images were shaped by a spiritual impulse,³ although not necessarily by religious principles, the anticipated “conversion” or transformation was not to a specific religion with a particular ideological framework as much as it was to a national ideal, even as spiritual impulses nourished that ideal. Apparently, Carr envisioned her audience as comprised of primarily Canadian inhabitants who had been conditioned to be sensitive to and to appreciate the land, and who would also be, therefore, more amenable to the spiritual influences that she believed her work would contain. She believed that aesthetic depictions of landscape thus contributed to the creation of an imagined national community or ideal, a transcendent entity in which the self was absorbed into a larger whole.

Canadian critics generally approach Carr’s aesthetic depictions of landscape in two ways. The first, although now considerably less popular, stream involves envisioning landscape as “hostile wilderness.” This pattern of English–Canadian cultural criticism was initiated by Northrop Frye, who predicates his argument on the assumption that the wilderness was an “other” that caused artists to experience first intellectual and imaginative dislocation and then, the inevitable corollary, “garrison mentality.”⁴ In *The One and the Many: English–Canadian Short Story Cycles* (2001), Gerald Lynch interprets Carr’s *Klee Wyck* (1941), the book which won the Governor General’s award for non-fiction in 1942, within the context of Frye’s “admittedly selective and tendentious reading” of Canadian literature.⁵ He argues that the vast Canadian wilderness promulgates Carr’s fear of “self-annihilation in wilderness space,” and her need to find “appeasement of and accommodation within that threat.”⁶ Generally no longer in vogue in English–Canadian literary criticism, this stream persists in other such disciplines as art history,⁷ sociology,⁸ and religious studies.⁹

The second stream of English-Canadian cultural criticism, now entrenched within contemporary literary and cultural discourse, considers modern aesthetic depictions of landscape as, at least ostensibly, benign: the discourse ranges from refuting Frye's view of artistic endeavours of this period and demonstrating that that view is more colonial than the subjects under his scrutiny,¹⁰ to suggesting that Carr's endeavours reflect national concerns,¹¹ to arguing that the employment of landscape may seem benevolent but is a function of the economic and political exploitation of indigenous peoples. Jonathan Bordo's "Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness" (2000) is an example of the latter, politically engaged tendency in cultural criticism. He investigates how artistic depictions of landscape disguise the tensions and inequalities that are embedded in the efforts to construct a uniform national identity, explores "the wilderness" as "a paradigmatic site for the symbolic staging of Benedict Anderson's imagined community of the nation-state," and suggests that, in such cultural endeavours, there is an implied witness who apprehends and depicts, but remains absent from, the wilderness: "The specular witness performs a rather special and dual role. It exalts a picture that testifies to an unpicturable condition – the wilderness sublime – while simultaneously legitimating, as a landscape picture, terrain violently seized, dispossessed of its indigenous inhabitants, and reconstituted as territory."¹²

Bordo's perspective is of particular interest because it registers a politically sensitive approach in contemporary cultural criticism – that is, this approach recognizes the shifting (and shifty) idea of a uniform national identity and gestures toward the complicity of such twentieth-century artists as the Group of Seven and Carr in the perpetuation of a homogenous national identity that often elided difference and effectively erased First Nations presence from artistic representations, or appropriated First Nations cultural production. Marcia Crosby, among other critics, adopts this ideological posture in relation to the artistic endeavours of Carr. She critiques her work, and all of the reviews that praise her unreservedly, for the underlying "assumptions of loss and salvage": "the paintings represent the land as devoid of its original owners

... thus lending tacit support for the actual dispossession of the property of First Nations people.¹³ Crosby's critique might be extended to Carr's writings, not just her paintings, given Carr's sense that the medium was *not* the message, but interchangeable: if the idea "was crystal clear," then "the medium would wrap it round."¹⁴ Since Carr often included, if she did not focus on, First Nations totem poles and iconography in her landscape paintings and wrote about First Nations cultural groups (predominantly in *Klee Wyck*), her artistic endeavours have also been encapsulated thus: "Like most individuals of her era who were embroiled in fantasies of colonial fulfillment, Carr saw First Nations culture as in eclipse – and consequently in need of documentation and salvaging before it disappeared entirely."¹⁵

Such a perspective, however just in its appraisal, does not account for what Carr herself believed she was doing, or how she engaged in sometimes subtle and complex ways with the idea of the nation, First Nations culture, and landscape. This approach imposes expectations, moreover, that are part of our own ideological inheritance, and, in so doing, dismisses Carr's remarkable artistic precociousness, her sense of self-agency in relation to the dominant ideology of the period, and the rather innovative ways in which she was interacting with First Nations communities and depicting their cultural artefacts when her own peers would not have considered the subject worthwhile. To some extent, Carr was involved in what Gerta Moray has called "aestheticized nostalgia," that is, the belief in (and hence contribution to) the demise of First Nations peoples and in the need, therefore, to render aesthetically their cultural artefacts;¹⁶ however, to castigate her for not living up to the contemporary political climate or to fail to provide a balanced account that takes into consideration her perception of her efforts seems to be critically reprehensible. Although Carr's notion of the forging of national identity and conception of indigenoussness might have been partly fostered by ideas that were prevalent at the time, her initial employment of First Nations iconography (what she conceived of as paying homage to one part of her cultural inheritance) and, later, landscape demonstrates that she was also actively engaged in contesting or resisting dominant

imperial forms. Her employment of what she regarded as indigenous material served an anti-colonial function; that is, it was used to express difference from imperial approaches.

If Carr were a “specular witness” who participated in the enforced exile of indigenous inhabitants, she herself believed that her artistic endeavours served quite another function: first, she maintained she was following the artistic example of and then exalting First Nations culture and iconography in the interest of finding an indigenous form of expression; and second, she believed she was aligning herself with the marginal status of First Nations people (even as her work supplanted their own and contributed to the denial of their self-agency and self-expression). Rather than “beautifying” Canada with imported feathers (and hence justifying Frye’s original indictment of English-Canadian artistic endeavours as articulated in his “Conclusion” to Carl F. Klinck’s *Literary History of Canada*), Carr sought to promulgate the development of a style and expression that was indigenous to the country and for which she initially found an example in First Nations’ artistic expression. She impugned the notion that “we are obliged to bedeck ourselves in borrowed plumes and copy art born of other countries and not ours”; instead, she believed that artists ought to “search as the Indian did, amid our own surroundings and material, for something of our own through which to express ourselves, and make for ourselves garments of our own spinning to fit our needs.”¹⁷ Carr is generally concerned with First Nations cultural forms because she believed they were “taken straight from nature” and the materials from “the country itself”: “The Indians of the west coast of Canada have an art that may be termed essentially ‘Canadian’ for in inspiration, production, and material it is of Canada’s very essence and can take its place beside the art of any nation.”¹⁸ She valorized aboriginal art and its corresponding value system because it was not inherited from or tainted by imported forms: “[T]he Indian [found] that great Art of his [...] Not in academics, or travel, or pictures, or books. He got it from profound observation, absorption of his material by all of his five senses. Only when he had made himself familiar with his material from bones to skin did he venture to express the thing in his art.”¹⁹

By extension, Carr believed that only after she immersed herself in the West Coast forests and absorbed her material with all her “five senses” would she too be able to express “the thing” in art. A direct response to nature was pivotal. Such a belief informed her own aesthetic sense, as is apparent in the justification for the original title (and subsequent subtitle) of *Klee Wyck*, “Tales in Cedar.” Apparently, every component of cedar was used: “The fibre of the bark” was employed for “weaving clothes, mats, baskets and the trees themselves they used for the carving of their totem poles.”²⁰ Carr wanted to create “stories in cedar” – to make use of indigenous material about her – in order to capture and convey, like the “Indian totem poles,” the “flavour” of “the West Coast.”²¹

As the title, *Klee Wyck*, also demonstrates, Carr identified with First Nations individuals, who provided her with “a sympathetic echo of her own condition”: she felt marginalized from conservative Victorian society.²² At the same time, she conceived of herself as a mediating figure between First Nations cultural groups and white, Western culture. She claims (however conveniently) that the Nuu-chah-nulth give her the name “Klee Wyck,” meaning “Laughing One,” a gesture that purportedly signals her acceptance into the community. Specifically, Carr suggests that the name is bestowed upon her by Mrs. Wynook, a First Nations woman who persuaded Carr not to paint “the old Indians [who] thought the spirit of a person got caught in a picture of him.”²³ The function of laughter in *Klee Wyck* is confirmed when, in “Kitwanoocool,” Carr explains how it “bridged the gap between their language and mine”²⁴ and results in the dissipation of cultural “strain”: more largely, Carr, as “the laughing one,” perceived herself as an intermediary figure between two distinct cultures.

Although her narrative about the process of her re-naming may be regarded as an attempt to “become Native,” as Terry Goldie suggests of such tendencies,²⁵ and thus as a seductive but pernicious way to justify her appropriation of First Nations iconography, she also recognized that she was not a part of First Nations communities, or, at least, not consistently regarded in that manner: “When the Indians accepted me as one of themselves, I was very grateful.”²⁶ She was initially committed to

including their cultural artefacts, rather than “erasing aboriginal presence,” and giving it the kind of attention that either ran counter to the stereotypes in currency in that period (see, for example, the paintings of Cornelius Krieghoff or the novels of Ralph Connor) or that was refused entirely by her contemporaries.²⁷

In fact, the original manuscript and first edition of *Klee Wyck* reveal her anger at the manner in which First Nations persons were being treated.²⁸ In “Friends,” a significant excerpt that caps the story in the original manuscript and the first published edition, but that was cut from subsequent editions, demonstrates Carr’s indignation: in this excerpt, she narrates her argument with a “Missionary” who demands that she “use [her] influence” to persuade Louisa and Jimmy, a First Nations couple, to “send their boys to the Industrial-boarding school for Indians.”²⁹ Carr’s initial response – a resolute “No” – is only elaborated upon when the missionary insists upon a reason for her unwillingness to intercede.³⁰ Louisa’s child, who is the “product of the Indian’s Industrial School,” Carr claims, learned to feel “ashamed of his Indian heritage”: Louisa, she maintains, is able to attend to her own children.³¹ Although she has been regarded as being unaware of the “political implications” of the situation for First Nations individuals, and as “fitting in with the Canadian government’s plan to absorb the original inhabitants of the country,” the early drafts of the manuscript demonstrate her considerable outrage at the efforts to assimilate First Nations cultural groups and suggest one of the original purposes for her interest in recording their work³² – as it also demonstrates her tendency to heroize herself.

Yet Carr is engaged in a situation, a cultural double bind, as it were, that effectively ties her artistic hands. What she writes or paints about will never be deemed appropriate in our period: if she refuses to include traces of First Nations culture, she is contributing to the erasure of aboriginal presence,³³ but, if she includes it, she is appropriating it.³⁴ To approach her painting and writing entirely from this point of view, however, obscures some of her own anti-colonial impulses, her refusal to pander to imported standards, which she perceived as impeding indigenous, national growth. Carr’s artistic endeavours may be seen as a

hybrid formation: on the one hand, participating in a limited fashion in what John O'Brian has called "fantasies of colonial fulfillment" by subsuming First Nations cultural material into her own (or refusing its representation in the later canvases), but, on the other hand, resisting her own imperial ideological inheritance.

Carr was motivated by her sense of the possibility of the development of another authentic national culture. She initially felt compelled to include First Nations cultural artefacts in her work because, aside from regarding these artefacts as being steadily obliterated, she conceived of their abandoned villages and the corresponding totem poles as indigenous, national "relics": "I glory in our wonderful West and I hope to leave behind me some of the relics of its first primitive greatness. These things should be to us Canadians what the Ancient Briton's relics are to the English, only a few more years and they will be gone forever."³⁵ She is intrigued by aboriginal images in part because she believes that these, rather than her own artistic expression forged in response to the West Coast, might be deemed indigenous (although that desire to "salvage" what she believes to be disappearing locates her as an imperial subject). In part, the impetus behind the employment of First Nations images in her canvases, especially totem poles, was to foster a national art (the West Coast exhibit in Ottawa had conferred much attention upon that notion) freed from or not associated with European conventions, even as she employed techniques she had acquired abroad in order to do so. Although she focussed on First Nations totem poles and images in her early canvases, and although the idea of painting "Western forests did not occur to [her] in that period," the shift from the former (First Nations iconography) to the latter (West Coast forests), which she conceived of as the spiritual force behind the totem poles, is thus consistent with her artistic aims:³⁶ to forge an indigenous artistic language and expression that reflected national concerns.

In terms of her canvases, Carr decided by the 1930s to shift from First Nations cultural iconography upon which she had become too dependent for the development of indigenous forms of expression. As she suggests in *Hundreds and Thousands* (1966), her posthumously published

journal, her sense of her artistic maturation is matched by her belief that her paintings ought to reflect a distinctly Canadian subject in an indigenous style (and, as such, share an affinity with First Nations cultural endeavours, but not depend on them for artistic expression) and convey a sense of the national spirit. Part of this shift may also be accounted for by Lawren Harris's encouragement to look directly to nature for the source of both material and techniques and to "saturate [herself] in our own place, the trees, skies, earth and rock," and to allow her art to "grow out of these.... It is the life that goes into the thing that counts."³⁷ Shortly after the West Coast exhibit, therefore, she began to regard First Nations artefacts and culture, not as subject matter, but as an example of how to approach Canadian landscape:

We may not believe in totems, but we believe in our country; and if we approach our work as the Indian did with singleness of purpose and determination to strive for the big thing that means Canada herself, and not hamper ourselves by wondering if our things will sell, or if they will please the public or bring us popularity or fame, but busy ourselves by trying to get near to the heart of things, however crude that work may be, it is liable to be more sincere and genuine.³⁸

Most importantly, she regarded First Nations totem poles as original, authentic expressions of indigenouness from which "newer" Canadians might learn. Although the totem poles "had served her well," and "had taken her into different places and kinds of nature," Carr's work began to reveal that "she was also reacting to and seeking out for the purposes of her changing art the various offerings of nature":³⁹ she effectively turned entirely toward depicting landscape.

To appreciate Carr's approach to landscape in both her writing and her painting, and her conception of its function in the construction of English-Canadian national identity, however, it must also be contextualized in the cultural system referred to as the nation-state. That phenomenon, as Anderson argues, emerged only within the past three

centuries and was once organized according to spiritual principles. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991), Anderson traces the rise of the nation and argues that it is imagined as both limited, that is, as separate and distinct from other nations, and sovereign, an entity that was borne out of the decline of the hierarchical dynastic realm, the monarchy being one example of this system. Ultimately, it is “imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”⁴⁰ He identifies how religious-based imaginings and impulses are similar to those that are nationalist-based, notwithstanding the fact that he tempers such an argument with the assertion that “it would be short-sighted ... to think of the imagined communities of nations as simply growing out of and replacing the religious communities and dynastic realms.”⁴¹

Yet, when the nation was being imagined, as it was in early twentieth-century English Canada by such artists as Carr, a sense of fervour was being fostered that bears resemblance to religious devotion and identification. In other words, the spiritual and religious rhetoric she employs to describe her artistic endeavours, especially in relation to nation-building discourse, are related to the fact that the nation-state (as defined by Anderson) evolved from the dynastic system. As the “contents” of the latter system altered, the structure remained: an ideal that involved imagining the nation as a transcendent entity and as emblemized by landscape replaced the figure of the monarch as the spiritual apex of the hierarchy. Cultural and artistic activity in early twentieth-century English-Canada provided spiritual orientation and centripetal, nation-building iconography, specifically images of the land. Carr, in like manner, believed she was contributing to the development of a sense of national unity and identity.

Just as the dynastic realm’s legitimacy was secured by the notion that it was divinely ordained, as Anderson suggests, so Carr’s belief in both First Nations cultural endeavours and Canadian landscape as sources of national identity and authenticity was derived from and legitimated by similar spiritually oriented principles. This connection explains why

she felt certain that her visual and verbal renderings of the essence of the Canadian West Coast and as an expression of indigenouness were, as she believed of Harris's depictions of Canadian landscape, religious in inclination: of Harris, she asserted that "his religion, whatever it is, and his paintings are one and the same," and of his canvases that "[t] here is a holiness about them, something you can't describe but just feel." On July 16, 1933, in *Hundreds and Thousands*, she thus wrote, "Once I heard it stated and now I believe it to be true that there is no true art without religion.... If something other than the material did not speak to [the artist], and if he did not have faith in that something and also in himself, he would not try to express it."⁴² Only a few days later, on July 17, she reveals the source of her own "faith": "God in all.... Nature is God revealing himself, expressing his wonders and his love, Nature clothed in God's beauty of holiness."⁴³ She expressed great disappointment, therefore, when she observed a priest strolling casually by Harris's canvas, "Mountain Forms," at a Royal Canadian Academy exhibit because she assumed that "the spirituality of the thing [ought] to appeal to one whose life was supposed to be given up to these things."⁴⁴

Many of these ideas were shaped by her contact with the Group of Seven, whom she met in 1927 when, at the invitation of Eric Brown, Director of the National Gallery, she travelled to Ottawa to view her canvases and Native-designed crafts displayed for a National Gallery exhibition (held in conjunction with the National Museum) entitled "Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern." She claimed that their paintings were a "revelation" about how to approach Canadian landscape aesthetically. Her response was spiritually charged, as is indicated by how she documented the experience in *Hundreds and Thousands*: "Oh, God, what have I seen? Where have I been? Something has spoken to the very soul of me, wonderful, mighty, not of this world.... What language do they speak, those silent, awe-filled spaces? I do not know. Wait and listen; you shall hear by and by. I long to hear and yet I'm half afraid. I think perhaps I shall find God here, the God I've longed and hunted for and failed to find."⁴⁵ Consistently after this experience, Carr describes the West Coast as essential to her – and others' – spiritual

transformation and, more largely, to the creation of a distinct, national aesthetic. Her literary work after this point in time generally reflects her struggle to develop a national art – she conceives of Canadian landscape, especially the West Coast, as a spiritual entity that is seminal in the provision of unrestricted, unregulated “space,” both literal and imagined, in which she might forge indigenous artistic expression and language.

She believed that, even if she might borrow the language of the religious establishment, art contained a spiritual force that operated outside of institutionalized religion. Conversely, she expressed considerable disdain for the Christian establishment and its missionaries because of their condescending and heedless attitude toward First Nations individuals. In the opening of *Klee Wyck*, in an instance of remarkable subtlety, she makes reference to the practice of repeating the “Our Father” in church as she gazes outside the window toward “a grand balsam pine tree”: “The Missionaries’ ‘trespasses’ jumped me back from the pine tree to the Lord’s Prayer just in time to ‘Amen.’”⁴⁶ Carr insinuates that the missionaries are responsible for “trespasses” (literally and figuratively) and for regressive rather than progressive movement (she “jumped back”), whereas the “pine tree,” a natural element, provides her with authentic spiritual orientation. Her paintings mediated this spiritual essence and thus served a religious function. “Art,” a means of rendering God in “Nature,” becomes “an aspect of God.”⁴⁷ In a manner that bears resemblance to the Group’s own expression of how their canvases are “witnesses” to the spiritual potential of Canadian landscape, Carr describes how she believed her own work was inspired by the land and how it ought to function in relation to her audience. When one of her own canvases received attention for “showing spirituality,” she was delighted and exclaimed, “Oh, if it *were* really a ‘spiritual interpretation.’ Will my work ever really be that? For it to be that I must myself live in the spirit. Unless we *know* the things of the spirit we cannot express them.” When she received a letter from Hanna Lund about how her painting entitled “Peace” “represents Divinity,” Carr recorded in her journal that “my soul spoke to hers, or rather, God spoke to her through me. Then he spoke back to me through her thought of writing [to] me. I am humbly grateful that my effort to

express God got through to one person.” God “speaks” to her, she claims, through nature: the woods are a source of the “profoundly solemn” from which, “like the Bible, you can find strength.”⁴⁸ Not only are they “God’s tabernacle,” but she could “eat the woods ... as one eats the sacrament.”⁴⁹ This curious metaphor of the eucharist suggests that she believed that she was obliged to internalize the West Coast forests, and that this process of internalization, like the receiving of the sacrament, was an act of faith. The religious nature of these references indicates that she regarded her subject matter and her canvases in ways that recall the principles of legitimation employed in dynastic realms: that is, she perceived both the land and her canvases as “divinely ordained.”

Carr had been consistently searching for a way to mediate spiritual transcendence (“the God I’ve longed and hunted for and failed to find”) that was rooted in her beloved West Coast and that was related more largely to national identity. That search was also informed by and couched in the rhetoric of the sublime and American transcendentalism. Specifically, some of her ideas were informed by her thorough reading of and admiration for the work of Walt Whitman. In her journal entry, dated August 12, 1933, for example, she mentions she is reading Frederick Housser’s *Whitman to America*, which, she claims, “clarifies so many things”:

[L]iving the creative life seems more grandly desirous (opening up marvellous vistas) when one is searching for higher, more uplifting inspiration.... I find that raising my eyes slightly above what I am regarding so that the thing is a little out of focus seems to bring the spiritual into clearer vision, as though there were something lifting the material up to the spiritual, bathing it in the glory.... Seek ever to lift the painting above paint.⁵⁰

She concludes this entry by examining her struggle to apply these principles to the mountain she is trying to paint – “it began to move, it was near the speaking, when suddenly it shifted.”⁵¹ She wonders about this

particular failure by asking herself, “Did I carelessly bungle, pandering to the material instead of the spiritual? Did I lose sight of God, too filled with petty household cares, sailing low to the ground, ploughing fleshily along?”⁵² She took these failures seriously and struggled because she wanted to build “an art worthy of our great country, and I want to have my share, to put in a little spoke for the West.”⁵³

The diction employed in such journal entries is also a response associated with the sublime, which is characterized by both a sense of that which rises above ordinary experience and ambivalence: both attraction to and fear of the subject matter, and a sense of serenity and terror, the latter being what Susan Glickman identifies in *The Picturesque and the Sublime* (1998) as “regenerative.”⁵⁴ In *Hundreds and Thousands*, Carr thus also repeatedly makes reference to her search for and the difficulties in forging a new vocabulary because these experiences, like those that are spiritually transformative in nature, defy existing forms of expressions and representation. This problem is linked to the sublime: the difficulty is not only how to articulate that which has no verbal or visual equivalent but also how to capture an unfamiliar experience and a geography that seemingly elude containment. As Glickman suggests, however, the Canadian sublime was also used to develop a sense of itself in opposition to British conceptions of the picturesque, which were in currency in Canada at that time. If “[a]rtists from the Old World” were alarmed by the West and found it “crude, unpaintable,” and if they felt “[i]ts bigness angered, its vastness and wild spaces terrif[ying],” Carr, as a New World artist, “loved every bit of it.”⁵⁵ The West Coast forests offer her the opportunity to express difference and to mediate transcendence, a raising above personal and individual concerns, in the form of the sublime, and the concomitant ecstasy involved in a sense of belonging to something higher, communal, and anti-individualistic.

Such temporary ontological dislocation, which Frye condemned because it apparently contributed to the stifling of English-Canadian artistic endeavours, is an integral part of the experience Carr wanted to capture and convey: how the human mind is subdued and overpowered by the sublime, the “recognition of the vastness surrounding it.”⁵⁶

The experience of the sublime, then, has been uncritically conflated with a part of the anxiety and sense of inferiority connected with colonial-mindedness. Yet, in the early twentieth century, it was this experience in which all Canadians were asked to partake and by which they would be made “Canadian”: Canada’s “wild magnificence” – that is, uncultivated land, or what Jonathan Bordo has defined as “wilderness” – was a source of inspiration and was given “parity with civilization in the expression of national character.”⁵⁷ English-Canadian depictions of a sublime landscape operated as a part of a larger national discourse that would create like-minded citizens.

That experience involves the dissolution of boundaries between self (or inhabitant of Canada) and other (wilderness). In the process, another larger self – an imagined Canadian national identity – and another “other,” imperial Britain, are forged. This form of the sublime may be fruitfully contrasted with that elicited by Carr’s experience in London. The “same feeling flooded over” her whenever she visited London: “[in] the stomach of the monster, [there was] no more You an individual but You lost in the whole. Part of its cruelty part of its life part of its wonderfulness part of its filth part of its sublimity and wonder, though it was not aware of you any more than you are aware of a pore in your skin.”⁵⁸ This description of the sublime corresponds to Frye’s now-popularized notion of the “garrison mentality” as he sees it generated by the Canadian wilderness and not, as Carr here suggests, by a city and certainly not by the imperial centre. Instead, she regards the experience of the sublime in Canada as a positive, if terrifying experience, which for Carr results in the undoing of any connection to British imperialist ideas and which is the matrix for the forging of a distinct Canadian identity. In a letter to Ira Dilworth, her editor and friend, she directly compares the “airless desolation of London” – the “factory outskirts, the smoke, grime, crowding people” and the “condensed horror heavier than weight itself, blacker than blackness” – with the West Coast in which she never experienced the “desolation of utter loneliness” which overcame her.⁵⁹ Her employment of the rhetoric of the sublime hearkens back to the dynastic system in terms of the structure and experience offered, although the

contents and specificity of effect – that is, a new kind of imagined community organized by different principles – have significantly altered.⁶⁰

Carr thus regarded Canadian wilderness as a civilizing force, not as a force to be civilized. She envisioned the Canadian West Coast as the matrix for spiritual experience and growth, for the forging of indigenous art, and for the creation of national development and identity: rather than grappling with issues of faith, she was endeavouring to generate or create faith and belief in national identity as she saw it being shaped by geographical uniqueness. As Stephanie Kirkwood Walker argues, “To accept a part in imaging the national soul, to join with the Group of Seven in devising images for the Canadian imagination, was to adopt a persuasive and compelling rhetoric that rested easily on the shoulders of a modern artist in a young country.”⁶¹ Despite Bordo’s sense that landscape was used as the “paradigmatic site for the symbolic staging of Benedict Anderson’s imagined community of the nation-state,” its use did not necessarily exclude First Nations cultural forms (although those forms were stifled when produced by First Nations themselves – see, for example, the banning of the potlatch in 1885). In fact, Carr’s interaction with First Nations communities indicates that she was quite uniquely engaged with the process of “shaping a nation” and with the English-Canadian nation-building discourse that was prominent at the time.

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NOTES

- 1 Republished by permission of *Canadian Literature* from *Canadian Literature* 185 (summer 2005): 43–57. Subsequently revised by the author.
- 2 Emily Carr, “Beckley Street,” 10 May 1936, in *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of an Artist* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1966), 237.
- 3 Walter Principe traces the root and application of the word, and suggests that, at its origin, it stood in opposition to another way of life: a spiritual person is one “whose life is guided by the Spirit of God” whereas a “carnal” person is one “whose life is opposed to the working and guidance of the Spirit of God” (Walter Principe, “Toward Defining Spirituality,” *Studies in Religion / Sciences religieuses* 12, no. 2 [spring 1983]: 130). To appreciate its significance, one “must take account of the link between the objects of faith and the reactions aroused by these objects in the religious consciousness” (*ibid.*, 137). In early twentieth-century English Canada, the “spiritual” or “spirituality” would have meant that which deals with experience outside of and in opposition to the material, corporeal world, but that experience is made in response to an object of faith: transcendence is thus integral to spiritual experience, articulated as something which is above and beyond individual concerns and the material world, and the object of faith was the land, as representative of the nation and its potential.
- 4 Northrop Frye, *Divisions on a Ground* (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), 49.
- 5 Gerald Lynch, *The One and the Many: English-Canadian Short Story Cycles* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 116.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 7 See Sharyn Rohlfen Udall, *Carr, O’Keefe, Kahlo: Places of Their Own* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 43.
- 8 See Ian Angus, *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality, and Wilderness* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 128.
- 9 See William Closson James, *Locations of the Sacred: Essays on Religion, Literature, and Canadian Culture* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 64.
- 10 See Diana Brydon, “It’s Time for a New Set of Questions,” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 71 (fall 2000): 14.
- 11 See Doris Shadbolt, *Seven Journeys: The Sketchbooks of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002), 115.
- 12 Jonathan Bordo, “Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness,” *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (winter 2000): 225.
- 13 Marcia Crosby, “Construction of the Imaginary Indian,” in *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, ed. Stan Douglas (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), 274. See also Reid Shier’s interview of the Salish artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun in “Native Son,” *Mix* 24, no. 1 (summer 1998): 48–55.
- 14 Carr, “Beckley Street,” *Hundreds and Thousands*, 237.
- 15 John O’Brian, “Introduction: Iconic Carr,” in *Gasoline, Oil, and Paper: The 1930s Oil-on-Paper Paintings of Emily Carr*, ed. John O’Brian (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1995), 9.
- 16 Gerta Moray, “Northwest Coast Culture and the Early Indian Paintings of Emily Carr, 1899–1913” (Diss., University of Toronto, 1993), 25.
- 17 Emily Carr, “Modern and Indian Art of the West Coast,” *Supplement to the*

- McGill News*, typescript, June 1929 (Emily Carr Papers, Art Gallery of Ontario Archives, Toronto), 4.
- 18 Ibid., 2.
- 19 Emily Carr, notebook, no date, qtd. in Emily Carr, *Sunlight in the Shadows: The Landscape of Emily Carr*, photography by Michael Breuer, text by Kerry Mason Dodd (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1984), n.p.
- 20 Ira Dilworth, letter to W. H. Clarke, 5 May 1941. BCARS, Parnall Collection (MS 2763), box 2, file 24.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Shadbolt, *Seven Journeys*, 12.
- 23 Emily Carr, *Klee Wyck* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1941), 10.
- 24 Ibid., 164.
- 25 Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 13.
- 26 Carr, *Klee Wyck*, 162-63.
- 27 Ibid., 13.
- 28 See Gerta Moray's "Wilderness, Modernity and Aboriginality in the Paintings of Emily Carr," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 33, no. 2 (summer 1998): 43-65, for a discussion of the editorial cuts made to the first edition of the book, which was "[sanitized ...] for use in Canadian schools" (52).
- 29 BCARS, Emily Carr Papers, MS 2181 (microfilm), Reel 1224.
- 30 Ibid. It was understood that this passage was an indictment of the residential school system. Blair Fraser commented upon how "That's really the keynote all through [*Klee Wyck*] - why should they give up their children, their folkways, their lives to an uncomprehending and contemptuous stranger?" ("Emily Carr and the Indians," *The Gazette* [8 Nov. 1941]: 11).
- 31 BCARS, Emily Carr Papers, MS 2181 (microfilm), Reel 1224.
- 32 Shadbolt, *Seven Journeys*, 15.
- 33 See Jonathan Bordo, "Jack Pine - Wilderness Sublime or the Erasure of the Aboriginal Presence from the Landscape," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, no. 4 (winter 1992): 98, and Crosby, "Construction of the Imaginary Indian."
- 34 See Shier, "Native Son" and Goldie, *Fear and Temptation*.
- 35 Emily Carr, "Lecture on Totems," qtd. in Moray, "Northwest," 211.
- 36 Carr, "Modern and Indian Art," 6.
- 37 Lawren Harris, letter to Emily Carr, 4 Nov. 1932, Carr papers. Qtd. in Maria Tippet, *Emily Carr: A Biography* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1979), 175-76.
- 38 Carr, "Modern and Indian Art," 4.
- 39 Shadbolt, *Seven Journeys*, 112.
- 40 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 7.
- 41 Ibid., 22.
- 42 Carr, in *Hundreds and Thousands*, 41.
- 43 Ibid., 42.
- 44 Carr, "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927," 5 Dec. 1927, in *Hundreds and Thousands*, 13.
- 45 Carr, "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927," 17 Nov. 1927, in *Hundreds and Thousands*, 7.
- 46 Carr, *Klee Wyck*, 4.
- 47 Carr, "Moving Forward," 12 Apr. 1934, in *Hundreds and Thousands*, 111.
- 48 Emily Carr, "Quatsino," in *Opposite Contraries: The Unknown Journals of Emily Carr and Other Writings*, ed. Susan Crean (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2003), 28.

- 49 "A Tabernacle in the Wood," 19 Sept. 1934, in *Hundreds and Thousands*, 201; 11 Oct. 1934, in *Hundreds and Thousands*, 196.
- 50 "The Elephant," 12 Aug. 1933, in *Hundreds and Thousands*, 48.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid., 48-49.
- 53 "Meeting with the Group of Seven," 15 Nov. 1927, in *Hundreds and Thousands*, 5.
- 54 Susan Glickman, *The Picturesque and the Sublime: A Poetics of the Canadian Landscape* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 139.
- 55 "Home Again," in *Growing Pains: The Autobiography of Emily Carr* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1946), 106.
- 56 Glickman, *The Picturesque and the Sublime*, 139.
- 57 Ibid., 49.
- 58 *Growing Pains*, ms., as qtd. in Paula Blanchard, *The Life of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987), 81.
- 59 BCARS, Emily Carr Papers, MS 2181 (microfilm, reel 1224), Emily Carr, letter to Ira Dilworth, 23 Nov. 1941.
- 60 Although Carr's "national imagined icon" is more specifically focussed on images of the West Coast, her canvases might still be regarded or invoked as if they were the "semiotic equivalent of nationhood" (W. H. New, *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997], 142). Artists of the modern period seemed to have few difficulties with seeing specific geographical locales as representative of the nation as a whole: her work was regarded as carrying "cultural resonances or assumptions" and as generalizing "from particular details to a panoramic truth about a characteristic – even if metaphorical – 'Canadian' landscape" (ibid., 144).
- 61 Stephanie Kirkwood Walker, *This Woman in Particular: Contexts for the Biographical Image of Emily Carr* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996), 58.

CHAPTER 16

“Mon pays, ce n’est pas un pays, c’est l’hiver”: Literary Representations of Nature and Ecocritical Thought in Quebec

Stephanie Posthumus and Élise Salaün

INTRODUCTION: “MON PAYS”

Gilles Vigneault’s opening line to the song “Mon pays” points to the complex issues involved in national identity. Asserting repeatedly that “My country is not a country, it’s the winter,” the song associates being Québécois with meteorological conditions – cold, snow, wind – and thus weaves together questions of nationalism and an evolving identity with Nature. However, Vigneault does not render this landscape exclusive to one particular group. Instead, he calls out to “all men on earth” that “his home is their home,” reassuring them that he is preparing, in his “own time and space,” a place for them near his fire. This juxtaposition

of indoor warmth and outdoor cold, of an enclosed personal space and a call to “humans from every horizon,” summarizes nicely the major themes of the current article that will attempt to tease out a Québécois ecocriticism from a multitude of images and influences, representations, and perceptions.

In the first part of the chapter, co-author Élise Salaün will concentrate on literary representations of nature in Québécois literature, offering an historical overview from an ecocritical perspective. Critiquing destructive ecological practices and highlighting alternative approaches to nature as they appear in Québécois literature over the last one hundred and fifty years, this part of the study aligns itself with the environmental politics characteristic of ecocriticism since its beginnings in texts like Joseph Meeker’s *The Comedy of Survival* or William Rueckert’s “Literature and Ecology.” At the same time, it seeks to point out the specificities of nature as portrayed in Québécois literature: for example, the agrarian model infused with Catholicism, the figure of the nomadic Voyageur, the urban novel as absolute refusal of the agrarian model, the symbolic fusions with Nature in poetry following the Quiet Revolution, and, finally, the diverse ecological concerns in the contemporary novel that go beyond Quebec’s borders (deforestation, industrialization, acid rain, etc.). Successfully avoiding the danger of reducing representations of nature in Québécois literature to a homogenous whole, such an overview paints a picture of an uneasy, loosely knit *ensemble*.

While the first part of the chapter is mainly literary in scope, close to ecocriticism in the traditional sense,¹ the second part, written by co-author Stephanie Posthumus, attempts to define ecocritical thought in Quebec based on a larger set of disciplines and more general questions of space and place. Rather than summarize the birth and development of ecology in Quebec as only political or scientific,² this part of the chapter defines ecocritical thought as a combination of concerns for the Earth that are not strictly environmental. It will largely be limited to the contemporary period – that is, the last twenty years – and will cover a subset of disciplines: geography, literature, philosophy, sociology, and theology. What emerges from this part of the analysis is a line of ecocritical

thought much in tune with Vigneault's song, concerned with defining local place and addressing global issues, driven by both a sense of *Eco* (place) and *Geo* (earth).

1. REPRESENTATIONS OF NATURE IN QUÉBÉCOIS LITERATURE: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

How has the representation of Nature in Québécois literature changed over the course of history? For a long time, it was the drama of the social, human context (religious, nationalist, individualistic, etc.) that attracted critical attention. Novels such as *La Terre paternelle* (Lacombe, 1846), *Jean Rivard le défricheur* (Gérin-Lajoie, 1862), and *Maria Chapdelaine* (Hémon, 1916) illustrated how forests were quickly and definitively transformed into farmed land “for the glory of God.” This representation of agricultural colonization in Québécois literature lasted for about a century, from 1840 to 1940. In the mid-twentieth century, the agrarian values promoted by the vast majority of novels were finally replaced by urban themes. Even if Quebec's population had been primarily urban since the 1920s, a strong pastoral ideology had kept the city far from the perfect, rural world of the novel. Published in 1937, *Menaud, maître-draveur* by Félix-Antoine Savard portrays the undoing of the agrarian model within a country setting. This questioning of the pastoral ideal leads to urban novels in which the agrarian imagination is replaced by images of the city. The characters interact with urban elements such as streets, automobiles, and factories, while distancing themselves from the Nature of their former rural way of life.

The years of the Quiet Revolution (1950–70) were a turning point for Nature in Québécois literature. Poetry gave voice to a new, symbolic Nature, providing an alternative form of “worship” at a time when Catholicism was being contested and secularized. In poetry collections such as *Ode au Saint-Laurent*, *Terre Québec*, and *L'homme rapaillé* (Miron, 1970), Nature is transformed into the myth of “the first morning.”³ In opposition to this symbolic Nature, the formalism of the 1970s represents

Nature as energy created by structure rather than meaning. The 1990s give rise to the subject and his/her refusal of master narratives, both reflected in the individualism of the Québécois novel, with the exception of what I will call the “ecological novel.” Although the subgenre “ecological novel” has not officially been adopted into francophone literary nomenclature, several contemporary novels such as *La Rage* (Hamelin, 1989), *Le Joueur de flûte* (Hamelin, 1997), *Nikolski* (Dickner, 2003), and *Champagne* (Proulx, 2008) focus on ecological themes of recycling, climate change, and pollution. These novels are politically engaged, portraying an endangered Nature that in turn becomes dangerous for the characters.

To fully understand the ecocritical stakes of the contemporary Québécois novel, it is necessary to go back to the pastoral of the nineteenth century and examine in detail this literary treatment of Nature. These are the years that set the premises for modern and postmodern Québécois novels.

Timber! for the Land of the Lord

During the mid-nineteenth century, the primary themes in Québécois literature served to preserve French-Canadian identity, rooted in the French language and the Catholic religion. Patrice Lacombe’s *La Terre paternelle* (1846) and Pierre-Joseph Olivier Chauveau’s *Charles Guérin* (1853) describe the already deforested countryside as if the forest had never existed. In such novels, deforestation appears as a heroic precursor to farming. With the Catholic propaganda of “opening the country” came the ideology of colonization, not exclusively in a political sense, but also in a biological one, as when a species imposes itself on an ecosystem and modifies it radically. Take, for example, the prophetic dream of the land-clearer Jean Rivard, at the beginning of the eponymously titled novel *Jean Rivard le défricheur* (Gérin-Lajoie, 1862):

He believed that he was in the middle of a giant forest. Suddenly, men appeared armed with axes, and the trees fell down to the ground here and there under the blade of the axe. Soon the trees were replaced by luxuriant harvests; then orchards,

gardens, flowers, blossomed as if by magic. The sun was shining with all its brightness; he believed he was in the middle of Paradise.⁴

Rivard's agrarian vision requires deforestation for the land to be bountiful. Deforestation is described in the novel as an utterly thorough activity, a *tabula rasa* that only a superior human being could bring about:

Our lumberjacks started by looking at the trees that were destined to destruction, to know which way they were leaning, because every tree, even the proudest, leans to one side or another and it is in that direction that the fall has to be determined. From morning to night, our two lumberjacks made the woods resonate with the sound of the useful instrument that we could, rightly, consider as the symbol and tool of civilization. Frightened birds flew away from those formerly peaceful retreats. When the hundred foot tree, struck in the heart by the deadly steel blade, announced the way it was to die, there was a second of solemn silence, then a terrible crack caused by the fall of the giant.⁵

When wild Nature does appear in the agrarian novel, it takes on the form of forests that stand between Catholic peasants and their future cornucopia. In the classic *Maria Chapdelaine* by Louis Hémon (1916), Laura Chapdelaine dreams of fields despite, or more accurately because, she is the spouse of a settler who advances into the woods, deforesting, instead of living the sedentary farmer's life. As Laura explains to one of her children, "it may be a sin to say this, but all of my life I will regret that your father had a constant need to move, to always push further and further into the woods, instead of buying land in an old parish."⁶

The figure of the land-clearer appears in the Quebec novel for a century (1850–1950), and his work always greatly transforms the environment. But it is also important to mention the figure of the "Coureur des bois" – the Voyageur – who lives off the forest without destroying it. This

character is often portrayed negatively because he doesn't participate in the agrarian transformation of the countryside. Moreover, he becomes the medium by which the fantastic penetrates the dogmatic vision of the pastoral setting. In *La Terre paternelle* (Lacombe, 1846), for example, the second son returns from a distant forest entirely transformed, wearing Indian cloths and jewels, rich, and sporting tattoos on his chest. In *Maria Chapdelaine* (1916), François Paradis dies in the freezing cold forest where "fairies of the forest"⁷ come to collect the bodies of dead Voyageurs.

These two opposing lifestyles within Nature – sedentary and nomadic – endure for about a century in the pastoral aesthetic and can still be found in Félix-Antoine Savard's *Menaud, maître-draveur* (1937). This novel represents an important turning point in the representation of nature in Québécois literature as it paradoxically endorses both sedentary and nomadic lifestyles. The old man Menaud lives on a mountainous domain he calls Mainsal. According to the narrator, private property does not apply to the forest. The freedom of the forest is described in opposition to the already owned and occupied agricultural land:

Menaud, Joson, Alexis, never came back, because they belonged to another race: the one that the measured, ploughed, and harvested land hadn't yet tamed. For them, life was in the mountain, where one is at home in the woods rather than trapped in stifling houses. It was the mountain of a hundred homes, of countless trails – marked by the great memories of the past. There, strong souls were made. From there the freedom would flow like a stream of anger that would set the country free from all the encroachers.⁸

In the novel, the scene of Joson's death reveals some key elements of the representation of Nature in Québécois literature of the time. While driving logs, Menaud's son is swept away in a jam and drowns. Here, the forest is not simply a setting; it is a relational element endowed with will. Invested with an essential strength, Nature imposes violent action

on human beings. Menaud remains helpless as the river sweeps away his son: "In front of him, the river yelled as a beast wanting to kill."⁹ The dialectic in *Menaud, maître-draveur* stems from the thin line drawn between the freedom of the forest, symbolized by Joson, "dead at the very moment he was to shout out his liberty from the heights of his legacy," and the enclosed fields exploited by Marie, Menaud's daughter.¹⁰

It is clear that Menaud incarnates a symbiotic conception of the human being and his habitat. For him, the forest preserves human dignity and liberty. Therefore, when the strangers who covet Menaud's estate end up owning it, Menaud loses more than a well-known and beloved territory; he also loses his connection to Nature. Sad, sick, and confined to the house, in the midst of cultivated land, caught in a web of fences defining private property, Menaud is overcome by an existential dispossession. He becomes crazy and, in his delirium, he repeats: "The strangers have come, the strangers have come."¹¹ Hearing Menaud's repeated proclamation, Josime, the farmer, forewarns: "It's not madness like any other. It seems to me to be a warning."¹²

What is the warning concealed in old man Menaud's madness? Published in 1965, Marie-Claire Blais's *Une Saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* begins with the birth of a sixteenth child to a poor farming family. The baby doesn't have a name until the Grandmother explains: "The Emmanuels were courageous; they always cultivated the land carefully. Let's name him Emmanuel."¹³ The eponymous character of the novel owes his name to the agrarian way of life that led Menaud to madness. Menaud lost his *oikos*, his natural habitat; he incarnates the end of the symbiotic interaction between wild and domesticated Nature. Menaud's madness becomes a warning that dispossession has no limit; once humans are removed or dissociated from wilderness, they become dependent on the agricultural/economical exploitation of the land. The state of the old man driven from his forest prefigures the coming of a newborn already dispossessed of his *oikos*, confined to the *domos*, literally inside the house, from where "the landscape was confusing, unreachable"¹⁴ and "the shadow spread over the hill, shrouding the white forest and the silent fields."¹⁵ In this hopeless universe lives the character of Jean-le-Maigre,

the child-poet who writes his biography, telling of how country life ends in the infertility of the earth: "My father had to put us in school, because he couldn't keep us on such sterile land."¹⁶ With this novel, the traditional agrarian way of life vanishes for good from Quebec literature.

I Am the Land

During the Quiet Revolution, the most vivid expressions of Nature migrate from the novel to poetry. Nature becomes the symbol of two opposing attitudes: on the one hand, the profound awareness of being dispossessed of the natural world – a belief that can be found in literature as far back as *Menaud, maître-draveur* – and, on the other, the thrill of founding a new country, a reflection of the promising nationalism of idealistic baby boomers, who reach their twenties in the sixties.

As Pierre Nepveu explains in terms of Paul-Marie Lapointe's poem *Pour les âmes* (in the collection *Le Réel absolu*), "dispossession and discontinuity define from the beginning the fundamental relationship to reality."¹⁷ Lapointe's first lines of *Pour les âmes* (1971) are clear: "No love possesses the earth that it embraces / and its rivers flow away."¹⁸ The impression of being separated from Nature can also be found in Gérald Godin's poem *Cantouque des racines*: "despite my dispossession, my absence, my orphanage / despite my wanderings, my running after my whole / my scouring the countryside tirelessly / hunting my habitat, my vital space / my area of not dying."¹⁹

Various poets tackle the tragic feeling of dispossession where the individual is alienated from the nature of his/her country. Life is no longer related to Nature as it was for generations, nor is it possible to celebrate the Catholic, agrarian way of life. The poets live in the City and are part of modern times, yet Nature finds its way into their poetry through primitivism.²⁰ According to Nepveu, "nothing is more typical of Quebec's modernity than its way of reaching the Modern by the non-Modern, the archaic, the primitive, the 'natural.'"²¹ This may be why poetry expresses Nature not only as separation but also as symbiosis. Humans intertwine with natural elements. That intimate relationship is present

in the title of the first part of Gatién Lapointe's *Ode au Saint-Laurent* (1963). In this poem, belonging to the earth means *becoming* the earth: "My childhood is that of a tree / Snow and rain penetrate my shoulders / Humus and seeds flow up through my veins / I am memory I am future."²² The poetic images of the human/nature symbiosis are numerous and striking in Paul Chamberland's *Terre Québec* (1964): "wings flapping in my blood,"²³ "I botanize my memories,"²⁴ "I move in the landscape of my blood,"²⁵ etc. The subject, after being rejected by Nature, envisions himself as Nature and becomes the country he claims.

A closer look reveals that the types of nature evoked in Quiet Revolution poetry are primarily the forest and the field. Unlike in the agrarian novel, the two do not oppose one another; they have different significations. Forests are linked with nostalgia and pride for their magnificence, but at the same time with guilt because of their destruction, while the fields – symbolized by the word *wheat* – are associated with a negative and rejected past. In Roland Giguère's *Ancêtres*,²⁶ this difference is projected as a collective schizophrenia characterizing Quebec's imagination of Nature: "We have the forest in mind when we speak about the plains. / Forever broken landscape / How to name? How to tell? / How to go back?"²⁷ Nature has been transformed from forest to field without any way of going back to the original forest. And poetry reminds us of this.

Moving into the seventies, poetry emphasizes form rather than representation. Nicole Brossard's *Le Centre blanc* (1970) is a collection of poems in which the "creative potential of the woman is defined as energy."²⁸ The theme of germination, growing, going forward is prominent in the poem. The "I," the subject of the logos, is the centre of movement, a psychic one, in which energy appears (germination) and from which energy is liberated by language (emission). With respect to the formalist subject in Brossard's work, Nepveu explains: "Egology / Ecology: the subject is a force field that is controlled by cycles, networks, circuits."²⁹

It is in formalist poetry that the aesthetic of waste begins to appear. The form of the fragment, itself a lonely piece, lost but having its own existence, is recuperated by poetry, and launched in the energetic

movement of literature. Formalist poetry has a very different interaction with Nature; rather than representing it as an exterior reality, formalist poetry simulates the macro-functioning (forces, energy, networks) of what will be better known in the next decade as Ecology.

Thinking Green

During the eighties, nonfiction essays take up the question of the Human/Nature relationship. After being incarnated by poets, Nature is seen as a system of thought and ecology follows suit. In his essay *Patience dans l'azur*, Hubert Reeves, an astrophysicist born in Quebec, explains the functioning of the universe as a story with a beginning, an end, chapters, and characters. The analogy between text and universe allows Reeves to popularize very complicated scientific matters. In the introduction, Reeves uses the metaphor of a mountain that gives birth to a mouse³⁰ to show how even the largest unanimated, natural element can produce biological life – like the Big Bang, which is still mysterious, scientifically speaking. Since *Patience dans l'azur*, Reeves has written many books mainly on the universe and the cosmos but also about ecology and the necessity to take action against the destruction of Nature.

In *Le Défi écologiste* (1984), a much more politically charged book-length essay, forest ecologist Michel Jurdant attacks Western capitalism as a leading cause of the over-exploitation of natural resources. After explaining some alternative ways of protecting the environment, Jurdant emphasizes the ethical necessity of changing our destructive relationship with Nature. Jurdant finishes his book by proposing a political agenda and by reasserting the need for a Green Party. At the time, Jurdant's discourse seemed alarmist because his portrait of the exploitation of natural resources by large companies was so fiercely negative. It was the first real essay published in Quebec about ecology not only as a science but also as a political manifesto.

The same year, Luc Bureau, a former geography professor at Laval University, published *Entre l'Éden et l'Utopie : Les Fondements de l'espace québécois*, an essay in which he illustrates the cultural, and therefore

subjective, influences on the study of geography. Bureau interprets quite liberally geographical concepts as intertwined with myths. In a jovial, almost ironic tone, the author explains how the trope of Eden, the perfect place, has played an important role in settling the French colony because the people were told that they were living in Eden in order to motivate them to stay and develop the land by deforesting and farming. As Bureau concludes, the colonial, agricultural development of the land was associated with Utopia because it required the destruction of Nature, the transformation of wild Eden into ... an agrarian Eden!

The main literary ecocritical work of the decade remains Nepveu's *L'Écologie du réel: Mort et naissance de la littérature québécoise contemporaine* (1988). Drawing from Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (1972), Nepveu's *L'Écologie du réel* interprets Québécois literature of the Quiet Revolution as a transforming energy cycle of destruction/creation. Nepveu explains how, from the 1950s to the 1970s, literature dramatically changed its representation of the interaction between humans and their habitat. Initial values were transformed, recuperated, and recycled into different forms at the end of this period. Nepveu primarily discusses poetry but shows how the novel uses irony as a method of simultaneous destruction and creation. Nepveu concludes with the idea of literature as "a supreme Ecology" – that is, of literature as organizing reality through relationships, cycles, energy, and the recycling of symbols, values, styles, genres. He goes so far as to promote "ecological thinking" as "an ethical and aesthetical answer to any prevailing confusion."³¹

Over the last two decades, the theme of the relationship between humans and nature has resurfaced in the Québécois novel. Since *La Rage* by Louis Hamelin (1989), a story about expropriation, many novels have tackled environmental issues where different forces fight over the use of natural resources. Ecological discourses are numerous and diverse, ranging from scientific to political, and from religious to esoteric, with natural elements being represented realistically, but also symbolically and mythologically. The literary quality of the political plots revolving

around an ecological crisis stems primarily from the secondary meanings evoked by the natural elements (water, animals, forest).

Louis Hamelin's *Le Joueur de flûte* (1997) tells the story of ecologists fighting against lumber companies for the preservation of an old-growth forest on Mere Island, British Columbia. Once again, the forest becomes the battleground of two opposing forces. The company's capitalist discourse distorts the vision of the land and exploits the territory of the First Nations people, while the media exacerbate the conflict. At the heart of the plot, the forest itself, portrayed by the synecdoche of a dead tree, becomes a refuge for the ecologist.

On a less hopeful note, Louise Desjardins' love story, *Darling* (1998), describes the inescapable pollution caused by the copper mines in Abitibi, northwest of Montreal. In this novel, mining companies take over the land, and the villagers can do nothing but accept the pollution of their water and vegetation. Nicolas Dickner's *Nikolski* (2005) is also about waste and pollution, but it adds the recurring motif of "recycling" as an important environmental component of the urban way of life. Among the traditional academic disciplines of the novel – history, anthropology, biology, etc. – a new object appears: the semiotic of waste and recycling. In *Nikolski*, notions related to the environmental crisis take on secondary meanings as cultural discourse. The literary themes of waste and recycling reflect the reality of postmodern thought, which has to process all waste – symbolically, mythically, ironically, etc.³² – because rejected matter is omnipresent in contemporary societies.

Less directly related to ecological concerns, Jean-François Beauchemin's *Le Jour des corneilles* (2004) explores the human material condition. How are emotions and reason integrated into the physical? Refusing the traditional dichotomy between Nature (body) and Culture (mind), and deconstructing the classical premise of the superiority of rational thought, the narrator envisions the world around him not as separate but as an extension of himself. In *Champagne* (2008), Monique Proulx also deconstructs oppositions between Human and Nature, Mind and Body. She creates a universe of natural beauty, the *Champagne* ("countryside" in Old French) referred to in the book's title, but

also raises the question of its fragility and its sickness by including in the story elements such as poachers, urban sprawl, and pollution.

In conclusion, this historical overview of representations of Nature in Québécois literature shows how deeply Nature has marked Quebec's identity as it takes on different forms in the collective imagination. But the question needs to be raised: what will the future hold? According to Nepveu, the present concern for Nature will become more and more significant and important: "The ecological path seems quite promising to me. Furthermore, it is clear that this theme will continue to emerge in literary works over the next few years, as it can now be found at the centre of our contemporary conscience."³³ The next section will explore how ecocritical thought is developing more generally in Quebec, becoming more heterogeneous in response to the complexity of today's environmental issues.

2. FLUID BORDERS, HYBRID IDENTITY: CONTEMPORARY ECOCRITICAL THOUGHT IN QUEBEC

Given Quebec's rocky relationship to the rest of Canada (Meech Lake Accord, sovereignty referendums, etc.), one must be careful about assigning any kind of fixed identity to "Québécois" thought. Yet there is something unique about the way in which contemporary eco-thinking has been developing in Quebec, influenced, on the one hand, by its North American geography, and, on the other, by its close relationship with francophone countries and most particularly France. Defining ecocritical thought in Quebec will require taking into consideration these different political influences. What will emerge from this introduction is a promising, diverse, interdisciplinary, and yet challenging approach to understanding the relationship between humans and their environments.

After reading ecocriticism's founding text, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Susie O'Brien relates her dissatisfaction with the fact that only one

Canadian, Neil Evernden, is included in the collection.³⁴ O'Brien then asks if it matters where an ecocritic comes from. Her affirmative response – “everyday practices of ecocriticism and nationalism are radically conjoined” – is based on a thorough analysis of the political powers that come into play when a well-known American, Robert Kennedy, makes an appearance on Canadian, or more precisely, Québécois, soil to defend the Great Whale site. As part of her analysis, O'Brien offers an historical overview of the development of scientific ecology in North America that includes an aside on the differences between English- and French-Canadian attitudes towards scientific research in the nineteenth century. Although she does not explore these differences further, her conclusion that Canadian authors are keenly aware of language as a mediating structure, and thus hold no claim (as American nature writers do) to unmediated nature, makes for an interesting point. Do different linguistic communities also give rise to different ecocritical approaches? Or do national differences prevail over linguistic differences? In the case of Quebec, both linguistic and national differences play a defining role in ecocritical thought.³⁵

As was true of Canadian ecocriticism,³⁶ Québécois ecocriticism has passed for the most part under the radar, with only a handful of studies available. But what of work being done under a name other than *écocritique*? Ecocritical thinking is alive and well in Quebec, but it simply does not line up easily with an anglophone ecocriticism. In other words, Québécois *écocritique* exists but not as a literal “translation” of North American ecocriticism. At the same time, it is important to point out that Québécois ecocritical thinking is not bound by local or provincial interests; rather, it manifests the type of “environmental imagination of the global” described by Ursula Heise in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*. Hence, the title of my section of this chapter, “Fluid Borders, Hybrid Identity,” which attempts to capture both the situatedness and the permeability of ecocritical thought in Quebec.

Eco-Ethics / Eco-Theology: Animal and Environment

Canada Research Chair in Environmental and Bio-Ethics at Laval University, Marie-Hélène Parizeau works on the edges of various new disciplines: animal studies, environmental studies, and bioethics. Questioning, deconstructing, complicating the relationship between the human, the animal, and the world, her approach offers some interesting directions for ecocriticism in Quebec. In “Enjeux et thèmes de l'éthique de l'environnement,” Parizeau notes some key differences between American environmental philosophy and French environmental thought: while American environmental ethics seek to define the nature of nature in order to preserve and conserve areas less modified by humans, the French (and, more generally, European) approach has been to value landscapes in terms of cultural heritage; while tenets of philosophies such as deep ecology promote a return to a simpler, more natural way of life, European thinkers develop the notion of sustainable development and the pre-eminence of human cultures over nature.

Interestingly enough, Parizeau does not situate Quebec within this American-European opposition. She does, however, reveal the different strands of thought that influence her own position. For example, her article “Gestion des risques environnementaux et principe de précaution: arrière-plan éthique” analyzes German sociologist Ulrich Beck's work on risk theory, which has been used to develop the European precautionary principle. Parizeau then draws on an example from Quebec soil (the possible construction of a natural-gas generating station at Suroît) to conclude that the precautionary principle does nothing to revolutionize the relationship between humans and the “nature-environment” because it remains open to manipulation by different political and economic forces.

Using again a comparative approach in her recent article, “Chimères: l'animal humanisé ou l'humain animalisé?,” Parizeau examines the regulatory laws in Britain, Canada, and the United States that determine the limits of scientific experimentation on animal and human stem cells. In her conclusion, she turns to the question of the ethical status of

these modified animals. After considering the argument for the inherent value of animals developed by American philosopher Tom Regan, Parizeau adopts instead the position of French philosopher Catherine Larrère, who advocates for the “bon usage” (wise use) of nature and the “bien-être” (well-being) of animals. While she is obviously aware of the different philosophical and ethical positions developing on both sides of the Atlantic, Parizeau seems to situate her own ecocritical thought closer to a contemporary European model than an American one.

A contributor to one of Parizeau’s edited collections on the human and the animal, theologian André Beauchamp is an important thinker in environmental politics and policy in Quebec. Head of the Inquiry Commission on Water Management in Quebec from 1998 to 2000, he also presided over the Commission for the Ethics of Science and Technology from 2001 to 2005. While Parizeau’s work spans the Atlantic, Beauchamp’s essays on the future of the environment in Quebec are a clear example of the situatedness of Québécois ecocritical thought.³⁷ A practising priest in Montreal, Beauchamp is a reminder of the important role the Catholic Church has played in defining national identity in Quebec. He also serves as a counter-example to the strong resistance to ecological science characteristic of nineteenth-century ultramontanism. Including Beauchamp in a description of Québécois ecocriticism is a way of signalling the relationship between Church and State, between faith and science, which colours Quebec’s past and present.³⁸

Literary Criticism: Habitat and Place

As has already been stated, Pierre Nepveu is a key figure in Quebec’s contemporary literary landscape. Yet his work covers a wide range of national literatures (what he calls New World literature – American, Canadian, and Québécois), demonstrating once again that Québécois ecocriticism is not limited to its political borders. Although the term *écocritique* never appears in his work, Nepveu’s first in-depth analysis of Québécois literature, *L’Écologie du réel*, retains the word *écologie* in the title and is very much an example of an ecocritical approach. As the

first part of this chapter has observed, Nepveu's understanding of the interactions between ecology and literature are very much like those of William Rueckert published ten years earlier. Where the two differ is in their understanding of representation and language. Much inspired by Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Nepveu conceptualizes ecology as systems of energy that take on material form in different objects. It is in this sense that he speaks of Nicole Brossard's "rhétorique énergétique"³⁹ ("energizing rhetoric") and Jacques Poulin's "conception énergétique globale qui inclut autant le moi, psychisme et corps que le milieu ambiant"⁴⁰ ("concept of global energy that includes as much the I, the psyche and the body as the surrounding environment"). But Nepveu's study also examines the sociohistorical conditions of the simultaneous birth and death of Québécois literature during the years following the Quiet Revolution. By not losing sight of the historic and material real nor the influence of language, by including both the political and the literary, Nepveu's study represents an impressive foundation for Québécois ecocriticism.

The at times highly metaphorical and figurative language of Nepveu's first work of (eco)criticism is countered in more recent texts where studies of specific aspects of individual works often include anecdotal or personal examples. Awarded the Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction in 1998, *Intérieurs du Nouveau Monde* responds to previous readings of space and place in New World literature. To a certain extent, Nepveu's interpretations can be seen as opposing those of a typical ecocritic who emphasizes representations of open space, wilderness, and the great outdoors in American literary classics. For Nepveu, it is the experience of enclosed spaces and small places that characterizes the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson, Laure Conan, and William Carlos Williams, to name but a few of the authors included in this collection of essays.

In light of recent critiques of ecocriticism's attempt to bring together the literary text and the physical world,⁴¹ the epigraph to Nepveu's most recent collection of studies, *Lectures des lieux* (2004), captures an interesting tension: "Une pensée qui ne se nourrit pas d'un lieu est-elle

encore une pensée? Et une pensée qui ne se nourrit que du lieu n'est-elle pas condamnée?" ("Is thinking that draws no nourishment from place still thinking? And is thinking that draws all its nourishment from place not doomed?").⁴² Exploring the roots of his own thinking about place, Nepveu explains in the book's preface that he has always inwardly been a geographer and a surveyor, while outwardly practising the professions of writer, poet, and university professor. His first "travaux d'écriture" ("works of writing") were maps of imaginary cities traced and coloured as a child. Learning to read, he discovered the pleasure of exploring literary representations of geographical places, for example, the "magie topographique" ("topographical magic") of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.⁴³ What is striking here is the contrast between Nepveu's predilection for places, particular cities, their bordering spaces, and inhabited landscapes, and the common preference for natural, preserved, open wilderness amongst ecocritics.⁴⁴ This contrast comes into play again and again in Nepveu's studies of different Québécois authors and poets. In a chapter on the act of rereading, for example, he acknowledges that landscape has often been used to define national identity (he even mentions wilderness as one example of a defining landscape), but then adopts the concept of landscape as a condition of individual existence, as one of the subject's formative activities, developed by French literary critic Michel Collot.⁴⁵

In the chapter "Narrations du monde actuel" (Narratives of the Actual World) of *Lectures des lieux*, a title that could easily refer to any number of American ecocritical studies, Nepveu reflects on the opening sentence of fellow literary critic François Paré's *Les Littératures de l'exigüité*: "J'écris ce livre face à la mer" (I am writing this book facing the sea).⁴⁶ Nepveu does not emphasize, however, the mimetic, referential quality of this sentence, which reminds the reader of the writer's actual physical condition and brings him/her closer to the world (the type of ecocritical reading that can be found, for example, in Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*). Nepveu's reading of Paré's opening sentence stresses instead a more general, symbolic sense of facing the sea as facing infinity, a condition for rediscovering "the little things, the confined spaces, the most fragile existences."⁴⁷ Nepveu goes on to explore a

number of “narratives of the actual world,” texts (both poetry and prose) that engage with the smallness of place as an alternate, albeit fragile, position from which to counter hegemonic discourses (economic, literary, political, social, etc.).

Can such a poetics found Québécois ecocriticism when Nepveu never explicitly embraces an environmentalist ethics, never adopts an overtly activist stance?⁴⁸ If the term “ecocriticism” is understood as an analysis of habitat and place, Nepveu is without a doubt an ecocritic. Moreover, his analysis of identity with respect to Quebec’s position within Canada and its relationship to the United States brings a politics of place into his work that has been notably absent from more traditional ecocritical studies. Finally, as a poet and literary critic, Nepveu is critically aware of the power of language to manipulate as well as to create. For Nepveu, poetry is a way of living in the (real, natural, urban, etc.) world and exploring alternative modes of inhabiting place. This exploration must also include, he stresses, the memories and stories of those who have been marginalized because of linguistic or cultural differences: “[J]e pense qu’il faut faire ... le pari de ces mémoires [de l’autre, des autres] fécondes, plurielles, les laisser nous étonner, nous stupéfier, nous fasciner, les laisser chuchoter leurs histoires, qui nous disent que le lieu que nous habitons est toujours bien petit.”⁴⁹ (“I think we must look to the fertile, diverse memories [of the other and of Others], and allow them to surprise us, to stupefy us, to fascinate us, allow them to whisper their stories that tell us that the places us that the places we live in are always very small.”) Going beyond national borders while focussing on the locality of place, the spirit of Nepveu’s work is most certainly ecocritical.

Geo/Text: Getting Back to the Earth

While an appeal to Thoreau’s “solid earth” may be absent from Nepveu’s work, it is at the heart of the geopoetics project headed by Rachel Bouvet, professor of literary studies at UQAM, Université de Québec à Montréal, and supported by the Québécois working group, La Traversée, founded in 2004. Geopoetics promotes contact with the real, physical, material

earth from a critical perspective situated at the confluence of science, art, and philosophy.⁵⁰ Activities include scholarly conferences, art exhibitions, poetry readings, and, more notably, trips to different natural and/or urban areas in Quebec. In many ways, the interests of the geopoetics group in Quebec resemble those of ecocritics: they have a predilection for travelling, for wandering, for landscapes (natural and urban), for oral and geo-morphological memory, for the writing-place relationship, and for artistic interventions within the environment. They are also an interdisciplinary group, including geographers, literary critics, philosophers, and sociologists, although the strongest connection exists between geographers and literary critics.⁵¹ In many respects, the aims of the group resonate deeply with those of traditional American ecocritics.

Some important distinctions should nonetheless be made. The working group in Quebec is part of the larger geopolitical archipelago founded by Kenneth White in 1989 and includes groups in Belgium, France, Scotland, and Switzerland. It is thus not limited to Quebec nor did it originate in Quebec. Although Scottish by birth, Kenneth White has resided in France since the late sixties and has written a large number of his texts in French.⁵² The concept of geopoetics as a new theory-practice for interacting with the earth came to him while walking along the shores of the St. Lawrence River in the late seventies.⁵³ Describing his “immediate,” “real” experience of nature, White’s prose parallels that of a nature writer whose contact with the physical world leads to a general revelation about life: “C’était exaltant. Cela me mettait littéralement ‘hors de moi’. Je me sentais en contact avec des forces immenses. Cela m’a donné une base, qui a permis toutes sortes de développements.”⁵⁴ (“It was exalting. It put me ‘outside of myself.’ I felt like I was in contact with great forces. It gave me a basis that has since led to all sorts of developments.”) While calling for a poetics of the earth, “plunged in biospheric space,”⁵⁵ White is not always clear about what he means by “earth” beyond the sense of “outside” (the terms “dehors,” “grands espaces,” and “terre” appear again and again in his articles on geopoetics).

Coming back to the work of Rachel Bouvet gives concrete form to the somewhat vague call for “contact with the earth” from geopoetics’

founder Kenneth White. Bouvet's work on collective imaginaries of the desert is particularly insightful, combining close readings of literary and geographical text (*Pages de sable*; "Le Désert"). Moreover, she clearly defines the characteristics of geopoetics: 1) it crosses disciplines, arts, science, literature; 2) it combines research and creative prose/poetry; 3) its primary preoccupation is the interaction of humans with the world; 4) its tools are crafted from both scientific observation and human perception; 5) it includes both on-site exploration (going out into the world) and textual analysis; 6) its object of study is the earth, but also the subject's experience and perception of this space.⁵⁶ While hinting at a political stance (emphasis on the earth as material, actual, real), Bouvet does not subscribe to environmentalism per se. Even if White calls for a radical change in the way humans interact with the earth,⁵⁷ his choice of the prefix "geo" in place of "eco" is an important and interesting difference.⁵⁸

Although not a member of the geopoetics group, Marc Brosseau has had frequent contact with Rachel Bouvet, and his studies as a geographer nicely complement hers as a literary scholar.⁵⁹ Working at the intersection of literature and geography, Brosseau adds another piece to the kaleidoscope of Québécois ecocritical possibilities.⁶⁰ In his first book-length study, *Des Romans-géographes*, Brosseau examines novels such as Michel Tournier's *Les Météores*, Julian Gracq's *Le Rivage des Syrtes*, and Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*, in which place takes on geographical meaning constructed by the experiences and impressions of different characters. Using novels as a source of geographical analysis to understand alternative constructions of place, Brosseau crosses national, linguistic, and disciplinary boundaries.

More explicitly concerned with an ecological perspective, geographer Luc Bureau published *La Terre et moi* in 1991, developing the concept of resonance to characterize the relationship between humans and the earth. On one end, he situates humans who resonate with the earth as parasites, feeding off its natural resources without any thought for its possible decline and degradation. According to Bureau, this relationship evolves on the principles of difference and distance. On the other end, he situates humans who see their life as dependent on that

of the earth, who enter into a relationship of solidarity and co-dependence. This relationship evolves on the principle of identity. In following chapters, Bureau explores personal (somewhat anecdotal) resonances with the earth, various countries, landscapes, cities, etc. The ecological argument of his text does not resurface until the conclusion when he explains the book's "hidden" objective: to give form to the earth as Gaia and to reveal geography as a genre of writing ("scratching words") from which Earth emerges and we from it.⁶¹ The emphasis on Geo- (earth) in Bouvet, Brousseau, and Bureau's work intersects with the emphasis on Eco- (place) in Nepveu's work, illustrating once again that Québécois ecocritical thought goes beyond geopolitical borders.

To conclude this overview of ecocritical thought in Quebec, it would be useful to come back to local ecological and environmentalist concerns within the province. The work of sociologists Brigitte Dumas, Roger Tessier, and Jean-Guy Vaillancourt is particularly helpful in this respect, as they develop an "eco-sociology" or "environmental social sciences" whose main focus is the study of ecological groups, leaders, activities, politics, decisions, etc., as social phenomena in Quebec.⁶² As Vaillancourt explains, it was the proposed construction of over thirty new nuclear energy reactors by Hydro-Québec that produced a new wave of environmentalists in the sixties (*Mouvement écologiste*).⁶³ Preoccupied with the toxic effects of these facilities, activist groups in Quebec were primarily concerned with protecting their own soil. It was only later, adds Vaillancourt, that they recognized solidarity with the French, who were also protesting against the construction of nuclear reactors in France. Vaillancourt concludes by noting that today's more radical eco-groups in Quebec tend to downplay national identity, searching, like other environmental groups around the world, for a (fragile) balance between local and global ecological concerns.

Stressing the fluid borders and hybrid identity of Québécois ecocritical thought is an important step in situating Quebec in the Canadian ecocritical landscape, but the very real question of language remains. To what extent do French-speaking Québécois thinkers read ecocritical work from English Canada or from ecocriticism's birthplace, the

United States? What impact does Québécois ecocritical thought written in French have on English Canada? Although Canada's official policy promotes bilingualism, language continues to present an undeniable barrier to the exchange of ideas between Quebec and the rest of North America. At the same time, this situation also presents a uniquely creative environment in which communities can work separately and then come together to share ideas. Co-written by a francophone professor of Québécois literature and a francophile professor of French literature, the present article is proof that Canadian ecocriticism is bound to be multilingual and multicultural, built on a self-reflexive model, caught up in language and its multiple possibilities (and difficulties).

CONCLUSION: "MON PAYS II"

Five years after composing "Mon pays" (1964), Gilles Vigneault wrote a second song entitled "Mon pays II" (1969), this time targeting a wider francophone audience to include countries such as Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. Rather than associating national identity with a cold, snowy winter, Vigneault poetically describes a country as "a window from which a child watches the seasons pass," as "a city in which young people use their boredom to make grass grow in the concrete," as "a young province searching for a prince to help it cross the bridge," as "a planet where the young replace the old," and finally, as "a planet that a young child, maybe a man, keeps spinning with his finger." Moving in larger and larger concentric circles, the song brings the listener back to the child in the window and asks who may be listening thousands of miles away. Such symmetry brings the local and the global into contact but almost too perfectly, too uniformly, as if in 1969, in the years following the Quiet Revolution, Vigneault was searching for a more stable alliance than the one alluded to in the first version of the song. And so it is fitting to return to the ambiguous, not easily explained final stanza of the first version of "Mon pays" to conclude this article on literary representations of nature and ecocritical thought in Quebec:

Mon pays ce n'est pas un pays c'est l'envers
 D'un pays qui n'était ni pays ni patrie
 Ma chanson ce n'est pas ma chanson c'est ma vie
 C'est pour toi que je veux posséder mes hivers...⁶⁴

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NOTES

- 1 In her introduction to ecocriticism, Cheryll Glotfelty defines the field as “tak[ing] as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature” (Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction” to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm [Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996], xix. Most often identified with ecocriticism, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment also insists on the literary artifact by its name alone. This more “traditional” form of ecocriticism contrasts with contemporary attempts to examine all cultural artifacts, film, visual arts, dance, music, etc., from an ecocritical perspective. The names chosen by more recently formed associations such as the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and the Environment and the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada reflect this attempt to go beyond the literary object.
- 2 This has already been done recently by Québécois historian Yves Hébert in *Une Histoire de l'écologie au Québec : Les Regards sur la nature des origines à nos jours* (Québec: Éditions Gid, 2006).
- 3 Pierre Nepveu, *L'Écologie du réel : Mort et naissance de la littérature québécoise contemporaine* (Montréal: Boréal, 1988), 22.
- 4 Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, *Jean Rivard le défricheur* (Montréal: Éditions Cahiers du Québec-Hurtubise HMH, 1977), 14.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 6 Louis Hémon, *Maria Chapdelaine* (Montréal: Éditions Fides, 1980), 36.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 141.
- 8 Félix-Antoine Savard, *Menaud, maître-draveur* (Montréal: Éditions Fides, 1982), 39.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 93.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 17 Nepveu, *L'Écologie du réel*, 81.
- 18 Paul-Marie Lapointe, *Le Réel absolu : Poèmes 1948–1965* (Montréal: Hexagone, 1971), 207.
- 19 Gérald Godin, *Les Cantouques : Poèmes en langue verte, populaire et quelquefois française* (Montréal: Hexagone, Coll. «Typo», 1991), 50.
- 20 The term “primitivism” is used here by Nepveu to express the ritual interactions between First Nations people and their habitat.
- 21 Nepveu, *L'Écologie du réel*, 88–89.
- 22 Gatien Lapointe, *Ode au Saint-Laurent, précédée de J'appartiens à la terre* (Montréal: Éditions du Jour, 1963), 66.
- 23 Paul Chamberland, *Terre Québec, suivi de L'Afficheur hurle et de L'Inavouable* (Montréal: Typo, 2003.), 29.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 26 Roland Giguère (1929–2003) is known as the poet of the interior landscape.
- 27 Roland Giguère, *Forêt vierge folle* (Québec: Hexagone, Coll. «Typo», 1988), 135.
- 28 Nicole Brossard, *Le Centre blanc* (Montréal: Éditions d'Orphée, 1970), 52.
- 29 Nepveu, *L'Écologie du réel*, 146.

- 30 This metaphor can be found in Horace's *Ars Poetica* and in Jean de la Fontaine's *Fables*, thus dating back (in French) to the seventeenth century.
- 31 Nepveu. *L'Écologie du réel*, 213.
- 32 Even the human body can become waste in an era of economical downsizing. The body of Suzie Legault in *Nikolski* is disposed of in a garbage container after she becomes useless as a worker.
- 33 This quotation is taken from personal correspondence with Pierre Nepveu, 16 May 2008.
- 34 Susie O'Brien, "Nature's Nation, National Natures? Reading Ecocriticism in a Canadian Context," *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Review* 42 (spring–summer 1998), Web. One may be similarly dissatisfied upon noting that no Québécois women are part of the recent collection, *This Elusive Land, Women and the Canadian Environment* (Melody Hessing, Rebecca Raglon, and Catriona Sandilands, eds., *This Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment* [Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005]). Neither does there appear to be a Québécois component to Andrew Wainwright's edited collection, *Every Grain of Sand: Canadian Perspectives on Ecology and Environment* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004). Is this due to a linguistic barrier? Or is it symptomatic of a deeper division within literary studies in Canada? Whatever the case may be, ecocritical work done on early Québécois poetry by Canadian literary scholars proves that the barrier is not insurmountable (see D.M.R. Bentley's *The Gay* / *Grey Moose: Essays on the Ecologies and Mythologies of Canadian Poetry 1690–1990* [Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1992] and Susan Glickman's *The Picturesque and the Sublime: A Poetics of the Canadian Landscape* [Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998]).
- 35 Canadian politicians have struggled to give legislative expression to this cultural and linguistic distinction. In 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper passed a motion stating that the "House recognizes that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada" ("PM declares...", *Office of the Prime Minister*, 22 Nov. 2006, Web). While affirming that the Québécois have an independent, national identity because they speak French, Harper wasn't sure if this included Québécois people living outside of Quebec ("Who's a Québécois? Harper isn't sure," *CBC News*, 19 Dec. 2006. Web). Again, the problem of linguistic identity confronts that of place identity.
- 36 Ecocritics such as Simon Estok hold that Canadian ecocriticism continues to remain unknown beyond the Canadian borders. The present collection of essays will, we hope, prove this affirmation wrong. (Simon Estok, "Landscapes of the United States, of Canada, and of Ecocritical Theory," EASCLE Conference: Cultural Landscapes: Heritage and Conservation. Alcalá University, Spain [17 Oct. 2008]).
- 37 See, for example, André Beauchamp and Julien Harvey, *Repères pour demain: Avenir et environnement au Québec* (Québec: Bellarmin, 1988), or more recently, André Beauchamp, "La Consultation sur la gestion de l'eau au Québec," in *De L'Inégalité dans le dialogue des cultures: Mondialisation, santé et environnement*, ed. Soheil Kash and Marie-Hélène Parizeau (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2005): 201–14.
- 38 An earlier figure of the Church–State, Faith–Science connection, Brother Marie-Victorin (1885–1944) was a passionate botanist, concerned with the ecological effect of plants immigrating from Europe to Canada

- and vice versa. His careful and detailed records of indigenous plant species in Quebec make him one of Quebec's first ecological figures (see Yves Hébert's *Une Histoire de l'écologie au Québec*).
- 39 Nepveu, *L'Écologie du réel*, 147.
- 40 Ibid., 175.
- 41 See Susie O'Brien, "Back to the World': Reading Ecocriticism in a Postcolonial Context," in *Five Emus to the King of Siam: Environment and Empire*, ed. Helen Tiffin (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007): 177–99; Serpil Oppermann, "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2006): 103–28; John Parham, "The Poverty of Ecocritical Theory: E. P. Thompson and the British Perspective," *New Formations* 64 (spring 2008): 25–38; and Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 42 Joël Pourbaix, qtd. in Pierre Nepveu, *Lectures des lieux* (Montréal: Boréal, 2004).
- 43 Nepveu, *Lectures*, 10.
- 44 As Lawrence Buell has noted in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, this is especially true of first-generation ecocritics, who have drawn much inspiration from nature writers such as Henry David Thoreau and their desire to retreat into nature in order to experience more fully life and the more-than-human world. Buell adds that second-generation ecocritics are more engaged with urban settings, virtual experiences, and theoretical issues.
- 45 Nepveu, *Lectures*, 190–96.
- 46 Ibid., 197.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Recognizing environmentalism as one of the major modes of thought of our time, Nepveu nevertheless strongly criticizes its animist, New-Age version that denounces the death of each and every tree or bird on the basis of some "mother earth" or "Gaia spirit" idea (Pierre Nepveu, *Intérieurs du Nouveau Monde* [Montréal: Boréal, 1998], 218–20). Neither does he hesitate from associating certain ecological concerns with the landscape aesthetics of urban dwellers (an argument drawn chiefly from the work of French art historian Alain Roger, whose work has since been disputed by other landscape theorists) (Nepveu, *Lectures*, 224–25).
- 49 Nepveu, *Lectures*, 208.
- 50 Rachel Bouvet and Kenneth White, eds, *Le Nouveau Territoire : L'Exploration géopoétique de l'espace* (Montréal: Figura, 2008).
- 51 Whereas literary critics in Quebec have joined up with geographers to develop an "outdoors" approach, American ecocritics have turned more often to biologists (E. O. Wilson) and ecologists (Eugene Odum). This difference will be explored further in the section on the work of two Québécois geographers ("Géographie et géopoétique," *Cafés géographiques* [15 May 2005], Web).
- 52 "Kenneth White: Biography," *The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics*, Web.
- 53 "Kenneth White and Geopoetics," *The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics*, Web.
- 54 Kenneth White, "Approches de la géopoétique," *Les Amis et lecteurs de Kenneth White*, Web.
- 55 Kenneth White, "Texte inaugural," *L'Institut international de géopoétique* (26 Apr. 1989), Web.
- 56 "Géographie et géopoétique."
- 57 White, "Approches."
- 58 A complete explanation for this choice of terminology is beyond the scope of this chapter. But it should be noted that the French have been particularly critical of ecological thought and

- environmental ethics (Ferry; Lascoumes; Roger). Perhaps White chose the prefix “geo” to avoid an immediate attack on his approach and to reflect more accurately the attitude towards environment in France. Interestingly, a second “geo” literary theory is being developed by Bertrand Westphal, whose “géocritique” has little to do with White’s “géopoétique.”
- 59 “Géographie et géopoétique.”
- 60 Brosseau’s case brings back into focus the problem of delimiting the boundaries of Québécois ecocriticism. While *Des Romans-géographes* was published with a French publisher (Harmattan), Brosseau has taught at the University of Ottawa since completing his studies at the Sorbonne and the University of Ottawa. He does not work in Quebec yet by publishing in French seems closer to Québécois ecocriticism than to English-Canadian ecocriticism.
- 61 Luc Bureau, *Entre l’Éden et l’Utopie: Fondements de l’imaginaire québécois* (Montréal: Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1984), 265–66.
- 62 For an interesting comparative study of “environmental sociology” in France and Quebec, see Philippe Boudes’ article “Sociologie de l’environnement, globalisation et traditions nationales : Une étude des cas français et québécois” (*Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie* 33, no. 3 [2008]: 657–88). Boudes draws conclusions similar to my own about the relationship between the national and the global but in terms of environmental sociology in Quebec.
- 63 For a particularly insightful analysis of Hydro-Québec’s importance in the development of Québécois society and politics, see Dominique Perron’s work (*Le Nouveau roman de l’énergie nationale : Analyse des discours promotionnels d’Hydro-Québec de 1964 à 1997* [Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006]).
- 64 “My country is not a country, it’s the reverse / Of a country that was neither country nor homeland / My song is not a song, it’s my life / It’s for you that I want to fully know [possess] my winters.”

CHAPTER 17

Decolonizasian: Reading Asian and First Nations Relations in Literature (2008)

*Rita Wong*¹

speak cree you're in canada now

speak siouan

speak salishan – Rajinderpal S. Pal, “Collective Amnesia”²

At the minimal level, Aboriginal thought teaches that everyone and everything are part of a whole in which they are interdependent. – Marie Battiste and Helen Semaganis, “First Thoughts on First Nations Citizenship”³

Nestled intimately against the forces of citizenship that have propelled many an Asian Canadian subject to oversimplify herself or himself by declaring “I am Canadian” are other possible configurations of imagined community. What happens if we position indigenous people’s struggles instead of normalized whiteness as the reference point through which we

come to articulate our subjectivities? How would such a move radically transform our perceptions of the land on which we live? Scott McFarlane has suggested that in the Canada constructed through legislative mechanisms such as the Multiculturalism Act, “people of colour and First Nations people are figured outside the discourse as, for example, immigrants or nonpersons who become ‘Canadian’ through their relationship to whiteness, as opposed to ‘the land.’”⁴ Oppositionality to whiteness – while logical in the face of racial oppression that was historically codified through instruments such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the War Measures Act, and the Continuous Voyage Provision⁵ – still directs energy toward whiteness without necessarily unpacking the specific problematics of racialized subjects who have inherited the violence of colonization. In particular, the challenging relationships between subjects positioned as “Asian Canadian” and “indigenous” raise questions regarding immigrant complicity in the colonization of land as well as the possibility of making alliances toward decolonization. Turning the lens in this direction, we find ourselves in the realm of the partial, the fragmented, the ruptured, the torn. It is in our brokenness that we come to know the effects of our violent histories as they continue to exert force upon the present. The very language in which I articulate these thoughts, English, is weighted with a colonial history particular to the land called Canada, in contrast to the languages that I might desire to circulate this essay in, be they Cree, Siouan, Salishan, or Cantonese. Through legislation such as the Indian Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), the Multiculturalism Act, and the Citizenship Act,⁶ “we” have historically been managed, divided, and scripted into the Canadian nation-state. Today ostensible security measures such as the Anti-Terrorism Act passed in the wake of September 11, 2001, have given the state more power to criminalize indigenous peoples, activists, and people of colour. If, in a move toward both individual and collective survival, a subject decides to direct her allegiances toward indigenous struggles for decolonization and sovereignty, she might consider the values described by filmmaker Loretta Todd:

Our concept of ownership evolved independent of European concepts of ownership and it persists today. Without the sense of private property that ascended with European culture, we evolved concepts of property that recognized the interdependence of communities, families and nations and favoured the guardianship of the earth, as opposed to its conquest. There was a sense of ownership, but not one that pre-empted the rights and privileges of others or the rights of the earth and the life that it sustained.⁷

Critical engagement with indigenous perspectives can be grounded in materially responsible and environmentally sustainable practices and models; the interdependency and land stewardship that Todd describes provide a focus for alliance-building in the face of ongoing processes of racialization and class oppression.

Such alliance-building must respect the values identified by thinkers such as Todd, so that the reaction against colonial frameworks is balanced with a generative vision of what one strives toward. Multiculturalism as government policy, while enabling in many regards, has also functioned to manage and contain difference. Although it is necessary to support multiculturalism in the face of white supremacist attacks, it is also important to understand the inadequacies of Canadian multiculturalism. As critics such as Himani Bannerji have pointed out, when multicultural policy was introduced in Canada in the 1970s,

There were no strong multicultural demands on the part of third world immigrants themselves to force such a policy. The issues raised by them were about racism, legal discrimination involving immigration and family reunification, about job discrimination on the basis of Canadian experience, and various adjustment difficulties, mainly of child care and language. In short, they were difficulties that are endemic to migration, and especially that of people coming in to low income jobs or with few assets. Immigrant demands were not then, or even

now, primarily cultural, nor was multiculturalism initially their formulation of the solution to their problems. It began as a state or an official/institutional discourse, and it involved the translation of issues of social and economic injustice into issues of culture.⁸

One of the challenges before contemporary cultural workers is to reappropriate “culture” in ways that lead the reader’s gaze back to the social and economic injustices neglected and deflected when multiculturalism’s lens becomes too narrow. Cultural labour has a role in fostering such a shift in values away from the economic violence and domination that our current neoliberal government normalizes through its submission to bodies such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, bodies that arguably operate against the interests of the majority of the Earth’s population (human and otherwise). An analysis that integrates considerations of planetary survival with local indigenous struggles is consistent in the works of indigenous thinkers such as Jeannette Armstrong, Winona LaDuke, and Loretta Todd; this work signals a direction from which those in Asian Canadian studies could benefit. That is, where diasporic communities meet indigenous communities, we encounter a process of contact and invention that deserves more attention than it has so far received.

As a writer and critic who lives on the unceded Coast Salish territory otherwise known as Vancouver, I am faced with the question of how to speak to and acknowledge debts and interdependencies that most of us were trained to ignore. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that cultural representation does not repeat the violence that has already occurred. Yet, in those cases where silence also seems to be an equally and perhaps even more unsatisfying complicity with – and perpetuation of – this violence, tactics of troubled visibility provide an ethical line of engagement that holds promise. As the debates on cultural appropriation in the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s remind us, cultural representation is a fraught process, and the best of intentions can nonetheless have terrible effects. However, we can still proceed carefully,

humbly, open to dialogue, and attentive to how material conditions and existent power relations can shape the dynamics of whose cultural labour is validated, whose is disregarded, and how. Lee Maracle's warning bears remembering:

If you conjure a character based on your in-fort stereotypes and trash my world, that's bad writing – racist literature – and I will take you on for it. If I tell you a story and you write it down and collect royal coinage from this story, that's stealing – appropriation of culture. But if you imagine a character who is from my world, attempting to deconstruct the attitudes of yours, while you may not be stealing, you still leave yourself open to criticism unless you do it well.⁹

In attempting to decolonize and deconstruct oppressive systems, writers racialized as Asian cannot avoid making reference to the First Nations of this land; at the same time, given the inheritance of racist, loaded discourses that have operated to dehumanize, commodify, and romanticize First Nations people, an immense challenge presents itself in terms of how to disrupt and derail these dominant discourses. The process of “doing it well” requires not only technical competency, however one might determine that, but also an understanding of how one is embedded within power relations that must be carefully negotiated. Scanning the textual horizon for novels, stories, and plays that address the complicated relationships between those who have been racialized as “Asian” and those who have been racialized as “indigenous,” I see some signs of life: SKY Lee's novel *Disappearing Moon Café*, Tamai Kobayashi's short stories in *Exile and the Heart*, Marie Clements' play *Burning Vision*, and Lee Maracle's story “Yin Chin” form part of a growing body of texts that discursively explores the possible relations between those racialized as “Asian” and “indigenous” on that part of Turtle Island also known as Canada.¹⁰

1. RE-VIEWING *DISAPPEARING MOON CAFE*

In my writing, I straddle the shifting locations of being Chinese, Canadian, contemporary, woman, and feminist of colour (etc). Insider and outsider to my own culture, gender, history and so on. I am able to take risks and transgress the boundaries (of these social constructs) each category imposes.

In *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990), the reader's gaze is never fixed due to these multiple locations, and travels through time and space. This is also a strategy of disrupting the conventional way texts are written and read so that the reader can be made more aware of her subject position. This awareness subverts the tendency toward passive consumption and the colonizing gaze. – SKY Lee, “*Disappearing Moon Cafe* and the Cultural Politics of Writing in Canada”¹¹

As many readers have noted, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* opens and closes with the relationship between Wong Gwei Chang, a Chinese man, and Kelora, a half-Native, half-Chinese woman of the Shi'atko clan. In so doing, it posits a potential alliance between two people who were both excluded by the Canadian nation in historically specific, racialized, gendered, and classed ways.¹² Gwei Chang's abandonment and betrayal of Kelora takes on both personal and social significance when we consider the role of cheap Chinese labour in facilitating the appropriation of indigenous land by the Canadian government. The labour of Chinese railway workers supported not only their families but also a Canadian nation-building project based on the exclusion and exploitation of both First Nations and people of colour. The dynamite-blasting process of railway construction entailed both an immense human cost and environmental disfigurement: “[Gwei Chang] imagined the mountain shuddering, roaring out in pain, demanding human sacrifice for this profanity. And the real culprits held out blood-spattered chinamen in front of them like a protective talisman.”¹³ The “real culprits,” the cap-

tains of industry behind the railway, remain outside the novel's realm, despite the impact of their decisions on both characters and readers. Gwei Chang's effort to retrieve the bones of the dead Chinese labourers depends greatly on Kelora's support in navigating unfamiliar land, for it is Kelora who leads Gwei Chang to safety when he is starving, "as if the barren wasteland around him had magically opened and allowed him admittance."¹⁴ Where the Canadian nation would have refused a Chinese man entrance as a citizen with full rights, Kelora's act allows Gwei Chang admittance into her community as an equal. Kelora makes possible a relationship to the land that is not codified into the property laws of the nation: "she taught him to love the same mother earth and to see her sloping curves in the mountains. He forgot that he had once thought of them as barriers."¹⁵ Having interviewed mixed-race families, Lee translates her research into a fictional frame that asserts what has been left out of official Canadian history. Examples of relationships between First Nations people and Chinese people, dating back at least to 1788,¹⁶ are often marginalized in official historical narratives that privilege nation-building premised on white dominance. The potential represented in the relationship between Gwei Chang and Kelora is not only based on desire and emotional connection but also shaped by the economic and political forces on their lives and by a respect for the land. Living with Kelora's people, Gwei Chang learns to appreciate the Native lifestyle before he rejects it for fear of poverty:

The sight of all this good food being hauled in got Gwei Chang very excited. It made him feel good to learn the indian ways, because they made him think that he might never starve like a chinaman again.

But Kelora told him that even with this abundance, her people faced famine later in the winter...

Gwei Chang had often looked into the sallow face of famine. He could see how famine was the one link that Kelora and he had in common, but for that instant, it made

him recoil from her as surely as if he had touched a beggar's squalid sore....

In the next instant, he looked at Kelora, and saw animal.¹⁷

Although famine is the one link that they *share*, the fear of this common threat is what drives Gwei Chang back to China to take a Chinese wife. This fear also drives him to dehumanize Kelora, to see her as “animal,” in a way that echoes the first time they met, when he assumed that she was savage. Her elegant rebuke at that time, that “he has no manners,”¹⁸ surprises him in a way that makes him feel “uncivilized, uncouth; the very qualities he had assigned so thoughtlessly to her.”¹⁹ It is symptomatic of dominant power relations that Gwei Chang functions within what might be termed a sinocentric worldview, one that eventually allows him upward mobility within the confines of the ethnic enclave of Chinatown. His trajectory can be read as a negotiation of survival tactics that drive an agent to form long-term relations of perceived racial cohesion rather than adhesion, with the attendant enabling and disabling limits of such moves.

In the context of Canada as a nation-state that historically excluded immigrants racialized as “nonwhite,” the importance of organizing formations of Chinese community to offer assistance against the state's restrictions was compelling. In Lee's novel, it is clear that the closeness of the Chinese community formed in part as a survival mechanism against white supremacist hostility in everything from detaining new arrivals to racist legislation. At the same time, the limits and inadequacies of these formations are also signalled by the unhappiness of Gwei Chang at the end of the novel. As he says to Kelora, “I've lived a miserable life, grieving for your loss, bitterly paying.”²⁰ His material wealth accumulated later in his life does not bring with it emotional fulfilment in that his marriage to Mui Lan is an unhappy one and his son Ting An rejects him once he realizes their biological relationship. The novel leaves us wondering what would have happened had Gwei Chang challenged ethnic containment and asserted solidarity with Kelora and her community. His failure to sustain such an alliance gestures not only to individual limits but also

to the ways in which oppressive social norms and legislative measures – such as the Immigration Act and the Indian Act – have historically scripted and enforced divisions between First Nations and Asian people in Canada. A difficult question arises: how does one assess the ways in which Chinese people have been implicated, albeit inadvertently, in their own ethnic containment within a Canadian nation-state that is itself a violent imposition upon indigenous land?

If, as Lee suggests at the beginning of this section, a subject is always multiply situated in terms of culture, gender, politics, and class, more comprehensive ways to articulate and understand such evolving, complicated, and often contradictory subject positions remain to be circulated more widely. One way of reading class mobility for immigrants within the Canadian nation-state has been through the filter of racialized categories rather than through the lens of immigrants' relations to indigenous land. In Lee's novel, such categories are constantly troubled and unravelled. Gwei Chang occupies multiple class positions over the course of the novel, from a starving worker in the beginning to a bourgeois patriarch by the end. His upward mobility in the confines of Chinatown arguably depends on his rejection of Kelora and his disavowal of their mixed-race son, Ting An, whom almost everyone in Chinatown knows as an orphan benefiting from Gwei Chang's patronage rather than as his first son. Kelora's own economic status is complicated; Kelora has "no rank" in her community, although her mother's family is "very wealthy, old and well-respected," and her abilities are clearly valued, including her knowledge of how to survive based on the land's natural bounty. She arguably unsettles and disrupts hierarchies of class and race, as does her son Ting An. Within the heart of the novel's ostensibly "Chinese" space, there is racial and cultural hybridity; though Ting An is accepted as "Chinese," he is also part Native, as are his descendants, including the novel's narrator, Kae. As Kae points out, "People used to say that [Ting An] was half-indian – his mother a savage. Before, Fong Mei used to search his face for traces of this, but she only saw a chiselled face, gracefully masculine, like a chinese from the north."²¹ The problematic, dominant social scripts of racist othering ("savage") and

assimilation (“like a chinese from the north”) are inadequate to address the possibilities of mixed-race identifications. Ting An, in a sense the physical product of Gwei Chang and Kelora’s relationship, is invited to live upriver with “a group of nlaka’pamux’sin people” but refuses because of his intuitive attachment to Gwei Chang.²² While Ting An is socially pulled into what turns out to be an unhappy life, the untaken alternatives that he has access to raise questions about what a shift in priorities would achieve. Such undeveloped alliances constitute the silences and empty centres upon which contemporary national formations continue to depend.

One could argue that, in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, it is the hyper-conspicuous absence of a Native woman, Kelora, that in a sense makes possible the novel’s plot. First, this absence makes visible the uneven relations the “Asian” characters have with the Native peoples of this land, gestures toward the complicated histories between First Nations and Chinese people, and acknowledges the legacy of interracial relationships that have often been marginalized. Second, one might ask what kind of shift in social relations it would require to move from absence to presence(s). What is an ethical way to proceed on this difficult terrain? The figure of the writer, Kae, negotiates a complicated relation of proximity and distance to the figure of a Native woman. Historical distancing operates in the recognition of Kelora as an ancestor within the family tree at the beginning of *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, although this distance is then destabilized and undermined by Kae’s retellings of family secrets as well as by Kelora’s and Gwei Chang’s interactions at the beginning and the end of the novel, putting the onus on the reader to imagine and build a present interracial alliance as compelling as the scene that closes the novel, “the heavy chant of the storyteller turning to mist” in Gwei Chang’s head.²³ The question remains: what kinds of changes would enable such moments of looking “backward” to become a looking forward into First Nations and Asian relationships?

It is possible and indeed desirable to read *Disappearing Moon Cafe* into the context of a need to transform the social relations we currently know. The novel makes visible the importance of alliances along

cross-racial, feminist, and anticapitalist lines, even though some of these alliances may not be directly achieved or successful in the novel's plot per se. The onus then shifts to the reader, for whom the mourning of lost possibilities frames the generations of turmoil represented in the novel's body. Within the novel, relations between Chinese and First Nations women are an uncharted territory. Although Kelora and Mui Lan are in a sense linked because of their relations to Gwei Chang, they never meet each other. At one point, Fong Mei states, "This was a land of fresh starts; I could have lived in the mountains like an Indian woman legend,"²⁴ suggesting that stories of Native women may be symbolic of freedom to her. It is more on the edges, the "outsides," of the novel that the potential of interracial relations is gestured to; on the dust jacket of the book's cover, blurbs by writers such as Joy Harjo and Audre Lorde signal a discursive community of politicized writers whose work has encouraged and inspired activists across North America. This political alignment also presents an obstruction to readings that would evacuate the novel of the resistant sensibilities out of which it partially arose.

Reading *Disappearing Moon Cafe* from this perspective only signals how much more there remains to do if cultural workers are to play a role in supporting alliance-building to work toward decolonization. These temporary but strong affective bonds suggest that promise exists, even though it has not been fulfilled. Affective bonds do not necessarily translate into political solidarity, but effective political solidarity is also less likely to happen without a deeply felt understanding of each other's perspectives and the ways in which oppression is both common and different for people racialized as "First Nations" and "Asian." Fiction offers a speculative space and challenges us to imagine the ways in which dialogue and interaction could spark deeper understanding of our interrelatedness.

2. EXILE AND THE HEART

In an interview with Larissa Lai, Tamai Kobayashi states: “History trickles down into my work, sometimes it pours.”²⁵ Questioning what constitutes “tradition,” Kobayashi rejects conventional assumptions that position “the East” as the site of oppressed, submissive women and “the West” as somehow enlightened. She suggests that her “traditions” may be found in the writers who have influenced her, including Audre Lorde, Hisaye Yamamoto, Joy Harjo, James Tiptree Jr., Wilfred Owen, Octavia Butler, Rampo, and Eduardo Galeano. With regard to Harjo, Kobayashi notes that “the sheer beauty and hope of Joy Harjo’s *She Had Some Horses*, how her experiences as a First Nations woman were reflected in her words, also had great impact.”²⁶ As a politically active writer (a founding member of ALOT, Asian Lesbians of Toronto, among many other things), Kobayashi is conscious of how important it is to investigate interracial relationships that do not centre on whiteness:

Race defines so much of you. I try to reveal this in my work, the quiet moments. Everything is contaminated by the way race has been constructed through history – this construction of people of colour by white people, by the structure of whiteness-as-the-ideal, whiteness-as-the-norm. I mean, think of how many times white people have been at the centre of stories, even if it’s not supposed to be about them? *Come to the Paradise* was supposed to be about the internment but Dennis Quaid was the star; *Dances With Wolves* starred Kevin Costner; *Cry Freedom*, a film about Steven Biko, starred Kevin Kline.²⁷

In her book of stories, *Exile and the Heart: Lesbian Fiction*, Kobayashi presents an everyday world where the interactions of Asian lesbians with other lesbians quietly take centre stage, deposing and dislocating whiteness, which still exerts pressure on the characters as a force but which is not the gaze through which perceptions come to form.

The relationship between Kathy Nakashima and Jan Lalonde in the story “Wind,” which opens *Exile and the Heart*, draws together a Japanese Canadian woman who burns her family’s redress letter of apology from Gerry Weiner and Brian Mulroney and a Métis woman with a “handful of Blackfoot and fistful of Cree” studying *Land Claims in Canadian Law*.²⁸ The lovers’ road trip through the Albertan landscape takes them to the Old Man Dam, which the government built despite the protests of the Peigan: “They have passed through Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, place names of Cypress Hills, Battleford and Buffalo Jump. What must it be like for her, Kathy wonders, these signposts, this road, that coulee, this river.”²⁹ The narration does not give the reader access to what those place names signify for Jan Lalonde, but we do find out that this place was once hell for her.³⁰ Portrayed as a blight on the land that will be useless in ten years’ time because of silt buildup,³¹ the dam marks an instance of colonial violence on indigenous land.

While this awareness of colonial violation exists throughout the story, it does not allow the lovers’ interactions to be defined or reduced to only reacting against colonization. The two characters continue to swim, to show each other affection, to go on relating to one another in subtle ways that affirm their connection. The poetic contemplativeness of the story ends abruptly with the violence of a gas station attendant who yells at Jan, “Get out of here and take your fucking squaw with you!”³² In the face of the racist ignorance that would equate “squaw” with “Jap,” the two women are positioned together, in rage against a common enemy. However, the characters do not stay fixed or united in reaction; their lives continue, and in a later story entitled “A Night at the Edge of the World” Kathy and Jan have broken up. Nonetheless, friendship remains, as Kathy and her current partner Gen host a farewell party for Jan, who is moving to British Columbia to look for her younger sister. Jan reappears in a later story, “Driftwood,” seen from a distance in Oppenheimer Park by Kathy’s mother, who observes a group of First Nations women tying memorial ribbons for fifteen Native women murdered in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.³³ The possibility of relations that sustain and support one another without being tied to codified possession

or ownership norms underlies Kobayashi's short, quietly intense stories, which evoke sensibilities and ways of thinking through a complicated, politically engaged, and emotionally deep lesbian-of-colour community. Here relationships are temporal, geographically situated on (de)colonized land, and open to negotiation and change.

3. *BURNING VISION*

Awarded the 2004 Japan–Canada Literary Award, Marie Clements' play *Burning Vision* explores powerful connections between “Asian” and “First Nations” characters by following the trail of uranium as it was mined from Dene land and eventually detonated in atomic bombs over Japan.³⁴ Clements writes as a First Nations woman responding to the history of transnational economic relations that contributed to the devastation marking the end of World War II:

In the 1940's uranium was mined from the Echo Bay Mine situated on the northeast corner of the Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories. The land it was mined from was on the Sahtu Dene territory. As a descendant of the Fort Norman Sahtu Dene Metis, [I have] always [found it] strange that the uranium that was used to build the first atomic bomb that was dropped on the Japanese in 1945 came from the land of my bones.... In the 1990's Dene elders flew to Japan and met with Japanese survivors of the bombing. The story I'd like to trace is the uranium rock that landed inside us. The physical connection of land and features, of visions and machinery, of two worlds meeting over and under land and the burning noise that took the worlds' breath away.³⁵

In *Burning Vision*, narrative is in a sense torn apart and sundered by the nuclear detonations that begin and end the play, leaving shreds of interconnections and resonances between characters as diverse as Tokyo Rose, a Native widow whose partner dies from mining uranium,

a Japanese grandmother, a white woman poisoned from painting radium watch dials, a Dene elder who prophesied atomic destruction, the miners who “discovered” uranium on Dene land, and many others. As multiple worlds collide in dramatic tension and evocative imagery, the play’s refusal of linear resolution speaks to the ongoing legacy of violence perpetuated through a process of colonization that encodes theft and violation as “discovery.”

A number of relationships in the play enact moments of reciprocity and solidarity between racialized bodies. For instance, *Burning Vision* proposes a relationship between a Métis woman named Rose and a Japanese man named Koji that seems to be geographically impossible (given that he is frozen in Japan in the moment before the bomb drops) but is made spiritually possible through the chain of uranium that brings them together (and through the transformation and hope symbolized in the cherry tree where he waits for his grandmother). When Rose and the Widow talk about Koji, the Widow says of him, “Indian? He looks sorta like an Indian but there’s something different going on.” Rose’s response is that “He’s Indian enough from the other side,”³⁶ gesturing to the ways in which both the Japanese and the Indians have been slotted into the role of “the enemy.” However, it is not being made the target of a common enemy that defines their relationship but what they produce out of these circumstances. In the collisions and devastations of a world shattered by the uranium that came from Rose’s land, Koji and Rose somehow meet, comfort one another, and make a child. Rose asks Koji, “If you make me yours do we make a world with no enemies?,”³⁷ and Koji reciprocates with “If we make a world, we will make one where there are no enemies?”³⁸ The mutuality implied by their parallel lines suggests that affiliation can be stronger than common enmity, though of course this possibility remains a question. Alongside the hope that their alliance brings is also the frighteningly faceless and ubiquitous threat to their environment caused by the radioactive mining byproducts. Surrounded by the poisonous black uranium dust that the wind blows everywhere,³⁹ even getting into the bread that she kneads, Rose’s pregnancy is laden with both hope and danger.⁴⁰

In contrast to the tenderness between Rose and Koji, the (white) Fat Man, who finds Round Rose (an aged Iva Toguri, a.k.a. Tokyo Rose) and the (Native) Little Boy in his home, eventually throws them out after having initially accepted them in the subordinate roles of Asian wife and adopted Native child: “I want you two aliens to get the hell out of my living room. You hear me? I said I want you two ungrateful aliens to leave.”⁴¹ “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” are, of course, the names of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945, killing over 210,000 people by the end of 1945. While Fat Man functions as a historical reference to World War II, he arguably also embodies the War Measures Act, used against both Aboriginal people and Japanese Canadians.⁴² While the character Fat Man soon shows remorse for his actions, actions that so perfectly replicate the colonization and appropriation of North America as a “white” home, Round Rose’s words emphasize the inadequacy of remorse:

You can’t really be sorry for something you don’t want to remember can you. Selective memory isn’t it? Let’s be honest, hell, you can’t even apologize for the shit you did yesterday never mind 50 years ago. Indian residential schools, Japanese Internment camps, hell, and this is just in your neighborhood. But it’s alright ... everybody’s sorry these days. The politicians are sorry, the cops are sorry, the priests are sorry, the logging companies are sorry, mining companies, electric companies, water companies, wife beaters, serial rapists, child molesters, mommy and daddy. Everybody’s sorry. Everybody’s sorry they got caught sticking it to someone else ... that’s what they are sorry about ... Getting caught. They could give a rat’s ass about you, or me, or the people they are saying sorry to. Think about it ... Don’t be a sorry ass, be sorry before you have to say you are sorry. Be sorry for even thinking about, bringing about something-sorry-filled.⁴³

The connection of this neighbourhood to overseas neighbourhoods is in a sense configured through the Little Boy. A personification of the darkest uranium found at the centre of the Earth, he enters and leaves scenes through the television, embodying the technologies that materialize the human capacity for both creation and destruction. Aligned with Round Rose because they both face the violence of the Fat Man's gun pointed at them, the Little Boy is at once local (from Dene land) and global (beaming into and out of the television). The complex relationships presented in Clements' visionary play interrogate the possibilities and limits of interracial affiliations.

The play's close, after the Japanese Grandmother has transformed into the Dene Widow,⁴⁴ creates an overlap between two previously separate relationships. Koji's ongoing comments to his grandmother, and the Widow's ongoing talk to her dead husband, merge, so that the Widow's Words to Koji bring together a number of previously fragmented relationships. The Widow states, "You are my special grandson. My small man now. My small man that survived. Tough like hope. If we listen we can hear them [their loved ones] too."⁴⁵ Although the term "small man" might, in another context, be taken to emasculate the Asian male, here it alludes to and transforms "little boy," positing Koji as a hope that loving affiliations might grow out of surviving historic violence and destruction. The play ends with Koji's words – "They [the Japanese and Dene loved ones] hear us, and they are talking back in hope over time"⁴⁶ – and images that merge Dene and Japanese references: "*Glowing herds of caribou move in unison over the vast empty landscape as cherry blossoms fall till they fill the stage.*"⁴⁷ What brings the characters together is not only shared suffering but also the one Earth on which they all live.

In a question-and-answer period following a reading in 2004, Clements stated that her writing process begins with the land. The land presents itself to her, and then the characters follow, like a musical score. As such, a discussion of the characters' interracial relationships needs to be framed within the structure of the play, which consists of four movements that begin with the fiery explosion and then pass through the four elements: "the frequency of discovery," "rare earth elements,"

“waterways,” and “radar echoes.” The context of people belonging to the land, rather than the land belonging to people, suggests that people are but one element in a larger view of the world that respects all non-human forms of life as well. Thus, the context that matters for the “small man” at the end of the play is the immensity of the planet itself, the land as the main reference point, not a white masculinity that belittles or emasculates the Asian male. The way in which the play is shaped in movements, not acts (which hearken back to human activity), pushes toward a paradigm where land, not people, are the central focus. Thus, the “characters,” in their fragmentation and symbolic weight, are not only people but also material signs of how the land has been disrupted and changed by human activity.

4. “YIN CHIN”

Dedicated to SKY Lee and Jim Wong-Chu, “Yin Chin,” by First Nations writer Lee Maracle, offers a number of insights into the realm of Native–Asian relations, naming both the distances and the moments of camaraderie between communities. Published in Maracle’s 1990 collection of short stories, *Sojourner’s Truth*, “Yin Chin” bravely questions the narrator’s own humanity by admitting the insidious effects of racial categorization upon her interactions with other people.⁴⁸ While the First Nations narrator is a little scared by how she has “lived in this city in the same neighbourhood as Chinese people for twenty-two years now and [doesn’t] know a single Chinese person,” she is also aware of the political urgency that links her own struggle against oppression to that of other peoples.⁴⁹ A recent memory describes the common recognition of the importance of fighting imperialism among writers from subordinated cultures:

Last Saturday (seems like a hundred years later) was different. The tableload of people was Asian/Native. We laughed at ourselves and spoke very seriously about our writing. We

really believe we are writers, someone had said, and the room shook with the hysteria of it all. We ran on and on about our growth and development and not once did the white man ever enter the room. It just seemed all too incredible that a dozen Hans and Natives could sit and discuss all things under heaven, including racism, and not talk about white people. It only took a half-dozen revolutions in the Third World, seventeen riots in America, one hundred demonstrations against racism in Canada, and thirty-seven dead Native youth in my life to become... We had crossed a millennium of bridges the rivers of which were swollen with the floodwaters of dark humanity's tenacious struggle to extricate themselves from oppression and we knew it.

We were born during the first sword wound that the Third World swung at imperialism. We were children of that wound, invincible, conscious, and movin' on up. We could laugh because we were no longer a joke. But somewhere along the line we forgot to tell the others, the thousands of our folks that still tell their kids about old chinamen.⁵⁰

How many more sword wounds must follow this first one? There is still a need to share this consciousness of a common struggle against oppression in the face of educational systems and media structures that are not designed for this, that arguably operate to produce docile citizen subjects who do not question the arbitrary borders we inhabit and carry within ourselves.⁵¹ In the space of a few pages, Maracle juxtaposes this larger picture against the daily and often overlooked incidents that materialize internalized oppressions. In particular, she interweaves two anecdotes into "Yin Chin." First, there is her contemporary experience of driving around Chinatown and seeing a Native man bully and harass an old Chinese woman. The narrator assists the old woman by beating the man off. Second, while she listens to the old woman's anger that none of the Chinese men around her had intervened, the narrator recalls a childhood experience with the Chinese storekeeper, Mad Sam.⁵²

Having absorbed “the words of the world ... [words such as] ‘don’t wander off or the ol’ chinamen will get you and eat you,’” the narrator-as-child’s internalized racism quietly manifests in her monthly vigil of watching old Chinese men to make sure they don’t grab children.⁵³ One might consider how laws forbidding Chinese immigration, making family reunification impossible for decades, might have contributed to such racist myths. Her internalized racism then flares up with a scream when a Chinese man looks through Sam’s store window at her. The narrator’s childhood response, “The chinaman was looking at me,” shames her mother and hurts Sam. Her description of Sam’s injured look as “the kind of hurt you can sometimes see in the eyes of people who have been cheated”⁵⁴ suggests that racism has systemically devalued people like Sam, who are viewed as dangerous by small children like the narrator through no fault or action of their own. That the child narrator eventually grows to have an analysis of imperialism’s effects on racialized peoples requires that she grapple with the contradictions of small, everyday moments such as that brief encounter in Sam’s discount food store.

When the old woman is done expressing her frustration, the narrator states, “How unkind of the world to school us in ignorance,” and gets back into her car.⁵⁵ The narrator’s words allude to both her childhood anecdote and the contemporary experience of comforting an old woman (who might or might not have an analysis of colonization’s effects on First Nations people) and beating off a Native man (whose violence refuses any affiliations that could be made along racial or gender or class lines). The differences in scale between individual and mass change are made concrete by Maracle’s stories embedded within stories, memories within memories.

5. NOT A CLOSING BUT A REOPENING

In an ongoing movement between fictional investigations and the social text, I would like to juxtapose a couple of instances from contemporary society against this discussion of fiction to speculate upon what further

associations might be made. In *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, Winona LaDuke describes the struggle against General Motors' PCB contamination in the reservation of Akwesasne, where about eight thousand Mohawk people live. This twenty-five-square-mile reservation spans the St. Lawrence River and the international border between Canada and the United States, Quebec and New York. It is grandmothers such as Katsi Cook (who jokes, "if you want something done, get a Mohawk to do it") who are leading this struggle for a healthy community.⁵⁶ In Vancouver, I had heard of Akwesasne because an article in the *Globe and Mail* mentions the smuggling of Chinese migrants through Akwesasne.⁵⁷ Straddling the border, the reserve is a hot spot, a place both vulnerable to corporate and governmental threats but also strategically located to challenge the state's authority over national borders. Akwesasne exists concurrently with and alternatively to the nation-state's uneasy partnership with corporate hegemony. That some Mohawks have chosen to assist Chinese migrants – whether for political, economic, or other reasons, in effect putting themselves at risk of police retribution – can have the effect of asserting their independence as well as political solidarity with the imagined Third World.⁵⁸

There is a growing awareness among people concerned about social justice that those who live in this space we call Canada need to educate ourselves about what First Nations people are doing and how we might act in solidarity with them. As Loretta Todd suggests, First Nations land claims should take precedence over international trade mechanisms such as NAFTA, for the preservation of First Nations land rights is in the long-term interests of everyone living on this land, not only First Nations people:

What could happen is aboriginal title could supersede the Free Trade Agreement, because [the courts] could say that aboriginal title to the water is more fundamental than the Free Trade Agreement. As a consequence, we could potentially have some say over how the water is used. So when we talk about the whole land claim issue, we're really talking

about restoring the health of the land so that there can be co-existence and co-management of all the people but also of all the animals and resources on the land.⁵⁹

As the discourse of corporate globalization threatens to recolonize our imaginations, alongside the material takeover of natural resources, I see it as a matter of not just principle but also survival to strive for an international network of locally based alliances challenging the transnational corporate hegemony that is protected and reinforced by neoliberal states.

With British Columbia's referendum on the treaty process in 2002, a dubious, poorly executed referendum that intensified racist violence against First Nations people, globalization returned with a vengeance to questions of local land claims. One of the referendum questions asked people to say yes or no to the following statement: "The terms and conditions of leases and licenses should be respected; fair compensation for unavoidable disruption of commercial interests should be ensured."⁶⁰ It can be argued that this clause dovetails with Chapter 11 of NAFTA, which allows private companies to sue states for perceived losses of profits and limits the ability of governments to safeguard environmental, health, and various social values when there are conflicting commercial interests, to prepare the government to further renege on its fiduciary responsibilities to the public, which includes First Nations people. While this might initially seem to be far away from my concerns about cultural production, I would argue that this sets the stage for the destruction of local communities and of course the cultures produced in and by these communities. As such, cultural workers do not have the luxury of ignoring these urgent matters; rather, they need to work with others to strengthen engagement with concepts of Aboriginal title as taking precedence over neoliberal trade agreements such as NAFTA.

By way of concluding my speculations, I would like to turn to the warnings and possibilities raised in the novel *The Kappa Child* by Hiromi Goto, wherein we find a childhood friendship between Gerald, a mixed-race Japanese and Blood boy, and the narrator, who is of Japanese descent. The fluid process of the social construction of racial and

gender identity is emphasized in a telling moment when Gerald asks the narrator “You a boy or a girl?” and the narrator asks him back “You Blood or Japanese?”⁶¹ The novel operates in a realm where it is possible to answer “both,” thus rejecting the binary divisions that have historically been deployed to systemic, oppressive effect. At the same time that the possibility for better forms of coexistence hovers, terrible mistakes can also happen. In particular, the narrator, in a moment of weakness and confusion, lashes out at Gerald when he tries to physically comfort her by calling him a sissy boy: “This hateful coil of ugliness twisting in my gut, the words stinging something inside me, but unable to stop.”⁶² After wrecking her childhood friendship with Gerald, the narrator is given a second chance toward the end of the novel when she encounters him as an adult. What happens next remains outside the text, for the reader to imagine and perhaps enact. The fragile, incomplete, and fraught relationship in *The Kappa Child* – like the broken and dynamic interracial relationships in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, *Exile and the Heart*, *Burning Vision*, and “Yin Chin” – gestures toward how much remains to be addressed and worked through in the process of decolonization. At both the level of individual interactions and the level of larger socioeconomic frameworks, building alliances that respect First Nations values of interdependency and land stewardship is an urgent focus if we are to foster ethical ways of long-term survival on this Earth.

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NOTES

- 1 Republished by permission of *Canadian Literature* from *Canadian Literature* 199 (winter 2008): 158–80. The present version has been edited for length. The author thanks Hiromi Goto, Larissa Lai, and Guy Beauregard for feedback on earlier versions of this essay.
- 2 Rajinderpal S. Pal, *Pappaji Wrote Poetry in a Language I Cannot Read* (Toronto: TSAR, 1998), 22
- 3 Marie Battiste and Helen Semaganis, “First Thoughts on First Nations Citizenship: Issues in Education,” in *Citizenship in Transformation in Canada*, ed. Yvonne Hébert (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 97.
- 4 Scott McFarlane, “The Haunt of Race: Canada’s Multiculturalism Act, the Politics of Incorporation, and Writing Thru Race,” *Fuse* 18, no. 3 (1995): 22.
- 5 The Continuous Voyage Provision, enacted in 1908, in effect encoded the exclusion of people from India to Canada. The War Measures Act, in place from 1914 until it was repealed in 1985 (and replaced in 1988 by the Emergencies Act), was used to detain people on the basis of their ethnicity. This power included confiscating Indian reserves from Aboriginal people and the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. More commonly known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the misleadingly named Chinese Immigration Act barred almost all Chinese people from immigrating to Canada between 1923 and 1947. Prior to that, from 1885 to 1923, Chinese immigrants were the only people charged a head tax (\$50 in 1885, \$100 in 1900, and \$500 from 1903 to 1923) to enter Canada. Due to this racist policy, the Canadian government collected about \$23 million from 81,000 Chinese immigrants. Today the so-called right of landing fee (ROLF) is a contemporary head tax that continues to effectively discriminate along class lines that disproportionately affect many people of colour. While the 2006 apology from the Canadian government for the head tax was an important step in acknowledging the few surviving head tax payers, it did not redress their families.
- 6 McFarlane points out that the “exclusion of the Yukon and Northwest Territories as well as First Nations and band councils from the [Multiculturalism] Act (Section 2) suggests a crisis of representation with respect to aboriginality. It is through these exclusions that the Act perpetuates two myths of Eurocentrism, providing a rationale for the operation of the liberal nation while at the same time obscuring a colonialist history of violence” (22). For a thoughtful discussion of the tensions between Canadian citizenship and Aboriginality, see Battiste and Semaganis, “First Thoughts on First Nations Citizenship: Issues in Education,” 93–111. They note that “the federal Indian Act created new categories and definitions of Aboriginal peoples. Under the policy of divide and conquer, the federal government defined ‘Indians’ in order to destroy communities by arbitrary criteria of residency, marriage, employability, education, and military service. These definitions, conceived without consent of the Aboriginal peoples, segmented Aboriginal societies into categories of status and non-status, treaty and non-treaty, urban and reserve, and enfranchised and disenfranchised Indians” (105). Given this history, Battiste and Semaganis argue that “current issues in citizenship in Canada ... drive ... First Nations relationships,

- treaties, and self-determination to a bias towards Eurocentric perceptions of citizenship and governance" (93). Immigration legislation further reinforces Eurocentric systems that structurally disadvantage people racialized as nonwhite.
- 7 Loretta Todd, "Notes on Appropriation," *Parallogramme* 16, no. 1 (1990): 26.
 - 8 Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000), 44.
 - 9 Lee Maracle, "The 'Post-Colonial' Imagination," *Fuse* 16, no. 1 (1992): 15.
 - 10 In a longer article, novels such as Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka* and Kevin Chong's *Baroque-a-Nova* would also deserve discussion, as would instances of racial misrecognition that have been noted in *Calendar Boy* by Andy Quan and *Scared Texts* by Jam Ismail. Films such as Eunhee Cha's *A Tribe of One* also explore the relationships between Asian and Native peoples.
 - 11 SKY Lee, "Disappearing Moon Cafe and the Cultural Politics of Writing in Canada," in *Millennium Messages*, ed. Kenda Gee and Wei Wong (Edmonton: Asian Canadian Writers Workshop Society of Edmonton, 1997), 12-13.
 - 12 Scott Kerwin points out that very different racist tropes were deployed against the "Oriental menace" and the "vanishing" Indian in the 1920s: "Using the metaphors of the day, the Aboriginal population could easily be 'absorbed' into the bloodstream of British Columbia without 'imperiling' the 'original type.' The dominant stereotype of the Asian population as the 'Yellow Peril' was the polar opposite of the metaphor of the 'Vanishing [Native] American.' British Columbia's white elite feared that a massive influx of Asian immigrants would 'dilute' the bloodstream of the body politic and literally change the face of the nation" (Scott Kerwin, "The Janet Smith Bill of 1924 and the Language of Race and Nation in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 121 [spring 1999]: 107).
 - 13 SKY Lee, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990), 12-13.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, 4.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, 14-15.
 - 16 See, for instance, Jim Wong-Chu and Linda Tzang, *A Brief History of Asian North America* (Vancouver: Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society, 2001), which mentions the arrival of fifty to seventy Chinese artisans at Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island on a ship captained by John Meares in 1788 as well as a ship, the *Pallas*, that left a crew of thirty-two Indians and three Chinese seamen stranded in Baltimore in 1785.
 - 17 Lee, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, 234.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, 3.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 3-4.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, 235.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, 54.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, 115.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, 237.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, 188.
 - 25 Tamai Kobayashi, interview with Larissa Lai, *West Coast Line* 33, no. 3 (2000): 124.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, 122.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, 124-25.
 - 28 Tamai Kobayashi, *Exile and the Heart: Lesbian Fiction* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1998), 13-14.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, 12.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, 16.
 - 31 *Ibid.*, 15.
 - 32 *Ibid.*, 16.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, 96.

- 34 First performed at Vancouver's Firehall Theatre, 23 Apr.–11 May 2002.
- 35 Qtd. in John Endo Greenaway, "Fire in the Sky," *Bulletin* [Burnaby, BC] 44, no. 4 (2002): 8.
- 36 Marie Clements, *Burning Vision* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2003), 105.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 95.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 114.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 98.
- 42 For more detail regarding how the War Measures Act was used to confiscate Indian reserves during World War I, see Ann Sunahara, "Legislative Roots of Injustice," in *In Justice: Canada, Minorities, and Human Rights*, ed. Roy Miki and Scott McFarlane (Winnipeg: National Association of Japanese Canadians, 1996), 7–22. Use of the Act to intern Japanese Canadians has also been well documented. See, for example, Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004).
- 43 Clements, *Burning Vision*, 100–101.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 Lee Maracle, "Yin Chin," in *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*, ed. Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 291.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Ibid.*, 291–92.
- 51 Maracle has also written a play, *If We'd Met*, which, through its spirited dialogue between multiracial characters, including Native and Asian women, enacts a process of decolonization through, among other tactics, decentring whiteness.
- 52 Note that "the mad was intended for the low prices and the crowds in his little store, not him" (Maracle, "Yin Chin," 292).
- 53 *Ibid.*, 293.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 294.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 Qtd. in Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 1999), 11.
- 57 Peter Cheney and Miro Cernetig, "Chinese Gangs Flood Canada with Lucrative Human Cargo," *Globe and Mail* (2 Feb. 1999): A1+.
- 58 One must look carefully at who is doing this work and why. Despite the possibilities of political solidarity, there are also problems with the violence that some smugglers have perpetrated on migrating people.
- 59 Loretta Todd, "On Redress for Aboriginal People," *Across Currents: Canada-Japan Minority Forum*, ed. Roy Miki and Rita Wong (Vancouver: JC Publications, 2001), 83.
- 60 See www.cbc.ca/news/background/aboriginals/bc_treaty_referendum.html.
- 61 Hiromi Goto, *The Kappa Child* (Calgary: Red Deer, 2001), 168.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 200.

SECTION 5

**NEIGHBOURS UNKNOWN:
ANIMALS IN CANADIAN LITERATURE**

CHAPTER 18

Selections from *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972)

*Margaret Atwood*¹

You'd think that the view of Nature as Monster so prevalent in Canadian literature would generate, as the typical Canadian animal story, a whole series of hair-raising tales about people being gnawed by bears, gored to death by evil-eyed moose, and riddled with quills by vengeful porcupines. In fact this is not the case; fangs and claws are sprouted by mountains and icebergs, it's true, but in stories about actual animals something much more peculiar happens, and it's this really odd pattern I'd like to pursue in this chapter. In the course of the hunt I hope to demonstrate that the "realistic" animal story, as invented and developed by Ernest Thompson Seton and Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, is not, as Alec Lucas would have it in the *Literary History of Canada*, "a rather isolated and minor kind of literature," but a genre which provides a key to an important facet of the Canadian psyche. Those looking for something "distinctively Canadian" in literature might well start right here.

The Canadian genre and its approach to its subject are in fact unique. It is true that stories ostensibly about animals appear in British literature; but as anyone who has read Kipling's Mowgli stories, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, or Beatrix Potter's tales can see, the animals in them are really, like the white rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*, Englishmen in furry zippered suits, often with a layer of human clothing added on top. They speak fluent English and are assigned places in a hierarchical social order which is essentially British (or British-colonial, as in the Mowgli stories): Toad of Toad Hall is an upper-class twit, the stoats and ferrets which invade his mansion are working-class louts and scoundrels. The ease with which these books can be – and have been – translated into plays, ballets, and cartoon movies, complete with song, dance, speech, and costume, is an indication of the essentially human nature of the protagonists. Of note also are the invariably happy endings.

Animals appear in American literature minus clothes and the ability to speak English, but seldom are they the centre of the action. Rather they are its goal, as these “animal stories” are in fact hunting stories, with the interest centred squarely on the hunter. The white whale in *Moby-Dick*, the bear in Faulkner's “The Bear,” the lion in Hemingway's “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” the grizzlies in Mailer's *Why Are We In Vietnam?*, the deer glimpsed by the narrator in James Dickey's *Deliverance* – all these and a host of others are animals endowed with magic symbolic qualities. They are Nature, mystery, challenge, otherness, what lies beyond the Frontier: the hunter wishes to match himself against them, conquer them by killing them, and assimilate their magic qualities, including their energy, violence, and wildness, thus “winning” over Nature and enhancing his own stature. American animal stories are quest stories – with the Holy Grail being a death – usually successful from the hunter's point of view, though not from the animal's; as such they are a comment on the general imperialism of the American cast of mind. When Americans have produced stories which superficially resemble those of Seton and Roberts, they are likely to be animal success-stories, the success being measured in terms of the animal's adjustment to people – as in Jack London's *White Fang*, where the

wolf-dog, mistreated in youth, begins by hating men but ends up loving them, saving them, and living in California.

The animal stories of Seton and Roberts are far from being success stories. They are almost invariably failure stories, ending with the death of the animal; but this death, far from being the accomplishment of a quest, to be greeted with rejoicing, is seen as tragic or pathetic, *because the stories are told from the point of view of the animal*. That's the key: English animal stories are about "social relations," American ones are about people killing animals; Canadian ones are about animals *being* killed, as felt emotionally from inside the fur and feathers. As you can see, *Moby-Dick* as told by the White Whale would be very different. ("Why is that strange man chasing me around with a harpoon?") For a Canadian version of whale-meets-whaler, see E. J. Pratt's "The Cachalot," in which it's the whale's death – not the whaler's – that we mourn. (The whaler, incidentally, is from New England...)

"The fact that these stories are true is the reason why all are tragic. The life of a wild animal *always has a tragic end*," says Seton in the Preface to *Wild Animals I Have Known*. He's defending his position as a realist, a purveyor of truth. However, "realism" in connection with animal stories must always be a somewhat false claim, for the simple reason that animals do not speak a human language; nor do they write stories. It's impossible to get the real inside story, from the horse's mouth so to speak. "Animal" stories must be stories written by people *about* animals, just as "Indian" stories have until very recently been stories written by white people *about* Indians. In the latter case the Indian tends to be made into a symbol; onto him the white man projects his own desire or fear. And so with the animal. "We and the beasts are kin," says Seton, all but acknowledging this connection.

The world of Nature presented by Seton and Roberts is one in which the animal is always a victim. No matter how brave, cunning, and strong he is, he will be killed eventually, either by other animals (which these authors don't seem to mind too much; it's part of the game) or by men. Seton, especially, reverses the Nature-as-Monster pattern in stories such as "Lobo," "The Springfield Fox," and "Redruff." Here it is man who is

the threat and the villain: the animals suffer much more through men, with their snares, traps, chains, and poisons, than they would through other animals, who are at least quick. The amount of elegiac emotion expended over the furry corpses that litter the pages of Seton and Roberts suggests that “tragic” is the wrong word; “pathetic” would be a better one. Tragedy requires a flaw of some kind on the part of the hero, but pathos as a literary mode simply demands that an innocent victim suffer. Seton and Roberts rarely offer their victims even a potential way out. As James Polk says in his essay “Lives of the Hunted,”

These doleful endings and the number of stoic moose, tragic bears, grouse dying in the snow, woodchucks devoured, salmon failing to make it upstream, grief-stricken wolves and doomed balls of fur, feathers or quills squealing for dead mothers tend to instill a certain fatalism in the reader...

If animals in literature are always symbols, and if Canadian animal stories present animals as victims, what trait in our national psyche do these animal victims symbolize? By now that should be an easily guessed riddle, but before unravelling it more fully let's consider two later examples of the realistic animal story as genre.

Though Lucas claims that “nature writing, particularly the animal story, had its hey-day in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” and has “long passed,” two widely read books have appeared since then which refute him: Fred Bodsworth's *Last of the Curlews* and Farley Mowat's *Never Cry Wolf*. In Bodsworth's novel the central characters are two birds, the last pair of their species. The book follows them through a season of their life; at its end the female curlew is shot by a man with a gun and the male curlew is left alone. Mowat's book is ostensibly a true-life account of the author's study of a pair of Arctic wolves. The wolves, seen at first as savage predators, emerge as highly commendable beings. But they too are doomed; in an epilogue the author tells us that soon after his visit a Predator Control Officer planted the wolves' den with cyanide, presumably finishing them off.

The difference between the earlier Seton and Roberts stories and the later Bodsworth and Mowat ones is that in the former it is the individual only who dies; the species remains. But *Last of the Curlews* is, as its name implies, the story of the death of a species, and Mowat indicates that not just the wolves but also the caribou and with them the whole Arctic ecological balance [are] threatened by the white man's short-sighted and destructive policies. Man is again the villain, but on a much larger scale.

...

Turning to recent prose fiction, we find the animal as victim making a significant appearance in the work of David Godfrey. *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*, Godfrey's first book, is essentially a collection of hunting stories. The point is made partly by the title, which links death with Coca-Cola, the great American beverage; partly by the initial quote, which is from biologist Konrad Lorenz's book *On Aggression* and which speaks of the destructive effects cultures regarded as "higher" – "as the culture of a conquering nation usually is" – have on those on "the subdued side"; and partly by the first story, "The Generation of Hunters," which is about a boy who is taught by his father how to shoot bears and who grows up to be a Marine. Americans, "the conquering nation," are the killers, Canadians are the killed, as the last story, "The Hard-Headed Collector," makes clear. The slaughter of moose and fish which occurs elsewhere in the stories, and which is performed in some cases by Canadians, is thus given an ironic framework: Canadians too can be hunters, but only by taking a stance towards Nature which is like the stance of America towards them. The only "authentic" hunters are those who must still kill to eat, the Indians and locals who "really live here." The rest are fakes, memento hunters, as the man who sets out to catch a flying fish in "The Flying Fish" learns when the fish he is allowed to hook turns out to be made of polyfoam. "It is something to mount on my wall," he says.

There's a fascinating poem by Alden Nowlan called "Hunters" which takes Americans-as-hunters a step further. The hunters, "Americans in

scarlet breeches,” have shot a bear which is roped to their car; one of them gets out to check the knots, looking “boyish,” and Nowlan comments:

... One senses how this cowed
and squalid beast enlivens him – its pain
and cornered anger squelched in the dark wood
that ornaments his world. It’s like a child
sprung from the violent act but tamed and good,
decoratively....

The Americans have been performing their ritual act of “taming” Nature by killing one of its animals, but somehow the thing is no longer real; the dark wood is now just ornamental, the dead animal a decoration, not something that can be seen as itself:

... He can’t see it wild,
alive in its own element. He might
as well have bought it and perhaps he did:
guides trap and sell them out by weight
to hunters who don’t want to hunt. The dead
beast-thing secured, the car starts homeward. There
bear skins are rugs, a den is not a lair.

Canada and America have interesting roles in this poem. America’s hunter-energy is running down, though a dead animal can still produce an enlivening thrill. Canada is the place where Americans now come to hunt. The dead bear is Canadian, a trophy to be taken from “here” to “there,” and “there” is seen as civilized, safe, non-wild, a place of rituals that have lost their meaning and of fake surfaces, of living skins turned into rugs. The function of the Canadian “guides” is curious; they are the middlemen, converting their own live reality to dead trophies so they can sell it. The narrative stance hovers tantalizingly between sympathy for the bear and potential fear of it; at any rate, the bear is real for the narrator in a way that it is not for the Americans.

We've established that the animal as victim is a persistent image in Canadian literature; now here's a further clue to its possible meaning. Biologist Desmond Morris conducted a survey of people's reactions to animals, through which he made the not surprising discovery that the animals people choose to identify with depend on the size and age of the people. Small children like large "parental" animals such as bears and elephants; slightly older children prefer white mice and squirrels and other things smaller than themselves which they can control; adolescents like companion or sexual-power figures such as dogs and horses; childless couples tend to favour substitute children such as cats, lapdogs, and housebirds. Very rarely is an animal liked or disliked for itself alone; it is chosen for its symbolic anthropomorphic values.

Elderly people in England tended to identify with threatened or nearly extinct species; obviously they themselves felt threatened or nearly extinct. But in Canada it is the nation as a whole that joins in animal-salvation campaigns such as the protest over the slaughter of baby seals and the movement to protect the wolf. This could – mistakenly, I think – be seen as national guilt: Canada after all was founded on the fur trade, and an animal cannot painlessly be separated from its skin. From the animal point of view, Canadians are as bad as the slave trade or the Inquisition; which casts a new light on those beavers on the nickels and caribou on the quarters. But it is much more likely that Canadians themselves feel threatened and nearly extinct as a nation, and suffer also from life-denying experience as individuals – the culture threatens the "animal" within them – and that their identification with animals is the expression of a deep-seated cultural fear. The animals, as Seton says, are us. And for the Canadian animal, bare survival is the main aim in life, failure as an individual is inevitable, and extinction as a species is a distinct possibility.

A search for animal victims in Québec literature uncovers an interesting phenomenon: the "realistic" version of the animal victim is almost unknown. Animals, when they appear, are more likely to be Aesop-fable humanoids like the bull in Jacques Ferron's story "Mélie and the Bull." The explanation may lie in the persistence of the French fable tradition

in Québec; or it may be that French Canadians have been more than willing to see themselves as victims, conquered and exploited, while English Canadians suppressed this knowledge of themselves – they won on the Plains of Abraham, didn't they? – and were able to project it only through their use of animal images.

However, there is one encounter with an animal in French-Canadian literature which could be straight out of Ernest Thompson Seton: I'm thinking of the moment in Gabrielle Roy's *The Hidden Mountain* [*La Montagne secrète*] where Pierre, having hunted down a caribou, finally kills it and it turns upon him a gaze full of resignation and suffering. This gaze exchanged between a hunter and an animal either dying or threatened with death – and it's usually a deer, moose, or caribou – is a recurring moment in Canadian literature; in it the hunter identifies with his prey as *suffering victim*. For an example from Seton, see *The Trail of the Sandhill Stag*, in which the narrator finally corners a stag after a long hunt but can't shoot because – during that meaningful gaze – he realizes that the stag is his brother.

In *The Bush Garden*, Northrop Frye notes “the prevalence in Canada of animal stories, in which animals are closely assimilated to human behaviour and emotions.” I would add that the human behaviour and emotions in question are limited in range, being usually flight, fear, and pain. Applying Morris's findings, we may infer that the English Canadian projects himself through his animal images as a threatened victim, confronted by a superior alien technology against which he feels powerless, unable to take any positive defensive action, and, survive each crisis as he may, ultimately doomed.

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Political Science: Realism in Roberts's Animal Stories (1996)

*Misao Dean*¹

In that country the animals
have the faces of people

– Margaret Atwood, “The Animals in That Country”

Charles G. D. Roberts's animal stories are usually discussed as an attempt to create a new kind of animal character, one which would not be an anthropomorphic copy of human psychology nor a one-dimensional allegory but a “real” animal based on the most up-to-date science and on accurate personal observation.² Critics read the stories as marking an important stage in the development of Canadian realism, citing the development of credible animal characters and the location of the stories in a meticulously accurate and recognizable New Brunswick landscape.³ But these analyses of Roberts's animal stories as “realistic” have failed to take account of the ideology implicit in realist technique. Even in the most “realistic” text, “the thing represented does not appear in a moment of pure identity.”⁴ Far from “reflecting” reality, Roberts's stories create as

reality a natural world which is inflected with assumptions about human personality and masculinity as norm which are endemic to his historical period.

Critical approaches to Roberts's stories are dominated by the assumption that in good writing language directly corresponds to material reality: "most critics have agreed ... that an intimate, almost transparent connection between diction and object, between the word and the phenomenal world, is the hallmark of Roberts's best writing."⁵ Terry Whalen sums up Roberts's "legacy to Canadian novelists" as his demonstration of how to represent in prose "the world as a tangible reality, human beings as recognizable entities, and settings as actual locales."⁶ John Lennox praises Roberts's ability to depict, "in a realistic way, animals as animals in relation to their place in the actual, natural world"⁷ and Joseph Gold locates "myth," which he argues structures all of Roberts's stories, "within the framework of an accurate survey of natural history."⁸ While Gold, Margaret Atwood, Robert H. MacDonald, and Thomas R. Dunlap emphasize the way the stories result from a dialectical relationship between material reality and the "shaping consciousness" of the artist, ultimately their critical judgments are based on the tenet that the stories are "true" in some ultimate sense – "true" to an observable physical reality and (perhaps) "true" to an underlying and universally (or, in the case of Atwood, nationally) valid mythical structure.

The verisimilitude of the stories is often confirmed by contrasting them to contemporary animal stories such as the sentimental novels of Anna Sewell and Marshall Saunders, or the two *Jungle Books* of Rudyard Kipling.⁹ Sewell's *Black Beauty* and Saunders's *Beautiful Joe* self-consciously create quasi-human "personalities" for their animal characters in order to foster reader identification, and so forward their animal-rights politics. Kipling, whose *Jungle Book* is "in no sense realistic," creates animal characters who are descendants equally of the proverbial animals of Aesop and of "Indian folk wisdom."¹⁰ All of these stories are infused with various kinds of Victorian ideological baggage: racist and colonialist attitudes in the case of Kipling, and the sentimental evocation of suffering innocence in order to arouse public concern in the cases of Sewell

and Saunders. In addition, their use of intrusive moralizing and their romantic and implausible plots make them technically less “realistic.” Placing Roberts’s animal stories in the context of these (now) obviously unrealistic works has the effect of making them seem objective and materially “real” by contrast.

Roberts invites such judgments when he presents the creation of a “realistic” animal personality based on taxonomy and the new science of psychology as the major innovation of the animal story as genre. Roberts argues that previous generations of writers had imposed an anthropomorphic self upon their animal characters in order to create moral fables for their readers. In contrast, his stories grew out of the scientific observation evident in their immediate predecessors, the hunting “story of adventure and the anecdote of observation.”¹¹ The first, he states, generated a taxonomy of animals: “Precise and patient scientists made the animals their care, observing with microscope and measure, comparing bones, assorting families, subdividing subdivisions, till at length, all the animals of significance to man were ticketed neatly, and laid bare, as far as their material substance was concerned.”¹² The second generated an interest in animal psychology, which he considers to be an inductive science whose methodology led inevitably to the conclusion that “animals can and do reason.”¹³ Observation confirmed Darwin’s speculation that if humans evolved from “lesser” animals and shared many traits with them, then reason (in a rudimentary form) might also be a common attribute; from this Roberts developed his idea that animals must possess a “personality, individuality, mentality”¹⁴ which is distinctive, and which he contrasts positively to “mere instinct and automatism.”¹⁵

But the language of Roberts’s animal stories cannot transparently reproduce material reality, for no realism is transparent: “in so far as language is a way of articulating experience, it necessarily participates in ideology.”¹⁶ All realistic works rely on the evocation of cultural codes which are ideological; they construct the real rather than reflect it. This is not to say that Roberts’s stories are not technically accomplished, or that they are ideologically suspect: even less does it suggest that they are consciously deceptive or bad. Rather, despite their modernist technique

of minimizing the intrusion of the narrator, despite their evocative description and claims to scientific accuracy, we cannot judge naïvely that they reproduce reality. The stories demand analysis as “realist,” that is, as attempts to create an illusion of reality. What they choose to signify as “real” is as important an area of analysis as how they signify it.

The ideology within which Roberts’s stories speak is the masculinist discourse of the early twentieth century in which the “primal” experiences of hunting, scouting, and woodcraft serve as an antidote for the feminized life of the industrial city dweller: “From 1890 to 1930 the ‘Nature Movement’ was at its height in the United States,” providing a focus for “conventional western ambivalence about ‘civilization.’”¹⁷ North Americans in an increasingly urban society idealized the (American) frontiersman and the (Canadian) trapper or voyageur; the British created a popular image of “empire” which relied upon the enterprise of the “clean-limbed” and active irregular troops, offered as a model for the supposedly lazy and immoral members of the urban working class. The perceived “crisis of masculinity” in English, American, and Canadian cultures consisted in the belief that men were becoming “soft,” physically weak and morally corrupt through sedentary or industrial work. The construction of homosexuality in the discourse surrounding the trial of Oscar Wilde and the “decadence” of the 1890s produced a corresponding emphasis on “cleanliness,” physical fitness, and sexual autonomy in the first decades of the twentieth century. The popular literature of empire portrayed British colonies as appropriate fields for the exercise of British masculinity, preferably through a “cleansing” encounter with the natural world in adventures which emphasized “instinctive” reactions; the ability of the frontiersmen or backwoodsmen to adapt to and overcome any conditions was the stuff of popular novels set in the American West, along the Canadian Railway, or in south-central Africa.¹⁸

In order to provide the reader with a “return to nature” without requiring a “return to barbarism,” Roberts’s animal stories create animals as models of ideal autonomous selfhood, masculine and free from the taint of civilized life; by representing these animals in deep communion with human observers, they reproduce the selfhood of the reader as

similarly autonomous, masculine, and free.¹⁹ By encouraging identification with the animal subject, and with the position of the knowledgeable backwoodsman who lingers in the text as author and authorizer, the stories literally “naturalize” the position of reader as the result of this supposed primal return to the essence of being-in-nature.

But the human selfhood which is attributed to the animals is the ideological cover story for the subjectivity which the stories create. For while the animals as individuals are attributed freedom and agency, they are also “subjected” by a discourse which figures them as “the same as” humans, yet places them in a material and evolutionary hierarchy which is dominated by humans.²⁰ Similarly, the reader is “subjected” by the structural identification with animals, who are theorized as wholly material beings acting according to “natural laws,” and with the predatory male human observer for whose specular consumption the drama of animal life is offered. The “return to nature” promised by “the Animal Story” is promised to the male reader who by its means is offered a subject position of competence and mastery directly linked to his biological heritage as white male human being, crown and end product of evolution.²¹

The theories of Charles Darwin were inevitably brought to aid this discourse. The struggle for existence, natural selection, and evolution were widely thought to apply to the human species at the turn of the century, and their application formed the basis of the developing discipline of sociobiology. Despite Darwin’s own careful disclaimers on this issue, responses to his work dominated the newly founded discipline of sociology, especially in the United States. One school of thought held that Darwin had merely projected onto the natural world the human society he saw around him; Marx, for example, wrote that “it is remarkable how Darwin recognizes among beasts and plants his English society, with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, ‘inventions,’ and the Malthusian ‘struggle for existence’ ... in Darwin, the animal kingdom figures as a civil society.”²² This contention was supported by Darwin’s own admission that he had drawn his idea of the “struggle for existence” from Malthus’s work on human population. Other thinkers, such as Herbert Spencer, argued that the “laws” of nature discovered by

Darwin to govern the animal kingdom ought to be guides for social policy, and still others argued that Darwin's description of the struggle for existence, or "survival of the fittest," ought to motivate people to adapt and create cooperative, moral organizational structures which would similarly ensure survival.²³ In the United States, naturalists and museum collectors commented on the supposed nuclear structure of animal families and constructed a fantasy of the peaceable kingdom in order to naturalize a conservative solution to social unrest: "naked eye science" could give direct vision of social peace and progress despite the appearances of class war and decadence.²⁴ What all of these streams of thought held in common was the importance of biological science in determining appropriate ways to view human societies, and the salience of the "social analogy underlying Darwin's description of the natural order."²⁵

In short, the animal "self" created by the stories, while naturalized by scientific theory and reported observation, is the very human self created by "classic realist fiction."²⁶ The animals masquerade as "other," but like the bull, cat, fox, and wolf of Atwood's poem ("The Animals in That Country"), they are really (m)animals, reproductions of the ideological subject offered to turn-of-the-century readers of realist fiction. Like the sentimental and self-consciously human animals of Sewell or Saunders, these (m)animals cannot claim to convey "the non-human aspect of [their] existence" except as absence.²⁷ In a culture increasingly obsessed with the "biological" or "natural" basis of human action, in which responses to Darwinism were the dominant sociological theory, Roberts's (m)animals function as simulacra of social subjects, and their motivations, actions, and fates are created by the conventions of realist narrative, turn-of-the-century gender politics, and the historical intersection of biological and sociological discourses.

The stories which fall into Roberts's category of "animal biography" offer examples of the way that conventional manipulation of realist "point of view" works to create subjectivity. Using conventional third-person narration, Roberts creates the physical perspective and psychological motivation to substantiate the subjectivity of his animal characters and

to structure the identification of reader with character. In “The Little Homeless One,” the title character encounters a goshawk in a rabbit run:

The runway was narrow, and densely overarched by low branches, so it was impossible that the great bird could have seen him from the upper air.... The beautiful, fierce-eyed bird was not home upon the level earth. His deadly talons were not made for walking, but for perching and for slaying. His realm was the free spaces of the air, and here in the runway he could not spread his wings. His progress was so slow, laborious and clumsy that, but for the glare of his level, piercing eyes he could have seemed grotesque.²⁸

The narrative here describes the scene from the physical point of view of the rabbit, which is the only perspective from which “the glare of [the goshawk’s] level, piercing eyes” and his laborious, clumsy movements would be visible. The rabbit’s perspective is also represented in the focus on the talons, whose functions are described with the elevated diction (“slaying”) which gives them a mythic importance for the vulnerable rabbit. As the anecdote continues, the rabbit is attributed a psychology which includes not only fear, but “curiosity.” “Gifted beyond his fellows with the power of learning from experience,” the “Homeless One” learns to be “a little suspicious” of rabbit runs, and retains this knowledge as a guide to future action.²⁹

The perspective of the rabbit in “The Little Homeless One” alternates with addresses to the reader which reproduce the discourse of romantic nature; the goshawk is described as “beautiful,” an inhabitant of the “realm” of the “free air.” Thus in addition to the positioning of the reader as identified with the subject animal, the narrative also invites the reader to participate in a discourse of “natural description” which positions him as knowledgeable observer, identified with the backwoodsman/author who directs his gaze. In “Mothers of the North,” this identification is structured by the creation of a physical perspective on the action which writer and reader share. From the open water both the

walrus herd and the attacking polar bear and her cub are visible. The narrative occasionally lodges a sweeping third-person description of a scene in the consciousness of one animal, such as the old bull who is “on watch,” or in the mind of the polar bear herself, who analyzes the scene for the most effective angle of attack, but the dominant perspective is that of the human viewer, as in this description of the walrus herd: “They were not, it must be confessed, a very attractive company, these uncouth sea-cattle. The adults were from ten to twelve feet in length, round and swollen looking as hogsheads, quite lacking the adornment of tails, and in colour of a dirty yellow-brown. Sparse bristles, scattered over their hides in rusty patches, gave them a disreputable, moth-eaten look.”³⁰ Specific dimensions, alternative vocabulary (“sea-cattle”), and colour references are “concrete details” that establish the referentiality of the description for the reader; the metaphors implied by “hogsheads” and “moth-eaten,” in addition to the attributes of uncouthness, unattractiveness, and disreputability, provide the connotative aspects of the “authorial vision.” This description, a demonstration of “reality” as “shaped” by the implied consciousness of the author, demonstrates the way that the text is constructed as a direct communication from one autonomous individual (author) to another (reader) and places both as observers of the scene.

In stories such as “King of the Mamozekel” and “The Little Homeless One” (in *The Vagrants of the Barren and Other Stories*) and “King of the Flaming Hoops” and “The Monarch of Park Barren” (in *Kings in Exile*), Roberts uses the conventional biographical narrative pattern to reify both reader and character as subjects. In accordance with the conventions of the genre, the stories present a chronology of individuals from birth through maturity, offering the unified narrative of exposition, rising action, climax, and dénouement which reproduces “character” as the determinant of action in both life and art. Roberts’s animal “personalities” are autonomous, and like the heroes of romance, create that autonomy by leaving home, undergoing adventures, and often returning to or re-establishing that home. Animals experience free choice through action which is “psychologically motivated”; they express their desire through action,

and their desire is eventually contained in the achievement of full adult autonomy and the opportunity to mate. In “King of the Mamozekel,” a moose is ejected from “home” by his mother’s new mate; after winning his own mate, and sustaining challenges for her possession, he achieves full selfhood by confronting his unreasoning fear of bears (created by the memory of being mauled as a calf) in a duel with a bear who attacks his own son. In “The Odyssey of the Great White Owl” (in *Lure of the Wild*), an arctic owl recently bereaved of his mate experiences a restless desire to travel which is only assuaged when he encounters a mateless female. In “The Little Homeless One,” a snowshoe rabbit, abandoned when his mother nurses a new litter, learns through observation and experience how to preserve his life from cunning predators and pass on his superior physical traits to his young. In *Kings in Exile*, animals removed from the wild soon after birth experience a relentless desire for freedom which creates a psychological kinship with man, and often results in their regaining freedom.

The values celebrated in these (m)animal “biographies” are predictable: independence, physical superiority, the ability to learn and adapt, superior cunning, honesty, trust, the ability to cooperate toward material ends. “The Little Homeless One” survives an attack on his abandoned siblings because he is independent enough to leave the nest; the “King of the Mamozekel” is admirable because of his physical size and ability to defeat rival males. Both survive because they learn from experience, the “King” from his encounter with bears, the “homeless one” from his observation of predators who stalk the rabbit runs. Blue Fox, the “Master of Supply” (in *Vagrants*) prevails over his enemies because he shows prudence, “wise forethought,” and “discretion,” by burying the fruits of his summer hunting in “cold storage” next to the permafrost to be eaten in winter; this animal expression of the Protestant work ethic has also learned to organize, calling on the aid of his fellow foxes to drive away marauders.

The realist technique of closure formally resolves the issues of the protagonists’ lives, whether structured to reinforce a positive teleology of progressive evolution or to shock the reader into recognizing the

impartiality of “science.” The protagonists of Roberts’s “anecdotes of observation” sometimes die meaningless deaths, dictated by random fate or undeserved bad luck: in these stories, such as “When Twilight Falls on the Stump Lots” (in *Kindred*), the strength of animal character and the persistence of animal endurance are irrelevant to the final disposition of things, and the reader’s identification with the animal characters results in a sense of the irrelevance of spiritual values to the workings of “natural law.” But the heroes of “animal biographies” often die the “good deaths” dictated by the genre. When the snowshoe rabbit makes himself a target for predators by thumping a warning to other rabbits, “The Homeless One, as truly as many a hero of history and song, die[s] for the safety of his tribe.”³¹ In both, “natural law” is triumphant, for despite the death of the individual, “The Homeless One” continues his line through his (numerous) offspring.

Following the conventions of biography, only outstanding *male* animals achieve the simple personality which characterizes the animal biographies. In these stories the linguistic practice of referring to animals using generic male pronouns has the effect of producing a natural world in which the vast majority of animals are gendered male. A survey of the stories published throughout Roberts’s career and posthumously reveals that the male is the norm; female animals appear only in the context of their reproductive functions, as “mate” or mother of the protagonist, actors in the struggle for existence only when procuring food for their (male) young. Animals who initially appear in the text as “it” (usually insects, such as the giant water-beetle in “In a Summer Pool”) become “he” when credited with voluntary action, instinct, or emotion.³² Individual animals designated by a generic species name, such as “Red Fox,” “Blue Fox,” “The Little Homeless One,” are always male; exemplars of the best of their breed, “King of the Mamozekel” or “Lord of the Air,” or the captive animals in *Kings in Exile*, are always male. Realist technique in fiction depends upon the creation of such “typical” characters which, rather than representing the average or ordinary specimen, join together a myriad of qualities which were considered desirable: in scientific circles at the turn of the century, the concept of the “typical” animal

specimen included not only extraordinary physique, physical perfection, and virtuous character, but – definitively – maleness.³³ The effect whereby this “generic male” becomes simply male is well known: Casey Miller and Kate Swift, in *Words and Women*, recount the way that the generic “he” used to designate animals creates a presumption that “the male is the norm, and the assumption that all animals are male unless they are known to be female.”³⁴

Such (m)animals are not neutrally designated male as a matter of grammatical convenience; in Roberts’s stories male animals display many of the characteristics typically associated with human masculinity at the turn of the century. Like the television programs on natural history, museum dioramas, and Disney movies which they spawned, these stories reify gender difference as the primary category of human experience by projecting it onto the natural world: “Here in the animal kingdom, a natural world of male dominance and aggression is revealed. Here are males defending their property (territory or wives). Here are females selecting their mates as ‘good’ parents, either for their genetic endowments or their ability to provide.”³⁵ Roberts’s male animals achieve an independence marked by love of adventure, superior mental skills, competitiveness, instinctive love of hunting, and virility.³⁶ In contrast, female animals are motivated primarily by mother-love;³⁷ the occasional unmated female characteristically displays simple cruelty and bloodlust and represents an uncontrollable, immoral wildness which demands human control.³⁸ Male animals are the agents of sexual desire in the stories: while cow moose sometimes feel “jealousy” at the idea of a female rival, male moose are driven into “an insurrection of madness, and suspense, and sweetness,” owls into migrations, and ganders enticed to flee captivity by sexual desire.³⁹ In an almost parodic representation of the rabbit’s legendary potency, “The Little Homeless One” is offered numerous opportunities to mate, as female rabbits coyly lead him into the bushes, flashing their haunches enticingly: “a sleek young doe met him in the runway, and waved long ears of admiration at his comely stature and length of limb. He stopped to touch noses and exchange compliments with her. Coyly she hopped away, leading him into a cool,

green-shadowed covert of sumach scrub.”⁴⁰ He spends his days “hopping lazily after a pair of does who were merely pretending, by way of sport, to evade him.”⁴¹

Roberts’s depiction of the female animal’s role in reproduction is particularly inflected with contemporary debates about the nature of women. Progressive thinkers in the United States argued that species evolution demanded that women should actively choose their own husbands, offering as evidence numerous animals species in which the female is dominant. Charlotte Perkins Gilman believed that men, by valuing small, weak, and frail “feminine” women as sexual partners, were unnaturally retarding the evolution of humankind, and with sociologist Lester Frank Ward she argued that women, as guardians of the species, were more competent to choose the fathers of their children than men were to choose the mothers.⁴² “King of the Mamozekel” depicts a cow moose who, while indifferently awaiting the outcome of a purely male battle in which she is the prize, yet has some concern in the affair beyond passive acquiescence: “But as for the cow, she moved up from the waterside and looked on with a fine impartiality. What concerned her was chiefly that none but the bravest and the strongest should be her mate – a question which only fighting could determine. Her favour would go with victory.”⁴³ Motivated by mother-love, she awaits the opportunity to become the mate of the most physically aggressive and strong male moose, a fit father for her children. The story intervenes in a debate about women by representing feminine animals who contradictorily exercise choice by remaining passive. “The Little Homeless One,” in a popular distortion of Darwinian evolution, seems to assert that advantageous genetic traits can only be passed from male parent to offspring, and that the female has little role in the improvement of the species. The male rabbit is “singled out, apparently, for the special favour of the Unseen Powers of the Wilderness ... to the end that he should grow up a peculiarly fine, vigorous, and prepotent specimen of his race, and reproduce himself abundantly, to the advantage, not only of the whole tribe of snowshoe rabbits, but all of the hunting beasts and birds of the wilderness, who chiefly depended upon that prolific and defenceless tribe for their prey.”⁴⁴

Mothers are represented as important in the nurture of their offspring, but random (in the case of the “Homeless One,” exceedingly random) and biologically unimportant factors in their nature.

Roberts emphasizes in “The Animal Story” the thematic and cultural importance of a mutual recognition of kinship between human and animal, ritualized as a look “deep into the eyes of certain of the four-footed kindred.”⁴⁵ This encounter is the theme of “stories of adventure with beasts,” another of Roberts’s three categories of animal stories.⁴⁶ In “The Moonlight Trails,” the recurring character called simply “the boy” shares with predatory animals the excitement of hunting and the kill: “His heart leapt, his eyes flamed, and he sprang forward, with a little cry, as a young beast might in sighting its first quarry.”⁴⁷ Everywhere in Roberts’s stories “man” is figured as a predator at the top of the food chain, sharing with animals the desire to hunt and needing meat to maintain physical health (see “Wild Motherhood” and “Savory Meats” in *The Kindred of the Wild*, and *The Heart of the Ancient Wood*). Yet man also shares with animals more complex identifications: “the boy” also identifies with his victim, and in “Moonlight Trails” he vows never to snare rabbits again after he witnesses the desecration of his snare by foxes. The stories in *Kings in Exile* represent exchanges and partnerships between “man” and wild animal, in which an identification based on the temporary emasculation represented by civilized life is played out between captive zoo or circus animals and their “masters.” In “Last Bull,” a relic of the dying race of American bison is named by “two grim old sachems of the Dacotahs” in symbolic recognition of their likeness; in “The Sun-Gazer,” Horner feels such strong identification with a caged eagle that he purchases it in order to set it free: “Horner could almost have cried, from pity and homesick sympathy.”⁴⁸ Stories of loyalty and honesty in relationships between human and animal, such as “Gray Master,” “Lord of the Flaming Hoops,” and “Lone Wolf,” emphasize the homosocial culture in which these stories originate. The experience of identification, of seeing “a something, before unrecognised, that answered to our inner and intellectual, if not spiritual selves” in the lives and personalities of animals, is represented as an exchange between male humans and male animals only.⁴⁹

Like the predators celebrated in Roberts's stories as intelligent and moral adversaries, "man" is also a "king," "lord," and "master" of the natural world. In "The Vagrants of the Barren," the woodsman hero becomes identified with his animal rivals in a struggle for existence: "His anger rose as he realized he was at bay. The indomitable man-spirit awoke with the anger. Sitting up suddenly, over the edge of the trench his deep eyes looked out over the shadowy spaces of the night with challenge and defiance. Against whatever odds, he declared to himself, he was master."⁵⁰ The language here associates the protagonist's animal defensiveness ("he was at bay") with his "indomitable man-spirit." The two become further identified as the story progresses, with the woodsman recognizing that "No animal but man himself could hunt" in the blizzard he confronts, and later choosing to spare the lives of a helpless caribou herd, founded in the snow: "through contact there in the savage darkness, a sympathy passed between the man and the beast. He could not help it. The poor beasts and he were in the same predicament, together holding the battlements of life against the blind and brutal madness of storm."⁵¹ While the story is structured to ironically challenge the protagonist's "obstinate pride in his superiority to the other creatures of the wilderness" by requiring the protagonist to descend to animality, it in fact "strikes the chord of man's innate superiority," demonstrating it to consist in both the physical strength and cunning which ensure survival, and the moral ability to discern kinship and thus spare lives.⁵²

The moment of mutual recognition and identification in these stories reifies the subjectivity of reader and animal and situates that subjectivity within a network of ideological assumptions. The first of these is a mutual recognition of shared conditions of life: both human and animal are products of "natural laws," most especially the struggle for existence, and their lives are determined by material conditions. The second, and intertwined, assumption, is their mutual rebellion against these conditions of life and their expression of the will to triumph in the struggle for existence by killing, and in the achievement of a free, independent life. "Man" is here assumed to be a predator like others, participating in an implicit morality in which "good" predators learn to live peacefully

among themselves through cooperation and kill only to survive (or to improve the breed through competition), and “bad” predators are loners, killing for sport and mad with “blood-lust.” This morality is not guaranteed by supernatural powers, but implied by the “laws” of evolution and natural selection, which, as suggested in Roberts’s sonnet, “In the Wide Awe and Wisdom of the Night,” may be the utterances of God, but need not be.

“If representation is not to be conceived as a mirror held up to nature but as a signifying practice, then it and not nature is responsible for its statements, and political questions can be addressed to it.”⁵³ By masquerading as “science,” Roberts’s animal stories do the work of politics, creating and maintaining a hierarchical power structure which is dominated by humans, naturalizing the masculine as norm and asserting unified autonomous human personality as a universal phenomenon. By effacing their status as ideological text and masquerading as “concrete reality,” the stories “[do] the work of ideology,” obscuring the arbitrary relationship between word and thing, discourse and subjectivity.⁵⁴ The stories occupy a place in the critical narrative of the development of realism in Canadian fiction, not by allowing “the thing represented” to “appear in a moment of pure identity,” but by constructing the reader as subject, “naturally” predatory, material, and male.⁵⁵

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NOTES

- 1 Republished with permission from *Studies in Canadian Literature* 21, no. 1 (1996): 1–16.
- 2 See Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), 72–75, for a discussion of the ways these stories are considered to be a reply to the anthropomorphic stories of British writers.
- 3 See John Lennox, “Roberts, Realism, and the Animal Story,” *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 2, no. 3 (1973): 121–23, and Terry Whalen, “Charles G. D. Roberts and His Works,” in *Canadian Writers and their Works (Fiction Series)*, ed. Robert Lecker, Jack David, and Ellen Quigley (Toronto: ECW Press, 1989), 156–216, for example.
- 4 Colin MacCabe, “Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses,” in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), 136.
- 5 Whalen, “Charles G. D. Roberts,” 172.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 168.
- 7 Lennox, “Roberts, Realism, and the Animal Story,” 121.
- 8 Joseph Gold, “The Precious Speck of Life,” *Canadian Literature* 26 (autumn 1965): 23.
- 9 See, for example, Martin Ware, Introduction to *The Vagrants of the Barren and Other Stories*, by Charles G. D. Roberts (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1992), xv.
- 10 *Ibid.*, xv.
- 11 Charles G. D. Roberts, *The Kindred of the Wild* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1902), 21.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 24. Robert H. MacDonald (“The Revolt against Instinct: The Animal Stories of Seton and Roberts,” *Canadian Literature* 84 [spring 1980]: 18–29) and Thomas R. Dunlap (“The old kinship of Earth’: Science, Man and Nature in the Animal Stories of Charles G. D. Roberts,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 22, no. 1 [1987]: 104–20) disagree as to the relative weight Roberts placed on the two terms in the binary construction of reason and instinct; I’m not convinced that Roberts is consistent in this regard.
- 16 Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 1980), 42.
- 17 Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 54.
- 18 See Robert H. MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement 1890–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) and *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Haraway, *Primate Visions*, esp. chap. 3; also Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990).
- 19 Roberts, *Kindred of the Wild*, 29.
- 20 There is a direct analogy between this discourse and the more overtly political “colonialist discourse” discussed by Stephen Slemon, which works “to produce and naturalise the hierarchical power structures of the imperial enterprise, and to mobilise those power structures in the management of both colonial and neo-colonial cross-cultural relationships” (qtd. in Linda Hutcheon, “Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological,” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 51–52 [winter

- 1993–spring 1994]: 150 [and rpt. this volume]).
- 21 Roberts, *Kindred of the Wild*, 29.
- 22 Qtd. in Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: ARK, 1985), 58.
- 23 See Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 14–33.
- 24 Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 54.
- 25 Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 58.
- 26 Belsey, *Critical Practice*, 73.
- 27 Ware, Introduction, xxi.
- 28 Charles G. D. Roberts, *The Vagrants of the Barren and Other Stories*, ed. Martin Ware (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1992), 41.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 32 Charles G. D. Roberts, *The Lure of the Wild*, ed. John Coldwell Adams (Ottawa: Borealis, 1980), 33–34.
- 33 Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 41.
- 34 Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *Words and Women: New Language in New Times* (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1977), 28.
- 35 Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (London: Granada, 1984), 212.
- 36 MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, *passim*.
- 37 Primarily, but not exclusively. In “The Little Homeless One,” the litter is abandoned by its mother in her struggle for survival.
- 38 Roberts, *Kindred of the Wild*, 233. Both sexes of the weasel, wolverine, and fisher are also represented as bloodthirsty animals who enjoy killing for its own sake (“Keepers of the Nest,” in *Vagrants of the Barren*, and “The Den of the Otter,” in *Lure of the Wild*) but in neither case is human intervention required.
- 39 Roberts, *Kindred of the Wild*, 185.
- 40 Roberts, *Vagrants of the Barren*, 40.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 41. Clearly, in the animal world of these stories, “no” means “chase me.” This fantasy projection of sexual power is all the more offensive in the biographical context of Roberts’s self-created image as a rogue and a successful ladies’ man.
- 42 See Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, ed. Ann J. Lane (New York: Pantheon, 1979).
- 43 Roberts, *Kindred of the Wild*, 315.
- 44 Roberts, *Vagrants of the Barren*, 39.
- 45 Roberts, *Kindred of the Wild*, 23. This moment became a conventional element of museum dioramas by the 1920s, which contained “at least one animal that catches the viewer’s gaze and holds it in communion.” Realistic technique creates the illusion that “There is no impediment to this vision, no mediation” between the animal and man, for “Only then could the hygiene of nature cure the sick vision of civilized man” (Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 30).
- 46 Roberts, *Kindred of the Wild*, 21.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 168.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 23–24.
- 50 Roberts, *Vagrants of the Barren*, 150.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 157.
- 52 Janice Kulyk Keefer, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 90.
- 53 Bruce Robbins, *The Servant’s Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 7.
- 54 Belsey, *Critical Practice*, 72.
- 55 MacCabe, “Realism and the Cinema,” 136.

The “I” in Beaver:
Sympathetic Identification and
Self-Representation in Grey Owl’s
Pilgrims of the Wild (2007)

*Carrie Dawson*¹

In her 1972 book *Survival*, Margaret Atwood compares American animal stories with Canadian animal stories and argues that the former are about killing animals while the latter are about “animals being killed, as felt emotionally from inside the fur and feathers.”² James Polk made a similar argument in the same year, suggesting that the difference between the two national traditions is that the former is concerned with “the lives of the hunters” and the latter with “the lives of the hunted.” More specifically, Polk cites Ernest Thompson Seton’s *The Biography of a Grizzly* as an example of a Canadian animal story and proposes that Seton’s “sympathetic identification” with his subject is such that readers “have no choice but to identify with his persecuted bears.”³ In an attempt to rejuvenate a critical discussion about self-representation in semi-autobiographical Canadian animal stories, this analysis extends and interrogates

the idea of sympathetic identification. But rather than arguing, like Polk and Atwood, that sympathetic identification with persecuted animals is an expression of the Canadian preoccupation with victimhood, I mean to consider the behaviours that sympathetic identification produces and the interests that it serves. The second aim of this analysis is to address a concern which Bill Plumstead voiced in a recent letter to the editors of *Maclean's* magazine. Writing in response to an article concerned with the depiction of Grey Owl in Richard Attenborough's eponymously named movie, Plumstead points out that "the Canadian literary establishment" has appraised the nature writer's identity claims while neglecting his writing because a "fraud writing about beavers is apparently an embarrassment to the custodians of CanLit."⁴ Because I am sympathetic to Plumstead's argument that literary criticism "is surely an appraisal of texts, not personalities,"⁵ I accept his letter as a challenge and, through an analysis of the relationship between sympathetic identification and cross-cultural identification in Grey Owl's *Pilgrims of the Wild* (1935), I will explore one way in which those of us inclined to identify as "custodians of CanLit" might usefully approach the question of how Canadian literary criticism has negotiated – and failed to negotiate – the relationship between and among human and non-human cultures.

THE "I" IN SYMPATHY

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith defines sympathy as an imaginative act in which we become "in some measure the same person" as the object of our sympathy.⁶ Like Smith, the psychologist Robert Katz foregrounds ideas of transformation and coalescence in his more recent definition of sympathy as an "as-if behaviour."⁷ But unlike Smith, Katz emphasizes that sympathy involves a degree of self–other differentiation when he writes: "Abandoning our own self, we *seem to* become fused with and absorbed in the inner experience of the other person."⁸ According to Katz, sympathy involves an *illusion* of oneness rather than a fusion of self and Other because the self-abandon experi-

enced by the sympathizing subject stops short of total self-abnegation. That said, sympathy is nevertheless *experienced* as a sort of fusion of self and Other because the “as-if” identification with another being temporarily obscures the self–Other differentiation on which the experience of sympathetic identification is predicated.

Although Katz addresses the sympathy that exists between two people, his argument can usefully be applied to the sympathy expressed by authors who identify with their animal subjects. Specifically, Katz’s emphasis on the temporary self-forgetfulness of sympathy has important ramifications for the study of nature writing and the subgenre of animal stories, insofar as those who write about the natural world typically downplay their own self-consciousness in an effort to communicate the sympathy and wonder with which they view their surroundings.⁹ Because the frequently “self-forgetful” narrators of animal stories tend to communicate their sympathy for the animals about which they write by emphasizing a similarity or kinship between themselves and their subjects, Katz’s argument about the assumption of oneness is also of interest. At the very least, it urges us to examine the ways in which oneness gets assumed in animal stories – to ask, “How is the narrator’s self-transformation structured?” and “What are its implications?”

Following Thoreau’s description of nature writing as a literature which urges the natural world to “flower in a truth” through “direct intercourse and sympathy,”¹⁰ numerous ecocritics have examined the rhetoric of sympathy in nature writing. Relatively few, however, have considered the relationship between sympathetic identification and cross-cultural identification. In the recent history of nature writing in Canada, the need to do so has been made clear on at least three occasions. First, in 1903 the highly regarded American naturalist John Burroughs published an article, “Real and Sham Natural History,” in which he argued that claims made by Ernest Thompson Seton in *Wild Animals I Have Known* were so outlandish that the book should have been called “*Wild Animals I Alone Have Known*.”¹¹ Thirty-five years later, a small Ontario newspaper published an article alleging that Grey Owl, the best-selling author of stories about the Canadian wilderness, had misrepresented himself as

a Native American. Moreover, in 1996 *Saturday Night* ran an article by John Goddard in which he argued that the accounts of Inuit culture in Farley Mowat's *People of the Deer* are based on a series of wholly fictitious visits to Inuit camps.

Although Mowat likely romanticized his relationships with Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic, and Seton identified with Native American cultures to the extent that he often referred to himself as "Black Wolf," it is Grey Owl's identification *as* a Native American that makes him the obvious candidate for a discussion of the relationship between sympathetic identification and self-representation in Canadian animal stories. Thus, in an attempt to determine how the rhetoric of sympathy functions as a vehicle for self-transformation in Canadian animal stories, I will consider Grey Owl's account of his conversion from trapping to animal conservation in his best-selling book *Pilgrims of the Wild*.

THE "I" IN BEAVER

Grey Owl was born Archibald Stansfeld Belaney in 1888 in Sussex, England. In 1906 he left England and moved to Canada, where he worked as a trapper and a guide. While living in the Temagami district of Ontario and later, while serving with the Canadian Armed Forces in France during World War I, Grey Owl circulated false stories about his upbringing in the American south-west as the child of an Apache woman and a Scotsman employed by the Buffalo Bill Show. After returning to Canada, Grey Owl gave up trapping and, at the suggestion of his third wife, Anahareo, he directed his energies toward protecting the beaver. As Grey Owl, he also embarked on a career as a writer and a public speaker. His success was such that, in a bid to increase the profile of the Canadian National Parks, Parks Canada employed him as the resident conservationist in Saskatchewan's Prince Albert National Park and installed him in a tailor-made cabin called "Beaver Lodge," where he remained until his death in April 1938. Although numerous people

suspected that Grey Owl's claims to Native ancestry were exaggerated if not entirely false, their suspicions were not given a public voice until the day after his death, when the *North Bay Nugget* published an article alleging that his identity claims were false. In the following weeks papers all over Canada and England carried the news that he whom Lloyd Roberts had dubbed "the first Indian that really looked like an Indian" was an Englishman.¹²

In his 1973 biography of Grey Owl, Lovat Dickson – who was Grey Owl's publisher and dedicated promoter – described his subject's effect on the Canadian public this way: "This voice from the forests momentarily releases us from some spell. In contrast with Hitler's screaming, ranting voice, and the remorseless clang of modern technology, Grey Owl's words evoked an unforgettable charm, lighting in our minds the vision of a cool, quiet place, where men and animals lived in love and trust together."¹³ On the one hand, Dickson, who was raised in Canada, suggests that the huge attraction that Grey Owl had for the Canadian public can be explained by the resurgence of primitivism in the years leading up to World War II. While recognizing that Grey Owl was an international rather than an exclusively national phenomenon, Dickson, on the other hand, indicates that Grey Owl appealed to Canadians because he provided them (us) with a means of proving the rule of racial difference while attesting to the specificity of Canadian culture. That is, Grey Owl evoked a capitulation to an idealized image of Native difference. He rewarded an audience desirous of a peaceable kingdom by offering them an image of themselves as the benevolent subjects of a beneficent nation-state wherein the appreciation of indigenous culture was such that all Canadians could live "in love and trust together."

Sixty-five years later, our concerns about the destruction of our natural environment and the extinction of an alarming number of non-human species have led an ever-increasing number of people to turn to aboriginal cultures for alternative ways of imagining the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Given the extent to which our anxieties about the welfare of the natural environment have been translated into or expressed as renewed appetite for the platitudes

of romantic primitivism (witness the present popularity of T-shirts, tattoos and tourist brochures that employ indigenous iconography), it is not surprising that Grey Owl has recently been resurrected as something of a popular hero. Since 1990 he has been the subject of two biographies, one long poem, numerous essays, and a major – albeit unsuccessful – Hollywood film.¹⁴ In contrast with Grey Owl's early biographers, recent critics are less inclined to naturalize or otherwise rationalize his claims to Native American ancestry, but they do partake of an established consensus that his achievements as a conservationist are ultimately more important than his identity claims. For example, in her 1991 essay "The Grey Owl Syndrome," Margaret Atwood felt compelled to apologize for "drop[ping] the unfortunate Grey Owl" into contemporary debates about identity, authenticity, and aboriginality.¹⁵ While I am of the opinion that Grey Owl's longstanding misrepresentation of himself as a Native American is enough to warrant "drop[ping]" him into debates about identity and aboriginality, I share Atwood's reluctance to emphasize his identity claims at the expense of his very successful attempts to popularize the Canadian wilderness. But because Grey Owl's representation of himself is inextricable from his representation of the wilderness, I think that we need to consider how the two projects are related.

Pilgrims of the Wild is a semi-autobiographical account of Grey Owl's conversion from trapper to conservationist and caretaker of beaver. It is largely concerned with the relationship that he and Anahareo had with the beavers who shared their home. Although Grey Owl condenses some major events in his life and omits others,¹⁶ the text is, for the most part, a faithful record of Grey Owl's experiences between 1927 and 1934. For the most part, Grey Owl enlists standard autobiographical techniques and refers to himself using the first person, thus narrowing the distance between author and narrator. However, in the first pages of the Preface, Grey Owl maintains a distance between himself and his narrator by using the third person. The Preface begins:

This is primarily an animal story; it is also the story of two people, and their struggle to emerge from the chaos into

which the failure of the fur trade, and the breaking down of the old proprietary system of hunting grounds plunged the Indian people, and not a few whites, during the last two decades.¹⁷

A few lines later these two people are further described as “a man and a woman [... who] broke loose from their surroundings taking with them all that was left to them of the once vast heritage of their people, their equipment and two small animals as pets.”¹⁸ A few pages later Grey Owl switches to first-person narration and identifies the “man” and “woman” as himself and Anahareo, who is, he emphasizes, of Mohawk descent. But before doing so, he intimates that “the vast heritage” of which he speaks is Native ancestry. He does not say so explicitly, but he does caution the reader that “it is necessary to remember that though [this] is not an altogether Indian story, it has an Indian background.”¹⁹ Grey Owl subsequently explains that the ambiguous phrase “Indian background” signifies an “attitude towards all nature.”²⁰ He defines that “attitude” by quoting a passage from John Gifford’s “Story of the Seminole War” in which Gifford represents the indigenous people as “part of nature.”²¹ After expressing his support for Gifford’s argument, Grey Owl extends that argument to include “those of other races who have resided for many years in the wilderness.”²² The effect of this very inclusive and experientially oriented definition of indigeneity, one which figures indigenous intimacy with nature as a form of training rather than a culturally specific mode of spirituality, is that it allows Grey Owl to establish that he is indigenous without making any genealogical claims.

After establishing his “Indian background,” Grey Owl turns his attention to the animal kingdom and attempts to demonstrate the similarly unique nature of his kinship with his animal subjects. First of all, Grey Owl carefully differentiates himself from authors who “ascribe human attributes to animals”²³ and he argues that if the “qualities” of the animals in *Pilgrims* “are found to closely approximate some of our own, it is because they have, unknown to us, always possessed them, and the fault lies in our not having discovered sooner that these characteristics

were not after all exclusively human.”²⁴ While declarations of kinship are, of course, standard fare in nature writing, Grey Owl’s declarations of interspecies commonality are nevertheless intriguing in light of his subsequent suggestion that the recognition of kinship is reciprocated by the beaver. Specifically, Grey Owl, who came to be known as the “beaver man,”²⁵ suggests that the beavers attribute animal characteristics to Anahareo and himself. Referring to Jelly Roll – the beaver who became famous in her own right as the star of five films produced by the Canadian Parks Board – Grey Owl says at various points in the narrative: “she took me as much for granted as if I had also been a beaver”; “[she] gave me a response of which I had not thought an animal capable”; and “[she] seem[ed] to look on me as a contemporary, accepting me as an equal and no more.”²⁶ By suggesting that it is the beaver and not the writer who is transformed by the feeling of sympathy, Grey Owl is able to detract attention from his efforts to create and maintain an illusion of oneness between himself and his subjects. At the same time, he is able to put the onus for “self-forgetful” behaviour on the animals.

If we recall Atwood’s and Polk’s arguments that Canadian writers of animal stories express a sympathetic identification with their subjects, and Robert Katz’s definition of sympathy as an “as-if behaviour” which involves an illusion of oneness, it is perhaps not altogether surprising that Grey Owl’s attempt to communicate his sympathy for the beaver involves identifying *as* a beaver: having stated his desire to avoid employing “coldly formal references to the writer himself in the third person,” Grey Owl declares his determination to include “a few good healthy unequivocating ‘I’s’ standing up honestly on their own hind legs.”²⁷ Given that Grey Owl frequently comments on the beavers’ predilection for standing on their hind legs and chattering, it can be inferred that he is identifying his narrator with or as a beaver. This is also true of a subsequent episode in which he accompanies his description of returning to his cabin to find that his “quarters have been invaded” with a drawing of an open-mouthed beaver who stands in the doorway of a cabin above a caption that reads, “My quarters have been invaded.”²⁸ Given the placement of the caption, the repetition of its contents, and the preceding

representation of the first-person narrator as four-legged, the caption can be simultaneously attributed to the beaver, the narrator, and the narrator-as-beaver.

Though it might be argued that Grey Owl's metaphoric representation of a four-legged narrator is somewhat unusual, there is, of course, nothing unusual about the extensive use of metaphors to figure the natural world. As James Olney points out, there is also nothing uncommon about the use of metaphors to figure the self in autobiography. As Olney elaborates,

A metaphor, then, [is that] through which we stamp our own image on the face of nature, [it] allows us to connect the known of ourselves to the unknown of the world, and, making available new relational patterns, it simultaneously organizes the self into a new and richer entity; so that the old known self is joined to and transformed into the new, the heretofore unknown, self.²⁹

Not only does Grey Owl's metaphor "stamp [his] own image on the face of nature," it also takes the narrator's "sympathetic identification" with his subject to its logical conclusion: with the image of a four-legged narrator, Grey Owl, himself, is "transformed" into "a new and richer entity" who is, as the title suggests, "of the wild."

McGinnis and McGinty were the names of the first pair of beaver kits that Grey Owl and Anahareo raised. A year later the kits went missing and the couple adopted two more beavers who came to be known as Jelly Roll and Rawhide. Despite Grey Owl's promise not to "draw comparisons between man and beast, save in a few instances which are too remarkable to be overlooked,"³⁰ he persistently refers to the beavers with metaphors that liken them to humans. For example, he calls them "Beaver People," "Little Indians," "Immigrants," and "small ambassadors."³¹ Jelly Roll is typically referred to as the "Queen" and, after Rawhide loses a piece of his scalp in an accident, Grey Owl takes to calling him "the Little Iroquois."³² In an article entitled "The Beaver as Native and as

Colonist,” Gordon Sayre offers one explanation for the wide-ranging and unlikely combination of epithets employed by Grey Owl. Addressing the representation of beavers in Canada between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, Sayre explains that the beaver’s “double status – as a natural and social marvel when alive, and as a valuable commodity when dead – caused representations of the beaver to become overdetermined with strong and contradictory ascriptions.”³³ By the latter part of the nineteenth century, one of the most common of these ascriptions involved the application of “vanishing Indian” and related “Noble Savage” tropes to the endangered beaver.³⁴ Like representations of the Noble Savage, idealized portrayals of the beaver were intended to “compensate for or justify its imminent demise.”³⁵ However, the tropes functioned differently in at least one important way: the rhetoric of Noble Savagery underscored *differences* between indigenous and colonial culture, while the figurative construction of the “Noble Beaver” underscored *likenesses* between the animal’s habits and early colonial culture in Canada.³⁶ Eighteenth-century French travel writers like Pierre Charlevoix and Nicolas Denys used the beaver to “elaborate a vision of colonial society with all the hierarchy and social control of France.”³⁷

Like Charlevoix and Denys, Grey Owl used the beaver to articulate a vision of an ideal society. However, Grey Owl’s “vision” differed from that of Charlevoix and Denys in at least two ways. First, and most importantly, Grey Owl’s ideal society was predicated on a respect for animal rights. Secondly, while Charlevoix and Denys depended on a dichotomized representation of beavers and Natives to articulate their vision, Grey Owl’s idealized vision of the “wilderness” assumed an essential continuity between beavers and Native peoples. By sympathetically identifying with both, Grey Owl was able to naturalize his production of himself as Native: beavers, wrote Grey Owl, “were of the Wild as were we” and “we,” he added, “are Indian.”³⁸

Although Grey Owl certainly valued indigenous cultures as idealized images of life close to nature, he also valued them for their ability to interpret, use, and express the natural environment. This is evident in *The Men of the Last Frontier*, where he argues that “[Indians] have

catalogued and docketed every possible combination of shape, sound, and colour possible in their surroundings,” so “a disarrangement in the set of leaves; the frayed edge of a newly broken stick, speak loud to the Indian’s eye.”³⁹ To the extent that this excerpt demonstrates Grey Owl’s respect for the “the Indian” as animist and archivist, it also suggests that his use of a metamorphizing narrator in *Pilgrims* constitutes an allusion to an aboriginal tradition of storytelling in which changes between animals and humans occur frequently and are integral to the story. The problem is, however, that even as Grey Owl underscores the virtues of an indigenous narrative tradition given to interpreting and expressing an environmental consciousness, he unwittingly demonstrates his distance from such a tradition by representing his relation with the non-human realm as largely a solitary affair: despite the narrating “I” who “stand[s] up earnestly on [his] own hind legs” in order to produce a narrator that is very much at home in the wilderness, images of isolation and alienation persist throughout *Pilgrims*. In the last pages of the book, Grey Owl underscores the absence of a community that shares his ecological consciousness. He declares, for example, that “the pilgrimage is over,”⁴⁰ but it is evident that his “pilgrimage,” unlike most, has not ended with a homecoming. The beavers are hibernating and, Anahareo, unable to put up with Grey Owl’s solitary lifestyle, has left. Thus the writer pictures himself alone in the cabin which Parks Canada constructed as an exact replica of one that he had shared with Anahareo and the beavers. “Atavistic?” he asks. “Perhaps it is, but good has come of it.”⁴¹ Though good certainly did come of Grey Owl’s very successful attempt to found a beaver colony, his effort to represent that process exhibits a weakness common to the genre that Atwood calls “realistic animal stories.”⁴² In the Introduction to *Family of Earth and Sky*, John Elder and Hertha Wong identify that weakness very elegantly by explaining that these narratives have helped to heal “the rift between the ‘two cultures’ of science and literature, ... [but that] they have also projected the voices of solitary – and sometimes alienated – individuals rather more often than they have emphasized how the human *community* might be seen as part of nature.”⁴³ Following Wong, Elder, and Robert Harrison – who points

out that human beings, unlike other species, “live not in nature but in relation to nature”⁴⁴ – we might conclude that the problem with some Canadian animal stories is that the sympathetic identification which produces an “I” who lives in nature has failed to produce a “we” who live “in relation” to nature.

THE “I” IN NATURE

Because Grey Owl “live[d] in relation to nature,” he faced the problem of how to represent himself “in nature” in writing. And because the self-conscious act of writing about nature is at odds with the self-forgetful wonder with which the nature writer approaches his subject, he had to enlist a number of strategies to get the writing out of nature writing. Thus Grey Owl represents himself as a very unlikely author whose fingers are “stiffened a little by the paddle and the pull of a loaded toboggan” and are consequently “ill suited” to what he calls the “writing game.”⁴⁵ He then elaborates on his supposed lack of experience with the English language by casting aspersions on the “factory-made English” that he claims to have very recently retrieved from the “cold storage where it had languished for the better part of three decades.”⁴⁶ As Donald Smith notes, Grey Owl’s characterization of himself as someone who has only recently acquired literacy belies his position as the top student in English at Hastings Grammar School in Sussex, England.⁴⁷ More importantly, it also belies the self-consciousness with which he crafted his sentences so as to appear like “factory-made English.”⁴⁸

In the latter part of *Pilgrims of the Wild*, Grey Owl reminisces about the process of writing his earlier book, *The Men of the Last Frontier*. He says that he had “no idea how to put a book together” when he embarked on that project. He writes: “I bethought me of the ‘Writing System’ that Anahareo had brought away from her home thinking they were cookery books. I dug them out of the oblivion in which they had so long lain forgotten and soon became deeply absorbed in matters of ‘Setting,’ ‘Dialogue,’ ‘Point of View,’ ‘Unity of Impression,’ and ‘Style.’”⁴⁹ The result,

says Grey Owl, is that his “stories seemed to have the peculiar faculty of writing themselves, quite against any previous plans [he] made for them.”⁵⁰ With this characterization of his stories as self-writing, Grey Owl effectively disavows self-consciousness, strategy, and agency. By disavowing self-consciousness, he also renounces the tension that is inherent in the genre of nature writing – namely, the tension between the transcendental wonder which nature evokes and the self-consciousness involved in representing that wonder. Having done so, he is able to claim that he “never felt so close to [Nature]” as he did when writing about it.⁵¹

Like Grey Owl, the American nature writer Annie Dillard proposes that the process of writing can be performed in obliviousness to the writing subject. In *The Writing Life*, a collection of reflections on writing, Dillard instructs her readers that “process is nothing; erase your tracks.”⁵² Because I have devoted a considerable part of this essay to exploring the various ways in which Grey Owl erases his “tracks,” I should add that there are relatively few points in the text where he does so by making direct claims to indigenous ancestry. Declarations like the aforementioned “for we are Indian” are rare.⁵³ More frequent are slightly ambiguous references to the author’s tendency temporarily to “rever[t] to the savagery of forgotten ancestors.”⁵⁴ Likewise, Grey Owl writes that people were kind to “a buckskin clad *sauvage*, and ... a woman of a conquered race.”⁵⁵ As Judith Dudar has noted, the difference between Grey Owl’s characterization of himself and his characterization of Anahareo in this passage is instructive because, rather than including himself among the “conquered race,” Grey Owl employs the more ambiguous “sauvage,” a French word that sounds like “savage” but translates as “wild.”⁵⁶ While Dudar is right to point out that passages of this kind “allow misinterpretation,”⁵⁷ it is also worth noting that the passages which allude to or affirm Grey Owl’s indigeneity are often attributed to others. For example, he writes that “there were not a few who looked askance at [us] passing Indians,”⁵⁸ and he recalls meeting a French-Canadian couple who appear friendly but say little to him because they assume – or so Grey Owl thinks – that he spoke “only Indian.”⁵⁹ By representing himself as he imagines he is seen by others, Grey Owl is able to construct his self-representation

as consensual while also putting the onus for identificatory claims on others.

In addition to the intradiegetic audience who corroborate Grey Owl's identity claims there was, of course, a sizeable extradiegetic audience who did the same thing. In part, they did so because Grey Owl successfully exploited a widespread appetite for nostalgic images of – to borrow a phrase – “imaginary Indians.”⁶⁰ He also exploited an equally widespread willingness to subsume the “Native” under the category of the natural, to assume that indigenous people are “of the wild,” that they are authorities on all aspects of “the wild,” and that they, like “the wild,” are quickly disappearing. In numerous books, magazine articles, films and lectures, Grey Owl exploited these primitivist fantasies in order to sell his own fantasy of a place where “the scars of ancient fires are slowly healing over ... [and] the beaver towns are filling up again.”⁶¹ If we consider that Grey Owl attended over 200 meetings and addressed over 500,000 people in the four months between November 1935 and February 1936,⁶² we can, no doubt, agree that his success was as spectacular as his beaded buckskin get-up. Given this, it strikes me that the best strategy is to exploit his present popularity. Perhaps the thing to do is to use Hollywood's depiction of Grey Owl as an opportunity to consider how aboriginal culture is spectacularized in Canada today. Equally, at a time when his books are being republished, we might consider how his representation of himself as a pilgrim “of the wild” perpetuates an idea of the natural world as an isolated “pristine landscape that we ourselves do not inhabit.”⁶³ And finally, perhaps we might heed the advice of another author of semi-autobiographical animal stories whose own identity claims have recently been subject to scrutiny – namely, Farley Mowat. When the journalist John Goddard questioned Mowat about the veracity of his published accounts of the time he spent in the Canadian Arctic, he is said to have exclaimed, “I never let the facts get in the way of the truth!” and, somewhat less poetically, “Fuck the facts!”⁶⁴ Elsewhere, Mowat has offered a somewhat more subtle explanation for the sorts of inconsistencies identified by Goddard. In the Preface to a catalogue of his papers at McMaster University, Mowat characterizes himself as “a

teller of tales.”⁶⁵ By way of conclusion, I want to suggest that we follow Farley Mowat and Bill Plumstead by paying close attention to the imaginative, rhetorical, and otherwise *literary* dimensions of animal stories. In respect to works by Grey Owl, this involves foregoing sensational accounts of assumed identity, and replacing them with more provocative questions about the relationship between sympathetic identification and strategic self-representation in a genre of writing where the former has been consistently over-determined and the latter has been typically under-emphasized. It seems to me that if we endeavour to think systematically about what Canadian animal stories and Canadian literary criticism have to say to one another, we may well be able to use romantic tales about nature writers living “in nature” to teach us what it is to live ethically and responsibly in “relation to nature.”

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NOTES

- 1 “The ‘I’ in Beaver: Sympathetic Identification and Self-Representation in Grey Owl’s *Pilgrims of the Wild*” originally appeared in *Five Emus to the King of Siam: Environment and Empire*, ed. Helen Tiffin, 113–29. Copyright 2007, Rodopi. Used with permission.
- 2 Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), 74.
- 3 James Polk, “Lives of the Hunted,” *Canadian Literature* 53 (summer 1972): 54, 53.
- 4 Plumstead was responding to Brian D. Johnson’s “Rediscovering Grey Owl,” *Maclean’s* 112, no. 40 (4 Oct. 1999): 52–56.
- 5 Bill Plumstead, Letter, *Maclean’s* 112, no. 42 (18 Oct. 1999): 4.
- 6 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982), 9.
- 7 Robert Katz, qtd. in Thomas J. McCarthy, *Relations of Sympathy: The Writer and the Reader in British Romanticism* (Aldershot, UK: Scolar, 1997), 12.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 12 (my emphasis).
- 9 See, for example, Scott Slovic, who, as part of his analysis of Annie Dillard’s “effacement of authorial identity,” argues that “consciousness of the present self interferes with both mystical vision and artistic creation” (*Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing: Henry Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez* [Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992], 66, 64).
- 10 Henry David Thoreau, “Natural History of Massachusetts,” in *The Natural History Essays*, ed. Robert Sattlemeyer (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1984), 130, 131.
- 11 John Burroughs, “Real and Sham Natural History,” *Atlantic Monthly* 91 (Mar. 1903): 298. See Betty Keller’s account of the “Nature Fakers” debate in chap. 12 of *Black Wolf: The Life of Ernest Thompson Seton* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984). See also Lawrence Buell’s short but engaging discussion of Burroughs’s article in chap. 6 of *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
- 12 Qtd. in Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), 131.
- 13 Lovat Dickson, *Wilderness Man: The Strange Story of Grey Owl* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), 5.
- 14 The biographies alluded to are Donald B. Smith’s *From the Land of the Shadows: The Making of Grey Owl* (Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1990) and Jane Billingham’s *Grey Owl: The Many Faces of Archibald Belaney* (Vancouver: Greystone, 1999). The long poem, which is written in the form of a biography, is Armand Garnet Ruffo’s *Grey Owl: The Mystery of Archibald Belaney* (Regina: Coteau, 1996).
- 15 Margaret Atwood, “The Grey Owl Syndrome,” in *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*, by Margaret Atwood (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 37.
- 16 For example, Grey Owl condenses the time he spent in Saskatchewan’s Prince Albert National Park and Manitoba’s Riding Mountain National Park by referring only to one unnamed national park.
- 17 Grey Owl, *Pilgrims of the Wild* (1935; London: Peter Davies, 1939), xiii.

- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid., xiv.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., xv–xvi.
- 24 Ibid., xvi.
- 25 Billingham, *Grey Owl*, 71.
- 26 Grey Owl, *Pilgrims of the Wild*, 192, 197, 198.
- 27 Ibid., 185.
- 28 Ibid., 273, 272.
- 29 James Olney, *Metaphors of the Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 31–32.
- 30 Grey Owl, *Pilgrims of the Wild*, xv.
- 31 Ibid., 54, 42, 93, 129.
- 32 Ibid., 77. He also calls them “queer diminutive Buddhas” (52) and “little folk from some other planet” (53).
- 33 Gordon Sayre, “The Beaver as Native and as Colonist,” *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue canadienne de littérature comparée* 22, no. 3–4 (Sept.–Dec. 1995): 659.
- 34 Ibid., 660.
- 35 Ibid., 665.
- 36 Sayre demonstrates that numerous eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century French travel writers and naturalists who visited Canada responded to French concerns that early settlers would mimic the lifestyle of the indigenous people by representing the “cooperative, industrious, and non-nomadic beaver ... as a model for colonists to imitate” (ibid., 660).
- 37 Ibid., 671.
- 38 Grey Owl, *Pilgrims of the Wild*, 163.
- 39 Grey Owl, *The Men of the Last Frontier* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1989), 219.
- 40 Grey Owl, *Pilgrims of the Wild*, 282.
- 41 Ibid., 281.
- 42 Atwood, “The Grey Owl Syndrome,” 73.
- 43 John Elder and Hertha D. Wong, eds., *Family of Earth and Sky: Indigenous Tales of Nature from Around the World* (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 3.
- 44 Robert P. Harrison, “Towards a Philosophy of Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: Norton, 1995), 426.
- 45 Grey Owl, *Pilgrims of the Wild*, xvi.
- 46 Ibid., 200.
- 47 Smith, *From the Land of the Shadows*, 19.
- 48 Smith points out that one way Belaney made his English appear “factory-made” was to stipulate that his publishers could not correct any of the numerous grammatical errors or unconventional sentence structures in his work (ibid., 118).
- 49 Grey Owl, *Pilgrims of the Wild*, 199.
- 50 Ibid., 200.
- 51 Ibid., 203.
- 52 Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 4.
- 53 Grey Owl, *Pilgrims of the Wild*, 163.
- 54 Ibid., 246. When, for example, Grey Owl writes “And ever in my heart there was an aching loneliness for the simple kindly people, companions and mentors of my younger days, whose ways had become my ways, and their gods, my gods,” it is unclear whether he refers to the Apache with whom he claimed to have grown up, the Ojibway with whom he later affiliated himself, or woodsmen and rural people of mixed race.
- 55 Ibid., 171.
- 56 Judith Dudar, “Feint of Heart and Sleight of Hand: Autobiographical Art and Artifice in the Life-Stories of Will

- James, Grey Owl, and Frederick Philip Grove," Diss. (Dalhousie University, 1994), 176.
- 57 Ibid., 173.
- 58 Grey Owl, *Pilgrims of the Wild*, 82.
- 59 Ibid., 74.
- 60 Daniel Francis argues that "the Indian is the invention of the European" and is thus "anything non-Natives wanted [him] to be" (*The Imaginary Indian*, 4–5).
- 61 Grey Owl, *Pilgrims of the Wild*, 282.
- 62 Billinghamurst, *Grey Owl*, 101.
- 63 William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: Norton, 1995), 88.
- 64 Qtd. in John Goddard, "A Real Whopper," *Saturday Night* 111, no. 4 (May 1996): 49.
- 65 Qtd. in *ibid.*

The Ontology and Epistemology
of Walking: Animality in Karsten
Heuer's *Being Caribou: Five Months
on Foot with an Arctic Herd*

*Pamela Banting*¹

You'd like to be the novice of a deer.

You'd do whatever it told you.

– Tim Lilburn, “Acedia,” *Moosewood Sandhills*

To think and to walk are the same thing. To follow the current of a river in a canoe and to reflect are also the same thing.

To hunt and to dream: another equivalent.

– Serge Bouchard, “Prologue,” *Caribou Hunter: A Song of a Vanished Innu Life*

In 2003, the newly wed biologist Karsten Heuer and filmmaker Leanne Allison embarked on a five-month journey to follow on foot the Porcupine caribou herd during their annual migration through northern

Canada to their calving grounds on Alaska's coastal plain. *Being Caribou: Five Months on Foot with an Arctic Herd*, Heuer's first-person non-fiction narrative about their trek, is thoroughly informed by current biological and ecological research. In his Prologue, Heuer relates that in his search for knowledge about the herd, he pored over reports, books, and maps: "I learned about birth and death rates, preferred foods, and the relative importance of caribou in the modern diet of the Gwich'in, Inuvialuit, and Inupiat people... I read summaries of the movements of radio-collared animals, of archaeological reports that put their annual migration in historical context."² Although both the trek and Heuer's book were guided by such research, *Being Caribou* also ventures cautiously into terrain that goes well beyond traditional scientific thought and into philosophy, particularly questions of ontology and epistemology. For example, in several places in the book, the young couple refer to themselves, sometimes comically, as "caribou." On their first day out on the land, crawling on all fours through a tunnel of twisted spruce trees, Allison jokes that "I think being caribou means being gymnasts."³ Further into the journey, as they struggle to grow accustomed to the level of exertion and stamina necessary to keep up with the animals, and fully sensitized to the advantages of four legs over two and of not having to carry one's food and shelter on one's back, Heuer writes, "We weren't moving *with* caribou, but we were moving *like* caribou: simply, efficiently, and fast, defaulting to the path of least resistance even when it was a curving, indirect line."⁴ At the climax of the trip, when the two camp on the edges of the caribou birthing grounds, so attuned to the herd have they become that they do not leave their tent for days, going for long periods without so much as water and urinating in cups rather than show themselves and risk driving the animals away at this crucial point in their annual life cycle.

In this article I examine the processes of being and becoming animal in this work of creative nonfiction by a Canadian biologist and environmentalist, and attempt to demonstrate some of the ways in which texts by biologists and naturalists about their interactions with other-than-human species can extend epistemology. To date, significant

scholarly attention has been paid to visual and performance artists who have explored the notions of being or becoming animal. For example, in *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*, Gregory L. Ulmer analyzes Beuys's performance piece "I like America and America likes me," in which the artist spent three days caged with a coyote in a room in an art gallery. The work of philosopher and jazz clarinetist David Rothenberg, who "jams" with birds in aviaries and whales in the ocean, is well known. British art historian Steve Baker, author of *The Postmodern Animal*, examines the work of artists such as Olly and Suzi, who "collaborate" with tarantulas, snakes, sharks, and other species. Simone Fullagar has examined Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "becoming animal" in the work of philosophers Alphonso Lingis and Val Plumwood, focussing primarily on Lingis's package tour to Antarctica and Plumwood's experience of having been very nearly killed and eaten by a crocodile.

However, although interspecies collaborations of artists with other-than-human animals and the representation of animals in key texts in the history of philosophy have been examined, strikingly little attention has been paid to the writings of naturalists, park wardens, ranchers, and biologists who have learned from, collaborated with, or apprenticed themselves to animals. Recent books and articles about animals focus, variously and productively, on tame and domestic animals, pets, zoos, animal rights, animals as food, feral animals in cities, feral animals in the wild, animals in literature, animals on film and television, animals in Continental philosophy, and more, but there is a distinct paucity of work on scientifically informed natural-history texts about wild animals in the wild. In the Canadian context, I think, for example, of the general scholarly neglect of the work of such figures as Grey Owl and his wife Anahareo, who shared their house with beavers; former guide and outfitter-cum-writer and documentary filmmaker Andy Russell; former park warden Sid Marty; Bill Lishman (a.k.a. Father Goose), who taught young geese to follow bird-costumed pilots flying ultra-light aircraft to encourage them to migrate south from Canada for the winter; and Charlie Russell, who spent eleven field seasons living among the grizzlies

of the Russian Far East, walking their trails and learning their habits and body language. Although there is good recent scholarship on Grey Owl, much of it investigates his persona, not his natural history. In the American context, while the decisions and premature death by mauling of Timothy Treadwell have been hotly debated, his work with the Alaskan brown bears themselves (other than in the moments immediately preceding his death) is much less discussed.

There are many reasons for the relative absence of critical and theoretical investigations of wild animals in the work of naturalists, land and marine biologists, anthropologists, wildlife photographers and documentary filmmakers, rural and backcountry residents, and others who have spent a great deal of time among animals other than human, even risking their lives, though I can only gesture toward them here. For one thing, nonfiction has tended to garner far less critical attention in Canada than other literary genres. Moreover, there is a widespread assumption that any and all texts about animals ought to be categorized either as children's literature or sub-literature. Third, an overwhelmingly urban-raised and urban-based professoriate simply does not have a lot of experience with wild animals.⁵ Fourth, most literature professors lack university-level training in biology or ecology. In fact, most of us who inhabit English departments probably know more about Freud's Wolfman than we do about wolves. Fifth, departmental, disciplinary, and institutional boundaries, barriers, and obstacles are far more impenetrable than one would imagine, despite official rhetoric to the contrary about inter-, multi-, and cross-disciplinarity. Sixth, as Rebecca Solnit writes, although postmodern and poststructuralist theorists have dismantled such false universals as the notion of objectivity, the conceit of being able to speak from nowhere,

... by emphasizing the role of the ethnic and gendered body in consciousness, these thinkers have apparently generalized what it means to be corporeal and human from their own specific experience – or inexperience – as bodies that, ap-

parently, lead a largely passive existence in highly insulated circumstances.

The body described again and again in postmodern theory does not suffer under the elements, encounter other species, experience primal fear or much in the way of exhilaration, or strain its muscles to the utmost. In sum, it doesn't engage in physical endeavour or spend time out of doors.⁶

Finally, there are ontological, epistemological, and linguistic difficulties in finding the concepts and words for talking about interspecies relationships between humans and other animals. As naturalist and bear expert Charlie Russell observes, in writing *Spirit Bear: Encounters with the White Bear of the Western Rainforest*, he “had to almost invent a new language to describe the human-wild animal relationship in ways that were not about conflict and fear.”⁷

Although Deleuze and Guattari and their interpreters have written so extensively about “becoming animal” as to have almost trademarked the phrase, for present purposes I shall largely bracket their work. In the words of Steve Baker, “Animals, for Deleuze and Guattari, seem to operate more as a device of writing – albeit a device which initiated its own forms of political practice – than as living beings whose conditions of life were of direct concern to the writers.”⁸ Moreover, when we theorists and critics posit what “becoming animal” might look like, consciously or unconsciously we often imagine becoming some furry, cuddly species with great big eyes; one of our pets; or something extraordinarily powerful and with an enormous brain, like a whale, or maybe a dolphin, a playful creature that appears to be on a permanent Caribbean vacation – *not* a four-legged, grass-eating ungulate perpetually on the move through the usually frigid, insect-riddled Arctic. Granting Deleuze and Guattari and other philosophers a virtual monopoly on the notion of “becoming animal” while simultaneously overlooking the texts of naturalists and biologists fails to get us any closer to understanding wild animals such as bears, cougars, coyotes, or caribou, or, I might add, to representations of them. While I fully subscribe to the poststructuralist tenet that humans

view the world through our own cultural representations,⁹ how can one critically assess cultural representations of animals (let alone representations by them) without knowing something about them from scientific texts or from first-hand observations and experiences such as those of naturalists? In “The Concept of a Cultural Landscape: Nature, Culture and Agency in the Land,” Val Plumwood deconstructs the hegemony of the concept of the cultural construction of nature, calling it “nature scepticism” and showing that “The concept of a cultural landscape has become a key part of an agenda in the humanities of human-centered and eurocentered reductions to culture that is the equal and opposite to the natural sciences reduction of explanation to nature.”¹⁰ She continues: “The idea that all nature is a human creation because it now shows some human influence rests on prioritizing the human or cultural element in mixtures of nature and culture.”¹¹

From its title and opening pages, *Being Caribou* raises both possibilities of and questions about trans-specific ontologies and epistemologies. First of all, it is important to note that the title can refer both to two humans attempting not just to witness but also as much as possible to “be” caribou by experiencing the caribou’s life-world – weather, terrain, predators, insects, river crossings, for instance – along with the herd *and* to the “being caribou” of the caribou. Secondly, the title is not “becoming caribou” but “being caribou.” Though the differences may seem slight, especially in light of the apparent impossibility of our physically metamorphosing into another species, I would suggest that Heuer’s use of the word “being” alludes less to gradually “becoming” animals (which from a biologist’s standpoint we already are) or “becoming caribou” than to the couple’s attempt from the start of their journey to put themselves, so to speak, in their hooves. Heuer and Allison are less interested in discovering or reconnecting with their own animality (three extreme wilderness treks will do that *for* you) than they are in learning about that of the Porcupine caribou herd.¹² As I shall argue, the book dwells not only on ontology but also on epistemology: what caribou know or seem to know, what Heuer and Allison learn about caribou, and the limits of what “non-caribou” can know about the lives of these fascinating deer.

If, as anthropologist Serge Bouchard suggests, to walk and to think are the same thing, then in *Being Caribou* walking is the path to those forms of knowledge.¹³ The initial impulse to follow the Porcupine caribou herd for 1,500 kilometres arose when Heuer was serving his first term as a seasonal warden in Canada's remote Ivvavik National Park. When Heuer and co-warden Steve Travis find themselves in the middle of the 2001 migration, Heuer tries to convey the scene to Allison by satellite phone. He writes: "When another group of animals thundered past, I held the phone out toward them, but the distance was too great. She was in the city of Vancouver; I was in the wilds of northern Yukon – and my words and the muffled sounds weren't enough to communicate the power of the migration."¹⁴ Even modern telecommunications are simply unequal to the task of transmitting such an event. As impressive and affecting as it would be in its own right, however, it is not solely the presence of 10,000 caribou that unsettles Heuer and Travis and makes it next to impossible for them to sleep that night, but also the high drama of the entire scene. Outside their cabin, there are twenty-four golden eagles, two foxes, thirteen ravens, a pair of rough-legged hawks, one peregrine falcon, countless gulls and terns, and eight grizzly bears.¹⁵ As Heuer recalls, young caribou struggled in the first big swim of their lives, the river current fatally separated some mothers and calves, a bear had a group of caribou on the run at one point, foxes yipped from where they watched on the other side of the river, and so on.¹⁶ Such events are the raw material of story, possibly even the primal impetus that propels the narrative impulse. As Gary Snyder writes in his essay "The Etiquette of Freedom," "The wild requires that we learn the terrain, nod to all the plants and animals and birds, ford the streams and cross the ridges, and tell a good story when we get back home."¹⁷ Unwilling to miss any part of the unfolding story, Heuer and Travis take only short naps between running outside to watch events transpire. By the next morning, Heuer and Allison each realize that their lives are about to change profoundly. As he puts it, the energy of the migration "had passed right through me and in its wake was a space, a loneliness, a yearning where none had existed before."¹⁸ Even after he and Travis are flown back to Inuvik, Heuer

remains “overcome with a strange sense of separation.” Currents stirred up by the migration had imbued him with an irresistible desire to join the herd.¹⁹

As tantalizing as the idea of “being caribou” is, however, the book’s subtitle is at least equally significant. The primary mode of transportation – and of thought – in *Being Caribou* is walking. I do not mean to imply merely that *while* walking the tundra Heuer and Allison have time to think but rather that walking *is* a form of thinking. Heuer and Allison venture on foot into caribou and Gwich’in territory because there are no roads, because they could not possibly follow the animals by snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle without putting them permanently on the run, and because they are protesting the George W. Bush Administration’s attempts to secure permission to drill for oil and gas in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in order to procure about six months’ worth of oil and gas for motor-vehicle transportation. Most importantly, however, ambulation is a process shared by humans and caribou. Plumwood observes that “To describe the land as a ‘landscape’ is to privilege the visual over other, more rounded and embodied ways of knowing the land, for example, by walking over it, or by smelling and tasting its life, from the perspective of predator or prey.”²⁰ Walking the land, smelling and tasting it, exposing themselves to the perspectives of both predator (wolves, grizzly bears) and prey (caribou, humans) is exactly what Heuer and Allison spend five months doing.

The philosopher of walking David Macauley muses that “In the act of walking, we are introduced to and into a larger order, a more capacious natural and social world. Through our ambling bodies, we can discover an elemental relationship to the earth, a robust, even when culturally mediated, processual field of phenomena flowing beneath – but not only beneath – our fleeting feet.”²¹ In restoring us to all of our senses and thereby placing us in the world, walking offers a kind of relational knowing – an “epistemology of contact.”²² For Heuer and Allison, five months of almost continual contact with the animals afford the opportunity to perceive caribou not only as a species – as a distinct set of taxonomic characteristics – but, to borrow Chantal Conneller’s phrase, as “an

assemblage composed of a number of ways of perceiving and acting in the world.”²³ In order to “be” caribou, Heuer and Allison must adopt, as much as humanly possible, their routes, paths, speed of movement, and modes of perceiving and acting in the world. This is not easy. About the first day of their journey Heuer writes:

What had impressed me the most while helping James [James Itsi, a Gwich’in hunter] butcher was the size of the animals’ hearts, lungs, and leg muscles: four times as large as my own, yet packaged in a fine-limbed body that, when upright, didn’t even reach my shoulders. Remembering the grace with which they’d moved even while being hunted, I followed the tracks of the wide, splayed hooves before me, trying to mimic the light-footed gait with which the trail had been made. But I couldn’t. Laden with satellite phone, cameras, solar panel, extra battery, food, clothes, and worries, I was too burdened to travel anything like caribou.²⁴

Carrying seventy pounds of one’s “habitat” (food, clothes, and technologies for communication and representation) in a backpack while trying to follow a herd of wild, four-legged animals with a heart, lungs, and leg muscles four times the size of one’s own seems at the outset nearly impossible, and in many ways it is the process by which Heuer and Allison struggle to adapt to keeping up with caribou that most of their knowledge is gained.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold’s contention – “Locomotion, not cognition, must be the starting point for the study of perceptual activity. Or more strictly, cognition should not be *set off* from locomotion, along the lines of a division between head and heels, since walking is itself a form of circumambulatory knowing”²⁵ – applies perfectly to what transpires between Heuer and Allison and the caribou during their common trek. Ingold writes that

It is in the very “tuning” of movement in response to the ever-changing conditions of an unfolding task that the skill of walking, as that of any other bodily technique, ultimately resides. Indeed, it could be said that walking is a highly intelligent activity. This intelligence, however, is not located exclusively in the head but is distributed throughout the entire field of relations comprised by the presence of the human being in the inhabited world.²⁶

Philosopher Christopher J. Preston argues that “human rationality and understanding is not a distinctive human activity at all but is in fact an activity tied intimately into our animal and animate being.”²⁷ For Preston, “sensori-motor life, a life that we share with all animals, is an ineradicable component of our ability to understand our world”²⁸ and of our ability to use language.²⁹ In walking the caribou’s habitat along with them, Heuer and Allison learn to ruminate like ruminants.

“Walking,” writes Macauley, is “intimately connected with habit and habitat.”³⁰ Walking is how habitat and range are used, managed, remembered, and possibly even celebrated, by caribou and many other animals, and it is in walking (and, in the early spring when the snow is deep, cross-country skiing) the terrain along with the caribou that Heuer and Allison come to “be” caribou. For Macauley, tracking – following an animal or animals – is “a learned skill in which success is determined in part by whether the animal or place in the end appears to us – a sign of the degree of respect we have given the process.”³¹ At one point in the first half of Allison’s documentary film of their trek, also called *Being Caribou*, as they struggle and often fail to keep up, Heuer remarks: “We’re trying to be caribou. We’re not being caribou. We’re following caribou. We’re being left behind by caribou.”³² Insofar as walking “involves a form of carrying or self-conveyance,”³³ a five-month walk places contemporary humans such as Heuer and Allison in the position of being “carried away,” carried out of themselves and into another reality by the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and contacts they experience. After all, to be “transported” means both to move between one place and another

and to be moved to strong emotion, carried away, enraptured. Moreover, such a trek provides an extremely rare opportunity for twenty-first century human beings to experience a prolonged, if not epic, period of self-conveyance. According to Macauley, “Walking puts the world back into perspective. Via our porous and sensing bodies, walking deepens and thickens the perceptual scene, unlike seated driving which tends to thin, draw out and attenuate our experiences.”³⁴ For example, immediately after concluding their expedition, Heuer and Allison fly to Washington, D.C., to relay to government officials what they have learned about the Porcupine caribou herd and the extreme importance of their calving grounds in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Heuer remarks about the experience of flying after months on foot: “After five months of moving under our own power, it was strange to sit and be moved.”³⁵

Inasmuch as Western culture dictates that language (like ours) and intelligence (like ours) are the two main lines of demarcation between humans and other animals, the idea of an intelligence or epistemology associated with walking – of which both humans and caribou are capable, even as in this case in tandem – may be anathema. For us, thinking is an interior affair associated with and emblemized by, as Jacques Derrida reminds us, the act of speaking and hearing oneself speak. To put it another way, we tend not to define ourselves, as some cultures do, by the act of walking and feeling oneself in motion across a storied landscape.³⁶ In an insightful essay, philosopher David Morris isolates a number of humanist prejudices (I am tempted to call them logical fallacies – perhaps an *argumentum ad bestia*) surrounding our thinking about non-human animals and their intelligence such as, for instance, our tendency to think about other animals the way we do about ourselves – as loners, isolated individuals – whereas in fact “animal life is pervasively a group phenomenon.”³⁷ Morris writes:

We thus engage another prejudice, viz. analyzing natural phenomena on the model of human-made mechanisms, and a related prejudice of artificially isolating natural phenomena from their contexts. Perhaps the prejudice underlying all of

these is a refusal to conceive thinking as *animal*, as an activity of an animal, an activity that is fundamentally animate in character. Our tradition teaches that human thinking is unlike any other animal activity, and the fact that we can experience thinking as a private, quiet affair encourages thinking the tradition is right. So thinking has a dignity that could be found only in a most un-animal part of the body, namely a brain dignified by functioning like a human-made machine.³⁸

Not only does our Western episteme hold that humans alone are capable of thought (whereas animals live by instinct and a limited range of responses to stimuli), but it contends that thought is always already defined as *not* an animal process. Scientific reductionism allows us to talk about “animal behaviour,” but historically a much narrower scope has been allowed for the possibilities of animal thought and knowledge. While according animals the power of action in the form of behaviours, we simultaneously rob them of agency insofar as we sheer off from their actions the notion of intentionality.

However, as cognitive scientist Philip Lieberman has argued, the proto-linguistic roots of human speech should be traced more to movement and gesture than to animal vocalizations.³⁹ Starting from the observation that the basal ganglia dysfunction that is the proximate cause of Parkinson’s disease impairs both walking and language, Lieberman posits that “selection for walking, starting from the base apparent in present-day chimpanzees, which can walk for limited periods, was perhaps the starting point for the evolution of human speech, language and cognition.”⁴⁰ He argues that there are both past evolutionary and contemporary physiological connections between motility and language: movements and gestures are not only primate or ancient hominid precursors or imperfect accessories to language but part of language. Speech may be better understood when considered in relation to motor control than sound. We understand speech, he claims, through a kind of biomimicry: by referring the sounds we hear to our own vocal apparatus and production mechanisms. Movements such as walking, grasping, and

gesturing are intrinsic parts of language due, in part, to the presence of mirror neurons for such physical actions in the speech area of the brain. Mirror neurons, says psychologist Michael Studdert-Kennedy, “provide an example of a direct physiological hookup between input and output: the observation of an action and its imitation.”⁴¹

Such work in the fields of philosophy, anthropology, and cognitive linguistics makes it feasible to propose that if walking is both evolutionary root and contemporary component of human language, then Heuer’s and Allison’s prolonged travelling on foot with the caribou herd may well lead them to forms of insight that extend beyond the parameters of normative scientific and behaviourist approaches to animals other than ourselves. Unlike behaviourism or other scientific methods premised solely on the construct of objectivity, which bars the observer from inferring any sort of “inner life” on the basis of external behaviour, Heuer and Allison walk like caribou with caribou and obtain new knowledge through these acts of mimicry. In “Becoming Deer: Corporeal Transformations at Star Carr,” anthropologist Chantal Conneller usefully contrasts European and Amerindian views about humans and animals, interiority and exteriority:

While Westerners see the difference between humans and animals as primarily internal, in the presence of a soul, the mind or self-consciousness, for the Amerindians the difference is external and located in the body. This is because, for the Amerindians, humans, spirits, animals (or at least important animals) and even certain objects are internally identical; each contains a common inner essence – a soul or spirit that is identical and immutable. In contrast to this stable inner part, the outer form, the body of both humans and animals, is seen as both mutable and relational; both human and animal bodies can transform.⁴²

She continues:

Thus people take on the animal habitus in order to enter into a particular set of relationships with the world. [Eduardo] Viveiros de Castro gives the analogy of a diver donning a wet suit. The wet suit is not worn because the diver wants to look like a fish, but because the diver wants to act like a fish. So a sorcerer who transforms into a bear does not do so as a disguise, but in order to harness bear “effects” in order to undertake suitably bear-like activities.⁴³

Heuer and Allison don the caribou habitus by walking, skiing, crawling, and floundering after the caribou herd. If, with Preston, Ingold, Morris, Lieberman, and Conneller, we posit that thinking is a physical, animal function that can occur within the body and, I would add, within a herd and even in relation to particular geographical places, then there is far less reason to maintain the great divide between humans and other animals.⁴⁴

At no point that I can recall does Heuer speculate about the question of caribou intelligence per se, but there are many occasions when he and Allison learn from caribou. In the first place, spending so much time with the animals, the couple is able to see through certain human tendencies and patterns. At one point in the text, Heuer wonders in retrospect why they had ignored a particular patch of worsening weather, packed up, and moved to a less hospitable location: “maybe it was our desire to be with caribou – or just the simple human belief that it was better somewhere else.”⁴⁵ Either way they end up camped in one of the worst storms of the entire trip, the tent nearly shredded by the wind. By contrast with their own anxieties and frustrations during the storm, he notes in his journal, “*the caribou are an island of calm in the raging blizzard, resting – even chewing their cud – while the wind hurls past in waves of horizontal snow.... after watching the animals go about their business, our panic fades.... The poles still flex, the tent still pops, but instead of a life-or-death situation, the caribou remind us, it is just another day.*”⁴⁶ Twenty-seven days into the trip, with their metabolisms racing but unable to keep up with their exertions, they are hungry day and night, and when no caribou

walk out of the storm to inspire them this time, Heuer says, he reverted to the “more human tendency: to scheme my way out of a predicament rather than wait and see what would happen next”.⁴⁷

Without caribou around to hold my attention, my mind wandered to places not visited for a very long time.... something was happening inside my head – a cleansing of sorts, as though the damper that held down useless memories, thoughts, and information had lifted and the long-overdue mental purge had begun: old phone numbers and addresses came out of nowhere; birthdays of long-lost schoolmates. And, of course, songs.⁴⁸

Old pop song lyrics begin to stream non-stop through his head. “Un-becoming” caribou, he reverts to the Western mania for numbers and measurement. At another point, the pair anticipate the caribou’s likely route and decide to take a shortcut instead of following them, which, when it turns out they guessed wrong, results in their losing track of the animals for several days. Human ways of thinking – such as ignoring the weather, scheming, looking for the shortcut, storing mental trivia, making bad decisions – reveal their limitations when juxtaposed with the relative equanimity, route-finding skills, and lifeways of the caribou.

But it is not only insights about what we might call, provisionally, “stupid human tricks” that Heuer and Allison gain from following the caribou. Heuer’s initial impulse to join the migration deepens along the way, and his examination of this sensation yields several insights about both the human and the more-than-human species. His journal entry for June 18 reads in part: “*I am noticing a trend here, a deterioration from belonging to loneliness each time we leave the caribou for a food drop.*”⁴⁹ One could easily ignore, downplay, or write off such statements. Given that the two of them are out on the tundra for five whole months with only the briefest other human company (an abrupt conversation with a bush pilot during a food drop, and chance encounters with one group of hunters and one outdoor adventure group), their loneliness is understandable.

However, it may also be worthwhile to consider the possibility of some kind of “herd mentality”⁵⁰ or herd impulse that can be transmitted across species, possibly through common movements through shared spaces.

With experience Heuer and Allison also learn from the caribou how better to read other animals. His journal entry for June 15 reads “*Not too long ago, we wouldn't have thought twice about packing up and moving on [due to the presence of grizzly bears]. But tonight, without discussion, we decide to stay. It's because of the bears' movements, because of the way the caribou hold themselves. Because of what they signal about intent and trust.*”⁵¹ Clearly the couple's epistemological gains have been tremendous, and contrary to what our Western ways of thinking might predict, they come partly from observation, and partly from their own walking and the walking and movements of the caribou and other animals. As geographer Hayden Lorimer states, “The study of a herd can mark the point where ethnography and ethnology meet.”⁵²

In “Herding Memories of Humans and Animals,” Lorimer examines the work of Frank Fraser Darling, who believed that, although anthropomorphism was probably an irresolvable controversy, scientists' zoological reductions of animal experience were equally problematic. His iconoclastic studies of red deer led him to contend that deer are capable of insight, foresight, and even agency. Examining Lorimer's application of some of Fraser Darling's thinking to his own reading of a herd of reindeer (caribou and reindeer are the same species, *Rangifer tarandus*)⁵³ has the potential to open up Heuer's book further and to provide many insights about caribou. Lorimer notes that the reindeer's territory “is known by its margins and bounds, by places to eat, to bed down, or to linger, by muster points, and according to networks of paths. Given their function, as an infrastructure connecting up commonly frequented sites, traditional routeways were, for Fraser Darling, deserving of the term ‘public works.’ The appeal of the herd's favoured haunts was more difficult to explain.”⁵⁴ Lorimer relates that in accordance with dramatic shifts in climatic conditions reindeer will engage in what might tentatively be described as rituals: “the approach of a cold weather front charges the herd with a vital energy, disposing them to choreographed shows of a

shared mood.”⁵⁵ In contrast to this collective, almost ritualistic behaviour, “Signature events, or distinguishable traits, in the biographies of reindeer are made memorable, at least in part, by virtue of their setting,” as exemplified by specific place-attachments exhibited by individual reindeer.⁵⁶ Lorimer elaborates:

On the basis of these retold stories [the stories of Edwin, a career reindeer herder] we can establish that living creatures have a sense of place and, by their repeated actions, afford place some of its most significant qualities.

The herd’s experience of geography is, unquestionably, practical, tactile, and prompted by collective, physiological needs: shelter, shade, comfort, and food. But if ... social memory and tradition function as forms of knowledge too, then we must entertain expressiveness in “animal nature.” By his [Edwin’s] measure – when and where you “learn to think like a reindeer” – an animal appreciation of topography, time and movement can be shared by humans.... Between the experiences of reindeer and humans, social and physical contours overlap. Among animals, the complex circuitry of material surfaces, too often truncated into mere range, distance, and destination, is a product of the same selective acts of place making and negotiation that we choose to recognise as landscape.⁵⁷

As normally construed, our notion of habitat is a reductive one connoting not much more than a delimited space with access to adequate security, water, food, and shelter. While other-than-human animals may have habitats, they lack any detectable consciousness of sense of place. But what, after all, is habitat but, as the word’s etymology reminds us, a place to dwell and a sense of place. Habitat is a place one senses is home. If an animal has a sense of its burrow, den, nest, birthing grounds, or natal stream, then that animal has a sense of place. If an animal is not perpetually lost but can locate its home place, it has a sense of place.

It is important to remember that other animals' navigational skills are often vastly superior to our own. If instead of thinking of knowledge as something you hold in your head like a fact or grasp in your hand like money, we think of it as a form of situated thought or even a form of "intelligibility that creates itself in movement,"⁵⁸ then animals such as caribou are capable of thought. As Plumwood argues:

Although the term "culture" is clearly intended as a surrogate for "human," it is simply invalid to identify culture with the human. As animal studies are increasingly showing, culture as learned forms of adaptation and forms of life is also found in other species, animals particularly, and is not exclusive to the human. If the term "culture" is used more broadly, in the fashion of anthropology, as meaning the sum total of a group's knowledge and practice in all spheres, there is even less case for confining it to the human.⁵⁹

Humanism, including the humanist residues within poststructuralist notions of cultural constructionism, has created and maintained versions of space, place, landscape, territory, and habitat that militate against our being able to perceive the world other than through the subject-object and us-them dialectics which obscure the possibilities of what Steve Hinchliffe calls a "politics of inhabitation."⁶⁰ However, as Preston shows in *Grounding Knowledge: Environmental Philosophy, Epistemology, and Place*, ontology and epistemology are not so different from one another:

The study of being has traditionally been regarded as demanding a different kind of inquiry from the study of knowing. But an interesting implication of dialectical biology is the softening of this very distinction between knowing and being. Dialectical biology does this by subscribing to a view of knowing not so much as an organism *representing* an external world as an organism *having* a world in which it can successfully operate. Dialectical biology suggests that knowing is a

kind of activity or performance rather than the creation of a mental map of how the world is.... Knowing is not a static mental state but an ongoing process of being able to function in an environment that continually exerts its energy and forces upon the organism.⁶¹

At many points in this narrative, Heuer notes that the caribou have tremendous endurance, speed, equanimity, navigational abilities, the ability to tell the difference between times when a predator is a mortal threat and times when she or he is just passing through, powers of nurturance and bonding, and possibly the ability to communicate through ultrasonic “thrumming,” all of which illustrates that they possess the ability to function in an environment that continually acts upon them.

If the Western tendency to categorize thought in terms of interiority has effectively barred us from thinking about the thinking of animals, this is especially true for herd animals, for whom cognition may occur both within the individual and also within or in relation to the collective (and the physical movements) of the herd. Our tendency to denigrate or discount those whom we consider nomads⁶² – whether gypsies, tramps, the homeless, traditional aboriginal peoples, or caribou – leads us to beliefs such as those held by the Bush Administration that, for instance, the nomadic caribou have no particular territory and can live just about anywhere in the north (and therefore no territorial claim can be made on their behalf), a move intended to justify the installation of oil and gas production facilities on their calving grounds. Maybe the only way to really appreciate nomadology is to be a nomad.⁶³ Walk like the animal (we are). Although, in the next passage, Solnit is speaking of academics, hunters, and religious pilgrims, her observations about following paths can be applied to Heuer and Allison’s walking like caribou with caribou in caribou terrain and to the processes of biomimicry involved in “being caribou”:

A path is a prior interpretation of the best way to traverse a landscape, and to follow a route is to accept an interpretation,

or to stalk your predecessors on it as scholars and trackers and pilgrims do. To walk the same way is to reiterate something deep; to move through the same space the same way is a means of becoming the same person, thinking the same thoughts. It's a form of spatial theater, but also spiritual theater, since one is emulating saints and gods in the hope of coming closer to them oneself, not just impersonating them for others. It's this that makes pilgrimage, with its emphasis on repetition and imitation, distinct amid all the modes of walking. If in no other way one can resemble a god, one can at least walk like one.⁶⁴

In addition to walking and various epistemological practices associated with that form of local motion, as an alternative to debates about what *separates* us from other animals, a debate about what *connects* us with them might cohere around sense of place. Instead of our restless attempts to isolate and privilege qualities we believe animals do not possess – intelligence, reason, self-consciousness, language, syntax, and so on – we need to explore walking and its construction of sense of place as shared qualities. Being or becoming animal involves not a literal physical metamorphosis but, at least in terms of *Being Caribou*, a very long walk, a migration or transmigration. As Chantal Conneller says of the prehistoric use of antlers at Star Carr, “Becoming animal is not about moving between different bodies. Though the animal is not literal, the transformation is.”⁶⁵ If, as Ken Worpole claims, “How you travel is who you are,”⁶⁶ then travelling like caribou and with caribou makes you “caribou.”

Because one of the perks (if it is one) of power is not having to listen to the Other and not having to learn the Other's language, environmental activism, like other forms of social activism, sometimes hinges on speaking on behalf of those that cannot speak directly or effectively to power themselves (whales, grizzly bears, burrowing owls, old-growth forests, songbirds, etc.).⁶⁷ At the beginning of *Being Caribou*, immediately after he and fellow warden Travis return to Inuvik, and still in a daze from the effects of the migration scene he had witnessed, Heuer

pores over dozens of scientific and archaeological reports, books, maps, statistics, indigenous stories, and poems about caribou, but realizes that, as he writes, the numbers and statistics

... can't really be compared: Six months' worth of oil versus 27,000 years of migration. The culture of about 4,000 Gwich'in versus the financial benefits to a handful of company executives and shareholders. Millions of mammals and birds versus billions of barrels of oil. Nowhere was there a hint of the energy and power that I'd felt out there on the tundra. Nowhere did I find the story of the caribou herd itself.⁶⁸

Against the ontological life-and-death dramas of the migration, logic and rationality, often emblemized by scientific information and economics or, more accurately, capitalism, are shown in their own terms to be illogical and irrational: meaningful comparisons cannot be made. After further reflection, Heuer realizes that the real story of the caribou herd lies instead "in the effort and risk the caribou took to get there [the birthing grounds] and back from their wintering grounds each year."⁶⁹ The real story is the story of life and death, survivance, living on, carrying on, and the only way to "get that story out" is to "migrate with the herd,"⁷⁰ as Allison puts it, to walk with the caribou, to assume as much as humanly possible that effort and those risks.

Just prior to their setting off on their journey, an elder tells Heuer about his own experiences seeing caribou

... moving hundreds of miles without stopping, crossing the frozen lakes of Old Crow Flats with their eyes closed, sleeping as they walked. He told me about earlier people who had followed them on snowshoes and foot ... not because they'd wanted to, but because it was what they did to survive.... "Back then people could talk to caribou, and caribou could talk to people."⁷¹

If walking is a form of intelligence and cognition, and if walking is associated in the human brain with language, then just maybe it was by walking with them – long enough and close enough to be able to see that the caribou had their eyes closed and were sleep-walking – that people could talk to caribou and caribou could talk to people. If ambulation is a form of being and knowing, if ontology and epistemology are not necessarily two separate branches of philosophy, then it is not unreasonable to consider walking as a mode through which we can come to recognize our own animality and also to recognize that there is no general concept of “the animal.” If, as Preston describes, knowing is not so much an organism “*representing* an external world as an organism *having* a world in which it can successfully operate,”⁷² then it is not unreasonable to posit that more than one animal or species at a time could share (knowledge of) a given world. As Jim Cheney writes, quoting the poet Robert Bringham, “Knowing can take shape as a form of domination and control. It can also take shape as a way of ‘stepping in tune with being.’”⁷³ Indeed, at the end of their journey, as Heuer and Allison drift in their canoe away from the caribou and back toward the village of Old Crow, they are met on the river by the same elder who had told Heuer before the couple left that his people used to be able to talk with caribou. The man does not voice the entire question, nor does Heuer voice a reply, merely nodding instead: “I remembered what he’d said, how I’d disbelieved it back then, and I nodded now as I looked back at him, hoping that he too could see it in our eyes: we had talked to caribou, and caribou had talked to us.”⁷⁴ Not only had they obtained information and knowledge *about* caribou; they had obtained knowledge *from* caribou. As they paddle back to Old Crow, they begin to reflect about, in Heuer’s words from the film, “how we’re going to make what we’ve learned on the trip and what the caribou have shown us, how we’re going to make it count, make it matter.”⁷⁵ As the journey comes full circle, the question becomes how to translate what the caribou have shown them and their own deep knowledge of and respect for the caribou’s effort, risk-taking, bonds and communication with one another and relationships with other animals, suffering, equanimity, joy, and relationships to specific places in the land

into language and story and ultimately into effectively speaking on their behalf to those of us who have not undertaken the journey.⁷⁶ Speaking on behalf of another species is not only speaking up for creatures who lack our languages but speaking from a position of learned respect for their lifeways, a position that stretches the limits of those languages non-indigenous to North America.⁷⁷

At stake in the loss of caribou, bear, fox, and human habitat if drilling for oil and gas in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge proceeds is the potential loss of those animals and species and also the loss of their multiple ontologies and epistemologies, lifeways, and cultures. Habitat itself is not just geographical coordinates plus the bare necessities of meagre survival. Much more than mere setting, habitat is the ground of all beings and the locus of knowledge. As Heuer concludes his book: “Our clean air is disappearing, the very climate that supports us is changing, and the last of the world’s big wildernesses – the reservoirs of knowledge and instinct that flicker inside all of us – are disappearing, all so we can save a few dollars on our next tank of gas.”⁷⁸ Knowledge, like beings, is mobile – not static, stationary, not just contained in the head, grasped by opposable thumbs, confined to language, or restrained indoors. Knowledge is rooted in bodies, habitats, places, and communities. Knowledge is indigenous. Knowledge is native, aboriginal. Knowledge walks the land on four legs and two. Knowledge ambles and pads, lopes and prances, skis and hikes, crawls and swims. Knowledge flocks across the sky in feathered guises. Knowledge moves you, carries you away, enraptures you, and alters your being in the world just as walking, moving, joining the herd, and stepping in tune with being are forms of knowledge. Knowledge is nomadic, migratory, and wild. Knowledge travels through and flows across landforms and beings in motion – individuals, herds, species, life-forms. Locomotion is a form of knowledge, and knowledge is that which is in local motion. Knowledge is alive, afoot and animal. Animality is a bundle of particular knowledges.

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NOTES

- 1 This paper was presented at the conference of the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE) in May 2007 at the University of Saskatchewan, and at “The Prairies in 3-D: Disorientations, Dispersals, Diversities” conference, St. John’s College, University of Manitoba, 27–29 Sept. 2007. I would like to thank the organizers and audiences of these two conferences for the opportunity to present my work.
- 2 Karsten Heuer, *Being Caribou: Five Months on Foot with an Arctic Herd* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2006), 5.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 5 Tim Lougheed reveals that increasingly even biology students enter their programs without so much as a camping trip in their past, and that they are often reluctant to go on field trips. Lougheed quotes Dan Brooks, a biology professor at the University of Toronto, as saying that “less than half of our first-year biology students ... have been on even one overnight camping trip.... They have no term of reference when we give any examples from real organisms” (Tim Lougheed, “The Not-So-Great Outdoors,” *University Affairs* 47, no. 4 [Apr. 2006]: 20).
- 6 Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 27–28. According to anthropologist Tim Ingold, “Where the boot, in reducing the activity of walking to the activity of a stepping-machine, deprives wearers of the possibility of thinking with their feet, the chair enables sitters to think without involving the feet at all. Between them, the boot and the chair establish a technological foundation for the separation of thought from action and of mind from body – that is for the fundamental *groundlessness* so characteristic of modern metropolitan dwelling” (Tim Ingold, “Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived through the Feet,” *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no. 3 [2004]: 323).
- 7 Charlie Russell with Maureen Enns and Fred Stenson, *Grizzly Heart: Living without Fear among the Brown Bears of Kamchatka* (Toronto: Random House, 2002), 12.
- 8 Steve Baker, “What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like?,” in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 95.
- 9 I would claim that humans are not unique in this respect. Other animals also view the world through their own inherited, learned, place-based, and habitual terms of reference.
- 10 Val Plumwood, “The Concept of a Cultural Landscape: Nature, Culture and Agency in the Land,” *Ethics and the Environment* 11, no. 2 (2006): 120.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 137.
- 12 In addition to following on foot for five months the Porcupine Caribou herd, in 1998–99, Heuer and Allison had trekked the 3,400 kilometres from Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming to Watson Lake, Yukon, as part of the Y2Y project to determine whether wildlife corridors between Yellowstone and Yukon exist or could be created. Their most recent journey was a canoe trip from Canmore, Alberta, to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Hikers as experienced as they already were had “a leg up” in terms of understanding the subtle, intricate and profound connections between walking and becoming, walking and thinking.

- 13 As Ken Worpole explains, “walking comes with a distinguished history of human insight and self-improvement. The walker-philosopher is, after all, a key figure of the Enlightenment. Jean-Jacques Rousseau admitted in his *Confessions* that he could ‘only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs.’ Wordsworth, Coleridge, Henry David Thoreau, Kant and Kierkegaard were among other famous meditative walkers.... The French structuralist, Jean-Christophe Bailly, has spoken of a ‘generative grammar of the leg’ ... while his compatriot, Michel de Certeau, claims that ‘The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language’” (Ken Worpole, “How You Travel Is Who You Are,” *OpenDemocracy*. Web).
- 14 Heuer, *Being Caribou*, 3.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 2–3.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 17 Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild: Essays* (San Francisco: North Point, 1990), 24.
- 18 Heuer, *Being Caribou*, 4. E. O. Wilson’s notion of “biophilia,” the intrinsic human affinity for life and lifelike processes, might also account for Heuer’s powerful impulse to join the herd (Stephen R. Kellert, *Kinship to Mastery: Biophilia in Human Evolution and Development* [Washington, DC: Island-Shearwater, 1997], 1).
- 19 One can only speculate as to whether this “energy,” as Heuer calls it, is similar to that which propels the animals themselves on their collective epic journeys.
- 20 Plumwood, “Concept of a Cultural Landscape,” 123.
- 21 David Macauley, “Walking the Elemental Earth: Phenomenological and Literary ‘Foot Notes,’” *Analecta Husserliana* 71 (2001): 15.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 17–18. Macauley attributes the term “epistemology of contact” to Laura Dassow Wall’s *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science* (1995).
- 23 Chantal Conneller, “Becoming Deer: Corporeal Transformations at Star Carr,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 11, no. 1 (2004): 44.
- 24 Heuer, *Being Caribou*, 30.
- 25 Ingold, “Culture on the Ground,” 331.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 332.
- 27 Christopher J. Preston, “Animality and Morality: Human Reason as an Animal Activity,” *Environmental Values* 11, no. 4 (2002): 429.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 434.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 437.
- 30 Macauley, “Walking the Elemental Earth,” 20.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 32 Leanne Allison and Diana Wilson, dirs., *Being Caribou*. Montreal: National Film Board, 2004.
- 33 Heuer, *Being Caribou*, 25.
- 34 Macauley, “Walking the Elemental Earth,” 26. Joe Sheridan describes how modernity in general and vehicular transportation in particular alter lived experience: “natural travel wanders in and as rivers, wind, and nomads. Automotive realism denounces these enchantments in favor of lethal linearities whose placelessness disintegrates spatial and temporal integrity.... Vehicular velocity, by getting away from getting away, manifests an ecologically malnourished, Neolithic bias against the Paleolithic wind and water sources of ‘the ride’ that transcend terrestrial landscapes” (Joe Sheridan, “The Rains Wept Time in the Badlands: Anthems of Liquid Movement,” *Space and Culture* 5, no. 2 [2002]: 127).
- 35 Heuer, *Being Caribou*, 228.

- 36 By contrast with such mainstream thinking, see Martin Mulligan's "Feet to the Ground in Storied Landscapes: Disrupting the Colonial Legacy with a Poetic Politics" (in *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-Colonial Era*, ed. William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan (London: Earthscan, 2003), 268–89; J. Edward Chamberlin's *If This Is Your Land: Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground* (Toronto: Vintage, 2004); and Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).
- 37 David Morris, "Animals and Humans, Thinking and Nature," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 4, no. 1 (Jan. 2005): 50.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 39 Similarly, with regard to a stage of human evolution which preceded bipedalism, Paul Shepard writes: "Speed in the trees nourished intelligence" (Paul Shepard, *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human* [Washington, DC: Island-Shearwater, 1996], 16).
- 40 Philip Lieberman, "The Evolution of Human Speech: Its Anatomical and Neural Bases," *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 1 (2007): 52.
- 41 Qtd. in Constance Holden, "The Origin of Speech," *Science* 303 (27 Feb. 2004): 1318.
- 42 Conneller, "Becoming Deer," 42–43.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 44 I am referring here to geographical places but rhetorical places are relevant, too.
- 45 Heuer, *Being Caribou*, 62.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 65. Heuer's journal entries are italicized in the original text.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 75.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 76–77.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 150.
- 50 It is interesting to note that the term "herd mentality" carries entirely negative connotations for speakers of English.
- 51 Heuer, *Being Caribou*, 145.
- 52 Hayden Lorimer, "Herding Memories of Humans and Animals," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24, no. 4 (2006): 497.
- 53 Caribou and reindeer are the same species; however, reindeer have been domesticated for at least a thousand years (conversation with wildlife veterinarian Jerry Haigh, University of Saskatchewan, 20 Apr. 2007, Banff Centre for the Arts, Banff, Alberta). For a detailed description of the evolution of the species, see Tim Ingold, *Hunters, Pastoralists and Ranchers: Reindeer Economies and Their Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 16–18.
- 54 Lorimer, "Herding Memories," 501.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 502.
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 *Ibid.*, 502–3.
- 58 David Morris, "What Is Living and What Is Non-Living in Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Movement and Expression," *Chiasmi International: Trilingual Studies Concerning Merleau-Ponty's Thought* 7 (2005): 226.
- 59 Plumwood, "Concept of a Cultural Landscape," 122.
- 60 Steve Hinchliffe, "Inhabiting: Landscapes and Nature," in *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, ed. Kay Anderson, Noma Donosh, Steve Pile, and Nigel Thrift (London: Sage, 2003), 207.
- 61 Christopher J. Preston, *Grounding Knowledge: Environmental Philosophy, Epistemology, and Place* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 56.

- 62 In using this term for indigenous people or caribou that matter, I am mindful of Chamberlin's challenge to the binary opposition between settlers and nomads: "Think about it. Aborigines, who know the names of every plant and the location of all the water holes, as perpetual nomads? Europeans in a place ten thousand miles from home, as settlers? It doesn't make sense" (Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land*, 29–30).
- 63 In academia, where much of the work on nomads and nomadology is being done, one way to derogate someone's writing is to describe it as "pedestrian prose." Heuer does not mention this in his book, but in Allison's film, there are a few brief scenes in which Heuer addresses a toy doll version of George Bush which they carried along with them on their journey so that the U.S. President could see the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and experience the nomadic journey of the caribou by proxy.
- 64 Solnit, *Wanderlust*, 68.
- 65 Conneller, "Becoming Deer," 50.
- 66 Worpole, "How You Travel," 2. Worpole is actually referring to class and power relations within the human kingdom.
- 67 As Donna Landry writes, "Extending liberty, equality, and fraternity to other nations, races, and even species, self-styled pedestrians of the 1790s might, like Coleridge, hail not only enslaved Africans but donkeys as brothers" (Donna Landry, "Radical Walking," *OpenDemocracy*. Web).
- 68 Heuer, *Being Caribou*, 8–9.
- 69 Ibid., 10.
- 70 Ibid., 11.
- 71 Ibid., 17.
- 72 Preston, *Grounding Knowledge*, 56.
- 73 Jim Cheney, "Truth, Knowledge and the Wild World," *Ethics and the Environment* 10, no. 2 (2005): 108.
- 74 Heuer, *Being Caribou*, 225.
- 75 Allison and Wilson, dirs., *Being Caribou*.
- 76 I am reminded of Charlie Russell's comment about almost having to invent a new language in which to convey the experiences he had with Kermodé bears.
- 77 Jim Cheney writes that "An epistemology of clear-eyed attentiveness with an eye to adaptive fit rather than control of one's environment is precisely what many indigenous people in North America are referring to when they use the English word *respect*." He quotes Tlingit writer and filmmaker Carol Geddes on what her people mean by respect: "It is more like awareness. It is more like knowledge and that is a very important distinction, because it is not like a moral law, it is more like something that is just a part of your whole awareness" (Cheney, "Truth, Knowledge and the Wild World," 118).
- 78 Heuer, *Being Caribou*, 231.

SECTION 6

**IN FULL BLOOM:
NEW DIRECTIONS IN CANADIAN THEORY**

CHAPTER 22

Poetics of the Semiosphere: Pataphysics, Biosemiotics, and Imaginary Solutions for Water (2011)

*Adam Dickinson*¹

In the small Ontario village of Port Carling, some seventeen miles west of Bracebridge, our party located a large pyramidal shaped edifice of some 22 feet in width, some 12 or so feet deep and at its apex reaching a height of nearly 24 feet. The structure is located on a shallow incline and rests between two modern structural domiciles... Modern mythobastardization has nurtured the common belief that the structure is a Victorian water tower erected to supply the early settlement with a plentiful water supply from the proximous lakes. – Kurt Wursthagen, “Piccu Carlu: The Muskoka-Maya Connexion”

INTRODUCTION: READING THE WATER TOWER

The citizens of the village of Port Carling (incorporated in 1896), located in the rugged Canadian Shield region of Muskoka, Ontario, have imagined the history of the municipal water supply in their community in a generally unremarkable way. A series of research papers published in 1981, however, tell a different and surprising story. Conducted with the assistance of the Department of Cartographical Complication and prepared in part for the Institute of Onto-genetics, these research papers propose and respond to the possibility that the Port Carling water tower is not a water tower at all, but an ancient example of proto-Mayan architecture.² What is more, “the pyramid itself is a three-dimensional linguistic unit within a macrosyntax.”³ The purpose of the water tower is semiotic, according to the authors: “In Muskoka lies the evidence of a writing system contradictory in its own force relations, a writing in which both form and content seem subservient to the material base.”⁴ The material base, in this case, is the water and rock both in and around the tower, which leads the researchers to a startling conclusion: the people of Port Carling “are drinking their reading and writing.”⁵

This re-imagination of Port Carling’s water supply was part of a special issue of the journal *Open Letter*, which featured a snapshot of Canadian pataphysical⁶ poets, including Steve McCaffery, Christopher Dewdney, and bpNichol along with their various imagined institutes and personae. A subsequent millennial edition of the journal (1997) testifies to the enduring interest in pataphysics among younger Canadian poets like Darren Wershler and Christian Bök. Pataphysics is “the science of imaginary solutions,” or the study of exceptions – a pseudoscience that traces its roots back to the proto-avant-garde French writer, Alfred Jarry.⁷ Pataphysical poets employ methodological constraints in experimental poetic composition in order to parody reductionist scientific analysis and to complicate questions of perspective and meaning. Examples include catalogues of exceptions, useless reference books, constraint-based writing, and “ready-made” found texts. As Craig Dworkin points out, “such seemingly meaningless procedures can yield unexpected information;

the imaginary solution is a perfectly concrete answer to a question no one had thought to ask.”⁸

In what follows, I propose an alternative conception of the relationship between experimental poetic and theoretical scientific epistemologies in order to argue that pataphysics is central to an emerging postmodern ecocriticism because it complicates and combines both the question of signification and the question of the environment. Pataphysical poetics push social constructionism to the extreme, parodying it not as a means of undermining it, but of expressing the contingencies and interconnections in the overlapping worlds of signification that constitute cultural and biological environments.

Just as R. W. Wursthagen, Richard Truhlar, and others focussed their attention on the pataphysical re-imagination of water in the bucolic, pastoral setting of Ontario’s “Cottage Country,” I want to focus my attention on two contemporary Canadian poets explicitly engaged with shifted urban perceptions of water and experimental recreations of the pastoral genre. While not commonly identified as pataphysical poets, and only more recently as ecopoets,⁹ both Erin Mouré in *Sheep’s Vigil by a Fervent Person* and Lisa Robertson in *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* imagine scientific research into the urban environment and its membranes of alternative civic memory and natural history. Through the invention of an imagined poetic persona (a “heteronym” like Fernando Pessoa’s creation of Alberto Caeiro), Mouré’s *Sheep’s Vigil by a Fervent Person* does more than simply translate the exuberant pastoral landscapes of Pessoa/Caeiro’s *O Guardador de Rebanhos*¹⁰ from Portuguese to English; her book-length poem also translates Toronto’s buried river system into an imagined landscape where the flow and function of water in the city become irrepressibly significant. Beginning in 1884, Taddle Creek, Garrison Creek, and a number of other smaller streams in Toronto were systematically buried by the city to obscure the problem of inadequate waste management associated with increasing urbanization. The creeks had become contaminated by sewage, so the growing city suppressed them, integrating them into the subterranean sewer system.¹¹ Mouré uncovers the rivers,

imagining an alternative solution to the problem of water in the city. Her pastoral, the result of various compositional constraints that merge the landscape and language of Toronto with Pessoa's original text, enacts a species of poetry that imagines itself as science, a text that turns to the empirical methodologies of the natural historian for imaginary solutions to the impediments of realist epistemologies and the expected fidelities of conventional translation practice. Moreover, Mouré's text represents a pataphysical pastoral that translates or "deterritorializes" genre, identity, and environment in ways suggestive of the unorthodox scientific theories of one of the founders of modern ecology, Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944), and his emphasis on the distinct *Umwelt* (self-world, or subjective universe) of living things. By "deterritorialization," I mean, in the terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the opening up of systematically fixed relations to new forms of organization, the possibility inherent within a territory or system for transformation. Through such deterritorializations, pataphysics ultimately puts into question what we might think of as realism, or scientifically sanctioned realism. *Sheep's Vigil for a Fervent Person* "is a miniature Toronto," Mouré claims in *My Beloved Wager*.¹² She describes her work as a "translation" of Caieiro's text and it represents for her "a history of water, for Toronto ... is a city of water, built on running water. It buries water but water continues to define the city."¹³ In this way, Mouré's pataphysical pastoral exposes the invisible, alternate reality of the buried waterways as a study of the exceptions that inhabit the city and deterritorialize it from the inside out.

By employing unconventional analytical methodologies in site reports and "propositions,"¹⁴ Robertson's *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* is similarly concerned with water and fluid dynamics in the recent history of the city of Vancouver – a city, as Robertson notes in her introduction, dissolving "in the fluid called money."¹⁵ The lyrical essays, which double as extended prose poems, were mostly written to accompany various art exhibitions; however, they also reflect Robertson's concern with the changing "urban texture" of Vancouver between the developments associated with Expo '86 and the acquisition of the rights to host the 2010 Winter Olympics. Accompanied

by the “Seven Walks” in the book – which are excursionist wanderings into the multiple surfaces of the landscape with the help of a Virgilian guide – the texts re-imagine various attempts to define Vancouver’s public spaces in idealized pastoral terms, paying particular attention to the contested definitions associated with the proliferation of corporately sponsored public fountains. Like Mouré’s use of heteronyms in *Sheep’s Vigil*, Robertson translates her authorial identity into the persona of the Office for Soft Architecture in order to, as she points out in her *PhyllyTalks* correspondence with McCaffery, “escape the author called ‘Lisa Robertson’” and pursue multiple points of contact with the surfaces of the city.¹⁶ The Office is a pataphysical creation, an imagined institute, which, similar to other Canadian pataphysical collectives such as the Toronto Research Group and the Institute for Linguistic Onto-genetics, aims to “explore the poetics of anomaly, on the assumption that literary research must be more experimental than instrumental.”¹⁷ Robertson’s Office opposes instrumentality by way of its explicit embrace of paradox and impediments in its research practices.

While the shifts in cultural *Umwelt* that result from the deterritorialized pastoral can be read, like Mouré’s text, in the terms of Uexküll’s unorthodox science, I propose to read Robertson’s concern with surfaces and membranes of civic memory in the context of biosemiotics and its extension of Uexküll’s *Umwelt* theory. Biosemiotics, an emerging field in biology, takes issue with traditional scientific reductionism by asserting that many forms of meaningful communication have been ignored in the scientific materialist discussion of the biosphere. Biosemiotics proposes the primacy of the “semiosphere” over the biosphere; it is concerned with living systems as nested sets of surfaces. The surface is where multiple signalling processes act on the cell membrane according to contextual recognition. Robertson’s pataphysical text – as well as Mouré’s, for that matter – is similarly concerned with the surface of “reality” as it is constituted by the contextual recognitions of cultural conventions, especially the rhetoric and practice of empirical observation and description. Proceeding as a self-described natural historian, the imagined Office for Soft Architecture reveals that expanded and oppositional fields of

signification are necessary for understanding and being responsible to the myriad of intercommunicating surfaces at work in the ecology of urban relationships.

Semiosis is the basis of biological life for biosemiotics; it is also the basis of ethical cultural life in the context of environmentalist politics. We often fail to care about things that do not signify for us; we need to expand and complicate our worlds of signification. The pataphysics of Robertson and Mouré engage the environment, not according to the objective realism of scientific materialism, but rather as a complex set of semiotic relationships where diverse forms of signification and alternative realities interact. We need to be alive to different *Umwelten*, to the different ways that water, for example, signifies to humans and non-humans, so that, like the citizens of Port Carling, we may reckon with natural history as cultural history and the unexpected ways in which we drink our reading and our writing.

CONTEXT: REALISM, PATAPHYSICS, AND THE UNORTHODOX SCIENCE OF UEXKÜLL

In a recent issue of *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, Glenn Adelson and John Elder combine the science of ecology with the practice of literary criticism in an examination of Robert Frost's poetry. In their conclusion, the authors caution that one should pay attention to the poem and its referential dimension as opposed to the potential "tendentious controversies" of literary theory.¹⁸ Emphasis on the referential has long been a focus of ecocriticism. Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* famously calls for a revival of realist aesthetics as a means of being accountable to what contemporary literary theory suppresses.¹⁹ In his preface to *The Greening of Literary Scholarship*, Steven Rosendale identifies the "mimetic concepts of literature's representation of nature that currently dominate ecocritical thought."²⁰ This referential turn can be seen productively as an expression of an ecocritical commitment to environmentalist politics, an "earth-centered" approach, as

Cheryll Glotfelty calls it, to bring attention to very real and pressing material concerns.²¹ Unfortunately, such views have facilitated a rejection of postmodernist modes of thinking and poststructuralist methods of reading in favour of what Serpil Oppermann calls a “naive version of the mimetic tradition,” which, ultimately, has had an impoverishing effect on ecocritical interpretive strategies.²²

An important point that has escaped significant attention, however, is the fact that the emphasis on realism in ecocriticism has increasingly manifested itself as an appeal to science and the resources of scientific analysis in interpreting texts. On the one hand, scientific principles are unearthed explicitly as evidence of environmental literacy, such as Adelson’s and Elder’s claims that the poem “Spring Pools” reveals “Frost’s understanding of the perennial nature of flowers, water, and tree buds.”²³ On the other hand, from a more methodological perspective, the loose definitions of ecocritical practice have inspired calls for a tighter integration with the scientific method.²⁴ As an extension of this increasingly systematic rigour, one of the principal aims of the ecocritic, according to Camilo Gomides, is “to gauge how well a work of art represents the physical world, with a bias toward works that display verisimilitude.”²⁵ Thus, in this case, scientific methodology is readily associated with and emerges out of a realist aesthetic.

The appeal to science in the emphasis on realism in ecocriticism finds one of its chief proponents in Glen Love and his work *Practical Ecocriticism*. Love proposes that postmodern practices and poststructural methods must be overcome in order to foster an environmental writing that accurately reflects the biological world, and by extension the cultural world, made available by scientific understanding. The pastoral, in particular, offers an opportunity for a scientifically informed literature with real consequences for environmentalist politics. A pastoral sufficiently grounded in the actual natural processes of the biological sciences has the potential “to be more valid and meaningful than those stories ‘too far removed’ from the hard actualities beneath social constructions.”²⁶

Love’s notion of a scientifically informed pastoral is an example of what Terry Gifford calls the “post-pastoral,” with its self-conscious

avoidance of the sentimental attributes that plague the traditional pastoral, including retreats to rural Arcadian fantasies. It is to this traditional definition (a discourse of retreat and idealization) that I refer throughout this essay when I talk about pastoral conventions; however, I do so with Gifford's qualification in mind that the pastoral is a historically complicated and contested term.²⁷ The texts I examine below do not fit into the category of the post-pastoral, as defined by Gifford, because they do not emphasize the requisite realist aesthetics.²⁸ Rather, as I will explain, Mouré and Robertson play with and ironize pastoral customs in order to direct attention to the semiotic surfaces of the city (both culturally and biologically) and the resultant shifts in perceptible realities that these require.

If the ecological pastoral for Love is best seen as science expressed through poetry, what do we make of poetry that imagines itself as science? What do we make of texts that turn to the strict methodologies of science for imagined, "unreal" ends? As an example of such an enterprise – one that I think has been overlooked by ecocritical preferences for literature that reflects the literal truths of science – I turn to the pseudoscience of "pataphysics." Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, the study of exceptions; it examines how contingencies and anomalies that conventional scientific procedures cast as extrinsic to any system are in fact intrinsic. Pataphysics, as Jarry points out, "will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one," which is a universe that one might envision – and that perhaps one *should* envision – in place of the established one.²⁹ Pataphysics supersedes metaphysics; it interrupts it in ways potentially productive for environmental ethics. As Bök argues: "pataphysics studies exceptions in order to make the weaker case the stronger."³⁰ This practice is consistent with ecocritical interests in realigning the terms of value when it comes to the environment and marginalized creatures, landscapes, and social commitments.

Pataphysics cannot easily be dismissed as anti-scientific postmodern play. It is thoroughly engaged with the methodologies and consequences of scientific thinking. Moreover, pataphysical texts are not

simply mimetic renderings of scientific insight in literary form; rather, they constitute “translations” or “deterritorializations” of scientific ideas and practices into alternate epistemological possibilities. In other words, science is deterritorialized as poetry. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari define deterritorialization as the “cutting edge” of an assemblage.³¹ By this they mean the creative potential of an assemblage to be exposed to new forms of organization.³² Science and poetry, as disciplines, as assemblages of methodological strategies, are brought together in pataphysics, not as a totalized unity, not as the literal expression of scientific principles in poetic form (as some ecocritics would have it), but as an articulatory relationship that transforms the ostensible “territories” of what constitutes science and poetry in the first place. Pataphysics effects a translation not unlike Mouré’s poem or Robertson’s natural history of surfaces; the original text is there (just as it is in terms of the traditional disciplinary distinctions between science and poetry), but the conventional realities of genre and content are altered, the perspective is shifted.

Translations and deterritorializations of this sort, and their potential to produce new types of inquiry, are evident in the pataphysical experiments of poets like Christopher Dewdney and Christian Bök. For example, in “Parasite Maintenance,” Dewdney uses diagrams and disciplinary rhetoric to expose the assemblages of neuroscience, language acquisition, and parasitology to a new form of organization. The result is an emergent analysis of poetic innovation and its capacity to counter the semiotically restrictive effects on human hosts of the “living and evolving intelligence” of language.³³ Similarly, Bök’s *Crystallography* explores the conception and manifestation of clarity (as it pertains to writing and thinking) in the distinct but overlapping phenomena of poetry and crystals. Employing a methodological constraint that intentionally “misreads the language of poetics through the conceits of geology” and crystalline forms, the text reveals that the structure of snow, for example, provides a way to rethink the semiotic capacities of lyric poetry.³⁴ In an accompanying note to a diagram of cryometric forms, Bök writes: “Semiotic saturation increases from a solid state of monosemy to a fluid state of polysemy

until meaning etherealizes itself in the region of cloud formation.”³⁵ As these examples from Bök and Dewdney illustrate, pataphysical experiments engage science in order to imagine new kinds of deterritorialized analysis that become neither conventionally scientific nor conventionally poetic in their procedures. Other pataphysical projects, such as Kenneth Goldsmith’s perceptually constraint-based methodologies in *Soliloquy* and *Fidget* among others and Robert Kocik’s exploration of intersections between prosody and pathology in *Rhrurbarb*, illuminate the expanded and paradoxical fields of signification necessary to understanding the interconnecting surfaces at work in the negotiation between subjective interiors and ostensibly objective, environmental exteriors.³⁶

While Robertson mentions only briefly that her pastoral poetics are concerned with an urban “pataphysical Utopia,”³⁷ her imaginary research office is clearly engaged with the rhetoric and practice of scientific analysis. She deterritorializes the descriptive modes of the natural historian into alternate, paratactic, antimetaphysical forms of empirical observation and expression: “The work of the SA [Soft Architect] paradoxically recompiles the metaphysics of surface, performing horizontal research which greets shreds of fibre, pigment flakes, the bleaching of light, proofs of lint, ink, spore, liquid and pixilation, the strange, frail, leaky cloths and sketchings and gestures which we are.”³⁸ In doing so, the Office for Soft Architecture, as I will demonstrate, exposes the exceptional surfaces and marginalized membranes of the urban environment, drawing attention to the double-sided nature of these surfaces, the combined influences of biological and cultural effects.

In its engagement with questions of perception and signification, pataphysics shares similar points of emphasis with ecological science, particularly the unorthodox, exceptional methodologies of the early ecologist, Uexküll.³⁹ As an alternative to conventional scientific interest in objectively determinable niches and mechanical material processes, Uexküll proposes in his writings that the emphasis in ecology should be placed on the subjective interaction of species with their environments. He writes in “The Theory of Meaning” that in studying biology, we “always begin with a subject that finds itself in its *Umwelt* (subjective

universe) and we examine its harmonious relationships with individual objects that have appeared as meaning-carriers to the subject.”⁴⁰ The stem of a blooming meadow-flower, for example, is an environment of multiple interpretations: the cow sees it as food, the ant sees it as a path, the cicada-larva sees it as a home, and a girl gathering flowers sees it as part of her bouquet.⁴¹ The meadow-flower has no objective meaning as such; it signifies variously according to the *Umwelten* of the creatures who use it. In pataphysical fashion, Uexküll, writing contemporaneously with the modernist avant-garde, imagines how the world looks according to moths, bats, crabs, dogs, spiders, and ticks to name but a few. As Giorgio Agamben remarks in *The Open*, Uexküll’s strange descriptions constitute “a high point of modern antihumanism and should be read next to *Ubu roi*,” Jarry’s famous pataphysical creation.⁴²

All of these descriptions and illustrations constitute pataphysical elaborations of imagined systems of meaning, where “the constancy of subjects is substantiated far better than the constancy of objects.”⁴³ Uexküll’s *Umwelt* theory undermines the primacy of scientific objectivity just as pataphysics challenges the generalities of science in favour of particulars.⁴⁴ Compositional constraints imposed on the generation of pataphysical texts enact often subtle shifts in what signifies as meaningful. For Uexküll, the limitations imposed by the sensory capacities of different organisms similarly shift the nature and number of perceivable phenomena – the thickness of a spider’s web, for example, is too thin to be perceived by a fly’s eye.⁴⁵ Instead of avoiding the question of meaning and its subjective implications, which have been anathema to traditional scientific methodologies, Uexküll underscores that “meaning is the guiding star that biology must follow.”⁴⁶ The exceptions, contingencies, and anomalies of any particular creature’s perspective become, like pataphysical constraints, intrinsic to any system of world-making. Moreover, these fundamental and particular differences in the nature of signification inform the larger “contrapuntal melody” that characterizes the relationship between different *Umwelten* in an ecosystem.⁴⁷ Organisms are constrained by the specific signifying environments of the creatures that they depend on (the spider depends on what is meaningful for the fly).

For example, Uexküll notes that “The spider’s web is certainly formed in a ‘fly-like’ manner, because the spider is ‘fly-like’.... To express it more accurately, the spider’s ‘fly-likeness’ comes about when its body structure has adopted certain themes from the fly’s melody.”⁴⁸ Counterpoint for Uexküll is the structural theme that links *Umwelten* with each other: the eye must be sun-like, the bee must be flower-like, the leaf must be rain-like, even the coffee cup must be coffee-like for meaningful relationships to be possible.⁴⁹ The ecologist becomes a musician for Uexküll, or by extension a pataphysician, concerned with the “exceptional singularity,” as Bök would say, of what counts as meaningful in the environment of tones and melodies.⁵⁰

MOURÉ: TRANSLATING THE BURIED CREEKS

Mouré’s translation *Sheep’s Vigil by a Fervent Person* is an example of a pataphysical pastoral that deterritorializes the environment of Toronto in order to enact a shift in cultural *Umwelten* in the ecological terms of Uexküll. The original text, Alberto Caeiro’s *O Guardador de Rebanhos* (*The Keeper of Sheep*), is itself a product of a kind of translation or deterritorialization: Caeiro was in fact an invented persona of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (who had created a series of “heteronyms,” as he called them, of various writing personalities, each with separate biographies and aesthetics). It was not until his death in 1935 that these writers were discovered to have been the same person. Mouré translated the book-length poem while living in Toronto during the summer of 2000. She recounts in her preface to *Sheep’s Vigil* that she realized “Pessoa had entered Toronto, living a pastoral life in Toronto’s not-quite-vanished original topographies.”⁵¹ She began noticing the buried creeks that flowed under and into the city’s infrastructure (as she listened at manhole covers and storm drains), and the creeks in turn found their way into her pastoral translation.

While she never directly discusses her work as pataphysical, Mouré’s translation is an example of pataphysics, I would propose, in several

different ways. On the one hand, Pessoa/Caeiro's work itself resists metaphysics, or, we might say, supersedes metaphysics. The speaker of the poem, a shepherd, proclaims at length the folly of metaphysical perspectives through extended meditations on observation and the virtues of empiricism:

There's enough metaphysics in just going about life with your eyes open.

...

Just open your eyes and see the sun!
If you do, you can't think anymore about anything
because sunlight is fab, more than all the thoughts
of philosophers and poets lumped together.
Sunlight doesn't know what it does
And, as such, doesn't goof up, and is ordinary and good.⁵²

Mouré's shepherd is an imagined pseudo-scientist, an empiricist zealously dedicated to perceiving the environment in an unorthodox, unmediated way: "I believe in the world and in marigolds, / Because I see them. But I don't think on it / For thinking can't understand..."⁵³ Additionally, Mouré's translational methodology serves as a critique of the normative, domesticating "science" of translation (with its expectations for the fluent reproduction and domestication of texts), or as Mouré calls it: "the translation practice most common in English that claims to 'represent' the author, while eliding the translator and the translator's sitedness."⁵⁴ Mouré re-imagines an exceptional pataphysical practice where translation deterritorializes into translational, a "performative gesture altering space, altering the original, and altering [her] own voice and capacity in English."⁵⁵

The constraints Mouré imposed as part of her methodology are, as she describes, "preposterous" and "excessive":⁵⁶

I worked within a framework of my own readerly response
that pulled into the translation not just the semantic level of

the Caeiro text but also the chance or hazardous appearance of words provoked in me by the sound of Portuguese.... I noted two more guiding principles. First, the idiom in the target language had to be resolutely Canadian but also a little old-fashioned, a little quaint from a twenty-first-century perspective (as Caeiro's Portuguese, it is said, was a little curious and simple as well). Second, the excessive or exorbitant gesture was permitted.⁵⁷

By responding to the poem through the abundant pursuit of "lines of flight" supplementary to its anti-metaphysical universe, Mouré's text illustrates the accidents and anomalies intrinsic to the system of translation. Moreover, Toronto is a city of water, but water is ignored, or bracketed as an inconvenience, according to the engineering science of urban construction. In Mouré's pataphysical poem, conversely, water and its poetic parapaxis – all the other kinds of accidental expressions of water in the city (be they people, cats, flowers, things flowing downhill, by chance, by accident) – are intrinsic to the organization of the city, despite being rendered as exterior to the city by urban planners. In various sections of the poem, the rivers have become subjects of idle conversations on buses (the Humber flows down from up north), the speaker points out, but few pay any further attention.⁵⁸ The speaker, by contrast, stoops to listen at manhole covers over Taddle Creek, while "Duped men" pass by honking. She "want[s] to show them / The small buds just now in leaf alongside rivers, / and they want to get fast to Bathurst and St. Clair."⁵⁹ The point of the poem is to shift the way in which water signifies in the urban environment, deterritorialize its quaint "idle" and "idyll" associations (in the context of the classical pastoral eclogue):

What I'd give to be the creek under the road at No Frills
So that people could sense water on the way to the Laundromat

What I'd give to be the scrub poplars at the parking lot of
No Frills

For they've just sky above and water below them

Well, and an ugly parking lot ...⁶⁰

Here the idealized landscape, the equivalent of the pastoral retreat, is not one of Arcadian dimensions, but one where conventional apprehensions are disrupted, where water does not fit into any narrative or arrangement beyond its own flow, "concentrating," as the speaker describes in a later section, "without plans / On flourishing and coursing."⁶¹ The *Umwelt* of the speaker is such that water matters in ways unperceived by the downtown businessman, who "senses there's a creek there ... but he'll never find it..."⁶² *Sheep's Vigil* presents an imaginary solution to the problem of water in the city, in this case uncontrolled waterways in the form of creeks and rivers that interfere with Toronto's orderly sense of urban and suburban development. The city has translated water in one way and Mouré has translated it in another, changing the variables of perspective in doing so. The outside becomes the inside in this text; it is the ostensibly foreign which illuminates the local as Pessoa's poems are credited with teaching Mouré to attend to the buried creeks in a city she eventually came to inhabit "with great joy."⁶³ The importance of the foreign to the local (a pataphysical predicament) extends to Mouré's sense of literature and translation more generally: to write about place and home requires exposure to other literatures and cultures. Translation serves to "Locate us as foreigners to what it translates, necessary foreigners, and – at the same time – as inhabitants of our own language, our own place, and our own opened possibilities for literature."⁶⁴

By imagining herself as the creek and as the poplars, Mouré's speaker enacts, not only the change in perspective that a shift in *Umwelt* requires, but also a change in identity, which is manifested literally in the translation of her authorial identity from Erin Mouré to Eirin Moure (the Galician spelling of her name). However, translation is more than an authorial identity; it is geographic, as Mouré declares, in its capacity to "surprise, and locate us."⁶⁵ By subjecting her pastoral translation to the pataphysical constraints of her "sitedness" in the environment

of Toronto, the poem imagines an *Umwelt* where the particularities of water, as a kind of anarchic “tactical” movement through the city (in the terms of Michel de Certeau) become the carriers of significance, rather than the totalizing “strategic” burials and effacements enacted by the projects of urban development and commercial interest.⁶⁶ The power of Mouré’s pataphysical pastoral does not lie in its ability to reflect the ecological insights of science in the form of literary realism or according to the procedural fidelities associated with translational fluency. Rather, Mouré’s shepherd is an eccentric natural scientist concerned with imaginary solutions, with deterritorializing and amplifying cultural *Umwelten* to the abundant realities beyond the ones we think we know.

ROBERTSON: FOUNTAINS, MEMBRANES, AND BIOSEMIOTICS

If diverting rivers into the city sewer system is one way of re-imagining water, public fountains are another. In light of Uexküll’s insights about perceptual worlds, Robertson’s *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* can be read as a collection of pataphysical texts engaged with the signifying surfaces (social, historical, rhetorical, and biological) of the urban environment of Vancouver – including the history of its public fountains. In “The Fountain Transcript,” a text accompanied by altered postcards depicting Vancouver with water fountains emerging from public buildings and, in one example, water shooting from the mouth of a polar bear at the zoo, the Office announces that the economies of its methodologies (which involve, among other things, bodily intuitions, chance, and friendship) will find their “antithesis in a fountain somewhere.”⁶⁷ Concerned with imaginary solutions and with refashioning the rhetoric of systematic empirical research, the Office seeks to “sketch the terrain of a future analysis” where “inquiry will erupt from its own methodological grid like syllables from our teeth and lips. We expect to be deliriously misinterpreted. We fountain, always astonished by the political physiology of laughter.”⁶⁸ Fountains are explored in

this text as research that fails to come to conclusions, as monuments that fail to be momentous. The city's fountains are industrial constructions that are "hidden among corporations ... relevant only as cheerful prosthetics to the atmosphere of the logo."⁶⁹ However, given Vancouver's lack of large, "bombastic" public fountains, the small, modest, personable settings of the fountains in the financial district of the city seem contrary to the grandiose aspirations of the corporations. Public fountains in Vancouver, therefore, exceed the confines of their civic definition – they are defined by misinterpretation, both in construction and reception: "They are corporate fantasies. Yet stylistically these fountains' nostalgia is not for omniscience but for unfashionable minor happiness; in this sense they flood the grid with its countertext."⁷⁰ The countertext of minor happiness and highly localized significance is what the Office explores by presenting a small inventory of fountains (including Vancouver's infamous leaky condominiums) that underscores the degree to which the economies of systematic research and corporate logic find their antithesis in water resistant to being packaged in commercially advantageous ways. By misinterpreting the city's imagination of water – through actual use at the local, personal, intimate level – the Office encounters fountains as exceptional anti-metaphysical interruptions of the civic grid. These "delirious misinterpretations," as Robertson calls them, recur throughout the book as fountains in their own right, as assertions of alternative *Umwelten*, as imagined solutions to various attempts at totalizing or homogenizing the environments of the city.

Like Mouré's *Sheep Vigil*, Robertson's *Occasional Work* is a pataphysical translation of the pastoral genre, as evidenced by its concern with idealized landscapes and idealized civic rhetoric. It extends her engagement with the "Virgilian corpus" in works such as *Debbie: An Epic* (1997), *XEclogue* (2nd ed., 1999), and *The Weather* (2001), which, as Stephen Collis notes, also explore "the ornamental and emblematic as pure surface."⁷¹ In her research into the palimpsestic nature of urban surfaces in *Occasional Work*, Robertson studies the history of a waterfront park in East Vancouver that has been constantly reinterpreted by the city. Having once been the proposed original site of Vancouver, it

has become variously the location for a hotel, a swimming pool, a Japanese internment camp, a factory, and then parkland. In her *PhyllyTalks* correspondence, Robertson points out that in New Brighton Park “This overlay – old world fantasy, leisure and industrial, racial and natural constructions – defines for me the pastoral. This is the pataphysical Utopia here in Vancouver. I want to represent its politics, as they appear fragmented in the landscape.”⁷² Just as Mouré imagines an eccentric empiricist listening at manhole covers for buried streams, Robertson imagines a research institute that uncovers the natural history of an urban space by attending to the translations of water, built structures, and capital. Mouré’s shepherd is Robertson’s excursionist, walking through possible worlds of the urban pastoral with a Virgilian guide, asserting the multiple surfaces and skins that emerge in alternative and expanded forms of attention.

Robertson’s text can be read, like Mouré’s, as an example of a deterritorialized pastoral that attends to the translations of environment, capital, genre, and identity in order to enact shifts in cultural *Umwelten*. For example, in “Fourth Walk,” while wandering through a decaying industrial district of Vancouver, the speaker at first aestheticizes her desire to recognize her suddenly unfamiliar city as a traditional struggle of “the heart.” This nostalgic retreat into the utopian ideals of love for a recognizable homeland is a pastoral convention. However, Robertson’s excursionist begins to want “the heart to mean something other than this interminable roman metronome of failed eros and placation.”⁷³ Her solution is to reframe her fields of signification, to deterritorialize her observational practice in order

... to notice the economies that could not appear in money: vast aluminum light sliding over the sea-like lake; the stack of disposable portable buildings labeled Women and Men; decayed orchards gone oblique between parking lots and the complex grainy scent that pervaded the street. As we walked we presented one another with looted images, tying them with great delicacy to our mortal memories and hopes. It was

as if at that hour we became strands of attention that spoke.
In this way we tethered our separate mortalities to a single
mutable surface.⁷⁴

The restricted economy of commerce, with its systematic logic and prescribed privilege, has determined both the city and these pastoral protocols of rhetoric and observation – Robertson explores at length in *XEclogue* the degree to which pastoral poetics have historically depended on patriarchy and class.⁷⁵ This entrenched *Umwelt* is interrupted in “Fourth Walk” by an alternate perspective, by an imaginary empiricism of “strange rules” that looks at and gives voice to things otherwise effaced by the metaphysics of capital.

As a consequence of Robertson’s particular concern for signifying surfaces and membranes, I propose to push this investigation of *Umwelten* a bit further and argue that the pataphysics of *Occasional Work* can be read in the context of the emerging field of biosemiotics, which is a theoretical extension of Uexküll’s *Umwelt* theory. Despite my focus on Robertson here, I wish to emphasize that *Sheep’s Vigil* is equally relevant to this discussion, given Mouré’s focus on the city as an enormously complex memory system in which different membranes (pedestrians, cats, buried rivers) have different capacities to remember and signify. Biosemiotics is the study of life processes as a function of semiosis. It is “an isolated discipline,” as biosemioticians themselves admit, “that lies at the outskirts of science, somewhere between biology and linguistics.”⁷⁶ This exceptional, pataphysical status makes biosemiotics an explicit challenge to dualist thinking that divides science from art and rational objectivity from subjective embodied meaning. Biosemiotics has emerged out of the cybernetic and ethological writings of Uexküll, the anthropological theories of Gregory Bateson, and the inflections of C. S. Peirce’s triadic model of the sign in the work of Thomas Sebeok. The discipline has been further developed by Jesper Hoffmeyer’s argument for the primacy of the “semiosphere” (or the world of signs and signification) over the biosphere, as well as the primacy of the sign over the molecule. Wendy Wheeler argues in “Figures in a Landscape,” that culture is “a *natural* evolution in

a world always already ‘perfused with signs.’”⁷⁷ She goes on to argue in *The Whole Creature* that biosemiotics is part of an intellectual continuum that involves poets and poetry. The centrality of intuitions and hunches in scientific discovery, as expressions of biosemiotic processes, reveal, according to Wheeler, that “Poetry is the model of scientific discovery.”⁷⁸

At the heart of biosemiotic theory is a critique of reductive notions of communication at the cellular level in molecular biology and at the intra- and interspecies level in zoology. Established biological conceptions of communication depict materials transported biochemically in order to trigger a switch. Additionally, on a larger scale, animal behaviour is frequently explained objectively according to genetic “hard wiring.” Traditional biology has ignored the importance of interpretive activity in favour of genetic causal explanations. Biosemiotics, on the other hand, envisions life as interconnected webs of communication and nests of surfaces where organisms and organic procedures within organisms (indeed, within cultural systems as a whole) respond to information through particular interpretations. The animal or cell behaves the way that it does not simply because of genes but also because of semiotic activities. Take, for example, the bird that pretends to have a broken wing in order to lure a predator away from its nest. Whether or not the predator falsely interprets this sign, as the bird hopes, is not a law-like certainty. As Hoffmeyer points out, “clearly the act of pretending in this case has to be well executed.”⁷⁹ For biosemiotics, interpretive membranes such as the skin are as much in control of life as DNA. A human body, Hoffmeyer notes, is made up of about thirty square kilometres of membrane structure.⁸⁰ It makes more sense, he argues, to locate human personhood not in the brain but in the skin, which is the fundamental locus of sensory interpretation.⁸¹

While Darwinian evolutionary theory is very important to biosemioticians, the emphasis on genes and molecular explanation in neo-Darwinism does not adequately account for the affective forces of lived reality. Hoffmeyer argues in *Signs of Meaning in the Universe* that from a biosemiotic perspective the guiding principle of life is semiosis: “The most pronounced feature of organic evolution is not the creation

of a multiplicity of amazing morphological structures, but the general expansion of ‘semiotic freedom,’ that is to say the increase in richness or ‘depth’ of meaning that can be communicated: From pheromones to birdsong and from antibodies to Japanese ceremonies of welcome.”⁸² The primacy of interpretation in biosemiotics means that subjectivity emerges in all life activities. All organisms, as Hoffmeyer points out, and Uexküll before him, are immersed in ecological relationships in ways that require them to learn signs in order to survive and to interact with their surroundings (*Umwelt*). Similarly, pataphysics, as experimentally employed in texts like Mouré’s and Robertson’s, is concerned in biosemiotic fashion with the surface of “reality” as it is constituted by the contextual recognitions of cultural conventions. Pataphysics enacts a concern for the “aboutness” of communication inasmuch as the application of constraints (through compositional methodologies) to particular systems interrupts the metaphysical assumptions that serve to obscure the different ways in which things matter, the different “abouts” to which they are relevant. In other words, pataphysics underscores the unavoidable articulatory mix between the subjective and the objective.

Bök argues that pataphysics “expresses on behalf of poetry what the metaphysics of science represses in itself: its own basis in signs.”⁸³ As that which deconstructs the metaphysics of scientific reductionism, pataphysics has much in common with biosemiotics in terms of its emphasis on the primacy of interpretative frames in determining reality and in its emphasis on increasing the complexity of what qualifies as significant. Hoffmeyer points out that “imagination is the creative exploitation of error.”⁸⁴ Mistakes are necessary for “all true development in this world.”⁸⁵ Pataphysics, as the science of imaginary solutions, as the science of exceptions, can similarly be seen as the creative exploitation of error. Ultimately, by controlling compositional variables to determine unusual frames of significance, pataphysics underscores that we are creatures of the semiosphere. This, I propose, is the ethical dimension that makes it most relevant to ecocriticism. Pataphysics complicates any cultural *Umwelt* by revealing it to be a nest of surfaces where different creatures and landscapes signify in diverse and potentially neglected ways. The

perceptual shifts enacted by pataphysical poetics are complicit with, as Hoffmeyer points out in the context of ethics, “our existential need to empathize with other *Umwelt* builders in this weird and wonderful world.”⁸⁶

Robertson’s pataphysics in *Occasional Work* is not simply a metaphorical rendering of alternative scientific principles; rather, the engagement with membranes, as critical sites of interpretation in her work, literally and distinctly re-imagines the form of biosemiotic concern with signification. Whereas biosemiotics focusses on the poetics of biological membranes, Robertson’s pataphysics – a science in its own right given its concern with analytical rhetoric and empirical data in site reports – researches the poetics of cultural membranes. For example, in “How to Colour,” the Office investigates colour as a highly affective cultural membrane that influences communication between subjects and environments: “It is as if colour hails us. When it does so our entire surface is concentric. We are soothed refreshed or repelled.... Colour, like a hormone, acts across, embarrasses, seduces.”⁸⁷ Just as biosemiotics seeks to correct the overemphasis on genes at the expense of membranes and environment, Robertson points out that “Soft Architecture will reverse the wrongheaded story of structural deepness” and attend instead to surfaces like colour, cloth, and scaffolding, to name but a few of the focusses for various essays in the book.⁸⁸

The Office examines *Rubus armeniacus*, a swift-growing blackberry species native to southwest Asia that Environment Canada has classified as a “minor invasive alien,” as it spreads over built surfaces in southwestern British Columbia, “transforming chain link and barbed wire to undulant green fruiting walls.”⁸⁹ Its capacity to cover and alter the surface appearance and function of buildings inspires the Office to see the plant as “an exemplary political decoration, a nutritious ornament that clandestinely modifies infrastructural morphology. Here affect invades the centre.... *Rubus* shows us how to invent.”⁹⁰ In pataphysical fashion, the margin becomes the centre, the surface influences the identity – the result is deterritorialized architectural practice. As Wheeler notes in “Figures in a Landscape,” biosemiotics assures us that culture and nature

cannot be discretely separated: “Creativity in culture and language reiterates creativity in nature.”⁹¹ The Office lauds “the limitless modification of the skin” that is “different from modernization”⁹²; it revels in the deterritorialized notions of contemporary built surfaces that the plant creates.⁹³

The walks in *Occasional Work* attend not only to the membranes of natural and cultural history but also to the relational surface of interpretation itself. This is consistent with biosemiotic interest in the ontological reality of relations and the emphasis on relationships (rather than individual species) as carriers of causality.⁹⁴ In Robertson’s walks, “My guide,” who serves to accompany and direct the attention of the first-person narrator, functions as a “Virgilish paramour.”⁹⁵ Just as the Roman poet Virgil translated the pastoral into Latin by way of his *Eclogues*, and just as Dante wrote Virgil into the *Divine Comedy* as a guide, Robertson translates her own pastoral forebear into a guide “who was like a text” through which she reads her environment.⁹⁶ In the “Sixth Walk,” she confesses a desire to know her guide, which is a wish to know the mechanism of interpretation through which her ambulatory encounters with the city have been framed. The guide, a pastoral architect, is literally a skin, a membrane that helps determine significance for the narrator. To pay attention to the guide is to attend to the significance of surfaces as the site, in biosemiotic terms, of multiple signalling processes acting according to contextual recognition. Self-conscious reflection on the guide makes the pastoral a “lexemic battleground” of rhetorical surfaces for Robertson, a term she borrows from McCaffery.⁹⁷ Her pataphysical poetics emphasize the agency of these surfaces, their capacity for re-signification, for generating innovative interpretations that foreground the marginal and the exceptional, whether it be decaying orchards or gendered experiences.

By expanding *Umwelten*, Robertson’s poetics enact communicative complexity. Her text reports on the different layers of interpretation that have been at work in the historically renegotiated membranes of coastal parkland, for example, or public fountains, or invasive blackberry species, or scaffolding. These interpretations are affected by both “genetic”

factors, or, in other words, deep structural determinants including official urban planning and zoning restrictions, and “epigenetic” factors,⁹⁸ or environmental contingencies exterior to certified civic plans, such as the ways in which people, animals, and plants have used and altered space regardless of its official designation. Robertson presents her research into the systematic genetic codes of governmentally determined memory and framed civic history, including historical plaques and the placement of memorial fountains. She also reports on the epigenetic environmental factors that have determined how the life of the area takes place, and how it is remembered differently through graffiti, unintended plant species, and the irrepressible signification of water in nearby leaky condos. Her research into these sites is deeply concerned with the “aboutness” of information in the semiosphere of the city. Ubiquitous urban scaffolding, for example, “works as a filter of exchange and inscription that localizes and differentiates the huge vibratory currents swathing the earth.”⁹⁹ Robertson’s as well as Mouré’s pataphysical experiments enact an expansion of potential worlds of signification, not in order to assume a more comprehensive or total way of knowing, but to be responsible to the paradoxes, gaps, and multiplicities that necessarily constitute any nature of things or spaces.

By exploring the implications for ecocriticism of poetry that imagines itself as science (pataphysics) and science that imagines itself as poetry (biosemiotics – inasmuch as biosemiotics can be said to be concerned with the semiotic resources of poetry), my intention is to argue for a renovated, semiotically concerned conception of environmental ethics in the humanities. The shifts in perspective that biosemiotics requires of traditional scientific thinking are relevant to the shifts in thinking that pataphysics requires of ecocritical interpretations of contemporary poetry. I want to be sensitive, however, to differences between these disciplines even as I argue for points of connection. Biosemioticians such as Hoffmeyer have worked against popular models that apply linguistic metaphors to genetic systems like DNA, arguing that these models privilege “digital” codes (alphabets and words) over “analogue” codes (body language and contingent bodily forms).¹⁰⁰ Hoffmeyer

stresses, rather, that code-duality is fundamental to semiotic survival: digital codes (genetics) as well as analogue codes (embodied interactions with the physical environment) are both integrally involved with life processes.¹⁰¹ Therefore, I want to make it clear that cells do not simply “read” their environment in the way that humans digitally read texts. Biosemiotics as well as pataphysics require that we think of reading and writing in more broad semiotic terms.¹⁰² Ultimately, I want to argue for a paratactic relationship between biosemiotics and pataphysics. What the former explores in the “scientific” realm, the latter explores in the “humanities” or “cultural” realm (to the degree that these distinctions are even meaningful – in fact, both disciplines deconstruct distinctions between subject and object, culture and environment). Nonetheless, let us think of biosemiotics and pataphysics, in the terms of Uexküll, as contrapuntal forms of research with different starting positions, different environments of signification.

CONCLUSION: DRINKING OUR READING AND WRITING

In a discussion of community arts in the context of water management and pollution in Toronto, Liz Forsberg and Georgia Ydreos issue a distinctly pataphysical call for imagined sculptures that would use collected rainwater or snow melt to “erupt into polyphonic fountains.”¹⁰³ Similarly, art projects like “Human River” (a parade of people draped in shiny fabric in order to re-embodiment Toronto’s many buried creeks) enact semiotic expansions of cultural *Umwelten*, akin to those explored in *Sheep’s Vigil* and *Occasional Work*, by allowing urban citizens to “savour sensory shifts while disrupting our usual grid-like paths through the city.”¹⁰⁴ The aim of such real and imagined works, with their emphasis on the multifaceted ways water signifies environmentally and culturally, is evocative of Astrida Neimanis’s assertion that any politics of water management and water rights must proceed from the idea that “we are both materially and semiotically entwined with other bodies of water in a gestating,

differentiating and interpermeating relation.”¹⁰⁵ Neimanis asks: “if we acknowledge that we are neither materially nor semiotically discrete from one another, even as we maintain our difference – what sort of social and political responses to other watery bodies are demanded of us?”¹⁰⁶ To accept a biosemiotic perspective on relationships between the physical and ideological surfaces of place is to understand our semiotic connection to creatures and materials beyond the ostensible limitations of our skin. Mouré’s speaker quite literally espouses a vision of Toronto’s water as semiotically connected to multiple times and places. Similarly, Robertson’s Office for Soft Architecture examines the manifold signifying surfaces of water in the city as a means of critiquing the confinement of water to industrial decoration.¹⁰⁷ In addition, Robertson’s Soft Architecture might be said to characterize the speculative environmentalist urban designs of Mitchell Joachim.¹⁰⁸ His proposals range “from impact absorbing ‘soft cars’ and towers clad in compacted trash to moveable dwellings and ‘meat houses.’”¹⁰⁹ These pataphysical creations enact biosemiotic concerns with biological and cultural membranes by shifting how food, energy, waste, and water signify in order to foster “a breathing interconnected metabolic urbanism.”¹¹⁰

Timothy Morton argues that the idea of nature is caught between competing substantialist and essentialist interpretations. Nature is at once a substance, “a squishy thing,” and an essence, a transcendent abstract material.¹¹¹ According to Morton, environmental thinking would be refreshed by exposing the different “fantasy images” of what constitutes the natural.¹¹² As I have been arguing here, pataphysics, in its concern with imaginary solutions and exceptions, is fundamentally concerned with ironizing and exposing fantastic reified notions of nature. The pataphysical poetics of Mouré and Robertson do more than simply expose fantasies, however, as Morton implies they must. Robertson claims that “we are Naturalists of the inessential”; her aim is not to revel in the “fantasized balance” of an organized view of nature, but to expose and attend to the various contexts of “environmental disturbance and contingency.”¹¹³ The natural scientists in both works by Mouré and Robertson stand in relation to such articulatory histories of

surfaces not as objects, not as settled subjects, but as relational, semiotic surfaces themselves – surfaces that are neither completely substances nor essences, but thresholds. The result is, not collapsed distinctions between subject and object or inside and outside, but a semiotically deepened sense of the complexity of nature and the natural as these materials and ideas come to signify in the contingent and limited *Umwelten* of the city.

My aim here is to directly challenge persistent realist and scientific materialist attitudes in ecocriticism that remain suspicious of the emphasis on semiotic concerns in postmodern literary theory. Jacques Derrida's claim in *Of Grammatology* that "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*"¹¹⁴ – often cited by ecocritics as an example of poststructuralism's disregard for nature – can be reconsidered in an ecocritical light, given the importance of signification to biosemiotic notions of ecology and environment. I propose that imaginary solutions have practical consequences, as evidenced by the cultural re-signification of Toronto's waterways through "citizen-led efforts to recall, rethink and restore our communal aqua," which has led to important memorial and biological rehabilitation.¹¹⁵ We drink water, it goes without saying. However, we also drink reading and writing. We drink our own as well as that belonging to those non-human others for whom we and water signify in ways that can only be imagined.

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NOTES

- 1 Adapted and expanded from “Pataphysics and Biosemiotics in Lisa Robertson’s Office for Soft Architecture,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 18, no. 3 (summer 2011): 615–36.
- 2 R. W. Wurstwagen, “Piccu Carlu: The Muskoka-Maya Connexion,” *Open Letter* 6–7 (winter 1980–81): 151.
- 3 Richard Truhlar, “Report from Piccu Carlu: The Muskokan-Mayan Shift,” *Open Letter* 6–7 (winter 1980–81): 155.
- 4 Wurstwagen, “Piccu Carlu,” 148.
- 5 Adrian Fortesque, “Ambulatory Signification: A Letter,” *Open Letter* 6–7 (winter 1980–81): 170.
- 6 Jarry spells *pataphysics* with an apostrophe (’pataphysics) in order to announce the fact that its origins are elsewhere, beyond the domain of the name. McCaffery and Nichol in the Toronto Research Group (TRG) spell *pataphysics* with two apostrophes, or an open quotation mark: “pataphysics. The TRG writes in the introduction to the *Open Letter* issue that the double apostrophe marks at once a double elision and “a shift from/to quotation” (Toronto Research Group, “Introduction,” *Open Letter* 6–7 [winter 1980–81]: 70). The emphasis on signification here (even in the context of non-signification that the authors go on to claim) is relevant to the discussion of semiotics below. However, for the sake of consistency and concision (admittedly pataphysical constraints), I will drop all apostrophes around the word.
- 7 Alfred Jarry, *Exploits & Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician* (1911), trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: Exact Change, 1996), 22.
- 8 Craig Douglas Dworkin, “The Imaginary Solution,” *Contemporary Literature* 48, no. 1 (2007): 54.
- 9 There has been very little scholarship done to date on Mouré and Robertson from an ecocritical perspective. See Adam Dickinson, “The Weather of Weeds: Lisa Robertson’s Rhizome Poetics,” *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* 15 (winter 2007). Web.
- 10 Translated as *The Keeper of Sheep*, originally published in 1914.
- 11 As Alfred Holden points out, “Lake Ontario was big enough and far enough away from where most people lived that discharge there seemed like the final solution” (Alfred Holden, “The Forgotten Stream: The Real Taddle Creek – A Brief History,” *Taddle Creek* 1, no. 1 [1997]. Web. Accessed 11 May 2008.) The systematic ingenuity of city planners had served to make invisible a portion of the city’s environmental reality.
- 12 Erin Mouré, *My Beloved Wager: Essays from a Writing Practice* (Edmonton: NeWest, 2009), 200.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 199.
- 14 Lisa Robertson, *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* (Astoria: Clear Cut, 2003), cover.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 16 Lisa Robertson and Steve McCaffery, “Correspondence,” in *PhillyTalks #17*, ed. Alan Filreis (Philadelphia: Kelly Writers House, 2000), 33.
- 17 Christian Bök, *’Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 84.
- 18 Glenn Adelson and John Elder, “Robert Frost’s Ecosystem of Meanings in

- “Spring Pools,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2006): 15.
- 19 Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 92.
- 20 Steven Rosendale, ed., *The Greening of Literary Scholarship: Literature, Theory, and the Environment* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), xxv.
- 21 Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii.
- 22 Serpil Oppermann, “Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2006): 107.
- 23 Adelson and Elder, “Robert Frost’s Ecosystem of Meanings,” 8.
- 24 Camilo Gomides, “Putting a New Definition of Ecocriticism to the Test: The Case of *The Burning Season*, a Film (Mal)Adaptation,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2006): 13.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 26 Glen A. Love, *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 87.
- 27 Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 147.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 29 Jarry, *Exploits & Opinions*, 21–22.
- 30 Bök, *Pataphysics*, 30.
- 31 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 88.
- 32 Adrian Parr, ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 67.
- 33 Christopher Dewdney, “Parasite Maintenance,” in *Alter Sublime*, by Christopher Dewdney (Toronto: Coach House, 1980), 78.
- 34 Christian Bök, *Crystallography*, 2nd rev. ed. (Toronto: Coach House, 2003), 156.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 114.
- 36 Kenneth Goldsmith, *Fidget* (Toronto: Coach House, 2000); Kenneth Goldsmith, *Soliloquy* (New York: Granary, 2001); Robert Kocik, *Rhrurbarb* (Bowdoinham, ME: Field, 2007).
- 37 Robertson and McCaffery, “Correspondence,” 24.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 39 Uexküll was a largely marginalized figure in twentieth-century ecology, dismissed as a vitalist and because of his resistance to evolutionary theory. His work has subsequently attracted renewed interest, however, particularly among biosemioticians. See Uexküll’s “A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men” for more specific examples of his strange descriptions of non-human *Umwelten* (Jakob von Uexküll, “A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds” [1934], in *Instinctive Behavior: The Development of a Modern Concept*, ed. and trans. Claire H. Shiller [New York: International University Press, 1957], 5–80).
- 40 Jakob von Uexküll, “The Theory of Meaning,” *Semiotica* 42, no. 1 (1982): 52.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 29–30.
- 42 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 45.
- 43 Von Uexküll, “Theory of Meaning,” 71.

- 44 Bök, *'Pataphysics*, 9.
- 45 Von Uexküll, "Theory of Meaning," 42.
- 46 Ibid., 43.
- 47 Ibid., 63.
- 48 Ibid., 66.
- 49 In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge the importance of Uexküll's emphasis on the affective meaning of an environment to their concept of deterritorialization. The spider and the fly are involved in a perpetual relationship of deterritorialization and reterritorialization: "How could movements of deterritorialization and the processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another? The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome" (10).
- 50 Bök, *'Pataphysics*, 3.
- 51 Erin Mouré, *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person: A Translation of Alberto Caeiro/ Fernando Pessoa's O Guardador de Rebanhos* (Toronto: Anansi, 2001), viii.
- 52 Ibid., 15.
- 53 Ibid., 7.
- 54 Mouré, *My Beloved Wager*, 199.
- 55 Ibid., 177.
- 56 Ibid., 188.
- 57 Ibid., 189.
- 58 Mouré, *Sheep's Vigil*, 59.
- 59 Ibid., 81.
- 60 Ibid., 55.
- 61 Ibid., 85.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Mouré, *My Beloved Wager*, 198.
- 64 Ibid., 200.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Michel de Certeau points out that *strategies* "seek to create places in conformity with abstract models" (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984], 29). Moreover, "strategies are able to produce, tabulate and impose these spaces" (30). *Tactics*, on the other hand, "do not obey the law of place, for they are not defined or identified by it" (29); "they can only, use, manipulate, and divert these spaces" (30).
- 67 Robertson, *Occasional Work*, 59.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid., 55.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Stephen Collis, "The Frayed Trope of Rome': Poetic Architecture in Robert Duncan, Ronald Johnson, and Lisa Robertson," *Mosaic* 35, no. 4 (2002): 155.
- 72 Robertson and McCaffery, "Correspondence," 24. With its emphasis on imaginary solutions, the traditional pastoral can be said to possess pataphysical characteristics. In his *PhillyTalks* correspondence with Robertson, McCaffery argues for the pataphysical character of historical forms of the pastoral: "The Virgil-Horace-Rapin-Pope line offers a theory of pastoral as the idealistic portrayal of a Golden Age; a 'pataphysical origin that offers itself as a recuperative quest" (ibid., 22). He goes on to point out that "pastoral is a kind of urban imaginary, a carefully constructed, overcoded artifice designed to meet the demand of a patrician coterie" (ibid.).
- 73 Robertson, *Occasional Work*, 250.
- 74 Ibid.

- 75 Robertson argues “that pastoral utopias have efficiently aestheticized and naturalized the political practices of genocide, misogyny, and class and race oppression” (Lisa Robertson, “How Pastoral: A Manifesto,” in *Telling It Slant: Avant-Garde Poetics of the 1990s*, ed. Mark Wallace and Steven Marks [Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002], 23).
- 76 Marcello Barbieri, “Editorial: The Challenge of Biosemiotics,” in *Introduction to Biosemiotics: The New Biological Synthesis*, ed. Marcello Barbieri (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), x.
- 77 Wendy Wheeler, “Figures in a Landscape: Biosemiotics and the Ecological Evolution of Cultural Creativity,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 46, no. 2 (2006): 103.
- 78 Wendy Wheeler, *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2006), 147.
- 79 Jesper Hoffmeyer, *Biosemiotics: An Examination into the Signs of Life and the Life of Signs*, trans. Jesper Hoffmeyer and Donald Favareau (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2008), 189.
- 80 Ibid., 27.
- 81 Ibid., 18.
- 82 Jesper Hoffmeyer, *Signs of Meaning in the Universe*, trans. Barbara J. Haveland (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 61.
- 83 Bök, *Pataphysics*, 16.
- 84 Hoffmeyer, *Signs of Meaning*, 145.
- 85 Ibid., 144.
- 86 Ibid., 141.
- 87 Robertson, *Occasional Work*, 149.
- 88 Ibid., 16–17.
- 89 Ibid., 126, 127.
- 90 Ibid., 130.
- 91 Wheeler, “Figures in a Landscape,” 104.
- 92 Miriam Nichols notes that the blackberry “does not try to get past the modern with its lingering affection for hard forms, but rather to work upon its surfaces” (Miriam Nichols, “Toward a Poetics of the Commons: *O Ciudadán* and *Occasional Work*,” in *Antiphonies: Essays on Women’s Experimental Poetics in Canada*, ed. Nate Doward [Toronto: The Gig, 2008], 160). In this way, the blackberry does not fall into the strictures of creativity that separate modern from postmodern. Its significance comes, not from its investment in essential artistic taxonomies, but from its complete concern with surfaces and its capacity to deterritorialize and reinvent any surfaces it comes into contact with.
- 93 Robertson, *Occasional Work*, 130. Not unlike Robertson’s discussion of the blackberry species, Mitchell Joachim’s pataphysical creation FAB TREE HAB proposes to grow homes and residential surfaces from living trees. See www.terreform.org/projects_habitat_fab.html.
- 94 Hoffmeyer, *Biosemiotics*, 49.
- 95 Jennifer Scappettone, “Site Surfeit: Office for Soft Architecture Makes the City Confess,” *Chicago Review* 51, no. 4 (2005): 74.
- 96 Robertson, *Occasional Work*, 256.
- 97 Robertson and McCaffery, “Correspondence,” 24.
- 98 Epigenetics attempts to account for influences other than DNA that affect the development of an organism. The term is defined by E. Li as “any heritable influence (in the progeny of cells or individuals) on gene function that is not accompanied by a change in DNA sequence” (E. Li, “Chromatin Modification and Epigenetic Reprogramming in Mammalian Development,” *Nature Reviews*

- Genetics* 3 [Sept. 2002]: 662–73, qtd. in Johannes Huber and Ingolf Schmid-Tannwald, “A Biosemiotic Approach to Epigenetics: Constructivist Aspects of Oocyte-to-Embryo Transition,” in *Introduction to Biosemiotics: The New Biological Synthesis*, ed. Marcello Barbieri [Dordrecht: Springer, 2007], 464). Similarly, as Leslie A. Pray points out, “epigenetic information modulates gene expression without modifying actual DNA sequence” (Leslie A Pray, “Epigenetics: Genome, Meet Your Environment,” *The Scientist* 18, no. 13/14 [5 July 2004], Web). Robertson’s research underscores the degree to which we inherit the spaces of the city, not simply according to their official designation or classification, which would represent genetic inheritance, but also according to the way people and other organisms have used and altered those spaces over time and the alternative memories that inhere as a result. As Wheeler points out in a discussion of the relevance of epigenetics to biosemiotics, “epigenetic inheritance indicates our inseparable lived relation to our environment, including our cultural environment” (Wheeler, *Whole Creature*, 14).
- 99 Robertson, *Occasional Work*, 164.
- 100 Hoffmeyer, *Biosemiotics*, 362.
- 101 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 102 Timo Maran helpfully makes the claim “that it is reasonable to consider [the] natural environment as being textual and related to written texts” (Timo Maran, “Towards an Integrated Methodology of Ecosemiotics: The Concept of Nature-Text,” *Sign Systems Studies* 35, no. 1–2 [2007]: 287). However, his insistence on the capacity of nature writing to directly communicate “nature” resurrects all of the difficulties associated with realist aesthetics that have been discussed above.
- 103 Liz Forsberg and Georgia Ydreos, “Participation/Precipitation: Can Community-based Arts Help Keep Us Afloat?” in *HTO: Toronto’s Water from Lake Iroquois to Lost Rivers to Low-flow Toilets*, ed. Wayne Reeves and Christina Palassio (Toronto: Coach House, 2008), 177.
- 104 *Ibid.*, 172.
- 105 Astrida Neimanis, “Bodies of Water, Human Rights and the Hydrocommons,” *TOPLA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 21 (spring 2009): 161.
- 106 *Ibid.*, 166.
- 107 It should be noted that my discussion of water in an essay on pataphysics and biosemiotics is highly appropriate given the role water plays as an exemplary object of pataphysical analysis in Jarry’s *Exploits & Opinions of Dr. Faustroll* (15–16) and as a key example of emergent phenomena in Wheeler’s discussion of biosemiotic freedom (Wheeler, “Figures in a Landscape,” 102–3).
- 108 Mitchell Joachim, “FAB TREE HAB: Living Graft Prefab Structure,” *Terreform1*. Web.
- 109 Christopher Hume, “A Meat Home on the Renewable Range,” *Toronto Star* (23 Jan. 2010): E1.
- 110 *Ibid.*, E14.
- 111 Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 16.
- 112 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 113 Robertson, *Occasional Work*, 130.
- 114 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 158.
- 115 Wayne Reeves and Christina Palassio, eds., *HTO: Toronto’s Water from Lake Iroquois to Lost Rivers to Low-flow Toilets* (Toronto: Coach House, 2008), 14.

CHAPTER 23

Literature and Geology: An Experiment in Interdisciplinary, Comparative Ecocriticism

Travis V. Mason

The Earth is a dynamic body with its surface constantly changing. – Harry H. Hess, “History of Ocean Basins”¹

Examine any long-term natural ecosystem in one of the few remaining untouched places of the Earth, and you will find it is dynamically stable, just like your own body. – James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*²

1. DYNAMIC STABILITY

We are bewildered by the thought that we might have a duty to something so clearly non-human. – Mary Midgley, *Science and Poetry*³

In *Science and Poetry* (2002), British philosopher of science Mary Midgley addresses, among other things, ethical dilemmas about the relation between humans and the earth. Her comment regarding the incredulity with which most humans confront this dilemma, however, begs the question: do ethical relationships necessarily depend upon the degree to which the Other appears human? While a continuum documenting other species' proximity to and distance from humanness (however defined) might support this notion, it would be facile to assume that humanness alone determines one's sense of duty to an Other. However, in light of the increasing fervour of "green consciousness" globally (which is not to say universally), I take Midgley's point that living organisms – humans, primates, marine life, dogs/cats, birds, trees, grasses, fruits/vegetables, mosses/lichens, insects – have by and large been acknowledged by environmentalists as worthy of ethical treatment by humans. If bonobos, for example, occupy a higher position on this imagined continuum than, say, salmon (which are, clearly, non-human), salmon have in turn been evoked more often as part of an ethically green movement than granite boulders and schist. The earth's non-humanness, then, results from its abiotic characteristics. Rocks do not live. Therefore, they are as far removed from humanness as possible. But, as geologists will tell you, much biotic activity on earth depends upon abiotic elements, such as rock and weather. Having developed strategies for reading literature about place, animals, and plants, ecocritics have not deviated too much from this focus on the biotic. Notions of place, land, and landscape, though strictly speaking abiotic, tend to comprise living organisms or, as in the case of landscape painting, to represent ideas/ideals linked to human thought and actions. Rocks and mountains, in other words, fulfil environmental rather than ecological imperatives.⁴

Taken to one extreme, ecocriticism understands humans both as vectors of injustices perpetrated by political and economic globalizing powers against the planet and its inhabitants *and* as agents capable of atoning for such injustices. Taken to another extreme, ecocriticism places humans within a natural and cultural world, a world that acknowledges the revolutionary theories of geologic time, of evolution by natural

selection, and of non-human agency – a world, in short, in which humans, historically, matter very little. Neither of these extremes strikes me as an ideal (and stable) version of ecocritical practice. The following experiment in interdisciplinary and comparative ecocriticism addresses the concerns of both extremes from somewhere in between.

Both interdisciplinary and comparative criticisms gesture beyond boundaries that can potentially restrict the breadth of scholarly investigation. According to Canadian ecocritic Susie O'Brien,

If ecocriticism is to be useful as a mode of critique, it will need to move ... away from simply analysing texts to looking at the institutional structures that frame such practices with the aim, not of transcending them with spurious claims of taking it back to the streets (or woods), but of, as a first goal, understanding how they work within, on, and through the categories of culture and environment.⁵

O'Brien's imperative emphasizes the political aspects of ecologically oriented scholarship and tends toward the ecocritical extreme that sees humans as vectors of harm and agents of change. Without disputing the value of O'Brien's cultural studies approach, I argue that textual analysis retains some usefulness – as a methodology capable of linking language to historical and political concerns – even within an ecocritical context that does not explicitly interrogate the categories of culture and environment. My experiment, however, implicitly transgresses such categories, relying as it does on Don McKay's claim that "it is as dangerous to act as though we were not a part of nature as it is to act as though we were not a part of culture."⁶

My essay's title deliberately echoes William Rueckert's pioneering and generative "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." Beyond the title, the influence resonates primarily in this essay's experimental tone. But I also recognize in Rueckert's essay a call to contextualize ecocriticism that O'Brien repeats nearly three decades later: "How," asks Rueckert, "does one engage in responsible creative and

cooperative biospheric action as a reader, teacher (especially this), and critic of literature? I think that we have to begin answering this question and that we should do what we have always done: turn to the poets. And then to the ecologists.”⁷ Since Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm included Rueckert’s experiment in the popular *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), ecocritics have begun to answer this question in compelling ways, even if the most influential ecocritics have not turned to ecologists (and other scientists) as often as Rueckert would have liked.⁸

Modifying Rueckert’s call to turn to the poets and ecologists, I want to shift the terms of debate to unsettle disciplinary and geopolitical boundaries in two ways: by focussing on the science of geology as a resource for ecocritical analysis, and by comparing poetry from different countries – Canada and South Africa. If ecocriticism has largely developed by ignoring the contributions of Canadian texts and critics,⁹ its focus on the global north¹⁰ has abrogated even more national literatures and critics that tend to be marginalized because of their sub-equatorial location. The following cross-cultural comparison of Canadian and South African poetry points to one way ecocriticism can widen its scope to global concerns while still remaining focussed on local realities and imaginings. The interdisciplinary component of this essay suggests one strategy for managing the tensions provoked by such a local-global experiment.¹¹

Interdisciplinary ecocriticism enables an understanding of how the physical world functions – biologically, chemically, ecologically – and how “science” collects, organizes, and disseminates such knowledge, effectively interrogating, as O’Brien would have it, the categories of “culture” and “environment,” albeit indirectly and with a degree of deference to what an institution such as science – broadly speaking – can teach ecocritics about the physical world. To the extent that they consider elements of the physical world in relation to human language and culture, ecocritics are perhaps the phenomenologists of literary and cultural criticism. As William Howarth notes in “Some Principles of Ecocriticism,” “Ecocriticism, instead of taxing science for its use of language to represent (mimesis), examines its ability to point (deixis).”¹² In addition to

spending time in the field observing, reading research and writing from the sciences enables greater proximity to the physical world than reading literature alone. The scientific texts I refer to in this essay – both popular and academic – shape my approach to the rocks and glaciers in the poems under discussion (primarily by providing me with a more thorough understanding of geologic time and processes than I had prior to writing this essay). Furthermore, whatever the science has taught me about plate tectonics and soil composition modifies, in practice, how I read rocks and soil and weather.

Keeping in mind Rueckert's experiment and O'Brien's challenge, I use Don McKay's notion of "geopoetry" – a deep-time variation on his earlier notion of "wilderness"¹³ – to frame close readings of lyric poems by McKay, W. H. New, and Dan Wylie. I limit my choice of poems to those dealing with geology and geologic time, particularly as they provide impetus for thinking about a human (and poetic) relation to the temporal and phenomenal world. By attending to the science of geology, moreover, I want to demonstrate how a science not typically associated with the environmental movement or ecology can contribute to an understanding of ecological processes that have been occurring for millennia and that remain relevant today.

Some ecocritics have begun to consider the implications of "geophilosophy" as a theoretical model for current ecocritical scholarship. In terms of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari's collaborative work, however, geophilosophy has far less to do with geology than with a geographical notion of mapping, despite their use of such terms as "stratification," "folding," and, well, "geology." Geology for Deleuze and Guattari, at least as they express it in "10,000 B.C.: The Geology of Morals" (a pun on Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morals") offers an alternative to the linear, progressive concept of genealogy. As Dianne Chisholm notes in her introduction to a special issue of the online journal *Rhizomes*, geophilosophy avoids geological discourse proper and instead

... probes the earth for an onto-geo-logic of complex processes of stratification.... [G]eophilosophy affirms how the earth moves in flows and folds, and how it stratifies and deterritorializes, with a constant and creative instability that we should discern in human social stratification. If geophilosophy escapes instrumental science, it also brings philosophy down to earth.¹⁴

Geopoetry, by contrast, does not seek to escape science but rather to incorporate it, simultaneously engaging with the failure of scientific and literary imaginations to fully articulate the workings of the physical world. Geopoetry, in other words, invites ecocritics to attend to language and to the phenomenal world studied by scientists, while geophilosophy insists on borrowing terms that ultimately reinforce the primacy of human language and intellect.¹⁵ The value of geopoetry from an ecocritical perspective lies in its insistence on cross-disciplinary, polyphonic reading strategies and in its capacity to invoke linguistic gestures of humility in response to the poetry of the phenomenal world.

2. PLACING GEOLOGY IN ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

... Astonished
you are famous and anonymous, the border
washed out by so soft a thing as weather.
– McKay, “Astonished – ”¹⁶

Literature scholars have begun paying heed to the influence of geology on literature, but few have done so within an explicitly ecocritical framework. Articles on Robinson Jeffers and his relation to other poets and on John Burroughs are notable exceptions.¹⁷ With *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (2004), Noah Heringman conducts a valuable reassessment of Romantic poetry as it developed alongside the science of geology, but he distances his work from ecocriticism because he claims, rather un-

convincingly, that his “focus on untamed nature is problematic from the point of view of ecocriticism and other recent environmental writing.”¹⁸ I am not sure how a focus on “untamed nature” would present problems for ecocritics, unless Heringman is referring to the likelihood that such a term is apt to be challenged by ecocritics. In a similarly recuperative mode, Ralph O’Connor offers, with *The Earth on Show: Fossils and the Poetics of Popular Science, 1802–1856* (2007), literary readings of popular geologic writings. While both Heringman’s and O’Connor’s texts have much to offer ecocritics with an eye to geology, neither positions itself consciously within an ecocritical paradigm. Despite this reluctance, both works comprise literary and cultural research germane to historians of science and ecocritics alike. The capacity of such an ongoing history to inform contemporary views of discrete scientific fields and their impact on ecocriticism cannot be underestimated. If nothing else, such work reminds that geology – like ecology, phenomenology, literary criticism, and sociology – affects research beyond the boundaries imposed by disciplinary thought.

But if Heringman and O’Connor contextualize a particular set of responses to geological discourse in the nineteenth century, they reveal little about how the science of geology affects the science of ecology. Since the mid-twentieth century, geology’s impact on ecology has become more pronounced, relating as it does to such environmental concerns as agriculture (soil science), climate (orography¹⁹ and weathering), and evolution (palaeontology). Insofar as ecologists and environmental scientists incorporate geological knowledge into their research, geology has the potential to inform ecocritical work intent on crossing disciplinary boundaries. Becoming familiarized with scientific discourse and extending research across disciplinary as well as geopolitical borders are both worthy goals if ecocritics are to seriously address conversations about the most pressing global crisis – namely, global climate change – of the twenty-first century. What can ecocritics offer these conversations besides insight into some of the finest “non-scientific” thinking and writing? As students of language, ecocritics can offer the capacity to use language and imagination to question the damaging choices humans

have made and the rhetoric used to condone such choices. As students of literature, ecocritics can offer the capacity to embrace paradox, polyphony, and in-betweenness. And, most importantly, as teachers of language and literature, ecocritics can offer the capacity to remind scores of students that literature, as part of their everyday lives, can actually engage real-world problems and invite participation in potential solutions.

Harry H. Hess, a geology professor at Princeton whose research was foundational in developing the unifying theory of plate tectonics, coined the term “geopoetry” in 1960 to describe the “unorthodox and tenuous” theory of continental drift,²⁰ a theory that most scientists had difficulty attributing to any physical forces that they knew about based on centuries of observation, deduction, and induction.²¹ In the decade following Hess’s coinage, mounting evidence conspired to turn Hess’s “poetry” into geofact: similar geological strata where South America and West Africa were once joined; identical fossil remains uncovered on different continents; maps and surveys of ocean floors.²² Systematic scientific research in the 1960s helped to prove continental-drift theories that had been circulating at least since Antonio Sinder-Pelligrini’s attempt to “reassemble the continents using scientific evidence” in 1859.²³ For McKay, the term geopoetry remains useful as a way to think about “those moments of pure wonder when we contemplate even the most basic elements of planetary dwelling, and our words fumble in their attempts to do them justice.”²⁴ Now that geologists no longer require “poetry” to justify the veracity of continental drift, “geopoetry” is free to signify a philosophical stance in keeping with McKay’s ecological poetics.

But McKay’s language in his explanation of geopoetry raises questions about a writer who maintains a philosophical distance from Romanticism’s reification of human desires and language, its “celebration of the creative imagination in and for itself.”²⁵ The awe with which McKay writes of rock and geologic time differs from the Romantic sublime, yet “moments of pure wonder” sounds very similar to characteristics of sublime descriptions. The difference is contextual and historical. According to Heringman, during the Romantic period the “geological sublime [held the observer’s] wonder in tension with the impulse toward

mastery,” in part because the contradiction “between the admiration and the domination of nature” had yet to be realized.²⁶ Centuries of scientific and philosophical scholarship have enabled the contradiction to be very much realized. As a result, McKay discusses nature in terms of the sublime more self-consciously than his Romantic predecessors. Intrigued by the potential of such terms as “wonder,” “astonishment,” and “awe” to articulate a poetic response to natural phenomena, McKay is nevertheless aware of the ease with which their use can slip into cliché like an eroded bank sliding into a muddy river. While the failure of human imagination informs both McKay’s and his Romantic predecessors’ poetry,²⁷ McKay’s failure extends to language itself, a distinction which is integral to an understanding of geopoetry vis-à-vis ecocriticism. “Poets,” he writes in *Vis à Vis* (2001), “are supremely interested in what language can’t do; in order to gesture outside, they use language in a way that flirts with its destruction.”²⁸ McKay’s wonder in response to the quartz crystal on his desk²⁹ or the Bow Glacier in Banff National Park,³⁰ expressed imperfectly in language, persists despite and because of the precise geological knowledge he has acquired.

Discussing his 2006 collection of poetry with David Reibetanz, McKay says that “all the geology in *Strike/Slip* is accurate – I’ve actually had geologists come up from the audience and compliment me on the accuracy, and I want that accuracy to hold. Because I want it rooted in phenomenology rather than Romanticism.”³¹ In *Vis à Vis*, McKay engages with the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas. I can identify McKay’s eco- and geopoetics, for example, in Merleau-Ponty’s claims that “the world is there before any possible analysis of mine”³² and that “looking for the world’s essence is not looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse; it is looking for what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization.”³³ Instead of citing the discovery and acquisition of such knowledge (or “facts”) as evidence of a supreme human intelligence, as the Romantics might have done,³⁴ McKay pursues a humble attention to physical forces bigger and older than humanity, albeit ones that humans are affected by and complicit in. The resulting attention, which McKay articulates

most fully in “Otherwise than Place,”³⁵ involves “asking, for example, not ‘what’s the beach to me?’ but ‘what am I to the beach?’”³⁶ Expressions of wonder inspired by recognizing humans as incidental to geological and evolutionary processes – which is as good a synopsis of the sublime as any – for McKay might manifest in two ways: as astonishment or as petrification. Each response correlates in McKay’s geopoetry to a different version of deep time: astonishment responds to eternity and implies a “wide-mouthed silence which we occupy, which occupies us as we turn to the immeasurable life of stone”³⁷; petrification responds to infinity and implies stone reverting to rock.³⁸ The first two poems in *Strike/Slip* illustrate the distinctions by way of introducing the collection’s main set of tensions.

Rather than denoting a simple binary, rock and stone represent differing degrees of use-value: “What happens between rock and stone is simply everything human.... [R]ock is as old as the earth is; stone is only as old as humanity.”³⁹ Playing on the aural and visual – though not, it must be said, the etymological – resonance between stone and astonishment, McKay aligns language with stone: both are, in McKavian terms, gestures toward domestication. In “Astonished –,” the speaker admits the tenuousness of such gestures by rendering synonyms of the title descriptor with a series of related participial adjectives, effectively imposing linguistic order within a verbal structure that, in grammatical terms, is non-finite. In other words, McKay chooses a verbal form that does not require a tense or a person. Implying a subject without naming one, the speaker follows the dash in the title with “astounded, astonished, astunned, stopped short / and turned toward stone, the moment / filling with its slow / stratified time.”⁴⁰ The litany of adjectives describes responses to deep time that indicate an inability to respond intelligently and coherently. The gesture insists on attempting a turn “toward stone,” to domesticate the moment by speaking it in language both stony and stupefied, thus retaining a semblance of control. But amid the realization that “sediments accumulate on seabeds, seabeds / rear up into mountains, ammonites / fossilize into gems,”⁴¹ the speaker wonders “Are you thinking / or being thought?”⁴² The question, which nicely illustrates

the ambivalence of geopoetic insight, disrupts the domesticating gesture by minimizing the role of human language in the life of the planet. Geopoetic responses to such ambiguity are not unlike the astonished exclamations of Romantic poets in the way geopoetry embraces the relative insignificance of the human voice and expresses it through language.⁴³

If the turn from rock to stone strikes a note of familiar, albeit discomfiting, human action, the turn from stone to rock evokes a vertiginous response experienced in moments of petrification. “Petrified –” recounts this vertigo, positing the geopoet as fixed “in the arms of wonder’s dark / undomesticated sister,”⁴⁴ unable to articulate himself. Without a name, this undomesticated relative of wonder prevents “the entrance into art”⁴⁵ that the poet relies upon to make sense of his astonishment. The geological poems in *Strike/Slip* address the fundamental tension between rock and stone, between wild and domesticated ideas that stretch the limits of the geopoet’s capacity to comprehend and communicate his place in deep time. A short poem that takes its title from a geology textbook illustrates this geopoetic struggle at the level of formal convention. Named for an early geologist’s application of a physics theory (about the potential failure of tensiles, ductiles, and brittles relative to the amount of stress exerted on them) to tectonic forces, “Stress, Shear, and Strain Theories of Failure” demonstrates McKay’s metaphorical skills as well as his ability to integrate language and concepts from the hard sciences. For a poem that announces itself as a sonnet with the line “This sonnet hereby sings,”⁴⁶ “Stress, Shear, and Strain Theories of Failure” accomplishes much more than its glib self-naming suggests by testing the limits of a traditional lyric form against a subject – the earth’s crust – that invites scientific knowledge in addition to emotional introspection.

Though it contains fourteen lines, this sonnet does not adhere to a strict metrical pattern or rhyming scheme, and it is about love, that traditional lyric subject, only in the sense that the poet might, in writing the poem, be paying homage to earth’s “chthonic shear.”⁴⁷ McKay plays on the tensions between fault (“The earth-engine / driving itself through death after death. Strike/slip, / thrust, and the fault called normal, which occurs / when two plates separate),” failure (as in the theories of the

title), and (human) failing (“Let us fail / in all the styles established by our lithosphere”).⁴⁸ The sonnet sustains McKay’s suspicion of language, metaphor, and poetry – his interest in what “language can’t do”⁴⁹ – all of which he argues elsewhere fail necessarily yet instructively.

The traditional sonnet here fails in its attempt to contain the shifting dynamics of the “earth-engine.”⁵⁰ Beginning the first line with three trochaic feet followed by an appropriately placed catalectic to echo the linguistic “lift,” the next three lines attempt to settle into an iambic pentameter but struggle under the “stress shear strain” of metapoetic humility and attention:

They have never heard of lift
and are – for no one, over and over – cleft. Riven,
recrystallized. Ruined again. The earth-engine
driving itself through death after death.⁵¹

Significant for giving the collection its title, this poem challenges conventional wisdom regarding both lyric poetry and lay geology. The rhythms are dissonant, and the earth itself splits and shifts, as the repetition of “death,” the synonymous “cleft” and “riven,” as well as “recrystallization” and “Ruined *again*” indicate. In choosing to resist the sonnet form by eschewing conventional metre, McKay does not suggest he has somehow found a way *not* to participate in the anthropocentrism of the lyric tradition. His poems reveal a complicity he feels as a member of North American society and as a poet. It is good “meditative medicine,” McKay writes, to consider otherwise-than-place⁵²; in other words, it is instructive to consider our relation to the world in ways that reveal, at the very least, our inadequacies as a species, and at the very worst, our arrogance and our violence.

3. RAUCOUS UNSONNETS

What happens to us
Is irrelevant to the world's geology
But what happens to the world's geology
Is not irrelevant to us.

– Hugh MacDiarmid, “On a Raised Beach”⁵³

W. H. New is best known as a teacher, editor, and critic of Canadian literature and postcolonial studies. In 1996, after having written or edited over thirty academic books,⁵⁴ he published *Science Lessons*, a collection of poems offering variations on the sonnet form.⁵⁵ If McKay's poetry functions in my experiment to mobilize an interdisciplinary ecocriticism, New's sonnets in *Science Lessons* serve to unsettle the extent to which scientific ideas and the lyric “I” are capable of addressing ecological crises. As sonnets that are not entirely comfortable with their formal limitations (though comfortable enough that their status as sonnets seems clear in spite of New's formal play), New's poems at once acknowledge and resist the authority of dominant discourse – both lyrical and cultural. McKay and New, in their essays and poems, write the paradox of human linguistic engagement with the land and its inhabitants and recognize the importance of paying attention to the non-human.

I focus here on three poems from *Science Lessons* that purport to provide lessons on geology: “Imprinting,” “Lithosphere,” and “Continental Drift.” New organizes his sequence as a lyrical *Bildungsroman*, the unnamed protagonist (or student) referred to throughout the collection simply as “he.” Though *Science Lessons* was published a decade earlier than McKay's “Stress, Shear, and Strain Theories of Failure,” “Lithosphere” nevertheless resonates with the later poem's attention to geological phenomena. New's earlier poem also confronts the notions of failure and decreation, though not in those terms. The lithosphere – literally *stone globe* – makes up the rigid portion of the earth's upper region, the tectosphere (the asthenosphere makes up the more plastic part, just

beneath the lithosphere), and it comprises the world's tectonic plates.⁵⁶ The "lesson" in this poem revolves around the knowledge that the earth is made of rock but that it nevertheless enables life: "He marvels that the earth should be productive – / mere mud he thought it, yet it yields / hot springs and eggplant."⁵⁷ Rock participates, actively if unconsciously, in the composition of soil, particularly when rock is exposed to conditions favourable for weathering. K. J. Hall and D.W.H. Walton summarize these conditions, after E. Yatsu's *The Nature of Weathering* (1988), as "climate, parent rock, topography, vegetation, hydrological conditions, and time."⁵⁸ Because, as Arthur R. Kruckeberg notes, "changes in landforms and their lithologies are incessant... the kind and amount of weathering yield a secondary geological product, the regolith – rock fragments, soils, and sediments."⁵⁹ Rock weathering represents a physical process that, as McKay says of symbiosis, the Gaia hypothesis, and ecology, is as poetic as it is scientific.⁶⁰ Information about soil's capacity to "yield" vegetables, both in gardens and in uncultivated ecosystems,⁶¹ suggests rich poetry, indeed. New's student reacts to this gardening lesson in a manner that recapitulates a Romantic stance vis-à-vis sublime landscapes, but with a crucial difference.

New is careful not to use words associated with the Romantic sublime when describing the student's response to processes that are bigger than him. As non-material nouns, such words as "wonder" or "awe" seem to have no place in the student's confrontation with the workings of the earth, most material of material. If "wonder" functions, as Heringman argues, to frame Romantic responses to "geologically significant landscapes,"⁶² "marvel," as New employs it, posits the student as an active and central figure in the lesson. Free of the Romanticism often associated with the term "wonder," the verb "marvel" also hints at the student's innocence, his humility vis-à-vis earth's productivity. To marvel is both to recognize a thing's worth and to admit humility in the face of that thing's very existence or accomplishment, such that individual human feats are rendered insignificant.⁶³ Indeed, the only other verb attributed to the student occurs in the phrase "his mind rattles," as if to reinforce his naïve struggle to comprehend an intelligence beyond himself.

For the remainder of the poem, New assigns verbal action to the earth and its concomitants:

it is the range that *rakes* him, the sheer
rainbow creativity that *has him*
dwelling again on ash and stone sidewalk,
looking for the simile, the plain parallel
of urban patch and fostered seedling.⁶⁴

The range – mountain range, range of earth products – “rakes him,” an action that implies a reverse ontology not unlike McKay’s “what am I to the beach?” He is raked like so many fallen leaves accumulating on a lawn; he is posited on an incline determined by the movement of tectonic plates relative to one another.⁶⁵ The action implies that he has been cultivated by the surrounding landscape, that his is not the dominant existence. The impulse to seek the pattern originates with the range’s “rainbow creativity,” which I take to be its striated appearance, evidence of the mountain’s creation. The impulse to look “for the simile” does not originate with the student’s mind. Yet the relation between student and earth has not been exactly reversed, which is why he marvels instead of expressing outright awe: “The earth grounds him,” New writes, “sets / him free, cracks open to sustain repair.”⁶⁶ The shift in these final lines from the creative redundancy of “earth grounds”⁶⁷ to the paradoxical creativity of grounding as freedom and cracking as repair resembles the decreative function of plate tectonics – effectively the geopoetry Hess coined to explain a paradoxical set of forces responsible for the lithosphere’s dynamic stability.

The narrative New constructs throughout *Science Lessons* uses carefully crafted unsonnets – familiar enough to recognize as sonnets, yet full of unconventional syllabics, metrics, and rhyme-schemes – to shape a *Bildungsroman* out of fragments and edges of a life.⁶⁸ Though hardly a conventional coming-of-age story, *Science Lessons* benefits from “the irreducible historical character of geologic phenomena”⁶⁹ to shape the significant – dare I say, rocky – events in the student’s life. In addition

to “Lithosphere” – not to mention “Palaeontology” and “Geological Engineering,” detailed discussion of which falls beyond the scope of this chapter – the book’s framing poems draw on geologic terms and ideas. As with much of New’s writing, the framing poems emphasize a preoccupation with borders and edges.⁷⁰ “Imprinting” provides a preface to the collection; as such it occupies the same temporality as the final poem, “Continental Drift.” Thus, from the retrospective vantage of adulthood, the collection begins: “*All mountains now he metes against / The Selkirks: rocky ridge stepping south / across the border, dissolving.*”⁷¹ This range, anticipating the lesson in “Lithosphere,” participates in historical processes beyond the purview of human agency. The rocky ridges cross political borders easily, and they dissolve more slowly than New’s protagonist can perceive.⁷² Rock and stone – though not precisely corresponding to McKay’s definitions – provide metaphors against which the student learns to measure his own ideas:

*All resolve
he measures by the certainty of stone,
the way grass catches it, dawn fog
coats it in grey illusion, and talus
recklessly records a glacial history
in substance, still being lived.*⁷³

As much as New relies on the metaphor of reading the land, he also acknowledges the extent to which science informs the metaphor, making it (and others throughout the collection) more accurate than it would be occupying a poem that ignores the intellectual history that enables a reading of glacial history. That the history is recorded by talus, or scree, reinforces the student’s movement toward an *edge* that occurs in both poems, resounding in the final poem’s *drift*.

To measure resolve against the certainty of stone is to embrace the dynamism of the earth system – as McKay puts it in *Deactivated West 100* (2005), “Terra Infirma.”⁷⁴ The evidence of this dynamism resides in faults, which in turn cause earthquakes and mountain ranges,

demonstrating in disturbing fashion that the earth's "basic *m.o.* is slow catastrophe, not calm."⁷⁵ New's student avoids becoming petrified by the evidence, however, choosing instead to marvel at the possibilities afforded by failure – the earth's and his own – and change. "Then he is another," begins the concluding poem, "and himself, and still / changing: the land drifts apart, the / great divide to the east, the rift valley."⁷⁶ Identity is at least as fluid as the land that drifts apart; the peaks and valleys of a life edge just this side of cliché: if New deploys the hackneyed metaphor of life as a journey full of peaks and valleys, he avoids cliché by extending the metaphor, emphasizing that a life is prone to shifts, faults, rifts. New articulates his protagonist's capacity to continue to change with a strategic line break, "still / changing," effectively collapsing the boundary between stasis and movement: dynamic stability. Being in place is never, according to the poem, being in one place. Despite the student's desire to remain *here* or *there*, "some insistent drive towards displacement / edges him onward,"⁷⁷ as if he were an erratic boulder caught beneath a slow-moving glacier and writing on the land his biography.

4. TIME, TRAVEL (OR, LOGIC OF EARTH TIME)

Moving, move!

We know where we are.

– Sydney Clouts, "Around this Coast"⁷⁸

A similar drive towards displacement might be said to motivate the best poetry of Zimbabwe-born Dan Wylie. But, although Wylie writes poems about geology and glaciers, the South African landscape in which he lives constitutes one of the most geomorphically stable regions on earth. As a result, Wylie's geopoetry is set mostly in South America. McKay and New ground their geopoetry in the relatively young mountainous terrain of British Columbia: no other landscape in Canada so explicitly and dramatically reminds of earth's dynamic stability.⁷⁹ Newfoundland, by contrast, is geologically old, as McKay notes in his interview with

David Reibetanz. McKay went to Newfoundland “to follow up on the opposite kind of geology from B.C.,” to contemplate the mind-boggling fact that the Avalon Peninsula used to be “a part of proto-Africa that broke off.”⁸⁰ Southern Africa is a current part of the African continent that inspires geopoetry, as well, with a geological history going back “some 3 600 million years” to the early Archaean Eon.⁸¹ Wylie has developed a sensitivity to geology through exposure to southern Africa’s unique ecological and geological features. Like New, Wylie is a teacher, a literary critic, and a poet who published his first collection in 1996.⁸² Unlike New, however, Wylie turned to writing poetry earlier in his academic career. Two poems from his fourth collection, *Road Work* (2007), contemplate geology in ways that are germane to the geopoetic context I have set up in this essay. “Glacier: Perito Moreno Glacier, Patagonia, 11 September 2003” and “Erratic Boulder: Lago Viedma, Patagonia, 30 September 2003” place the speaker in unfamiliar territory, yet for all the geographical distance between South America and southern Africa – though it is worth recalling that approximately 300 million years ago, South America and Africa were likely joined as a “supercontinent”⁸³ – both poems remain close to a traveller’s concern with movement. For both New and Wylie, travel articulates a constancy of change that resembles the constant movement of the earth’s crust and what lies below. If plate tectonics represents, as McKay suggests, a decreative force – breakdown with the possibility of productive return – then New’s and Wylie’s travellers undo themselves amid unfamiliar landscapes and cultures, only to be ontologically reconstituted upon returning home.

Wylie’s poems in *Road Work* resemble neither sonnets nor unsonnets in the sense that I am using the term. “Glacier,” for example, consists of three sections; framed by two brief sections (four and five lines, respectively) that place the speaker on a tour bus travelling to visit the glacier, the middle section inscribes a violent glacial ontology in twenty-one lines. Despite the formal differences, I am tempted to read this middle section of “Glacier” as a hulking sonnet, a sonnet on steroids: perhaps, with its seven extra lines, it might be a sonnet and a half. But whereas McKay’s and New’s unsonnets articulate a modest respect for the form

they parody, Wylie's lyric description of the glacier shucks conventional syllabics like flexing biceps ripping a shirt sleeve. Each line seems enraged with the glacier's animalism, its "serpentine motion / impenetrably frozen, all menace and caress, / armageddon snapping, implacable fragmentation."⁸⁴ Marvelling as New's student marvels, Wylie's speaker encapsulates glaciation's long-term effects, describing how the glacier – "vital ice,"⁸⁵ a noun phrase that sounds like the verb "vitalize" – "gouges down continents to their fossil beds" and "rucks geology up into forests and weak lakes."⁸⁶ Though not alive in a biological sense, this glacier moves with merciless and indifferent force. Wylie effectively evokes a Romantic sense of awe without evoking Romantic formal conventions, as McKay and New both do. In other words, Wylie seems less inclined to reform what McKay considers to be Romanticism's "celebration of the creative imagination in and for itself."⁸⁷ So, although his account of the glacier "grinding / all ethics and terror to rubbled moraine"⁸⁸ jibes with Shelley's account of an Alpine glacier's progress "mapped out [in 'Mont Blanc'] as another illustration of Power,"⁸⁹ it does so inadvertently; Wylie makes no attempt to recapitulate – ironically or otherwise – the pentameter of "Mont Blanc." Nevertheless, the violence with which Wylie imbues the slow-moving Perito Moreno Glacier and the rocky cadences with which he describes it link "poetic and geologic form" in much the same way Shelley's "imitative, 'inorganic'" lines create "a way for the poem to transvalue the conventional catalogue of sublime Alpine features."⁹⁰ Whereas Shelley relied on natural history to forge the link, though, Wylie complements his metaphors with a scientific geology unavailable to Shelley. The result is an account of glaciers' awesome violence that avoids the apocalyptic timbre of "Mont Blanc." The speaker's experience, which he extends while his chagrined fellow tourists wait in the bus, reveals a genuine willingness to acquiesce to the glacier's invitation to be held, literally and figuratively.⁹¹

In the collection's final poem, Wylie revisits the curious wonder that arises when humans are confronted with deep time. Spoken from the perspective, though not in the voice, of Charles Darwin, who visited Patagonia (and other South American locations) during his famous voyage

on Captain FitzRoy's *Beagle*, "Erratic Boulder" recounts Darwin's incredulity at having encountered a large granite rock some "sixty-seven miles distant from the nearest mountain."⁹² Erratic boulders represent a particularly poetic natural process, which also happens to have played a key role in the development of geology and the idea that the earth is billions of years old. At the time of Darwin's *Beagle* voyage, geologists were grappling "to explain the present situation of such travelled fragments," most of which had been observed along "the coasts of Canada and Gulf of St. Lawrence, and also in Chili [*sic*], Patagonia, and the island of South Georgia."⁹³ Jeff Walker identifies John Burroughs as a writer who articulates the poetry of such a process, quoting the American naturalist's comment about a boulder on a neighbouring farmer's property. Imagining how much interest and pride the farmer might take in the boulder if he knew its history,⁹⁴ Burroughs writes that "it was Adirondack gneiss, and had been brought from that region on the back, or the maw, of a glacier, many tens of thousands of years ago."⁹⁵ As Walker explains, Burroughs's metaphors indicate that the erratic "either fell onto the top of the glacier ('on the back') or was scraped from the earth's surface and carried within the glacial ice ('in the maw'),"⁹⁶ both of which are plausible and accurate explanations for how the boulder ended up where it is.

At the beginning of Wylie's poem, "Mister Darwin is puzzled" by a boulder "planted like an affront / on the plain of his millhouse mind."⁹⁷ Initially, the problem represented by the boulder is an epistemological one: "How long have you been stranded?" Darwin asks, "Do you always travel alone? / Did you fall from the grip of an iceberg / adrift like an idea on an ancient sea?"⁹⁸ The questions cannot be answered definitively by Darwin, but based on the conditions in which he encounters erratic boulders in Patagonia – namely, the absence of any signs indicating catastrophic violence – Darwin himself believed, following Lyell, that it is "quite impossible to explain the transportal of these gigantic masses of rock so many miles from their parent-source, on any theory except by that of floating icebergs."⁹⁹ The result, in Darwin's writing and in Wylie's poem, endorses a way of knowing that encompasses an understanding

of deep time as both utterly beyond our capacity to imagine and ironically suitable as metaphor for our movement in space and time. Call it geo-logic, or earth logic, by way of geopoetry.

By ending his collection of travel poems with a poem about Darwin's encounter with an erratic boulder in Patagonia, Wylie accomplishes at least two things. First, he aligns himself (and, by extension, other environmentally conscious writers) with the erratic boulder. In answer to the poetic Darwin, who wonders, "Why should we not be content to rest, / spiny calafate sheltering in our lee?"¹⁰⁰ as the erratic boulder is content to rest, Wylie seems to imply that environmentally conscious writers and travellers are both similar to and different from erratics. On the one hand, what else might we be, having acknowledged humans' relatively inconsequential presence in earth history, but "such travelled fragments," objectified, as New's student is, by the productive, decreative earth? On the other hand, we cannot be content to remain still long enough for plants to grow in our shade. Second, Wylie effectively recognizes geological ideas as ecological ideas and the idea of deep time as a necessary precursor to evolutionary theory as defined by Darwin in the wake of his *Beagle* voyage. As Michael P. Cohen has demonstrated – following Joseph Carroll and Glen Love – evolutionary theory informs environmentalism and ecology to such an extent that ecocritics might as well consider themselves "evocritics."¹⁰¹ Cohen reasons that "if the idea of limited global resources is central to modern environmentalism, it is also rooted in evolutionary theory, from Malthus onward."¹⁰² By the same token, ecology cannot exist without evolutionary theory; in fact, ecology in many ways puts into practice certain aspects of evolutionary theory – namely, population abundance and distribution. I agree that ecocritics have much to learn from evolutionary theory; I am not convinced that the theory sufficiently translates into textual or cultural analysis without first passing through a filter such as ecology, ethology, behaviour psychology, or geology. In part, I blame the narrative focus of evolutionary theory, which has helped to reify narrative literature (novels, stories, myths) over lyric poetry, drama, visual art. The literal and figurative interconnectedness of ecology invites a much broader textual

approach that embraces evolutionary theory as well as history, biology, and geology.

But Cohen's nominal suggestion aside – he does not belabour the point about a possible name change – Wylie's references to animals in "Erratic Boulder" suffice to link biotic and abiotic:

There's nothing here but gross geology,
a tribal irritation of wary guanacos,
a lone loica perched on a grass-blade,
bright chest bulbing like a globule of blood.
The pampas is turning to steel in the presence of doubt.
Mister Darwin must bend his head, and listen.¹⁰³

These lines remind that geological forces have shaped evolutionary and ecological theories since before Darwin's visit to Patagonia. The camelid guanacos and the robin-sized loica both evolved on the pampas – a flat grassland created by successive periods of glaciation and affected by orographic physiognomy (surrounding mountains) – developing adaptations to high altitudes and a cool climate. The doubt Wylie identifies belongs to Darwin, uncertain at this stage of his travels about how the geology of the place affects its natural history. In the absence of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, the ground might as well be steel, incapable of hosting or producing life, impenetrable to analysis. Darwin, though, continues to observe, to listen, inspired by Lyell's discussion of the influence of inorganic causes on species extinction.¹⁰⁴ For Wylie, the agglomeration of forces results in "gross geology," which impels Darwin to wonder what continues "travelling / in the granite centre of [the boulder's] stillness?"¹⁰⁵ The erratic boulder's historical link to movement coupled with its seemingly static position comes to represent conflicting ecocritical tensions between literature and science. By thinking of the boulder as part of an organic world, Wylie invites interdisciplinary movement key to ecological – including evolutionary, geological, biological – readings of the world.

5. SPEAKING FOR THE UTTER

In this timescale logic
doesn't take me very far.

– Robert Berold, “Geologic”¹⁰⁶

McKay, New, and Wylie aptly demonstrate how a poet might find useful, interesting words and ideas in scientific writing. But by using those words and ideas for more than expanding their vocabulary, each also demonstrates a commitment to destabilizing the borders between disciplines and literary forms. At the risk of sounding trite, I think that these poets have written some deceptively simple poems, which require attentive forays into the non-literary world of science if they are to inspire anything other than more poetry. William Rueckert ended his 1978 experiment “short of action, halfway between literature and ecology,” wondering how he and his colleagues could possibly “translate literature into purgative-redemptive biospheric action” and “turn words into something more than more words.”¹⁰⁷ Despite thirty years of potential response to Rueckert’s pioneering efforts, ecocritics have yet to redeem ourselves as a profession and as a species. As Susie O’Brien soberly points out, the past few decades of ecocriticism’s institutional rise have coincided with “accelerating environmental degradation,” a coincidence which highlights the need for ecocritics to examine our strategies and habits critically and reflexively.¹⁰⁸ I have not responded to Rueckert’s call by producing fewer words and more actions; neither have I responded to O’Brien’s advice by turning my attention from poetry to cultural studies or by tempering the geological aspect of my experiment with sociohistorical context (that the science of geology developed in large part to determine and establish mineral wealth for rich nations, for example).¹⁰⁹ The writing and publishing of words make up a small portion of what we do, however, and I hope that by choosing to demonstrate this experiment in interdisciplinary, comparative ecocriticism I have not precluded other strategies.

If I stubbornly emphasize a tendency among the poets I discuss in these pages to write precisely and profoundly about the biospheric community, I do so fully aware of the cultural paradigms – Romanticism, taxonomy, linear narrative, Western science – they depend upon to make sense of their imaginative reactions to the physical world. To follow up and contextualize the geologic language in these poems with explanations from scientific materials is not, I think, merely to defer to a higher authority in hopes of communicating singular meaning. Rather, it is to unsettle the boundaries between disciplines, between ways of knowing, and to encourage all such boundary-crossing with the goal, not of achieving a unified theory of knowledge, but of increasing our capacity to know how the world functions.

Finally, shifting the way we think about language, words, and poetry, all of which still tend to refer to the realm of human creativity, remains paramount to the ecocriticism I want to practice. I want to convince more people to listen to the poetry of birds and plants and rocks and water. I want to use language to remind people that language is flawed, and that the way we write now is not so different from the way rocks were painted thousands of years ago, which Al Purdy memorably describes in “The Horseman of Agawa” as “pitting fish eggs and bear grease against eternity / which is kind of ludicrous or kind of beautiful I guess.”¹¹⁰ To pursue the potential in that paradox is to approach a way of knowing that does not rely on the centrality of human experience. In his preface to the eighth edition of *Principles of Geology* (1850), Charles Lyell explains his reasons for investigating the effects of geologic actions:

Such effects are the enduring monuments of the ever-varying state of the physical geography of the globe, the lasting signs of its destruction and renovation, and the memorials of the equally fluctuating condition of the organic world. They may be regarded, in short, as a symbolical language, in which earth’s autobiography is written.¹¹¹

Such traces tell a story of inexorable and unpredictable dynamism in the guise of knowable and dependable stability. We can think of earth's language, as Lyell has it, as a series of utterances and utters, such as those McKay writes about in "Utter": "the utter left by the brute / weight of the piano. By the locomotive / grinding and polishing its tracks."¹¹² Everything leaves traces that invite, and often resist, interpretation. Let the earth and its inhabitants speak for themselves, even as we practice speaking for the utters.¹¹³

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NOTES

- 1 Harry H. Hess, "History of Ocean Basins" (1962), in *Plate Tectonics and Geomagnetic Reversals*, ed. Allan Cox (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1973), 38.
- 2 James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth Is Fighting Back – and How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Penguin, 2006), 34.
- 3 Mary Midgley, *Science and Poetry* (London: Routledge, 2002), 172.
- 4 I do not mean for the difference between "environmental" and "ecological" in this essay to suggest a popular or a non-negotiable division, or for the terms to be mutually exclusive. For my purposes, "environmental" refers to a generalized philosophical view of the natural world, which relies upon an inclusive yet vague term – *the environment* – to impel a green consciousness and, perhaps, influence political action; "ecological," though the term itself seems relatively exclusive, refers nevertheless to a more material view of the natural world, which relies upon a scientific understanding of ecological principles – including evolution – to impel a consciousness attuned to the ways commonly opposed ideas, such as nature and culture, interconnect.
- 5 Susie O'Brien, "Back to the World': Reading Ecocriticism in a Postcolonial Context," in *Five Emus to the King of Siam: Environment and Empire*, ed. Helen Tiffin (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 196.
- 6 Don McKay, *Vis à Vis: Field Notes on Poetry and Wilderness* (Wolfville, NS: Gaspereau, 2001), 30–31.
- 7 William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 114.
- 8 Scholars began to mark the absence of scientific ecology in ecocritical discourse after approximately a decade of important critical work on the literary value of nature writing. For commentary on the lack of scientific rigour in foundational works of ecocriticism, see Glen Love's *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003) and Dana Phillips's *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 9 See Susie O'Brien's "Nature's Nation, National Natures? Reading Ecocriticism in a Canadian Context" (*Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 42 [spring–summer 1998]: 17–41; and rpt. this volume), in which she examines the relative absence of Canadian voices in the early days of institutional ecocriticism.
- 10 While literary and cultural studies has generally operated within a west/east (or occident/orient) dialectic, environmental history and geography have focussed more on the disparities between the rich, industrialized global north and the relatively disadvantaged (yet often) resource-rich global south. Noting the uneven distribution of wealth and the disproportionate use of non-renewable resources, environmental geographers have identified a more accurate paradigm within which to consider neo-colonialism and its effects on such crises as global warming, food scarcity, and resource extraction in Africa and South America.

- 11 While important work has been done to compare Canadian and American literature within an ecological, bioregional framework, much Canadian ecocriticism thus far has been productively concerned with establishing a tradition, and tracing a trajectory, of ecocritical thinking and writing in *Canada*. For comparisons between Canadian and American environmental writing, see Laurie Ricou's *Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest* (Edmonton: NeWest, 2002); D.M.R. Bentley's *The Confederation Group of Canadian Poets, 1880–1897* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), especially the chapters on John Burroughs's influence on Roberts and Lampman; Rebecca Raglon and Marian Scholtmeijer's "Animals are not believers in ecology': Mapping Critical Differences between Environmental and Animal Advocacy Literatures" (*Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 14, no. 2 [2007]: 121–40); and Nicholas Bradley's "Men with Guts: Al Purdy, Robinson Jeffers, and Geopoetic Influence" (*Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 62 [spring–summer 2008]: 44–63).
- 12 William Howarth, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 80.
- 13 McKay develops his theory of wilderness in *Vis à Vis*: "By 'wilderness,'" he writes, "I want to mean, not just a set of endangered spaces, but the capacity of all things to elude the mind's appropriations. That tools retain a vestige of wilderness is especially evident when we think of their existence in time and eventual graduation from utility: breakdown" (McKay, *Vis à Vis*, 21). Wilderness resides to varying degrees in everything that humans use and/or create for our use. That it remains most visible in typical considerations of "nature" and non-human animals only obscures its less visible presence when our tools, in the broadest sense of the term, fail to do what we want them to. Those moments when the Internet is down or when your shoelace comes untied are moments of wilderness.
- 14 Dianne Chisholm, "Rhizome, Ecology, Geophilosophy (A Map to This Issue)," *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* 15 (winter 2007), par. 3. Web.
- 15 A full consideration of the tensions between geophilosophy and geopoetry falls beyond the limits of my argument here. While I am not convinced that the tensions are necessarily irreconcilable, I nevertheless remain suspicious of pseudo- and anti-scientific claims (see Alan Sokal, *Beyond the Hoax: Science, Philosophy, and Culture* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2008], for a sobering, if incomplete, critique of pseudo-science in academia. Sokal tends not to suffer much in the way of imaginative, creative ambiguity: he likes his sentences to mean what they say and say what they mean). Chisholm's statement that "geophilosophy is *more ecological than ecology*, the discipline of which is restricted to the quantifying analytics of ecosystem dynamics, ecosite constituencies, and population stability and sustainability," for example, wrongly assumes that disciplinary restrictions (or limits) prevent cross-disciplinary work (Chisholm, "Rhizome, Ecology, Geophilosophy [A Map to This Issue]," par. 5).
- 16 Don McKay, *Strike/Slip* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2006), 3.
- 17 See ShaunAnne Tangney's "A Divine Physical World: Catastrophic Geology and Jeffers Country," *Jeffers Studies* 8, no. 1 (2004): 5–15; George Hart's "Seeing Rock for the First Time: Varieties of Geological Experience

- in Jeffers, Rexroth, and Snyder,” *Jeffers Studies* 8, no. 1 (2004), 17–29; Bradley, “Men with Guts”; and Jeff Walker, “The Great, Shaggy Barbaric Earth: Geological Writings of John Burroughs,” in *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*, ed. Annie Merrill Ingram et al. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 250–59.
- 18 Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 12.
- 19 Orography, the study of the formation and relief of mountains, hills, and other elevated landmasses, contributes to an understanding of global climate since mountainous regions impact the flow of wind so profoundly.
- 20 Hess in fact borrows the term “geopoetry” from J.H.F. Umbgrove’s 1947 work *The Pulse of the Earth*. Whereas Umbgrove coins the term to acknowledge the need to furnish geological prose with “temporary hypothetical constructions for lack of solid facts” (J.H.F. Umbgrove, *The Pulse of the Earth*, 2nd ed. [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1947], 1), Hess uses the term to refer specifically to his attempt “to invent an evolution for ocean basins” (Hess, “History of Ocean Basins,” 38). When writing *The Pulse of the Earth*, Umbgrove was not convinced by extant theories of continental drift.
- 21 “Geopoetry Becomes Geofact,” *Time*, 5 Jan. 1970. Web.
- 22 Ibid., par. 7; Terence McCarthy and Bruce Rubidge, *The Story of Earth and Life: A Southern African Perspective on a 4.6 Billion-Year Journey* (Cape Town: Struik-New Holland, 2005), 22–25.
- 23 McCarthy and Rubidge, *Story of Earth and Life*, 22.
- 24 Don McKay, *Deactivated West 100* (Kentville, NS: Gaspereau, 2005), 42.
- 25 McKay, *Vis à Vis*, 28.
- 26 Heringman, *Romantic Rocks*, 50.
- 27 Ibid., 49–51.
- 28 McKay, *Vis à Vis*, 32.
- 29 McKay, *Strike/Slip*, 15–16.
- 30 McKay, *Deactivated West 100*, 23–25.
- 31 Don McKay, “Growing an Ear,” interview with David Reibetanz, *Echolocation* 7 (2008): 64. McKay’s ornithological and ecological accuracy is the subject of Travis V. Mason, *Ornithologies of Desire: Ecocritical Essays, Avian Poetics, and Don McKay* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013).
- 32 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (London: Routledge, 2004), 66.
- 33 Ibid., 72. Merleau-Ponty represents a clear influence on McKay’s phenomenology, but the French philosopher holds a slightly more skeptical view of science than McKay. Merleau-Ponty’s claim that science “comes face to face with the real world only at rare intervals” explains away the extent to which the results of reductive, repeatable experiments can get humans closer to the real world by cultivating familiarity with the phenomenal world (291).
- 34 Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2006), 93.
- 35 McKay, *Deactivated West 100*, 15–31.
- 36 Ibid., 17.
- 37 Ibid., 35.
- 38 Ibid., 47. So, stone-eternity-astonishment corresponds to rock-infinity-petrification. In other words, stone is domesticated rock (think stone hammer, tombstone, keystone); “the idea of eternity domesticates infinity” (ibid., 40); and astonishment enables moments of geopoetic insight while petrification prevents it, replacing

- insight with a fear “of endless uninflected time” (ibid., 40, 46).
- 39 Ibid., 59.
- 40 McKay, *Strike/Slip*, 3.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Cf., for example, Shelley’s speaker in “Mont Blanc” –

The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
 Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
 So solemn, so serene, that man may be,
 In such a faith, with nature reconciled, –
 Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to
 repeal
 Large codes of fraud and woe not
 understood
 By all, but which the wise, and great,
 and good
 Interpret, or make felt, or feel!

(Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 2, ed. Neville Rogers [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975], 76–83). The wilderness and the mountain are granted agency to inspire humans; but certain humans, “the wise,” are capable of interpreting and feeling for themselves what Nature has to teach.

- 44 McKay, *Strike/Slip*, 4.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid., 33.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 McKay, *Vis à Vis*, 32.
- 50 McKay, *Strike/Slip*, 33.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 McKay, *Deactivated West 100*, 19.

- 53 Hugh MacDiarmid, *Selected Poems*, ed. Alan Raich and Michael Grieve (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), 215–18.
- 54 As critic of Canadian and postcolonial writing, New has written such books as *Articulating West* (1972); *Among Worlds: An Introduction to Modern Commonwealth and South African Fiction* (1975); *A History of Canadian Literature* (1989; rpt. 2003); and *Land Sliding: Imaging Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* (1997). As editor, he has published numerous teaching anthologies and such critical works as *A Political Art: Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock* (1978); *Native Writers and Canadian Writing* (1990); *Inside the Poem: Essays and Poems in Honour of Donald Stephens* (1992); and *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (2002). Publication details are included in the list of Works Cited.
- 55 Since that first collection, New has consistently published poetry with Oolichan Press. Though hardly academic in content or style, each collection comprises personae that grapple with questions similar to those New has made prominent in his scholarly work: questions of home, of place vis-à-vis land and language, of personal and communal histories, of movement and travel, of voice and story. *Science Lessons* was followed by *Raucous* (1999), *Stone | Rain* (2001), *Riverbook & Ocean* (2002), *Night Room* (2003), *Underwood Log* (2004), which was nominated for a Governor General’s Award, *Touching Ecuador* (2006), *Along A Snake Fence Riding* (2007), *The Rope-Maker’s Tale* (2009), and *YVR* (2011). Publication details are included in the list of Works Cited.
- 56 Ron Redfern, *Origins: The Evolution of Continents, Oceans, and Life* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 46.
- 57 W. H. New, *Science Lessons* (Lantzville, BC: Oolichan, 1996), 44.

- 58 K. J. Hall and D.W.H. Walton, "Rock Weathering, Soil Development and Colonization under a Changing Climate," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B* 338 (1992): 271.
- 59 Arthur R. Kruckeberg, *Geology and Plant Life: The Effects of Landforms and Rock Types on Plants* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 5.
- 60 McKay, "Growing an Ear," 64. Rock weathering is also responsible for other important processes, as Mary Midgley notes in *Science and Poetry* (2002): "if you stand on the cliffs of Dover, you have beneath you *hundreds of metres of chalk* – tiny shells left by the creatures of an ancient ocean. These shells are made of calcium carbonate, using carbon that mostly came from the air via the weathering of rocks – the reaction of carbon dioxide with basaltic rock dissolved by rain. This process of rock weathering can itself take place without life. But when life is present – when organisms are working on the rock and the earth that surrounds it – it takes place *one thousand times faster* than it would on sterile rock" (175).
- 61 Hall and Walton, "Rock Weathering," 73–74.
- 62 Heringman, *Romantic Rocks*, xv.
- 63 I cannot help but hear an echo here, too, of Andrew Marvell, whose most famous work is "The Garden." The connection is all the more plausible, I think, when we consider that New's own gardening proclivities are well known among his friends and colleagues. It would also imply that *Science Lessons* is at least semi-autobiographical, a perspective that falls beyond the scope and aims of this essay.
- 64 New, *Science Lessons*, 44; my italics.
- 65 "To cause to incline or slope in a particular direction. Chiefly in *pa. pple*" ("Rake, v.3," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2008. Oxford University Press. Web).
- 66 New, *Science Lessons*, 44. The pun on grounding recurs throughout New's fourth book for young readers, *The Year I Was Grounded*, in which Geordie learns about gardening, word puzzles, and the deteriorating health of the earth. Describing a moment that wouldn't be out of place in *Science Lessons*, Geordie writes about looking "closely at the earth. / Layer by layer, / it told me its history" ("Strata," in W. H. New, *The Year I Was Grounded* [Vancouver: Tradewind, 2008], 4–6). Ultimately, Geordie realizes that "Like cedar trees, ringing every year / their diaries of thirst and rain, / we belong to the earth" (*ibid.*, 16–18).
- 67 New, *Science Lessons*, 44.
- 68 For his doctorate, taken at Leeds in 1966, New studied the modern *Bildungsroman* as social paradigm.
- 69 Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 154.
- 70 See, especially, *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canada* (1997) and *Borderlands: How We Talk about Canada* (1998). Publication details are included in the list of Works Cited.
- 71 New, *Science Lessons*, 11; New's italics.
- 72 The Selkirks make up part of the Columbia mountain range and extend from southeastern British Columbia into Idaho for approximately 320 kilometres. A product of uplift during the Mesozoic era, the Selkirks are distinctly older than the Precambrian-/Cretaceous-era Rocky Mountains.
- 73 New, *Science Lessons*, 11; New's italics.
- 74 McKay, *Deactivated West* 100, 41.
- 75 *Ibid.*
- 76 New, *Science Lessons*, 90.
- 77 *Ibid.*

- 78 Sydney Clouts, *One Life* (Cape Town: Purnell, 1966), 17.
- 79 Living among mountains in Alberta or British Columbia is not, of course, a prerequisite for writing about geology. E. J. Pratt's well-known representation, in *Towards the Last Spike* (1952), of the Canadian Shield – the oldest rock in North America – as a prehistoric lizard disturbed by dynamite blasts during construction of the CPR; Christopher Dewdney's *Palaeozoic Geology of London, Ontario* (1973); and Christian Bök's *Crystallography* (1994) are some examples of geological interest outside of British Columbia.
- 80 McKay, "Growing an Ear," 63.
- 81 McCarthy and Rubidge, *Story of Earth and Life*, 14.
- 82 Wylie's debut, *The Road Out* (1996), won both the Ingrid Jonker Prize and the Olive Schreiner Prize for Poetry. It was followed by *Original Forest* (2001), *The Fourteen: Sonnets from amongst the Portuguese* (2005), both self-published, and *Road Work* (2007). If I were comparing stylistic elements only, it would make more sense to compare New's *Science Lessons* to Wylie's *The Fourteen*, which both comprise unconventional sonnets, or *Underwood Log* to *Road Work*, which both might be read as long poems documenting travelling personae. In many ways, *Road Work* resembles *Underwood Log* both thematically and stylistically: in both books the authors demonstrate a characteristic curiosity, which they nurture with travel and cultivate via contemplation and linguistic shiftiness.
- 83 McCarthy and Rubidge, *Story of Earth and Life*, 151.
- 84 Dan Wylie, *Road Work* (Empangeni: Echoing Green, 2007), 71.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 McKay, *Vis à Vis*, 28.
- 88 Wylie, *Road Work*, 71.
- 89 Heringman, *Romantic Rocks*, 72.
- 90 Ibid., 71.
- 91 Wylie, *Road Work*, 72.
- 92 Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839), in *Darwin: The Indelible Stamp*, ed. James D. Watson (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2005), 128. Yet another of New's poetry collections connects with this aspect of Wylie's work. *Touching Ecuador* (2006) is a long poem documenting the observations of four personae – a traveller, a preacher, a castaway, and a weaver – in and around the Galápagos archipelago, where Darwin's most well-known research occurred. New's collection also, of course, responds to Al Purdy's *Birdwatching at the Equator: The Galápagos Islands Poems* (1982).
- 93 Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology; or, The Modern Changes of the Earth and Its Inhabitants Considered as Illustrative of Geology* (1830–33), 8th ed. (London: 1850), 152.
- 94 Burroughs's presumption that the farmer would become more interested in and proud of the boulder at knowing it is a glacial erratic finds a parallel in McKay's comment, near the end of "Otherwise than Place," "about the place he used to live in Lobo Township" (McKay, *Deactivated West 100*, 27). What he misses most about that place is an overgrown area "where the permeable membrane between place and its otherwise first became apparent" and where, next to a ditch, rests "a large granite boulder [he] fondly hoped was a glacial erratic" (ibid.). This hope says more about the desire to know one's place in earth's history than about needing such knowledge in order to recognize a place's capacity to invite meditation, pause, and reflection.
- 95 Qtd. in Walker, "Great, Shaggy Barbaric Earth," 251.

- 96 Ibid., 251–52.
- 97 Wylie, *Road Work*, 82.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle*, 128.
- 100 Wylie, *Road Work*, 82.
- 101 Michael P. Cohen, “Reading after Darwin: A Prospectus,” in *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*, ed. Annie Merrill Ingram et al. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 221.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Wylie, *Road Work*, 82.
- 104 See Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*, 666–78, and Darwin’s reference to these influences while observing the glacial history of Patagonia (*Voyage of the Beagle*, 120).
- 105 Wylie, *Road Work*, 82.
- 106 Robert Berold, *The Fires of the Dead* (Cape Town: Carrefour, 1989), 48.
- 107 William Rueckert, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 121.
- 108 O’Brien, “Back to the World,” 178, 196.
- 109 See William Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment 1770–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 83–86; and S. H. Haughton, “South African Geology,” in *A History of Scientific Endeavour in South Africa*, ed. A. C. Brown (Cape Town: Royal Society of South Africa, 1977), 339–56.
- 110 Al Purdy, *Beyond Remembering: The Collected Poems of Al Purdy*, ed. Al Purdy and Sam Solecki (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 2000), 23–24.
- 111 Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, A2.
- 112 McKay, *Strike/Slip*, 7–9. As McKay notes in *Strike/Slip*, “as a noun, *utter* means the irregular marks left on a surface by the vibration or too great pressure of a tool” (76).
- 113 Excerpts from *Strike/Slip* (2006), by Don McKay, reprinted with permission of McClelland & Stewart. Excerpts from *Science Lessons* (1996), by W. H. New, reprinted with permission of Oolichan Press and the author. Excerpts from *Road Work* (1996), by Dan Wylie, reprinted with permission of Echoing Green Press and the author.

The Dwelling Perspective in English-Canadian Drama

Nelson Gray

Portraying our relationship to the more-than-human world is not a new phenomenon in English-Canadian drama. Its first discernible signs can be traced to the 1920s and '30s, when playwrights were beginning to turn their attention to this country's expansive natural environment as an *oikos* or dwelling-place.¹ Since the late 1960s, however, concerns about dwelling have, for the most part, appeared in two forms that, while mutually instructive, reflect different histories and different ontologies. On the one hand, theatre artists such as Michael Cook, Karen Hines, Daniel Brooks, and Blake Brooker, writing in the context of a deepening ecological crisis, have conveyed environmental losses as an attendant loss of self and a profound displacement from the more-than-human world. In the work of First Nations and Métis playwrights such as Tomson Highway, Monique Mojica, and Marie Clements, however, relations with the more-than-human world are, more often than not, identity-forming – part of an Indigenous response to social injustice – and depicted in terms of what Tim Ingold has characterized as a “dwelling perspective.”

Drawing on the philosophy of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty and on the ecopsychology of James Gibson, Ingold defines a dwelling perspective as one “that treats the immersion of the organism-person in an environment or lifeworld as an inescapable condition of existence.”² For Ingold, this worldview is one that perceives human existence as an organic and relational process, part and parcel of a continual state of becoming. Rather than understanding our experience of the natural world as a decoding of an environment that is “out there,” outside and separate from ourselves, a dwelling perspective situates us, in ecological terms, as “organism-persons within a world that is inhabited by beings of manifold kinds, both human and non-human. Therefore, relations among humans, which we are accustomed to calling ‘social,’ are but a subset of ecological relations”³

Evidence of a dwelling perspective in Canadian drama is not exclusive to dramatic works by First Nations and Métis writers. Two early examples occur in Herman Voaden’s *Murder Pattern* (1936) and James Reaney’s *Colours in the Dark* (1967) – plays in which action emerges within an unfolding physical world that is active, alive, and replete with diverse non-human agencies. In *Murder Pattern*, for instance, Voaden includes, in addition to his human characters, two “Earth Voices” that speak from the perspective of the more-than-human world, placing emphasis on its geological processes and situating the story of a murder in an isolated farming community within this larger field of activity.⁴ Similarly, in *Colours in the Dark*, a story involving human characters and actions takes shape as part of a continually forming generative force that includes a wide range of life forms and phenomena. At the start of the play, the emphasis is on a human-centred narrative, with a grandfather (Pa) setting out to tell his children and grandchildren about his life’s journey from boyhood to maturity. As the story unfolds, however, the audience soon comes to see that this journey is part of a world comprised of bears and forests, wind and thunder, and of the physical cosmos as a whole. “*Dimly we realize*,” Reaney writes in his stage directions, “*that not only are we going through the hero’s life and stories he heard as a child, but we are going through Canada’s story – glacier and forest, also the world’s story.*”⁵

The world of non-human nature that eventually emerges in *Colours in the Dark*, however, is noticeably more fragile than the one Voaden depicts in *Murder Pattern*. In the mid-1930s, Voaden was writing from the perspective of a European settler culture's confrontations with what George Grant called the "intractability" of nature in the "New World."⁶ Influenced by Walt Whitman's pantheism and by the landscape paintings of the Group of Seven,⁷ he portrayed his "Earth Voices" as omniscient, invincible forces that surpassed human understanding. Thirty years later, when Reaney was writing *Colours in the Dark*, nature's "intractability" had been overshadowed by powerful technologies. As the historian Donald Worster notes, the detonation of atomic bombs in 1945 and in tests during the Cold War confronted humankind with its capacity for destroying both human lives and natural systems on a scale never before deemed possible, and the rapid industrialization that followed in the wake of the Second World War resulted in a disturbing legacy of unprecedented environmental damage.⁸ In *Colours in the Dark*, the signs of a natural environment under duress arise when Reaney's protagonist travels from his rural home to Toronto, sees the pavement as a "cement tapeworm," and curses the "street where it's increasingly difficult to find a green leaf." At one point, he is stopped in his tracks by a dead bird on the sidewalk: "An indigo bunting. Total blue." "Do you know who it is?" he asks a group of children; "It's the body of someone slowly freezing to death – frozen to / Death with the hard heart and deaf ear that will not listen." "Is the dead bird you?" the children ask. "It's you," he answers, "It's me."⁹ This heightened sensitivity to the death of a single songbird, with its recognition that nature's frailty bespeaks our own, is in direct contrast to Voaden's depiction of a vast, sublime natural world, seemingly impervious to human activity.

Since the late 1960s, recognitions of nature's frailty have occurred with increasing frequency in English-Canadian plays, and in many of these works such recognitions are integral to the action. Plays such as Michael Cook's *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*, Blake Brooker's *The Land, The Animals*, Karen Hines's *The Pochsy Plays*, and Daniel Brooks's *The Eco Show* explore environmental losses as a displacement

from the physical world and a concomitant loss of identity. In Cook's play, it is the loss of the Atlantic cod stocks that is the source of this displacement. "[T]he trouble is the god damn place has died afore us," laments one of his Newfoundland characters; "We can't git that out of our guts, can we?"¹⁰ In *The Pochsy Plays*, *The Land*, *The Animals*, and *The Eco Show*, a wide range of environmental loss is acknowledged. "Call attention to the enemies of water," admonishes Doris, one of the scientists in *The Land*, *The Animals*; "All drains are connected to your throat."¹¹ "We know that our polluted air stunts, sickens and kills children," observes the apocalyptically minded father in *The Eco Show*.¹² "We live in a scary time," Pochsy tells her audience at the beginning of *The Pochsy Plays*; "All indicators point to the distinct possibility that we are a species bent on self-extinction."¹³

Given such dire circumstances, much of the action in each of these plays involves characters' attempts to resolve existential fears arising, not from a loss of faith in some fixed cosmological design, but from something much more material: their own embodied existence as part of a natural world that is polluted and vanishing. Resolutions, however, are in short supply. In *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*, catharsis is, to some degree, held in suspense by a tragedy of the commons that has exiled two old fishermen in what is, in effect, an ecological version of Beckett's *Endgame*,¹⁴ and in Brooks's *The Eco Show*, a protagonist named "Hamm" endures a similarly Beckettian existence, living with his wife and children amidst the encroaching pressures of a global ecocide. Anxieties over environmental losses remain unresolved as well in *The Land*, *The Animals* and *The Pochsy Plays*. In the former – a play that, according to one of its characters, began as "a scream from the marsh's clogged throat" before turning into a "dark green" comedy¹⁵ – four scientists investigating the suicide of a geologist discover his (and their own) deep estrangement from the natural world; while in *The Pochsy Plays*, Hines assumes the role of Pochsy, a *bouffon*/clown for an ecological age whose attempts to deny her victimization from mercury poisoning lead repeatedly to revelations of a natural world that mirrors her own contamination.¹⁶

In many respects, such portrayals of characters increasingly isolated and removed from the circumambient world are the very inverse of a dwelling perspective. To be sure, if the world of non-human nature has any agency in these plays, it is by virtue of its *absence*, and its human characters can do little it seems but overcome (or not) their denials of this state of affairs, and grieve (or not) for the losses. Moreover, the possibility for acceptance and grieving in these plays is often complicated by the fact that many of these same characters wind up, whether consciously or not, indicting themselves as part of the problem. In Cook's play, the characters faced with the disastrous results of overfishing are themselves fishermen; in Brooks's *The Eco Show*, a family's capitulation to the solace of an air conditioner serves only to exacerbate an already overheated climate.¹⁷ For Campbell, one of the scientists in *The Land, The Animals*, "Science," in addition to being "a map to hell," is "a gold card meat-eater that looks like a man who / Has had his eyelids removed for 'practical purposes,'"¹⁸ and Hines's Pochsy persona is all too ready to embrace the escapist diversions of a commodity culture that has, in effect, contributed to her death sentence.¹⁹ In such plays, then, the portrayal of identity vis-à-vis the natural world is, in almost every respect, abject – the visible evidence of a collective ethos that is as toxic as the environment it has fouled.

For First Nations and Métis playwrights such as Highway, Mojica, and Clements, however, identity – and, in particular, identity seen in relation to the non-human physical world – is far from being abject and is more likely to be affirmed as part of a collective resistance to social and environmental injustice. As in the plays of Voaden and Reaney, a dwelling perspective informs much of the action in these works, but it does so, in large part, as a way of confronting and proposing alternatives to colonizing attitudes toward both Indigenous people and the natural environment.

Colonization, according to the ecofeminist Val Plumwood, occurs not only in acts of territorial expansion but also in the "conceptual strategies" that colonizers adopt to justify their own supremacy: "Since the [colonized] Other is perceived in terms of inferiority, and their own

agency and creation of value are denied, it is [deemed] appropriate that the colonizer imposes his own value, agency and meaning, and that the colonized be made to serve the colonizer as a means to his ends.”²⁰ For Plumwood, the mechanistic view of nature that emerged in Britain and France during the seventeenth century (and that objectified the natural world as mere resource) was a colonization of nature that was then further employed in a colonization of the “New World” that treated both Indigenous people and their lands in this way. The anthropocentric colonization of nature, Plumwood argues, was based on the same conceptual strategies employed for the Eurocentric colonization of people and the natural world, both in the Americas and elsewhere.²¹

Colonizing attitudes of the kind that Plumwood identifies have been present in Canadian drama since the 1606 production of Marc Lescarbot’s *Theatre of Neptune in New France*, a work that, according to Jerry Wasserman, was “the first theatrical script to have been written and produced in what would become Canada”²² and that Anton Wagner, in accordance with several other theatre historians,²³ describes as a work “intending to subdue the hostile natural environment and native peoples to the rule of French imperial civilization.”²⁴ Moreover, from 1606 until the early twentieth century, most of the drama written in this part of the world, when it acknowledges nature in the “New World” at all, either depicts it as a *terra nullius*, available for annexation, or elegizes it as a newly discovered Eden that, along with its noble savages, is doomed to extinction.²⁵ From the perspective of European monarchies and invader/settler populations, such portrayals were convenient fantasies, of course. Territorializing or elegizing a (supposedly vanishing) Indigenous people by conflating them with lands whose agency had been similarly devalued or wished away was, on the one hand, a way to justify the removal of First Nations people from their lands, and, on the other, a way to rationalize the wholesale extraction of resources from the environment with little respect or concern for the consequences.²⁶

For Indigenous peoples in North America, the dislocation from traditional lands that such attitudes justified has been particularly debilitating. As the Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver explains, the loss of lands to

invading settler populations was not only the loss of livelihood, but also – because language and traditions were so closely tied to the land – the loss of a cultural identity informed by a geocentric worldview: “When Natives are removed from their traditional lands, they are robbed of more than territory; they are deprived of numinous landscapes that are central to their faith and their identity, lands populated by their blood relations, ancestors, animals and beings both physical and mythological. A kind of psychic homicide is committed.”²⁷

Weaver’s insights here – his observations that the cultural identity of Indigenous North Americans is inseparable from their dwelling in numinous as well as material landscapes – accord with Tim Ingold’s descriptions of the animist ontology that characterizes First Nations traditions, an ontology that adds ecological resonance to the sociopolitical critiques in plays by Highway, Mojica, and Clements. Ingold points out that the animist belief that human identity forms in a reciprocal and dialogical relationship with other forms of life stems from a view of the world as the perpetual transformation of a “vital force” – “often envisaged as one or several kinds of spirit or soul” – that animates all earthly existence. “The world of this ‘animic’ understanding,” he explains, “is home to innumerable beings whose presence is manifested in this form or that” but that “in order to live must constantly draw upon the vitality of others.” As Ingold puts it, in animist thinking, “[a] complex network of reciprocal interdependence, based on the give and take of substance, care and vital force ... extends throughout the cosmos, linking human, animal and all other forms of life.”²⁸ Like Ingold’s dwelling perspective, then, the animist world is inherently ecological – a perpetual process of becoming within which humans and other “innumerable beings” exist in a web of reciprocity – an ecological community, as it were, comprised of interdependent and ontologically equivalent agencies, both human and non-human.

In the plays of Highway, Mojica, and Clements, this animist/dwelling perspective emerges when First Nations characters, in order to assert their identity and agency, do so vis-à-vis their relationships with agencies and energies in the natural environment. In Highway’s *Aria*, for

instance, an elderly Native grandmother (the Kokum), although “blind,” “deaf,” and sitting in a “ramshackle house,” manages, through her identification with a songbird, to revitalize her spirit and, in a series of transformations, to speak through a number of dramatic personae.²⁹ In one of these transformations, the old woman speaks as a “White Woman,” walking through a cement cityscape, and experiencing the cement and herself as “distinctly separate and apart.”³⁰ By the end of *Aria*, however, the Kokum is able to reassert her own agency as part of a living Earth. “I knew she was alive. / I know Earth is alive,” she proclaims, “I can feel through the soles of / My moving feet ... / Earth. / Nuna. / *Us-ki!*”³¹

Monique Mojica, in *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, another play structured as a series of transformations, also draws connections between Indigenous identity and the vitality of the non-human physical world, but she does so in a more overtly political context. In “Transformation #3,” for instance, she writes from the persona of Malinche, the Aztec woman sold into slavery to Spanish forces, who, after becoming Cortés’ mistress, was viewed as a traitor by many of her own people. Mojica’s Malinche, to protest her two-fold mistreatment, wraps a swirl of cloth around her and ascends a pyramid to take on the form of an erupting volcano: “I spit, burn and char the earth.”³² She then transforms again, this time into a myriad of non-human forms, her spirit eventually becoming part of a fecund earth and her voice, the wailing of the desert wind: “I turn to tree whose branches drip bleeding flowers. Bleed into this piece of earth where I grow, mix with volcanic ash and produce fertile soil. Born from the earth, fed with my blood, anything alive here is alive because I stayed alive! I turn to wind. You hear my Llorona’s wail screaming across the desert.”³³

Malinche’s metamorphosis is not the only example of Mojica portraying the transformation of a human character into the more-than-human natural world as a response to a social injustice. In “Transformation 12,” a Native woman and a Chilean-born woman, after sharing stories involving the torture and murder of Mi’kmaq activist Annie Mae Aquash, confirm their solidarity by drawing on the energies of a “Spirit Animal” who appears in the form of a coyote/trickster:

slant-eyed and head swinging low
to the ground
 my muscles ripple
 from shoulder to haunch
 now running – now stopping
 to sniff the air.³⁴

Then, the Chilean-born woman, in her role as a “Spirit-Sister,” speaks from the same voice: “slant-eyed and head swinging / low to the ground / my spine arches from / neck to tail.”³⁵ For Mojica, enacting ancestral traditions in this way is a significant aspect of healing and decolonization and, as in Highway’s *Aria*, doing so conveys an “intangible reality,” an “ethereal and material” world in which both human and non-human subjects participate.³⁶

In several of Marie Clements’ plays, a similarly animist-informed dwelling perspective comes to the fore along with explicit connections between social injustice and a mistreated environment. In her first staged play, *Age of Iron*, a First Nations character named Wise Guy tears up pieces of concrete to free a paved-over “Mother Earth” and then confronts his own “enemies” as those who are responsible for her mistreatment. “You have no such land,” he declares, “because you have covered it with an ungiving surface. You call us barbarians. But that is what we call you.”³⁷ In her second play, *The Girl Who Swam Forever*, a young First Nations woman’s suicide is prevented by a shape-shifting experience that connects her own identity with that of a sturgeon/grandmother lying forgotten in the thick mud of a polluted river.³⁸ And, in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, Clements makes links between the racism and misogyny leading to the murders of First Nations women and a deforestation of the land carried out without due respect for “the give and take of nature.”³⁹ *Burning Vision*, Clements’ fourth staged work, makes the relations between poisonous social injustices and the poisoning of the biosphere even more apparent and manages, at the same time, to show their global interconnections. Situating Indigenous land rights in the

context of transnational politics, Clements depicts how mining companies exposed workers and local Indigenous populations to fatal doses of radiation through the extraction of uranium ore that was destined to become the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945. For director and ecocritic Theresa May, Clements' ability to draw connections between the Dene people in northern Canada and the Japanese in Hiroshima constitutes "a transnational countergeography that makes previously invisible relationships explicit and meaningful."⁴⁰ And, as part of this "countergeography," Clements – as in nearly all of her works – takes pains to include a number of subjects from the more-than-human world. One of these is the uranium itself, personified as a naked Indian boy who, after being discovered, claimed, and dug out of the earth, is monstrously transformed into "Little Boy" – the name of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Another equally important non-human agency is a herd of ghostly caribou that haunts the "earth space" of the play and expands its multi-ethnic community into an ecological one.⁴¹

The assertion of Indigenous identity and of an ontology that views such identity as part of an ecological community is a consistent and distinguishing feature in the plays of Highway, Mojica, and Clements. But if in such plays the more-than-human physical world has agency as part of a challenge to social and environmental justice, it is not because First Nations and Métis artists are essentially any "closer to nature" than contemporary non-Native playwrights, but because historical conditions in this country have positioned them to situate their postcolonial politics within an image of the world that makes dwelling in reciprocity with the more-than-human world a crucial aspect of what it means to be human. Conversely, the existential anxieties, loss of identity, and displacement from the physical world conveyed by non-Native theatre artists such as Cook, Brooks, Hines, and Brooker deserve to be seen, in light of present ecological challenges, not as the expression of some inescapable destiny, but as a cry of protest for this sorrowful state of affairs and an implicit call for actions that dispense with denials and embrace a more earth-centred perspective. As Lawrence Buell has astutely observed, when it comes to eco-apocalyptic scenarios, "the environmentalist dreams such dreams

precisely in order to render the dream-scenario impotent.”⁴² Karen Hines, in her introduction to *The Pochsy Plays*, says something similar: “my ultimate goal” she writes, “is to create, in the laughter that springs from a shared sense of futility, a persistent glimmer of hope.”⁴³ Speaking in a recent interview about the creation of her Pochsy persona, she reiterates this intention: “the aim,” she explains, “was to create a self-consuming artifact, something that, by virtue of being so profoundly one thing, invites questions about its opposite.”⁴⁴

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NOTES

- 1 Characters who express environmental concerns include a First Nations character named Yellow Snake in the 1922 Hart House production of Carroll Aikins's *The God of Gods*, published in *Canadian Plays from Hart House Theatre*, and a conservation-minded prospector, George Fairburn, in Archibald Key's *The Mother Lode*, published in the 1930 anthology *Six Canadian Plays* (Carroll Aikins, *The God of Gods*, in *Canadian Plays from Hart House Theatre*, ed. Vincent Massey [Toronto: Macmillan, 1926]; Archibald F. Key, *The Mother Lode*, in *Six Canadian Plays*, ed. Herman Voaden [Toronto: Copp Clark, 1920], 25–47).
- 2 Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 153.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 4 Herman Voaden, *Murder Pattern*, in *A Vision of Canada*, ed. Anton Wagner (Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1993), 317–42.
- 5 James Reaney, *Colours in the Dark* (Vancouver: Talonplays, 1971), 19.
- 6 In *Technology and Empire*, Grant writes that “the very intractability, immensity and extremes of the new land required that its meeting with mastering Europeans be a battle of subjugation” (George Parkin Grant, *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* [Toronto: Anansi, 1969], 17).
- 7 In his introduction to *Six Canadian Plays*, Voaden makes two references to the paintings of the Group of Seven as models for Canadian playwrights (Herman Voaden, Introduction to *Six Canadian Plays*, ed. Herman Voaden [Toronto: Copp Clark, 1930], xix, xxi) and pays homage to Whitman as “the most definite inspiration in the movement of Canadianism up to this time” (xvi). For Voaden's identification with Whitman's pantheist beliefs, see Herman Voaden, *A Vision of Canada*, ed. Anton Wagner (Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1993), 314.
- 8 Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 342–60.
- 9 Reaney, *Colours in the Dark*, 73.
- 10 Michael Cook, *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance* (Portugal Cove, NL: Breakwater, 1974), 48.
- 11 Blake Brooker, *The Land, The Animals*, in *Ilsa, Queen of the Nazi Love Camp and Other Plays* (Red Deer, AB: Red Deer College Press, 1993), 114.
- 12 Daniel Brooks, “*The Eco Show*,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 144 (fall 2010): 60–84.
- 13 Karen Hines, *The Pochsy Plays* [1st ed.] (Toronto: Coach House, 2004), 25.
- 14 In an interview with Robert Wallace, Cook refers to Beckett as his greatest influence (Michael Cook, interview, *The Work: Conversations with English-Canadian Playwrights*, ed. Robert Wallace and Cynthia Zimmerman [Toronto: Coach House, 1982], 165). At one point in *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*, Uncle John, one of two disillusioned fishermen, describes their plight as a “death game.”
- 15 Brooker, *The Land, The Animals*, 75.
- 16 In *Oh, Baby*, the second play in the Pochsy trilogy, Pochsy's acceptance of a paid seaside holiday from her employers at Mercury Packers brings her into contact with a sun that threatens her with skin cancer, fish dying from the same toxins as the ones in her body, and a sight-seeing excursion where the only sea turtles she encounters are the ones on the company's shiny brochure (Hines, *Pochsy Plays*, 59, 82, 64).

- 17 Brooks, *Eco Show*, 62.
- 18 Brooker, *The Land, The Animals*, 78.
- 19 Celeste Derkson considers this complicity in some detail in “Complexion as Metaphor: Eco-Satire in *The Pochsy Plays*” (*Canadian Theatre Review* 144 [fall 2010]: 35–41).
- 20 Val Plumwood, “Decolonizing Relationships with Nature,” in *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-Colonial Era*, ed. William H. Adams and Martin Mulligan (London: Earthscan, 2003), 59.
- 21 Plumwood, *Decolonizing Nature*, 53.
- 22 Jerry Wasserman, *Spectacle of Empire: Marc Lescarbot’s Theatre of Neptune in New France* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2006), 16.
- 23 See also *ibid.*, 13–14; Hannah Fournier, “Lescarbot’s ‘Théâtre de Neptune’: New World Pageant, Old World Polemic,” *Canadian Drama* 7, no. 1 (1981): 4; Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly, *English-Canadian Theatre* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 42; and Rick Bower, “The Theatre of Neptune: Marc Lescarbot and the New World Masque,” *Canadian Drama* 15, no. 1 (spring 1994): 42.
- 24 Anton Wagner, *Lost Canadian Plays*, vol. 4 (Toronto: CTR Publications, 1982), 7.
- 25 For examples of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century plays in which land is configured as territory see George Cockings’s *The Conquest of Canada* (London, 1766), Antoine Gérin-Lajoie’s *The Young Latour* (1844; in *Canada’s Lost Plays*, vol. 4, *Colonial Quebec: French-Canadian Drama, 1606 to 1966*, ed. Anton Wagner [Toronto: CTR Publications, 1982], 111–39), Louis Fréchette’s *Papineau* (1880; in *Canada’s Lost Plays*, vol. 4, *Colonial Quebec: French-Canadian Drama, 1606 to 1966*, ed. Anton Wagner [Toronto: CTR Publications, 1982], 141–202), and Sarah Curzon’s *Laura Secord, The Heroine of 1812* (in *Canada’s Lost Plays*, vol. 4, *Colonial Quebec: French-Canadian Drama, 1606 to 1966*, ed. Anton Wagner [Toronto: CTR Publications, 1982], 92–139).
- 26 Two recent studies of European fictional constructions of Native North Americans are Tim Fulford’s *Romantic Indians: Native Americans, British Literature, and Transatlantic Culture, 1756–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Kevin Hutchings’s *Romantic Ecologies and Colonial Cultures in the British Atlantic World, 1770–1850* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009). See also H. N. Fairchild’s *The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), Brian Dippie’s *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), and the introduction to Shepard Krech’s *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: Norton, 1999).
- 27 Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 38.
- 28 Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 113.
- 29 Tomson Highway, *Aria*, in *Staging Coyote’s Dream*, ed. Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles, vol. 1 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2003), 81.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 89.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 32 Monique Mojica, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, in *Staging Coyote’s Dream*, ed. Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles, vol. 1 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2003), 144.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 144.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 165.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 167.
- 36 *Ibid.*, iii–viii.

- 37 Marie Humber Clements, *Age of Iron*, in *DraMétis: Three Métis Plays*, ed. Greg Daniels, Marie Clements, and Margo Kane (Penticton, BC: Theytus, 2001), 202.
- 38 Marie Humber Clements, *The Girl Who Swam Forever*, in *Footpaths and Bridges*, ed. Shirley A. Huston-Findley and Rebecca Howard (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 51–70. See Nelson Gray, “The Murmuring-in-Between: Eco-centric Politics in *The Girl Who Swam Forever*,” *Theatre Research in Canada* 31, no. 2 (2010): 193–207.
- 39 Marie Humber Clements, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2005), 470.
- 40 Theresa May, “Kneading Marie Clements’ *Burning Vision*,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 144 (fall 2010): 7.
- 41 Marie Humber Clements, *Burning Vision* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2003). For an explanation of the material and spiritual significance of the caribou for the Dene people, see Henry S. Sharp, *Loon: Memory, Meaning, and Reality in a Northern Dene Community* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).
- 42 Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 59.
- 43 Karen Hines, *Pochsy Plays*, 15.
- 44 Karen Hines, “Yes to Everything: A Conversation on Theatre and Ecology with Daniel Brooks, Marie Clements, Kendra Fanconi, and Karen Hines,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 144 (fall 2010): 27.

Afterword: Ecocritical Futures

Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley

This book has traced a genealogy of ecocritical approaches to Canadian literature. One of its defining premises has been that the current state of the field – vibrant and in flux – owes a considerable debt to scholarly investigations that anticipated ecocriticism proper and to inaugurating ecocritical analyses and explorations. The present, in short, is tightly linked to the past, even as the breadth, diversity, and theoretical sophistication of contemporary environmental criticism throw into relief the tentative character of some of the preliminary forays included herein. But what does the future look like for ecocriticism and Canadian literary studies? Making predictions about emerging critical trends is liable to make the predictor soon look naïve or simply wrong: in addition to the inherent difficulty of forecasting, the speed with which ecocriticism has transformed itself, and continues to do so, threatens to render any speculation almost immediately out of date. This afterword nonetheless offers a brief set of suggestions (or proposals) for ecocritical futures. The aim is not to be programmatic, but rather to begin the task of looking ahead prompted by the necessarily (and intentionally) retrospective outlook of *Greening the Maple*.

As the chapters in this collection amply demonstrate, certain genres, authors, and works have lent themselves repeatedly to ecocritical examination. New trajectories will doubtless emerge as the range of subjects expands further. The works of many notable Canadian authors, of the past and the present, have yet to be brought into the ecocritical fold. This is especially true of diasporic writing, which tends – to risk a gross generalization – not to rely on the familiar literary tropes of Canadian wilderness. That the animal story, the nature lyric, and the meditative essay have been recurring subjects of ecocritical analysis is no surprise, but conclusions about Canadian literature will surely be altered as a wider range of genres and modes receives sustained scrutiny. These include traditional literary genres to which ecocriticism has only belatedly turned, such as drama and children’s literature, as well as emerging and metamorphosing forms, from experimental poetry to graphic narratives to literature shaped by and read on electronic platforms. More significant still, perhaps, are the opportunities afforded by an environmental criticism that does not restrict itself to literary studies but instead places literary works in conversation with other forms of cultural production and expression. Although interdisciplinarity has commonly been understood as a mandate of ecocriticism, scholars have, more often than not, worked within disciplinary boundaries. To make this observation is not to suggest individual failings; rather, it is to note the tremendous possibilities that remain for innovative forms of multidisciplinary inquiry into environments and cultures. The future of literary ecocriticism may well lie, at least to some degree, in a shift away from a strictly literary focus – although literary works will continue to be illuminated by now-standard methods and ideas.

In its conceptualization of Canadian literature, ecocriticism has room to become increasingly multicultural and multilingual, informed by and respectful of indigenous languages and epistemologies, and mindful of overlapping categories of identity and cultural affiliation. It can also become engaged with other transformations in the humanities. Community-based environmental initiatives, collaborative projects, and digital tools and techniques, to name only a few examples, will expand

the range of practices associated with ecocriticism, even as the conventional (and necessary) practices of interpretation and commentary flourish. Environmental criticism in coming years – interdisciplinary, politically engaged, theoretically robust, scientifically rigorous, sensitive to textual nuance, and perhaps also still attuned to the pleasure and hopefulness that environmental literature can provide – will certainly assume many shapes and have many aspirations. Our ambition in this volume has been to assert that ecocriticism's past affects its present, and that the shifting present configures perspectives on the achievements and limitations of the beginnings of the endeavour. The chapters in this anthology may be used as an introduction to Canadianist ecocriticism, but as the field develops, the genealogy that they trace will need to be revisited, revised, and supplemented.

The future of Canadianist ecocriticism will also be shaped by changes – often unhappy ones, in all probability – to physical environments. In the past decades, environmentally oriented studies of literary works have succeeded in demonstrating the persistence of writers' desire to engage, whether in celebration or in lament, the places in which they find themselves. This literary-historical constant, however, is perpetually inflected by environmental change. The anthropogenic causes of massive environmental disruptions, moreover, ensure that ecocriticism will have reason to retain its political significance and to preserve its transgressive edge. Environmental criticism, broadly understood, insists upon the central place of environmental concerns in the academic study of culture; in its public orientation, which includes teaching, ecocriticism claims a place in civic discourse for interpretation and theorization. One of the principles on which ecocriticism was initially based – that teaching and scholarship could not, in a time of ecological crisis, ignore the cultural dimensions of such crises and of responses to them – is still acutely relevant today.

In assembling the essays, old and new, that constitute *Greening the Maple*, we have sought to focus attention anew on significant, distinctive, and provocative moments in the history of environmental inquiries into Canadian literature and to illustrate the manifold ways in which

Canadian writing, for so long associated with a nature variously malevolent and benevolent, has reflected and disseminated beliefs and attitudes toward the non-human world. If there remains room in this critical discussion, as we have suggested here, for new directions, then we hope that the book will contribute by shedding light on the interrelations of Canadian literature and environments and by providing readers with a plethora of germinative ideas. Indeed we hope that the insights of the studies contained in this book, as well as the connections made evident by their juxtaposition, will expand and invigorate the study of environments and cultures in Canada.

Appendix: Taking Flight: From Little Grey Birds to *The Goose*

Lisa Szabo-Jones

In June 2005, at the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) Biennial Conference in Eugene, Oregon, a group of Canadians initiated events that would lead to the eventual formation of the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada (ALECC) and the creation of its online newsletter, *The Goose*, which has since evolved into the association's journal.¹ At that time, ASLE had formal and informal affiliates in Korea, Japan, Europe, Great Britain, India, and Australia and New Zealand; Canadians were obliged to join the American umbrella organization.² Canada, because of its geographical proximity to the United States, tends to be seen to have cultural practices similar to those of its southern neighbour. Many Canadians present at the Eugene conference questioned the assumption of cross-border commonality. The creation of a Canadian chapter of ASLE transpired from a conviction that a distinctly Canadian ecocritical discourse exists, and that forming an ASLE-affiliated group would heighten the profile of

Canadian literature-and-environment studies within a predominantly American ecocritical world, as well as within Canadian literary and cultural studies.³ *The Goose*, with its emphasis on regional specificity and the promotion of Canadian literature, arts, and environments, serves as a forum to counter broad cultural assumptions about North America; the publication's open-access, online medium (effectively a "placeless" virtual world) allows it to extend to wider global affiliations. *The Goose* may thus be viewed as simultaneously specialized in its primarily Canadian emphasis and grass-roots origin and cosmopolitan in its coverage of international material and its potentially global reach.⁴

This discussion is not meant as an exercise in finger-pointing; rather, my intention is to demonstrate how a Canadian ecocritical community flocked together and took flight, and how *The Goose* emerged from that formation. *The Goose* and ALECC have grown not out of a reaction to a devaluation of Canadian environmental literature, but as a response to oversight, an apparent cultural myopia rooted too deeply in the bounds of place-based research. Canadian critic W. H. New claims that people settled in their own place often seek and find meaning within that place, often excluding or marginalizing that which lives, thrives, and grows beyond the boundaries of their place.⁵ As New further contends in "Writing Here," "people in place seek out meaning in the world they want to value; they attach relevance to what they see and give priority to: the things, the persons, actions, images that appear to give their lives stability."⁶ ASLE's membership has a large American contingent: many scholars whose study and writing find meaning and value in local places that geographically abut but generally exclude Canadian referents. If bioregion, ecology, and watersheds are some of the common ecocritical tropes used to undermine the insularity of political boundaries while simultaneously attending to the local, these same tropes can also be limiting: the intersections of political, cultural, and social differences make porous those same ecological, bioregional, and watershed boundaries. Without local re-envisioning such as New suggests, often that which exists on and beyond the local's periphery loses focus, becomes overlooked to the extent that dominant versions of place inevitably exclude or marginalize other

versions of place. As a result, those marginalized reject these versions of place for alternative imaginings – they reorient priorities and reassert relevance, so that “‘writing here,’ in this context, turns from a study of literature-in-location to a study of the workings of a discourse.”⁷ New’s observation could apply to the frequent American marginalization of Canadian conceptions of local, national, and global affiliations within ecocritical discourse. In a community that attends to ecosystems and ecological interconnections in literature, place, and culture, focussing too closely on living in place often prevents the movement and passage of critical cross-cultural thought. For an academic community immersed in the local, sometimes at the expense of cross-cultural comparison, myopia and insularity are an ever-present threat. The potential for alternative discursive practices to create new critical interchanges can stagnate, restrained by human-made boundaries.

During a roundtable discussion, “Internationalizing: Ecologically Oriented Literary and Cultural Studies,” at the ASLE conference in Eugene, some Canadians present indicated that “internationalizing” included Canada. A desire for Canadian autonomy bewildered some Americans in the room; they could not understand why Canadians would feel the need for a separate chapter, particularly given that, as one unidentified individual noted, one aim of ecological studies is to transgress borders. Though there were grumblings (mine included) that stressed the distinct cultural, social, and historical differences that affect Canadian artistic and cultural production, the Canadians’ disaffection stemmed not so much from a recognition of difference, but rather from the unanimous belief that Canadian literature and ecocritical work deserved a stronger profile within ASLE. I pointed out that from a Canadian perspective, the low profile of British Columbian writers in the conference’s celebration of the Pacific Northwest bioregion did not do much to offset a sense of Canadian marginalization in ASLE.

For many Canadian members, the lack of Canadian keynote speakers at ASLE’s 2005 conference served as evidence that Canadian environmental literature and scholarship needed greater attention. Within this context, Richard Evanoff’s claim resonates: “while the historically

contingent and socially situated nature of cultural discourses can be readily acknowledged, effective dialogue between cultures on problems of mutual concern can be conducted only if the two groups are able to transcend their particular 'situatedness' and effectively take into account the point of view of others with whom they have relations."⁸ (In fairness to the conference organizers, I should note that two intended keynote speakers from Canada, Don McKay and David Suzuki, were unable to attend.) Nevertheless, despite the high-profile Canadian scholars and writers who attended the conference – Laurie Ricou, Cate Sandilands, Pamela Banting, and Brian Bartlett, to name a few – Canadian representation remained scattered among the various panels and roundtable discussions. For whatever reason, ASLE did not want to take this particular cross-cultural risk. Perhaps a fear of low audience attendance played into the decision; how, though, do you raise the profile of and open dialogue with Canadian writers and scholars within an American organization without taking that risk? In June 2009, ASLE held its biennial conference in Canada for the first time – at the University of Victoria on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Thanks to the commitment of ALECC's Richard Pickard, ASLE's conference chair, Dan Philippon, and various other ALECC and ASLE members, there was greater emphasis on Canadian speakers (including Jeannette Armstrong, Karsten Heuer, Kla-kisht-ke-is [Chief Simon Lucas], Rita Wong, and Jan Zwicky) as well as participation by a greater number of Canadian scholars and writers. The conference helped to galvanize greater interest in ALECC and by association, I believe, in *The Goose*.

Because of Ella Soper's, Michael Pereira's, and my efforts, in 2005 *The Goose* materialized as a newsletter to address and open up ecocritical discursive practices in Canada and the United States, as well as to establish a Canadian ecocritical community. Through ALECC and *The Goose*, "we have at last begun to find each other and to establish the foundations of an interdisciplinary, national community"⁹ An open-access, online publication dedicated to profiling literary ecological and environmental studies in Canada, *The Goose*, transformed from a newsletter to a journal, has become crucial in creating a network that extends across

Canada. Whether *The Goose* has, like its namesake, reached areas beyond Canada, I can only comment anecdotally; nonetheless, to access wider terrain through the Web remains one of the publication's primary mandates. In 2013 we will see this effort realized, as we have entered an agreement with Wilfrid Laurier University Press (WLUP) and the University's library, which will house the journal on a Digital Creative Commons platform and act as an archival repository. WLUP will assist in marketing and disseminating the journal. In addition, Canadian, international, and American scholars, ASLE, and the association's affiliates have helped much in extending *The Goose's* reach through social media, citations, and personal and academic websites. Through such networks, *The Goose* opens borders and invites Canadian and non-Canadian scholars and non-scholars to participate in shaping and unshaping landscapes through visual and literary discourse. An imaginary political border cleaves (in both its meanings) local and global boundaries, which "allows for either/or, and for a *both* that is a uniquely interdependent fusion."¹⁰ In response to such doubleness, *The Goose* does not estrange itself from, but rather complements, American ecocritical periodicals and newsletters and becomes a part of an assemblage that forms a larger, interconnected global ecocritical discourse. *The Goose* facilitates "a uniquely interdependent fusion" of global and local envisioning of place-based research and artistic production.

In 1991, Canadian ecocritic Laurie Ricou urged scholars to consider a new way of approaching literature, one that would breach critical preconceptions:

The challenge for ecocriticism, as for all criticism, is to relate form to language. It's not sufficient to write about the environment, or to write about writing about the environment – although both these obligations are part of what describes ecocriticism. And it's not sufficient to go on a search to say there's another spotted owl in so-and-so's poem, or novel. Nor is it satisfactory to avoid connections by retreating into the metaphor that language is its own ecology.¹¹

Ricou's interdisciplinary and cross-border research has for the past twenty years (and arguably longer) pushed critical boundaries of literary and environmental interconnections. His shift from regionalism to bioregionalism, from analyzing text to reading species and habitats "textually," opened up new critical models in Canadian literary studies for reading place-based literature. Environmental issues were present, yet interest in the study of environment and literature remained scattered. Ricou's call for analysis that goes beyond species sightings, or "retreating into the metaphor that language is its own ecology," hints at earlier environmental and regional literary criticism in Canada, and calls for examinations that recognize the complex relations between language, literature, and environment.

Ricou was not the only Canadian literary scholar pushing critical boundaries. During the 1990s and the onset of the twenty-first century, feminist, queer, poststructuralist, colonial, and postcolonial investigations into environmental and ecological writings appeared from critics such as D.M.R. Bentley, Gabriele Helms, Pamela Banting, Diana M. A. Relke, Dorothy Nielsen, Cate Sandilands, Susie O'Brien, and Rebecca Raglon. Yet a comparison of Canadian and American articles and books pertaining to ecocriticism during the 1990s reveals that, at least within literary studies, a Canadian ecocritical discourse and community remained marginal and unformed.¹² Today there is a substantial number of Canadian ecocritical articles, though book-length ecocritical studies still remain few.¹³ Yet ALECC's membership and the frequent book reviewers for *The Goose* indicate that many young scholars and graduate students are participating in literary studies of the environment in Canada, and as Ricou repeatedly notes, it is this generation that will help ensure ecocriticism's legitimization in Canadian academic institutions.¹⁴

Admittedly, *The Goose*, in profiling both Canadian bioregional writings and Canadian environmental and academic networks, reinforces what may be a futile tendency: to identify a distinctly Canadian ecocritical thought, distinguishable from other national traditions. *The Goose* emerged from a need to draw the critical gaze north, to attend to writing

and research here in Canada. Pamela Banting observes that “one might think that just as Canada geese, wolves, grizzly bears, purple loosestrife, and the waters of Devils Lake transgress national borders, so too might the reading and critical practices of ecocritics, whose practices are rooted in the natural world.”¹⁵ Banting’s point emphasizes, in many instances, what remains a one-way ecocritical cross-cultural discourse. Despite American ecocritics’ recognition of and play with ecological boundaries, Banting’s claim suggests, many Canadian critics are aware of Canadian and American ecocritical dialogue while few American scholars engage with Canadian environmental writing or ecocritical discourse. By observing a North American imbalance, a critical disparity, I do not mean to fault American scholars but to acknowledge a larger institutional dilemma: Canadian literary scholarship is generally overshadowed by American literary studies. Yet I cannot disregard that Ricou’s assertion – “In a bioregion, Canadian is at once meaningless and still crucial”¹⁶ – holds weight when one transgresses regional and transnational spaces. Ricou’s comment, when coupled with Banting’s point, can be taken to suggest that Canada is “still crucial” if Canadian scholars wish both to identify and to locate a transnational oversight and to negotiate Canada’s own political, social, and cultural diversity. Keeping “Canada” on the map, so to speak, is both meaningless and crucial because from both Canadian and non-Canadian perspectives, the emphasis challenges settled notions of what it means to be Canadian, while remaining open to pluralistic viewpoints.

Arguably, with its emphasis on non-American content, *The Goose* practices and perpetuates the same critical myopia that some Canadian ecocritics accuse their American counterparts of enacting. Simon Estok claims that “ecocriticism has distinguished itself . . . by its commitment to making connections.”¹⁷ His comment illuminates the interdisciplinarity of the field, the discipline’s commitment to playing out the metaphorical implications of ecosystem and ecological terminologies: edge effects and ecotones, for instance. *The Goose* makes those connections, at least for now, primarily within Canada. Connections between Canada and the United States, however, remain tenuous. Jenny Kerber, Cate Sandilands,

Rebecca Raglon, Angela Waldie, and Laurie Ricou are a few Canadian ecocritics who have repeatedly focussed on the forty-ninth parallel in order to emphasize commonalities as well as differences, and to make Americans aware of Canadian environmental writing. *The Goose*, by overlooking specifically American content in favour of a Canadian and international focus, perhaps undoes what these Canadian scholars have attempted. However, such endeavours, to borrow Huey-Li Li's observation of the relations between bioregionalism and globalization, become "essential to keep[ing] the boundaries open – that is, to situat[ing] the local in the global context. At the same time, [keeping in mind that] interlocking localities shape and form the global."¹⁸ Attending to the intersections of the local and the global in the assembling and disassembling of a distinctly Canadian ecocritical discourse avoids over-determined definitions of place-based identity. But for now, *The Goose's* Canadian emphasis is an appropriate over-correction. *The Goose* attends to cross-cultural emphasis by showcasing Canadian environmental literature to Canadian, American, and international readers. Ecocriticism's propensity for bioregionalism takes us to local affiliations, but there remains also the risk of insularity. As Canadian environmental thought becomes more visible, we must not settle too comfortably; rather we must remember that what instigated the movement for a Canadian ecocritical community was recognition of migrations, of fluid borders, of the "interlocking" connections between the local and the global. And, we must remember, as Laurie Ricou observes, "that U.S.-based scholars had the passion and concern to risk disrupting their discipline."¹⁹

The Goose contributes to shaping an environmental discourse in Canada, one that seeks not so much to be differentiated from as to complement other national discourses of environmental criticism – to add to the assemblages that comprise and help legitimize ecological and environmental studies, a field that in turn adds to the assemblages that comprise other discursive practices. *The Goose's* textual condition (virtual, open-access) also connects a disparate ecocritical community, permitting readers to extend definitions of "here" beyond their own backyards. Ella Soper, Mike Pereira, Paul Huebener, and I settled on three sustaining

features: “The Regional Feature,” “Edge Effects,” and book reviews. We established these three aspects of *The Goose* to emphasize intersecting paths that connect readers to various Canadian ecologies: bioregional, interdisciplinary, and literary. As the ecocritical thought became more diverse, so did the journal, and so the sections we had initially created no longer seemed sufficient. We now let the journal’s layout reflect an ever-changing development and diversity of contributions, particularly since many of our regional features have resisted a unified, distinctly Canadian identity. *The Goose* creates a forum from where, to borrow Tim Lilburn’s words, “we must start again learning how to be in this place ... of yielding, of stepping aside. This will be like breathing through the whole body, the new larger body of a place that might take us in.”²⁰ (*The Goose*’s flexible format and content allow for comparison, allow for recognizing greater commonality, disjuncture, or tenuous skeletal connections both within a national and a global context – it offers a site to “start again learning how to be in this place” we call Canada.)

The Goose began in the fall of 2005 and is published semi-annually. Thanks to volunteer efforts, it has fared well. The reduced costs of online distribution do much to assure its survival. *The Goose* attempts to address interdisciplinary topics and manifold locales. Our editing is based on mutual editorial decision-making. Collaboration ensures that *The Goose* maintains a pluralistic voice, and contributors’ diverse backgrounds ensure multiplicity. Contributors are free to choose the form and direction of their pieces with editorial guidance provided near the final draft stages. When soliciting writers for the regional feature, moreover, we do not always seek self-proclaimed ecocritics. Rather, we want to demonstrate that environmental consciousness persists broadly in Canadian culture. Intermixing ecocritical scholars with critics preferring different approaches and with non-scholars becomes a means of pushing beyond boundaries – discouraging insularity, opening up paths that might otherwise have remained overgrown with disciplinary biases. After all, as Canadian ecocritic Travis V. Mason commented when comparing *The Goose* to the Canada geese in Jacques Perrin’s *Winged Migration*, “[Canada geese] don’t just encounter other geese on their journeys” – and so

ecocritics, with their interdisciplinary and literary interests, do not encounter only other ecocritics in *The Goose*.²¹

The co-editors of *The Goose* cannot claim sole responsibility for the publication's growth. We aim for a flexible format, always leaving room to introduce new ecocritical and environmental expressions – academic and non-academic. Yet the publication's true success has depended on and will continue to depend on readers and writers who supported the venture from the onset. The dedication of our first contributors, including Pamela Banting, Travis Mason, Jennifer Delisle, and Adam Dickinson, and the generosity of new and established Canadian poets and scholars, led to a vibrant publication. Other contributors – such as Jessica Marion Barr, Brian Bartlett, Ken Belford, Tom Berryman, Sonnet L'Abbé, Alison Calder, Jonquil Covello, Don Gayton, Sue Goyette, David Heinemann, Nancy Holmes, Basma Kavanagh, Ian LeTourneau, Tim Lilburn, Leigh Matthews, Don McKay, Jonathan Meakin, Camilla Nelson, Emily Nilsen, Anne Simpson, E. Alex Pierce, Sandy Pool, Sina Queyras, a.rawlings, Rod Schumacher, Megan Simpson, Fenn Stewart, Harry Thurston, Maria Whiteman, Erin Whitmore, Rita Wong, David Zieroth, Jan Zwicky, and many more – have enabled *The Goose's* content to expand. Their ongoing support demonstrates a commitment to literature and art as effective mediums in which to communicate environmental and ecological concerns. To be sure, there are risks to publishing in an open-access, online forum: a non-guaranteed readership, as well as the inherent copyright problems in open access. The benefits of online distribution, however, can often outweigh the risks; the potential exists for wide readership. Furthermore, the Web's formal attributes, with its endless hyperlinks, are an effective means of disrupting boundaries while drawing attention to specific physical places – such as Newfoundland and Labrador, the Thompson-Nicola Regional District, or Saint John, New Brunswick, regions that *The Goose* has featured – and while leading readers to overlapping literary and artistic terrains.

The continued dedication of particular Canadian ecocritical scholars and creative writers to *The Goose*, I believe, has helped materialize Canadian critic Diana M. A. Relke's call “to reinforce [...] a growing

perception within the Canadian critical community that ecocriticism is a legitimate endeavour in its own right, rather than some ephemeral spinoff of ‘real’ literary studies – an endeavour that contributes not only to our understanding of literature and landscape but also to a vision of the future of literature and the species that produces it.”²² ALECC is a “placeless” community inasmuch as the membership is a virtually linked community. As a location for providing Canadian ecocritics a network and forum for communicating environmental issues, *The Goose* and ALECC have influenced a stronger ecocritical presence in Canada – and those locations, we must remind ourselves, were built by people. Whether either ALECC or *The Goose* has had any effect in shifting critical views remains a matter for speculation; yet, I would like to believe that the two, in creating a sense of community, have brought together a scattered group of committed ecocritics and writers and provided a place from which to legitimize ecocriticism in Canada. Regardless, ecocriticism has gained critical ground. For instance, in October 2007 many ALECC members attended the conference hosted by York University’s Environmental Studies program and organized by Catriona Sandilands, “Nature Matters: Materiality and the More-Than-Human in Cultural Studies of the Environment.” In December 2006/March 2007, *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* published a two-volume special issue, *The Animal*. During the 2008 meeting of the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE), the panel “Canadian Ecocriticism: Histories, Taxonomies, Trajectories,” chaired by Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley, attracted a large audience. At the 2010 meeting of ACCUTE in Montreal, Paul Huebener and I succeeded in co-organizing and chairing two ecocriticism panels (our first panel also filled the room). “Transcanada 3,” organized by the Transcanada Institute (Guelph University), included an ecocritical call for its third and final conference in July 2008, diverging from “Transcanada 1,” which, perhaps because it was held concurrently with ASLE’s 2005 conference, featured only two Canadian ecocritical papers.²³ Other significant ecocritical conferences and workshops initiated by ALECC members in Canada include: the joint ALECC and Network

in Canadian Environmental History (NiCHE) workshop “Cross-Pollination: Seeding New Ground for Environmental Thought and Activism across the Arts and Humanities” (2011),²⁴ “Green Words/Green Worlds: Environmental Literatures and Politics in Canada” (2011), and “Underground Ecocriticism” (2012). In 2012, Travis Mason and I kicked off ALECC’s “100 Mile Verses” trans-Canada series in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, and brought Don McKay, Basma Kavanagh, Brian Bartlett, and E. Alex Pierce to the town’s local theatre for an evening of poetry. In 2013, poet Madhur Anand hosted the second reading series at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph, with poets Karen Houle, David Waltner-Toews, and Nora Gould. In addition, since 2005, Wilfrid Laurier University Press initiated the *Environmental Humanities* series; Rebecca Raglon (University of British Columbia), Marian Scholtmeijer (University of Northern British Columbia), and Michael Howlett (Simon Fraser University) launched the online *Journal of Ecocriticism*, the publication of the Canadian Association for the Study of Humanities and the Environment; UBC Okanagan’s creative writing department established *Lake: A Journal of Arts and Environment*; and *The Malahat Review* published a special issue, *The Green Imagination* (2008).²⁵ But the most telling events, since 2005, that signal ecocriticism’s established presence in Canada are the two biennial ALECC conferences to date. The inaugural conference, held in Sydney, Nova Scotia (2010), and the second, in Kelowna, British Columbia (2012), successfully brought together innovative scholars and artists from Canada and abroad. Plans are underway for future ALECC conferences.

In 1991, Laurie Ricou cautioned that “the current clamour to be ‘green’” was not without an element of hype.²⁶ The “green” commotion has not decreased, but continues to intensify, particularly as the consequences of climate change and human negligence become more apparent. To be “green,” much then as today, seemed a movement that frequently vacillated between “ethical commitment and cynical exploitation.”²⁷ And so perhaps the emergence of “something called ecocriticism should prompt as much skepticism as fervour.”²⁸ If, as Ricou claims, long before ecocriticism “nature has loomed large in the Canadian consciousness,”²⁹

then a shift to an environmental and ecological emphasis would seem natural in Canadian literary studies. Initially, a few Canadian scholars did make this critical turn. But these Canadian “ecocritics thrum[med] like some scattered little grey birds among a flock of cranes beating their way into motion.”³⁰ Ecocriticism remained “a here and there, almost underground phenomenon.”³¹ Within the last twenty years, however, ecocriticism in Canada has taken flight – become a different kind of bird, one with a wider wingspan and clearer formation. Granted, ecocritics in Canada are still a relatively small group, but *The Goose* and ALECC provide (inter)connections both locally and beyond that continue to increase our numbers. In linking interdisciplinary global and local pursuits, and by providing a homing position for critical “migratory flights,” together ALECC and *The Goose* will help to keep Canadian ecocriticism aloft and from remaining an “underground phenomenon.”

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NOTES

- 1 The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment Biennial Conference was held at the University of Oregon, Eugene, 21–26 June 2005. ALECC, originally called ASLE-Canada, began as an informal listserv network administered by Pamela Banting (University of Calgary). Banting launched the listserv in April 2005, and by October 2005 membership had gone from 8 to 100 subscribers (Pamela Banting, “Imagining Community,” *The Goose* 1, no. 1 [2005]. Web). The jump in subscribers, I believe, derived from both informal and formal forums created at the Eugene conference (roundtable discussions and social occasions), which brought some Canadian ecocritics face-to-face for the first time. The presence of approximately thirty Canadians with a common interest in Canadian ecocritical studies made more tangible the realization of an actual ASLE-Canada chapter. Three figures who were instrumental in bringing these meetings together were Banting, Stephanie Posthumus (then McMaster University), and Catriona Sandilands (York University). After the first issue of *The Goose*, I sent e-mails to various Canadian arts and humanities faculties and graduate programs to recruit members for ASLE-Canada’s listserv. The membership continues to grow. During Congress (an annual Canadian gathering for academics in the arts, humanities, and social sciences) of May/June 2006 at York University, a few members of the listserv met to discuss formalizing ASLE-Canada as an official organization. Concurrent online postings allowed members unable to attend to participate in the debate. Subsequent to this meeting, the organization elected an executive and created a constitution.
- 2 The ASLE affiliates are ASLE-Korea; ASLE-Japan; the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and the Environment (EASLCE); ASLE-UK (now ASLE-UKI, to include Ireland); ASLE-India; the Organization for Studies in Literature and Environment (OSLE-India); and ASLE-ANZ (Australia and New Zealand).
- 3 On 24 June 2005, as participants in a roundtable discussion moderated by Scott Slovic (University of Nevada), “Internationalizing: Ecologically Oriented Literary and Cultural Studies,” Pamela Banting and Stephanie Posthumus advocated a Canadian association. As I recall, some of the Canadians who attended the ASLE Biennial conference were Laurie Ricou, Jenny Kerber, Catriona Sandilands, Ella Soper, Angela Waldie, Diane Guichon, Brian Bartlett, Alanna F. Bondar, Adam Dickinson, Michael Pereira, Mark Dickinson, J. A. Wainwright, Keri Cronin, Dominique Perron, Vermonja R. Alston, Erin Whitmore, and Rebecca Raglon.

- 4 I do not imply that *The Goose* has an extensive and wide global audience. Rather, to beat the flight metaphor into the ground, once I post *The Goose*, I no longer have control over its migrations, and currently I am unable to track the number of visits to each publication. With the move of *The Goose* to the Wilfrid Laurier University Press Digital Commons platform and the reformatting of the publication, readership will become easier to track.
- 5 W. H. New, "Writing Here," *BC Studies* 147 (autumn 2005): 19.
- 6 Ibid., 18.
- 7 Ibid., 19.
- 8 Richard Evanoff, "Bioregionalism and Cross-Cultural Dialogue on a Land Ethic," *Ethics, Place, and Environment* 10, no. 2 (2007): 151.
- 9 Ella Soper-Jones, "Letter from the Editors," *The Goose* 1, no. 1 (2005). Web.
- 10 Laurie Ricou, *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest* (Edmonton: NeWest, 2002), 1.
- 11 Laurie Ricou, "So Big about Green," *Canadian Literature* 130 (autumn 1991): 6; Ricou's emphasis.
- 12 For a more detailed examination of the development of ecocritical studies in Canada prior to 2000, see D.M.R. Bentley's "Preface: The Absence of Neoconservatism and Ecocriticism in Canadian Literary Studies" in *Much with Nature: Ecocritical Essays on Canadian Writing*, a special issue of *Canadian Poetry* 42 (spring-summer 1998): 5-15.
- 13 When compiling reading lists in 2007-2008 for my doctoral candidacy exams, my section of Canadian ecocritical "voices" was comprised of a significant number of unpublished dissertations. This outcome, I believe, is more indicative of 1) the growth of the field in Canada; 2) the legitimization of the field in Canadian universities; and 3) the emergence of a generation of Canadian ecocritical scholars newly graduated, rather than the Canadian publishing industry's reluctance to take on ecocritical works. The Wilfrid Laurier University Press *Environmental Humanities* series, led by series editor Cheryl Lousley, for instance, has already made a notable contribution to the field.
- 14 Ricou's claim has shown fruition in the creation in recent years of tenure-track positions at Canadian universities that specified and/or support research interests in environmental literary studies. There is also the movement of established Canadian scholars into environmental criticism and animal studies: Dianne Chisholm (University of Alberta), Jodey Castricano (University of British Columbia Okanagan), Nancy Holmes (University of British Columbia Okanagan), Harry Vandervlist (University of Calgary), Robert Boschman (Mount Royal University), Glenn Willmott (Queen's University), Alice Kuzniar (University of Waterloo). Because of space, there are many other academics I have not mentioned, a number of them doctoral candidates – not to mention non-academics (artists, activists, writers) who also participate in the ecocritical community in Canada.
- 15 Pamela Banting, "Imagining Community," *The Goose* 1, no. 1 (2005). Web.
- 16 Laurie Ricou, "Pacifist Poetics," *Canadian Literature* 185 (summer 2005): 6.
- 17 Simon Estok, "Bridging the Great Divide: Ecocritical Theory and the Great Unwashed," *English Studies in Canada* 31, no. 4 (2005): 198.
- 18 Huey-Li Li, "Bioregionalism and Global Education: A Reexamination," *Educational Theory* 53, no. 1 (2005): 62.

- 19 Laurie Ricou, correspondence with the author (4 Feb. 2009).
- 20 Tim Lilburn, "Going Home," in *Thinking and Singing: Poetry and the Practice of Philosophy*, ed. Tim Lilburn (Toronto: Cormorant, 2002), 184.
- 21 Travis V. Mason, correspondence with the author (7 Nov. 2008).
- 22 Diana M. A. Relke, *Green(w)orlds: Ecocritical Readings of Canadian Women's Poetry* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1999), 317.
- 23 In May 2005, approximately a month before the ASLE Eugene conference, the University of Ottawa hosted "The Animals in This Country: A Canadian Literature Symposium." The symposium organizer, Janice Fiamengo (University of Ottawa), subsequently published an edited collection of conference papers: *Other Selves: Animals in the Canadian Literary Imagination* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007).
- 24 This workshop resulted in the publication of a co-edited collection by Liza Piper and Lisa Szabo, *Sustaining the West: Cultural Responses to Western Environments, Past and Present* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), which brings together environmental critics from the arts and humanities; a large number of the contributors are from literary studies and are ALECC members.
- 25 It is worth noting that because of their editorial efforts as well as their own writing, Laurie Ricou (*Canadian Literature*) and D.M.R. Bentley (*Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews*) have sustained a Canadian ecocritical presence since the 1990s – and some would argue since as early as the 1980s.
- 26 Ricou, "So Big about Green," 3.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.

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Ecocriticism is the investigation of the many ways in which culture and the environment are interrelated and conceptualized. As an approach to literary studies and other forms of cultural inquiry, it aspires to understand and often to celebrate the natural world. It has been hailed as one of the most timely and provocative developments in literary and cultural studies of recent decades.

Greening the Maple brings into view the development of ecocriticism in the context of Canadian literary studies, in which it has a rich and vibrant past and present. An indispensable introduction to ecocriticism in Canada, the essays in this volume survey the rise of the field, reflect on its beginnings, and look ahead to its future.

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