



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

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## **SECTION 3**

### **READING CANADIAN LANDSCAPES**



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

*Jenny Kerber*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the same time, past and present examples of social and environmental injustice in transborder regions remind critics studying these spaces to be wary of approaches that too easily reduce politics to the unifying tropes of nature. This is why Gayton’s and Ricou’s respective attempts to read region through and with species such as kokanee salmon and salal also hold fast to representation and mediation – precisely those things that O’Brien argues the ecocritical drive to “get back to nature” has historically overlooked. As Ricou insists, “the idea of writing must also move us back into the book, into the human articulation, into the necessity of language and story.”<sup>69</sup> Ricou’s account of salal – his reading of native plant as text<sup>70</sup> – is thus made up of many (sometimes competing) voices, drawing on experiences and livelihoods connected to salal by everyone from those immigrants who go out daily to pick it in the harvested cutblocks of West Coast forests, to the European florist who relies upon its timely delivery to add it to a bouquet ordered from halfway across the world on the same day. Similarly, for Gayton, the story of the kokanee is one told by scientists, but it is also a story told in various ways by different First Nations, settler groups, and those who seek to create and recreate the regional mythologies of the future.<sup>71</sup> This dual approach, winding together ecology and story, restores some of the “thickness” of political debate to borders that ecocritical discourse might otherwise render too permeable. At its best, environmental criticism of transborder literatures makes nature, nation, and the relationship

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

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## NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

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



## CHAPTER 13

# Calypso Trails: Botanizing on the Bruce Peninsula (2010)

*Catriona Sandilands<sup>1</sup>*

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

### JOHN MUIR ARRIVES AT DORCAS BAY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CATTLEYS, COMMODITIES, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE MYSTERY OF THE PURPLE-FRINGED ORCHID<sup>30</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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NOTES

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

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

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

## CHAPTER 14

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

*Cheryl Lousley*<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

## POWER, PLACE, AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## HISTORY, SPACE, AND REALISM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY AND *THE DISINHERITED*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## GEOPOLITICAL SPACE: *ELIZABETH AND AFTER*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### HOPELESS ENVIRONMENTS: *LIVES OF SHORT DURATION*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## MORAL AGENCY: MERCY AMONG THE CHILDREN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CONCLUSIONS

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

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

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

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NOTES

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

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