



**GREENING THE MAPLE:
CANADIAN ECOCRITICISM IN CONTEXT**
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SECTION 4

ENVIRONMENTS AND CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

CHAPTER 15

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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NOTES

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

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

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

CHAPTER 16

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

Stephanie Posthumus and Élise Salaün

INTRODUCTION: “MON PAYS”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Timber! for the Land of the Lord

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the child-poet who writes his biography, telling of how country life ends in the infertility of the earth: "My father had to put us in school, because he couldn't keep us on such sterile land."¹⁶ With this novel, the traditional agrarian way of life vanishes for good from Quebec literature.

I Am the Land

During the Quiet Revolution, the most vivid expressions of Nature migrate from the novel to poetry. Nature becomes the symbol of two opposing attitudes: on the one hand, the profound awareness of being dispossessed of the natural world – a belief that can be found in literature as far back as *Menaud, maître-draveur* – and, on the other, the thrill of founding a new country, a reflection of the promising nationalism of idealistic baby boomers, who reach their twenties in the sixties.

As Pierre Nepveu explains in terms of Paul-Marie Lapointe's poem *Pour les âmes* (in the collection *Le Réel absolu*), "dispossession and discontinuity define from the beginning the fundamental relationship to reality."¹⁷ Lapointe's first lines of *Pour les âmes* (1971) are clear: "No love possesses the earth that it embraces / and its rivers flow away."¹⁸ The impression of being separated from Nature can also be found in Gérald Godin's poem *Cantouque des racines*: "despite my dispossession, my absence, my orphanage / despite my wanderings, my running after my whole / my scouring the countryside tirelessly / hunting my habitat, my vital space / my area of not dying."¹⁹

Various poets tackle the tragic feeling of dispossession where the individual is alienated from the nature of his/her country. Life is no longer related to Nature as it was for generations, nor is it possible to celebrate the Catholic, agrarian way of life. The poets live in the City and are part of modern times, yet Nature finds its way into their poetry through primitivism.²⁰ According to Nepveu, "nothing is more typical of Quebec's modernity than its way of reaching the Modern by the non-Modern, the archaic, the primitive, the 'natural.'"²¹ This may be why poetry expresses Nature not only as separation but also as symbiosis. Humans intertwine with natural elements. That intimate relationship is present

in the title of the first part of Gatién Lapointe's *Ode au Saint-Laurent* (1963). In this poem, belonging to the earth means *becoming* the earth: "My childhood is that of a tree / Snow and rain penetrate my shoulders / Humus and seeds flow up through my veins / I am memory I am future."²² The poetic images of the human/nature symbiosis are numerous and striking in Paul Chamberland's *Terre Québec* (1964): "wings flapping in my blood,"²³ "I botanize my memories,"²⁴ "I move in the landscape of my blood,"²⁵ etc. The subject, after being rejected by Nature, envisions himself as Nature and becomes the country he claims.

A closer look reveals that the types of nature evoked in Quiet Revolution poetry are primarily the forest and the field. Unlike in the agrarian novel, the two do not oppose one another; they have different significations. Forests are linked with nostalgia and pride for their magnificence, but at the same time with guilt because of their destruction, while the fields – symbolized by the word *wheat* – are associated with a negative and rejected past. In Roland Giguère's *Ancêtres*,²⁶ this difference is projected as a collective schizophrenia characterizing Quebec's imagination of Nature: "We have the forest in mind when we speak about the plains. / Forever broken landscape / How to name? How to tell? / How to go back?"²⁷ Nature has been transformed from forest to field without any way of going back to the original forest. And poetry reminds us of this.

Moving into the seventies, poetry emphasizes form rather than representation. Nicole Brossard's *Le Centre blanc* (1970) is a collection of poems in which the "creative potential of the woman is defined as energy."²⁸ The theme of germination, growing, going forward is prominent in the poem. The "I," the subject of the logos, is the centre of movement, a psychic one, in which energy appears (germination) and from which energy is liberated by language (emission). With respect to the formalist subject in Brossard's work, Nepveu explains: "Egology / Ecology: the subject is a force field that is controlled by cycles, networks, circuits."²⁹

It is in formalist poetry that the aesthetic of waste begins to appear. The form of the fragment, itself a lonely piece, lost but having its own existence, is recuperated by poetry, and launched in the energetic

movement of literature. Formalist poetry has a very different interaction with Nature; rather than representing it as an exterior reality, formalist poetry simulates the macro-functioning (forces, energy, networks) of what will be better known in the next decade as Ecology.

Thinking Green

During the eighties, nonfiction essays take up the question of the Human/Nature relationship. After being incarnated by poets, Nature is seen as a system of thought and ecology follows suit. In his essay *Patience dans l'azur*, Hubert Reeves, an astrophysicist born in Quebec, explains the functioning of the universe as a story with a beginning, an end, chapters, and characters. The analogy between text and universe allows Reeves to popularize very complicated scientific matters. In the introduction, Reeves uses the metaphor of a mountain that gives birth to a mouse³⁰ to show how even the largest unanimated, natural element can produce biological life – like the Big Bang, which is still mysterious, scientifically speaking. Since *Patience dans l'azur*, Reeves has written many books mainly on the universe and the cosmos but also about ecology and the necessity to take action against the destruction of Nature.

In *Le Défi écologiste* (1984), a much more politically charged book-length essay, forest ecologist Michel Jurdant attacks Western capitalism as a leading cause of the over-exploitation of natural resources. After explaining some alternative ways of protecting the environment, Jurdant emphasizes the ethical necessity of changing our destructive relationship with Nature. Jurdant finishes his book by proposing a political agenda and by reasserting the need for a Green Party. At the time, Jurdant's discourse seemed alarmist because his portrait of the exploitation of natural resources by large companies was so fiercely negative. It was the first real essay published in Quebec about ecology not only as a science but also as a political manifesto.

The same year, Luc Bureau, a former geography professor at Laval University, published *Entre l'Éden et l'Utopie : Les Fondements de l'espace québécois*, an essay in which he illustrates the cultural, and therefore

subjective, influences on the study of geography. Bureau interprets quite liberally geographical concepts as intertwined with myths. In a jovial, almost ironic tone, the author explains how the trope of Eden, the perfect place, has played an important role in settling the French colony because the people were told that they were living in Eden in order to motivate them to stay and develop the land by deforesting and farming. As Bureau concludes, the colonial, agricultural development of the land was associated with Utopia because it required the destruction of Nature, the transformation of wild Eden into ... an agrarian Eden!

The main literary ecocritical work of the decade remains Nepveu's *L'Écologie du réel: Mort et naissance de la littérature québécoise contemporaine* (1988). Drawing from Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (1972), Nepveu's *L'Écologie du réel* interprets Québécois literature of the Quiet Revolution as a transforming energy cycle of destruction/creation. Nepveu explains how, from the 1950s to the 1970s, literature dramatically changed its representation of the interaction between humans and their habitat. Initial values were transformed, recuperated, and recycled into different forms at the end of this period. Nepveu primarily discusses poetry but shows how the novel uses irony as a method of simultaneous destruction and creation. Nepveu concludes with the idea of literature as "a supreme Ecology" – that is, of literature as organizing reality through relationships, cycles, energy, and the recycling of symbols, values, styles, genres. He goes so far as to promote "ecological thinking" as "an ethical and aesthetical answer to any prevailing confusion."³¹

Over the last two decades, the theme of the relationship between humans and nature has resurfaced in the Québécois novel. Since *La Rage* by Louis Hamelin (1989), a story about expropriation, many novels have tackled environmental issues where different forces fight over the use of natural resources. Ecological discourses are numerous and diverse, ranging from scientific to political, and from religious to esoteric, with natural elements being represented realistically, but also symbolically and mythologically. The literary quality of the political plots revolving

around an ecological crisis stems primarily from the secondary meanings evoked by the natural elements (water, animals, forest).

Louis Hamelin's *Le Joueur de flûte* (1997) tells the story of ecologists fighting against lumber companies for the preservation of an old-growth forest on Mere Island, British Columbia. Once again, the forest becomes the battleground of two opposing forces. The company's capitalist discourse distorts the vision of the land and exploits the territory of the First Nations people, while the media exacerbate the conflict. At the heart of the plot, the forest itself, portrayed by the synecdoche of a dead tree, becomes a refuge for the ecologist.

On a less hopeful note, Louise Desjardins' love story, *Darling* (1998), describes the inescapable pollution caused by the copper mines in Abitibi, northwest of Montreal. In this novel, mining companies take over the land, and the villagers can do nothing but accept the pollution of their water and vegetation. Nicolas Dickner's *Nikolski* (2005) is also about waste and pollution, but it adds the recurring motif of "recycling" as an important environmental component of the urban way of life. Among the traditional academic disciplines of the novel – history, anthropology, biology, etc. – a new object appears: the semiotic of waste and recycling. In *Nikolski*, notions related to the environmental crisis take on secondary meanings as cultural discourse. The literary themes of waste and recycling reflect the reality of postmodern thought, which has to process all waste – symbolically, mythically, ironically, etc.³² – because rejected matter is omnipresent in contemporary societies.

Less directly related to ecological concerns, Jean-François Beauchemin's *Le Jour des corneilles* (2004) explores the human material condition. How are emotions and reason integrated into the physical? Refusing the traditional dichotomy between Nature (body) and Culture (mind), and deconstructing the classical premise of the superiority of rational thought, the narrator envisions the world around him not as separate but as an extension of himself. In *Champagne* (2008), Monique Proulx also deconstructs oppositions between Human and Nature, Mind and Body. She creates a universe of natural beauty, the *Champagne* ("countryside" in Old French) referred to in the book's title, but

also raises the question of its fragility and its sickness by including in the story elements such as poachers, urban sprawl, and pollution.

In conclusion, this historical overview of representations of Nature in Québécois literature shows how deeply Nature has marked Quebec's identity as it takes on different forms in the collective imagination. But the question needs to be raised: what will the future hold? According to Nepveu, the present concern for Nature will become more and more significant and important: "The ecological path seems quite promising to me. Furthermore, it is clear that this theme will continue to emerge in literary works over the next few years, as it can now be found at the centre of our contemporary conscience."³³ The next section will explore how ecocritical thought is developing more generally in Quebec, becoming more heterogeneous in response to the complexity of today's environmental issues.

2. FLUID BORDERS, HYBRID IDENTITY: CONTEMPORARY ECOCRITICAL THOUGHT IN QUEBEC

Given Quebec's rocky relationship to the rest of Canada (Meech Lake Accord, sovereignty referendums, etc.), one must be careful about assigning any kind of fixed identity to "Québécois" thought. Yet there is something unique about the way in which contemporary eco-thinking has been developing in Quebec, influenced, on the one hand, by its North American geography, and, on the other, by its close relationship with francophone countries and most particularly France. Defining ecocritical thought in Quebec will require taking into consideration these different political influences. What will emerge from this introduction is a promising, diverse, interdisciplinary, and yet challenging approach to understanding the relationship between humans and their environments.

After reading ecocriticism's founding text, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Susie O'Brien relates her dissatisfaction with the fact that only one

Canadian, Neil Evernden, is included in the collection.³⁴ O'Brien then asks if it matters where an ecocritic comes from. Her affirmative response – “everyday practices of ecocriticism and nationalism are radically conjoined” – is based on a thorough analysis of the political powers that come into play when a well-known American, Robert Kennedy, makes an appearance on Canadian, or more precisely, Québécois, soil to defend the Great Whale site. As part of her analysis, O'Brien offers an historical overview of the development of scientific ecology in North America that includes an aside on the differences between English- and French-Canadian attitudes towards scientific research in the nineteenth century. Although she does not explore these differences further, her conclusion that Canadian authors are keenly aware of language as a mediating structure, and thus hold no claim (as American nature writers do) to unmediated nature, makes for an interesting point. Do different linguistic communities also give rise to different ecocritical approaches? Or do national differences prevail over linguistic differences? In the case of Quebec, both linguistic and national differences play a defining role in ecocritical thought.³⁵

As was true of Canadian ecocriticism,³⁶ Québécois ecocriticism has passed for the most part under the radar, with only a handful of studies available. But what of work being done under a name other than *écocritique*? Ecocritical thinking is alive and well in Quebec, but it simply does not line up easily with an anglophone ecocriticism. In other words, Québécois *écocritique* exists but not as a literal “translation” of North American ecocriticism. At the same time, it is important to point out that Québécois ecocritical thinking is not bound by local or provincial interests; rather, it manifests the type of “environmental imagination of the global” described by Ursula Heise in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*. Hence, the title of my section of this chapter, “Fluid Borders, Hybrid Identity,” which attempts to capture both the situatedness and the permeability of ecocritical thought in Quebec.

Eco-Ethics / Eco-Theology: Animal and Environment

Canada Research Chair in Environmental and Bio-Ethics at Laval University, Marie-Hélène Parizeau works on the edges of various new disciplines: animal studies, environmental studies, and bioethics. Questioning, deconstructing, complicating the relationship between the human, the animal, and the world, her approach offers some interesting directions for ecocriticism in Quebec. In “Enjeux et thèmes de l'éthique de l'environnement,” Parizeau notes some key differences between American environmental philosophy and French environmental thought: while American environmental ethics seek to define the nature of nature in order to preserve and conserve areas less modified by humans, the French (and, more generally, European) approach has been to value landscapes in terms of cultural heritage; while tenets of philosophies such as deep ecology promote a return to a simpler, more natural way of life, European thinkers develop the notion of sustainable development and the pre-eminence of human cultures over nature.

Interestingly enough, Parizeau does not situate Quebec within this American-European opposition. She does, however, reveal the different strands of thought that influence her own position. For example, her article “Gestion des risques environnementaux et principe de précaution: arrière-plan éthique” analyzes German sociologist Ulrich Beck's work on risk theory, which has been used to develop the European precautionary principle. Parizeau then draws on an example from Quebec soil (the possible construction of a natural-gas generating station at Suroît) to conclude that the precautionary principle does nothing to revolutionize the relationship between humans and the “nature-environment” because it remains open to manipulation by different political and economic forces.

Using again a comparative approach in her recent article, “Chimères: l'animal humanisé ou l'humain animalisé?,” Parizeau examines the regulatory laws in Britain, Canada, and the United States that determine the limits of scientific experimentation on animal and human stem cells. In her conclusion, she turns to the question of the ethical status of

these modified animals. After considering the argument for the inherent value of animals developed by American philosopher Tom Regan, Parizeau adopts instead the position of French philosopher Catherine Larrère, who advocates for the “bon usage” (wise use) of nature and the “bien-être” (well-being) of animals. While she is obviously aware of the different philosophical and ethical positions developing on both sides of the Atlantic, Parizeau seems to situate her own ecocritical thought closer to a contemporary European model than an American one.

A contributor to one of Parizeau’s edited collections on the human and the animal, theologian André Beauchamp is an important thinker in environmental politics and policy in Quebec. Head of the Inquiry Commission on Water Management in Quebec from 1998 to 2000, he also presided over the Commission for the Ethics of Science and Technology from 2001 to 2005. While Parizeau’s work spans the Atlantic, Beauchamp’s essays on the future of the environment in Quebec are a clear example of the situatedness of Québécois ecocritical thought.³⁷ A practising priest in Montreal, Beauchamp is a reminder of the important role the Catholic Church has played in defining national identity in Quebec. He also serves as a counter-example to the strong resistance to ecological science characteristic of nineteenth-century ultramontanism. Including Beauchamp in a description of Québécois ecocriticism is a way of signalling the relationship between Church and State, between faith and science, which colours Quebec’s past and present.³⁸

Literary Criticism: Habitat and Place

As has already been stated, Pierre Nepveu is a key figure in Quebec’s contemporary literary landscape. Yet his work covers a wide range of national literatures (what he calls New World literature – American, Canadian, and Québécois), demonstrating once again that Québécois ecocriticism is not limited to its political borders. Although the term *écocritique* never appears in his work, Nepveu’s first in-depth analysis of Québécois literature, *L’Écologie du réel*, retains the word *écologie* in the title and is very much an example of an ecocritical approach. As the

first part of this chapter has observed, Nepveu's understanding of the interactions between ecology and literature are very much like those of William Rueckert published ten years earlier. Where the two differ is in their understanding of representation and language. Much inspired by Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Nepveu conceptualizes ecology as systems of energy that take on material form in different objects. It is in this sense that he speaks of Nicole Brossard's "rhétorique énergétique"³⁹ ("energizing rhetoric") and Jacques Poulin's "conception énergétique globale qui inclut autant le moi, psychisme et corps que le milieu ambiant"⁴⁰ ("concept of global energy that includes as much the I, the psyche and the body as the surrounding environment"). But Nepveu's study also examines the sociohistorical conditions of the simultaneous birth and death of Québécois literature during the years following the Quiet Revolution. By not losing sight of the historic and material real nor the influence of language, by including both the political and the literary, Nepveu's study represents an impressive foundation for Québécois ecocriticism.

The at times highly metaphorical and figurative language of Nepveu's first work of (eco)criticism is countered in more recent texts where studies of specific aspects of individual works often include anecdotal or personal examples. Awarded the Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction in 1998, *Intérieurs du Nouveau Monde* responds to previous readings of space and place in New World literature. To a certain extent, Nepveu's interpretations can be seen as opposing those of a typical ecocritic who emphasizes representations of open space, wilderness, and the great outdoors in American literary classics. For Nepveu, it is the experience of enclosed spaces and small places that characterizes the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson, Laure Conan, and William Carlos Williams, to name but a few of the authors included in this collection of essays.

In light of recent critiques of ecocriticism's attempt to bring together the literary text and the physical world,⁴¹ the epigraph to Nepveu's most recent collection of studies, *Lectures des lieux* (2004), captures an interesting tension: "Une pensée qui ne se nourrit pas d'un lieu est-elle

encore une pensée? Et une pensée qui ne se nourrit que du lieu n'est-elle pas condamnée?" ("Is thinking that draws no nourishment from place still thinking? And is thinking that draws all its nourishment from place not doomed?").⁴² Exploring the roots of his own thinking about place, Nepveu explains in the book's preface that he has always inwardly been a geographer and a surveyor, while outwardly practising the professions of writer, poet, and university professor. His first "travaux d'écriture" ("works of writing") were maps of imaginary cities traced and coloured as a child. Learning to read, he discovered the pleasure of exploring literary representations of geographical places, for example, the "magie topographique" ("topographical magic") of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.⁴³ What is striking here is the contrast between Nepveu's predilection for places, particular cities, their bordering spaces, and inhabited landscapes, and the common preference for natural, preserved, open wilderness amongst ecocritics.⁴⁴ This contrast comes into play again and again in Nepveu's studies of different Québécois authors and poets. In a chapter on the act of rereading, for example, he acknowledges that landscape has often been used to define national identity (he even mentions wilderness as one example of a defining landscape), but then adopts the concept of landscape as a condition of individual existence, as one of the subject's formative activities, developed by French literary critic Michel Collot.⁴⁵

In the chapter "Narrations du monde actuel" (Narratives of the Actual World) of *Lectures des lieux*, a title that could easily refer to any number of American ecocritical studies, Nepveu reflects on the opening sentence of fellow literary critic François Paré's *Les Littératures de l'exigüité*: "J'écris ce livre face à la mer" (I am writing this book facing the sea).⁴⁶ Nepveu does not emphasize, however, the mimetic, referential quality of this sentence, which reminds the reader of the writer's actual physical condition and brings him/her closer to the world (the type of ecocritical reading that can be found, for example, in Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*). Nepveu's reading of Paré's opening sentence stresses instead a more general, symbolic sense of facing the sea as facing infinity, a condition for rediscovering "the little things, the confined spaces, the most fragile existences."⁴⁷ Nepveu goes on to explore a

number of “narratives of the actual world,” texts (both poetry and prose) that engage with the smallness of place as an alternate, albeit fragile, position from which to counter hegemonic discourses (economic, literary, political, social, etc.).

Can such a poetics found Québécois ecocriticism when Nepveu never explicitly embraces an environmentalist ethics, never adopts an overtly activist stance?⁴⁸ If the term “ecocriticism” is understood as an analysis of habitat and place, Nepveu is without a doubt an ecocritic. Moreover, his analysis of identity with respect to Quebec’s position within Canada and its relationship to the United States brings a politics of place into his work that has been notably absent from more traditional ecocritical studies. Finally, as a poet and literary critic, Nepveu is critically aware of the power of language to manipulate as well as to create. For Nepveu, poetry is a way of living in the (real, natural, urban, etc.) world and exploring alternative modes of inhabiting place. This exploration must also include, he stresses, the memories and stories of those who have been marginalized because of linguistic or cultural differences: “[J]e pense qu’il faut faire ... le pari de ces mémoires [de l’autre, des autres] fécondes, plurielles, les laisser nous étonner, nous stupéfier, nous fasciner, les laisser chuchoter leurs histoires, qui nous disent que le lieu que nous habitons est toujours bien petit.”⁴⁹ (“I think we must look to the fertile, diverse memories [of the other and of Others], and allow them to surprise us, to stupefy us, to fascinate us, allow them to whisper their stories that tell us that the places us that the places we live in are always very small.”) Going beyond national borders while focussing on the locality of place, the spirit of Nepveu’s work is most certainly ecocritical.

Geo/Text: Getting Back to the Earth

While an appeal to Thoreau’s “solid earth” may be absent from Nepveu’s work, it is at the heart of the geopoetics project headed by Rachel Bouvet, professor of literary studies at UQAM, Université de Québec à Montréal, and supported by the Québécois working group, La Traversée, founded in 2004. Geopoetics promotes contact with the real, physical, material

earth from a critical perspective situated at the confluence of science, art, and philosophy.⁵⁰ Activities include scholarly conferences, art exhibitions, poetry readings, and, more notably, trips to different natural and/or urban areas in Quebec. In many ways, the interests of the geopoetics group in Quebec resemble those of ecocritics: they have a predilection for travelling, for wandering, for landscapes (natural and urban), for oral and geo-morphological memory, for the writing-place relationship, and for artistic interventions within the environment. They are also an interdisciplinary group, including geographers, literary critics, philosophers, and sociologists, although the strongest connection exists between geographers and literary critics.⁵¹ In many respects, the aims of the group resonate deeply with those of traditional American ecocritics.

Some important distinctions should nonetheless be made. The working group in Quebec is part of the larger geopolitical archipelago founded by Kenneth White in 1989 and includes groups in Belgium, France, Scotland, and Switzerland. It is thus not limited to Quebec nor did it originate in Quebec. Although Scottish by birth, Kenneth White has resided in France since the late sixties and has written a large number of his texts in French.⁵² The concept of geopoetics as a new theory-practice for interacting with the earth came to him while walking along the shores of the St. Lawrence River in the late seventies.⁵³ Describing his “immediate,” “real” experience of nature, White’s prose parallels that of a nature writer whose contact with the physical world leads to a general revelation about life: “C’était exaltant. Cela me mettait littéralement ‘hors de moi’. Je me sentais en contact avec des forces immenses. Cela m’a donné une base, qui a permis toutes sortes de développements.”⁵⁴ (“It was exalting. It put me ‘outside of myself.’ I felt like I was in contact with great forces. It gave me a basis that has since led to all sorts of developments.”) While calling for a poetics of the earth, “plunged in biospheric space,”⁵⁵ White is not always clear about what he means by “earth” beyond the sense of “outside” (the terms “dehors,” “grands espaces,” and “terre” appear again and again in his articles on geopoetics).

Coming back to the work of Rachel Bouvet gives concrete form to the somewhat vague call for “contact with the earth” from geopoetics’

founder Kenneth White. Bouvet's work on collective imaginaries of the desert is particularly insightful, combining close readings of literary and geographical text (*Pages de sable*; "Le Désert"). Moreover, she clearly defines the characteristics of geopoetics: 1) it crosses disciplines, arts, science, literature; 2) it combines research and creative prose/poetry; 3) its primary preoccupation is the interaction of humans with the world; 4) its tools are crafted from both scientific observation and human perception; 5) it includes both on-site exploration (going out into the world) and textual analysis; 6) its object of study is the earth, but also the subject's experience and perception of this space.⁵⁶ While hinting at a political stance (emphasis on the earth as material, actual, real), Bouvet does not subscribe to environmentalism per se. Even if White calls for a radical change in the way humans interact with the earth,⁵⁷ his choice of the prefix "geo" in place of "eco" is an important and interesting difference.⁵⁸

Although not a member of the geopoetics group, Marc Brosseau has had frequent contact with Rachel Bouvet, and his studies as a geographer nicely complement hers as a literary scholar.⁵⁹ Working at the intersection of literature and geography, Brosseau adds another piece to the kaleidoscope of Québécois ecocritical possibilities.⁶⁰ In his first book-length study, *Des Romans-géographes*, Brosseau examines novels such as Michel Tournier's *Les Météores*, Julian Gracq's *Le Rivage des Syrtes*, and Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*, in which place takes on geographical meaning constructed by the experiences and impressions of different characters. Using novels as a source of geographical analysis to understand alternative constructions of place, Brosseau crosses national, linguistic, and disciplinary boundaries.

More explicitly concerned with an ecological perspective, geographer Luc Bureau published *La Terre et moi* in 1991, developing the concept of resonance to characterize the relationship between humans and the earth. On one end, he situates humans who resonate with the earth as parasites, feeding off its natural resources without any thought for its possible decline and degradation. According to Bureau, this relationship evolves on the principles of difference and distance. On the other end, he situates humans who see their life as dependent on that

of the earth, who enter into a relationship of solidarity and co-dependence. This relationship evolves on the principle of identity. In following chapters, Bureau explores personal (somewhat anecdotal) resonances with the earth, various countries, landscapes, cities, etc. The ecological argument of his text does not resurface until the conclusion when he explains the book's "hidden" objective: to give form to the earth as Gaia and to reveal geography as a genre of writing ("scratching words") from which Earth emerges and we from it.⁶¹ The emphasis on Geo- (earth) in Bouvet, Brousseau, and Bureau's work intersects with the emphasis on Eco- (place) in Nepveu's work, illustrating once again that Québécois ecocritical thought goes beyond geopolitical borders.

To conclude this overview of ecocritical thought in Quebec, it would be useful to come back to local ecological and environmentalist concerns within the province. The work of sociologists Brigitte Dumas, Roger Tessier, and Jean-Guy Vaillancourt is particularly helpful in this respect, as they develop an "eco-sociology" or "environmental social sciences" whose main focus is the study of ecological groups, leaders, activities, politics, decisions, etc., as social phenomena in Quebec.⁶² As Vaillancourt explains, it was the proposed construction of over thirty new nuclear energy reactors by Hydro-Québec that produced a new wave of environmentalists in the sixties (*Mouvement écologiste*).⁶³ Preoccupied with the toxic effects of these facilities, activist groups in Quebec were primarily concerned with protecting their own soil. It was only later, adds Vaillancourt, that they recognized solidarity with the French, who were also protesting against the construction of nuclear reactors in France. Vaillancourt concludes by noting that today's more radical eco-groups in Quebec tend to downplay national identity, searching, like other environmental groups around the world, for a (fragile) balance between local and global ecological concerns.

Stressing the fluid borders and hybrid identity of Québécois ecocritical thought is an important step in situating Quebec in the Canadian ecocritical landscape, but the very real question of language remains. To what extent do French-speaking Québécois thinkers read ecocritical work from English Canada or from ecocriticism's birthplace, the

United States? What impact does Québécois ecocritical thought written in French have on English Canada? Although Canada's official policy promotes bilingualism, language continues to present an undeniable barrier to the exchange of ideas between Quebec and the rest of North America. At the same time, this situation also presents a uniquely creative environment in which communities can work separately and then come together to share ideas. Co-written by a francophone professor of Québécois literature and a francophile professor of French literature, the present article is proof that Canadian ecocriticism is bound to be multilingual and multicultural, built on a self-reflexive model, caught up in language and its multiple possibilities (and difficulties).

CONCLUSION: "MON PAYS II"

Five years after composing "Mon pays" (1964), Gilles Vigneault wrote a second song entitled "Mon pays II" (1969), this time targeting a wider francophone audience to include countries such as Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. Rather than associating national identity with a cold, snowy winter, Vigneault poetically describes a country as "a window from which a child watches the seasons pass," as "a city in which young people use their boredom to make grass grow in the concrete," as "a young province searching for a prince to help it cross the bridge," as "a planet where the young replace the old," and finally, as "a planet that a young child, maybe a man, keeps spinning with his finger." Moving in larger and larger concentric circles, the song brings the listener back to the child in the window and asks who may be listening thousands of miles away. Such symmetry brings the local and the global into contact but almost too perfectly, too uniformly, as if in 1969, in the years following the Quiet Revolution, Vigneault was searching for a more stable alliance than the one alluded to in the first version of the song. And so it is fitting to return to the ambiguous, not easily explained final stanza of the first version of "Mon pays" to conclude this article on literary representations of nature and ecocritical thought in Quebec:

Mon pays ce n'est pas un pays c'est l'envers
 D'un pays qui n'était ni pays ni patrie
 Ma chanson ce n'est pas ma chanson c'est ma vie
 C'est pour toi que je veux posséder mes hivers...⁶⁴

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NOTES

- 1 In her introduction to ecocriticism, Cheryll Glotfelty defines the field as “tak[ing] as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature” (Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction” to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm [Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996], xix. Most often identified with ecocriticism, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment also insists on the literary artifact by its name alone. This more “traditional” form of ecocriticism contrasts with contemporary attempts to examine all cultural artifacts, film, visual arts, dance, music, etc., from an ecocritical perspective. The names chosen by more recently formed associations such as the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and the Environment and the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada reflect this attempt to go beyond the literary object.
- 2 This has already been done recently by Québécois historian Yves Hébert in *Une Histoire de l'écologie au Québec : Les Regards sur la nature des origines à nos jours* (Québec: Éditions Gid, 2006).
- 3 Pierre Nepveu, *L'Écologie du réel : Mort et naissance de la littérature québécoise contemporaine* (Montréal: Boréal, 1988), 22.
- 4 Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, *Jean Rivard le défricheur* (Montréal: Éditions Cahiers du Québec-Hurtubise HMH, 1977), 14.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 6 Louis Hémon, *Maria Chapdelaine* (Montréal: Éditions Fides, 1980), 36.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 141.
- 8 Félix-Antoine Savard, *Menaud, maître-draveur* (Montréal: Éditions Fides, 1982), 39.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 93.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 17 Nepveu, *L'Écologie du réel*, 81.
- 18 Paul-Marie Lapointe, *Le Réel absolu : Poèmes 1948–1965* (Montréal: Hexagone, 1971), 207.
- 19 Gérald Godin, *Les Cantouques : Poèmes en langue verte, populaire et quelquefois française* (Montréal: Hexagone, Coll. «Typo», 1991), 50.
- 20 The term “primitivism” is used here by Nepveu to express the ritual interactions between First Nations people and their habitat.
- 21 Nepveu, *L'Écologie du réel*, 88–89.
- 22 Gatien Lapointe, *Ode au Saint-Laurent, précédée de J'appartiens à la terre* (Montréal: Éditions du Jour, 1963), 66.
- 23 Paul Chamberland, *Terre Québec, suivi de L'Afficheur hurle et de L'Inavouable* (Montréal: Typo, 2003.), 29.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 26 Roland Giguère (1929–2003) is known as the poet of the interior landscape.
- 27 Roland Giguère, *Forêt vierge folle* (Québec: Hexagone, Coll. «Typo», 1988), 135.
- 28 Nicole Brossard, *Le Centre blanc* (Montréal: Éditions d'Orphée, 1970), 52.
- 29 Nepveu, *L'Écologie du réel*, 146.

- 30 This metaphor can be found in Horace's *Ars Poetica* and in Jean de la Fontaine's *Fables*, thus dating back (in French) to the seventeenth century.
- 31 Nepveu. *L'Écologie du réel*, 213.
- 32 Even the human body can become waste in an era of economical downsizing. The body of Suzie Legault in *Nikolski* is disposed of in a garbage container after she becomes useless as a worker.
- 33 This quotation is taken from personal correspondence with Pierre Nepveu, 16 May 2008.
- 34 Susie O'Brien, "Nature's Nation, National Natures? Reading Ecocriticism in a Canadian Context," *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Review* 42 (spring–summer 1998), Web. One may be similarly dissatisfied upon noting that no Québécois women are part of the recent collection, *This Elusive Land, Women and the Canadian Environment* (Melody Hessing, Rebecca Raglon, and Catriona Sandilands, eds., *This Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment* [Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005]). Neither does there appear to be a Québécois component to Andrew Wainwright's edited collection, *Every Grain of Sand: Canadian Perspectives on Ecology and Environment* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004). Is this due to a linguistic barrier? Or is it symptomatic of a deeper division within literary studies in Canada? Whatever the case may be, ecocritical work done on early Québécois poetry by Canadian literary scholars proves that the barrier is not insurmountable (see D.M.R. Bentley's *The Gay* [*Grey Moose: Essays on the Ecologies and Mythologies of Canadian Poetry 1690–1990*] [Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1992] and Susan Glickman's *The Picturesque and the Sublime: A Poetics of the Canadian Landscape* [Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998]).
- 35 Canadian politicians have struggled to give legislative expression to this cultural and linguistic distinction. In 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper passed a motion stating that the "House recognizes that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada" ("PM declares...", *Office of the Prime Minister*, 22 Nov. 2006, Web). While affirming that the Québécois have an independent, national identity because they speak French, Harper wasn't sure if this included Québécois people living outside of Quebec ("Who's a Québécois? Harper isn't sure," *CBC News*, 19 Dec. 2006, Web). Again, the problem of linguistic identity confronts that of place identity.
- 36 Ecocritics such as Simon Estok hold that Canadian ecocriticism continues to remain unknown beyond the Canadian borders. The present collection of essays will, we hope, prove this affirmation wrong. (Simon Estok, "Landscapes of the United States, of Canada, and of Ecocritical Theory," EASCLE Conference: Cultural Landscapes: Heritage and Conservation. Alcalá University, Spain [17 Oct. 2008]).
- 37 See, for example, André Beauchamp and Julien Harvey, *Repères pour demain: Avenir et environnement au Québec* (Québec: Bellarmin, 1988), or more recently, André Beauchamp, "La Consultation sur la gestion de l'eau au Québec," in *De L'Inégalité dans le dialogue des cultures: Mondialisation, santé et environnement*, ed. Soheil Kash and Marie-Hélène Parizeau (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2005): 201–14.
- 38 An earlier figure of the Church–State, Faith–Science connection, Brother Marie-Victorin (1885–1944) was a passionate botanist, concerned with the ecological effect of plants immigrating from Europe to Canada

- and vice versa. His careful and detailed records of indigenous plant species in Quebec make him one of Quebec's first ecological figures (see Yves Hébert's *Une Histoire de l'écologie au Québec*).
- 39 Nepveu, *L'Écologie du réel*, 147.
- 40 Ibid., 175.
- 41 See Susie O'Brien, "Back to the World': Reading Ecocriticism in a Postcolonial Context," in *Five Emus to the King of Siam: Environment and Empire*, ed. Helen Tiffin (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007): 177–99; Serpil Oppermann, "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2006): 103–28; John Parham, "The Poverty of Ecocritical Theory: E. P. Thompson and the British Perspective," *New Formations* 64 (spring 2008): 25–38; and Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 42 Joël Pourbaix, qtd. in Pierre Nepveu, *Lectures des lieux* (Montréal: Boréal, 2004).
- 43 Nepveu, *Lectures*, 10.
- 44 As Lawrence Buell has noted in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, this is especially true of first-generation ecocritics, who have drawn much inspiration from nature writers such as Henry David Thoreau and their desire to retreat into nature in order to experience more fully life and the more-than-human world. Buell adds that second-generation ecocritics are more engaged with urban settings, virtual experiences, and theoretical issues.
- 45 Nepveu, *Lectures*, 190–96.
- 46 Ibid., 197.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Recognizing environmentalism as one of the major modes of thought of our time, Nepveu nevertheless strongly criticizes its animist, New-Age version that denounces the death of each and every tree or bird on the basis of some "mother earth" or "Gaia spirit" idea (Pierre Nepveu, *Intérieurs du Nouveau Monde* [Montréal: Boréal, 1998], 218–20). Neither does he hesitate from associating certain ecological concerns with the landscape aesthetics of urban dwellers (an argument drawn chiefly from the work of French art historian Alain Roger, whose work has since been disputed by other landscape theorists) (Nepveu, *Lectures*, 224–25).
- 49 Nepveu, *Lectures*, 208.
- 50 Rachel Bouvet and Kenneth White, eds, *Le Nouveau Territoire : L'Exploration géopoétique de l'espace* (Montréal: Figura, 2008).
- 51 Whereas literary critics in Quebec have joined up with geographers to develop an "outdoors" approach, American ecocritics have turned more often to biologists (E. O. Wilson) and ecologists (Eugene Odum). This difference will be explored further in the section on the work of two Québécois geographers ("Géographie et géopoétique," *Cafés géographiques* [15 May 2005], Web).
- 52 "Kenneth White: Biography," *The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics*, Web.
- 53 "Kenneth White and Geopoetics," *The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics*, Web.
- 54 Kenneth White, "Approches de la géopoétique," *Les Amis et lecteurs de Kenneth White*, Web.
- 55 Kenneth White, "Texte inaugural," *L'Institut international de géopoétique* (26 Apr. 1989), Web.
- 56 "Géographie et géopoétique."
- 57 White, "Approches."
- 58 A complete explanation for this choice of terminology is beyond the scope of this chapter. But it should be noted that the French have been particularly critical of ecological thought and

- environmental ethics (Ferry; Lascoumes; Roger). Perhaps White chose the prefix “geo” to avoid an immediate attack on his approach and to reflect more accurately the attitude towards environment in France. Interestingly, a second “geo” literary theory is being developed by Bertrand Westphal, whose “géocritique” has little to do with White’s “géopoétique.”
- 59 “Géographie et géopoétique.”
- 60 Brosseau’s case brings back into focus the problem of delimiting the boundaries of Québécois ecocriticism. While *Des Romans-géographes* was published with a French publisher (Harmattan), Brosseau has taught at the University of Ottawa since completing his studies at the Sorbonne and the University of Ottawa. He does not work in Quebec yet by publishing in French seems closer to Québécois ecocriticism than to English-Canadian ecocriticism.
- 61 Luc Bureau, *Entre l’Éden et l’Utopie: Fondements de l’imaginaire québécois* (Montréal: Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1984), 265–66.
- 62 For an interesting comparative study of “environmental sociology” in France and Quebec, see Philippe Boudes’ article “Sociologie de l’environnement, globalisation et traditions nationales : Une étude des cas français et québécois” (*Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie* 33, no. 3 [2008]: 657–88). Boudes draws conclusions similar to my own about the relationship between the national and the global but in terms of environmental sociology in Quebec.
- 63 For a particularly insightful analysis of Hydro-Québec’s importance in the development of Québécois society and politics, see Dominique Perron’s work (*Le Nouveau roman de l’énergie nationale : Analyse des discours promotionnels d’Hydro-Québec de 1964 à 1997* [Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006]).
- 64 “My country is not a country, it’s the reverse / Of a country that was neither country nor homeland / My song is not a song, it’s my life / It’s for you that I want to fully know [possess] my winters.”

CHAPTER 17

Decolonizasian: Reading Asian and First Nations Relations in Literature (2008)

*Rita Wong*¹

speak cree you're in canada now

speak siouan

speak salishan – Rajinderpal S. Pal, “Collective Amnesia”²

At the minimal level, Aboriginal thought teaches that everyone and everything are part of a whole in which they are interdependent. – Marie Battiste and Helen Semaganis, “First Thoughts on First Nations Citizenship”³

Nestled intimately against the forces of citizenship that have propelled many an Asian Canadian subject to oversimplify herself or himself by declaring “I am Canadian” are other possible configurations of imagined community. What happens if we position indigenous people’s struggles instead of normalized whiteness as the reference point through which we

come to articulate our subjectivities? How would such a move radically transform our perceptions of the land on which we live? Scott McFarlane has suggested that in the Canada constructed through legislative mechanisms such as the Multiculturalism Act, “people of colour and First Nations people are figured outside the discourse as, for example, immigrants or nonpersons who become ‘Canadian’ through their relationship to whiteness, as opposed to ‘the land.’”⁴ Oppositionality to whiteness – while logical in the face of racial oppression that was historically codified through instruments such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the War Measures Act, and the Continuous Voyage Provision⁵ – still directs energy toward whiteness without necessarily unpacking the specific problematics of racialized subjects who have inherited the violence of colonization. In particular, the challenging relationships between subjects positioned as “Asian Canadian” and “indigenous” raise questions regarding immigrant complicity in the colonization of land as well as the possibility of making alliances toward decolonization. Turning the lens in this direction, we find ourselves in the realm of the partial, the fragmented, the ruptured, the torn. It is in our brokenness that we come to know the effects of our violent histories as they continue to exert force upon the present. The very language in which I articulate these thoughts, English, is weighted with a colonial history particular to the land called Canada, in contrast to the languages that I might desire to circulate this essay in, be they Cree, Siouan, Salishan, or Cantonese. Through legislation such as the Indian Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), the Multiculturalism Act, and the Citizenship Act,⁶ “we” have historically been managed, divided, and scripted into the Canadian nation-state. Today ostensible security measures such as the Anti-Terrorism Act passed in the wake of September 11, 2001, have given the state more power to criminalize indigenous peoples, activists, and people of colour. If, in a move toward both individual and collective survival, a subject decides to direct her allegiances toward indigenous struggles for decolonization and sovereignty, she might consider the values described by filmmaker Loretta Todd:

Our concept of ownership evolved independent of European concepts of ownership and it persists today. Without the sense of private property that ascended with European culture, we evolved concepts of property that recognized the interdependence of communities, families and nations and favoured the guardianship of the earth, as opposed to its conquest. There was a sense of ownership, but not one that pre-empted the rights and privileges of others or the rights of the earth and the life that it sustained.⁷

Critical engagement with indigenous perspectives can be grounded in materially responsible and environmentally sustainable practices and models; the interdependency and land stewardship that Todd describes provide a focus for alliance-building in the face of ongoing processes of racialization and class oppression.

Such alliance-building must respect the values identified by thinkers such as Todd, so that the reaction against colonial frameworks is balanced with a generative vision of what one strives toward. Multiculturalism as government policy, while enabling in many regards, has also functioned to manage and contain difference. Although it is necessary to support multiculturalism in the face of white supremacist attacks, it is also important to understand the inadequacies of Canadian multiculturalism. As critics such as Himani Bannerji have pointed out, when multicultural policy was introduced in Canada in the 1970s,

There were no strong multicultural demands on the part of third world immigrants themselves to force such a policy. The issues raised by them were about racism, legal discrimination involving immigration and family reunification, about job discrimination on the basis of Canadian experience, and various adjustment difficulties, mainly of child care and language. In short, they were difficulties that are endemic to migration, and especially that of people coming in to low income jobs or with few assets. Immigrant demands were not then, or even

now, primarily cultural, nor was multiculturalism initially their formulation of the solution to their problems. It began as a state or an official/institutional discourse, and it involved the translation of issues of social and economic injustice into issues of culture.⁸

One of the challenges before contemporary cultural workers is to reappropriate “culture” in ways that lead the reader’s gaze back to the social and economic injustices neglected and deflected when multiculturalism’s lens becomes too narrow. Cultural labour has a role in fostering such a shift in values away from the economic violence and domination that our current neoliberal government normalizes through its submission to bodies such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, bodies that arguably operate against the interests of the majority of the Earth’s population (human and otherwise). An analysis that integrates considerations of planetary survival with local indigenous struggles is consistent in the works of indigenous thinkers such as Jeannette Armstrong, Winona LaDuke, and Loretta Todd; this work signals a direction from which those in Asian Canadian studies could benefit. That is, where diasporic communities meet indigenous communities, we encounter a process of contact and invention that deserves more attention than it has so far received.

As a writer and critic who lives on the unceded Coast Salish territory otherwise known as Vancouver, I am faced with the question of how to speak to and acknowledge debts and interdependencies that most of us were trained to ignore. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that cultural representation does not repeat the violence that has already occurred. Yet, in those cases where silence also seems to be an equally and perhaps even more unsatisfying complicity with – and perpetuation of – this violence, tactics of troubled visibility provide an ethical line of engagement that holds promise. As the debates on cultural appropriation in the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s remind us, cultural representation is a fraught process, and the best of intentions can nonetheless have terrible effects. However, we can still proceed carefully,

humbly, open to dialogue, and attentive to how material conditions and existent power relations can shape the dynamics of whose cultural labour is validated, whose is disregarded, and how. Lee Maracle's warning bears remembering:

If you conjure a character based on your in-fort stereotypes and trash my world, that's bad writing – racist literature – and I will take you on for it. If I tell you a story and you write it down and collect royal coinage from this story, that's stealing – appropriation of culture. But if you imagine a character who is from my world, attempting to deconstruct the attitudes of yours, while you may not be stealing, you still leave yourself open to criticism unless you do it well.⁹

In attempting to decolonize and deconstruct oppressive systems, writers racialized as Asian cannot avoid making reference to the First Nations of this land; at the same time, given the inheritance of racist, loaded discourses that have operated to dehumanize, commodify, and romanticize First Nations people, an immense challenge presents itself in terms of how to disrupt and derail these dominant discourses. The process of “doing it well” requires not only technical competency, however one might determine that, but also an understanding of how one is embedded within power relations that must be carefully negotiated. Scanning the textual horizon for novels, stories, and plays that address the complicated relationships between those who have been racialized as “Asian” and those who have been racialized as “indigenous,” I see some signs of life: SKY Lee's novel *Disappearing Moon Café*, Tamai Kobayashi's short stories in *Exile and the Heart*, Marie Clements' play *Burning Vision*, and Lee Maracle's story “Yin Chin” form part of a growing body of texts that discursively explores the possible relations between those racialized as “Asian” and “indigenous” on that part of Turtle Island also known as Canada.¹⁰

1. RE-VIEWING *DISAPPEARING MOON CAFE*

In my writing, I straddle the shifting locations of being Chinese, Canadian, contemporary, woman, and feminist of colour (etc). Insider and outsider to my own culture, gender, history and so on. I am able to take risks and transgress the boundaries (of these social constructs) each category imposes.

In *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990), the reader's gaze is never fixed due to these multiple locations, and travels through time and space. This is also a strategy of disrupting the conventional way texts are written and read so that the reader can be made more aware of her subject position. This awareness subverts the tendency toward passive consumption and the colonizing gaze. – SKY Lee, “*Disappearing Moon Cafe* and the Cultural Politics of Writing in Canada”¹¹

As many readers have noted, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* opens and closes with the relationship between Wong Gwei Chang, a Chinese man, and Kelora, a half-Native, half-Chinese woman of the Shi'atko clan. In so doing, it posits a potential alliance between two people who were both excluded by the Canadian nation in historically specific, racialized, gendered, and classed ways.¹² Gwei Chang's abandonment and betrayal of Kelora takes on both personal and social significance when we consider the role of cheap Chinese labour in facilitating the appropriation of indigenous land by the Canadian government. The labour of Chinese railway workers supported not only their families but also a Canadian nation-building project based on the exclusion and exploitation of both First Nations and people of colour. The dynamite-blasting process of railway construction entailed both an immense human cost and environmental disfigurement: “[Gwei Chang] imagined the mountain shuddering, roaring out in pain, demanding human sacrifice for this profanity. And the real culprits held out blood-spattered chinamen in front of them like a protective talisman.”¹³ The “real culprits,” the cap-

tains of industry behind the railway, remain outside the novel's realm, despite the impact of their decisions on both characters and readers. Gwei Chang's effort to retrieve the bones of the dead Chinese labourers depends greatly on Kelora's support in navigating unfamiliar land, for it is Kelora who leads Gwei Chang to safety when he is starving, "as if the barren wasteland around him had magically opened and allowed him admittance."¹⁴ Where the Canadian nation would have refused a Chinese man entrance as a citizen with full rights, Kelora's act allows Gwei Chang admittance into her community as an equal. Kelora makes possible a relationship to the land that is not codified into the property laws of the nation: "she taught him to love the same mother earth and to see her sloping curves in the mountains. He forgot that he had once thought of them as barriers."¹⁵ Having interviewed mixed-race families, Lee translates her research into a fictional frame that asserts what has been left out of official Canadian history. Examples of relationships between First Nations people and Chinese people, dating back at least to 1788,¹⁶ are often marginalized in official historical narratives that privilege nation-building premised on white dominance. The potential represented in the relationship between Gwei Chang and Kelora is not only based on desire and emotional connection but also shaped by the economic and political forces on their lives and by a respect for the land. Living with Kelora's people, Gwei Chang learns to appreciate the Native lifestyle before he rejects it for fear of poverty:

The sight of all this good food being hauled in got Gwei Chang very excited. It made him feel good to learn the indian ways, because they made him think that he might never starve like a chinaman again.

But Kelora told him that even with this abundance, her people faced famine later in the winter...

Gwei Chang had often looked into the sallow face of famine. He could see how famine was the one link that Kelora and he had in common, but for that instant, it made

him recoil from her as surely as if he had touched a beggar's squalid sore....

In the next instant, he looked at Kelora, and saw animal.¹⁷

Although famine is the one link that they *share*, the fear of this common threat is what drives Gwei Chang back to China to take a Chinese wife. This fear also drives him to dehumanize Kelora, to see her as “animal,” in a way that echoes the first time they met, when he assumed that she was savage. Her elegant rebuke at that time, that “he has no manners,”¹⁸ surprises him in a way that makes him feel “uncivilized, uncouth; the very qualities he had assigned so thoughtlessly to her.”¹⁹ It is symptomatic of dominant power relations that Gwei Chang functions within what might be termed a sinocentric worldview, one that eventually allows him upward mobility within the confines of the ethnic enclave of Chinatown. His trajectory can be read as a negotiation of survival tactics that drive an agent to form long-term relations of perceived racial cohesion rather than adhesion, with the attendant enabling and disabling limits of such moves.

In the context of Canada as a nation-state that historically excluded immigrants racialized as “nonwhite,” the importance of organizing formations of Chinese community to offer assistance against the state's restrictions was compelling. In Lee's novel, it is clear that the closeness of the Chinese community formed in part as a survival mechanism against white supremacist hostility in everything from detaining new arrivals to racist legislation. At the same time, the limits and inadequacies of these formations are also signalled by the unhappiness of Gwei Chang at the end of the novel. As he says to Kelora, “I've lived a miserable life, grieving for your loss, bitterly paying.”²⁰ His material wealth accumulated later in his life does not bring with it emotional fulfilment in that his marriage to Mui Lan is an unhappy one and his son Ting An rejects him once he realizes their biological relationship. The novel leaves us wondering what would have happened had Gwei Chang challenged ethnic containment and asserted solidarity with Kelora and her community. His failure to sustain such an alliance gestures not only to individual limits but also

to the ways in which oppressive social norms and legislative measures – such as the Immigration Act and the Indian Act – have historically scripted and enforced divisions between First Nations and Asian people in Canada. A difficult question arises: how does one assess the ways in which Chinese people have been implicated, albeit inadvertently, in their own ethnic containment within a Canadian nation-state that is itself a violent imposition upon indigenous land?

If, as Lee suggests at the beginning of this section, a subject is always multiply situated in terms of culture, gender, politics, and class, more comprehensive ways to articulate and understand such evolving, complicated, and often contradictory subject positions remain to be circulated more widely. One way of reading class mobility for immigrants within the Canadian nation-state has been through the filter of racialized categories rather than through the lens of immigrants' relations to indigenous land. In Lee's novel, such categories are constantly troubled and unravelled. Gwei Chang occupies multiple class positions over the course of the novel, from a starving worker in the beginning to a bourgeois patriarch by the end. His upward mobility in the confines of Chinatown arguably depends on his rejection of Kelora and his disavowal of their mixed-race son, Ting An, whom almost everyone in Chinatown knows as an orphan benefiting from Gwei Chang's patronage rather than as his first son. Kelora's own economic status is complicated; Kelora has "no rank" in her community, although her mother's family is "very wealthy, old and well-respected," and her abilities are clearly valued, including her knowledge of how to survive based on the land's natural bounty. She arguably unsettles and disrupts hierarchies of class and race, as does her son Ting An. Within the heart of the novel's ostensibly "Chinese" space, there is racial and cultural hybridity; though Ting An is accepted as "Chinese," he is also part Native, as are his descendants, including the novel's narrator, Kae. As Kae points out, "People used to say that [Ting An] was half-indian – his mother a savage. Before, Fong Mei used to search his face for traces of this, but she only saw a chiselled face, gracefully masculine, like a chinese from the north."²¹ The problematic, dominant social scripts of racist othering ("savage") and

assimilation (“like a chinese from the north”) are inadequate to address the possibilities of mixed-race identifications. Ting An, in a sense the physical product of Gwei Chang and Kelora’s relationship, is invited to live upriver with “a group of nlaka’pamux’sin people” but refuses because of his intuitive attachment to Gwei Chang.²² While Ting An is socially pulled into what turns out to be an unhappy life, the untaken alternatives that he has access to raise questions about what a shift in priorities would achieve. Such undeveloped alliances constitute the silences and empty centres upon which contemporary national formations continue to depend.

One could argue that, in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, it is the hyper-conspicuous absence of a Native woman, Kelora, that in a sense makes possible the novel’s plot. First, this absence makes visible the uneven relations the “Asian” characters have with the Native peoples of this land, gestures toward the complicated histories between First Nations and Chinese people, and acknowledges the legacy of interracial relationships that have often been marginalized. Second, one might ask what kind of shift in social relations it would require to move from absence to presence(s). What is an ethical way to proceed on this difficult terrain? The figure of the writer, Kae, negotiates a complicated relation of proximity and distance to the figure of a Native woman. Historical distancing operates in the recognition of Kelora as an ancestor within the family tree at the beginning of *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, although this distance is then destabilized and undermined by Kae’s retellings of family secrets as well as by Kelora’s and Gwei Chang’s interactions at the beginning and the end of the novel, putting the onus on the reader to imagine and build a present interracial alliance as compelling as the scene that closes the novel, “the heavy chant of the storyteller turning to mist” in Gwei Chang’s head.²³ The question remains: what kinds of changes would enable such moments of looking “backward” to become a looking forward into First Nations and Asian relationships?

It is possible and indeed desirable to read *Disappearing Moon Cafe* into the context of a need to transform the social relations we currently know. The novel makes visible the importance of alliances along

cross-racial, feminist, and anticapitalist lines, even though some of these alliances may not be directly achieved or successful in the novel's plot per se. The onus then shifts to the reader, for whom the mourning of lost possibilities frames the generations of turmoil represented in the novel's body. Within the novel, relations between Chinese and First Nations women are an uncharted territory. Although Kelora and Mui Lan are in a sense linked because of their relations to Gwei Chang, they never meet each other. At one point, Fong Mei states, "This was a land of fresh starts; I could have lived in the mountains like an indian woman legend,"²⁴ suggesting that stories of Native women may be symbolic of freedom to her. It is more on the edges, the "outsides," of the novel that the potential of interracial relations is gestured to; on the dust jacket of the book's cover, blurbs by writers such as Joy Harjo and Audre Lorde signal a discursive community of politicized writers whose work has encouraged and inspired activists across North America. This political alignment also presents an obstruction to readings that would evacuate the novel of the resistant sensibilities out of which it partially arose.

Reading *Disappearing Moon Cafe* from this perspective only signals how much more there remains to do if cultural workers are to play a role in supporting alliance-building to work toward decolonization. These temporary but strong affective bonds suggest that promise exists, even though it has not been fulfilled. Affective bonds do not necessarily translate into political solidarity, but effective political solidarity is also less likely to happen without a deeply felt understanding of each other's perspectives and the ways in which oppression is both common and different for people racialized as "First Nations" and "Asian." Fiction offers a speculative space and challenges us to imagine the ways in which dialogue and interaction could spark deeper understanding of our interrelatedness.

2. EXILE AND THE HEART

In an interview with Larissa Lai, Tamai Kobayashi states: “History trickles down into my work, sometimes it pours.”²⁵ Questioning what constitutes “tradition,” Kobayashi rejects conventional assumptions that position “the East” as the site of oppressed, submissive women and “the West” as somehow enlightened. She suggests that her “traditions” may be found in the writers who have influenced her, including Audre Lorde, Hisaye Yamamoto, Joy Harjo, James Tiptree Jr., Wilfred Owen, Octavia Butler, Rampo, and Eduardo Galeano. With regard to Harjo, Kobayashi notes that “the sheer beauty and hope of Joy Harjo’s *She Had Some Horses*, how her experiences as a First Nations woman were reflected in her words, also had great impact.”²⁶ As a politically active writer (a founding member of ALOT, Asian Lesbians of Toronto, among many other things), Kobayashi is conscious of how important it is to investigate interracial relationships that do not centre on whiteness:

Race defines so much of you. I try to reveal this in my work, the quiet moments. Everything is contaminated by the way race has been constructed through history – this construction of people of colour by white people, by the structure of whiteness-as-the-ideal, whiteness-as-the-norm. I mean, think of how many times white people have been at the centre of stories, even if it’s not supposed to be about them? *Come to the Paradise* was supposed to be about the internment but Dennis Quaid was the star; *Dances With Wolves* starred Kevin Costner; *Cry Freedom*, a film about Steven Biko, starred Kevin Kline.²⁷

In her book of stories, *Exile and the Heart: Lesbian Fiction*, Kobayashi presents an everyday world where the interactions of Asian lesbians with other lesbians quietly take centre stage, deposing and dislocating whiteness, which still exerts pressure on the characters as a force but which is not the gaze through which perceptions come to form.

The relationship between Kathy Nakashima and Jan Lalonde in the story “Wind,” which opens *Exile and the Heart*, draws together a Japanese Canadian woman who burns her family’s redress letter of apology from Gerry Weiner and Brian Mulroney and a Métis woman with a “handful of Blackfoot and fistful of Cree” studying *Land Claims in Canadian Law*.²⁸ The lovers’ road trip through the Albertan landscape takes them to the Old Man Dam, which the government built despite the protests of the Peigan: “They have passed through Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, place names of Cypress Hills, Battleford and Buffalo Jump. What must it be like for her, Kathy wonders, these signposts, this road, that coulee, this river.”²⁹ The narration does not give the reader access to what those place names signify for Jan Lalonde, but we do find out that this place was once hell for her.³⁰ Portrayed as a blight on the land that will be useless in ten years’ time because of silt buildup,³¹ the dam marks an instance of colonial violence on indigenous land.

While this awareness of colonial violation exists throughout the story, it does not allow the lovers’ interactions to be defined or reduced to only reacting against colonization. The two characters continue to swim, to show each other affection, to go on relating to one another in subtle ways that affirm their connection. The poetic contemplativeness of the story ends abruptly with the violence of a gas station attendant who yells at Jan, “Get out of here and take your fucking squaw with you!”³² In the face of the racist ignorance that would equate “squaw” with “Jap,” the two women are positioned together, in rage against a common enemy. However, the characters do not stay fixed or united in reaction; their lives continue, and in a later story entitled “A Night at the Edge of the World” Kathy and Jan have broken up. Nonetheless, friendship remains, as Kathy and her current partner Gen host a farewell party for Jan, who is moving to British Columbia to look for her younger sister. Jan reappears in a later story, “Driftwood,” seen from a distance in Oppenheimer Park by Kathy’s mother, who observes a group of First Nations women tying memorial ribbons for fifteen Native women murdered in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.³³ The possibility of relations that sustain and support one another without being tied to codified possession

or ownership norms underlies Kobayashi's short, quietly intense stories, which evoke sensibilities and ways of thinking through a complicated, politically engaged, and emotionally deep lesbian-of-colour community. Here relationships are temporal, geographically situated on (de)colonized land, and open to negotiation and change.

3. *BURNING VISION*

Awarded the 2004 Japan–Canada Literary Award, Marie Clements' play *Burning Vision* explores powerful connections between “Asian” and “First Nations” characters by following the trail of uranium as it was mined from Dene land and eventually detonated in atomic bombs over Japan.³⁴ Clements writes as a First Nations woman responding to the history of transnational economic relations that contributed to the devastation marking the end of World War II:

In the 1940's uranium was mined from the Echo Bay Mine situated on the northeast corner of the Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories. The land it was mined from was on the Sahtu Dene territory. As a descendant of the Fort Norman Sahtu Dene Metis, [I have] always [found it] strange that the uranium that was used to build the first atomic bomb that was dropped on the Japanese in 1945 came from the land of my bones.... In the 1990's Dene elders flew to Japan and met with Japanese survivors of the bombing. The story I'd like to trace is the uranium rock that landed inside us. The physical connection of land and features, of visions and machinery, of two worlds meeting over and under land and the burning noise that took the worlds' breath away.³⁵

In *Burning Vision*, narrative is in a sense torn apart and sundered by the nuclear detonations that begin and end the play, leaving shreds of interconnections and resonances between characters as diverse as Tokyo Rose, a Native widow whose partner dies from mining uranium,

a Japanese grandmother, a white woman poisoned from painting radium watch dials, a Dene elder who prophesied atomic destruction, the miners who “discovered” uranium on Dene land, and many others. As multiple worlds collide in dramatic tension and evocative imagery, the play’s refusal of linear resolution speaks to the ongoing legacy of violence perpetuated through a process of colonization that encodes theft and violation as “discovery.”

A number of relationships in the play enact moments of reciprocity and solidarity between racialized bodies. For instance, *Burning Vision* proposes a relationship between a Métis woman named Rose and a Japanese man named Koji that seems to be geographically impossible (given that he is frozen in Japan in the moment before the bomb drops) but is made spiritually possible through the chain of uranium that brings them together (and through the transformation and hope symbolized in the cherry tree where he waits for his grandmother). When Rose and the Widow talk about Koji, the Widow says of him, “Indian? He looks sorta like an Indian but there’s something different going on.” Rose’s response is that “He’s Indian enough from the other side,”³⁶ gesturing to the ways in which both the Japanese and the Indians have been slotted into the role of “the enemy.” However, it is not being made the target of a common enemy that defines their relationship but what they produce out of these circumstances. In the collisions and devastations of a world shattered by the uranium that came from Rose’s land, Koji and Rose somehow meet, comfort one another, and make a child. Rose asks Koji, “If you make me yours do we make a world with no enemies?,”³⁷ and Koji reciprocates with “If we make a world, we will make one where there are no enemies?”³⁸ The mutuality implied by their parallel lines suggests that affiliation can be stronger than common enmity, though of course this possibility remains a question. Alongside the hope that their alliance brings is also the frighteningly faceless and ubiquitous threat to their environment caused by the radioactive mining byproducts. Surrounded by the poisonous black uranium dust that the wind blows everywhere,³⁹ even getting into the bread that she kneads, Rose’s pregnancy is laden with both hope and danger.⁴⁰

In contrast to the tenderness between Rose and Koji, the (white) Fat Man, who finds Round Rose (an aged Iva Toguri, a.k.a. Tokyo Rose) and the (Native) Little Boy in his home, eventually throws them out after having initially accepted them in the subordinate roles of Asian wife and adopted Native child: “I want you two aliens to get the hell out of my living room. You hear me? I said I want you two ungrateful aliens to leave.”⁴¹ “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” are, of course, the names of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945, killing over 210,000 people by the end of 1945. While Fat Man functions as a historical reference to World War II, he arguably also embodies the War Measures Act, used against both Aboriginal people and Japanese Canadians.⁴² While the character Fat Man soon shows remorse for his actions, actions that so perfectly replicate the colonization and appropriation of North America as a “white” home, Round Rose’s words emphasize the inadequacy of remorse:

You can’t really be sorry for something you don’t want to remember can you. Selective memory isn’t it? Let’s be honest, hell, you can’t even apologize for the shit you did yesterday never mind 50 years ago. Indian residential schools, Japanese Internment camps, hell, and this is just in your neighborhood. But it’s alright ... everybody’s sorry these days. The politicians are sorry, the cops are sorry, the priests are sorry, the logging companies are sorry, mining companies, electric companies, water companies, wife beaters, serial rapists, child molesters, mommy and daddy. Everybody’s sorry. Everybody’s sorry they got caught sticking it to someone else ... that’s what they are sorry about ... Getting caught. They could give a rat’s ass about you, or me, or the people they are saying sorry to. Think about it ... Don’t be a sorry ass, be sorry before you have to say you are sorry. Be sorry for even thinking about, bringing about something-sorry-filled.⁴³

The connection of this neighbourhood to overseas neighbourhoods is in a sense configured through the Little Boy. A personification of the darkest uranium found at the centre of the Earth, he enters and leaves scenes through the television, embodying the technologies that materialize the human capacity for both creation and destruction. Aligned with Round Rose because they both face the violence of the Fat Man's gun pointed at them, the Little Boy is at once local (from Dene land) and global (beaming into and out of the television). The complex relationships presented in Clements' visionary play interrogate the possibilities and limits of interracial affiliations.

The play's close, after the Japanese Grandmother has transformed into the Dene Widow,⁴⁴ creates an overlap between two previously separate relationships. Koji's ongoing comments to his grandmother, and the Widow's ongoing talk to her dead husband, merge, so that the Widow's Words to Koji bring together a number of previously fragmented relationships. The Widow states, "You are my special grandson. My small man now. My small man that survived. Tough like hope. If we listen we can hear them [their loved ones] too."⁴⁵ Although the term "small man" might, in another context, be taken to emasculate the Asian male, here it alludes to and transforms "little boy," positing Koji as a hope that loving affiliations might grow out of surviving historic violence and destruction. The play ends with Koji's words – "They [the Japanese and Dene loved ones] hear us, and they are talking back in hope over time"⁴⁶ – and images that merge Dene and Japanese references: "*Glowing herds of caribou move in unison over the vast empty landscape as cherry blossoms fall till they fill the stage.*"⁴⁷ What brings the characters together is not only shared suffering but also the one Earth on which they all live.

In a question-and-answer period following a reading in 2004, Clements stated that her writing process begins with the land. The land presents itself to her, and then the characters follow, like a musical score. As such, a discussion of the characters' interracial relationships needs to be framed within the structure of the play, which consists of four movements that begin with the fiery explosion and then pass through the four elements: "the frequency of discovery," "rare earth elements,"

“waterways,” and “radar echoes.” The context of people belonging to the land, rather than the land belonging to people, suggests that people are but one element in a larger view of the world that respects all non-human forms of life as well. Thus, the context that matters for the “small man” at the end of the play is the immensity of the planet itself, the land as the main reference point, not a white masculinity that belittles or emasculates the Asian male. The way in which the play is shaped in movements, not acts (which hearken back to human activity), pushes toward a paradigm where land, not people, are the central focus. Thus, the “characters,” in their fragmentation and symbolic weight, are not only people but also material signs of how the land has been disrupted and changed by human activity.

4. “YIN CHIN”

Dedicated to SKY Lee and Jim Wong-Chu, “Yin Chin,” by First Nations writer Lee Maracle, offers a number of insights into the realm of Native–Asian relations, naming both the distances and the moments of camaraderie between communities. Published in Maracle’s 1990 collection of short stories, *Sojourner’s Truth*, “Yin Chin” bravely questions the narrator’s own humanity by admitting the insidious effects of racial categorization upon her interactions with other people.⁴⁸ While the First Nations narrator is a little scared by how she has “lived in this city in the same neighbourhood as Chinese people for twenty-two years now and [doesn’t] know a single Chinese person,” she is also aware of the political urgency that links her own struggle against oppression to that of other peoples.⁴⁹ A recent memory describes the common recognition of the importance of fighting imperialism among writers from subordinated cultures:

Last Saturday (seems like a hundred years later) was different. The tableload of people was Asian/Native. We laughed at ourselves and spoke very seriously about our writing. We

really believe we are writers, someone had said, and the room shook with the hysteria of it all. We ran on and on about our growth and development and not once did the white man ever enter the room. It just seemed all too incredible that a dozen Hans and Natives could sit and discuss all things under heaven, including racism, and not talk about white people. It only took a half-dozen revolutions in the Third World, seventeen riots in America, one hundred demonstrations against racism in Canada, and thirty-seven dead Native youth in my life to become... We had crossed a millennium of bridges the rivers of which were swollen with the floodwaters of dark humanity's tenacious struggle to extricate themselves from oppression and we knew it.

We were born during the first sword wound that the Third World swung at imperialism. We were children of that wound, invincible, conscious, and movin' on up. We could laugh because we were no longer a joke. But somewhere along the line we forgot to tell the others, the thousands of our folks that still tell their kids about old chinamen.⁵⁰

How many more sword wounds must follow this first one? There is still a need to share this consciousness of a common struggle against oppression in the face of educational systems and media structures that are not designed for this, that arguably operate to produce docile citizen subjects who do not question the arbitrary borders we inhabit and carry within ourselves.⁵¹ In the space of a few pages, Maracle juxtaposes this larger picture against the daily and often overlooked incidents that materialize internalized oppressions. In particular, she interweaves two anecdotes into "Yin Chin." First, there is her contemporary experience of driving around Chinatown and seeing a Native man bully and harass an old Chinese woman. The narrator assists the old woman by beating the man off. Second, while she listens to the old woman's anger that none of the Chinese men around her had intervened, the narrator recalls a childhood experience with the Chinese storekeeper, Mad Sam.⁵²

Having absorbed “the words of the world ... [words such as] ‘don’t wander off or the ol’ chinamen will get you and eat you,’” the narrator-as-child’s internalized racism quietly manifests in her monthly vigil of watching old Chinese men to make sure they don’t grab children.⁵³ One might consider how laws forbidding Chinese immigration, making family reunification impossible for decades, might have contributed to such racist myths. Her internalized racism then flares up with a scream when a Chinese man looks through Sam’s store window at her. The narrator’s childhood response, “The chinaman was looking at me,” shames her mother and hurts Sam. Her description of Sam’s injured look as “the kind of hurt you can sometimes see in the eyes of people who have been cheated”⁵⁴ suggests that racism has systemically devalued people like Sam, who are viewed as dangerous by small children like the narrator through no fault or action of their own. That the child narrator eventually grows to have an analysis of imperialism’s effects on racialized peoples requires that she grapple with the contradictions of small, everyday moments such as that brief encounter in Sam’s discount food store.

When the old woman is done expressing her frustration, the narrator states, “How unkind of the world to school us in ignorance,” and gets back into her car.⁵⁵ The narrator’s words allude to both her childhood anecdote and the contemporary experience of comforting an old woman (who might or might not have an analysis of colonization’s effects on First Nations people) and beating off a Native man (whose violence refuses any affiliations that could be made along racial or gender or class lines). The differences in scale between individual and mass change are made concrete by Maracle’s stories embedded within stories, memories within memories.

5. NOT A CLOSING BUT A REOPENING

In an ongoing movement between fictional investigations and the social text, I would like to juxtapose a couple of instances from contemporary society against this discussion of fiction to speculate upon what further

associations might be made. In *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, Winona LaDuke describes the struggle against General Motors' PCB contamination in the reservation of Akwesasne, where about eight thousand Mohawk people live. This twenty-five-square-mile reservation spans the St. Lawrence River and the international border between Canada and the United States, Quebec and New York. It is grandmothers such as Katsi Cook (who jokes, "if you want something done, get a Mohawk to do it") who are leading this struggle for a healthy community.⁵⁶ In Vancouver, I had heard of Akwesasne because an article in the *Globe and Mail* mentions the smuggling of Chinese migrants through Akwesasne.⁵⁷ Straddling the border, the reserve is a hot spot, a place both vulnerable to corporate and governmental threats but also strategically located to challenge the state's authority over national borders. Akwesasne exists concurrently with and alternatively to the nation-state's uneasy partnership with corporate hegemony. That some Mohawks have chosen to assist Chinese migrants – whether for political, economic, or other reasons, in effect putting themselves at risk of police retribution – can have the effect of asserting their independence as well as political solidarity with the imagined Third World.⁵⁸

There is a growing awareness among people concerned about social justice that those who live in this space we call Canada need to educate ourselves about what First Nations people are doing and how we might act in solidarity with them. As Loretta Todd suggests, First Nations land claims should take precedence over international trade mechanisms such as NAFTA, for the preservation of First Nations land rights is in the long-term interests of everyone living on this land, not only First Nations people:

What could happen is aboriginal title could supersede the Free Trade Agreement, because [the courts] could say that aboriginal title to the water is more fundamental than the Free Trade Agreement. As a consequence, we could potentially have some say over how the water is used. So when we talk about the whole land claim issue, we're really talking

about restoring the health of the land so that there can be co-existence and co-management of all the people but also of all the animals and resources on the land.⁵⁹

As the discourse of corporate globalization threatens to recolonize our imaginations, alongside the material takeover of natural resources, I see it as a matter of not just principle but also survival to strive for an international network of locally based alliances challenging the transnational corporate hegemony that is protected and reinforced by neoliberal states.

With British Columbia's referendum on the treaty process in 2002, a dubious, poorly executed referendum that intensified racist violence against First Nations people, globalization returned with a vengeance to questions of local land claims. One of the referendum questions asked people to say yes or no to the following statement: "The terms and conditions of leases and licenses should be respected; fair compensation for unavoidable disruption of commercial interests should be ensured."⁶⁰ It can be argued that this clause dovetails with Chapter 11 of NAFTA, which allows private companies to sue states for perceived losses of profits and limits the ability of governments to safeguard environmental, health, and various social values when there are conflicting commercial interests, to prepare the government to further renege on its fiduciary responsibilities to the public, which includes First Nations people. While this might initially seem to be far away from my concerns about cultural production, I would argue that this sets the stage for the destruction of local communities and of course the cultures produced in and by these communities. As such, cultural workers do not have the luxury of ignoring these urgent matters; rather, they need to work with others to strengthen engagement with concepts of Aboriginal title as taking precedence over neoliberal trade agreements such as NAFTA.

By way of concluding my speculations, I would like to turn to the warnings and possibilities raised in the novel *The Kappa Child* by Hiromi Goto, wherein we find a childhood friendship between Gerald, a mixed-race Japanese and Blood boy, and the narrator, who is of Japanese descent. The fluid process of the social construction of racial and

gender identity is emphasized in a telling moment when Gerald asks the narrator “You a boy or a girl?” and the narrator asks him back “You Blood or Japanese?”⁶¹ The novel operates in a realm where it is possible to answer “both,” thus rejecting the binary divisions that have historically been deployed to systemic, oppressive effect. At the same time that the possibility for better forms of coexistence hovers, terrible mistakes can also happen. In particular, the narrator, in a moment of weakness and confusion, lashes out at Gerald when he tries to physically comfort her by calling him a sissy boy: “This hateful coil of ugliness twisting in my gut, the words stinging something inside me, but unable to stop.”⁶² After wrecking her childhood friendship with Gerald, the narrator is given a second chance toward the end of the novel when she encounters him as an adult. What happens next remains outside the text, for the reader to imagine and perhaps enact. The fragile, incomplete, and fraught relationship in *The Kappa Child* – like the broken and dynamic interracial relationships in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, *Exile and the Heart*, *Burning Vision*, and “Yin Chin” – gestures toward how much remains to be addressed and worked through in the process of decolonization. At both the level of individual interactions and the level of larger socioeconomic frameworks, building alliances that respect First Nations values of interdependency and land stewardship is an urgent focus if we are to foster ethical ways of long-term survival on this Earth.

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NOTES

- 1 Republished by permission of *Canadian Literature* from *Canadian Literature* 199 (winter 2008): 158–80. The present version has been edited for length. The author thanks Hiromi Goto, Larissa Lai, and Guy Beauregard for feedback on earlier versions of this essay.
- 2 Rajinderpal S. Pal, *Pappaji Wrote Poetry in a Language I Cannot Read* (Toronto: TSAR, 1998), 22
- 3 Marie Battiste and Helen Semaganis, “First Thoughts on First Nations Citizenship: Issues in Education,” in *Citizenship in Transformation in Canada*, ed. Yvonne Hébert (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 97.
- 4 Scott McFarlane, “The Haunt of Race: Canada’s Multiculturalism Act, the Politics of Incorporation, and Writing Thru Race,” *Fuse* 18, no. 3 (1995): 22.
- 5 The Continuous Voyage Provision, enacted in 1908, in effect encoded the exclusion of people from India to Canada. The War Measures Act, in place from 1914 until it was repealed in 1985 (and replaced in 1988 by the Emergencies Act), was used to detain people on the basis of their ethnicity. This power included confiscating Indian reserves from Aboriginal people and the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. More commonly known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the misleadingly named Chinese Immigration Act barred almost all Chinese people from immigrating to Canada between 1923 and 1947. Prior to that, from 1885 to 1923, Chinese immigrants were the only people charged a head tax (\$50 in 1885, \$100 in 1900, and \$500 from 1903 to 1923) to enter Canada. Due to this racist policy, the Canadian government collected about \$23 million from 81,000 Chinese immigrants. Today the so-called right of landing fee (ROLF) is a contemporary head tax that continues to effectively discriminate along class lines that disproportionately affect many people of colour. While the 2006 apology from the Canadian government for the head tax was an important step in acknowledging the few surviving head tax payers, it did not redress their families.
- 6 McFarlane points out that the “exclusion of the Yukon and Northwest Territories as well as First Nations and band councils from the [Multiculturalism] Act (Section 2) suggests a crisis of representation with respect to aboriginality. It is through these exclusions that the Act perpetuates two myths of Eurocentrism, providing a rationale for the operation of the liberal nation while at the same time obscuring a colonialist history of violence” (22). For a thoughtful discussion of the tensions between Canadian citizenship and Aboriginality, see Battiste and Semaganis, “First Thoughts on First Nations Citizenship: Issues in Education,” 93–111. They note that “the federal Indian Act created new categories and definitions of Aboriginal peoples. Under the policy of divide and conquer, the federal government defined ‘Indians’ in order to destroy communities by arbitrary criteria of residency, marriage, employability, education, and military service. These definitions, conceived without consent of the Aboriginal peoples, segmented Aboriginal societies into categories of status and non-status, treaty and non-treaty, urban and reserve, and enfranchised and disenfranchised Indians” (105). Given this history, Battiste and Semaganis argue that “current issues in citizenship in Canada ... drive ... First Nations relationships,

- treaties, and self-determination to a bias towards Eurocentric perceptions of citizenship and governance" (93). Immigration legislation further reinforces Eurocentric systems that structurally disadvantage people racialized as nonwhite.
- 7 Loretta Todd, "Notes on Appropriation," *Parallogramme* 16, no. 1 (1990): 26.
 - 8 Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000), 44.
 - 9 Lee Maracle, "The 'Post-Colonial' Imagination," *Fuse* 16, no. 1 (1992): 15.
 - 10 In a longer article, novels such as Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka* and Kevin Chong's *Baroque-a-Nova* would also deserve discussion, as would instances of racial misrecognition that have been noted in *Calendar Boy* by Andy Quan and *Scared Texts* by Jam Ismail. Films such as Eunhee Cha's *A Tribe of One* also explore the relationships between Asian and Native peoples.
 - 11 SKY Lee, "Disappearing Moon Cafe and the Cultural Politics of Writing in Canada," in *Millennium Messages*, ed. Kenda Gee and Wei Wong (Edmonton: Asian Canadian Writers Workshop Society of Edmonton, 1997), 12-13.
 - 12 Scott Kerwin points out that very different racist tropes were deployed against the "Oriental menace" and the "vanishing" Indian in the 1920s: "Using the metaphors of the day, the Aboriginal population could easily be 'absorbed' into the bloodstream of British Columbia without 'imperiling' the 'original type.' The dominant stereotype of the Asian population as the 'Yellow Peril' was the polar opposite of the metaphor of the 'Vanishing [Native] American.' British Columbia's white elite feared that a massive influx of Asian immigrants would 'dilute' the bloodstream of the body politic and literally change the face of the nation" (Scott Kerwin, "The Janet Smith Bill of 1924 and the Language of Race and Nation in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 121 [spring 1999]: 107).
 - 13 SKY Lee, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990), 12-13.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, 4.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, 14-15.
 - 16 See, for instance, Jim Wong-Chu and Linda Tzang, *A Brief History of Asian North America* (Vancouver: Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society, 2001), which mentions the arrival of fifty to seventy Chinese artisans at Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island on a ship captained by John Meares in 1788 as well as a ship, the *Pallas*, that left a crew of thirty-two Indians and three Chinese seamen stranded in Baltimore in 1785.
 - 17 Lee, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, 234.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, 3.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 3-4.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, 235.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, 54.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, 115.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, 237.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, 188.
 - 25 Tamai Kobayashi, interview with Larissa Lai, *West Coast Line* 33, no. 3 (2000): 124.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, 122.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, 124-25.
 - 28 Tamai Kobayashi, *Exile and the Heart: Lesbian Fiction* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1998), 13-14.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, 12.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, 16.
 - 31 *Ibid.*, 15.
 - 32 *Ibid.*, 16.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, 96.

- 34 First performed at Vancouver's Firehall Theatre, 23 Apr.–11 May 2002.
- 35 Qtd. in John Endo Greenaway, "Fire in the Sky," *Bulletin* [Burnaby, BC] 44, no. 4 (2002): 8.
- 36 Marie Clements, *Burning Vision* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2003), 105.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 95.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 114.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 98.
- 42 For more detail regarding how the War Measures Act was used to confiscate Indian reserves during World War I, see Ann Sunahara, "Legislative Roots of Injustice," in *In Justice: Canada, Minorities, and Human Rights*, ed. Roy Miki and Scott McFarlane (Winnipeg: National Association of Japanese Canadians, 1996), 7–22. Use of the Act to intern Japanese Canadians has also been well documented. See, for example, Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004).
- 43 Clements, *Burning Vision*, 100–101.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 Lee Maracle, "Yin Chin," in *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*, ed. Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 291.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Ibid.*, 291–92.
- 51 Maracle has also written a play, *If We'd Met*, which, through its spirited dialogue between multiracial characters, including Native and Asian women, enacts a process of decolonization through, among other tactics, decentring whiteness.
- 52 Note that "the mad was intended for the low prices and the crowds in his little store, not him" (Maracle, "Yin Chin," 292).
- 53 *Ibid.*, 293.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 294.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 Qtd. in Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 1999), 11.
- 57 Peter Cheney and Miro Cernetig, "Chinese Gangs Flood Canada with Lucrative Human Cargo," *Globe and Mail* (2 Feb. 1999): A1+.
- 58 One must look carefully at who is doing this work and why. Despite the possibilities of political solidarity, there are also problems with the violence that some smugglers have perpetrated on migrating people.
- 59 Loretta Todd, "On Redress for Aboriginal People," *Across Currents: Canada-Japan Minority Forum*, ed. Roy Miki and Rita Wong (Vancouver: JC Publications, 2001), 83.
- 60 See www.cbc.ca/news/background/aboriginals/bc_treaty_referendum.html.
- 61 Hiromi Goto, *The Kappa Child* (Calgary: Red Deer, 2001), 168.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 200.

