



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

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## **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*<sup>1</sup>

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 Arl” 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

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## CHAPTER 2

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

*Margaret Atwood<sup>1</sup>*

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 steeped 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*<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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?”<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.”<sup>7</sup> Her ritual preparation, whether by coincidence or intention, corresponds with the stages of shamanistic initiation outlined by Mircea Eliade.<sup>8</sup> 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.”<sup>9</sup>

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."<sup>10</sup>

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*<sup>1</sup>

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.”<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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*.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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.”<sup>9</sup> 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.”<sup>10</sup>

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.”<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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”<sup>14</sup> (“dark, narrow streets [and] obscurity between houses”<sup>15</sup>). He knows that spring in this city is a “saison de pauvres illusions”<sup>16</sup> (“season of thin illusions”<sup>17</sup>), 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”<sup>18</sup> (“his old and sterile pity”<sup>19</sup>), 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.<sup>20</sup>



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!<sup>21</sup>

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”<sup>22</sup> (“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”<sup>23</sup>). 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”<sup>24</sup> (“a tree in a backyard, its branches tortured among electric wires and clotheslines, its leaves dry and shrivelled before they were fully out”<sup>25</sup>). 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."<sup>26</sup> 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."<sup>27</sup> 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.”<sup>28</sup> Although they impinge less stridently, even the newspapers remind her that this “place is a prison” and “there is nowhere to go but here.”<sup>29</sup> Stacey’s increasing hysteria and self-alienation climax in an italicized nightmare in which she stumbles through a forest carrying her severed head.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.”<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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.”<sup>35</sup> 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.”<sup>36</sup>

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.”<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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."<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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.<sup>41</sup>

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,”<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup>

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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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*<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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."<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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*.<sup>14</sup>

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.”<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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.”<sup>17</sup>

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 garri-son” 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, disenchanted 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.<sup>18</sup> 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"<sup>19</sup>; 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.”<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup> 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.”<sup>23</sup> 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 deed 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.”)<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup>

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).<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

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."<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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/NcWest, 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 Ortnor, "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.

