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Everything Is Awful? Ecology and Affect in Literatures in Canada

Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

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EVERYTHING IS AWFUL? ECOLOGY AND AFFECT IN LITERATURES IN CANADA

Contents

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Creative Writing

Everything is Awful?
Ecology and Affect in Literatures in Canada

Introduction

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Everything Is Awful? Ecology and Affect in Literatures in Canada

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> What kinds of shared futures can you and I imagine and bring into the realm of the possible, despite a highly organized investment in business as usual?
>
> –Min Hyoung Song,
> *Climate Lyricism*

> We want to restore balance, right relations, ethical being. We cannot afford delusional hierarchies. We will not race each other to the bottom. We commit to live up to the future's call. We want our lives to not be wasted.
>
> –Rita Wong,
> "bisphenol ache"

> … even the 'bad' [affects] might be important to cultivate in our present environmental moment, in which the diametrically opposed feelings of hope and despair are too often framed as the only options.
>
> –Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino,
> *Affective Ecocriticism*

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We began the call for papers for this special issue with a focus on environmental catastrophes. At that time, we found ourselves asking the following: "How might literary scholars and writers in Canada respond in meaningful ways to ongoing ecological crises?" This call for papers is one that was issued amidst prairie drought, Rocky Mountain and Boreal forest fires, flooding in both Alberta and British Columbia, rapid Arctic warming, and rising sea levels, as well as politically significant ecological concerns such as logging in Fairy Creek, pipelines impacting the Wet'suwet'en, and the Site C dam on the Peace River, environmental crises that were unavoidable in this moment. It was becoming increasingly clear that literary critics and creative writers needed to (re)train themselves to respond to the climate emergency. These concerns have not abated; if anything, they have only intensified.

The call was also issued during the COVID-19 pandemic, during a time at which it had become very difficult to be attuned attuned to the moment, disconnected as we were from one another and grappling with the spaces between us. We were asking how we might position ourselves as scholars emerging from a period of time that felt awful—but, at the same time, we wanted to listen to alternative possibilities. We found ourselves, in effect, asking a version of the ironic question that became the title of this issue: everything is awful? Or, rather, is everything awful? We ask this question through the lens of the song "Everything is Awesome!," a song by Canadian pop duo Tegan & Sara, but we deliberately mishear the word "Awful" where "Awesome" should rightly be. This mondegreen moment in our title riffs on the context in which Tegan & Sara's song occurs, the heavily ironic 2014 children's film *The Lego Movie*, in which the instruction manuals with which Lego-branded sets are built shift from being helpful guides for how to build useful things into becoming oppressive, limiting signifiers that forestall meanings and possibilities. Tegan & Sara's song quickly becomes a harbinger not of an excellent and unified society, world, and environment, but rather of a darkly dystopic realm in which surface-level happiness masks deeper discontents. Mishearing "awful" in the place of "awesome" becomes, then, one index of the affective ambivalence with which we meet the contemporary moment.

If *The Lego Movie* shows a world that is deeply invested in business as usual—in that film's case most deeply emblematized by the villain President Business (voiced by Will Ferrell)—and then proceeds to show viewers how deeply wrong that world is, what alternatives might we point toward? In the first epigraph above, Min Hyoung Song suggests that there is a need to reinvent a new "realm of the possible" that moves beyond quotidian investments in "business as usual." The question mark in the title of this issue holds onto such a form of questioning: perhaps everything isn't awful. Perhaps it is. At a moment when we were endeavouring to think beyond the pandemic and its own series

of ugly feelings (to borrow for a moment from Sianne Ngai), we found a need to hang onto the ambivalences, too. Is it ironic or playful to question the possibility that everything is, indeed, awful, when the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report suggests that, in many respects, we have already reached a tipping point in climate change? Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, in their introduction to *Affective Ecocriticism*, argue that, as in our third epigraph above, "bad" affects and negative emotional registers are ones that might usefully be valorized in this moment as a way of getting beyond the polarized environmental responses of either unthinking technocratic optimism or outright despair. The times call for more complex responses, as, indeed, our own experiences of the pandemic have highlighted for us in turn.

And, so, as literary scholars, we found ourselves asking, in concert with Dionne Brand, about what it means to think about land and environment at a time when scholars and writers are navigating the "return to normal" that ostensibly comes with COVID becoming endemic—"as if that normal was not in contention," Dionne Brand cautions. How is literature uniquely positioned to investigate what this "return" will look like? Instead of individualistic forms of adaptation, how, instead, might the literary point toward alternative, social lines of flight away from an environmentally destructive form of "return"? We do not propose simple answers to these challenging questions. Rather, we have sought the answers from our community of fellow thinkers, and we have been gratified by the nuanced range of questions proposed in the submissions that we received.

1. The Turn to Affect and Environment

What are the literary affects of this moment of ecological crisis? What models do writers offer to us for thinking through this time? In assembling this special issue, we found ourselves compelled by the ways in which criticism has begun to combine work in ecocriticism with the realm of affect theory, in part as a way of endeavouring to think through the pitfalls of ecological grief as a potential endpoint for many people who find themselves grappling with environmental loss. Both ecocriticism and affect theory are established academic (and critical as well as creative) practices, and these are in the process of being brought together in crucial ways.

In the context covered by the journal *Canada and Beyond*, we start by noting that Canadian ecocriticism has seen an upsurge in critical interest early in the millennium. The landmark anthology of ecocriticism in Canada, *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (2013), edited by Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley, brings together what is already an established set of

practices. That volume takes as its point of origin re-readings of the thematic criticism of Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood and moves through to present practice. Soper and Bradley note that "'Canadian ecocriticism' is a capacious term" ("Introduction," xix), and this practice might be said to be in-built to a literary tradition that concerned itself with maple leaves, the Rocky Mountains, and animal stories since well before Frye and Atwood's respective interventions. Indeed, ecocriticism in Canada might be said to intersect and overlap with the rise of U.S. American ecocriticism since the 1996 *Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. The recent prominence of ecocritics situated in Canada (such as Adam Dickinson, Cheryl Lousley, and Catriona Sandilands) in contexts like the 2014 *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, edited by Greg Garrard (who is also situated in Canada), suggests that Canadian and international modes of ecocritical work frequently overlap. As Pamela Banting notes in her valuable overview of Canadian ecocriticism, this overlap is not surprising given that "our shared watersheds, bioregions, weather systems, plants, animals, oil pipelines, and other factors are important to the field of ecocriticism" (729). In addition to the ecocritical journal *The Goose: A Journal of Arts, Environment, and Culture in Canada*, recent work in this area in Canada includes two special issues of leading journals in the field: first, the 2021 "Neoliberal Environments" issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature* edited by Tania Aguila-Way, Kit Dobson, and Nicole Shukin; and the 2023 "Poetics and Extraction" issue of *Canadian Literature* edited by Max Karpinski and Melanie Dennis Unrau. Both issues continue to develop particular approaches to ecocritical practice in Canada and (in these examples) demonstrate the intersections between ecocriticism, critiques of neoliberalism as an economic system bound up in settler colonialism and racial capitalism, and the growing body of research on petrocultures and the energy humanities. This work is wide-ranging, well beyond what we are able to note here.

Affect theory, in turn, emerges from a range of thinkers whom we might associate with feminism, psychoanalysis, queer theory, new materialism, and intersectional modes of analysis, although even such a broad statement feels highly reductive. While the 2007 edited collection *The Affective Turn*, edited by Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, shortly followed by the 2009 *Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, might be the two most obvious signposts for this field of study, affect theory is characterized broadly by investigations into a range of affects and feelings that might be described as "ugly" (Ngai), "ordinary" (Stewart), or otherwise. These investigations have prompted some critics, like Lauren Berlant, to note that affective ties can be used in order to manipulate and control our behaviours, as with her analysis of what she calls "cruel optimism," a term that identifies the ways in which affective ties to ideas of, for instance, "the good life" might limit the ways

in which we respond to toxic states of being. This field, too, has clear impacts across literary studies in Canada, perhaps most evidently as collected in the 2021 volume *All the Feels / Tous les sens: Affect and Writing in Canada / Affect et écriture au Canada*, co-edited by Marie Carrière, Ursula Mathis-Moser, and Kit Dobson. That volume is a reflection of growing directions across literary criticism's concerns in the fields of Indigenous literatures, literatures in Canada, and Québecois writing.

Affective studies of environment are, in turn, also becoming prominent. Some scholars, like Alexa Weik von Mossner, have sought to study these questions within empiricist modes of thought. Although this is not the mode that we have pursued in this issue—and neither is it a dominant mode of the critics, writers, and poets whose work appears here—the capacity for such study is potentially great. Indeed, Weik von Mossner is interested in genuinely testing out the "great trust" that ecocriticism has had "in the ability of environmental narratives to have lasting effects on the attitudes and behaviors of their readers" (8). The seeming despair expressed by some that media and art do not in fact seem to change environmentally destructive behaviour warrants a wide range of scholarly approaches so that we might better understand how to motivate and then create more livable ecological futures. Weik von Mossner's call for "empirical studies" of the narrative engagements of readers and viewers of environmental narratives is a welcome one (196), although, in this context, it is mostly so for the ways in which it makes space for additional scholarship to unfold.

It is work such as Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino's *Affective Ecocriticism* from which we take our more immediate cues. Bladow and Ladino's collection offers provocations that build on their recognition that "the Anthropocene is fundamentally estranging" ("Toward" 26). Jobb Arnold, for instance, in an analysis of Alberta's bitumen extraction projects, develops a notion of "land affect" in order to analyze "nontechnologically mediated experience of affective energy that cause people to *feel with the land*" (italics in original; 97). Similarly, perhaps, Brian Deyo analyzes the registers of the "'negative' affects set in motion by nature's unpredictability" by interrogating a notion of "ecophobia" (195). Lisa Ottum, in turn, takes seriously the question of what it might "mean to be disappointed by a landscape" (258), endeavouring to theorize ways in which disappointment itself might become a motivational political praxis. These suggestions and approaches all seem to be prompted by something like the question asked by Allyse Knox-Russell in the same volume: "how do we grieve, or encourage others to grieve, that which does not fit into normative conceptions of 'the grievable'… ?" (214); that is, how might we mourn environmental loss and change that may exceed grief as it has thus far been understood? While the possible approaches vary widely, the turn to an affective ecocritical mode provides new paths for investigation.

One particularly provocative set of possibilities is offered by Nicole Seymour. Building on queer theory's analyses of modes such as drag, camp, and humour, Seymour argues for the political efficacy of affective modes that depart from negativity. Seymour's contribution to *Affective Ecocriticism* proposes "inappropriateness," "overinvestment," and "excessiveness" as potential "rallying points for environmental activists" ("Queerness" 251). Expanding on these points in her 2018 monograph *Bad Environmentalism*, Seymour notes not only that environmental movements are typically mired in forms of negativity and guilt, but also that the forms of normative appeals to "wholesome, healthy citizenship" to which environmentalism makes recourse can be readily co-opted by conservative movements and "corporate greenwashing" (15). In this context, she develops a notion of "bad environmentalism," which she defines as "environmental thought that employs dissident, often-denigrated affects and sensibilities to reflect critically on both our current moment and mainstream environmental art, activism, and discourse" (6). The particular affects on which she draws include "absurdity and irony, as well as… irreverence, ambivalence, camp, frivolity, indecorum, awkwardness, sardonicism, perversity, playfulness, and glee" (4). The texts that she investigates indeed use such affective modes in order to achieve surprising critiques of environmental plight. It is within this context of interrogating affective possibilities that we, too, began this project.

These, then, are approaches that might both build from and lead to further practice. For instance, Lisa Lowe's key 2015 historical study of globalization and the interconnectedness of trade, slavery, and settler-colonialism, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, crucially relies upon an affective notion of intimacy. This concept of intimacy allows Lowe to theorize the ways in which seemingly disparate practices may in fact have points of unacknowledged, yet still deeply present, intimate contact, and she explicitly builds upon Lauren Berlant's examination "of intimacy as the affective medium for republican citizenship and the subject's felt sense of individual belonging" in her project (21). In turn, Min Hyoung Song's 2022 book *Climate Lyricism* relies deeply on a mode of optimistic lyricism and the ongoing affects of "feeling bad" (80). Song notes that this pairing seems at first to be "counterintuitive" (80). Yet the goal of that project is to "find ways to democratize agency that break the spell of powerlessness, so that thinking about climate change emboldens rather than leads to a shrinking back" (2). This approach of working across seemingly contradictory or counterintuitive affective modes may be one way of acknowledging the nuance and complexity needed in order to make effective environmental interventions in the contemporary moment. Indeed, invoking a range of possible affects is crucially important to this issue's interrogation of the possibilities of ecocritical practice.

Attending to these complex affects involves orienting to the environment in ways that attune us to our sensory relationships with the land. Warren Cariou

(Métis) is one of many writers and critics whose work grounds readers in such forms of attunement. For instance, in "Landsensing: Body, Territory, Relation"—a 2023 essay inspired by Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan), renowned writer and scholar of Okanagan Syilx language, oral literature, and environmental ethics—Cariou reflects on his relationship with the land as an intimate and deeply embodied way of knowing grounded in taste, smell, and the other senses. Indeed, he contends that Indigenous resurgence movements that perpetually resist the environmental injustices of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and extractivism "connect with and learn from their surroundings" by relying on "particular skills of 'sensing' the land" (309). He suggests that this highly developed skillset, crucial to Indigenous peoples' survival for generations, became a prime target of colonialism, as Indigenous philosophies grounded in sensory engagement with the land value forms of intimacy that threaten ideologies of separation required to commodify and exploit land as resource (310-11). Cariou calls for "reestablishing an intimacy with the land" and "improv[ing] our skills of sensing our environment" not simply through scientific methods and technological means, but also through "something more personal, more rooted in affect" that allows us to "find better ways to *feel* our connection to the environment, and the sources of our energy, so that we understand at a deep bodily level what is at stake in our relationship with the world" (322). Like Cariou's essay, which he invites readers to "think of… as a walk on the land" (308), a number of essays in this issue contribute to these rich discussions by exploring the links between affect, environment, and the senses.

2. In this Issue

In her opening article "Bears and Scents of Place in Sid Marty's *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek*," Pamela Banting reconsiders "sense of belonging" and "sense of place" to suggest that such affective relationships to the environment are not solely reserved for humans. Tracing the limits of scientific thinking about animals, which often frames the more-than-human in terms of basic survival, observable traits and behaviours, and abstract notions of ecology, habitat, and territory, Banting argues for the recognition of place attachments for bears. Her illuminating analysis of Marty's 2008 animal biography, which offers a detailed account of a series of bear attacks in the popular resort town of Banff, Alberta, in the summer of 1980, illustrates how literary nonfiction offers a starting point for thinking about bears' sense of place. Emphasizing that sense of place is a "sensuous construct," Banting reads Marty's descriptions of ancient bear roads and the impressive ursine sense of smell as maps, as she convincingly argues that bears are consistently grounded in a deep sense of specific locales. As she

puts it: "Learning about scent with bears as our teachers, as Sid Marty's *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek* allows us to do, can help us rethink place and develop a fuller relationship with places and rethink who we are as sensing animals." Banting's provocative analysis not only advocates for, but also practices an art of attention that grounds readers more firmly in a sense of place not only accessible to humans.

Carys Hughes raises a different set of ursine-related concerns in "'Significant Otherness' versus Othering in Marian Engel's *Bear*." Bringing contemporary discussions of settler colonialism, indigenization, and animal studies to bear (pun intended) on Engel's 1976 novel, Hughes joins other critics in re-examining protagonist Lou's relationship to indigeneity and the natural world. The article challenges the idea that Lou's treatment of Lucy Leroy, a Cree woman and seemingly peripheral character in the novel, is part of a broader aesthetic strategy that relies on narrative irony to create a deliberately ambiguous text. Hughes highlights the tensions in Engel's re-telling of the Haida story of Mouse Woman and offers a nuanced reading of racism and speciesism in the novel, illustrating how Engel's feminist interventions are complicated by Lou's settler desire to indigenize on the land. Analyzing how Lou's desire to indigenize underwrites her relationships to Lucy and the bear, Hughes traces the similarities and differences between how both are treated in the text, ultimately suggesting that the bear is given the opportunity to contest his instrumentalization while Lucy is not. By focusing on how Engel's novel emphasizes the limits of fetishizing and anthropomorphizing animals while leaving appropriative relationships to Indigenous characters intact, Hughes underscores the difficulty of disentangling affects connected to racism and ecological imperialism. The article makes a valuable contribution to scholarship on a canonical text that has played a significant role in critical conversations of affect and environment in Canadian literary studies.

Zahra Tootonsab's expansive and cross-disciplinary essay "'Niagara as Technology': Rupturing the Technological for the Wordy Ecologies of Niagara Falls" echoes earlier discussions of the senses by tuning into decolonial practices of listening. Positioning herself as a settler, woman of colour, and poet committed to engaging with critical listening practices, Tootonsab takes up Dylan Robinson's (Stó:lō) and Adrienne Maree Brown's respective concepts of hungry listening and murmuration in order to explore how readers might attune themselves to other bodies and lands through collaborative movements and affective-sonic experiences grounded in trust and radical love. Blending personal reflections with theoretical meditations on research creation, Tootonsab extends Eve Tuck's (Unangax̂) thinking in order to develop a "thirdspace" listening positionality through found poetry written in response to environmental historian Daniel Macfarlane's 2020 book *Fixing Niagara Falls: Environment, Energy, and*

Engineers at the World's Most Famous Waterfall. In her poetry, which portrays the falls as "a critical place for ecologies coming-to-being," Tootonsab re-appropriates extractive practices of capture and transformation to critique and disorient neo-colonial representations of "Niagara-as-technology." She concludes by considering a call-and-response video game about the falls created by Waylon Wilson (Tuscarora), which teaches a listening practice based in reciprocal relationships with other human and more-than-human beings that has the power to heal industrialized landscapes.

Lucía López-Serrano's contribution to this special issue finds its particular focus on examining relationships between ecocritical, ecofeminist, and Indigenous practices. Her article, "Indigenous Ecofeminism? Decolonial Practices and Indigenous Resurgence in Lee Maracle's Works," analyzes the late Stö:lō writer's texts in order to understand the possible convergences and divergences of these fields. Tracing the importance of the climate crisis and current governmental and supra-governmental efforts to confront the enormity of the issues leads directly to the article's engagement with the specificity of Maracle's politics and literary craft. An acute awareness of the ways in which ecocritical and ecofeminist politics can risk replicating the extractive exploitations of late capitalism lies at the crux of Maracle's intersectional practice, the article's argument shows. Concerned with how to respectfully engage with Indigenous knowledge systems leads López-Serrano to analyze the ways in which a resurgent practice in Maracle's work might complement the work of ecological feminist thinking without being appropriated to it. Nuanced readings of Maracle's novels *Ravensong* and *Celia's Song* alongside Maracle's nonfiction works allows for the affective weight and measure of such efforts fully to be realized.

In his contribution, Max Karpinski moves from the macro to the micro with the essay "'My Body is a Spaceship': Technoscience and Experiments Otherwise in Adam Dickinson's *Anatomic*." A close reading of and scholarly meditation on Dickinson's experimental poetry collection, Karpinski finds in *Anatomic* a fixation upon toxins that disrupts—in all senses—the totality of the western liberal subject. That *Anatomic* is concerned with the (im)possibilities of representing human subjectivity as it fragments in a time of proliferating waste and chemical impurity becomes a form of paradox. On the one hand, the worry with which the subject's demise is foretold in its disunity marks a crisis of both representation and totalizing forms of control. On the other hand, the toxicity that Dickinson reads through his own body demonstrates the very real tolls of such dissolution. Neither celebratory nor pessimistic, Karpinski instead analyzes Dickinson's corporeal ruins in an effort to understand the entangled stakes for the human subject in this era sometimes known as the Anthropocene. Writing in and of this time, this essay provocatively demonstrates, is a hugely fraught endeavour, but one that might, too, work across multiple scales in order to forge links between those

with whom we co-exist, both human and otherwise. The specificity of Dickinson's project, moreover, intimately links settler-colonial modes of extractivism and violence back to the body, drawing intersecting lines of accountability between the settler poet and Indigenous communities most directly harmed by the toxins that Dickinson traces back to his own embodied form.

Finally, Sarah Krotz completes the articles in this special issue with a piece entitled "Outside Words." A lyrical essay that shifts the grounds of what the essay form in the discipline of English might achieve, this piece is an offering and provocation to renew our considerations of land, environment, and literary works. Beginning at the University of Alberta's campus on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River in the city of Edmonton, the essay descends both to the river and into the muddy complexities of poetry that concerns itself with these lands. The essay works geocritically and ecocritically through the works and words of Dwayne Donald (Cree), Tomson Highway (Cree), Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi), a. rawlings, and Christine Stewart, among others. Doing so allows Krotz to weave an insistent argument for the necessity of returning, again and again, to the land. Concerned also with how readers might meaningfully teach students with landscapes through texts, Krotz's essay provides a thoughtful, care-filled response to the persistent anxiety with which we initially wrote our call for papers. It therefore serves wonderfully as the final essay of this special issue.

The issue also includes "Everything Is Awe-ful: A Conversation on Climate Change Fiction" between Stephanie Oliver and Rebecca Campbell, a Canadian author of climate change fiction and other works of science fiction, speculative fiction, body horror, and weird stories. Campbell engages deeply with questions of affect and environment in her work, making her well-suited to exploring this issue's themes in relation to climate change fiction. Her recent novella *Arboreality* (published in 2022 with Stelliform Press, a small independent Canadian publisher committed to challenging dominant narratives of climate change) provides inspiration for the conversation. Set on Vancouver Island in the near future, the novella spans multiple characters and generations, weaving an intricate tale of the entangled lives of trees and people as both try to survive the intergenerational impacts of climate change. In this wide-ranging conversation, Campbell shares her thoughts on the affects that inspired *Arboreality*, the importance of "sense of place," the uneven ways in which climate disasters unfold, and the ways in which writers and literary scholars might address the question of "what do we save?" Emphasizing the power of shared vulnerability, Campbell underscores the need to make space for a range of complicated affects in fiction and in broader discussions about climate change—affects that include not only hope and despair, but also dread, anxiety, grief, joy, pleasure, and satisfaction. She reflects on the importance of storytelling, and specifically "CliFi" and genre fiction, for exploring these affects alongside the complex scalar impacts of climate change. As part

of this discussion, Campbell offers illuminating thoughts on Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*, including his comments about the dearth of (realist) climate change novels; she also reflects on the recent rise of tree-centric eco-fiction and responses of "Literary Tree Fatigue." Situating her work in relation t the (often marginalized) literary traditions of science fiction and speculative fiction, Campbell invites readers to follow her into the forests of Ursula K. Le Guin and, leading us into the world of *Arboreality*, considers what trees have to teach us about community, connection, and survival in the face of climate change. She also addresses the concept of resilience and adaptation in future generations, outlines her approach to addressing climate change in the classroom, and reflects on what she has learned about being a "good ancestor" by sitting with the inheritances of settler colonialism, capitalism, and climate change.

Finally, this special issue wraps up with a selection of poetry that takes up the invitations in the call for papers to consider affective elements of ecocritical thinking. Shazia Hafiz Ramji's "Morning Ritual" opens this section with a long-lined, compressed and imagistic interrogation of mediation, photography, and space, an interrogation that considers the affects of witnessing. Matthew Rader's "Atmospheric Moon River" mashes up the experience of the atmospheric river—a meteorological event that led to recent widespread flooding in British Columbia—with the classic song "Moon River" in its title and works through a personal reckoning with grief and loss. Our third poetic contribution, David Janzen's "Canoeing the Milk River: A Theory of Lines," works closely with the experience of paddling the Milk River in southern Alberta, investigating both human and nonhuman relations and the historical and ongoing relationships between Blackfoot and settler-colonial communities on the land. Finally, we include an excerpt from Ariel Gordon and Brenda Schmidt's forthcoming book *Siteseeing*, a collaborative call-and-response project written during the heights of the pandemic. In this book, Gordon and Schmidt mull over their experiences of place in order to find shared vocabularies to describe their felt environments. This contribution aptly, we feel in turn, ends this special issue on a note that demonstrates a commitment to dialogue, to collaboration, and to the ongoing building of community conversations, be those conversations between poets, critics, and writers; between humans and nonhumans; or between agents and actors that exclude the realm of the human entirely.

3. Conclusion

We have not yet discussed the second epigraph with which we opened this introduction, which comes from the poem "bisphenol ache" by Rita Wong. We find ourselves returning to Wong's thinking as we head toward this special

issue itself. In the afterword to the book *Current, Climate: The Poetry of Rita Wong*, an afterword written in the tenth month of the pandemic and during a series of environmental cataclysms and legislative overhauls, Wong writes: "I am weary. I don't have much energy to write poems these days.… I feel a widely shared ecological grief at this desecration caused by short-sighted colonial occupation, and I cope… by directing my energy into supporting collective action" ("Afterword" 71-72). What is the relationship between grief, literature, collective action, and joy? When is poetry possible? When is it impossible? When does that (im)possibility link to affective moments? If Wong finds herself unable to write in a poetic register due to an affective weariness, what, we find ourselves asking, does it mean to take on the labours of returning to speech, to writing? These things are literally exhausting in a world where we are simultaneously also choking in the exhaust of a system that consumes energy, both petroleum-based energies and emotional energies, that leave us drained. We do not wish simply to recommit to individual forms of resilience that might become only too complicit with neoliberal forms of governance, but we do need to theorize ways to (re)commit on an ongoing basis to an awareness of how we can attune ourselves to the environment so as to mitigate our impacts upon it, while celebrating, too, the creative modes of address that we can create in response. In their 2022 book *Rehearsals for Living*, Robyn Maynard writes the following to her Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg collaborator Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: "I am writing to you so we can think together about what it means for us to build livable lives together in the wreckage" (10). Such thinking aligns with the impetus of this special issue. Maynard and Simpson invoke forms of future-oriented action that might bring forth as-yet unrealized possibilities. These are the possibilities to which we might now direct ourselves. The contributors to this special issue have created such directions, in our view, and for that we thank them.

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Articles

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Bears and Scents of Place in Sid Marty's *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek*

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ABSTRACT

Most Western humans think of more-than-human animals as having certain spatial requirements adequate to their needs to feed, reproduce and survive but assume that their territorial needs are more or less generic and interchangeable. In his acclaimed literary nonfiction book *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek* (2008) Sid Marty represents the spaces and places of two bears, a black bear and a grizzly bear. In this animal biography cum forensic account of a series of bear attacks upon humans in Banff, Alberta, Canada, during eleven days in 1980, Marty reconstructs the events by researching the particular bears and interviewing the wardens involved, and factoring in the climatic and environmental forces – particularly the eruption that spring of Mount St. Helens and the concomitant alteration of weather patterns and plant growth as far away as Banff, Alberta – that led to the unusually high number of tragic bear-human encounters that summer. I argue that *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek*, several chapters of which Marty writes in the third-person as if from the points of view of each of the two individual bears involved, allows us to explore how we might think of bears' and by extension other more-than-human animals' senses of place and exemplifies how literary works can play a role in coming to understand more fully the lives of some of our animal relations. I argue that bears' tremendous olfactory senses are so indelibly connected with their familiar surroundings as to constitute a veritable "scents of place."

Keywords

bears; olfaction; animals' sense of place; territory and range; the politics of eating; Sid Marty

Every animal knows way more than you do.

–Lavine Williams, Koyukon teacher, quoted in Barry Lopez,
Embrace Fearlessly the Burning World: Essays

1. Introduction

The outpouring of recent research on the ontology and epistemology of more-than-human animals has taken us a long way toward greater understanding of our fellow Earth creatures. However, explorations of such animals' being and knowledge (and not just our relationships with and knowledge of them) often run aground on the shoals of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. If a more-than-human animal trait is one shared with humans, then contrary to logic and common sense that trait is often regarded either as *exclusively* human or one that it is simply impossible to know animals share. As Marcus Bullock writes, "[t]hat steadfast refusal to see expressiveness anywhere [other than in humans] merely becomes another species of anthropomorphism, should we turn so intently against the other temptation as to insist on hearing only silence and seeing only empty matter in the language of animal forms" (112). While in many instances human intentions and human affects can also only be inferred, and sometimes they too can seem incomprehensible or unmotivated—it is another form of anthropocentrism to hold as one's premise that human psyches, even one's own by oneself, are understood—nevertheless more-than-human animals typically function as a limit-case when it comes to ontology and epistemology. The dominant paradigm claims that we do not and cannot know anything about their *Umwelten*.

2. Animal Geographies

When western humans think about more-than-human animals we tend to think of them in terms of their unique identifying traits: their physical appearance and a set of scientifically observed and ascribed characteristics and behaviours. We think of them occupying specific habitats or ecological niches and going about their lives—being born and raised, leaving the nest or burrow or den, and then reproducing and raising their own young in turn—within the confines of territories or ranges that supply no more than the basics of life. That is, as virtually any field guide or nature documentary demonstrates, we tend to think of other animals' occupation of space mostly in terms of access to the simple bare necessities of water, food, relative safety, and shelter. In terms of

Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we reserve "sense of belonging" and other higher needs exclusively for ourselves. In truth, we seldom think of animals as having a sense of belonging. We tend to think of them in terms of relatively abstract philosophical and scientific notions such as space, ecology or ecological niche, habitat, range, and territory but not in terms of their having a sense of place, even though it is probable that more-than-human animals have a far greater knowledge of and relationships with the particularities of their respective territories than we do of our own. It is almost as if we deploy such abstract notions of spatiality as a way of rooting them out of and appropriating the fields, meadows, fens, coulees, valleys, mountainsides, swamps, and especially the prime real estate they occupy. Through manoeuvres such as this, we draw them out of their geographical places and into rhetorical and theoretical places in our own minds. During my research for this and other articles on the nonfiction of Sid Marty and other bear experts, it became evident that even a significant number of articles in the field of animal geographies that contain the word *place* in their titles or abstracts treat animals' places as rhetorical places or philosophical and cultural placements rather than physical, material locations.

The converse is also true. Anthropocentrism also comes into play in our assumption that humans' senses of place are not related to nurture or satisfaction of our basic Maslovian needs. Widespread privilege has eroded our ability even to notice, let alone appreciate, either the built or the natural infrastructure that supplies those needs.[1] While knowing the particulars of one's territory is not necessarily tantamount to possessing a sense of place, which implies a sense of belonging to or in that zone constructed out of memories, associations, affects, and perhaps even nostalgia or solastalgia, there is sufficient cause to extrapolate from animals' superb navigational and threat-avoidance capabilities based on their precise and deep knowledge of the geographies they inhabit at least to explore the possibility that they may also have place-attachments.[2]

A corresponding absence in most of our philosophical and cultural figurations of animals is the notion of the specificity of individual animals' lives, a

1. For an eye-opening examination of the ways in which North American privilege has radically obscured our awareness and knowledge of infrastructure, see Harold Fromm's article.
2. In my article on walking with caribou I argue that locomotion can serve as a bridge to understanding between species, even between ungulates and humans, four-legs and two-legs. In that paper, I drew in part upon Hayden Lorimer's article "Herding Memories of Humans and Animals" in which he demonstrates that "Signature events, or distinguishable traits, in the biographies of reindeer [caribou] are made memorable, at least in part, by virtue of their setting.… On the basis of these retold stories [about individual reindeer's place-attachments] we can establish that living creatures have a sense of place and, by their repeated actions, afford place some of its most significant qualities" (502).

lack I would link to our scepticism about their senses of place. We imagine our furry compatriots living lives rendered typical, almost allegorical, by virtue of our sense that they have no sense of place as it is only emplaced lives in which history, event or context can develop.[3] That is, we simply presume that a Richardson's ground squirrel lives the life story of a type, a Richardson's ground squirrel, not of a Richardson's ground squirrel in the city of Calgary or one in Grasslands National Park in semi-remote southern Saskatchewan. Even those of us who recognize that humans have profound and differential historical effects upon other animals' lives—through sport hunting, factory farming and slaughter for fur or food, habitat depletion, bitumen mining, and countless other practices—and critique such practices tend to strand more-than-human animals in the zones of the typical and the timeless,[4] a move that probably has more to do with our own impulse toward abstraction and less to do with their lives. Bear Awareness Pamphlets, for instance, tell us what to do in the event of being approached or attacked by a black bear as opposed to a grizzly bear. While there is strong scientific validity to such categorizations and avoidance tactics, individual bears' distinct histories also shape their temperaments, moods, lives, the lives of their offspring, and their situational responses.

In this essay I propose to look at representations of bears somewhat less in terms of ontology (who or what they are) or epistemology (what they know or do not know but we do know) but in terms of their senses of place (whether and how they might conceive of or feel where they are). That is, I postulate that place is an important variable not only in terms of bears' fundamental survival but also a strong constituent in the specificity of their lives and the events that happen to them. While admittedly this is largely unknowable and even while fully recognizing that any given animal's, group's, or species' place or sense of place is not necessarily similar to that of a human animal, and that animals occupy, in Nigel Thrift's words, "what are often radically different umwelten" (156), I think it worth at least considering the question in the hope that it will lead us to possible insights about the lives of other creatures.

In addition to the problem of scepticism about animal intelligence and range of affect, and the difficulty of knowing what it is like to be a bat, a tick, or a weasel, there are many significant obstacles to considering animals' sense of place. For present purposes it may be sufficient simply to present an overview here. Most obviously, contemporary North American society tends to denigrate the importance of place-attachments in human lives, so it could fairly be

3. The exceptions include animals in animal biographies and the realistic wild animal story.
4. Erica Fudge addresses the question of animals' histories.

regarded as odd to reflect at length on animals' senses of place. Secondly, though not unrelatedly, as economist Geerat J. Vermeij writes,

> An ever-increasing proportion of biologists has grown up in suburbs and cities, where highly artificial venues—gardens, zoos, petri dishes, and laboratory cages—are the chief meeting places between people and other living things. Most of us encounter organisms and their remains far from places in which those creatures lived and evolved, with the inevitable result that we cannot easily envision the problems and opportunities that living things face on an everyday basis. (39)

As a corollary to the increasing extirpation of our own experiences with animals in their habitats,[5] the prestige of scientific discourse is such that increasingly we consciously or subconsciously associate animals' spaces not only with the wild but also or even more so with the zoo, observation platform or blind, laboratory, cage, box, maze, documentary film, and other scientific and cultural apparatuses. In the popular mind, animals have become experimental objects of the scientific gaze. Vermeij also suggests that one outcome of the increased focus on molecular biology and genetics has been to reduce organisms to collections of markers (40). To scientists hoping to discover universal principles, he writes, context (time and place) "is a hindrance to the recognition of deeper truths and patterns" (41). Moreover, natural history is often marginalized as an antiquated, amateur, and denigrated area of endeavour peripheral to science.[6] However, contradictorily, scientific explanations of animal behaviour that are careful to bracket intentionality and the notion of animal minds nevertheless do not hesitate to construct animals as either frugal or extravagant economic subjects—the frugal ones always defaulting to the line of least resistance, conserving energy, maximizing potential return on the basis of the least investment (the taming of the shrewd). Given that, as Deborah Tall argues, at least in the North American context, the social construction of economic humans typically denigrates place-attachments precisely in order to maintain a highly mobile

5. See Robert Michael Pyle's work on how local extirpations and extinctions of species result in a corresponding extinction of our own experiences.
6. Vermeij continues: "Molecular biology routinely dismissed classification and anatomy as stamp collecting, as the descriptive accumulation of trivia. Controlled experiments, inspired by Karl Popper's contention that the only good science is hypothesis-driven experimental science, crowded out investigations that were based on observation, comparative studies, and historical reconstruction. Experiments by their nature are executed at small spatial scales and on very short time scales, meaning that phenomena of larger magnitudes were often off limits to those who took Popper too seriously" (40).

workforce,[7] such a construction would seem to apply to our thinking about more-than-human animals too. Finally, though not exhaustively, as Thrift writes, "[t]he problem, of course, is that, as Derrida has pointed out at length, 'animal' covers a very large range of different kinds of affects, sufficient to make it possible to question the very category itself. 'Animal' is clearly not a satisfactory descriptor. . ." (156).

The variable of *place* can be just as vaguely referential as the term *animal*. So much intellectual energy is devoted to deconstructing more-than-humans' *place* in our own rhetoric, ontologies, and epistemologies that their physical, material, geographical locations are often overlooked even by those fighting for their welfare and their rights to their lives. I would suggest that this is also because a great deal of animal studies scholarship is devoted to pets and other domestic animals whose *place* can be taken for granted as being the same dwelling or property as their human companions. Finally, the other category to which a lot of fascinating research is devoted is to representations of animals in human-made artworks or artworks made in collaboration between humans and more-than-human animals. The *places* in such research are the canvas, paper, photograph, painting, sculpture, film, performance space, or exhibition.

3. Bears' Sense of Place

In what follows then, I will analyze writer Sid Marty's representation of the senses of place of two individual bears in his acclaimed literary nonfiction book *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek* (2008).[8] In this animal biography cum forensic account of a series of bear attacks upon humans in Banff, Alberta, Canada, during the summer of 1980, Marty reconstructs the events in exhaustive detail by researching the particular bears, interviewing the wardens, a victim, and others who were involved, and incorporating into the narrative the environmental and climatic forces both within and distant from the Banff area, namely, the eruption

7. Tall writes that "we are awash in a landscape of mobility that eschews connection to particular plots, has no need or desire for great distinction between places, and is essentially utilitarian about the land, often lacking environmental conscience. Place has come to mean proximity to highways, shopping, and year-round recreation, rather than natural situation or indigenous character" (106).

8. Sid Marty is a highly respected environmental nonfiction writer, poet and singer-songwriter. In addition to *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek* (2008), see, for example, his *Leaning on the Wind: Under the Spell of the Great Chinook* (1995) and *Switchbacks: True Stories from the Canadian Rockies* (1999). His latest book, *Oldman's River: New and Collected Poems,* was published in Spring 2023 by NeWest Press.

of Mount St. Helens and the concomitant alteration of weather patterns that spring and summer[9] that led to the unusually high number of tragic bear-human encounters that summer. Several chapters of *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek*, the title of which gestures toward the idea that bears' identities have a place-based component, are written in third person *as if* from the points of view of the grizzly bear or black bear. In his prefatory author's note, Marty acknowledges that his attempt at telling parts of the story from the point of view of a bear "is obviously an imaginative exercise, rather than reportage" (n.p.), his "best guess," but one based on his experience as a park warden and then a journalist who has in the writing of the book "tethered" his imagination to the evidence uncovered.

The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek illuminates how we might begin to think of bears' sense of place and exemplifies how a work of literary nonfiction can play a significant role in extending our understanding of the importance of specific places—and not solely habitat and range—to some of our animal kin. Although the book is named after one of its main actors, an anomalously black brown bear or grizzly, the book is devoted about equally to Bear 054, at 350 pounds an unusually large black bear for the eastern slopes of the Rockies (170). Both bears then are atypical, not interchangeable representatives of their respective species, most importantly in terms of their colour and size. The tension, suspense, and narrative pull of the book depend largely on the mystery as to which species of bear, *and* which individual bear, mauled a fisherman, a tourist, and a drifter in the summer of 1980 a mere five hundred metres outside the resort town of Banff,[10] a summer when the berry crop failed and garbage management practices in the park were weak and under-enforced.

However, despite his important disclaimer that "No one can say with any certainty what goes on in the mind of a bear" (author's note, n.p.), what is truly remarkable about the book is Marty's seeming ability to do just that, to write his way into the points of view and lives of each of the two different bears. For instance, chapter six opens with a description of bear roads, trails that "tunnel through the krummholz and slide alder where most people stop, baffled, unwilling to get down on all fours and crawl, unsure of their welcome in that hedged darkness" (61). Bear roads are an important part of bear infrastructure. Both the map and the territory, "They are roads of ancestral knowledge, passed on from the mother bear to the cubs, imprinted in the brain to be recalled later, perhaps some years after the cubs have dispersed, maybe long after the siblings

9. Banff is about 465 air miles northeast of Mount St. Helens (45).
10. Actually, as Sid Marty writes, "five people were attacked during an 11-day rampage" (7) in 1980.

have gone their separate ways. Mothers and cubs might meet again on those roads, and recognize each other, and pass each other by without doing harm" (61). The trails are maps, sites of both contemporary and ancestral knowledge, spaces of détente, and political spaces. Bears also maintain the infrastructure along their roads: "Here a hole in the path marks where a boulder the size of a small car was grappled and shoved out of the way, and sent rolling down the mountain like local thunder" (61). Their roads also include amenities such as spots where "the traveller beast can stretch out and rub its back and cool off in the icy slush for a moment below a boiling of frustrated deer flies" (62). A bear road may also curve from time to time through a scenic mossy gulch "where a brook purls down the mountain to form a pool of icy water in which a bear may stop to bathe its hot, cracked footpads in the mud while slaking its thirst" (62). Clearly, the roads function as more than linear, efficient, energy-saving, and economical routes from A to B. In fact, one of the most remarkable features of a bear road is that the individual tracks within it can be as much as a foot deep and a foot or more long: "These tracks were made over the centuries by the padded humanoid feet of bears that journey between mountain ranges; each has put its front foot and then the corresponding rear foot down in the same print the first of its tribe made here centuries before" (62). Whether fear of detection, the ease of passage, good business sense, smearing one's own odour with that of predecessors, ritual affirmation of their old paths and old ways, acknowledgement of tribal (or what we call species) identity, tribute to the ancestors, demonstration of solidarity or reciprocity, practice marking bears' special sense of time, pure habit, or all or none of above, we cannot know, but suffice to say the bear roads and the bears' practice of placing their feet precisely in the prints of precursor bears is an important component of bears' sense of place.[11]

Of course, bears' sense of place encompasses more than their tracks and trails.[12] In the first chapter written in third-person singular *ursus*, "Sticky Mouth Awakes," Marty imagines the bear being roused in his winter den by a slight thunder and trembling of the mountain on the day Mount St. Helens erupts. Marty speculates about the bear's day-to-day consciousness of place: "For him the mountain must seem like a living thing because it provides both food and

11. In their work with the brown bears of Kamchatka in eastern Russia, Charlie Russell and Maureen Enns noticed the same phenomenon of bears placing their feet precisely in the footprints of other bears who had used the trail before. For images of bear roads, see chapter one, "Discovering Kamchatka 1994 - 96," of their photography book *Grizzly Seasons*.
12. For more speculation on tracks, trails, maps, inscriptions, and co-writing with more-than-human animals, see my chapter "Magic is Afoot: Hoof Marks, Paw Prints and the Problem of Writing Wildly."

drink all summer long from alpine meadow to valley bottom, and it speaks to him with the voice of water, with the voice of wind and the voice of the falling rock and snow" (55). The mountain provides shelter and safety during the long months of winter torpor, as well, perhaps, as companionship as in this passage. It risks stating the obvious and sounding ridiculous, but in Marty's "best guess," and against the pervasive background of western humanism, it may be worth suggesting that the bear has an animistic sense of place.

While it is not true, as popularly held, that bears have poor eyesight, according to Marty's representations of them bears are far more governed by the senses of smell and taste than by sight.[13] As he writes,

> According to researcher Dr. George Stevenson, a grizzly bear can smell seven times better than a hound dog, which in turn smells 300 times better than we do. Sniffing at a spot where a man had urinated, or just following a human trail through the bush with his nose until he was close enough to look at the man he was following (bears see in colour), helped him later to picture the man associated with that particular smell; perhaps one had more garlic in his urine, one had more fat cells. (235)

4. Bears' Olfactory and Gustatory Senses

Bears do more than just scent the presence or absence of a smell: they subject their samples to a rigorous analysis, extracting and absorbing a level of detailed information of which any laboratory technician would be envious, and then link that odour and its analysis to the visual appearance of the person who emitted it. Just as Marty conducts a forensic analysis of the scenes of terrible injury and harm, a bear conducts its own forensics including the equivalent of lab work using just the evidence of its nose and eyes. Sticky Mouth can *see* for kilometres with his nose; his nostrils pose his questions to the air. Following the first bear attack on a human described in the book, the smell of human blood suddenly floats on the air, and Sticky Mouth "rears up on his hinders, whiffles air into his nares, trying to scent it, to see it. An enticing tang of musky underling stink rewards his inquiring nose" (107). He too seeks an answer as to which bear is responsible, and courtesy of his acute olfactory sense he easily obtains that information that eludes the diligently searching wardens.

13. Although he does not discuss bears, Ed Yong's book *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us* offers a fascinating overview of the senses of numerous more-than-human animals. Chapter One is about smells and tastes.

For bears, odour serves as a mnemonic, and it underwrites a sensory map of place. Marty writes that olfactory and gustatory associations combined are a powerful *aide-mémoire* for bears:

> When it comes to finding food, grizzly bears have very good memories. The cub learns where the berry patches are by following at its mother's heels. Likewise, it recalls avalanche slopes where winter-killed goats and bighorn sheep may be found melting out of the snow in spring. A bear remembers picnic grounds where it successfully stole a camper's lunch, or garbage dumpsters that were once left open. We wardens found that once a bear was successful in obtaining human food, its memory of that success drew it back to an area again and again. (30)

Bears' maps are not scalar visual abstractions of a given area (a bird's eye view, an airplane's flyover or a satellite's survey), as ours are: they are redolent with smells. It follows that if bears have very good memories for the locations of food sources, then they have very good memories for locations. In these instances, food functions as a draw and a memory trigger, but it would be difficult to separate memories of food from those of the places where it has been found. That is, a bear's place memory includes but goes beyond places associated with food. It would be unrealistic to think that their memory of a particularly productive camping spot is full of highly pixelated locational detail whereas the rest of their domain is just a myopic blur akin to a very faded or old photograph. Describing how B054 eludes the wardens who are searching for the bear that injured the fisherman, in the following passage Marty depicts the bear's knowledge of terrain that has no evident connection with eating:

> He was completely at home in the forest, a maestro of the shintangle who shambled through willow hells with Olympian detachment, where men could only curse and crawl. It is quite likely he knew the terrain more intimately than his hunters, and even if he had last moved through it years earlier, he would have remembered it far better than the humans, such was the map of the mountains imprinted on his neurons. (122)

In this light, to presume that bears have no sense of place and no place-attachments and can make a living anywhere there is forest or grassland is misguided thinking. Moreover, thinking with bears about the notion of sense of place is an excellent way of remembering that sense of place is a sensuous construct. That is, sense of place is far more than one's home address, general latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates, or merely familiar geography: it is the place where all of one's senses have been at least intermittently open and alive to that location from the degree of humidity or dryness of the air, to the quality of the sunshine,

the strength of the prevailing winds, the shapes of the typical clouds, the appearance and smell of the vegetation, the other animals in that country, and so much more.[14]

To illustrate bears' olfactory prowess, Marty poetically encapsulates the effects of the odours of human food on the grizzly. Some of his olfactory and gustatory descriptions are surprisingly evocative, even if one does not share bears' taste for rotten carcasses of winter-killed moose (60) or rancid, insect-riddled garbage:

> The intoxicating scent of restaurant scraps tickles Sticky Mouth's nose. It smells as though a great dead beast, half beef cow and half fish, is fermenting in a vat of spoiled fruit, rancid butter and deep-fry fat, perfuming the atmosphere with its captivating putrescence. He lies quietly, his nose made drunk with excess aroma… His nostrils flare at the rancid joys; his stomach sings hosannahs. (79)

Tantalized by those delights, Marty writes, Sticky Mouth "moans with hyperphagic anticipation, aching to gorge and gorge again on flesh" (80). Marty not only states that at this stage of the season the bear's dietary preferences are for meat and fat, all the better to prepare for months of winter torpor; his insight into the affects associated with the physical urgency of hyperphagia are highly convincing and illuminating: "Every day he is growing fatter and more powerful and every day he feels the need to be bigger still" (63). The putrefying, odorous steak and lobster leftovers from a popular Banff restaurant ("cowfish" to the bear, in Marty's rendering) imbue the bear with "an exquisite torment." Sticky Mouth "pictures writhing legions of sweet, nut-flavoured maggots; recalls the zesty crunch of carrion beetles on his palate…" (75). Marty depicts the bear's all-consuming urge to feed by elaborating with Rabelaisian excess and delight on the esculent and excellent delights to a bear of human food and bears as ursine gourmands in their own terms. Sticky Mouth even desires to eat B054, whom he trees at one point: "Fat! He does not have a name for it, but he knows it when he smells it. He craves and aches and swoons for the taste of it" (83).[15]

14. See Don Gayton's essay "Primal" in his book *Landscapes of the Interior: Re-Explorations of Nature and the Human Spirit* for a description of humans' attachments to our primal landscapes.
15. For more on bears' and other animals' relation to fat, grease, blubber, and oil, see my chapter on "Anim-Oils: Wild Animals in Petro-Cultural Landscapes."

5. Eating and Consumption

Thinking through the act and the politics of eating from the grizzly bear's point of view Marty directs his inquiry in turn to the consumption patterns of our own species, asking "What is a car, or an ATV, or a motor home, if not a device for eating up space and time by displacing the natural world from out of our path as we speed from A to B? We are not savouring our time on this earth, we are cramming it down our craws at a ravenous pace.… We North Americans have the appetites of gods" (19). We stalwartly maintain that *we* are the eaters, not the eaten: "Our flesh is not for the eating…" (19). It is our disproportionate appetite for and consumption of virtually everything—even space and time—that "we will not admit to and what the bear cannot understand about us that leads to tragedy" (19). Because the bear is so much stronger than we are, he fails to realize "that humans, not bears, are the gods of eating and occasionally it decides to eat one of us either literally, which is rare, or figuratively in the form of a bear mauling" (19). Because we behave as if we are gods, not mammals like Sticky Mouth a.k.a. Our-Brother-Across-the-River,[16] it can be a startling realization when we hear of a bear attack, because for a while we are dragged "back down out of the clouds, back down into our basic mammalian reality" (19). North American humans maintain a year-round, not just seasonal, hyperphagia as we joylessly, albeit relentlessly, smugly and self-satisfyingly, consume and cannibalize the Earth.

Throughout the book Marty illustrates connections between smell and the drive to eat with bear knowledge, bear epistemology. For the black bear, B054, however, humans and our food also carry knowledge of our greed and impecuniousness and his fear and trauma. For B054 "the smell of them [humans] made him think always of their meat-hoards and sweet-hoards" (92). Because B054 has been tranquillized, trapped and relocated more than once, by metonymic association with human smell he has a harrowing flashback: "He saw that picture now, and felt the fear again.… He remembered it [a helicopter] carrying him off; remembered feeling weightless over a void, followed by the silences of a strange country where he wandered in confusion" (92). B054's

16. The ordinary name for the bear in southern Blackfoot, *Pah'-ksi-kwo-yi*, translates as Real Bear or Sticky Mouth (Marty 9). Another Indigenous euphemism deployed to avoid using its sacred appellation is Our-Brother-Across-the-River (22). In connection with my argument about eating, it is interesting to note that in some Indigenous cultures that Marty does not specify "When a man killed a bear, he had to be extremely observant of elaborate rituals to propitiate its proud and vengeful spirit. If treated without proper honours, it might counsel the other animal spirits to deny their flesh to such ungrateful hunters for a time" (22). Such a view understands the grizzly bear to be the controller of eating.

craving for human food results in hostile encounters with us, which lead to his being transported far from his home range. However, his traumatic memories of those events[17] result not in his becoming "ecologically correct" (34) again by returning to a diet of carrion, roots, berries, and forbs, but in his learning that the two-legged "naked bears" (92) have a propensity to protect their food hoards and even their discards through violence, entrapment and exile to a place where he does not know his way nor does he know the local bears in whose territory he suddenly and unexpectedly finds himself, where he suffers a loss of local knowledge and feelings of displacement, estrangement and fear, where, in other words, he suffers a lack of sense of place. Such knowledge is not transitory; it resurfaces in association with the smells of humans and our food and triggers powerful affects: "There was a dread in his brain, dread and simmering fury. He moaned in rage" (92).

In their article "The Smell of Nature: Olfaction, Knowledge and the Environment," Daniel Press and Steven C. Minta argue that "olfaction offers unique entry into the non-human world" (173). However, regrettably, "Western culture constrains such an opportunity because of the dominance of the visual mode of perception and its attendant reliance on language for cognition." In their brief survey of the privileging of sight over other senses, Press and Minta suggest that "Unlike the purely subjective senses of smell and taste, those of sight, touch and hearing lend 'an empirical thrust' to the perceptions of external objects. In the act of seeing, one remains oneself: in the act of smelling, one dissolves" (174). This dissolution or partial dissolution of self may describe what the bears experience as their physiological need to gorge ramps up over the summer. (It may also account for some of the moans they emit in the text). Moreover, because bears have extremely powerful senses of smell, their imprinting on locations where they find a banquet must be extraordinary. Imagine for a moment the agonies you would suffer if your longing to dine at your favourite restaurant or to eat a certain meal were compounded by a factor of, say, three hundred times (which would still only make you a hound dog) and then seven times more (bear). When one thinks of a bear's sense of smell, one can only conclude that they must not only be maestros of the shintangle with an astonishing knowledge of place but also absolute zen masters of restraint and control for not just walking into our grocery stores to feed or into restaurants and devouring the buffet special. With the failure of the wild berry crop in 1980 due to the weather conditions created by the eruption of Mount St. Helens, the bear experiences what we would call uneasiness or anxiety in a human: "This

17. B054 seems to have suffered capture myopathy, the terror of being flown over a great abyss in a helicopter sling, and possibly an unfriendly reception in other bears' territory.

lack of fruit makes him uneasy; he has experienced this loss before and he recalls it as a relentless hunger followed by a long, restless sleep" (75).

While we contemporary resource-exploiting, pell-mell humans with our exponentially weaker sense of smell usually think of odours as extremely transitory, Press and Minta state that in fact "Scent glands allow long-lasting messages that operate in the sender's absence" (177). Scents not only provide signs that may be read and comprehended, but they may be read, like handwriting or print, in the sender's absence. Although far more ephemeral than writing of course, scent persists in the environment long enough to be read by those who need to be in the know and far longer than speech utterances. Furthermore, also like writing, smell is capable of transmitting character studies and narrative elements: details such as age, size, sex, ability and willingness to defend one's territory, dominance or submission, social status, and other details are discernible from scent (178).

6. Conclusion

To the extent that smells disarm, transgress boundaries, and threaten subjects with dissolution (even with being eaten by and becoming one's predator),[18] exploring bears' 'scents of place' furthers our understanding of the specificity of their lives, opens wider the field of our potential relations with them, and teaches us what a highly developed sense of place can be. Smells—both noxious or unpleasant ones, as well as comely or intoxicating ones—can appall, humble, delight, and enlighten us and may even make us realize eventually that it is not the lingering and fraught questions of language and mind that separate us from other animals. The humanist obsession with language and mind as dividing lines between us and all other animal species overshadows knowledge about the senses, especially but not only olfaction and gustation and the insights they provide. As Christopher J. Preston writes, a non-anthropocentric epistemology "refuses to let knowledge float free of its connections to

18. Of course, if one of the effects of being inundated by smells is the dissolution of the self, then the fear of being eaten, incorporated by and into the other animal, as philosopher James Hatley writes in his article on "The Uncanny Goodness of Being Edible to Bears," exponentially amplifies such fears: "The stalking bear's gaze reminds me that my flesh is not only my own but also a mode of becoming bear" (21). Hatley describes the moment of exchanging gazes with a bear: "In that look the claim of the animal to one's flesh makes relative one's own claim to oneself, or at least to one's body.… This gaze submits me to the flesh of the other such that my very body is revealed as the capacity to be the body of a bear, as well as that of a human" (21).

our embodied and embedded nature in the physical world" (xi). Smells, of course, can do no other than ground us in our bodies and our surroundings, the places from which they emanate. Learning about scent with bears as our teachers, as Sid Marty's *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek* allows us to do, can help us rethink place and develop a fuller relationship with places and rethink who we are as sensing animals. Truly becoming native to a place means coming to know the geography, ecology, habitat, range, and niche we share with more-than-human animals, coming to know ourselves as fellow creatures also in need of clean air and water, food, climate stability, and relative safety, and coming to a sense of belonging to the land rather than the ravenous, consumption-driven "gods" (19) we have become. To dwell in flourishing, life-sustaining, lively, animate landscapes, we must respect and learn from the animate lives and systems still present wherever we live during this, the Sixth Mass Extinction. One solution to the awfulness of everything that threatens almost all of earth's beings and becomings at this historical and ecological moment is to practice the art of attention, sometimes under the guidance of other forms of life. To pay attention with all of one's senses is to attend, to be present, to be on location. It is to understand that everything is awe-full.

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"Significant Otherness" versus Othering in Marian Engel's *Bear*

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ABSTRACT
This article explores Marian Engel's portrayal of what Animal Studies scholar Donna J. Haraway terms "significant otherness" (the simultaneous interconnection and mysterious difference between animal and human life/connections) and othering as a form of dismissal and a perpetuation of colonial hierarchies of gendered and racial power. I explore the overlaps of Engel's othering of Indigenous characters in the novel and the racism present in speciesism, exposing why the character of the bear is more knowable to the protagonist than Lucy Leroy (Cree). I offer a decolonial reading of this seminal Canadian text, drawing on Engel's desire to disrupt literary utilization of animals as images of nationalism and emblems of patriotic virtue, while simultaneously exposing the prevalence of entrenched gendered and racial hierarchical perceptions of Indigenous women and relationships to nature. In offering this reading, I hope to suggest that decolonial readings offer us the tools to integrate the ideals expressed in Haraway's "significant otherness" reading of companion-animal relationships with decoloniality and the deconstruction of hierarchies of power as pioneered by Indigenous authors, artists, and activists. This generates hope.

Keywords
Othering; Significant Otherness; Marian Engel; *Bear*

> She was trying to decide to regard the black flies as a good symptom of the liveliness of the North, a sign that nature will never capitulate, that man is red in the tooth and claw but there is something that cannot be controlled by him.
>
> –Marian Engel, *Bear*

Janice Fiamengo writes that animals are so fundamental to Canadian literature that Canadian writing "is founded on the bodies of animals—alive or dead; anthropomorphized or 'realistic;' indigenous or exotic; sentimental, tragic, magical, and mythical" (5-6). In Marian Engel's *Bear* (1976), human and beyond-human otherness intersects and clashes in ways that raise important questions about the Anthropocene and settler colonial incursion in the Canadian wilderness. *Bear* follows Lou, an archivist from Toronto, as she undertakes the task of travelling to a small island in northern Ontario to catalogue the library of Colonel Cary, a colonialist who built a house in the wilderness. Upon her arrival she learns that the role will involve taking care of a bear. As Lou catalogues the library, she discovers that the Carys had always owned bears at the property, and she learns how to connect with the bear through the advice of Lucy, a Cree Elder. Lou begins to project meaning onto her relationship with the bear, finding that she can "paint any face on him" (80) that she wishes and uses him as a vehicle for indigenisation (Aguila-Way 8), while she is also repeatedly confronted with the fact that the bear is a bear. When she consummates the relationship sexually, the bear announces his presence in the novel (Barrett 140) by striking her across the back with his paw. The wound serves as a spell-breaker that prevents Lou from instrumentalising and anthropomorphising the bear further, but it doesn't resolve Lou's subalternisation of Indigenous characters in the novel and much is left unresolved and unsettlingly ambiguous at the novel's conclusion.

1. Situating a Decolonial Reading of *Bear*

Published in 1976, *Bear* is part of a context of literature that challenged the use of animals as symbols of national belonging, and that attempted to justify settler-colonialism while demarcating Canada from the U.S. during the 1970s. The encroach of U.S. cultural imperialism was especially feared by Canadians post-Vietnam War, and growing anti-Americanism and the 1967 Centennial celebrations reaffirmed the urgent need to clearly define the Canadian national character (Mackey 46; Aguila-Way 6). As Fiamengo writes, critical attention to literary animals was piecemeal and did not result in any broader literary

criticism on the intersection of nationalism, postcolonialism, and ecocriticism through the portrayal of animals, and one-off pieces often focused on historical approaches to animal writing (9-10). However, literary portrayals of animals as patriotic images of Canadian national identity jarred with writers like Marian Engel and Margaret Atwood, the latter penning *Survival* (1972) as a politically motivated response to the milestone *Literary History of Canada* (1965) and Northrop Frye's reprinted collection *The Bush Garden* (1971) in which he discusses the symbolic import of animals in Canadian literature (Fiamengo 5-7). Atwood's approach revealed an alternative depiction of the Canadian psyche, one that distinguishes Canadian writing from triumphant American hunting tales (Fiamengo 7-8). Canadian animal narratives have also explored the national fear of "victimization by American power" which Fiamengo argues "is not because they empathize with animals themselves but because, as a colonial people who feel politically and culturally vulnerable, they recognize their own situation in the plight of suffering and endangered creatures" (7-8). Alternatively, Engel and Atwood attempt to expose these tensions by depicting animals free from symbolic and anthropomorphic, human-centred knowing, by accepting their otherness. Gwendolyn Guth argues that Engel's novel expands upon Atwood's work and builds on Tim Lilburn's and Dom McKay's "practical anthropomorphism" as a form of "enacting [anthropomorphism and translating wilderness] thoughtfully" (43). Here, the curious national fear of victimisation, a response to enacting the gendered and exploitative violence of settler colonialism, is a tension present in Canadian writing that suggests a national imaginary more able to relate to animals than to apply logics of empathy to Indigenous peoples. In this article I explore how Engel, like her contemporaries, attempted to divorce herself from human-centred nationalistic portrayals of animals, while her work more ambiguously grapples with indigeneity and the subalternisation of Indigenous peoples.

While discourses surrounding settler colonialism, indigenisation and animal studies reflect more modern shifts in Canadian literary scholarship and Engel wrote *Bear* within the context of the 1970s, these discourses do offer significant new frameworks with which to further contemplate and examine Engel's canonical text. *Bear* was published before third wave feminism and greater mainstream intersectionality, and well before more mainstream conceptions of settler-Indigenous allyship forged by Indigenous Women Water Protectors' #IdleNoMore grassroots activism against the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock in North Dakota in 2016 (Roberts 65-66). The 1970s saw Indigenous grassroots activism garner more mainstream attention with the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the U.S. and the Indian Rights for Indian Women (IRIW) protesting gender discrimination in the Indian Act in Canada from 1967. The White Paper of 1969 proposed that the Indian Act be abolished and removed

"the federal government's moral and material responsibility for Indigenous peoples… and undermined Indigenous people's special legislated status" under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's government, demonstrating poor settler understandings of the legacies of racism and settler colonialism, and enabled continued socio-economic oppression and political marginalisation of Indigenous peoples under the guise of "equality" (Nickel 224-225).

Bear has often been analysed within the context of the second wave feminism movement and Engel's feminism is an important component of her often women-centred narratives. As Joan Sangster notes, local and historical specificity demonstrate significant variations in the claim that second wave feminism in Canada was entirely "essentialist and universalist," with solidarity demonstrated most clearly between Black, Indigenous, and other minority activist groups (399). However, definite gaps in many second wave feminists' understandings of oppression have been identified, such as unpredictable or racist language, flawed or incomplete understandings of the legacies of slavery and colonialism, and a focus on class and not race (399). Indeed, media coverage of Indigenous women's struggles "was sometimes superficial and often assumed parallel women's movements, but did not theorize the connections between race, gender, and class" that developed more broadly in the 1980s and 90s (399). Biographies of women in journals and papers sought to emphasise the "unordinary ordinary" woman in Canadian society and in Northern Canadian papers, profiles on "Pioneer Women" featured regularly in ways that failed to acknowledge white female settlers' complicity in settler colonialism and Indigenous dispossession, while "*other* articles covered Native women's grievances, land issues, and organizations like Indian Rights for Indian Women: the two themes were often compartmentalized" (Sangster 393-394). In this way, while Engel's novel is important as a feminist work, her interactions with colonialism and her refutations of nationalism and its use of anthropomorphic symbols of nationhood do intersect with this feminism in ways that cannot be neatly compartmentalised, and complicate and problematise her portrayal of Lucy Leroy in the novel.

That the 1970s saw an increased literary focus on feminism, postcolonialism, and nationalism is apparent in *Bear* as a form of canonical revision which attempts to legitimise "forms of literary expression that lie beyond the more familiar genre categories such as the novel or poetry" and "the importance of work by numerous women writers who chose alternative literary practices or forms of expression" as a result of second wave feminism and postmodernism (Verduyn 22). Christl Verduyn cites the language of feminist writer Adrienne Rich when she argues that Engel attempted to create the impression of "seeing again with fresh eyes" in her literature (4-5). However, I would argue that while Lou's experience as a woman is centred alongside Engel's deconstruction of

Lou's relationship with the natural world, *Bear* raises important questions about the extent to which Lou's freshly acquired vision at the end of the novel is one that positively encompasses intersectionality. In earlier feminist scholarship, the bear's identity as a bear seems outweighed by the bear's symbolic identity of "what they [the reader] want it to be," to use Engel's own description of the multitude of interpretations the text's ambiguity has evoked (Klein). As Paul Barrett notes, Patricia Monk's Jungian interpretation of Engel's novel determines that the bear is "a feminine divinity in theriomorphic form—the bear-goddess Artio" (qtd. in Monk 35) and is therefore "specifically a mother image" (Monk 37; Barrett 125). In this way, earlier feminist readings of the novel haven't always acknowledged or fully contested the novel's examination of postcolonialism and its intersections with Lou's treatment of indigeneity and the natural world.

Engel's use of narrative irony is also widely debated in discourse about the novel, with most scholars acknowledging its effectiveness in exposing and problematising the unsettling power binaries often reinforced through anthropomorphising animals in literature. Barrett argues that Engel deliberately uses "a narrative mode in which speaking subjects are ambiguous to the extent that Lou's perspective, the narrator's perspective, and possibly even Bear's perspective can never be wholly isolated… Literality is, therefore, always evasive: simultaneously desirable and impossible" (143). While Engel's novel utilises narrative irony as its primary aesthetic mode, Tania Aguila-Way underlines the "necessity of moving beyond this stance of ironic awareness to construct an aesthetic that mobilizes the affective power of literature" (24) and that enables us to articulate the imaginary interior landscape of a bear's mind, but which might also highlight the inequities in representation of, to use Carol Adams' term, other absent referents "whose fate[s] [are] transmuted into a metaphor for someone else's existence or fate" (Aguila-Way 24; Barrett 123; Adams 53). Even if Lucy Leroy is a deliberately ironic depiction of Lou's own prejudices, one that is intentionally complicated by Lou's inability to apply the same logics of significant otherness and respect to both Lucy and the Bear, Lucy still exists on the periphery of the novel and remains subalternised and vanishing (Aguila-Way 27). If Engel is ironising this conclusion, Lucy's portrayal in the novel doesn't revise nor fully problematise depictions of the "vanishing" indigene that are so pervasive in U.S. and Canadian literature.

Awarded the Governor General's Award for best English-language Canadian fiction in 1976, *Bear* has been critically analysed as a pastoral, a mythic, and a gothic narrative, as pornography, as a critique of colonialism, and more and generated much public controversy because of its explicit content (Verduyn 118). Engel's research for the novel consisted of educating herself on the history of Ontario pioneers (119), and is especially evident when her protagonist, Lou, finds notes of paper, recorded by one of the Colonel Carys, that document collected

pieces of anthropological wisdom regarding bears, archived in between the pages of the books in the library at Pennarth. The name Pennarth itself means "bear's head" or "head of the bear" in Welsh, with the architectural design of the house based on that of Orson Squire Fowler, a phrenologist and vegetarian who transmuted domestic space into the shape of the brain. Lou scoffs at the house and views the structure as "colonial pretentious" and suggests that Fowler was "the sort of American we were all warned about" (Engel, *Bear* 36), emulating national attitudes of the time.

2. Indigenous and Settler Narrative Interaction

Engel also spoke to Haida sculptor Bill Reid when she was struggling with *Bear*'s narrative. Reid told her about the Traditional Haida Story of *The Bear Mother*, also known as *The Bear Princess*, which Engel cites as an influence in a CBC interview in 1978 but never formally references or acknowledges this in the novel. The story exists in many different forms and is shared by Haida, Gitxsan, Coast Tsimshian, and Nisga'a nations based in the Pacific Northwest. Essentially, a woman who disrespects bears is kidnapped and forced to marry the son of a grizzly bear chief who impregnates her with twin bear cubs who possess both human and bear features (The Bill Reid Centre). Engel used French-Canadian folklorist and ethnographer Marius Barbeau's translation of the Haida story (Ore) and writes in the novel that Lou wishes "to offer him [the bear] her two breasts and womb, almost believing that he could impregnate her with the twin heroes that would save her tribe" (Engel, *Bear* 143), a direct mention of the Haida narrative. Here, Engel's protagonist fully envisions herself as an Indigenous member of a nation; specifically, she envisions herself in the Haida story and yet the novel is set in Ontario. As Aguila-Way explains, Engel's usage of this Traditional Haida Story has been adapted and appropriated into *Bear* in such a way that ambiguously "perpetuat[es] a story that appropriates Indigenous lore or lampoons it" (qtd. in Ore), emblematised by the novel's conclusion when Lou returns to the city feeling innocent and free from guilt, which Engel appears to problematise through narrative irony (Ore). While the text itself appears ambiguous in the questions raised and absence of answers offered given Engel's death in 1985, the extent to which narrative irony sufficiently or believably explains some of the novel's content still permeates through the novel and its reception. How aware and in control is Engel of her treatment of Indigenous peoples and how much authorial distance is placed between her own beliefs and Lou?

When Reid advised Engel to read Barbeau's *Haida Myths* (1953) he told her, "You've probably left Mouse Woman out" (Engel, "A Conversation with," 28).

The Haida character of Mouse Woman (*kuugan jaad*) is known for her ability to shape shift between animal and human form, often intervening in human affairs in order to restore respect for the natural world, animals, and cultural traditions (Evans 53-54). Haida artist Robert Davidson describes Mouse Woman as "helping the storyline along and sometimes lending a hand to the human characters" (n.p.). Engel read *The Bear Princess* and returned to her manuscript to write "an extra half page" and describes finding that she "had Mouse Woman in there. I didn't have her doing anything. And that's the section that most people object to very much. A little old woman comes out and says, shoot the bear. And that's all the content that was needed to make the whole thing fall together… it's just a question of the instincts being lined up the right way, I guess" ("A Conversation" 27-28; Verduyn 129). Engel's reference to "a collective unconscious" ("A Conversation" 27-28; Verduyn 130) when she realises Lucy Leroy can be read as Mouse Woman highlights the tensions present in white retellings of Traditional Indigenous Stories. While Engel conceptualised Lucy before knowledge of Mouse Woman, her utilisation of *The Bear Princess* and Mouse Woman in the final novel demonstrate the unsettling legacies of implying a "collective conscious" between settler narratives and Traditional Indigenous Stories, especially where settler indebtedness to Indigenous writers and artists isn't formally acknowledged or referenced. Does our perception of Lucy Leroy change when we think of her as Engel's recreation of the Haida character Mouse Woman? And in light of this information, how far can our perception of a white retelling of a Traditional Haida Story set in the wilderness of Northern Ontario, a retelling in which Traditional Haida Knowledge is never formally referenced, be altered by this understanding of Lucy Leroy (Cree)?

Indeed, Reid similarly advised and illustrated Christie Harris' novel *Raven's Cry* (1966) and then in the late 1970s he illustrated several adaptations of Haida stories of Mouse Woman, often combined with European fairy tales and folklore, as well as Tsimshian Traditional Stories (Evans 53). As Gwyneth Evans notes, at the time some felt that "the adaptation of these stories by white people, to conform to white tastes in narrative, [was] a desecration" (53), unlike Reid, who argues that Indigenous storytelling and settlers have become interdependent on one another and that collaboration "increases general knowledge of the wealth of Native culture" (Evans 53). Certainly, there have been shifts in contemporary attitudes regarding the ethics of citation, appropriation, and the appropriateness of Indigenous stories being utilised or narrated by settler authors, although the work of pervasive decolonisation is still much needed. However, I argue that it is valuable to analyse canonical texts through the lens of settler colonialism and speciesism so that we can more clearly comprehend the complexities and ethics of literature through the interplay of indigeneity, the natural world, and colonialism within the context of a broader Canadian literary canon. This does not

negate the significance of Engel's novel as a feminist text that powerfully rejects human-centric depictions of animals in Canadian literature. Rather, I argue that Engel's *Bear* continues to raise pertinent questions about settler and Indigenous narrative interactions, as well as the ways in which indigeneity and connectivity with the natural world implicitly correspond with settler colonialism in ways that do limit Engel's deconstruction of male and human-centric power hierarchies.

3. Othering versus "Significant Otherness"

I will use Donna Haraway's definition of "significant otherness," among other terms, in order to examine the tension between celebration or acceptance of otherness versus the dynamics of othering present in *Bear*. Haraway defines her term as the subtle and overt intersections of human and beyond-human life, and the historical and environmental ways that that our lives overlap, demonstrating that nature and culture are interconnected and not in the isolated spheres that settler colonialism and capitalism have marked out: "natucultures" (100-101). Otherness is acknowledged as not being completely understood, and from this acceptance grows a more symbiotic kinship. Connectivity can be as microscopic as genetics, or as broad as sharing the same environment. By contrast, othering is to dismiss and minimise the importance of intersection and interconnection, rendering the human or beyond-human an unknowable other, often stemming from assumptions based on racism, class formations, gender or sexual identity, and speciesism, which I will continue to elaborate can operate as a form of racism. Othering draws upon human-supremacist models of "racial and ethnic inferiorisation… assimilating racially subordinated groups to women, or to animals and children" in overlapping layers of oppression (Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* 106). Another term that guides my discussion of otherness is ecofeminist Val Plumwood's concept of "hyper-separation" which is defined as "the structure of dominance that drives western binaries… [and] accords value to one side of the binary, and relegates the other side to a position of oppositional subordination" (Rose 94). Here, there is a clear distinction between Haraway's term which celebrates otherness, and otherness in this sense implies connectivity, as opposed to the othering utilised through hyper-separation, which implies difference that cannot be bridged.

Engel's treatment of the bear in the novel finally embraces the bear's "significant otherness" at the end of the novel when Lou understands that the images and desires she has projected onto him have failed to respect this difference. By co-opting the bear into her vision of indigenisation to escape victimisation, "the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous" facilitated through the recognition of "an Other having greater roots in that place" (Goldie 13-14), Lou has

actively perpetuated racism and speciesism by reinforcing the exploitative power hierarchies of settler colonialism in order to realise her identity. Lou's realisation of the bear's "significant otherness," however, has no bearing on her treatment of Lucy Leroy, who remains othered in such a way that dismisses their shared humanity, and the many interconnections, genetic, environmental, or otherwise, that link them as humans. Instead, Lou sustains "the forcible imposition of the dominator and his discursive system within the dominated space… and *appropriation*… the consumption enforced by the dominator of what belongs to the dominated" (Goldie 15; emphasis in original). Lucy is racially othered by Engel's protagonist who seeks to become indigenised through the bear as a form of validation. While this cognitive dissonance is more obvious to a contemporary reader, Lou's treatment of Lucy Leroy in the novel has been unsatisfactorily explained away as part of the deliberate ambiguity of narrative irony as an aesthetic mode.

I argue that Lucy Leroy's existence as a white image of the indigene in Engel's novel can be interpreted as a literary form of racial othering, even if Engel's narrative irony is intended to ambiguously challenge such depictions. Terry Goldie builds on Abdul R. Jan-Mohammed's "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" (1985) by arguing that in contemporary literature "the opposition is frequently between the 'putative superiority' of the indigene and the 'supposed inferiority' of the white" but "the positive and negative sides of the image are but swings of one and the same pendulum," a model that fundamentally reduces the indigene to a set of prescribed symbols, "a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker" (10). Engel seeks to disrupt the anthropocentric and human-centred models that utilise and construct white images of beyond-human animals like the bear at the beginning of the novel. The extent to which narrative irony explains why Engel also continues in the style of her literary forebears to convey a white image of the indigene so as to facilitate settler indigenisation narratives of the white settler gaining rootedness in the natural world remains ambiguous and unanswered. I argue the possibility that Engel's usage of narrative irony does not fully explain why Engel offers no transformation at the end of the novel that fully connects the commonalities between racism and speciesism, and that Lou's eventual acknowledgement of the "significant otherness" of the bear as a beyond-human animal only starkens the absence of acknowledged interconnections with human Lucy Leroy. If this is intended to be interpreted in ironic terms, it raises questions about how effective white settler narratives can be at critiquing colonialism without disambiguating the purpose of such replications of harmful literary tropes. This depiction of an Indigenous woman is also significant when placed within the context of Engel's usage of a Traditional Haida Story without any formal citation or credit given and removed from its place-based logics of conception. Therefore, the plausibility that Lucy is intentionally peripheral and

subalternised given Engel's discovery of the Haida Mouse Woman after Lucy's character had already been conceptualised is limited.

4. Instrumentalisation, Indigenisation and the "Vanishing Indigene" in *Bear*

Huggan and Tiffin argue that by interrogating "the category of the human itself and… the ways in which the construction of ourselves *against* nature—with the hierarchisation of life forms that construction implies—has been and remains complicit in colonialist and racist exploitation from the time of imperial conquest to the present day" (6). Indigenous peoples have been viewed as "part of nature—and thus treated instrumentally as animals" (6), as a part of environmental imperialism and colonialism. Engel depicts Lucy Leroy as part of a vanishing people whose knowledge of nature (the bear) is extracted by Lou and is presented in crude terms through their discussion about how Lou should defecate near the bear so it learns her scent. Lou assigns to Lucy this colonial construction of Indigenous peoples as more like animals than western human colonisers, recalling the "ecological Indian." The notion of Indigenous peoples as closer to the natural world is the resultant construction of settler colonialism and demarcating a Canadian national identity free from U.S. cultural imperialism, and as a way of creating a dichotomy between Westerners as "civilised" and Indigenous peoples as "primitive" (Mackey 45). Unlike the bear who announces his presence in the narrative by refusing Lou's advances, Lucy is not afforded the same opportunity to contest her own instrumentalisation. Therefore, Engel's depiction of Lucy can be interpreted as a white image of indigeneity, one that perpetuates the tropes and hierarchies of settler colonialism, and not one that can authentically, accurately, and ethically represent the diversity and uniqueness of Indigenous people's relationships with nature.

Aguila-Way argues that *Bear* attempts to uncover "the instrumentalizing and indigenizing logics that often lie beneath the nation's environmental ethos" while also producing more ethical portrayals of animals in keeping with Haraway and Cary Wolfe's posthumanist theories that "construct common worlds" between humans and animals "while maintaining their irreducible differences" (6). However, such instrumentalising and indigenising logics are still deployed in ways that serve to bolster settler-colonialism through Engel's portrayal of Indigenous characters in her novel. While Engel's protagonist seems to learn by the end of the novel that she has harmfully fetishised and anthropomorphised the bear to the extreme of bestiality, Engel does not resolve Lou's attempts to indigenise herself to the landscape. Questions can still be raised over whether Lou's conclusive return to Toronto resolves Engel's prejudiced depictions of Indigenous peoples in the novel who only appear at the periphery of the

narrative and appear to fit tropes assigned to U.S. literature of the vanished or ghostly Indian (Bergland), nor is Lou's hyper-fascination with indigeneity and colonialism resolved. Indigeneity in the novel is depicted as akin to animalism, with Lucy Leroy's eyes described as "alive as oysters" (Engel, *Bear* 51). Such depictions simplify the many diverse epistemologies and material connections that Indigenous peoples have with animals, and that assigns these knowledge sets to the past. Material connections with animals are portrayed as vehicles of indigenisation (Aguila-Way 27) in such a way that is harmful to both animals and Indigenous peoples. Even if Lucy's connection with the natural world is intended as a depiction of the Haida Mouse Woman who shape-shifts between human and animal form and reminds Lou of how she must respect the natural world, Lucy is condemned to vanish at the end of the novel having served the narrative purpose of educating the white settler, raising questions about the ambiguities of how far narrative irony extends in this portrayal.

The depiction of Indigenous peoples as vanishing is intrinsically related to Eurocentric colonisation, as Val Plumwood notes, with human and beyond-humans in nature invoking anthropocentrism to justify and portray incursions on ideal "unused, underused or empty" landscapes where Indigenous cultures are judged to be "primitive" and more akin to animals (Plumwood, "Decolonizing Relationships" 53). Huggan and Tiffin build on Cary Wolfe and Jacques Derrida's work to delineate how this clearly demonstrates the intersection of racism and speciesism which "relies on the tacit acceptance that full transcendence to the human requires the sacrifice of the animal and animalistic" (Wolfe 39, Huggan and Tiffin 5), therefore marking both animals and humans as "primitive" and unable to assimilate into this model. The perpetuation of racism through ecological imperialism is explored by Engel as she attempts to disentangle these notions through Lou's relationship with the bear, but through the novel's gaze, Lucy Leroy remains subalternised and unknowable. Therefore Engel does not fully dismantle these notions in her novel, and instead perpetuates their assignation to human-others.

Lou compares Lucy to a woman she saw as a child "who used to peddle bittersweet on the street… a toothless old Indian crone in many cardigans and running shoes, ten cents a bunch" that her mother condemned derogatively as "a waste of money, a form of begging" (Engel, *Bear* 51). Lou attempts to assign her mother's prejudice to generational difference and to suggest that her own attitudes may be more progressive when Lou notes that she bought a bunch of bittersweet berries. However, Lou's internalised colonial prejudices pervade the novel and are only partially transformed by her encounters with the bear. Lucy Leroy is repetitively described as old and withering, as practically vanishing before Lou's eyes, in language that recalls Renée L. Bergland's theory that Indigenous peoples as ghostly and vanishing "function both as representations of national guilt and as triumphant agents of Americanization," reinforcers of national identity but also reminders

of the origins of this national identity (4). I argue that though Canadian writers attempted to divorce themselves from U.S. cultural imperialism, their shared enactment of settler colonialism binds them to the necessity of demarcating a national identity that is patriotic and assimilative but is necessarily haunted. In this way, Lou's reference to another Indigenous woman who was similarly toothless and old and described as a beggar further echoes the colonial mindset of assimilation and suggests Lou's lack of exposure to Indigenous peoples and different cultures. Lucy Leroy and the woman selling bittersweet berries are portrayed as existing at the periphery of society and as part of a disappearing people, but their knowledge of animals and nature remains useful to Lou. Before Lucy physically enters the novel, her agedness and decrepit appearance, as well as her Indigeneity, are overstated: "She's as old as the hills and she's got no teeth," Homer tells Lou (Engel, *Bear* 17). He later says, "Lucy says he's a good bear and you know some people don't like Indians and they can't hold their liquor, but around here we respect Lucy" (25). As Aguila-Way argues, while the bear resists his instrumentalisation, Engel "consign[s] indigenous peoples to an economy of representation in which they figure only as empty signifiers for stereotypical notions of the 'vanishing' indigene" (23) and are denied agency as white symbols of white settler attitudes.

Depictions in settler literature of the "vanishing indigene" also directly relate to the colonial concept of the untouched wilderness uncontaminated by humans as an example of purity (Plumwood, "Decolonizing Relationships" 57). Human-others become backgrounded, homogenised, and hyper-separated, and their "prior ownership of the land and… dispossession and murder is never spoken or admitted. Their trace in the land is denied, and they are represented as *inessential* because their land and their labour embodied in it are taken over as 'nature' or as 'wilderness'" (Plumwood, "Decolonizing Relationships" 57). Where Lucy, her nephew, and her community live is also mysterious. When Lucy introduces herself to Lou she says that she lives on Neebish. Lou walks to the other side of the island where Lucy's cabin is supposed to be but "found no sign of another habitation" (Engel, *Bear* 101), perpetuating the indigene as ghostly, vanishing, and mysterious. There is also ambiguity surrounding whether the mysteriousness of Lucy's cabin is intended to reflect the Haida Mouse Woman's often mystifying appearances in Traditional Haida Stories. Ultimately, however, Lucy and her nephew Joe arrive on the island as mysteriously as they leave, travelling by boat and consigned to a vanishing past.

5. Claiming the Wilderness through Animals

While Lucy can be interpreted as a vanishing image of indigeneity, in Engel's novel it is the bear and the wilderness that are presented as essential to Lou's

transformation, but the history of the land and the evidence of settlement she seeks to record as part of her job as an archivist is non-existent. Plumwood writes:

> Ronald Reagan's famous remark "You've seen one redwood, you've seen them all" invokes a parallel homogenization of nature. An anthropocentric culture rarely sees nature and animals as individual centres of striving or needs… conceived in terms of interchangeable and replaceable units… rather than diverse and always in excess of knowledge and classification. ("Decolonizing Relationships" 56)

This human-supremacist understanding of difference sees beyond-human and human-others as interchangeable components that can be used and exploited to avoid victimisation. As Aguila-Way demonstrates, Engel's novel is an important example of the aesthetic challenges and tensions present between animal studies and postcolonial studies, related fields that can potentially advance embodied understandings of human-animal relationships if a position of decoloniality is adopted (26). Animals have been used in Canadian settler fiction in such a way that has normalised subalternisation and marginalisation of Indigenous peoples despite the intersection of these fields (27). Paul Barrett, Serpil Oppermann, Lawrence Buell, and John Cooley argue that for an ecological conception of textuality that "makes animals and the environment matter in representation rather than somehow beyond representation" (Barrett 126). An understanding of the intersection of depictions of beyond-humans and human-others could lead to better representations that acknowledge "significant difference" instead of further distancing and rejecting these connections and nuances.

Plumwood argues that such hyper-separation, meaning "defining the dominant identity emphatically against, or in opposition to, the subordinated identity, by exclusion of their real or supposed qualities" is a mode of colonialism based on racial exclusion through othering ("Decolonizing Relationships" 54). We can see this hyper-separation most clearly through Engel's portrayal of Lucy Leroy in the novel. Human-centred hyper-separation also defines the natural world as "other" and humans connected to the natural and beyond-human world are viewed as subordinate, especially women as this gendered colonialism has "historically linked [women] to 'nature' as reproductive bodies and through their supposedly greater emotionality, while indigenous people are seen as a primitive, 'earlier stage' of humanity" (Plumwood, "Decolonizing Relationships" 55). Lou fantasises about simultaneously colonising and becoming indigenous to the island with the bear as her male beyond-human partner. Lucy Leroy, as an Indigenous woman, plays no part in this vision beyond the advice she gives Lou about caring for the bear, and instead fades into the margins of Lou's imagined version of her Canadian life. The bear breaks out of this hyper-separation by

rejecting Lou's sexual advances with a swipe of his paw that cuts Lou across her back. This serves as a reminder that the bear is beyond-human and their relationship is therefore imbued with "significant otherness."

6. Settling the Settler: Canadian Instrumentalisation of the Pioneer and the Indigene

Once Lou realises she cannot pursue further sexual relations with the bear, she returns to her position as tourist "ramm[ing] about the channel like any other foolish motorised person," "a woman who stank of bestiality. A woman who understood nothing, who had no use, no function" (Engel, *Bear* 145). She dreams of Tarzan (145), the fictional son of a British lord who becomes stranded in the African jungle as a child and learns to coexist with nature. Soon after, Lou looks at herself in "the female colonel's pier-glass," in a house filled with relics and emblematic itself of colonialism and sees that her "hair and eyes were wild. Her skin was brown and her body was different and her face was not the same face she had seen before. She was frightened of herself" (148). Her physical appearance is transformed, most notably her darkened skin, in keeping with the recurrent trope in settler literature of the settler becoming indigenous to nature through contact with the wilderness. Carol Ann Howells assigns this transformation to "the alien Canadian landscape" where "[t]he brownness of the bear is of a different quality from the whiteness of the whale in *Moby Dick*… his colour makes him a part of the Canadian landscape with its dark forests and curiously dark clear lakes" (107). Howells fails to note that the bear's perceived "otherness" and Lou's darker skin form a problematic nationalistic narrative that through connectivity with nature and animals, the settler can become Indigenous, a narrative motivated by attempts to justify colonial settlement. These connections also directly relate to the relationship between racism and speciesism that has been clearly delineated by postcolonial and animal studies scholars. While Lou romanticises the idea her darker skin might offer her the identity and rootedness she seeks, she is also fearful of being victimised because of it. While catching fish, she fears that "she might get Minamata disease and be arrested for a drunken Indian" (Engel, *Bear* 114). Lou only wishes to become indigenised so far as she can live with her othered and anthropomorphised version of the bear, but not so far that she is perceived with settler colonial prejudices and victimised. Lou's prejudices are reinscribed by her fear of nature and her reiteration of colonial racial hierarchies of power. She temporarily reassigns indigeneity to the derogatory stereotype of the "drunken Indian."

Though Lou envisions her own indigeneity, she also fantasises about subverting the gendered hierarchies of settler colonialism, becoming a

female-colonist and asserting her feminine authority: "She felt victorious over them [the bear and the Carys]; she felt she was their inheritor; a woman rubbing her foot in the thick black pelt of a bear was more than they could have imagined. More, too, than a military victory: splendour" (Engel, *Bear* 63). Of course, there are violent implications in embedding herself in this structure whichever way she attempts to subvert or recreate colonial hierarchies and it is clear that Engel attempts to address the gendered and violent legacies of colonialism here by exposing Lou's flawed and untrustworthy vision of herself as a colonial pioneer. The imperialism and militarisation of her vision only perpetuates a violence that serves to other those lower down the power structure: Indigenous peoples and animals, which appears only partially understood by Lou by the novel's conclusion. In Haraway's examination of human-companion animal relationships, she writes that by touching her dog she also touches many sprawling connections with Indigenous sovereignty rights, settler colonialism, racial justice, ecological survival, and naturecultures where their lives have historically and still intersect (189). Lou touching the bear evokes an interconnected experience of settler colonial violence, which for Lou translates as gendered sexual abuse, as she reflects when Homer makes inappropriate sexual advances towards her that she "won't ever lie back on a desk again," recalling the imbalanced power dynamics in her sexual relationship with the Institute Director in Toronto (Engel, *Bear* 128). By contrast, the imagery of Lou's foot symbolically positioned above the bear's fur evokes violent images of colonisation and the fur industry. Her perpetuation of power hierarchies is symptomatic of settler colonialism and therefore not simply a subversion of gendered power dynamics, because in this image she celebrates having conquered the male Colonel Cary as well as the bear.

The complex tensions between Lou's romanticisation of the coloniser versus the colonised are also clearly drawn in the character of Colonel Jocelyn. Jocelyn appeals to Lou because of her subversion of gendered power dynamics: she was known as "the first woman to wear pants up here" and "[S]he and Lucy got on like a house on fire. You know, people will tell you Lucy's Metis [*sic*], but that was a long time back. I figure she and Joe are nearly full-blooded Indians, and what that means is you never know where they are" (Engel, *Bear* 89). Here, Homer's depiction of Jocelyn as a self-determined woman connected to indigeneity appeals to Lou's desire for sexual agency and power. Homer also demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to be Métis, and to have a mixture of Indigenous and European ancestry. Jocelyn is described as "an imitation man, but a damned good one" (92), having trapped rats and beavers, even "trooping the pelt of an illegal lynx" (92) which he describes as "tough, cold work, you got to be part Indian to put up with it" (90). Colonel Jocelyn is described nostalgically as radiating hardiness as well as

Hollywood glamour, combined with a knowledge of the cricks and inlets of the shore that recalls the trope of the "ecological Indian."

Colonel Jocelyn's racial identity is unknown, but Engel imbues her with qualities that are akin to those traditionally assigned to Indigenous peoples, while also glamourising her physical appearance and social standing within the racially hierarchical structure of settler colonialism. Lou is attracted to Homer's depiction of Colonel Jocelyn because of her own fantasies of acquiring power and identity, and she views Homer's image of Jocelyn as possessing the power of a colonist with the identity and place-based rootedness of an Indigenous person, as a way of successfully transcending the gendered sexual abuse she has experienced in Toronto. These paradigms, however, only reinforce such gendered violence because they are undivorceable from settler colonialism. Lou admires Jocelyn as a subversive female symbol with colonial power who enacts indigeneity as a method of demonstrating national belonging, because this conception of Jocelyn suggests that she is more able to resist gendered violence. However, this conception is flawed because it is based on patriarchal and racial power hierarchies that uphold disproportionate violence against Indigenous women and perpetuate power imbalances. Lou seeks to protect herself from gendered violence through settler colonialism which Engel demonstrates ambiguously as problematic through such ironic narrative interactions with postcolonialism, but which still ultimately compartmentalise white female experiences of colonial gendered hierarchies from those of Indigenous women.

Engel certainly effectively utilises Lou's confliction over her own settler status and her complicity with settler colonialism to challenge nationalistic narratives. When Lou tends to her garden, she ties a piece of cheesecloth around her head and "felt like a colonial civil servant's wife in India, struggling to endure… with a new respect for farmers and pioneers" (*Bear* 81). Lou plays at enacting the national imaginary of Canada's past, romanticising a pastoral vision of coloniality, an image intentionally separated from violence against Black, Brown, and Indigenous peoples. Later, she muses that the island's beauty is "unpretentious" and "[s]he had seen parts of Canada that would cause any explorer to roll back his eyes like Stout Cortez" (99), a reference to John Keats' sonnet in which Keats compares colonist Hernán Cortés's first view of the Pacific during his conquest of the Baja California Peninsula and northwestern Mexico to the reading of George Chapman's translation of Homer. Engel's reference positions Lou as the explorer, the conquistador, the colonist. Engel clearly gestures to Canada's significant literary tradition of romanticised settlement and appropriated indigeneity through Lou's fascination with literature. Lou wonders what made the original Colonel Cary want to move to the island and postulates that he might have been "entranced by the novels of Mrs Aphra Behn… *Atala* and the idea of the noble savage then James Fenimore Cooper?" (*Bear* 105). This is a significant mention

mention when considering that Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) depicts the indigenisation of white characters. A "feminist friend" even writes to her "enquiring why she was not doing research on a female pioneer for International Women's Year" (111). Lou's blatant interest in pioneers and settlement becomes intertwined with her desire to be indigenous to the landscape in order to know her identity better.

While searching for narratives that depict settlement and that relate to her experiences on the island, Lou muses that there must be "something in that enormous library, surely an annotated *Roughing it in the Bush* or a journal" (150). This reference to a canonical Canadian nature text is particularly significant in that Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) features the depiction of Indigenous peoples described through metaphors involving comparisons to animals and the natural world. Somewhat ironically, Lou muses that she "was never a woman who wore circles of animals eating each other around her neck to church. I don't want his guts for my windowpanes or his shoulder blades to cut my grass. I only want to love him" (Engel, *Bear* 151), as she attempts to divorce and disassociate herself from others who might objectify and cause the bear harm. Yet, in her longing for the bear to help her express her own identity, she most overtly expresses her colonial mentality by commanding, not asking, the bear to give her his skin: "Bear, make me comfortable in the world at last. Give me your skin" (132). Imagery of Lou taking the bear's skin and of Lou asking the bear to pull off her head recalls the violence present in many of the international stories that Lou discovers Colonel Cary collected within the pages of his book collection. Cary's notes reference multiple, diverse bear facts and stories from Indigenous communities; for example, he writes that "[T]he Esquimaux believe that the soul of a wounded polar bear tarries three days near the spot where it leaves his body" and that the Sámi believe bears to be "King of the Beasts" (72).

The violence Lou imagines is also symptomatic of her settler colonial guilt, and she believes that by violently removing her head, symbolic of her mindset, and wearing his skin, she will be rid of this guilt, therefore initiating her indigenisation. By contrast, in Inuit traditional storytelling, the removal of and wearing of skins is literally and symbolically representative of the interconnectivity of human and beyond-human relationships, and violence in narratives tends to illustrate how not to be Inuit (Martin). Through Adams' theory of the absent referent, whose original meaning is undermined and used in another hierarchy of meaning (Barrett 123), Barrett argues that while "the bear and the environment matter only insofar as they fit [Lou's] schema of representation," the bear is constructed as a mythic alternative to gendered violence and patriarchy (139), but he cannot be instrumentalised as a vehicle to indigenisation. While Lou searches for meaning through her construction of the bear, her

instrumentalisation of the bear and her colonial fantasies of human-centred wealth and power deeply ironize any truly alternative vision. This vision is certainly disrupted when the bear rejects Lou's attempt to engage in sexual relations and he swipes her across her back, simultaneously rejecting his portrayal as an absent referent and announcing himself as an embodied subject (Barrett 140). There is tension in Engel's suggestion that living at one with the bear in the wilderness is more knowable and desirable to Lou than the Indigenous woman who advises her, because it demonstrates a level of cognitive dissonance that she cannot seek to better understand Lucy and yet she can seek to better understand the bear, when both the bear and Lucy are othered and hyper-separated by settler colonialism.

The bear's violence disrupts Lou's constant fear of victimisation, but the flux and juxtaposition of her desire to become indigenised and her desire to conquer is sustained. Her involvement of the bear in this internal quandary is exemplified by her anthropomorphisation and utilisation of the bear towards these desires. Lou discovers that the bear's "actual range of expression was a mystery" (Engel, *Bear* 80-81). Here, Engel highlights the uncomfortable relationship between anthropocentrism and the inherent unknowability of translating animal lives into human fiction in that the latter has often been used as an excuse for the former. Throughout the novel, Engel refers to the bear as an object or as something other than what the bear truly is, a bear. He is described in metaphors and similes, "as solid as a sofa, domestic, a rug of a bear" (78) and as "like the books, [he] knew generations of secrets" (79). As Barrett writes, the "Bear is always marked by an absence… repeatedly perceived as a quasi-object" (140). The objectification and instrumentalisation of the bear is part of Engel's use of narrative irony to illustrate tension between Lou's treatment of the bear and Lou's self-described conflict with the portrayal of animals in western literature.

Like Lucy Leroy, the bear is very much depicted as indigenous to the land, despite the reality that he was brought to the island by the Carys: "There had always, it seemed, been a bear" (Engel, *Bear* 23). The bear is "kind of old, nobody remembers how old," according to Homer, not unlike Lou's description of Lucy as "eternal," and initially, although Lou considers herself ambivalent towards animals "the idea of the bear struck her as joyfully Elizabethan and exotic" (27). Within the context of the island and the grand colonial structure of Pennarth, the bear's depicted indigeneity is perplexing given he is kept chained by humans and joins his settler adopters from Europe. That he appeals to Lou because of the colonial associations she makes between the bear and exoticism and the archaic is highly revealing of her mindset: one of entrenched colonial hierarchies that perpetuate racism and speciesism. When Lou plays music to the bear in the living room at Pennarth, Engel writes that she put on a "more primitive record" (134), further positioning Lou as part of a human-centred power hierarchy

with racial implications, reaffirming the convergence of speciesism and racism by asserting a civilised versus primitive dichotomy.

Lou's identification with the bear "often borders on a dynamic of indigenization that echoes troubling episodes of Canada's settler-invader history" (Aguila-Way 6). James Polk argues in *Wilderness Writers* (1972) that Canadians sympathetically portray animals because "the wilderness to us is more than just an empty place out there; it is a part of every Canadian's idea of himself and his country" and therefore, animals are part of a national and cultural sense of self (Fiamengo 8; Polk 13-14). However, Polk's portrayal of the Canadian wilderness as "just an empty place" perpetuates colonial notions of a landscape where Indigenous peoples are made absent, and where the beyond-human animals, although othered, are more readily sympathised with than the Indigenous human. In this way, Polk, Atwood, and Engel are unable to contest the tensions present in this national imaginary or problematise the absence and othering of Indigenous peoples from their originary landscape. The perpetuation of racism through ecological imperialism is explored by Engel as she attempts to disentangle these notions through her relationship with the bear, but this disentanglement does not extend to human-others.

7. Conclusion

The novel ends as Lou leaves the island and the bear is entrusted to the dying Lucy Leroy and her nephew for the winter, and Lou watches "the bear recede down the channel, a fat dignified old woman… He did not look back. She did not expect him to" (Engel, *Bear* 164). Engel disrupts this anthropomorphism by demonstrating that Lou has learned to stop humanising the bear and his behaviour, and instead treats him as a bear. Lou drives through northern Ontario with the windows open "until the smell of the land stopped being the smell of water and trees became cities and gas fumes" and "overhead the Great Bear and his thirty-seven-thousand virgins kept her company" (167). Much has been made of Engel's choice to close the novel with Lou's voluntary return to urban Toronto, despite her transformative experiences. She decides on a new job and therefore rejects the uncomfortable power dynamics of the sexual relationship instigated by her boss. Still, she chooses to return to an environment decidedly devoid of human-animal-nature encounters and instead travels back to the urban-scape that is emblematic of capitalism and of engrained gendered and racial power hierarchies. Does Lou leave the wilderness because of her guilt over performing indigeneity and mistreating the bear? This is unclear. Lou's care-free departure and her treatment of Indigenous peoples in the novel certainly doesn't suggest this. Engel's use of narrative irony is ambiguous and

Guth argues instead that Lou's transformation is one of "'geopsychic' comprehension of impossible connection" rather than "a newly achieved version of humanity" (43), akin to Haraway and Scottish sculptor Andrew Goldsworthy's conception of "the history of the land as living" (Haraway 114).

Lou's newfound "geopsychic comprehension" recalls her earlier anxiety in the novel that she and Colonel Cary were "surely one of the great irrelevancies of Canadian history… Neither of them was connected to anything" (Engel, *Bear* 95), a feeling that she likens to a tradition-bound French novelist unable to "build an abstract structure" (96). In Lou's yearning to belong and to be authentically connected to the natural world, she perpetuates the hierarchical racism and speciesism of settler colonialism, a system through which she has already personally endured gendered sexual violence and discrimination as a woman. Engel's portrayal of Lou's relationship with the bear is as revealing of the "unapproachable otherness" or "significant otherness" of beyond-human and human connections (Guth 43) as it is of the othering of other, namely, Indigenous humans. Haraway writes that "[R]elationship is multiform, at stake, unfinished, consequential" (122). Lou's relationships, beyond-human and human, are intrinsically evident of a sprawling series of complex interconnections that reveal the "significant otherness" that imbues all life forms. The appropriation of Indigenous perspectives in *Bear* and the reproduction of white images of the indigene does somewhat diminish Engel's attempts to remove beyond-human beings from human-centred spheres of meaning. However, this is not to undermine the significant strides the novel has made toward deconstructing harmful depictions of human-animal relationships and of Engel's portrayal of the complex, albeit white, interior worlds of women. If Engel's depiction of indigeneity is entirely ironic and intended to problematise the existing body of Canadian literature that portrays Indigenous peoples as vanishing, it highlights the issues of removing Traditional Indigenous Stories from their specific place-based logics, further underscores the importance of an ethic of formal citation (Ahmed), and underlines the necessity of disambiguating irony through literary portrayals that ultimately or eventually resist instrumentalisation.

Bear further highlights the importance of postcolonial scholars and animal studies scholars working to explore these tensions in settler narratives and to better acknowledge the multiform, complex nature of interconnectivity. What emerges is the possibility that Engel's narrative is more intelligent than the writer and reader. The questions raised are compelling queries of canonical national literary narratives, ones that begin to reflect more meaningfully on the legacies of settler colonialism and on the often appropriative nature of settler relationships with animals and the natural world as extensions of gendered and racial hierarchies of power. Ultimately, Engel's intentions appear to matter less when we consider how interpretations of *Bear* evolve throughout time

and as scholarship begins to meaningfully assimilate understandings of settler colonial violence, scholarship must commit more broadly to decolonising our perceptions of literary portrayals of "otherness."

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"Niagara as Technology": Rupturing the Technological for the Wordy Ecologies of Niagara Falls

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ABSTRACT
My research-creation examines how colonial language and words inspire the logic behind resource extraction, appropriation, and exploitation. Through found poetry—a creative and analytical process of using different ("found") sources and various methods to critique and view the world—I create a collection of poems responding to Daniel Macfarlane's *Fixing Niagara Falls: Environment, Energy, and Engineers at the World's Most Famous Waterfall* (2020). Macfarlane claims that the "result" of Niagara Falls is a "compromise between scenic beauty and electricity generation" (208). However, I argue that Niagara Falls is not a "compromised" space but a hub of ecosystems coming into being. My poetic techniques emphasize the arbitrariness of colonial practices that classify beings as successful, political, and economic gains or progress. As such, I use various found methods to think with water and Indigenous modes of healing with Niagara Falls. By redacting, cutting, and layering the found words, I create an ethos of confusion, apprehension, unease, and responsibility in order to call into question the colonial logic that defines how settlers position themselves on Indigenous lands and in order to offer the possibility to listen otherwise.

Keywords
Niagara Falls; Indigenous Knowledges; Found Poetry; Ecopoetics; Ecocriticism; Ecology and Affect; Environmental Justice; Decolonial Poetics

1. Introduction

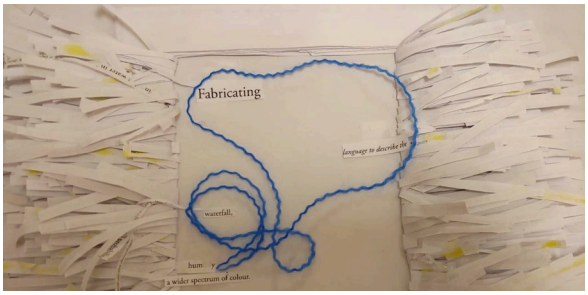
I begin by acknowledging and giving thanks to the spirits and Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, specifically the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Mississaugas, where I currently reside, work, write, and embody the knowledges I have learned throughout the years. I was born on Treaty 13, the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. I also come from Iranian-Bakhtiari parents who immigrated to Canada and started a family benefiting from stolen Indigenous lands. As such, I am indebted to this land and to the peoples who have and continue to sustain the waterways. From this positionality of gratitude, I consider critically how I write about the environment, the land I am both from and not from, my ancestral relations in Iran, and my belonging with the more-than-human world without replicating the grammar of colonial violence.

Decolonial environmental humanities scholar Macarena Gómez-Barris states that ongoing Euro-western projects of civilization, such as settler-colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, engage with Indigenous territories of the Global North and South "through the gaze of *terra nullius,*" which uses the language of coloniality to represent nature as "the other" and "Indigenous peoples as nonexistent" (6). As such, I begin this paper with a two-part provocation. The first part comes from a site of struggle; everything I write grapples with the past, present, and future aftermaths of the language of colonial singularity. I am writing in one of the languages of the colonizer, a language that divides "nature from culture," "ecology from the vernacular," and "land into private property" (2). The second part is of the nature of a wave: nothing that I write write is new. There is a wide range of thinkers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors, who write about the ongoing practices of colonial capitalism, what it means to decolonize our languages and practices, and how to become better relatives to the more-than-human world, on Indigenous lands, with Indigenous peoples. Hence, this introduction is neither the beginning nor the end; it is where I can see you, dear reader, as a co-writer and collaborator in my work for decolonization and radical love. Here I include words from my "Conclusion": *my work is ongoing and in motion. My poetic techniques subvert the idea that poetry centers on an "I" or one author and speaker. I use my poetic voice in conversation with Indigenous voices to create practices of care, respect, and reciprocity. I hope to revisit this work again with different scholars and thinkers because, as Stó:lō writer Dylan Robinson argues, it is through "another meeting" that decolonial art practices can expand and redirect "thought in motion" (253).*

In his book *Hungry Listening*, Robinson portrays how a violent listening experience embodies a settler's complex "starving" orientation to Indigenous lands, resources, and knowledges (2). The settler subject's listening positionality

can reinforce the "persistent settler colonial listening regimes" that constitute structures privileging Euro-western practices of possession and extraction (10). As a settler and Iranian-Bakhtiari woman, I occupy what Unangaŝ scholar Eve Tuck conceptualizes as the "thirding of the dichotomized categories of reproduction and resistance," embodying a desire for both/neither reproduction and/nor resistance (419–420). As a result, in this "thirdspace," or what we may also term a "thirding" listening positionality, I benefit from the colonial structures that constitute my western consumerist lifestyle, but I am also affected by and resisting its racializing structures of oppression and commodification. It is important, then, to consider issues of race, gender, culture, and privilege when thinking and writing about "the interlinked ecologies of the humanities and the environment" (LeMenager and Foote 5).

2. Poem 5[1]



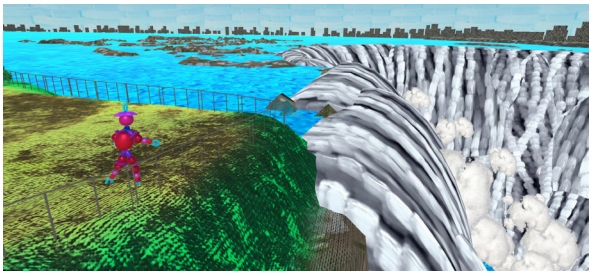


Fig. 1, Fig. 2. Conclusion: Fabricating Niagara Falls.

Source: Image by Tuscarora writer and game maker Waylon Wilson from *Čá··hu!* (*Is Anyone There?*) video game. Image included with permission from Waylon Wilson.

1. This poem is discussed in more detail in the conclusion.

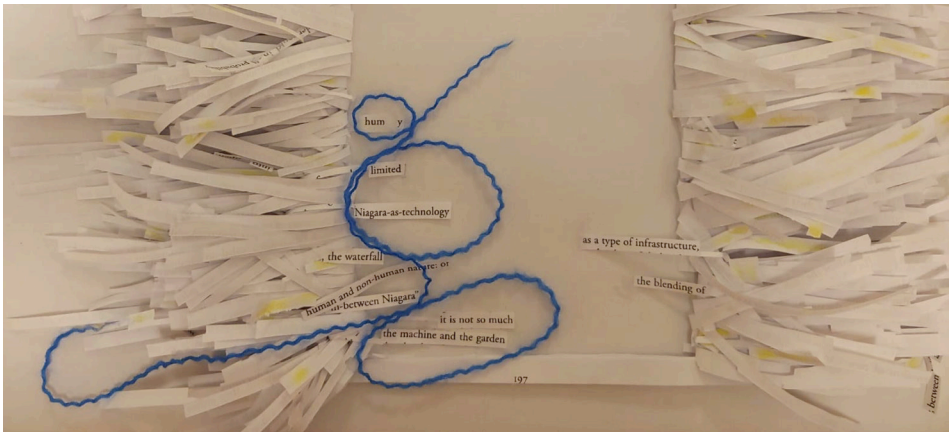


Fig. 3. and Fig. 4. Rupturing the "Conclusion" to Listen in Relation with Niagara Falls / A Decolonial Re-Introduction.

Source: Mixed media sculpture "1779" by Mohawk filmmaker and visual artist Shelley Niro from Shelley Niro: 1779 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. Image included with permission from Shelley Niro.

My affinity for Robinson's *Hungry Listening* stems primarily from the desire to unpack my listening encounters with my immigrant parents in relation to our sense of belonging as settlers on Turtle Island; what I could not understand then has become hauntingly familiar. Growing up in a low-income household meant

spending most of our family vacations at Niagara Falls for its affordable attractions. "What luck," Baba would say, "to live so close to Niagara Falls." As I got older, I questioned what it meant to witness the Falls as often as I did and if my encounters were a product of luck or misfortune—is there a difference? According to Robinson, "as part of our listening positionality, we each carry listening privilege, listening biases, and listening ability that are never wholly positive or negative" (10). For Robinson, our listening privilege orients us "teleologically toward progression and resolution, just as hunger drives toward satiation" (50). For Baba, it made "sense" to imagine the Falls as a vacation destination because we lived "so close" and, ultimately, were poor. And as a child, I would listen to Baba romanticize and justify the Falls during our annual road trips, carefully explaining why travelling anywhere else would waste time and money when "so many people worldwide dream of seeing the glorious Niagara Falls." Although I listened to Baba and Maman sound happy and excited for these seemingly effortless Niagara trips, I also grew up listening to them yell, cry, and shake hopelessly during times of nothingness, when the only food we had to eat was free pizza from Baba's fast food job. This shifting and sonic relational experience of being lucky or unlucky became part of our quotidian identities, which I have come to understand as occupying a "thirding" listening positionality.

Our hungry listening for moments of economic progress and resolution within settler-colonial systems determined what we said and heard and how we approached our environments. Hungry listening is thus a mental and physical orientation toward recognizing familiar things—the satisfaction of familiarity (Robinson 51). This sense of familiarity enables the settler to feel lucky and certain about how they "fit," as Robinson explains, "within a predetermined framework" (51). For example, when visiting Niagara Falls during the early stages of the pandemic, I was struck for the first time by a jarring feeling while walking around the Niagara landscape. One of the world's busiest tourist attractions was now empty, with hardly any cars or people. I found myself disoriented in this unfamiliar space as time slowed down and the booming thunder of the Falls echoed in the absence of bright lights and city noises. This juxtaposition is critical to Robinson's examination of how settler subjects can begin to hear beyond what he calls "the 'white noise' of daily settlement that guides the perceptual logic of settler colonialism" (258). Hence, what is important, says Robinson, is how we "becom[e] aware of [our] normative listening habits and abilities" so that "we are better able to listen otherwise" (11).

One of the ways in which we can learn to listen otherwise, Robinson affirms, is to reconsider "how we might write otherwise" (11). For Robinson, the "epistemic violence of listening experience… takes place at the level of language and structure of writing itself" (11). For example, in Indigenous cosmologies, time is presented as intergenerational/national and cyclical–a perspective in which we

consider ourselves as living side by side with our ancestors as well as descendants. While this notion is quite imperceptible in the language of colonial singularity, Indigenous epistemologies of time help us witness how the long-standing past is present in the landscape itself. As Potawatomi scholar-activist Kyle Whyte notes, "Indigenous conceptions of the future often present striking contrasts between deep Indigenous histories and the brief, but highly disruptive colonial, capitalist, and industrial periods" (159). Thus, according to Robinson, to write otherwise insists upon "disciplinary redress" (11). Robinson explains:

> Disciplinary redress demands that individual disciplinary mischaracterizations of Indigenous knowledge are made known; that non-Indigenous scholars amend their citational practice to prioritize Indigenous writers, knowledge keepers, and artists; and that Indigenous methodologies and forms of writing and knowledge dissemination are not merely accepted within the areas of publication and peer review but are understood as vital contributions to scholarship. (11)

Integral to the process of disciplinary redress, Robinson tells us, is understanding that our present and future acts and actions cannot "seek to extract and apply a particular" Indigenous listening practice (51); to pick and choose our listening positionality "would also constitute appropriation" (11). Thinking with Robinson's notion of hungry listening and working through my own positionality as a settler, woman of colour, and poet/writer, I will explore how writing otherwise can engender a "thirding" listening practice for minority settlers. A thirding listening practice embodies the juxtaposition of knowing you are teleologically oriented toward progression and resolution but also actively resisting/refusing the colonial/capitalist structures of racial oppression. Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson specifically writes about "actions that engage in a general refusal of an aspect of state control," a refusal that "continues the work of dismantling heteropatriarchy as a dispossessive force" (*As We Have Always Done* 34–35). I consider this thirding of Robinson's listening positionality as a desire to understand how minority settlers can participate in practices of refusal: "how to continue to resist and resurge in the face of ongoing colonialism" (19). For me, acts of refusal mean intentionally adapting my movements, writing justice, and practicing care to exist through radical love on Indigenous lands.

In *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, Black writer and social/environmental activist Adrienne Maree Brown propels readers into an inward and outward momentous cycle, asking us to reflect on our feelings and interactions. For Brown, transformation arises from *intentional* movements or adaptations that oppose the colonial and capitalist legacies of the world (31). She terms this transformative and relational way of being the "emergent strategy" (5). Emergent strategy becomes an intentional "awakening" (23) of both our

individual imaginations and our critical, vulnerable, and authentic connections with the world around us (10). Brown tells us that by decentralizing our imaginations about movement and healing and focusing on graceful acts of adaptation that recognize other beings' capacities for change, we become a species with planetary integrity (32). However, moving and adapting with intention does not mean there is no chaos or nonsense in transformation. For Brown, "existence is fractal," which means that large, relatively stable patterns recur on smaller scales through random and chaotic movement (9). Hence, Brown believes that regardless of the circumstances, we must develop our capacity for intentional adaptation at the smallest scale to foster "growth, relationship, and regeneration" (32).

Brown portrays the importance of micro-scale and collaborative movement through the affective-sonic vibrations in "murmuration" (32). An example she provides is "the way groups of starlings billow, dive, spin, and dance collectively through the air—to avoid predators" (32). A murmuration is when birds are "tuned in to [their] neighbors" and they "feel the micro-adaptations of the other bodies," so that each bird adapts its speed, direction, and proximity based on the information of the others in the group (32). We can also define "murmuration" as "the act of murmuring": a low and soft utterance of continuous sounds; "a half-suppressed or muttered complaint"; and the "atypical sound of the heart" ("Murmur," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). In this context, "murmuration" is both the attunement of bodies through movement and the affective-sonic experiences of unconventional or "atypical" love. To move as murmuration necessitates a radical love that comes with its own set of challenges because being in relation can sometimes feel frustrating and opaque, especially when cultivating "trust and depth with each other" (Brown 32). Due to the challenges of radical love, it is important to ask ourselves how we can be part of meaningful discussions and collaborations to cultivate a deep sense of trust with other beings. How can we "shift from individual, interpersonal, and inter-organizational anger toward viable, generative, [and] sustainable systemic change" (62)?

In order to exist in radical love, the pace and sonic interactions of asking and listening go hand in hand, like a group of starlings flying and changing pace together in unison murmurs of knowledge. Similarly, ecofeminist scholar Donna Haraway asks that we partake in active re-learning practices where "order is reknitted," and we become "with and of the [E]arth… in times that remain at stake" (55). Robinson also sees "collaboration and conversation between various settler, diasporic, immigrant or 'arrivant' subjects" (253) as necessary to embody "a critical positionality of guest movement, listening, and touch" (258). Whereas a tourist is conditioned to spend money in exchange for endless fun and possessions, a guest or visitor partakes in a relationship of respect and reciprocity with Indigenous lands and knowledges. Robinson, Haraway, and Brown explore kinship practices not through dishonest attempts for reconciliation or

what Robinson terms "positionality confession," but by turning a critical lens toward how settler work can deconstruct colonial structures (254). As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith tells us, Indigenous peoples' sense of history relies on "a principle of reciprocity and feedback," which collides and crashes with the binary and codifying thinking of the discipline of settler history (15). In Indigenous worldviews, methodology and method are far more critical than the outcome (128). Hence, this work is a research-creation project that allows for a thoughtful, fluid, and cross-disciplinary engagement at the boundaries of diverging thoughts, means of making, and ways of knowing. Contemporary artist Natalie Loveless defines research-creation as the process of bringing together different matters, bodies, and ideas, loosely bound into various forms of connection and connectivity (30). For Loveless, "the crafting of a research question is the crafting of a story that is also the crafting of an ethics" (95). Engaging in ethical practices for Simpson requires a sense of responsibility for our thoughts, ideas, and interpretations ("Land as Pedagogy" 11). Simpson favours "ethical and profoundly careful" (11) modes of sharing knowledge that re-create the networks of "consensual relationships" (16) and Indigenous context "within which learning takes place" (9). Thus, for Simpson, ethical practices are "contextual and relational" (7), which means sharing and receiving knowledge within the limitations of what we are allowed to know and share.

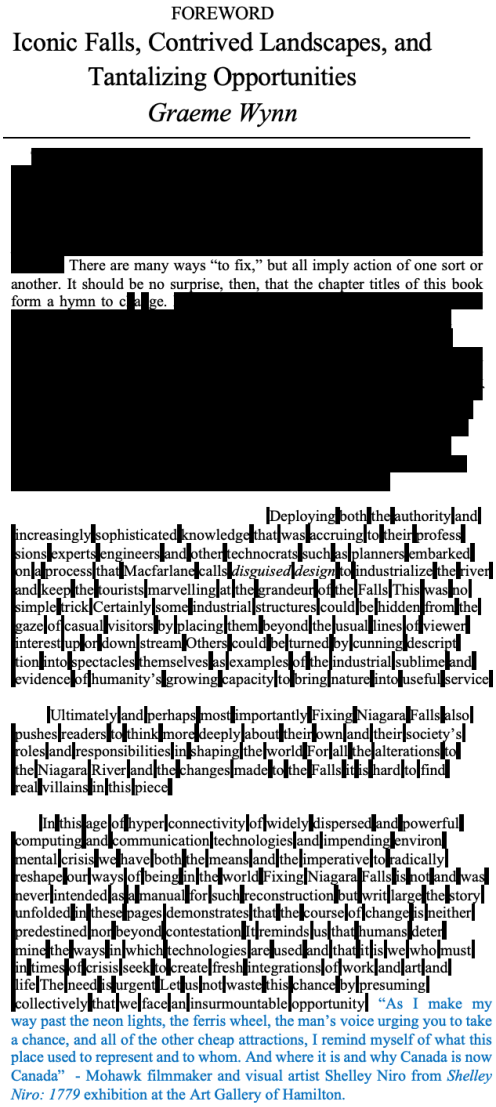
To enter Indigenous sound territories as settler-guests necessitates "an inability to hear and sense the land" because not all voices, songs, stories, knowledges, and languages are accessible to our ears and belong to us (Robinson 53). Attempts to discern what we cannot and should not hear/know become practices of appropriation (53). As a writer, I actively work to prevent any opportunity to appropriate or digest other peoples' works, knowledges, and ways of being. I also acknowledge that recognizing and opposing appropriating works about Indigenous lands, peoples, and histories is crucial to my "thirdspace" listening positionality. Robinson argues that deconstructing colonial practices and positionalities requires that we pay particular attention to "compositional methodologies" through aesthetic practices of "marking what has been previously unmarked" (254). To write otherwise has always required me to return to locations and settings that have influenced my sense of belonging. Thus, my transformative and relational way of being, or "emergent strategy," emerges in how I engage in discussions about Niagara Falls—and how I "stay[] with the trouble" (Haraway 2) of reading books about the History of the Falls. This transformation materializes from my *intentional* understanding of the colonial and capitalist legacies of appropriation of the Falls–how I "withdraw and participate in uneven social structures" (Tuck 420) in order to exist in this "thirdspace" listening positionality *with* Indigenous modes of tending to land and beings. Through found poetry, which questions received notions of originality and

claiming, I re-appropriate extractive practices of capture and transformation (by using aesthetic practices of erasure, redaction, and layering) to critique environmental historian Daniel Macfarlane's book, *Fixing Niagara Falls: Environment, Energy, and Engineers at the World's Most Famous Waterfall* (2020).[2] According to Macfarlane, the book documents "the physical manipulation of the waterfall, including the politics and diplomacy that enabled engineering alterations" (6). I have created a collection of found poems that contest Macfarlane's re-presentation of "Niagara-as-technology" (198) by portraying Niagara Falls as a critical place for ecologies coming-to-being.[3]

3. Poem 1

In the "Forward" chapter, Graeme Wynn describes Macfarlane's work as the "fertile ground between environmental history and the history of technology" (xx). I argue that Macfarlane's "fertile" mediation reproduces what Smith calls colonial "systems of classification, representation and evaluation" (43) to rationalize colonial and extractive practices. In Poem 1, for example, I black-out the word "change" to read "cage," implying that the book's perceptions about Niagara Falls enact fixity instead of fluidity. For instance, Wynn describes the process of disguising the River's industrialization as "no simple trick," and he claims this demonstrates "humanity's growing capacity to bring nature into useful service" (xviii). Here, Wynn justifies the colonial and economic exploitation of Niagara Falls by evaluating nature's ability to be of "useful service" to humanity. As a result, the poem's black bars create a sense of entrapment and serve as a barrier to easily reading the words, illustrating how Wynn's re-presentation of Niagara Falls is limited and manipulative.

2. My interest in Daniel Macfarlane's book arose while reading multiple environmental history books about the Great Lakes regions and also learning about the *Resilienceproject*. I started critically analyzing Macfarlane's book when I realized that his conception of the Falls as merely technological infrastructure embodies the various misconceptions and tensions that the curated *Resilience* collection portrays. This collection comprises 50 Indigenous women artists and their contemporary Indigenous art that speaks to the "ongoing racial tensions with non-Indigenous cultures" (Martin). The collection portrays Indigenous resilience through art and photography as a critical place for ecologies and bodies coming-to-being. The Indigenous artists re-appropriate photography from an colonial/anthropologist tool that documents and objectifies Indigenous peoples as a "vanishing race" (Martin) into an artistic practice where ecologies and women's bodies rupture from the colonial reservoir of (re)production and embody spaces of wellness, reciprocity, desire, love, and collective mourning.
3. This type of thinking originated from my reflections on the *Resilience project*.


FOREWORD

Iconic Falls, Contrived Landscapes, and Tantalizing Opportunities

Graeme Wynn

There are many ways "to fix," but all imply action of one sort or another. It should be no surprise, then, that the chapter titles of this book form a hymn to change.

Deploying both the authority and increasingly sophisticated knowledge that was accruing to their professions, experts, engineers, and other technocrats such as planners embarked on a process that Macfarlane calls *disguised design* to industrialize the river and keep the tourists marvelling at the grandeur of the Falls. This was no simple trick. Certainly some industrial structures could be hidden from the gaze of casual visitors by placing them beyond the usual lines of viewer interest up or down stream. Others could be turned by cunning description into spectacles themselves as examples of the industrial sublime and evidence of humanity's growing capacity to bring nature into useful service.

Ultimately and perhaps most importantly, Fixing Niagara Falls also pushes readers to think more deeply about their own and their society's roles and responsibilities in shaping the world. For all the alterations to the Niagara River and the changes made to the Falls, it is hard to find real villains in this piece.

In this age of hyper connectivity of widely dispersed and powerful computing and communication technologies and impending environmental crisis we have both the means and the imperative to radically reshape our ways of being in the world. Fixing Niagara Falls is not and was never intended as a manual for such reconstruction but writ large the story unfolded in these pages demonstrates that the course of change is neither predestined nor beyond contestation. It reminds us that humans determine the ways in which technologies are used and that it is we who must in times of crisis seek to create fresh integrations of work and art and life. The need is urgent. Let us not waste this chance by presuming collectively that we face an insurmountable opportunity. "As I make my way past the neon lights, the ferris wheel, the man's voice urging you to take a chance, and all of the other cheap attractions, I remind myself of what this place used to represent and to whom. And where it is and why Canada is now Canada" - Mohawk filmmaker and visual artist Shelley Niro from *Shelley Niro: 1779* exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

Fig. 5. Poem 1

We can also read the black bars as "structural refusals," which Robinson explains "are formal and aesthetic strategies that impede Indigenous knowledge extraction and instrumentalization" (23). For example, in the last paragraph of the poem, I place a structural refusal after Wynn's last words where he urges the

reader to "not waste" their "chance" and develop new combinations of "work and art and life" (xxvi). This structural refusal can be seen as what Robinson calls a "blockade" that disrupts the flow of resource or knowledge extraction and consumption (23). I place this blockade to stop or refuse Wynn's request for new re/sources and to center Indigenous perspectives such as Mohawk filmmaker and visual artist Shelley Niro's 1779 exhibition, which took place at the Art Gallery of Hamilton from 2017 to 2018. I portray Niro's writing in blue to symbolize water and how Indigenous knowledges, works, and practices are a conversation in movement, like Niagara Falls. Niro's reflection about her experience walking around Niagara Falls ironically responds to Wynn's assertion to not "waste" opportunities. Niro reflects walking past cheap tourist attractions, and a "man's voice," which we can presume is a voice like Wynn's, who urges her "to take a chance" (11). Niro reminds herself "of what this place used to represent and to whom," and by doing so, she reminds her audience where they are and why "Canada is now Canada" (11). Thus, Niro's refusal to engage with the settler's intellectual pursuit emerges through her relationship with the land, which for Simpson is "both context and process" ("Land as Pedagogy" 7). Simpson states that "the process of coming to know" (7) how to create and live on land cannot be appropriated within "hyperindividualism" (9) but must be "woven within kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion, [therefore,] it is contextual and relational" (7). By re-appropriating the practices of "blockade," I impede time and disrupt space. Through this out-of-place experience, the reader lingers in thought to possibly re-consider how they might work and belong as a respectful guest on Indigenous lands.

Macfarlane prefaces capitalism's Eurocentric and racist ideologies as ex post facto events, in which capitalism's appropriation of Indigenous lands and waters is a result of colonization rather than a condition of capitalist progress. For example, in the "Introduction" chapter, Macfarlane states:

> Reading between the lines, what further distinguished Niagara Falls for many was racial and cultural chauvinism: the waterfall came to be controlled by cultures that believed they knew how best to appreciate and appropriate its liquid wealth so that it wasn't squandered by simply running to the sea. (4)

However, for Jennifer Wenzel, capitalist modernity begins with the "improving eye" of the European explorer that is "at once economic and aesthetic" (2). The Europeans were the first to gaze upon the "beckoning landscapes" of the "Americas" in a manner that envisioned the beautiful only as profitable (2). As a result, resource extraction is inextricably related to a colonial aesthetics that imagines Indigenous landscapes in need of cultivation in order to elicit their potential for capital, productivity, and technology.

4. Poem 2

Fig. 6. Poem 2

In Poem 2, I use a literal approach to "reading between the lines" by blacking out Macfarlane's words, enabling the reader to deduce Macfarlane's colonial approach to reading or "improving" the capitalist manipulation of Niagara Falls. I reveal the poem's provocation through redaction: "Reading between the lines is racial and cultural chauvinism: controlled by appropriat/i/o/n." With this provocation, I demonstrate how referring to the racial and cultural chauvinism surrounding Niagara Falls as speculative data re-appropriates the colonial mindset that continues to justify the appropriation of Indigenous lands and peoples. Macfarlane situates colonialism as a historical event that implicitly shaped the future of capitalism, thus reinforcing the logics of coloniality that see appropriation as cultural exchange, racism as past tense, and capitalism as progress.

Wynn calls Macfarlane's book an "innovative[] and well written work on the interaction of people and nature through time in North America" (ii). However, when we examine Macfarlane's work on Niagara Falls in light of its omissions and gaps, we begin to challenge Macfarlane's historical portrayal of the Falls. We might ask, who benefits from racial and cultural chauvinism? Who is responsible? Macfarlane's limitations in acknowledging the specific effects of settler-colonial manipulation of Niagara Falls on Indigenous peoples (such as the linguistic, social, and economic consequences) become the appropriative practices that legitimize resource exploitation. For Macfarlane to create alternative (decolonial) interpretations of Niagara Falls' history, the voices and narratives of Indigenous peoples, whose perspectives have long been excluded from the "official narrative," must be amplified. According to Simpson, this requires Macfarlane to abandon hyperindividualism in favor of "the process of coming to know" how to learn, create, and live on Indigenous lands. It begins with an unsettling question: are Macfarlane's reading and writing practices innovative or appropriative?

5. Poem 3

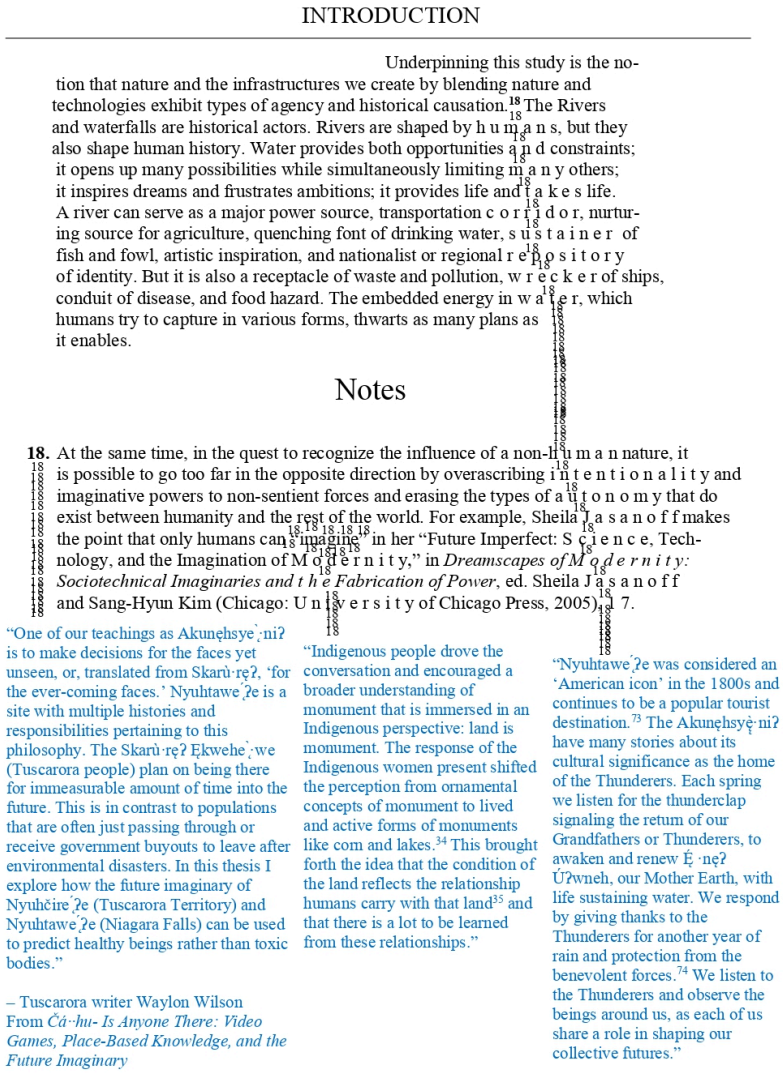


Fig. 7. Poem 3

In the "Notes" section of his book, Macfarlane explains that he is conscious not to "overascrib[e]" intentionality to "non-sentient" forces like the Falls (215). In Poem 3, I break apart Macfarlane's words to create what Robinson terms an

"intellectual impasse" where the contours of space are obscured and "open out into anxiety" (257). I argue that this anxiety is necessary to think outside Macfarlane's teleological view of Niagara Falls' history so that we can listen otherwise. I awkwardly expand the superscript 18 through the ruptures to offer the possibility of moving across Macfarlane's linear and static bounds of space and time that characterize our perception of the more-than-human world.

In his thesis, Skarù·rę? (Tuscarora) writer Waylon Wilson portrays the land as a place of learned relationality where all beings share a role in shaping collective futures, which include, as Wilson tells us, "the ever-coming faces" of Niagara Falls (17). Wilson's thesis, for example, is about a computer game he created that "explore[s] how the future imaginary of Nyuhčiré?e (Tuscarora Territory) and Nyuhtawé?e (Niagara Falls) can be used to predict healthy beings rather than toxic bodies" (17). The game is called "Čá··hu," a Skarù·rę? phrase which, according to Wilson, "one uses to call out to see if anyone is there and listens for a response" (2). Wilson's closest English equivalent is "yoo-hoo" (2). In the game, the player calls out "Čá··hu!" to "Nyuhtawé?e," the home of the Thunderers, and listens to who responds (16). Wilson encourages his player to engage with Skarù·rę? landscape and helps "Skarù·rę? youth specifically and Akunę̀hsyę̀·ni? [Haudenosaunee] youth in general understand the importance of reciprocity in giving or returning thanks" (16). The game objective is to show how the "future imaginary" of Nyuhtawé?e as an environmentally devastated landscape can become one of wellness when humans re-establish their relationships with the natural world, allowing humans and more-than-human beings to fulfill their obligations to one another, including sustaining a healthy environment for future ancestors (2).

The primary character of the game is an iconic Skarù·rę? figure known as the Jitterbug. The "Jitterbug person" starts in a grey cityscape with a "red wireframe… without any beads attached to it" (27). The Jitterbug is lost in this "disorienting maze" and calls out "Čá··hu" in the hopes of eliciting a response (33). Remnants of nature still survive in this region (like "the birds that fly overhead"), and they assist Jitterbug in finding the bridge that crosses the Niagara River (33). When Jitterbug moves across the bridge from the "chaotic urban landscape" to the green islands with "vibrant blue waters," the player notices that everything in this world is made of Skarù·rę? beaded designs (27). The Jitterbug shouts "Čá··hu" once more, and this time a beaded woman made of wampum ("an ancestral being to the Jitterbug") appears from the belt to welcome the player (29). She welcomes the player to Nyuhtawé?e and sets the standard for gameplay—how to play the game right—by teaching the player the Ha? Kanę̀herathéčreh, or "Thanksgiving Address," also known as the "Words Before All Else" (29). When Skarù·rę? and their Akunę̀hsye̗·ni? sister nations gather, the Ha? Kanę̀herathéčreh is recited to unite minds and to "remind [them] to be thankful of the non-hierarchical relationship between [themselves]

as humans and all other living things" (1). By patiently observing and thanking the many "beings throughout the entire beaded island," the Jitterbug transforms into a fully beaded figure with "a beautiful array of colors" (30). Through Jitterbug's metamorphosis, Wilson teaches his readers that the condition of the land "reflects the relationship humans carry with that land," emphasizing the importance of reciprocity with nature, how to listen to more-than-human beings, and how to respect the boundaries they share (8).

Jitterbug's listening experience represents what Robinson calls the "critical listening positionality"—the meeting point between attentive listening and the Thanksgiving Address (52). In this critical listening positionality, humans are attentive and grateful to the relations they carry with other beings, which means "listening-in-relation" to the knowledges and histories they share (51). In the game, Jitterbug's critical listening positionality engages with Tuscarora knowledge as land-based pedagogy, teaching the player that when they respect the freedom of the more-than-human world, they are in a relationship of physical and spiritual growth with all beings, similar to Jitterbug's "ever-coming" transformation in the game.

Wilson's portrayal of Niagara Falls as relationality and a place of becoming can be connected to Brian Massumi's notion of an affective event and his comments on "the nature of a *gesture*" in his book, *Politics of Affect* (105). An affective event sets in motion and activates the entire configuration of the environment, involving a multiplicity of bodies and relations, interruptions and ruptures. Similar to Robinson's notion of listening positionality as involving opposing forces—"never wholly positive or negative" (Robinson 10)—an affective event encompasses both "tendencies towards free action" and "tendencies towards capture" (Massumi 104). As bodies relate in the affective event, they have the capacity to affect or be affected, thus intermixing their potentials and leaving traces on the bodies. Here, the traces left on the body are the memories of past events that create tendencies and gestures. These tendencies and gestures can become habits that bodies reproduce and can either make a body's actions too predictable and close off its potential to change, or they can augment the body for new possibilities. For example, Wilson explains that the bridge between the grey landscape and the beaded landscape "represents an in-between state of being where a definitive path, or way of life, must be chosen in order to advance in the game" (34). If the player chooses to stay in the grey landscape with very few affective relationships, their actions (game play) become too predictable, preventing Jitterbug's transformation. However, if the player moves into the beaded landscape, the Jitterbug also transforms into a beaded figure by interacting with the "language materials," the "peaceful soundscape," and "the beautiful artistry of beadwork inspired by Skarù·rę? women" (45). Hence, the player learns that if their actions and habits in the game limit their relationality with the Niagara River such that the Jitterbug is

not affecting *and* being affected by the Niagara landscape, then their relationship with Niagara Falls is one-sided, making Jitterbug's positionality vulnerable and dangerous. However, by constituting a relationship of respect, openness, and reciprocity with the River and the environment, the player can augment Jitterbug's habitual tendencies to create what Massumi terms "counter-tendencies" (105). These "counter-tendencies" enable Jitterbug to be in a creative and transformational process with the beaded landscape and "become-otherwise" (105).

Wilson's understanding of Niagara Falls as a critical place for ecologies coming-to-being contrasts with Macfarlane's categorization of the Falls as "a built architecture" (199) with limiting qualities. While Macfarlane cautions his readers about the power of nature to "thwart" human objectives (8), he also embodies the conventions of Robinson's hungry listening. According to Robinson, a person's hungry listening "is hungry for the felt confirmations of square pegs in square holes, for the satisfactory fit as sound knowledge slides into its appropriate place" (51). Thus, when Macfarlane refers to water as a "historical actor" that may either help or hinder humanity's future (8), he is essentially "listening for" the satisfaction of familiarity (Robinson 51); how humans can employ the "hidden energy in water" (Macfarlane 8) to fit within the settler's future plans for development. Envisioning Niagara Falls as both a historical actor and an architectural wonder allows for a starving and controlling orientation to the Falls, where the hungry listener's "'fevered' pace of consumption for knowledge resources" (Robinson 53) transforms Niagara Falls into a reservoir of productivity. Robinson argues that in order to move beyond hungry listening and toward the positionality of critical listening, we must disorient ourselves from "antirelational and nonsituated settler colonial positions of certainty" (53). This move toward critical listening is what I refer to as "an ethical (s)pace of being." In my poem, I break Macfarlane's words to create an ethical space that slows the pace of listening. With this poetic technique, as well as the number 18 cascading through the ruptures and connecting to Wilson's thesis excerpts, I disorient Macfarlane's annotative practice from a mode of white and colonial justification to a practice of kinship.

Wilson's game is "deeply invested in historic and specific Skarù·rę? references" and empowers "Skarù·rę? youth to engage with Skarù·rę? place-based teachings and ways of knowing using an updated digital format" (1). As Wilson explains, Indigenous peoples have used technology for millennia in many types of media, such as pottery, beading, and wampum (8). *Čá··hu* brings the two technologies together: "the video game space and the beading space" (45). Thus, Wilson's use of digital media to transform the Jitterbug from a red wireframe into a beautiful beaded figure portrays the Skarù·rę? peoples' past and present use of technology "to create and activate Indigenous futures and future imaginaries" (9). These technological structures and systems are monuments "for Skarù·rę? peoples as [they tell] the story of [their] ancestors, [their] history, and [their] culture while

also carrying the geographical tracings of [their] generational development" (8). While technology for Indigenous peoples means the transmission of land-based knowledge and ways of knowing in order to "strengthen human relationships to place" (44), "Niagara-as-technology," for Macfarlane, is a "compromise between scenic beauty and electricity generation" (208) that transforms the Falls into a technological sublime, appealing to both the European aesthetic gaze and their "improving eye." As such, in Poem 3, I juxtapose Wilson's and Macfarlane's descriptions of Niagara Falls to create an in-between space where the poet and the reader meet through a destabilizing and perplexing orientation to the Falls. The poem creates an apprehensive environment that forces both the reader and the poet to reconsider their knowledge of Niagara Falls, what the landscape should or should not look like, and how they should connect to this Indigenous territory.

6. Poem 4

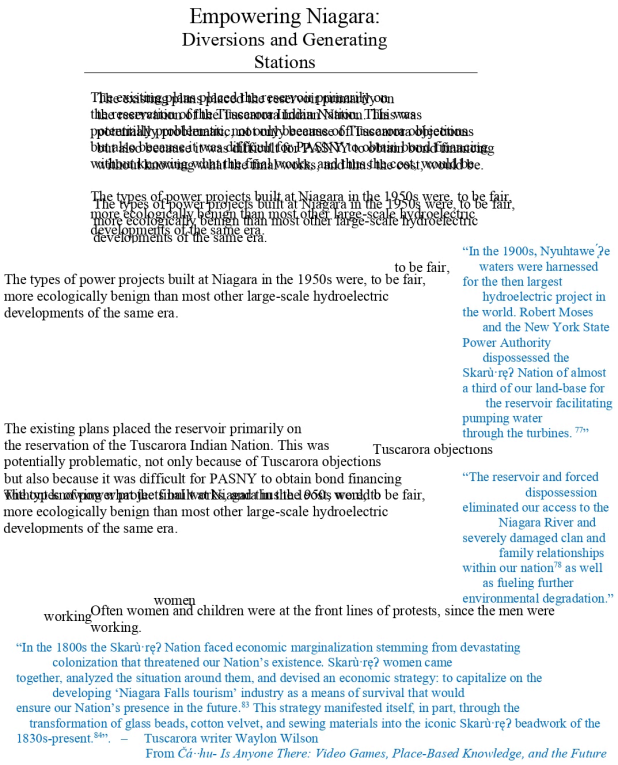


Fig. 8. Poem 4

In the book's "Empowering" chapter, Macfarlane chronicles the creation of the Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant and accompanying infrastructure at Niagara Falls. He notes that these efforts drew "Tuscarora objections" since they infringed on their territories and lifeways (113). However, he then paradoxically counters his critique of the Power Plant by stating, "The sorts of power plants established at Niagara in the 1950s were, to be fair, more ecologically benign than most other large-scale hydroelectric operations of the same era" (129). In Poem 4, I obfuscate Macfarlane's re-presentation of the Power Plant as a "more ecologically benign" hydroelectric development, as well as his dominant settler-colonialist and capitalist ideologies, to introduce an Indigenous point of reference for how we read and grasp Niagara Falls' history. I replicate and layer sections of Macfarlane's chapter to create a vortex of noise and chaos that collapses Macfarlane's dialectic reasoning of history and temporality. As the words and phrases pile on top of one another, it becomes increasingly difficult to read and comprehend Macfarlane's work, slowing time and widening space for keywords to emerge from the chaos. For example, I extract the words "to be fair" from this chaotic cloud and set them in the margins. I also copy and paste the words "Tuscarora objections," "women," and "working" next to their fixed counterparts. These repeated extractions serve as keywords for the chapter's core themes as well as entry words for establishing ethical (s)paces (ongoing spaces and paces of responsibility and kinship) around the margins. Through these ethical (s)paces, Wilson's Indigenous counter-histories emerge and annotate Macfarlane's representation of hydroelectric development on Indigenous lands. Wilson's excerpts are in blue and embody the ebb and flow of water. As a result, the reader enters the ethical (s)paces in shifting positionalities to observe and pay attention to Wilson's seascape.

The keywords are meant to question Macfarlane's re-presentation of Niagara Falls by accentuating the "systems of classification, representation, and evaluation" (Smith 43) he employs to justify the Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant operations. For example, by measuring ecological safety against Eurocentric environmental and resource management systems, Macfarlane undermines Tuscarora people's sovereignty over their lands and the knowledge, protocols, laws, and ethics that come from their relationship with the more-than-human world. Through the use of repetition, the keywords echo back to the reader and haunt them into a critical listening positionality to question Macfarlane's hungry listening. According to Robinson, "a decolonial practice of critical listening positionality actively seeks out (or allows itself) to become haunted" (62). This means that the listening subject recognizes and confronts the "aural traces of history," or keywords as I refer to them, that "productively haunt" and ontologically reorient their listening positionality (62). In this sense, the listening subject seeks after the "echoes, whispers, and voices" of history that make possible

"a potentially insurgent form of aural redress" (62). The listening subject finds themselves affectively oscillating between different strata of listening positionality that escape the boundedness of representational fixity.

This listening oscillation is activated when the reader comes into contact with the visual-sonic affective keywords that haunt the reader's positionality. Through this haunting, aspects of the reader's listening positionality come to the surface. The reader begins to identify "the ways in which those aspects allow or foreclose upon certain ways of looking, kinds of touch, or listening hunger/fixity" (Robinson 60-61). For example, the first time the reader reads a keyword, they are introduced to its virtual implications in Macfarlane's work. However, as the keyword echoes back through its repetition in the poem, the reader has the opportunity to augment their affective relationship with the keyword and reckon with the material that is at stake through Wilson's excerpts annotating Macfarlane's work. Wilson's work teaches the reader about the tangible repercussions of "Robert Moses and the New York State Power Authority" on Indigenous lands in this new positionality (16). For instance, Wilson details their forced dispossession from their lands due to the power plant development, which eliminated their access to the Niagara River and severely damaged their clan and family relationships within the Tuscarora nation (16). The reader then oscillates between a virtual positionality with the Power Plant and a material listening positionality through Wilson's excerpts. According to Massumi, an affective event is the oscillation between the virtual and the actual through which inventions are formulated, extricated, modulated, and reinvented ("Autonomy" 99). As a result, the reader is not only influenced by the haunting of the term but also brings into existence a separate stratum of listening positionality. Thus, when the reader comes across the second keyword, they will interact with it through a modulated listening positionality. The reader's relationship with the power plant is now different than how they related to it before as a novice listener.

Robinson suggests using "such haunting as a very literal strategy for whispered interventions to take place" (62). As such, the keywords embody the "echoes, whispers, and voices" of history "that become audible momentarily" and offer the potential to listen-otherwise (62). For example, Macfarlane also mentions that, Tuscarora women and children were often "at the front lines of protests since the men were working" (114). Through keywords that lead the reader to a passage from Wilson's thesis, I question this colonial re-presentation of Tuscarora women as not "working." Wilson portrays Tuscarora women in the 1800s strategizing and selling their beadwork in response to the nation's economic marginalization as a result of colonization. Wilson's excerpt teaches the reader about Tuscarora women's "ability to adapt or transform through their critical thinking and action" (19). As Wilson explains, "What we create, tourist item or not, serves as a reminder of our spiritual, cultural and

economic survival" (18). Thus, this ethical (s)pace resists Macfarlane's hungry listening by "dislocating the fixity and goal-oriented teleology of" coming-to-know about the history of Tuscarora women and their actions (Robinson 58). The keyword also haunts the reader's "listening ability, privilege, and habit" (61) by contesting Macfarlane's colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal understanding of "work" and productivity. The meaning of work then shifts from capitalist and Eurocentric origins to Indigenous resistance, sovereignty, and existence.

7. Conclusion

In Poem 5 (see page 65-66), I re-appropriate extractive practices of mining by cutting sentences, words, and letters from the "Conclusion" chapter of Macfarlane's book. Here, the erasure technique breaks textual fixity by fragmenting sentences and words. Through the erasure technique, words linger in the empty spaces and each letter, word, and punctuation opens up space for the new words and letters to emerge. New subjectivities accumulate and adhere to the gravitational forces of other subjectivities by opening up space for the particularities of words and sentences to confront each other and accent MacFarlane's appropriating practices. For example, in the second part of the poem, I ask: "hum y/ limited/ Niagara-as-technology/ it is not so much/ the machine and the garden." In both sections of Poem 5, I pose questions and react with imagery from Wilson's and Niro's work.

In the first part of the poem, I ask "hum y" MacFarlane fabricates language to describe the waterfall. According to MacFarlane, "Niagara Falls is a place marked by hubris and selfishness," and "we, and the waterfall, require humility and grace" (209). However, by asserting that both humanity and the waterfall "require" humility and grace, MacFarlane frames the waterfall and humans as equal collaborators in constructing the history of Niagara Falls, whereas in fact, humans are to blame for Niagara Falls' reputation as an arrogant and selfish place. Indeed, it is we humans who require humility and grace to understand the non-hierarchical interactions we share with the world around us (Wilson 23). As a result, when humans demonstrate humility, responsibility, and reciprocity towards nature, nature responds with grace.

I use one of Wilson's game images to portray the significance of the words "hum y" in relation to MacFarlane's mischaracterization of the Falls. The Jitterbug is still in the image, "listening to the loud waterfall" (39). The "hum" of running water pauses time as the Jitterbug upholds Akunęhsye˛·niʔ teachings and values, such as "recognizing all beings of this world and beyond as being of equal importance" (23). As a result, I also pause time by interrupting MacFarlane's statements with the fragmented syllables spelling "hum y," inviting

the reader to pause, listen, and think about how MacFarlane's use of language re-establishes a manipulative connection with nature.

Both works portray Niagara Falls as a place of well-being for their present and future communities and a site of Indigenous resurgence. For example, both Wilson and Niro use beadwork practices to portray what Wilson calls Indigenous "survivance strategy and transformation of culture" (5). For Niro, her beadwork over stiletto shoes depicts the year that "5000 Iroquois began walking north after the extreme violence they experienced during the American Confederation of 1776" (4). Niro also states how the beadwork represents her people's patience, strength, wisdom, and resistance (4). Similarly, Wilson uses the figure of the "Jitterbug," which is made from beadwork, to portray the strength and dedication of the Tuscarora women at the Falls, particularly, Wilson explains, when they had to sell their beadwork because the nation "faced economic marginalization" (17). Indigenous beading methods represent Indigenous practices of self-determination, survivance, and creativity (5). Beadwork also symbolizes for Wilson the "transmission" of land-based knowledge through the transformation of the Jitterbug (31). In the game, the Jitterbug's ability to learn from the land becomes what Wilson calls "the survivance and resiliency of Indigenous ways of knowing" for the future health of all beings (43).

Through the anxious encounter with Macfarlane's words and the different types of relationships created with Wilson's and Niro's works, the found poems ask the reader to question and analyze their current relationships with nature and land. However, as Robinson explains, it is important "that in entering Indigenous sound territories as guests," we recognize an "incommensurability" that prevents us from hearing "these specific assertions of Indigenous sovereignty" (53). With this in mind, I portray the boundaries and limits of settler listening positionalities by placing blockades in my poems. By re-appropriating the blockade, my goal is to acknowledge Indigenous voices and bodies while, echoing Robinson, not "acting as a container of Indigenous content" (25). *I conclude by stating that my work is ongoing and in motion. My poetic techniques subvert the idea that poetry centers on an "I" or one author and speaker. I use my poetic voice in conversation with Indigenous voices to create practices of care, respect, and reciprocity. I hope to revisit this work again with different scholars and thinkers because, as Robinson argues, it is through "another meeting" that decolonial art practices can expand and redirect "thought in motion" (253).*

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Indigenous Ecofeminism? Decolonial Practices and Indigenous Resurgence in Lee Maracle's Works

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ABSTRACT

Ecocritical and ecofeminist studies have frequently borrowed from Indigenous epistemologies to conform new approaches to human-nature relations, particularly now that the pressing climate crisis is making western societies contemplate the need for radical solutions. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson remarks, "the western academy is now becoming interested in certain aspects of Indigenous Knowledge" such as "Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)" (373). However, the scope of this interest is reduced and disconnects ecological knowledge from decolonial practices, such as land claims or Indigenous feminisms.[1] Maile Arvin et al. emphatically support that "settler colonialism has been and continues to be a gendered process" (8) and thus its ramifications and effects (upon nature or Indigenous communities) cannot be detangled without an Indigenous feminist perspective. In this article, I focus on an ecocritical analysis of several works by Lee Maracle, who dedicated her career to the regeneration and revalorization of Indigenous systems of knowledge, in order to pinpoint the intersections between feminism, decolonization, and nonhuman ecological thinking that might develop into a potential Indigenous ecofeminism that truly recognizes Indigenous epistemologies in their full context. Basing myself

1. "The issues facing Indigenous women… are resolved via decolonization and sovereignty, not (just) parity" (Arvin et al. 10).

off Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's theories on Indigenous radical resurgence, which assert that a cultural resurgence (such as a revalorization of Indigenous ecological knowledge) cannot take place without a political resurgence (such as the acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty), I argue that Maracle's portrayal of natural elements and her imagining of human-nature relations is inextricably linked to a decolonizing perspective foregrounded on Indigenous feminism.

Keywords
Decolonial; Ecocriticism; Ecofeminism; Indigenous; Refusal; Resurgence

1. Introduction

The need for human beings to envision and enact new ways of existing on Earth has become dire in the face of the unprecedented climate crisis that is irrevocably changing the planet as we know it. Temperatures are increasingly abnormally higher to the extent that people all over the world are being impacted. However, as Indigenous activists have reminded the world during the 2021 COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, their communities are bearing the brunt of climate change, and are facing, in the words of Daniela Balaguera, from the Arhuaco community in the North of Colombia, the threat of "the second extinction of our cultural practices" (Barret). With these words, Balaguera firmly links the dire consequences colonial oppression had over First Nations with the over-exploitation of natural resources that have brought us to where we are today. Beyond the annihilation of the lives and cultures of Indigenous communities, both processes are brought about by the anthropocentric philosophies of the Enlightenment and the consequent practices of capitalism.

As Rosi Braidotti explains, there is an urgent need to reformulate our relationship with the natural world beyond capitalist exploitation, "which is the root cause of the climate change emergency" (27). In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Braidotti is firm in the need for "an affirmative relational ethics… driven by environmental principles, which combine more inclusive ways of caring, across a transversal, multi-species spectrum that encompasses the entire planet and its majority of nonhuman inhabitants" (28), thus de-centering the anthropocentric modes of being and knowing that have landed us in this man-made environmental emergency. The need to examine and rethink the ideological orientations behind the destructive practices that have led us to this point has prompted many strands of thought, such as ecofeminisms, which look to establish a conceptual reorientation of our relationship with the nonhuman that destabilizes a very specific subject—"masculine, white, Eurocentric, practicing compulsory heterosexuality and reproduction, able-bodied, urbanized, and speaking a standard language" (Braidotti 29)—from the oppressive

position at the top of a hierarchy of importance. In an effort to displace this normative perception of subjectivity from the top of the hierarchy, certain strands of ecofeminism widely known as spiritual or cultural ecofeminisms,[2] have sometimes "utilized the beliefs and historical experiences of Indigenous peoples to support feminist theories of women–nature connections. By drawing upon Aboriginal cultures to support these claims, Indigenous beliefs, knowledge, and experiences are at times appropriated" (Wilson 334). In their in-depth exposition of Indigenous feminisms, Hawaiian scholar Maile Arvin et al. "plea that feminists must avoid New Age forms of recognition that idealize and appropriate Indigenous cultures and religion" (21) and acknowledge instead Indigenous feminist theories as an ongoing project of resistance that contests patriarchy and its power relationships, including decolonization and ecological exploitation. For Kim TallBear, citizen of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, her wish to "dismantle hierarchies and 'be in good relation' with one another" (qtd. in Nickel and Fehr 2) was what led her to Indigenous feminism, claiming that "Indigenous thinkers need to be at the table with feminists, we need to be at the table with disability scholars, and we need to be at the table with Queer theorists because we have very similar critiques of power. So that's how I became a feminist. It wasn't because of Indigenous women" (2). With this statement, TallBear highlights the profoundly intersectional nature of Indigenous feminism, and its potential for dismantling patriarchal power relations and re-imagining new relationalities.

Similarly, in the search for alternative modes of relating to other Earth-dwellers, many are looking at the connection Indigenous communities have with the natural world. As Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson remarks, "[a]fter centuries of benefiting from the promotion of European colonialism and the denial of Indigenous Knowledge as a legitimate knowledge system, the western academy is now becoming interested in certain aspects of Indigenous Knowledge" such as "Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)" ("Anticolonial" 373). However, the scope of this interest is specific and disconnects ecological knowledge from decolonial practices, such as land claims or Indigenous feminisms, and from "the spiritual foundations" of Indigenous Knowledge and

2. Ecofeminisms are rooted in the notion that "land is tied to the conceptualization and treatment of women, and how the feminizing of land facilitates its colonial and patriarchal possession" (Bedford 203). However, many strands diverge into more essentialist conceptions of women/nature, and scholars like Kathi Wilson establish a difference between a "spiritual ecofeminism" which reclaims and celebrates a "gendered connection to nature" and a "social ecofeminism" which contends that this connection "represents a patriarchal artifice that reinforces oppression" (333).

"the Indigenous values and worldviews that support it" (374). Simpson notes that the use made of TEK by western science is often relegated to a mere data gathering of factual knowledge in regions where it is lacking to "better control those environments" (374), an approach that only furthers the practices of modernity that see the natural world as a non-being that must be tamed in the service of humanity.[3] Consequently, western incursions into TEK are oblivious to the "impact of colonialism on Indigenous Knowledge systems" (375). It is my position that for white audiences to fruitfully engage with Indigenous thinking, ecocritical readings of Indigenous texts will help displace anthropocentric thinking and re-imagine new systems of relations with the natural world. Furthermore, engagement with Indigenous feminism, which has acknowledged the intersectionality of the oppressions it seeks to dismantle from its very conception,[4] presents a fruitful opportunity to radically re-think the metanarratives that have led the western world to the terrible crisis we are experiencing.

As a white, feminist scholar brought up in European academic institutions who firmly believes in the need for a revalorization of Indigenous knowledges, I am concerned with the way in which we may engage respectfully with Indigenous epistemologies from western academia without risking the re-production of exploitative colonial practices.[5] In the search for an answer, the spirit of bridge-crossing evoked by Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* and its sequel, *Celia's Song,* comes to mind. In this article, I seek to establish whether we can talk of

3. Amongst other scholarship, Walter Mignolo's *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011) expands on the inextricable links between modernity and colonialism, arguing that coloniality (the ongoing colonial oppression consequence of Imperialism and firmly linked to capitalism) is the direct consequence of the logic of western modernity. For Mignolo, the rhetoric of religious salvation, the civilizing missions (including the submission of nature at the service of mankind), and the discourse on democracy and advancement that are staples of modernity have justified different iterations of colonialism from the 16th century onwards.

4. It is widely acknowledged that the feminist movement was spearheaded by white educated women who fought for (much needed) rights to vote, political representation, and access to education and the workforce, but it has largely been a fight for parity, whereas Black and Indigenous feminisms have long claimed the need for the dismantling and reformulation of western capitalist and patriarchal societies.

5. As a white reader engaging critically with Maracle's work, a key part of the process of writing has involved the continuous reassessment of my own assumptions and an attempt to place my reading in a position where I was not "speaking for" Indigenous voices. Thus, my investigation has included an in-depth reading of Maracle's theoretical texts and interviews about both her writing and activism, which have informed my analyses of her novels. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the position of my reading to be one unavoidably rooted in western capitalism, and I would like to consider this exercise one of deep listening.

Indigenous ecofeminism in Lee Maracle's works, and what it may entail. I pose that an analysis of the intersections between feminism, decolonization, and non-human ecological thinking in *I am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (1988), *Ravensong: A Novel* (1993), and its sequel *Celia's Song* (2014) reveals a potential Indigenous ecofeminism that truly recognizes Indigenous epistemologies in their full context. Basing myself off Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's theories on Indigenous radical resurgence, which assert that a cultural resurgence (such as a revalorization of Indigenous ecological knowledge) cannot take place without a political resurgence (such as the acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty), I argue that Maracle's portrayal of natural elements and her imagining of human-natural relations is inextricably linked to a radical decolonizing perspective foregrounded on Indigenous feminism.

2. Ecocritical Analysis of *Ravensong* and *Celia's Song*: Survival vs. Resurgence

> Without song, all that's left is the thinnest sense of survival. This spiderweb of survival has snapped from whatever mooring it attached itself to and the silk threads lie all withered and tangled in a heap on the floor of a burned-down longhouse that has not been rebuilt.
>
> —Lee Maracle, *Celia's Song*

Lee Maracle, who unfortunately passed away in 2021, was a writer and activist from the Stó:lō Nation who dedicated her long career to the recovery and revitalization of Indigenous knowledge. Together with authors like Tomson Highway and Maria Campbell, she was part of the so-called Indigenous literary renaissance of the 20th century. As a writer, activist, orator, and cultural critic, Maracle devoted herself to the examination of the harms perpetrated against First Nations by European colonization and the subsequent emergence of the Canadian nation-state. She continuously highlights the fact that colonialism is still an ongoing process, and advocates for the revalorization of Indigenous knowledge and the sovereignty of Indigenous nations. A dedicated researcher of Stó:lō Nation cultural practices, her storytelling follows what she refers to as "orature," a combination of traditional "oratory and European story" (Maracle, "Trickster" 11), which maintains the pedagogical orientation of Indigenous storytelling as a transmitter of traditional knowledge.[6] Thus, her writings

6. Maracle took special issue with the problematic over-generalization of Indigenous cultural elements (Maracle, "National Literature" 88) and consequent erasure of tribal

"merely pose the dilemma" (Maracle, "Trickster" 12), challenging the reader's preconceptions and guiding them to a position of critical thinking instead of providing a pre-packaged solution, thus establishing storytelling as a vehicle for activism, an engine for transformation and social change.

The challenging dilemma presented in *Ravensong* is, precisely, the difficult coexistence of the Indigenous and settler communities in what we know as Canada, within the colonial structures of the nation-state. Although Maracle was an advocate for the resurgence and liberation of the Indigenous communities of Turtle Island, the extreme precarity and segregation imposed upon them mean that for the Indigenous nations to resurge, first they must survive under the forces of lateral violence, transgenerational trauma, and assimilation, all emerging from colonization. In the three selected books, I argue, we can identify a constant tension between the need to guarantee the survival of Indigenous communities, sometimes benefitting from structures and institutions that may acknowledge Indigenous identity and even the harms of colonialism, but which exist within the settler colonial state, and, on the other hand, in the words of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a radical resurgence dependent upon the destruction of settler colonialism, and capitalism as its economic model.[7] In the short essay "Law, Politics, and Tradition" published in 1988 in *I am Woman*, Maracle presents the tension between individual resilience and communal resurgence in a clear-cut way that leaves very little room for nuance: "[t]hose who held fast to the essential principles of their culture went in the direction of sovereignty; those who became alienated from their communities trod in the direction of sub-normal integration" (37). With these words, she establishes a clear binary between "self-determination" and "continued dependence" (37). In the process, she condemns a middle-class Indigenous elite that grew thanks to opportunities funded by the Canadian government, as she argues that "[t]his elite owes both its existence and its loyalty to the piper that paid it to play the tune" (38). Similarly, in "Rebel" she expands on this dichotomy to claim that

identities, and her work shows no inclination to stand as representative of a multitude of tribal systems of incredible complexity. She attempted, however, to draft a homogenous way forward, both for the Indigenous community and for their settler neighbors.

7. Simpson predicates the Radical Resurgence Project on a generative refusal of "colonialism and its current settler colonial structural manifestation" (*Always* 34), one that calls for the formation of constellations of organizing and activism against heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy and their forces of dispossession, generating an Indigenous alternative (35). Simpson's *radical* resurgence is not "compatible with the reconciliation discourse, the healing industry, or other depolitized recovery-based narratives" (49) and decries forms of cultural recognition that co-opt Indigenous cultural resurgence for the Canadian multicultural state without recognizing a political dimension (50).

rebellion is not possible from within the system of oppression. To illustrate this point, she depicts the co-option of the Red Power movement by the flag of cultural nationalism (97) and argues that its original power, rooted in civil disobedience, was lost after government funds administered by those educated in white institutions set the guidelines for any possible actions, making it impossible to resist against the settler state. Succinctly, she claims that "we had no way to move beyond survival" (100), delineating the idea that a battle for survival had no room for radical resurgence.

It is my position that *Ravensong*, published only a few years later in 1993, develops the nuanced tension between survival and resurgence by acknowledging the terrible material and spiritual conditions in which many of the Indigenous communities of North America find themselves, and the very real threat to their continued existence they experience. In *Ravensong*, Maracle seems to privilege guaranteeing the resilience (and survival) of the Indigenous communities before a project of resurgence may emerge. Set in the 1950s, the novel focuses on a small Stó:lō village in British Columbia where sisters Stacey and little Celia live with Momma and their extended family, and the neighboring settler town of Maillardville. Raven, a trickster figure and narrator of the story, is witness to the seemingly inevitable path to the demise of the Indigenous village, which struggles with terrible precarity and appears disconnected from the world. As a result, Raven decides to send a terrible flu epidemic that will force the villagers to "come out of the house" (Kelly 75) and engage with the nearby settler town.[8] As a harbinger of change and a symbol of "transformation and agency" (Maracle, "Understanding" 88), Raven sets its hopes for bridge-crossing on Stacey, a 17-year-old Indigenous girl who attends the high school in Maillardville and dreams of becoming a teacher and coming back to the village to create a school where the Indigenous children may learn their own traditions.

The dilemma presented in *Ravensong* involves the difficult coexistence of the white and Indigenous neighboring communities in the face of a health crisis that Raven claims will prove to the Indigenous village the need to bridge the cultural gap and learn from each other in terms of equality. The opposing options between integration and radical sovereignty appear nuanced and developed here: Raven is insistent throughout the novel that salvation will only come with the engagement of the settlers, and the hope for the village's future

8. Maracle repeatedly warns against the dangers of segregation and the consequent silencing of Indigenous voices. In the preface to *Ravensong*'s new edition she states that "[t]his country knows very little about us. We are something of a mystery. For decades no trespassing signs kept Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people separated. The mystery surrounded us, turned to speculation, and eventually stereotypes were born" (xii).

relies on Stacey being sent off to university (an elite institution of the settler state if there is one) so she can gain the necessary credentials to open a school in the village. This way, the children will learn traditional knowledge from their Elders instead of being indoctrinated in Euro-Canadian values. However, at the end of *Ravensong*, we learn that the settler government of British Columbia never allowed Stacey to open the school, and that "the village fell apart" (181) over the next decade. Any movement towards harmonious integration within the settler state seems shattered in the epilogue, set twenty five years later, in which Stacey, Celia, and Momma explain to Stacey's son Jacob the story of the epidemic and the damage caused by the restrictions and prohibitions set on the villagers by the state—"'Not allowed' seemed to be all there was left to their life" (181). Jacob's response, "Why did anyone pay attention to them?" (182), opens up the possibility of an alternative relation to the settlers, one that will only appear through the generative refusal (Simpson, *Always* 9) of their authority.

Although it is in *Celia's Song* where Maracle directly outlines how the trauma of colonization is responsible for the expressions of lateral violence, addiction, and suicide in Indigenous populations, *Ravensong* traces the loss of knowledge and tradition and the overwhelming precarity of said communities to first contact. Maracle begins the story with the evocation of a mournful and melancholic song that emanates from Raven and is echoed by water, earth, and wind, and joined by Cedar and Cloud. This forlorn song is translated into images for little Celia, who is able to witness the first contact between the Wolf Clan and the settlers. Celia's visions tell the story of how colonization brought disease and "a new moral sensibility" that spelled the death of "the old culture" (2) for the village. However, her young age makes her unable to interpret the images of violence and death, and she is incapable to find a meaning that can translate into action for her community. Natural elements appear from the beginning of the story as sources of knowledge, repositories of the long story of the colonization of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, whose contact with the Indigenous communities was once possible but has been cut off by the loss of spiritual knowledge. This situation echoes theories on place-thought, which argue that "[l]and is a vital element in re-storying body sovereignty" (de Finney et al. 90) since "land can be considered as a teacher and conduit of memory" (Tuck and McKenzie 57). Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie quote citizen of the Chickasaw Nation Jody Byrd, who points out that land "both remembers life and its loss and serves itself as a mnemonic device that triggers the ethics of relationality with the sacred geographies that constitute Indigenous peoples' histories" (57). Certainly, this is the role Cedar, Cloud, and Raven play in *Ravensong*: that of witnesses to a history of dispossession and de-spiriting that has led the villagers to their current moment of precarity and vulnerability.

Their insistence on trying to communicate the larger framework of the colonial enterprise to Celia, and through her to the villagers, seems to imply that this knowledge is a pre-condition for their survival.

Similarly, in *Celia's Song*, Stacey's son Jacob is the only one, apart from an older Celia, who can connect with Cedar and Mountain and gain knowledge from them, marking him for a position of guidance and leadership in the resurgence of traditional cultural practices. As Celia is able to listen to ravensong, which tells the long story of the colonization of her peoples, Jacob's song "'sits at the edge of the mountain," awaiting his voice (61). Celia notices Jacob's initial resistance to listen to cedar's story and embrace his role as a leader for his people, as Celia herself did years before, and she "urges Jacob to be calm. 'Listen, cedar wants to tell you something, listen to cedar.' Jacob ignores her" (61-62). It is not until he witnesses the terrible abuse that Amos inflicts upon Shelley, one of the village's girls, and recognizes in himself the same potential to recreate the cycle of abuse, that Jacob feels the need to seek a different path that may heal the enormous trauma his community is suffering. Amongst a multitude of feminine characters, Jacob stands out as a "decolonial representation of Indigenous masculinities… outside the pathologizing stereotype of being inherently damaged by intergenerational trauma and destined to inherit and perpetuate the violent legacies of colonial gender relations" (de Finney et al. 88). Reconciled with the old ways, he travels up Cheam mountain, where he meets the spirit of his ancestor, Alice. For four days, she guides him to the conclusion that humans have a natural need for ritual that must be consciously channeled into ceremony. The answer for the village, Jacob infers in the mountain, is to revive ceremony to restore their path (181). For Jacob, his journey into the mountain and the consequent acceptance of his leadership role in reviving ceremony for the village involves what Sandrina de Finney et al. have called "rekinning," a re-connection to "land kin [which] offers ways to re-spirit, to rebody all our relations" (86), a re-implication of "Indigenous young people with each other and with place and land" (91).

Reading from a western context, it is important to note that Maracle's representations of human-nature connections develop beyond the spiritual and acknowledge the crucial role played in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples by the settler state's control of natural resources. western readings of Indigenous human-nature are often overly simplistic and rely in romantic and static representations (Schmitt et al.). Aware of this misinterpretation, rooted on racist stereotyping, de Finney et al. are careful to assert that Indigenous "land-body kinships are not romanticized bound-to-land essentialisms but a very condition of our Indigeneity" (90), thus establishing land reclamation processes as an unavoidable condition for resurgence. Maracle also steps away from essentialist connections between Indigeneity and nature by explaining how the control of

natural resources by an exploitative settler state had contributed to the precarity of the Indigenous peoples of North America. Thinking of Old Nora, a single mother of several children, Stacey reflects on how her survival was dependent on "poaching" the natural resources the government had deemed forbidden:

> She watched her fish the river without a boat, alone under the cover of darkness, one eye on her children, the other watching for the game warden while her hands worked the deep net, filling it with fish.… Stacey cherished this memory of modest courage. Nora fished when the fish ran, regardless of the law outside herself. She was not interested in discussing her right to fish with anyone. She paid no attention to the men who rattled on about their right to fish—Aboriginal or otherwise. It wasn't relevant to her. Her children may have lacked clothing but they were never hungry. (12)

Similarly, in *Celia's Song*, Maracle

> traces the poverty, precarity, and loss of knowledge the villagers experience to the clear-cutting practices that have greatly worked to facilitate Canada's position as a powerful international economy. For the villagers, "[n]o trees in the last century… means no means of acquiring sustenance. No one knows how to carve the hooks or the bowls or make the clothing, and weirs are still illegal to use" (chap. I). In this way, Maracle links Indigenous precarity with the criminalization of resource-gathering practices. (Fraile-Marcos and López-Serrano 10)

The control of natural resources by the settler government in order to make a profit contrasts greatly with the subsistence relationship to the land of Indigenous communities. These conflicting approaches to nature show that it is impossible for both practices to coexist within the same system, which means that a genuine interest from western society in Indigenous human-nature relationships must necessarily move away from for-profit exploitation and start truly considering the impact of said exploitation on both the present and the future.

Such extreme differences in thought may make the reader think that any cultural encounter between Indigenous and western thought is doomed to failure, and indeed, Raven's insistence on bridge-crossing revives the tension between the necessity of survival and the possibility of resurgence. Stacey seems to embody the dangers of bartering with settler institutions in exchange for the power to change the situation for Indigenous communities from within. Educated in the white town so she can access university and the necessary qualifications to become a teacher, she walks the fine line between assimilation of settler culture in exchange for a path that will grant her the ability to create a school for her village. Slowly, she starts to contemplate her family, environment,

and traditions through the white gaze: "It was unavoidable. Half of Stacey's life was spent across the river in the warm sanctuary of white-town's evenly-heated institutions with their high ceilings, the other half was spent looking at the bedraggled single old hall that squatted stubbornly at the centre of her village" (9). Her thoughts infuriate Raven, whose motivation for the Indigenous community's bridge-crossing is the revalorization of Indigenous knowledge: a cultural encounter on equal terms. However, certain events make Stacey realize the hypocrisy and disconnection hidden behind the white façades of Maillardville, and she starts to reevaluate Momma's teachings. At one point Stacey contemplates Mrs. Snowden, a white woman, uprooting weeds from her manicured garden and making them "disappear in a strong black garbage bag out of sight from the public" (21). Stacey, recognizing the plants as "[c]omfrey root, dandelion, plantain and mullein" (21) all used as sources of food in her village, is bewildered by the fact that in the white town, "[a]esthetic waste supplanted good sense and thrift in the care of their yards" (23), effectively de-centering western/Eurocentric (non)relations to the natural world. Stacey's observations of the "neat little throw-away world" (23) of Maillardville revalorize Indigenous epistemologies that predicate the relationships between human and nonhuman beings on stewardship and sustenance, displacing other motivations like desire, comfort, or aesthetic pleasure, and exposing the damaging effects of western understandings of kinship with human and nonhuman Earth beings. The cultural encounter, in this instance, serves for Stacey to resist assimilation.

An explicit link between Mrs. Snowden's discarded weeds and Polly, one of Stacey's classmates, is established in *Ravensong*, confirming that Maracle contemplates the traditionally ecofeminist connection between woman and nature as productive for critical examination. Polly, a young girl from Maillardville who has been caught arranging an assignation with a boy by one of the teachers is condemned and ostracized for the forced publicization of her sexuality, until the pressure of the town's Catholic morality and the domestic violence experienced at home[9]—"He [Polly's father] beats her [Polly's mother] pretty regular" (69)—drive her to suicide. Initially having disentangled herself from Polly's troubles since she was "one of theirs" (19), Stacey's guilt prompts her to reconsider the social dynamics of the settler town and sees "Polly in her perfection being weeded from the ranks of her own, an unwanted dandelion" (21). Considering these politics of waste, she reflects that "[i]t would have been amusing had it just been the plants these people threw away, but Polly was a young seductive

9. Although "English had been their first language for some three generations" (Maracle, *Ravensong* 20) the Catholic morality brought over by the French settlers is prevalent in Maillardville and heavily influences the Christian section of the Indigenous village.

woman whom no one wanted to see anymore" (23). Disturbed by the patriarchal configurations of nuclear families that leave women isolated from other forms of kinship and "with no more rank in the house than the children" (25), Stacey ponders on the individuality and isolation that prevails in Maillardville: "[t]here were no support systems for white women… No wonder Polly killed herself" (Maracle, *Ravensong* 69).

In contrast, although the same patriarchal constructions have infiltrated the village, traditional systems of community support that endow the villagers with a duty to one another remain and ensure the protection of Madeline and her daughters after her husband, a.k.a. "the old snake," is discovered to have been abusing them. Maracle explicitly links domestic violence to colonialism by stating that it was after the old snake worked in the railroad with white men that "he came back full of crazy notions about his wife's place: "'I am the head of my household.'… He said crude things to young boys about making women mind" (134). Maracle describes instances of spousal abuse between Indigenous men who buy into settler understandings of patriarchal hierarchy and vulnerable women who are "mostly illiterate—another crippled two-tongued product of residential school" (135). In the case of Madeline, the old snake's wife, her vulnerability is heightened by the fact that she is a member of the Manitoba Saulteaux, and only came to Salish territory after marrying the old snake, who kept her isolated in the house and unable to form any community bonds within the village.[10] Thus, domestic gendered violence appears as a by-product of the permeation of patriarchal colonial values, a clear illustration of how "colonial violence infiltrates [Indigenous] systems, relations, bodies, and spirits" (de Finney et al. 85). Ultimately, Stacey's bridge-crossing adds nuance to Maracle's thesis that there is no recovering from colonial trauma while under colonial rule, and the forced precarity and conditions of assimilation are explored in depth in *Ravensong,* explaining the unavoidability of thinking in terms of survival. However, the explicit clashing of Indigenous thought with colonial morality, understanding of family, and kinship bonds that exclude the natural world lead the reader to understand that, for Maracle, the only long term solution for the Indigenous communities of Turtle Island is a radical rejection of Euro-Canadian systems of thought and governance in order to embark on a process of resurgence.

In his edited anthology of Canadian Indigenous fiction *All My Relations* (1990), self-identified Cherokee writer Thomas King explains the expression chosen as the title is a reminder not only of the importance of family, but also of

10. In Maracle's 1996 preface of *I am Woman*, she reports her shock at the high level of sexism amongst Indigenous men, claiming "no one would have dared doubt the intelligence of women ten years earlier" (ix).

the symbiotic relationships that Indigenous peoples have established with the "animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined" (ix). King refers to a framework of connectedness that implicates moral responsibility, "intricate webs of kinship that radiate from a Native sense of family" (King xiv). This resonates with the sense of duty and responsibility that awakens the Indigenous resurgence Maracle envisions in *Celia's Song*, a duty that extends to the natural resources being over-exploited by the settler state. For Maracle, Indigenous peoples must take their "birthright as care-takers of the land" (*Woman* 40). If *Ravensong* exposes precarity and focuses on survival, endurance, and adaptation, which is ultimately proven insufficient to avoid the decimation of the villagers, *Celia's Song* is a chant to radical resurgence. Set twenty-five years after the events narrated in *Ravensong*, Momma, Stacey, Celia, and the rest of the villagers realize that the damages of colonization are destroying the Indigenous communities from the inside: an epidemic of addiction, lateral violence, and suicide that Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran have referred to as the expression of a "soul wound" (45) caused by colonial policies.

Still trying to make sense of the suicide of little Jimmy, Celia's son, the family is faced with a terrible crime committed against one of the village's girls. Amos, a survivor of residential school and sexual abuse himself, enacts terrible violence against Celia's cousin Stella and her small daughter Shelley, to the point almost of death. Stella and Amos will then stand as examples of the terrible consequences and manifestations of colonial trauma, which Métis writer Jo-Ann Episkenew has identified "violence, rarely against the settler but against oneself, one's family, or one's community, and addiction as a form of self-medicating to temporarily ease the despair of personal and political powerlessness" (8). Although Maracle's story does not fail to acknowledge the individual's responsibility for the terrible acts perpetrated—indeed, justice is effectively carried out—Stella and Amos emerge as examples of how traumatic events, lack of decision power, and lack of a supportive structure confabulate to erase all sense of self-worth. However, amongst the villagers, Amos' terrible actions, Stella's failure to protect her daughter, and the shame these events provoke trigger a movement towards collective responsibility that will motivate the radical resurgence of their traditional practices:

> We are patching a child who has been tortured by one of our own. Someone of us birthed the child who became the beast who did this… We need to have some grave doubts, not about what we are doing now, but what we have been doing. We need to doubt who we have become. (147)

In a moment of terrible crisis in which suicide, addiction, and violence seem to sweep the village, Maracle shifts the focus from victimhood to hopeful futurity

by setting duty and responsibility (to the ancestors,[11] to the present, to the future) as the motivation that will drive the characters onwards. The impact of Shelley's trauma awakens for the villagers what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has called "generative refusal": a rejection of recognition from the settler government that involves the revival of Indigenous institutions of self-government (Simpson, *Always* 35). In a movement that declares the radical separation of the villagers from the settler state, they do not report Amos' abuse and instead, guided by Celia and Jacob and the knowledge they gain from their spiritual connections to the clan's past, they build a longhouse that will serve as the locus of the ceremonial practices intended to maintain the global health and harmony of the community. Its consolidation as an institution that replaces settler authority in the village comes to be realized by the administration of justice to Amos for his crimes against Shelley and Stella. Led to a dance trance inside the longhouse, Amos purges his sins and trauma through the sweat of his body and seems to find a peaceful death. Celia reflects that "[t]he deaths of the two men had been good for the village… it signified the birth of their beautiful smokehouse and its feasting ways, as well as the end of their sickness" (259). Finally refusing to "pay attention to them, of all people" (*Ravensong* 182), Stacey's school opens, allowing the journey towards Indigenous self-determination to begin after the restoration of a system of justice, governance, and education that is separate from that of the settler government.

Maracle has long highlighted the important role played by imagination and storytelling in any movement towards decolonization: ". . . for the oppressed, art, freedom and feminism intersect and become part of a global struggle for renewal. This always begins with an imagined sensibility of future" (qtd. in Fiola 166), and in *Celia's Song*, she envisions a true path towards Indigenous liberation and the dismantling of the oppressive structures of colonialism. An important step in this path, visible in both novels, is what she has called the "re-matriating" of family and society, a process that includes much more than a dismantling of hierarchies where male identities receive primacy. For Maracle, re-matriating is a process by which modern rationality and objectivity lose their primacy in the system of values established by the Enlightenment, and hierarchy is replaced by kinship and

11. In *Celia's Song*, the village's happenings are narrated by Mink whose role is bearing witness, and who reports the anger and restlessness of the bones of the ancestors of Turtle Island. In a vision, Celia hears them say that "Someone has to pay for decades of neglect. Someone has to appease our need for respect" (7). Although *Celia's Song* is oriented towards futurity, this device serves to reaffirm a sense of connectedness through generations that calls to mind the Haudenosaunee teaching that prefaces Winona LaDuke's *All Our Relations:* "Our past is our present, our present is our future, and our future is seven generations past and present."

balance as a system of relations in the world (qtd. in Fiola 165). This is also linked to the dismantling of the model of heteropatriarchal nuclear family imposed upon Indigenous peoples through colonization, opening possibilities for different models of family kinship and for gender expressions beyond the binary. Both *Ravensong* and *Celia's Song* introduce examples of this, and how they clash with the Catholic morality some of the villagers have assimilated. In *Ravensong*, after the death of Jim, Stacey and Celia's father, Stacey learns that their biological father is Ned, Jim's twin brother. Unable to produce children with Momma, the couple followed the advice of Grandpa Thomas, one of the village's Elders, and Momma "spent time in the city with Ned—four times, in fact" (90), resulting in Stacey, Jim, and Celia. Initially shocked and ashamed, particularly because after Jim's death Momma seems to be rekindling her romance with Ned, Stacey struggles to liberate herself from the Catholic mindset that judges Momma's acts as immoral and sinful. It is not until talking to old Ella that Stacey faces her own hypocrisy and admits that "Polly and Momma were the same woman—good-hearted and passionate" (94) and understands that she is judging her mother's actions through the gaze of the settlers: "she had brought their world into Momma's house" (95). Momma's actions call into question the patriarchal nuclear family as an extension of state sovereignty, and Stacey must critically analyze the ways in which she herself replicates heteropatriarchal and colonial ideas that are unjust with the grounded normativity of her clan's traditions (Simpson, "Co-Resistance" 22).[12] In this case, Indigenous feminist actions (resistance in the face of patriarchal structures) expose the connections between heteropatriarchy and colonization, and kinscapes,[13] "constellations of relations that implicate people with each other and with place and land" (de Finney et al. 91), substitute the patriarchal model of nuclear family.

3. Conclusion

If "settler colonialism has been and continues to be a gendered process" (Arvin et al. 8), a viable project for Indigenous resurgence must engage Indigenous

12. Simpson incorporates Glen Sean Coulthard's theories on grounded normativity, "the systems of ethics that are continuously generated by a relationship with a particular place, with land, through the Indigenous processes and knowledges that make up Indigenous life" (22). In *Ravensong*, Stacey's relationships to Momma, her family and the Elders, the river and the salmon's cycle, the mountain, and Rena's knowledge of the plants, their uses and cycles, form Stacey's grounded normativity, which stands in opposition to the patriarchal and colonial systems of values present in Maillardville.

13. de Finney et al. insist on the dimension of mutual responsibility and accountability inherent to the kinscape.

feminisms. For Maracle's project of decolonization, the process of dismantling patriarchal systems and re-matriating is central, but those emerge, she seems to say in *Ravensong* and *Celia's Song*, from a sense of duty to oneself, to one's networks of human and nonhuman beings, and to one's nation (with its past and futures adscriptions). Maracle's reflections on accountability "to our kin across time and place" (de Finney et al. 91) display a glocal perspective and emphasize the dilemma of either investing in a project for Indigenous resurgence that is grounded in an exploitative settler state or renouncing the project of resurgence by investing limited resources in survival. In the works analyzed, the difficulties of generative refusal (economic precarity, prosecution of dissidence, vulnerability) are fully acknowledged, and Maracle herself acknowledges the dilemma, far from the radical condemnations of *I am Woman*. Here I reference an interview on transnational feminism where she recognizes the benefits of accessing the privileges of settlers (free time, cheap products, access to higher education, and a stable economy), that allowed her to develop her activism on behalf of Indigenous liberation, but she remarks that much of this comes at the cost of the hyper-exploitation of natural resources and labour forces elsewhere: "we need to be cognizant that when we seek monetary gain here, we are also assuring greater exploitation elsewhere" (qtd. in Fiola 164). To fully achieve the global liberation of Indigenous women, who greatly make up the cheaper labuor forces from which the so-called "developed world" benefits, the current economic model must be dismantled. In other words, there is no Indigenous feminism without decolonization, and there is no decolonization under capitalism. A sustainable project must then include "local self-reliance and the recovery of Indigenous systems of knowledge, jurisdiction, practice and governance" (LaDuke 200) that can allow for the cultural difference of Indigenous nations, oriented with a sense of global responsibility towards other human and nonhuman Earth beings, recognizing a non-hierarchical framework that opposes the orders of modernity.

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"My Body is a Spaceship": Technoscience and Experiments Otherwise in Adam Dickinson's *Anatomic*

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ABSTRACT
What does an understanding of the self as constantly rearticulated mean for ecopoetry and the lyric "I"? And how might an emphasis on a multiscalar semiotics, where different forms of writing are understood to carry the capacity to literally reorganize material life, reframe the possibilities for writing under the contested sign of the Anthropocene, in the midst of the Earth's sixth extinction event, the accelerating acidification of the planet's oceans, and the largescale climatic reorganizations wrought by climate change? This article reads the idiosyncratic mode of production and the poems of Adam Dickinson's *Anatomic* alongside recent scholarship in ecopoetics, environmental humanities, and science and technology studies to advance a particular and specific (that is, non-generic) understanding of Dickinson's *experimental* poetics. From its beginnings in the desire to catalogue and identify the presence of a dizzying array of bacteria, chemicals, metals, and other substances in the body, *Anatomic* narrates the movement from a misguided and despairing purity politics to a transformative conception of the individual body and consciousness as shot through with relations at multiple, unfathomable scales. Intervening in the discourses, techniques, and worldview of what Max Liboiron (Métis) has termed "dominant science" (20), Dickinson's text elaborates an experimental practice that invites us to rethink our modes and forms of relating to one another and the more-than-human entanglements that sustain, feed off, or simply co-exist with us.

Keywords
Adam Dickinson; Ecopoetics; Ecopoetry; Experiment; Experimental Poetry; Technoscience

1. Introduction

The introductory prose poem of Adam Dickinson's *Anatomic* (2018) announces the collection's overt concern with the proliferation of toxins and toxicants that continually wash over the contemporary, western subject:

> The keys touch me as I type.… My neighbour's attempt to control dandelion leads to misspellings in my adrenal gland.… My fat collects signatures from one of the most profitable companies in the world.… Petrochemicals brand hormonal messages that course through endocrine pathways and drive my metabolism. I wear multinational companies in my flesh. But I also wear symbiotic and parasitic relationships with countless nonhumans who insist for their own reasons on making me human. I want to know the stories of these chemicals, metals, and organisms that compose me. I am an event, a site within which the industrial powers and evolutionary pressures of my time come to write. I am a spectacular and horrifying crowd. How can I read me? How can I write me? (9)

Dickinson's first sentence resituates an object or instrument of writing—the keyboard—as an actor in a mutually constitutive performance. The "I" here remains legible, but the sentence's grammar relocates it into a subordinate clause, predicated on the "touch[ing]" occasioned by the subject, the "keys." Images related to writing and textuality recur throughout this passage in various forms, offering a bridge between the uneasy recognition of toxic accumulation ("misspellings in my adrenal gland," "My fat collects signatures," "Petrochemicals brand hormonal messages") and the problem of representation that has emerged as a central preoccupation for theorists of the Anthropocene in the humanities.[1] Dickinson foregrounds the notion that the self is constantly overwritten or "compose[d]" by a range of environmental, chemical, and biological beings or markers. Indeed, this poem seems open to the possibility that this constant reshaping of the self characterizes what it means to be "human" in

1. By the "problem of representation" I mean the many variations on the argument that the Anthropocene "overturns our representations of the world" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 45), or that "the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination" (Ghosh 9). Similarly, from a public humanities perspective, Imre Szeman contends that "how to effectively communicate about global warming… is a challenge less of available data than of rhetoric and representation" (3).

the contemporary moment. The stew of chemicals, endocrine disruptors, and those "symbiotic and parasitic relationships," Dickinson suggests, are what "mak[e] me human." As the poem announces in its concluding sentence, "What is inscribed in me is in you, too" (10).

Dickinson's first poem, and *Anatomic* broadly speaking, also addresses that anxiety of representation, both at the scale of the individual subject and, I will argue, in relation to larger, self-reflexive questions about the problematics of writing in the Anthropocene. These concerns are visible in those questions that close the extended excerpt above: "How can I read me? How can I write me?" To scale these questions beyond the individual to the level of poetic form, we might ask, with Dickinson: What does an understanding of the self as constantly rearticulated mean for ecopoetry and the lyric "I"? And how might this emphasis on a multiscalar semiotics, where different forms of writing are understood to carry the capacity to literally reorganize material life, reframe the possibilities for writing under the contested sign of the Anthropocene, in the midst of the Earth's sixth extinction event, the accelerating acidification of the planet's oceans, and the largescale reorganizations wrought by climate change? In what follows, I read the idiosyncratic mode of production and the poems of *Anatomic* alongside recent scholarship in ecopoetics, environmental humanities, and science and technology studies to advance a particular and specific (that is, non-generic) understanding of Dickinson's *experimental* poetics. From its beginnings in the desire to catalogue and identify the presence of a dizzying array of bacteria, chemicals, metals, and other substances in the body, *Anatomic* narrates the movement from a misguided and despairing purity politics to a transformative conception of the individual body and consciousness as shot through with relations at multiple, unfathomable scales. Intervening in the discourses, techniques, and worldview of what Max Liboiron (Métis) has termed "dominant science" (20), Dickinson's text elaborates an experimental practice that invites us to rethink our modes and forms of relating to one another and the more-than-human entanglements that sustain, feed off, or simply co-exist with us.

2. Ecopoetics and/as Experiment

To better begin to unpack Dickinson's interventions, I want to first situate his poetry in the context of recent trends and criticism in the field of ecopoetics proper. As the extended excerpt above no doubt demonstrates, *Anatomic* traffics in what Lynn Keller identifies as a poetics of the "self-conscious Anthropocene." Keller coins the term in her study of ecopoetics in North America in the 21st century. The self-conscious Anthropocene names, for Keller, the resonance of the Anthropocene concept in the cultural sphere. In other words, regardless

of the debates in Earth system sciences about the Anthropocene's start date or in environmental humanities about alternative names and narrations of this newly recognized geological epoch, the term and its implications—that human activity has and continues to irreversibly alter the planet with massive consequences for life as we have known it—has become a powerful cultural touchstone.[2] This is to approach the Anthropocene, as Keller notes, "as a cultural reality more than a scientific one" (2). More than just a claim about the relevance of the Anthropocene's conceptual apparatus for contemporary cultural work across forms, modes, and media, Keller's self-conscious Anthropocene also does the work of periodizing ecopoetics. This shift in the cultural imaginary is intimately tied to Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer's introduction of the term "Anthropocene" in 2000; the insinuation, for Keller, is that there have been palpable changes in ecopoetics or environmental poetry since the turn of the 21st century.

On a similar timeline, Margaret Ronda has recently identified a "literary mode of ecopoetics" that "emerges in North American poetry in the early 2000s" (*Remainders* 117, 113). Reading post-1945 environmental poetry in the United States, Ronda historicizes this branch of environmental poetry, suggesting its development and shaping against the backdrop of the Kyoto Protocol (1997), Bush's withdrawal from Kyoto (2001), Hurricane Katrina (2005), the BP Spill (2010), and, in her analysis, a general malaise with green consumerism as the dominant mode of environmental consciousness at the turn of the 21st century. In terms that resonate with Keller's notion of the recognition of the Anthropocene's effects becoming commonplace or widespread in non-scientific communities or parlance, Ronda argues that the ecopoetics she traces "thus appeared in a moment where planetary crisis had become the new normal and where no countering force for change, whether governmental or communal, seemed in sight" (117). I want to momentarily bracket Ronda's gesture to the absence of a "communal" "force for change" as one pressure among many from which a new mode of ecopoetics arises in the 21st century. Dickinson's *Anatomic* is attentive to the ways that the contemporary petroculture literally organizes life, at the level of the hormone as mentioned above, but also in

2. Keller's focus is contemporary culture, with experimental ecopoetics occupying a very narrow and specialist area of that terrain. We might compare Keller's claim, about the relevance of the Anthropocene concept for humanists and various artmaking communities, with Lesley Sklair's findings in the Anthropocene Media Project (AMP) after studying how media reports on the Anthropocene or presents narratives pertaining to an Anthropocenean present and future: "it is likely that most people have either never heard of [the Anthropocene] or, if they have, they have no clear idea about it" (3).

terms of the possibilities for the social.[3] But rather than closing in on itself in despair or concern, either at embodied toxic accumulation or the worlds and livelihoods we have lost, I want to read *Anatomic* generatively, that is, as advancing a vision of a "world of abundance" (Papadopoulos 7) and cracking open a foreclosed and colonial future to the otherwise.

Keller's and Ronda's parallel narratives of ecopoetics in the 21st century are invaluable as a starting point for thinking about how contemporary environmental poetry enters into dialogue with historically situated political and theoretical concepts and discourses. At the same time, it is worth distilling further the particular, Canadian context of Dickinson's contemporary ecopoetics. As Catriona Sandilands notes in a recent introduction to a journal cluster on environmental literatures and politics in Canada, there is "a geographical, historical, colonial, economic, political, and literary specificity" to Canadian environmental writing and ecocriticism, and "environmental literatures and politics take particular, interrelated shapes here" (284). In the Canadian context, settler colonialism is not an optional framework for environmental literary scholarship, or, I would argue, for contemporary ecopoetics. Indeed, in Canada in the 21st century, the acceleration of extractivist projects and associated infrastructure development has been met with concerted social organization and Indigenous-led protests that have forced the field of Canadian poetry, specifically, to confront its relation to environmental politics. Sandilands notes the $5.6M lawsuit that Kinder Morgan, the Texas-based oil company then operating the Trans Mountain Pipeline in Burnaby B.C., served in 2014 to Stephen Collis for his participation in pipeline protests; during the trial, Collis's poetic blog posts were read by the prosecuting council as evidence of his criminality (283). In the late summer and fall of 2019, both the Canadian poet, scholar, and activist Rita Wong and Tawahum Bige—a Łutselk'e Dene, Plains Cree, Two-Spirit and Non-binary poet—were arrested and subsequently jailed for conducting ceremony and defending Burnaby Mountain, on unceded Coast Salish territory, from the same Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. More than twenty years out from the coinage of the Anthropocene, perhaps the ground has shifted to the point that we can identify a renewed mode of politicized ecopoetics commensurate to the shift in environmentalism from Ronda's green consumerist malaise to a more urgent, anti-extractivist, and often Indigenous-led environmental politics.

3. My use of the term "petroculture" in this essay takes a cue from Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden, who present oil "as the central concern of a vast network or 'assemblage' of interlinked technological, commercial, financial, and political initiatives" (xxiv). Petroculture, in this context, names the dominant, fossil-fueled energy system and its attendant social, political, and infrastructural formations.

Dickinson's *Anatomic* addresses itself to the "geographical, historical, colonial, economic, political, and literary" contexts that shape the confluence of "environmental literatures and politics" in Canada through, I argue, a critical and self-reflexive engagement with "experiment." "Experiment," for my purposes here, straddles the lexicons or vocabularies of dominant science and contemporary ecopoetics, and might offer a way to conceive of the work of the literary in the Anthropocene. We might also route the "experiment" back through a shared node in both Keller's and Ronda's constellation of 21st century ecopoetics, that is, the journal *ecopoetics*, first published in 2001 by Jonathan Skinner out of SUNY Buffalo. In the "Editor's Statement" in that inaugural issue, Skinner makes an argument for an "investigative poetics" for environmental poetry that grows out of an avant-garde genealogy, thereby bringing experimental poetics into a political engagement with climate while also opening a literary space for a new kind of poetic articulation of environmental consciousness (7). As Ronda puts it, investigative ecopoetics was "characterize[d] as an extension of avant-garde poetry with sustained attention to environmental concerns" (118). Keller notes that the project of *ecopoetics* cut in two directions: from Skinner's perspective, on the one hand, environmentally minded poetry had remained latched to a reductive understanding of nature poetry, limiting itself to outdated ideas of the coherent and separate human subject coming into consciousness of the environment or place through which they move; on the other hand, "experimental" or "avant-garde" poetry had failed to conceptually, theoretically, or critically engage questions of climate and environmental degradation. An "investigative poetics" in ecopoetry, in other words, intervened in both of these literary and formal lacunae.

There is a line to be drawn between the "investigative poetics" that Skinner identifies as characteristic of his mode of contemporary ecopoetry and the literal "experiments" or the mode of production of Dickinson's *Anatomic*. Dickinson performed extensive biomonitoring and microbiome testing on himself, measuring the presence of chemicals and microbes in his blood, urine, and feces in order to determine the extent to which the individual body is inundated with the byproducts of contemporary petroculture. He catalogues in gruesome detail the physical and mental effects of this kind of self-extraction: drawing 76 vials of blood in one sitting ("My veins were a mess.… By the end of it, I was drawing from both arms and yanking on the tourniquet with my teeth" [16]); complications from colonoscopies (68); intensified anxiety from the litany of chemicals he finds present within himself (27). He uses the discoveries from these experiments as occasions for poetry, writing "chemical and microbial poems" that use the "organisms discovered during" the tests, as well as their measured presence in his bodily fluids, as epigraphs (149). For example, the poem "Lipids," which I will read in more detail shortly, has as an

epigraph for its first section "Polychlorinated Biphenyls, # 105 (plasma): 1.88 ng/g lipid" (32).[4]

An understanding of the origins of the collection's subject matter, as well as its harrowing method of textual production, allows us to qualify the text's status as "experimental" poetry. This is what I meant above in suggesting that *Anatomic* advances a non-generic experimental poetics. *Experimental*, as it is often deployed in poetry and poetics criticism, functions as a multivalent marker that nonetheless remains difficult to pin down: it gestures to forms and modes associated with or understood as avant-garde, including agrammatical modernist techniques that rely on fragmentation, paratactical construction, and interruption, or a mixing of linguistic, textual, and/or affective registers, styles, and discourses; it also sometimes suggests, to varying degrees of intensity, a politics, that is, a commitment to composing a more equitable and just world. Indeed, the relationship between art and politics is a key part of Gregory Betts's argument in his recent study of avant-garde poetry and artmaking communities in Vancouver in the second half of the 20th century, and a key sticking point in differentiating avant-gardism and experimentation, writ large:

> the avant-garde is always, by name and definition, the productive, liberatory dynamic at work in literature. Revolutionary work presumes the possibility of a better or ideal social contract, but that begins by re-imagining interpersonal relations and daily life. If the radical affect disappears, so does the avant-garde. (*Finding* 45)

At the same time as I am wary of conflating the aims, politics, and expressions of experimental and avant-garde writing,[5] I want to suggest there are elements

4. Dickinson's hyper-specificity in naming the trace presences he finds in his various samples inaugurates an interesting tension in the context of the collection's gestures to contamination as a universalizing experience, such as the statement, quoted above, "What is inscribed in me is in you, too." I am inclined to read these epigraphs in the context of Jean-Thomas Tremblay's notion of an "ecology of the particular," a "methodological principle" that tracks the uneven distribution of harms at the hands of "toxification and environmental calamities" that might otherwise be understood to "homogenize, and as such departicularize, experience" (20).

5. As this article deploys *avant-garde* in relation to Dickinson's work, it feels relevant to flag the intensified debate of the past decade about the uneven distribution in the frequency with which the moniker attaches to white, cis, and male writers and artists. This is Cathy Park Hong's argument in "Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde," which names avant-garde poetry "a racist tradition" and condemns the process by which experimental, innovative, or radical BIPOC artists and writers have been canonized "under

of avant-gardism that prove useful to understanding what I am calling Dickinson's *experimental* ecopoetics.

In an earlier monograph, some of which lays the foundation for the examination of Vancouver's postwar avant-gardes, Betts develops his theory of the avant-garde by emphasizing its attachment to the "revolutionary" impulse to create "an art that participates in or serves the liberation of culture and ideology" (*Avant-Garde* 17). Indeed, this becomes the defining separation between *experimental* and *avant-garde*: "avant-gardism, unlike other forms of experimental or innovative art, intertwines aesthetic novelty with sociopolitical revolution" (18). While Dickinson's poetics refuse a traditional, grandiose avant-garde militancy, focused as they are inwardly on the cellular and microscopic, I want to tentatively suggest there is nonetheless an element of what Betts might describe as a "new world consciousness" that emerges in the text's radical reconceptualization of the embodied self (*Finding* 45). To reroute this discussion back to the experiments of *Anatomic*, there is also an echo between the avant-garde's fraught relationship to "progress" (Betts, *Avant-Garde* 17; Tremblay and Strombeck 3) and Dickinson's interventions into laboratory spaces and discourses. Put differently, the poetics of Dickinson's *Anatomic*, I want to suggest, qualify *experimental* through a critical emphasis on the "experiment" and the ways this term circulates across registers from the literary to the technoscientific. *Anatomic* is not only experimental ecopoetry in the sense that it appears out of, and engages with, a lineage of avant-garde, politically engaged environmental literature; it is *experimental* in that it models a particular ontology for the Anthropocene, one that emerges from a critical and anticolonial reconsideration of the affordances, possibilities, and incommensurabilities of a range of technoscientific practices.

3. "Lipids," Endocrine Disruptors, Infrastructure

To get a better sense of how Dickinson develops this *experimental* mode across *Anatomic*, I want to turn to the aforementioned sequence of poems, "Lipids" (32-41), with a particular focus on the section that references Aamjiwnaang First Nation (39). "Lipids" is introduced by a standalone prose piece, which

the banner of ethnic studies" and "rarely regarded as core figures in experimental poetry." In their overview of crisis in/and the contemporary avant-garde, Jean-Thomas Tremblay and Andrew Strombeck show that "too often, *avant-garde* has served as shorthand for a certain dogma around experimental work—a dogma that, at its worst, disguises whiteness as post-identity" (1).

reiterates the introductory poem's concerns with cellular semiotics, while also making clear the collection's self-conscious engagement with the Anthropocene concept: "I have found one of the most widely distributed environmental contaminants on the planet in my body: polychlorinated biphenyls, PCBs.… PCBs constitute a form of writing in the Anthropocene" (31). These PCBs, as Dickinson's poem notes, are part of the class of endocrine disrupting chemicals, or EDCs, and function "as subtle revisions to the hormonal cascades that precipitate bodily morphologies" (31). Liboiron offers a "simplistic, biologically reductive" description of EDCs that is nonetheless useful for understanding the operations of these toxicants, particularly for a poetry scholar (94). Unlike toxins, which are nonindustrial in origin and which "work like [a] bull-in-a-china-shop… wrecking things and spilling cell soup," EDCs "work as part of the system, disrupting it while allowing it to continue" (95).[6] This is not to place toxicants and toxins on a continuum of bad to worse. EDCs, as Liboiron points out, are implicated in a range of harms, "resulting in things like recurrent miscarriages, early-onset puberty, early-onset menopause, obesity, diabetes, and neurological disorders" (95). Crucially for our purposes, and as Dickinson's engagement with Canada's Chemical Valley suggests, EDCs "are also parts of structures of violence" (Liboiron 95).

The sixth section of "Lipids" is a short prose piece that makes legible the scale-shifting required to navigate between specific, sited harms and structural violence. The poem reads in full:

> In Aamjiwnaang First Nation, only a third of all babies are boys. The hockey team is disbanded. Girls' softball was added. Refineries rim the community with pipes. Cholera, smallpox, the British, and the French split piles of young Anishinabek men. In unceded lipidscapes, offspring now flare with feedback. Injuries take their course like conclusions draw baths. Boilerplates rust in jurisdictional prudence. On the back of the old ten-dollar bill, the picture of smokestacks and holding tanks could only have been taken by standing on the reserve. I called to ask. (39)

The naming of Aamjiwnaang here in the first line of the poem is a startling moment that jolts the reader into a specific relation. It should be noted that

6. In flagging the difference between toxins and toxicants from the outset of this article, I follow Liboiron's convincing argument throughout *Pollution is Colonialism* that distinguishing between these terms is not simply "fussy science-nerd semantics," but that toxins and toxicants "operate at different scales, engender different relationships, have different modes of both harm and violence, and thus have different politics" (94). Cf. also Liboiron 87 n28.

Dickinson announces the collection's interest in the confluence of environmental, toxic accumulation and settler colonialism from the opening section of "Hormone," the long poem that runs in divided sections throughout the text. There, the speaker ruminates on the "buffalo meat / that built railroads / and fuelled wagon trains" and, in an echo of the Aamjiwnaang poem above, asserts that "Every nation / sits atop / a *pile* / and waits" (13, emphasis added). At the same time, however, this section of "Lipids" marks something of a departure for the collection so far in that it names specific harms and also self-reflexively implicates the settler poet—and settler readers, myself included—in the ongoing structures that perpetuate those harms.[7]

Before attending more closely to "Lipids," I want to offer some necessary context on Aamjiwnaang and the relationships between settler colonialism and pollution. Dickinson himself points to Sarah Marie Wiebe's scholarship on Aamjiwnaang for further context on this poem (146). Wiebe fuses policy analysis, an environmental justice framework, and ethnographic fieldwork to trace the ongoing impacts for residents of Aamjiwnaang, which sits in what has become known as Canada's Chemical Valley in Sarnia, Ontario. As Wiebe describes it, "Chemical Valley is a heavy industrial zone, located in southwestern Ontario and responsible for approximately 40 percent of Canada's chemical manufacturing" (11). In terms that resonate with my initial gloss of Dickinson's poem as implicating the settler self and readership in the harms perpetuated in Aamjiwnaang, Wiebe documents the ways that "contemporary manifestations of colonial biopower in Canada, from universal state policies to intimate sites and lived experiences, are distributed through policies across scales from the Canadian Constitution to the individual citizen" (17). Her overarching argument is to reimagine the way the settler nation does policy in relation to environmental reproductive justice, that is, to infuse "an old colonial system of land relations where the land is a Resource" (Liboiron 39) with a sincere engagement with the epistemologies and lifeways of the Indigenous peoples who live with and on the land itself. Wiebe's suggestion that "Injury and wounding in Chemical Valley" become "incidental features of Canadian politics" (17) is articulated in the "smokestacks" that Dickinson describes "on the back of the old ten-dollar bill";

7. Dickinson self-identifies as a settler in the text. A later poem, "The People of Grassy Don't Have a Mercury Problem, They Have a Drinking Problem" (65), is occasioned by the discovery of mercury in his blood. As Dickinson tells it in the "Notes" at the collection's conclusion, this discovery "made me think about my connection… as a privileged settler in southern Ontario" to the ongoing effects of mercury poisoning in the Wabigoon-English River system and the prejudices of "the largely white community of Kenora toward the Indigenous residents of nearby Grassy Narrows" (147).

the "piles of young Anishinabek men" and the broader community of Aamjiwnaang are both imagined as resource, and their exposure to the castoff of petrochemical industry circulates as literal currency in the settler-colonial nation (see fig. 1).[8]

Fig. 1. An engraving of the Polymer Corporation plant in Sarnia, Ontario, which draws from the photographs of George Hunter. Sourced from The Bank of Canada Museum Blog.

Liboiron traces the historical emergence of "permission-to-pollute" (39) systems that rely on the "threshold theory of pollution" (40) to advance a central claim that remains implicit in Dickinson's engagement with Aamjiwnaang. They argue forcefully that

> pollution is not a manifestation or side effect of colonialism but is rather an enactment of ongoing colonial relations to Land. That is, pollution is best understood as the violence of colonial land relations rather than environmental damage, which is a symptom of violence. (6-7)

Following Liboiron's narration, contemporary policy relating to pollution dates to the 1936 publication of the "Streeter-Phelps equation," that is, the "scientific and mathematical model" developed by Earle B. Phelps and H.W. Streeter that

8. Wiebe, like Dickinson, notes the usage of one of Sarnia's petrochemical plants on the old ten-dollar bill (23). In a blog post for The Bank of Canada Museum with section headings like "Where there's smoke, there's progress," Graham Iddon outlines how foregrounding industrial infrastructure on currency was a deliberate choice, meant to emphasize "Canadian achievement."

showed the "conditions and rates under which water… could purify itself of organic pollutants" (3-4). Streeter and Phelps's highly specific study (they developed their equation by studying a particular stretch of the Ohio River) was soon applied universally. The portability of the Streeter-Phelps equation, that is, its universal application, is problematic because it *over*writes, or ignores, the differences between particular locations, including myriad other environmental factors that affect a body of water's assimilative capacity; the Streeter-Phelps equation also *re*writes Land and all its specificities—its "histories, spirits, events, kinships, accountabilities" (43)—as primarily, and essentially, a resource for settler use.[9] Put differently, in quantifying the limits of pollution, Streeter and Phelps provide dominant science with a new vocabulary for the enclosure of everything as a sink for pollution, in the process facilitating the transformation of all Land into Resource.

This is the colonial backdrop for the slow violence of Chemical Valley,[10] against which Dickinson's prose poem engages the lives and livelihoods of Aamjiwnaang's residents and registers individual harms at the endocrine scale. The poem opens by addressing the community's declining rate of male births; in the "Notes" at the collection's close, Dickinson makes clear that "While PCBs have been implicated in altered offspring sex ratios… the matter is complex and as yet unsettled" and "[m]any other factors and chemicals may be involved" (145-146). If the text refuses to ascribe an etiological origin for "offspring sex ratios," the descriptions of the community's material reorganization that follows suggests causality: "The hockey team is disbanded. Girls' softball was added" (39). These matter-of-fact and notably passive sentences (who, or what "disband[s]" or "add[s]" is unclear) naturalize the impacts felt by Aamjiwnaang's residents, not only at the scale of individual harm, but in the very shape of the community that remains. The passive voice recalls Wiebe's notion of "wounding" as "incidental"; this is just the way it is. Here, petrocultural infrastructures—the "pipes" and "refineries" that "rim the community"—alter the very

9. Jason W. Moore explores a similar dynamic in the context of greenhouse gases, showing how capitalism "enclose[s] the atmosphere as a gigantic dumping ground" (37). At the same time as they caution us not to conflate the two, Liboiron notes that "capitalism and colonialism make such friendly bedfellows in part because of… analogous relational logics" (64 n89).

10. Rob Nixon's landmark concept of "slow violence," that is, "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" remains a powerful framework for thinking about environmental racism (2). Cf. also the "small breakage" of Elizabeth Povinelli's quasi-event (134) and Thomas D. Beamish's "crescive troubles" (4).

possibilities for sociality, for modes of community or being together. Recognizing how Aamjiwnaang's residents bear an inordinate amount of environmental risk in their proximity to Canada's densest concentration of petrochemical processing and chemical manufacturing, Dickinson's poem alerts us also to the ways that these infrastructures parcel out the possibilities for participation in a common or shared sphere of relations.

Dickinson's "Lipids" supplements an attention to environmental racism with a broader invitation to reflect on the ways our everyday lives are materially structured—from plastics in our home to the leisure activities available to us—by petrodependence. In this way, the poem also returns us to a question posed by Wiebe in her examination of the confluence of environmental, political, and jurisdictional actors in Aamjiwnaang: "What does policy feel like?" (41). Wiebe's question reminds us to attend to the structural violence within which individual harm is implicated, but it also opens onto another, related question: what could policy feel like otherwise? Indeed, the otherwise emerges as a useful schematic or organizing principle for a range of scholars working in the field of petrocultures and imagining the possibility of just energy transition. Often, this work involves cracking open calcified, naturalized logics and expectations. As Stephanie LeMenager suggests, "petroleum infrastructure has become embodied memory and habitus for modern humans, insofar as everyday events such as driving or feeling the summer heat of asphalt on the soles of one's feet are incorporating practices" (104). In a later poem in *Anatomic* that thinks with another EDC, phthalates, Dickinson similarly identifies the relationship between pleasure and petroculture: "The characteristic and desirable 'new car smell' is composed in part of phthalates off-gassing from plastic finishes" (76). LeMenager and Dickinson both flag the ways our shared experiences, desires, and pleasures are simultaneously delimited, and actively reproduced, by our dependence on fossil fuels.

Responding to this recognition that petroleum, in its varied forms and applications, shapes not only our desires and pleasures but their very horizon of possibility, recent critical work in the environmental humanities has attempted to advance a theory of alternative pleasures. For LeMenager, the response to the "incorporating practices" and embodied memories of petrodependence is "decoupling human corporeal memory from the infrastructures that have sustained it" (104). Indeed, in her estimation, this becomes "the primary challenge for ecological narrative in the service of human species survival beyond the twenty-first century" (104). In a similar vein, Cara New Daggett urges environmentalists to "counter[] the pleasures of the post-Fordist, consumerist life of high energy consumption with an alternative political vision of pleasure" (190); Stacy Alaimo enumerates a range of community actions, from bee-keeping to seed bombing, offering them as "environmental pleasures" that operate

"through abundant practices of sensuality and playful experimentation" (28). Alaimo's intervention here is striking for its return to this language of experiment that I have wanted to attach, with specific qualifications and connotations, to Dickinson's poetics. As we move further through *Anatomic,* then, we arrive at a clearer sense of Dickinson's poetic project as an attempt to experiment with alternative, literary modes of pleasure that might operate as otherwise infrastructures for sustaining particular kinds of communal relations within the midst of petroculture.

4. Purity Politics, Cosmonauts, Ontology

If *Anatomic* gestures to these broader environmental and literary concerns, I would argue that, by "Lipids," Dickinson hasn't quite developed a vocabulary for how best to articulate this political project. Indeed, the Aamjiwnaang poem offers the startling phrase "unceded lipidscapes," an image that suggests the individual body is colonized by unwanted or "wayward particles" (Liboiron 19). This metaphor circulates throughout the early sections of *Anatomic*, in particular the "*Specimen*" prose narratives that relate, in a kind of flat, autobiographical voice, the strange and disorienting processes that Dickinson underwent in order to perform the necessary tests for the project. In a section that describes keeping a food diary because of an upcoming stool sample, for example, Dickinson struggles with a commonsensical anxiety: "If I ate less, I would limit the PCBs, pesticides, and metals that could get in, right? This idea consumed me" (27). Later, "When the results started to arrive," he navigates newfound fears relating to the recognition of his always already compromised body: "When I came across a chemical that measured among the top percentiles, I panicked" (30). There is, perhaps, an ironic or self-reflexive way to understand the "unceded lipidscapes" that surface in Aamjiwnaang; rather than reading this phrase as doubling down on a misguided desire for bodily autonomy, EDCs give the lie to our uncritical assumption of a "sovereign" body. Put differently, they provide a transit from purity politics to a transformative understanding of selfhood in the Anthropocene.

Given the presence of this recurring anxiety relating to contamination across the first third of *Anatomic*, it feels important that "Lipids" is immediately followed by a section of "*Specimen*" (42) that shifts the affective register—fear, concern—that had hitherto characterized Dickinson's descriptions of the processes and protocols for gathering test material and data. Suddenly, the "sovereign" body is reconceptualized as a vehicle for a host of nonhuman beings:

> My gut is a tropical forest of microbes. Their cells, which cover my entire body, are at least as numerous as my own. These microbiota live on and within me as

> a giant nonhuman organ, controlling the expression of genes and the imagined sense of self.… It is unclear, in fact, whether the immune system controls the microbes or the microbes control the immune system. My body is a spaceship designed to optimize the proliferation and growth of its microbial cosmonauts. These organisms enact a form of biochemical writing through their integral involvement in the metabolic processes that fuel my life. (42)

This section of "*Specimen*" formalizes the body made strange by playing with scale and metaphor. The "tropical forest" of "my gut" is contained by the "spaceship" of "my body." More than incidental bedfellows, the microbiota function as a "nonhuman organ," literally organizing and reorganizing gene expression and "the imagined sense of self," and possibly exerting a form of control over the immune system. Undoing the logic of the coherent and autonomous subject that becomes contaminated or polluted by other presences, actors, or microbes, these microbiota are already here with each of us. Indeed, we might be "designed" for their reproduction; they are "integral" and "fuel my life."

In my reading of *Anatomic*, this section of "*Specimen*" not only marks a key shift in the text's affective preoccupations but also flags a critical engagement with speculative literary metaphors. This pairing—the speculative mode alongside the exploration of a range of environmental affects beyond the elegiac—offers a productive lens for thinking more carefully about Dickinson's *experimental* poetics. This section of "*Specimen*" foregrounds a particular mode of relationality; the human carries microbiota, who are invested in a kind of stewardship of the "metabolic processes" of their human host. The body as a "spaceship" holding within itself "microbial cosmonauts" is a playful self-representation that, as noted above, emerges out of an attempt to make sense of the poet/speaker's newly estranged corporality. But the long quotation above might also be understood to demonstrate a range of traditionally "experimental" or avant-garde techniques, which Ronda has recently argued are deserving of intensified engagement in the context of "speculative poetics." Ronda suggests that, although "speculative work tends to be approached as a predominantly narrative modality," the poetic, "with its capacities for paratactic leap and temporal play, its nonlinear logics and modes of expansion and condensation" emerges "as a particularly exciting site for creative speculation" ("The Social"). The scalar distortions of "*Specimen*"—its shuttling across scales from microbiota, to the human, to the intergalactic or cosmic—performs the "modes of expansion and condensation" suggested by Ronda. More than simply naming, or pointing to, the coexistence of scales, Dickinson's poem distributes agency across every level. Indeed, it is possible to read this section of the text, with its intimations of the possibility that "microbes control the immune system," as offering a model for the creation of livable worlds via a kind of agency from below.

To put it clearly, my initial hesitation at the phrase "unceded lipidscapes" in Dickinson's Aamjiwnaang poem relates to the appropriation and deployment of the scale of structural, colonial violence to describe personal, bodily harm or injury, including the insinuation that settler bodies experience "colonization" by EDCs. As Liboiron puts it in their critique of "purity activism," this is a "scalar mismatch" (101). More interesting to me is the experimentation, in "*Specimen*," with what we might frame as an anticolonial understanding of the self as embedded and shot through with relations and entanglements at multiple scales, impossible to fathom or document. Liboiron identifies the most common manifestations of purity activism as tactics of "avoidance, consumer choice, and technological fixes" that, much like the universal application of the Streeter-Phelps equation noted above, functionally "secure land as standing reserves for plastics" in that they fail to make meaningful interventions at the scale that matters, that is, production (101-102). This is to shift focus away from purity politics and/or activism that responds to the fear of personal contamination and towards a model of relationality that questions dominant assumptions, in technoscience and politics, about continued access to Land as resource, as well as how we understand the relationships between the self and the so-called environment.

Before closing on a deeper consideration of the affective experimentation of *Anatomic*, I want to offer one final theoretical interlocutor for the speculative work that, in my reading, characterizes Dickinson's experimental poetics. Dimitris Papadopoulos theorizes "experimental practices" as a wide-ranging assemblage of tactics undertaken by "more-than-social movements" that bring about the material transformation of everyday existence. Like Alaimo, quoted above, he enumerates the ways "grassroots ecological activism" has "craft[ed] a multiplicity of alternative forms of life" from "urban gardening" to the "disruption of agribusiness" (21). To return to the possibilities of the speculative in poetry, Papadopoulos introduces the concept of "terraformation from below" (29) as a counter to some of the modes or discussions of terraforming that circulate in contemporary Anthropocene criticism, namely, that humans have irrevocably transformed the Earth (bad terraforming) *but also* that technoscience solutions are the path out of the climate crisis (good terraforming). In other words, "the destruction of Earth" and "the promise of redemption" are contained within a "single matrix" (28).[11]

11. Papadopoulos's framing of terraforming as, at once, the source of our contemporary climate crisis and the path to salvation, echoes Allan Stoekl's critique of sustainability discourses which transform "the quantified, mechanized destruction of Earth" into the "quantified, mechanized preservation of Earth" (133). Any attempt to recuperate, or take seriously, terraformation as a liberatory, de-, or anticolonial practice must also reckon with the argument of Heather Davis and Zoe Todd (Métis) in their landmark es-

Terraformation from below, on the other hand, would be about "rescaling the geographies of technoscience in ways that matter" (22), or about inhabiting the very logics, techniques, and strategies of technoscience otherwise. In opposition to those "managerial ontologies" that enclose the future for colonial use (Liboiron 65), Papadopoulos offers us a vocabulary for understanding Dickinson's experimental poetics as an ontological practice oriented towards the articulation of anticolonial relations in the Anthropocenean contemporary.[12]

5. Conclusion: Humour, Instrumentality, Urine

In closing, I want to briefly turn to the image-poem sequence "Metabolic Poetics" that concludes Dickinson's *Anatomic* to extend what I have located as the text's experimental practice alongside a consideration of environmental affects. "Metabolic Poetics" represents the collection's clearest instance of an *experimental* poetics in a pair of related ways: first, in the generic sense, the image-poems that make up this section are the most explicitly non-traditional in the text, reframing "found" technoscientific imagery as poetry and drawing on visual and constraint-based poetic traditions;[13] and second, these poems take experiment and experimentation literally, for example inviting bacteria to perform erasure poetry in a controlled, laboratory setting (see fig. 2). In this instance, Dickinson prints a catalogue of "Other words for money" (141) on a small, rectangular sheet of paper, swabs literal currency, and then cultures the bacteria from the swabs in petri dishes so that the growths write over the catalogue. The metaphor of a cellular semiotics—from the "misspellings in my adrenal gland" of the introductory poem to the "biochemical writing" of the gut

say "Decolonizing the Anthropocene" that "processes of terraforming… define[] the Anthropocene" and "settler colonialism—which in the Americas simultaneously employed the twinned processes of dispossession and chattel slavery—was always about changing the land, transforming the earth itself, including the creatures, the plants, the soil composition and the atmosphere" (770).

12. My use of "ontology" here follows Papadopoulos, who uses the term in a "concrete and ordinary way" to refer to "the habitat and space of existence of various animal species, groups of humans and things that provide specific conditions of how its materiality can be changed" (162). Ontology here is not defined by "what it is, but how it can and cannot change" (162).

13. Another important context for Dickinson's playful and non-generic "experimental" poetics is his continued engagement with pataphysics, the "science of imaginary solutions" developed by French writer Alfred Jarry (68). Keller reads Dickinson's *The Polymers* (2013) alongside pataphysics. Cf. also Dickinson, "Pataphysics" and Dickinson, "Poetics."

microbiota—is made literal in this lab experiment, as the catalogue is returned to the poet/reader "edited and revised" (141). Throughout this sequence, Dickinson's fraught engagement with the laboratory, including questions of access, comes to the fore. As he notes in that early "*Specimen*" section that narrates the complications from his blood draw, "The university eventually found out what we had done. New policies were put in place" (16). "Metabolic Poetics" exists in strange relation to those laboratory spaces and techniques that enable its production, embodying a kind of fringe or provisional practice that might point to broader cultural and institutional reorientations of the relationship between modes of cultural and knowledge production.

In terms that resonate with Dickinson's interventions or disruptions of the laboratory, Darren Wershler, Lori Emerson, and Jussi Parikka have recently traced the ascendance of the "lab" as a hybrid, interdisciplinary, and institutional figure for the production of various forms of knowledge. Examining the consequences of what kinds of spaces gain access to the designation "lab," they think through "the lab" as "a way of understanding recurring forms of power and experimentality" (7). In other words, as assemblages of technical apparatuses and cultural or scientific discourses and imaginaries, labs emerge from, and risk participating in or even reproducing, the structures of power and violence that perpetuate harms in the contemporary moment.[14] But the lab also holds within it the potential of an otherwise. Drawing from Wershler, Emerson, and Parikka's discussion of the relationship between experiment and failure, we can arrive at an understanding of Dickinson's minoritarian forms of aesthetic-scientific experimentation, in their iterative, contentious, and slantwise deployment of lab spaces, as "point[ing] to the possibility of moving beyond narrow functional uses, or the limits of what is currently believed to be possible" (230). In "Metabolic Poetics," Dickinson takes up the tactics of Papadopoulos's "experimental practice," very literally deploying the tools and techniques of technoscientific practices that identify and regulate "wayward molecules" in order to create poetry. The results, I argue, might orient us towards a necessary shift for thinking about the possibilities for environmental affects and poetics.

14. Wershler, Emerson, and Parikka point to the lab that Liboiron runs, the Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR), as an example of "a lab that pursues institutional change in and around labs on nearly every level" (241). Describing the operations of CLEAR, Liboiron emphasizes that science labs have an obligation to consider questions of colonial knowledge production. They emphasize that, while the lab and its members "are dedicated to doing science differently by foregrounding *anti*colonial land relations… CLEAR is not unique: land relations always already play a central role in all sciences, anticolonial and otherwise" (6).

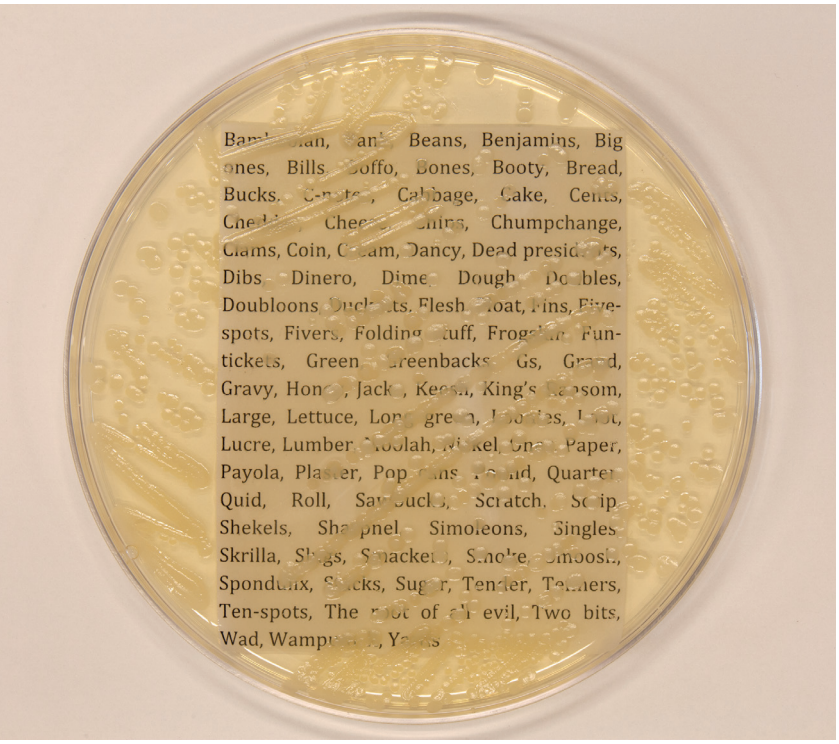

Fig. 2. Bacteria perform an erasure poem from the image-poem sequence "Metabolic Poetics."

The gambit of my reading of "Metabolic Poetics" is simply that this section of *Anatomic* is *funny*. The humour of these image-poems lies, in part, in precisely the use of lab instruments and technoscientific material and data otherwise, in the service of poetry. In this playfulness, I argue, "Metabolic Poetics" addresses itself to a twofold despair or nihilism that rears its head in multiple, related and unrelated, ways in both environmental and poetic discourses. Throughout this essay I have gestured to "despair" or the "despairing" quality of purity politics as an affective description of the fears and anxieties related to coming into knowledge of a world awash in plastics, EDCs, and other harmful substances.[15] This is a commonsensical, because inherited, position that elegizes so-called nature as something that has been lost or irrevocably transformed.

15. In the late stages of writing this essay I read, for the first time, one of the blurbs on *Anatomic*'s book jacket, from Juliana Spahr: "a book of meaningful despair."

But as the microbial cosmonauts teach us, there is a shift to be made from this backwards-gazing elegiac mode to a different understanding of how to build relations from below, living with and alongside compromised bodies. In a similar vein, Ursula Heise argues forcefully for the need to articulate a "more affirmative vision of our biological future" by "mov[ing] beyond mourning, melancholia, and nostalgia" (13). Throughout her recent study on the cultural imaginaries of extinction, Heise draws on this language of "story templates" to find alternatives for representing the scale and impact of the ongoing sixth extinction event, offering a critical view of the shortcomings of elegy, specifically its "proxy logics" and tendency to fall into the uncritical reproduction of a declensionist narrative. Indeed, she turns to the language of "experiment" precisely in a chapter that explores "humour" as an environmental mode; instead of imagining "a well-functioning natural realm disrupted by the advent of modern society," a non-elegiac or non-tragic story template might allow us to read "nature and culture as parallel and intersecting histories of experiments that continually succeed or fail" (53).

The second kind of despair is about literature or poetry itself. When I first presented a version of this paper at a conference, one of questions was about Dickinson's privilege, as a tenured professor, running expensive tests on himself and only gesturing to the material realities of exposure in places like Aamjiwnaang. I hope that the preceding essay has more fully addressed questions of privilege as well as the place and protocol of settler engagement with colonial structures and Indigenous epistemologies and communities. But I have returned to this critique in my own thinking about Dickinson, and experimental ecopoetics more broadly, not to belittle or scold it, but because I think it captures something of an anxiety about the role of both the literary, as an activist mode of cultural production, and literary scholarship. This is a critique levied by a kind of pure environmentalism that, in Nicole Seymour's trenchant analysis, remains concerned primarily with instrumentality. As Seymour argues in her critical study of "bad" environmental affects, "ecocritics have also tended to take an instrumentalist approach to environmental art," evaluating "cultural texts on their capacity to inculcate 'proper' environmentalist feelings—often, reverence, love, and wonder—educate the public, incite quantifiable environmental activism, or even solve environmental problems" (26). In other words, the question for these "good" environmentalists and ecocritics might be: how does running elaborate laboratory tests and making poetry out of the results benefit the broader environmental movement, or move us towards a more equitable, just, and ecological way of living together?

Even if the answer here is "maybe it doesn't," following Seymour, this refusal to traffic in "good" or "mainstream environmental art, activism, and discourse" should not automatically consign *Anatomic* as less worthy of serious

consideration as an ecological text (15). Put differently, if ecocritics organize our critical approach to texts as always a process of searching out or identifying "what kinds of stories and genres might be more successful at generating… concern than others" (Heise 13) we have begun from a position that limits the possibilities of what environmental literature can do, what kinds of affects or responses environmental literatures can play with, and the very forms and shapes they can take. Dickinson's poetry, I argue, might be helpful for bridging those two despairing modes, the environmental and literary or poetic, described above. Seymour's attempt to decouple the dominant critical rubric of instrumentality from environmental literary scholarship recalls Daggett's arguments for "an alternative political vision of pleasure" (190). To bring these two scholars and projects together, perhaps one tactic for ecocritics and ecopoets that might address a political, and politicized, articulation of pleasurable experiences, is to experiment with affects and story templates beyond the tragic and elegiac. In other words, perhaps one way to build alternative social and cultural infrastructures that sustain life, joy, and good relation, would be to think, with Seymour, about environmental literatures in their capacity as playful, irreverent, perverse, ironic, absurd, and/or frivolous.

To briefly model one such experiment, in closing, I want to look at one more image-poem from "Metabolic Poetics" (see fig. 3). A fractal, crystalline shape extends from the top left corner of the image; the colours are primarily mucky brown with golden highlights. The gloss attached to the image announces a grand and transformative potential for the literary or poetic: "Can writing function as a productive hormone disruptor within larger cultural narrative sequences?" (136). The image-poem, it might be argued, appropriates the individual harms and structural violence of endocrine disrupting chemicals and deploys them to intervene in dominant cultural scripts, effecting a kind of detournement, in an avant-garde lineage, of cellular semiotics. The sentence calls back to the arguments, from LeMenager and others, of fashioning an infrastructural otherwise through the proliferation of alternative social and cultural imaginaries. And then the next sentence reads "This is my urine" (136). Each of those "bad" affects—playfulness, irreverence, perversity, irony, absurdity, frivolity—circulates in the shift from the first sentence to the second. Notably, in my reading, the humour in this image-poem does not undermine the claim for the possibilities of writing in the Anthropocene suggested by the first; rather, new avenues are opened up for environmental literary work through the pleasure of humour. This image-poem of urine, its attendant gloss, and Dickinson's *Anatomic* broadly speaking, allow us multiple affective experiences and critical concepts for moving together in petroculture, and for orienting ourselves towards new and productive modes of intimacy, beyond "good" or instrumental environmentalism, and between and among "the crowds in common that we are" (143).

Fig. 3. Dickinson's urine from the image-poem sequence "Metabolic Poetics."

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Outside Words[1]

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ABSTRACT
We read differently outside. Discussing works by two experimental poets, a. rawlings and Christine Stewart, this essay draws on geocritical and ecocritical methodologies alongside Indigenous theories that link language, story, and land to consider how an outdoor pedagogical practice attunes readers not only to the spatial dynamics of language, but also to the linguistic dynamics of place. While the colonial, sedentary structures of traditional classrooms shut out the world, immersing us in literary realms as though they were separate from our physical realities, reading outside makes us viscerally aware of how land and language shape one another. Beyond the walls of our classrooms and homes, we can feel our entanglements with the land, its histories, and other species. In the colonial spaces of Canada, which continues to grapple with considerable ecological and social harms, cultivating such awareness matters: while reading outside is not enough to save us from the environmental crises we are facing or assuage colonial grief and guilt, doing so brings us closer to the living edges of language, which

1. I would like to thank Emily Hoven and Eric Adams for their generous and generative readings of early drafts of this essay, Christine Stewart for ongoing conversations about poetry and Treaty, my students who have accompanied me outside and prompted many of these thoughts, and the two anonymous reviewers whose thoughtful interventions sharpened my thinking about many aspects of this essay. Its shortcomings, of course, are mine alone.

is where new forms of attention might nourish a more mutually sustaining relationship between land and words.

Keywords
Geocriticism; Ecocriticism; Habitat Studies; Colonial Relationships to Land; Outdoor Reading Practice; Experimental Poetry; Treaty; Deixis.

It is autumn, the first day of fall term classes. After the relative quiet of summer, the university campus is full of life again, the buildings crowded with students. I greet my new literature seminar in our assigned room on the second floor of the Humanities Centre—a concrete block of brutalist architecture completed in 1972 that currently houses the Department of English and Film Studies. After a brief introduction, we leave behind our classroom's stucco walls, two narrow windows, and brown industrial carpeting, and head outside. Past the manicured lawn with its artificial brook-fed koi pond, across Saskatchewan Drive, we head down the steep wooded banks of the North Saskatchewan River Valley that cuts a long, undulating, blue, green, gold, or—during our long winters—white line through the city.

More and more frequently since I began teaching in 2008, I have been taking my classes outside. Sometimes we head across campus, settling in amongst the boulders in the geology garden or on some quiet patch of grass on the Quad, but mostly we end up in the river valley. There, we cross paths with a handful of other people: joggers, a cyclist, a group of biology students checking bug traps. There is room for us to spread out under the trees, not just to read and talk, but to walk and observe. Across the river, the downtown buildings reflect the sky. The LRT rattles the bridge overhead. The air hums with the distant but perpetual sound of traffic. But we can also hear bird calls, rustling leaves, a chattering squirrel.

My outdoor pedagogy has been influenced by multifarious and, in my research, entangled commitments of geocriticism and ecocriticism, along with a deepening sense of my responsibility as a descendant of settlers teaching English literatures in Treaty 6 Territory and Region 4 of the Métis Nation of Alberta, all of which lure me outdoors to consider how reading extends to land. Geocriticism, as developed by Bertrand Westphal, posits a method of reading places, not just in, but through literature (see especially ch. 4). Ecocriticism—particularly the method of habitat studies pioneered by Laurie Ricou—challenges literary scholars not only to read for interspecies relationships in literary texts, but also to "*listen to what the world outside of (human) language systems might be saying*" ("Disturbance-Loving Species" 163; italics in original). Acknowledging Indigenous territory and Treaty obligations anchors these forms

of attention to the interplay of land and language in my responsibilities to the complex ecologies of the place where I live and work, with its confluence of languages, histories, and Indigenous and newcomer ways of knowing.

As awkward as it sometimes feels to let go of reading practices honed in the cloistered, sedentary space of a classroom, to expose ourselves to the unpredictability of wind and weather, or the late-summer panic of wasps searching for food, this practice has felt increasingly necessary. We read differently outdoors. This essay is my account of how this happens—or at least how it has happened to me, in a particular place, at a particular time—and why it matters.

Beyond the walls of our classroom, we become entangled in the worlds we read about. Moreover, we can think more concretely about language as something that we not only speak and read, but also *inhabit*. As much as we dwell in architectural and geographical spaces and places, we also live in (and through) the soundscapes and perceptual frames of words. Edmonton, a place known to the nêhiyawak (Cree) as *amiskwaciwâskahikan* (Beaver Hills House), is home to many languages. I dwell predominantly in English. Like the walls of the buildings I occupy, like the fences and hedges that divide land into private and public property, and like the roads and pathways that guide my movements through these spaces, the vocabulary and grammar of this language shapes my experience of, and relationships to, the world. Outside—immersed in a wider environment that includes both human-designed spaces and the tangle of more-than-human lives with whom we share them—these perceptual frames become all the more apparent.

In *Treaty 6 Deixis*, a long poem that rearticulates ways of relating to this place through the limited frames of English, Christine Stewart asks: "What happens when the text is invited into this / frozen sky wind north with snow with tree and snow shaking in this wind this cold these hands cold hands" (116-17). What happens, indeed, when—as Dwayne Donald, a scholar descended from the *amiskwaciwiyiniwak* (Beaver Hills people) and the Papaschase Cree, suggests—the land itself doesn't understand English.[2] Guided by experimental poems by a. rawlings and Stewart, Donald's reflections on walking and wâhkôhtowin imagination, and other interventions by Indigenous and non-Indigenous poets and thinkers who have sought to reorient English and its systems toward the world, I take words outside to both understand and shift the colonial ecological relationships that are built into my language.[3] Not because such practices

2. Donald has mentioned this on more than one of his guided walks through the River Valley, which he has been giving since 2006 (see Donald 61 and Connor McNally's film *ôtênaw*).

3. a. (or Angela) rawlings is known for producing "a radically experimental poetry that

alone can save us from the ecological crises we are facing or assuage colonial grief and guilt, but because they bring us closer to the living edges of language, which is where new forms of attention can nourish a more mutually constitutive relationship between land and words.

1. Inhabiting English

One warm fall morning early in the term, many weeks before the first snow, we gather on the grass to contemplate encounters between this language and this place. Under a towering poplar, leaves turning a rich golden yellow above us, between the Humanities Centre and Saskatchewan Drive, which runs along the upper banks of the river valley, we open a copy of *ReGreen: New Canadian Ecological Poetry*, edited by Anand Madhur and Adam Dickinson (regrettably now out of print). Turning to a. rawlings' poem "signs of whom," we read aloud. In his review of this collection, Travis Mason emphasizes that "these words" in particular "are meant to be read (and heard) and not to be just looked at (and seen)." Read aloud outside, they become especially potent. In the first two lines of the poem, the pronouns "I you he she they we" move swiftly into their possessive forms, "her your our my her his their." These possessives then run riot in the second verse paragraph:

> yours mine theirs theirs theirs
> theirs mine theirs theirs theirs
> theirs theirs yours theirs theirs
> ours yours theirs theirs theirs
> ..... .

until, eventually, they seem to take over the speaker:

> mine Mine mine mine mine
> mine mine mine Mine mine
> Mine mine mine
> ours… (lines 8-18)

Among the trees and shrubs, the sidewalks, the road, the woods and thick underbrush that blocks our view of the river on the other side, and the cityscape punctuating the sky beyond it all, rawlings' words resonate as part of our

critiques the role that anthropo-, phallo-, and eurocentric language has played in the discursive settling of Canada" (Groeneveld 141).

habitat. The repeated possessives become active determinants of our relations to the built spaces and managed natures in our midst. Is this building "ours" or "theirs," we wonder. What about the trees? the grass? the historic "Rutherford House" now dwarfed by university buildings ("his," we conclude).

As we walk down to the river, the words clinging to us like spider-webs, we read the land itself through them. We find analogs for rawlings' language of possession all around us: in fences and walls, signs, gates, locked doors, lawns and benches, bike paths and streets; in the bushes, a collection of sundry items mark a space someone has claimed for shelter. On the path that runs alongside the river, we notice that, while much of this managed forest and undergrowth remains open (and thus accessible habitat for coyotes, porcupines, and unhoused fellow humans who dwell, in the warmer months, amongst the red osier dogwood, highbush cranberry, and balsam poplar), some has been fenced off; although none of us is sure why, we immediately understand that this is "theirs" (whose?) rather than "ours."

Rawlings' poem makes us suddenly and sharply aware of the extent to which this city is a concentration of humanised, managed, and owned spaces that extend across thousands of miles of prairie. Read aloud in this place, their words become a distant, colonial-world echo of Gertrude Stein's account of nineteenth century English literature as a literature of possession:

> They owned everything inside of course but that they had always done, but now they owned everything outside and that reinforced their owning everything inside, and that was as it was only more so but as they owned everything outside, outside and inside had to be told something about all this owning and so there was invented explaining and that made nineteenth century English literature what it is. (48)[4]

From the boreal forests and Precambrian shield on its northern fringes, to the mountains along its western edge, what was once open grassland shared by millions of migratory bison, bears, birds, and of course people, was transformed by the Dominion Land Survey into a now familiar patchwork of private farms. Nowhere was the difference felt more acutely, perhaps, than on the reserves to which Indigenous nations were relegated, their movements restricted

4. For a detailed and succinct analysis of other ways English served colonial appropriation in the earliest encounters between Anglo writers and the lands now called Canada, see D.M.R. Bentley's "Tokens of Being There: Land Deeds and Demarcations"; this subject also runs through my book *Mapping With Words: Anglo-Canadian Literary Cartographies, 1789-1916*.

by resident Indian Agents well into the twentieth century (the Pass System was not formally repealed until 1951).

The shapes of colonial ownership, and the uneven relations it produces between humans as well as between us and other species, are still apparent almost everywhere we look. And so, gathered on the grass, we inhabit—not metaphorically, but literally—this language of possession. As surely as maps and walls, "yours," "mine," "ours," and "theirs" determine who belongs where. These words texture our experiences of the world, determining how we perceive and act in it, shaping our relationships with everything and everyone who is not "us."

While rawlings attunes us to the power of possessive language, the experience of semantic satiation that the poem produces (whereby repetition robs words of their meaning) also renders these words absurd. Reading them outside in the river valley accentuates this feeling, the proprietary language becoming increasingly strange as it echoes through a world which, it soon becomes obvious, should not, indeed *can*not, be appropriated. The valley may be quiet compared to the city above, but it vibrates with life. More than 2000 coyotes live here, along with a similar number of beavers; waterfowl, songbirds, woodpeckers, owls, hawks, ravens, and even bald eagles find shelter and food, as do many species of fish and insects, garter snakes, chipmunks, muskrats, weasels… The list is, needless to say, far longer and more diverse than I can do justice to here—Wikipedia tells me that "at least 325 vascular plant species, 50 types of mosses,… 40 lichen species[,]… 150 bird species, 50 mammal species, 27 fish species, and seven amphibian and reptile species" are estimated to live "in the river valley" ("North Saskatchewan"). It is for good reason that this area has, since time immemorial, been recognized by the nêhiyawak (Plains Cree) as a *pêhonân*: a gathering place for more-than-human communities and kin. How can such a place be owned?

2. Beyond English

According to Tomson Highway, who grew up speaking Cree in Dene territory (and has learned several other languages since), "speaking one language is like living in a house with one window only; all you see is that one perspective when, in point of fact, dozens, hundreds, of other perspectives exist and one must, at the very least, heed them, see them, hear them" (20). In his guided walks through the river valley, Donald has suggested that this land doesn't understand English: it needs to be spoken to in nêhiyawêwin, which has deep connections to these landforms and waterways. In this predominantly anglophone city, however, we are surrounded by words that not only define the world as property, as rawlings' poem underlines, but also conjure elsewhere

rather than connecting us to here. "Edmonton," named for a suburb of London, encapsulates the exogenous character of the language most of us inhabit. By contrast, the nêhiyawêwin place-name, *amiskwacîwâskahikan*, or "Beaver Hills House," draws attention to the specific geography and ecology of the area: the hills bordering the river, the beavers who have lived along these banks since time immemorial, and the humans who joined them in this *pêhonân*.

Cree intersects with other Indigenous languages—such as Stoney, Siksiká, or Dene—that also speak from this region. Highway explains: "the Dene language belongs to and comes from the soil and the muskeg and the reindeer moss of the northern extremities of the three Prairie provinces and a sizeable chunk of the Northwest Territories" (11). If "Cree comes from the laughter of a cosmic clown" who takes the form of "Coyote on the plains" (11), this language also binds humans with the landscapes they inhabit. The North Saskatchewan River is an anglicised form of the nêhiyawêwin name *kisiskâciwan-sîpî*, which describes the water flowing at a swift walking pace. As Donald has pointed out on his guided walks, only by walking beside the river can one experience the embodied relationship upon which this name relies—how it holds within it a sensory mode of knowing, a phenomenological experience of one of this river's most prominent attributes, or ways of being.

The difficulty of English is not just that it is an exogenous language without roots in these particular geographies, but that its very vocabularies and grammatical structures can hinder intimate relationships with the earth and its other creatures. In her essay "Land Speaking," Okanagan writer Jeanette Armstrong illuminates this problem by pointing to the differences between the English and Okanagan word for "dog." Because the Okanagan word *kekwep* contains both "an action syllable meaning something like 'happening upon a small (thing),'" and a second syllable "meaning something like 'sprouting profusely (as in fur),'" Armstrong observes, "[w]hen you say the Okanagan word for dog, you don't 'see' a dog image"; rather, "you summon an experience of a little furred life, the exactness of which is known only by its interaction with you or something" (190). By contrast, "[t]he English word solicits an inanimate generic symbol… independent and isolated from everything else, as though a dog without context and without anything to which it is connected could really exist. It must be a frightful experience to be a dog in English" (190).

In a similar vein, in her essay "Learning the Grammar of Animacy," the Potawatomi writer and biologist Robin Wall Kimmerer considers the perceptual implications of verb-based Anishinaabemowin languages compared with the noun-based English. For Kimmerer, the fact that English is so noun-heavy—70 percent of our words are nouns—is "somehow appropriate to a culture so obsessed with things" (53). Her discovery, upon studying her ancestral Potawatomi language, that 70 percent of Anishinaabemowin words are verbs shifted her

understanding of the world and her relationship to it. In Anishinaabe languages, even rocks and water are conceived grammatically as active, animate beings. What in English we know simply as "a bay," static and discrete—not unlike the word "dog" in Armstrong's account—is, in Anishinaabemowin, "to be a bay." Conjuring a state of watery being, the active grammatical structure makes it harder to regard nature as a collection of inanimate objects and resources (mere "things"). A grammar of animacy opens up an active realm of beings deserving of a different kind of consideration.

Kimmerer and Armstrong offer glimpses through what are, for me, new windows onto the world, fresh ways of seeing places I thought I knew. As I walk with my students through the woods with these teachings turning over in our minds, we endeavour to acknowledge—not to understand, but to recognize and appreciate—what it might mean to be a river, to be a balsam poplar, to be a coyote, to be a blade of grass. It takes time to loosen the bonds of the English tropes and literary traditions that make it difficult to imagine animacy as something other than personification, or the metaphorical transfer of human attributes to a nonhuman being or object. Kimmerer's elucidation of Potawatomi and Anishinaabemowin grammar brings us closer to understanding the embodiments of being that exist here, too, alongside the human.

Inviting rawlings' text into this particular place draws attention to why it is necessary "*to listen to what the world outside of (human) language systems might be saying*" (Ricou, "Disturbance-Loving Species" 163). This endeavour is a central tenet of habitat studies, an ecocritical method developed by Ricou that radically opens up the very concept of reading: to different kinds of writing, to wider ideas of storytelling, to broad and capacious listening. The habitat studies scholar reads in order to grapple with the tangled and shifting mesh of relations among beings, both animal and vegetable, in the shared spaces we inhabit. Eclectic and interdisciplinary literary histories converge around a particular animal, plant, or feature of the bioregion—for Ricou: salal, the plant that grows on the forest floor throughout the Pacific Northwest region of North America; or salmon; or even rain; here: magpie, chickadee, trembling aspen, coyote…[5] In this practice of reading, the habitat studies scholar leaves the classroom behind in order to attend to the larger world in which human activities and cultural practices are embedded—a vast and complex world that sustains us, body and soul, and that imprints itself on our language—but that speaks

5. See Ricou, *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest* and *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory*; inspired by Ricou's methods, my own areas of research and graduate teaching are increasingly focused on how other species, especially those common to the parkland biome, can guide our reading practices.

in other tongues. Habitat study thus decenters not only a particular bookish scholarly tradition in literary studies, but also our very language.

As we walk among the balsam poplars, red osier dogwood, and sarsaparilla sprouting on the forest floor (many of us suddenly aware of how few of the species around us we can even accurately identify), the questions remain: how to listen to these tongues? How to read the land's own languages?

Indigenous scholars remind us that such questions are colonial ones. The rift between nature and culture that ecocriticism seeks to mend is, in North America, an imported construct that is in many ways inseparable from the introduction of English and other European languages to these places. As we have already seen, many Indigenous languages nurture different relationships between humans and nonhuman kin. In "Land Speaking," Armstrong emphasizes the inseparability of land and language: "it is land that holds all knowledge of life and death and is a constant teacher. It is said in Okanagan that the land constantly speaks. It is constantly communicating. Not to learn its language is to die" (176). As Armstrong underscores, the articulateness of the land is not *distinct* from human language, as Ricou suggests, but embedded in it. For a speaker of Okanagan (or N'silxchn), listening to the land does not require moving beyond human language, because this "language was given to us by the land we live within" (Armstrong 175). The relationships upon which such listening depends are reflected in the vocabularies and grammars of N'silxchn, along with many other Indigenous languages.

Writing in both N'silxchn and English, Armstrong wrestles with the difficulty of translation. She explains, for instance, how "the term *Tmixw* in Okanagan, meaning something like loving-ancestor-land-spirit," becomes simply "Grandmothers" in her poem of that title. A fuller translation emerges from the poem itself, which describes the ancestor-land-spirit's "voices speaking to me / in early morning light / glinting off water / speaking to me in fragile green / pushing upward / groping sun and warmth / pulling earth's breath / down and in / to join with porous stone" (176-77). As the slow rhythms of Armstrong's English words draw together land, sun, water, fire, and air, she evokes how, for the Okanagan people, "land as language surrounds us completely, just like the physical reality of it surrounds us" (178). "Within that vast speaking," she elaborates, "both externally and internally, we human beings are an inextricable part—though a minute part—of the land language" (178). Along with scholars like Kimmerer, Armstrong suggests that it is not necessarily "human" language that poses a problem for deep ecological listening, but rather the introduced colonial languages that emphasize—some might even say create—a separation between the land and the words we use to define it.

For many Indigenous educators, leaving the classroom is a political act that is central to decolonization and cultural resurgence rooted in the integral

connections between land, language, knowledge, law, and governance. As the Anishinaabekwe scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson observes, "Indigenous education" is founded upon learning "*from* the land and *with* the land" (154, 150). This learning lies at the heart of the laws that undergird Anishinaabe culture and relationships with the nonhuman world, as Indigenous systems of "Natural Law"—including the *nêhiyaw* system of *wâhkôhtowin*—"flow from the consequences of creation or the 'natural' world or environment" (Borrows 28). The Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows explains that these laws "may be regarded as literally being written on the earth," and so "the casebook for learning natural law requires an intimate knowledge of how to read the world" (29, see 28-35). As Borrows describes it, the land itself is a language that enunciates—for those who learn to listen to its complex syntax—ways of being in community not just with fellow humans, but with birds, insects, plants, animals, soil, water, rock, and so on.

In a recent article on "walking and the wâhkôhtowin imagination," Donald underscores that paradigms of sedentary, book-centred classroom-learning anchor much of our educational system in a colonial model of progress that obscures Indigenous knowledge, which, here in Treaty 6 Territory, includes the nêhiyaw practice of wâhkôhtowin. Walking outside, Donald argues, not only facilitates the creative thinking that is required to find "a new story to live by," but, more specifically, nurtures a "wâhkôhtowin imagination" attuned to kinship and reciprocity (61). Walking "wake[s] up something important inside of people that was put to sleep as they became educated. By walking and listening, people begin to perceive the life around themselves differently. They feel enmeshed in relationships" (61).

3. Reading at the Edges of English

When we walk in the river valley—which some students tell me they have never visited, despite its proximity to campus—the enmeshment that Donald describes begins to undo the separation we feel when overlooking this space from the windows of our classrooms. And while English reinforces this separation in many ways, it also, as Kimmerer underscores, has a certain elasticity to it (as all languages do). A new set of relationships becomes possible when we use our language differently, opening it up to other grammars. When Kimmerer questions why, in English, we usually refer to nonhuman beings—even other animals—as "it," she also observes:

> In English, we never refer to a member of our family, or indeed to any person, as it. That would be a profound act of disrespect. It robs a person of selfhood and

> kinship, reducing a person to a mere thing. So it is that in Potawatomi and most other indigenous languages, we use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family. (55)

She goes on to show how a simple change in diction can nurture companionship with other beings: for example, when a lifeless "something" becomes "someone," as in "'Someone is in my hat,'" a deerfly ceases to be simply a nuisance and becomes an individual in their own right, buzzing around for their own particular reason, experiencing humans in their own way (56).

Experimental poets like rawlings and, as I will discuss momentarily, Stewart, probe the limits and possibilities of English as a tool that, for better or worse, they are compelled to use as they try to attune themselves (and their readers) differently to the land. In the midst of rawlings' text-scape of possessive pronouns, a single noun appears in the final two lines: "II my my moth. Yesyes her with my / moth. Still." Its jarring emergence reminds me of—while simultaneously affirming and defying—Kimmerer's critique of the noun-heaviness of English. Conjuring a delicate, winged insect "covered in microscopic scales, typically drably coloured and held flat when at rest" ("Moth") this noun brings welcome relief from the abstractions that all but conceal the animate world through the rest of the poem, alighting on it in much the same way as a moth suddenly lands on a back-lit window-screen.

In keeping with Kimmerer's critique of the interpenetration of English and cultures of consumption and extractivism, the dominant way of relating to this solitary living creature in the poem remains trapped in the possessive: "*my* moth" (emphasis added). Indeed, the moth may be "still" because it has literally become "my moth"—preserved, lifeless, pinned to a board in a collection (a familiar sight on a university campus, I cannot help but think). "We murder to dissect," warned Wordsworth in his own critique of western practices of book learning; in *Wide Slumber for Lepidopterists*, rawlings "draw[s] a parallel between the lepidopterist who pins down moths and butterflies and the act of rape" (Groeneveld 149; see rawlings, *Wide* 74-78). Given the rest of rawlings' near-obsessive dissection and re-collection of possessive language, we might well read the moth as another victim of these ways of carving up the land itself into discrete entities: a specimen violently cut off from the ecological liveliness in which she was once enmeshed. It is frightful to be a moth in English, Armstrong might say.

At the same time, the sudden emergence of this creature in the poem—the sudden emergence of the poem's only noun—also ruptures the text-scape of possessive pronouns, even as the creature becomes embedded in it. Against the strangeness of a text devoid of other nouns, the "moth" introduces a concrete liveliness to which we must "listen," if only for a moment. In this spirit, "my

moth" could be an affectionate gesture of kinship rather than possession. The stillness that descends on the final line, in such a reading, could be the stillness of the moth settling on the poem, which unsettles the static rigidity of those borders of "yours" and "mine" (which mean nothing, after all, to a moth); or it could be the stillness of a speaker without adequate words, the stillness that descends when one listens beyond human language.

Either way, this unexpected beacon from the nonhuman world throws the dense, abstract text-scape of pronouns and possessions into relief in a way that makes us feel the absurdity of confining a varied and complex ecosystem within a language of ownership. "Moth," too, is cast into relief by these words, not unlike how a living moth, drawn to a small circle of light, becomes a small but vivid presence against the darkness with which it is surrounded. Whether we imagine this delicate creature pinned in a private collection or landing on a window-screen, she is there, inviting the reader to imagine the reciprocal entanglement, the mutual shaping, of language and world.

Outside, on the day that we are discussing this poem and wondering at how even our limited, noun-based language might cultivate attentiveness to a world beyond the text, a white-tailed deer walks quietly by the patch of grass where we are sitting. Stunned to silence, we consider how the noun, "moth"—with its soft humming and fricative flow evoking the quiet, airy being of the moth herself—might similarly conjure an encounter with wilderness, in Don McKay's sense of the term: a being or life-force that, even when pinned by a word, nonetheless "eludes the mind's" (or poem's) "appropriations" (21). Did this moth fly into rawlings' poem the way an actual moth flies in at an open door, or a deer wanders into our peripheral vision, unbidden, transgressing the threshold of "yours" and "mine"? This poem, after all, inhabits the world of the moth—is at once sustained and disrupted by it.

4. A Language that Points

Habitat studies prompts us to attend to moths and other organisms who show up in our poems and stories by going outside the text to the ecological contexts described by biologists and ecologists as much as by poets. Attention, in this method, begins with a name, however imperfect that name may be. A non-specific noun that tells us only the genus, "moth" opens the poem to any number of potential species. Despite the taxonomic knowledge that runs through her collection *Wide Slumber for Lepidopterists*, rawlings' vagueness here is understandable: this, after all, is how many of us relate to these winged nocturnal insects, using one catch-all name to conjure any one of the thousands of species that exist (there are around 160,000 in the world, "many of

which have yet to be described," Wikipedia tells me). The more than 2000 species that live in Alberta include Hummingbird Clearwing, Sphynx, Police Car moth—the allure of these metaphors reminding me of the many ways that "moth" brings us to the edges of language.

Outside, we are inspired to learn the names that will help us read the "forest" and "river" not as indistinct landscape, but as complexly variegated ecological communities. Wandering among the trees and understory shrubs, one student acquaints us with the Red Osier Dogwood, with its long, elegant, deep red branches used by Indigenous people for pipe-stems; another draws our gaze down to the forest floor, where horsetail has been growing since dinosaurs roamed these regions. Combining our limited lexicons and partial knowledge and experience, our vocabularies expand into new, more granular forms of attention.

We can also feel the wholeness of life that cannot be named. All names are, in a certain sense, metaphors. "Moth" is but a sign carried over for a signified; a quiet cluster of letters on a page; a thin, soft sound, beyond which lies a whole world of creaturely lives and languages. In *Vis à Vis: Field Notes on Poetry & Wilderness*, McKay describes the "vertigo" that afflicts those who recognize that "even 'apt' names touch but a tiny portion of a creature, place, or thing. When that vertigo arrives," he says, "we're aware of the abject thinness of language, while simultaneously realizing its necessity" (64). We are left in a state of longing for the wilderness beyond language. He adds, "But longing: well, longing leads to poetry, which speaks out of, and sometimes to, this crisis in the naming of things" (64).

As a poet, McKay is drawn to metaphor, the "excess" of which "points to a world beyond language"—the world to which Ricou would have us listen—"even while it cuts a fancy linguistic figure" (85). Metaphor, he argues (borrowing a beautiful one from Mary Oliver) liberates the "screech owl" from the "cage" of his ill-fitting name and carries Adam, in McKay's meditation on this originary story of naming, "'down the little aluminum ladder of his scream'" (qtd. in McKay 93). But metaphors are themselves limited; as McKay observes, even Oliver's resonant image fails to convey "that gentle fatal presence on the path, that extra hush" that befalls Adam when he encounters this creature, "a darker darkness that swept down the path and into the foliage" (92, 91). Not even the most sensuously playful of metaphors can contain the fullness of existence. As McKay observes, this language "can be no more than—in the traditional metaphor—a finger pointing at the moon" (86).

This idea becomes an animating principle in Stewart's *Treaty 6 Deixis*, a long poem noticeably devoid of metaphors, but full of words that point. In it, Stewart registers a deep awareness of the problems with English—its shortcomings, and even violence, which are tied to the poet's own shortcomings and simultaneous "love and… violence" as "a person of white settler descent" struggling to "honour [her] obligations as expressed in the spirit and intent of the Treaty negotiations" (113). "Here," Stewart writes,

> we are asked to learn the meaning of Treaty 6 itself as it was agreed to by the nêhiyaw Îyârhe Nakoda Dene and Saulteaux.… nêhiyaw elder Bob Cardinal says that Treaty 6 is based on the original agreements of reciprocity that were made and that have existed since the beginning of time agreements of reciprocation that were made between humans and animals between humans and air between humans and water humans and plants humans and rocks. (124)

As Rob Jackson observes, Stewart's "short dyspneic lines… evoke a sense of hesitancy in the face of the English's inadequacy for articulating the intensity and necessity of treaty relationships" (82). Moved by the problem of "how to turn English from a low-context language / into a high-context language" (as Rita Wong put it in these lines from "value chain," which form one of the book's epigraphs), Stewart considers the potential of deixis as a means of re-articulating relations between the poet/reader and this place. Deixis is "'verbal pointing,' that is to say pointing by means of language" (Stewart, *Treaty 6* n.p.); she elaborates: "[a] deictic expression (or deixis) is a word or phrase (*this, that, these those, now, then*…) that points to the time, place, or situation in which a speaker is speaking" (115-16). Among other effects, "Deixis indicates the thing's location"; thus, it "invites the outside world of space into that of the text," reminding us that "we are also sustained by our spatiotemporal context" (116).

Deixis has long been a feature of ecological and anticolonial poetics. Behind Stewart's work lie the experiments of Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, and Juliana Spahr, among others—all of whom, like her, resist appropriative language and the anthropocentric nostalgia of the lyric voice. Stewart's epigraphs and citations trace a literary context that also includes Wong, Rachel Blau Duplessis, and Stein, whose "language practices consider the material world by pointing to the matter of English and its grammars" (117). Most vitally, given where she is and the understanding of the Treaty that guides her (124-27), Stewart follows nêhiyaw language teacher Reuben Quinn, who provides her with the epigraph "Touch the earth with each word, reorient yourself." Reorientation requires a poetics of "minding" rather than knowing (51). Accordingly, Stewart eschews descriptive and figurative language, particularly metaphor—which, conveying the referent by way of a vehicle that is radically other than the thing itself, arguably "touch[es] the earth" only by moving away from it (the way that the owl's call becomes a "little ladder"). Instead of emerging from figures of speech, the meaning of her text relies on context—on the meeting of poet and world. "*This valley*," "*This river*," "That bridge," "this water," "this sand," "that bend," "*That bank*"—these phrases are kinetic gestures that point beyond the thin veneer of words to an embodied experience of the world that the poet meets and minds, beckoning us also to attend to where we are (4-8; italics in original). In the classroom, we can only imagine these points of contact, but venturing outside, we

become participants in the intimate and physical poetic labour of reorienting ourselves, wherever we may be.

Everywhere, there are invitations to notice. "This is the object of our attention," we read: "A bird's head looking out at a bird's head" (Stewart, *Treaty 6* 55). Outside, the reader continues this project of noticing by filling in the blank spaces: This magpie. That squirrel. This balsam poplar's sticky fragrant buds. Polysensory space, "like that where we were there was this noise this noise," makes other beings "the centre of our attention" (60). Although, unlike many of the nature poets McKay describes, Stewart relies on concrete rather than figurative language, her book contains a handful of deictic half-similes that repeat the act of pointing rather than offering fully realised comparisons: "Beavers through there" / "Like this" (14-15). Like what, we wonder? The lacuna suggests both the ludicrousness of comparisons, and our need for them. Again, we must fill in for the poet to co-create an encounter between text and world.

Reading outside, immersed in the "here" to which Stewart points, reminds us of the reciprocities of the Treaty, and the labour that they require. Still, Dallas Hunt's caution that "the collection risks being read like the all too easy declarations that 'we are all treaty people'" (107) registers an anxiety that runs through these poems. "[W]hat else might poetry do"? Hunt asks (108). Stewart writes from this question, too, claiming very little for the white settler poet, other than gestures "to what I do not know and to the reasons why I do not know" (*Treaty 6* 115). For Stewart, pointing is noting rather than understanding. There is no mastery here. Bidding us to "notice our robbing minds, telling, representing," she resists the urge to describe, to represent. Instead, she offers the simple instruction: "Shut up… Drink this / river's water" (96-97). Thus, we repeatedly feel the poet standing in the quiet space beyond the limits of her words, watching and listening for elk and beaver, coyote and human—all the beings who move in the interstices of the colonial city—reminding us that this place we share sustains us.

Colonial relationship-denial is, Stewart emphasizes, a physical condition and practice: "our bodies became that ignorance," she writes, "and by extension became / this violence" (*Treaty 6* 78). Deixis reminds us not only of the weight and complexity of where we are, but also of the poet's (and by extension, the reader's) corporeal presence in the midst of everything—and everyone—else. This state of being-in-the-midst is critical to Stewart's consideration of the encounter between words (both English and nêhiyawêwin) and the place she inhabits. Stopping the violence involves a careful negotiation of an embodied process of speaking, reading, and writing ethically, in relation to her ever-unfolding Treaty obligations: "The points of connection and obligations," she urges, "are infinite and demanding" (115).

By pointing rather than describing, *Treaty 6 Deixis* resists the myriad ways in which "[l]and calls settler bodies forth into a horizon of perceptual entitlement,"

as Paul J. Guernsey memorably puts it (835). Treaty, as it is understood by Indigenous scholars and knowledge-holders—those who honour the "legally binding contract" of "the pipestem" rather than only the "'affixing marks in ink'" (Stewart, *Treaty 6* 71, 74)—calls on settlers to relinquish this entitlement, which includes mistaken perceptions of terra nullius: "But this which they saw and do see with authority as empty / perfectly empty perfectly was not of course it was not" (82). Citing Sharon H. Venne's "Treaties Made in Good Faith," Stewart reminds readers of "[t]he simple fact… that, without the treaty, no one other than Indigenous Peoples has the right to live in our land" (63).

Unlike the "yours" and "mine" of rawlings' text-scape, "this" and "that" locate without appropriating. Stewart's deictic language places the poet in the midst of a world much larger than herself and her desires, although she admits to having been driven by an acquisitive compulsion, too: "I collected because I could because I desired because I wanted everything because I could because I could I wanted everything and was absolved of nothing" (*Treaty 6* 85). Deixis does not absolve her (or us). But it indicates another way of being and thinking and looking at the world that changes the registers—and implications—of our attention: "To be found waiting not wanting / To be found to show in a way to be thanking and waiting" (94). Waiting, not wanting, the silent spaces of her text leave room for moths to land, for deer to walk by. By quieting the dominant language of English, she leaves space, also, for nêhiyawêwin, a language she has studied with Quinn, but which speaks in her text primarily through the words of the Cree Elder Jim Kâ-nîpitêhtêw, whose account of Treaty 6 remains one of the most important records of this negotiation.

First signed in 1876, Treaty 6, according to Indigenous interpreters and knowledge holders, asks us to "have respect for the land and all its relationships" (Venne 7), to attend to our nonhuman kin as well as Indigenous relations with whom we share the land and water in order "to restore the kinship systems and the balance that is necessary for all life" (Stewart, *Treaty 6* 124). This alone should be reason enough to take our students outside: shut away in our classrooms, it becomes difficult to remember where we are and the responsibilities we carry. As Stewart reflects in "Propositions from Under Mill Creek Bridge," an essay that contemplates how to read the confluence lives and alterities that are all too often unseen or ignored in this urban space: "when I don't go back to the underbridge, when I just keep writing and stop wandering, the underbridge"—including the complexities of this place marked by capitalism and colonialism, and her discomfort in reading it—"turns into something else, an embellished abstraction" (252). Through repeated encounters, however, she notes that "the underbridge stopped being a liminal space," and, instead, "began to run dendritic through the middle and around the edges of everything" (246).

Literary scholars can attend to these relationships and our Treaty obligations to them by illuminating the ways that language shapes, and can be shaped by, them. As Donald posits, we all are in need of "a new story that can give good guidance on how to live life in accordance with kinship relationality" instead of through the "relational psychosis" that afflicts colonial society (55, 56). The question that Duplessis asks in an epigraph to Stewart's book—"Will sheer pointing / save the place?"—remains unanswered. But we know a little more, after reading this work, how much is at stake. Reading outside, moreover, re-engages the connections between language and habitat, bringing us to the edges of English where, in the hands of poets, it loosens its grip on the world, opening up to more ethical possibilities that balance the needs of humans with those of nonhuman kin. As Stewart shows, English can become quieter, less certain. In this quiet space, we can continue to look for and cultivate the words that, alongside Indigenous language systems, might help attune us to the articulateness of land.

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Interview

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"Everything Is Awe-ful: A Conversation on Climate Change Fiction" – with Rebecca Campbell

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1. Introduction

When Kit and I began working on this special issue on affect and environment in literatures in Canada, the idea for a conversation with Rebecca Campbell immediately came to mind. A Canadian writer of climate change fiction and other genre-bending works of science fiction, speculative fiction, body horror, and weird stories, Rebecca has developed a rich body of work over the past decade that engages deeply with questions related to affect and environment.[1]

1. For full disclosure, Rebecca Campbell and I completed our PhDs in English together at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada, where she wrote a dissertation on the role of battlefields and military commemoration in the production of Canada's national literature. We also co-organized a Speculative Fiction Reading Group and have had many conversations about science fiction, speculative fiction, and weird fiction over the years. For these reasons, I will use her first name in this interview. I am grateful to Rebecca for how those conversations have informed my work, and I am especially grateful to her for introducing me to Larissa Lai's 2002 novel *Salt Fish Girl*, a work of speculative fiction that sparked my research interest in representations of smell and (un)belonging

Her first novel, *The Paradise Engine*, was published by NeWest Press in 2013, and her short stories include "The Fourth Trimester is the Strangest," which won the 2020 Sunburst Award for Excellence in Canadian Literature of the Fantastic. In 2022 she published two novellas: *The Talosite* with Undertow Publications and *Arboreality* with Stelliform Press. Nominated for the 2023 Philip K. Dick Award and currently in the running for the 2023 Ursula K. Le Guin Prize for Fiction, *Arboreality* expands on Campbell's novelette "An Important Failure," winner of the 2020 Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award. *Arboreality* tells a near-future tale of the intertwined lives of trees and people as both try to survive the intergenerational impacts of climate change on Vancouver Island.

In works like *Arboreality*—a story that might be characterized as climate change fiction or "CliFi"—Rebecca does not approach affect as a problem to be solved, nor does she take a didactic approach that would invite ecocritics to measure the work by its ability to educate or create change (Seymour 8). Instead, the novella creates space for a range of complex emotions in response to the climate crisis, and in doing so, challenges what Nicole Seymour describes as the polarizing logic of hope and despair that marks mainstream environmental discourse (5). While Rebecca's writing has appeared in established science fiction publications, garnered numerous awards, and been widely recognized in genre fiction circles, these venues and honours exist at the margins of the Canadian literary canon; as a result, these important contributions to climate change conversations often go unnoticed by the literary establishment. Following Seymour's desire "to outline neglected traditions of alternative environmentalism" (7), this interview with Rebecca about climate change fiction underscores the need for a related project: elevating neglected literary forms that offer alternative representations of affect and environment in response to climate change.

2. Conversation

Stephanie Oliver: First, thank you for agreeing to an interview for this special issue "Everything is Awful? Ecology and Affect in Literatures in Canada." *Arboreality* is a beautiful book. The publisher describes it as a novella that "pulls the echoing effects of small acts and intimate moments through [a] multi-generational and interconnected story of how a West coast community survives the ravages of climate change." In many ways, the novella offers a creative response to the feeling that "everything is awful," particularly as the ongoing

in literatures in Canada. This interview was conducted online over a series of email exchanges in the spring and summer of 2023.

effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and intensifying impacts of climate change amplify structural inequalities. When you were writing the novella, did you have the sense that everything was awful or were you driven by a different set of affects? In a November 2022 *Get Lit* podcast, you said that writing *Arboreality* was therapeutic. How do you see the novella as offering a therapeutic response to these issues, for you and for your readers?

Rebecca Campbell: I definitely felt, while writing *Arboreality,* that everything was awful. The first iterations of the manuscript were like exposure-and-response-prevention therapy. I was trying to inoculate myself against panic by imagining precisely those things that most terrified me: vulnerable children, collapse, disconnection; wildfires and heat domes. But while that's where the story began, it became something a little less awful as I thought about our human capacity for improvisation. We are curious and creative, and those gifts have not abandoned us in past transformations. We are very good at making do with what we have on hand.

And, most importantly, Stelliform Press's mandate is hope. Selena Middleton has a determined faith that the stories we tell are important, especially those that celebrate transformation and resistance. I knew I had to write a story that didn't blink at the frightening possibilities of collapse. But in keeping with Stelliform's message, I didn't want to resign myself to the familiar apocalyptic narratives I learned as a child of the Cold War. I did that by writing about change rather than obliteration.

SO: One of the ways that you engage with affect and environment in your writing is by developing a strong "sense of place." Your PhD research focused on sense of place by examining commemoration and representations of military landscapes in Canadian literature; your website WhereIsHere.ca evokes Northrop Frye's famous field-framing question for Canadian literature; your website describes Canadian landscapes as "cultural text[s] to be read" and your writing as "location work." *Arboreality* grounds readers in a strong sense of place, even if (like me) they have not visited the places described in the book. You now live in southwestern Ontario, but I know that you have deep personal ties to Vancouver Island where the novella is set. How do you understand sense of place, and how do you see *Arboreality* engaging with sense of place—affectively, environmentally, socially, politically, or otherwise? What is the importance of developing or reconnecting with a sense of place in the face of climate change?

RC: In order to understand our moment, I think we have learned to live with this strange oscillation between scales, from the intimate and personal, to the

social, the continental, the global. That is, we have to constantly reframe ourselves in different ways: the rain we need for our garden this summer beside changing global weather patterns; the gum arabic in the food we eat and political unrest in Sudan; transoceanic fibreoptic networks and the kitchen table at which we sit while we doom-scroll the day's news. This is "location work" with different definitions of "here": extending from one's home and community to the "here" of a particular ecosystem, a continent, a planet.

I think fiction—maybe the SF novel in particular—is surprisingly well-suited to this work, and can help us orient ourselves in these various scales. It lets us tell stories that are local, and explore individual lives, but it can also circle outward to take in wider, more generous definitions of "here" and "now."

And ideally, this location-work should also include species: who are we here with? What does it mean to share space with species that live for a few weeks? Or a few hundred years? Or millennia? Their "here" and "now" is so different than ours, and it is wonderful to try and imagine it. This is where speculative fiction has the advantage, since we're used to imagining the nonhuman, huge time-scales, and alien perspectives.

SO: To build on your comments about form, what do you make of Amitav Ghosh's argument in *The Great Derangement* that the novel, at the level of narrative form, struggles to incorporate climate change? Writing in 2016, he claims that climate change is virtually non-existent in contemporary literary fiction, arguing: "It is as though in the literary imagination climate change were somehow akin to extraterrestrials or interplanetary travel" (7). By "literary fiction" he means the realist novel, which he suggests is defined by an irony that poses a fundamental problem for representing climate change, as "the very gestures with which it conjures up reality are actually a concealment of the real" (23). Making the case for representing climate change in realist novels, Ghosh concludes: "to treat [seemingly improbable weather events] as magical or surreal would be to rob them of precisely the quality that makes them so urgently compelling—which is that they are actually happening on this Earth, at this time" (27). While we might consider the implications of Ghosh framing "literary" (read: realist) novels as the "manor house" of "serious" fiction, and genres like science fiction that deal more directly with climate change as its "out-houses" (24), I am also wondering what you make of his framing of the challenges of the novel form. How did you approach these apparent challenges when writing *Arboreality*?

RC: I long ago fled the "preserves of serious fiction" that Ghosh discusses, and headed to the trash stratum of horror and science fiction, so *Arboreality* owes far more to the weird than it does to realist Canadian literature. I fled in

part because I recognized what Ghosh was saying about the limits of the realist novel, and I found that speculative fiction offered me more tools to explore what frightened me about late capitalism and climate change. He's right that the literary novel (as it is practiced) is implicated in exactly the structures that brought about climate change in the first place, so the occlusion Ghosh identifies is built into the genre, just as the social order of industrialization is embedded in the sprawling novels of the nineteenth century.

If there was anything I wanted to accomplish with *Arboreality*, it was to centre a system, rather than an individual, and to explore a larger time-scale than that of a human life, or even a human family. Genre fiction is better suited to that kind of story, because it has always explored the limits of the human, our relationship with the technologies that define us, and the world they create. *Arboreality* is about decolonization in a practical sense, about dismantling the physical structures of empire, and trying to imagine what comes after them: after the suburb, the nation-state, the industrial farm. It makes sense then to also dismantle some of the structures of the novel and turn away from literary realism to something with more space for the nonhuman. In a strange way, weird fiction offers a truer portrait of the world because it allows for improbability (to borrow Ghosh's phrasing). We live in an improbable moment, as we struggle to really understand that human endeavour has changed the nature of our world in irreversible ways. In fact, I'm surprised that cosmic horror isn't a commoner element in climate change fiction, since cosmic horror thematizes our encounters with the ineffable and terrifying, and Donna Haraway has already theorized the Chthulucene, and the "myriad tentacles" necessary to tell its story. What better way to describe our relationship with accelerating change and an unknowable future than Lovecraftian horrors from deep time?

SO: Let me ask you then about the novella's relationship to accelerating change and the unknowable future. *Arboreality* begins in the near future at a time of compounding climate emergencies and frequent pandemics. In the opening chapter, Jude—an Engineering Communications instructor trained in 18th-century literature—helps the librarian Berenice save books from a flooded university library by distributing them to community members. The question quickly becomes: "What do we save?" Other texts, like Emily St. John Mandel's 2014 novel *Station Eleven*, have explored similar questions. For Jude, the obvious answer is the work of Alexander Pope; for Berenice, it is books on animal husbandry, geography, geology, teeth extraction, and running a homestead. This scene sets the stage for the rest of the novella, and later we see how future generations use these books to survive (notably, this essential information does not come from computers or smartphones, which have all died due to the lack of reliable energy sources and widespread telecommunications networks). How

do you think about this question of "what do we save"? And while Jude's answer ("Pope, obviously") is in some ways played for laughs, how do you think literary scholars—whose knowledge and training is often viewed as esoteric and socially irrelevant, particularly in times of emergency—should respond to this question?

RC: This is a hard one. I alternate between thinking (gloomily) that if we are to survive we must be practical, and that all other concerns are secondary to the crisis. I also sympathize with the criticism of academia and literature as exclusive, disconnected from the problems we face, and entangled with all the colonial, capitalist structures we promise to critique. But I also believe that if we are to survive this, we need to think carefully about who we are and what we want. The humanities classroom—like the novel (in all of its forms), the essay, the poem—is one of the few places we've got that's suitable for the conversation. If we can save anything, maybe it should be that little space where students have the time and support to really think about what's happening in our world, and their place in it. Even if it's only for a semester.

Finally—and this may be a little selfish—stories are such a huge source of pleasure. They're also cheap, take up little space, and can be carried anywhere. Maybe it's not a bad thing to save such an economical source of joy.

SO: The novella highlights how existing social structures and dominant ways of thinking bound up in capitalism and colonialism both perpetuate climate change and are woefully unprepared to deal with it. One striking example is the scene featuring Jim, a suburbanite who obsessively waters his lawn to keep it golf-course green, "a dream fulfilled briefly" (17) amidst blistering summer temperatures. His neighbour Bernard looks on "in horror and wonder" (17); unlike Jim, Bernard is attempting to rewild his lawn despite antiquated bylaws about grass height that officers still enforce. Jim is eventually forced to abandon his home to escape the rising temperatures, while Bernard expands his rewilding efforts with the hope of creating fertile, wildfire-resistant spaces for some future generation. Bernard is an example of the ones who stay behind to form the small, increasingly isolated island communities that survive in collaboration with nature.

In contrast, we hear about Ontario—the distant land of "the Canadians"—where billionaires sound like would-be saviours, promising new technologies to address compounding climate emergencies while they escape to settlements on other planets. At once ridiculous, sad, ironic, and unsettlingly familiar, these moments draw attention to the unevenness that marks how climate change is, and will continue to be, experienced differently depending on who you are and where you live. Why was it important for you to highlight this unevenness in this way?

RC: I wanted to imagine as many different responses to climate disaster as I could, and there are a number that I had to cut as I revised. These include corporate solutions, where I tried to evoke techno-utopianism that promises to "disrupt" everything but capitalism. I also wanted to gesture toward state-sponsored, top-down solutions: centralized mobilization inspired by the idea of total war, administered by a government that deploys all available resources in pursuit of a single, collective goal. That felt deeply Canadian to me, with our love for trans-continental railways and broadcasting corporations.

There was, however, one approach that made more sense to me than the others, and it dominated most of *Aboreality*. Rather than seeking a continental solution, my characters solve immediate problems, whether individually or in small groups. This response to climate change is reactive, more local improvisation than central planning. I drew on what I know about my family's history of homesteading during the early twentieth century, which required endurance, but also creative thinking, given how far they all were from supply chains, so a jury-rigged world made sense to me. My characters don't fix the climate—but they adapt and survive.

SO: On the topic of adaptation and survival, children in particular are often described as resilient, and the notion of resilience tends to permeate discussions of climate change today. While reading *Arboreality*, I was struck by the descriptions of children playing, exploring, and adapting creatively to their changing environment. Some of the kids seem unphased by the world they are born into, as it is the only world they know; they embody a form of resilience unavailable to adult characters who remember the "before times." But when we get a closer look at young characters like Kit and Meg, we gain more insight into the challenges (existential, medical, and otherwise) that children will face in the future. You have a small child and have written about the experience of becoming a parent in your award-winning short story "The Fourth Trimester is the Strangest." How do you think about climate change and its impact on future generations, particularly children? How do you think about the concept of resilience?

RC: I panic when I think about children and climate change. How do we prepare a child for a world we cannot imagine? How can we give them the skills they need, and avoid saddling them with institutions and conventions that don't work anymore? I don't know the answer to that as a parent or a teacher.

In many ways, that's been the thematic content of SF from the beginning: we've always written about the creative possibilities of new technologies, first contacts, and revolution. From a parent's point of view, it's a horror story to imagine our kids in a world that's alien to us, but I think it must be different

for the kids who belong there. When I was writing, I thought about children's capacity to play anywhere and make toys out of anything. I also thought about the way teenagers will always fall in love and drink terrible booze and hang out around bonfires if they can. A lot of my story is about being a good ancestor, and leaving things of value behind—but I also like to imagine the kids who pick up what's left and make it into something new for a world I can't imagine.

SO: Speaking of future generations, I am curious about your approach to climate change literature and classroom pedagogy. Many university instructors are grappling with how to discuss climate change with students who are struggling with a profound sense of ecological grief. Meanwhile, other students may relate differently to climate change and display other affects in the classroom (I'm thinking, for example, of climate change deniers). How do you, as an author and university instructor, teach these difficult topics? How do you approach ecological grief and other affective responses to climate change in the classroom?

RC: I have talked to students who believe deeply and grimly that they are the last, or nearly last generation. Obviously, this is a familiar kind of dread—I remember feeling that way as a kid during the 1980s as I began to understand what nuclear war was. I've spoken to many people who have had the same sense of doom at different times during the past seventy years, and for different reasons.

If the classroom offers anything, it might be a place to practice sitting with that discomfort, making sense of it, perhaps learning to live in defiance of it. Maybe a glimpse of what the character Benno talks about, the possibility that we are not isolated in this anxiety, but that it is part of a larger, shared sense of dread. Is it sentimental to believe that it is valuable to talk about these feelings? It sounds utopian, but undergraduate literature classrooms offered me a space to explore the historical trauma of empire in a way that let me understand my own origins, and my own context as a settler. I'm grateful to teachers who helped me to sit with this inheritance, no matter how uncomfortable it is.

In recent panels and workshops, we've discussed climate change fiction, and I've heard from people who are looking for better ways to understand their anxiety. We all want tools with which to think about something that is, in so many ways, unthinkable. It leaves me a little more hopeful when people leave these discussions invigorated by the simple fact that they could talk about how it feels to live right now. That has value, even if it doesn't effect the change we want.

SO: Much of *Arboreality*'s hopefulness stems from its beautiful meditation on the lives (and afterlives) of trees. In reflecting on this focus on trees, I could not help but notice how, in recent years, there have been a growing number

of bestselling novels about trees, such as Annie Proulx's *Barkskins* (2016), Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018), Karl Marlantes' *Deep River* (2019), and Michael Christie's *Greenwood* (2020). In fact, in 2020 Mark Athitakis used the phrase "Literary Tree Fatigue" to describe this growing sub-genre of ecofiction (an interesting proclamation, given that these titles—some of which might be said to constitute the "serious" realist novels about climate change that Ghosh describes—emerge at precisely the moment that he decries their absence). Do you see any possible points of connection or departure with these tree-centric stories and *Arboreality*, which also spans multiple characters and generations but is much shorter than these hefty tomes? Based on our earlier discussion of the limitations of the realist novel form, I am wondering if you see *Arboreality* as part of this sub-genre of ecofiction or if you instead see it as part of a different literary tradition of authors like Ursula Le Guin who writes extensively about trees in science fiction stories like 1972's "The Word for World is Forest"?

RC: I will never escape Ursula Le Guin's forests, not since I read *The Eye of the Heron* as a kid, or the fairy-tale woods of *The Beginning Place*. *Always Coming Home* was a pretty specific influence on *Arboreality*, because it described a far-future, sustainable, decentralized society on the Pacific coast of North America. I am always following Le Guin into the woods.

So while I think *Arboreality* begins in the familiar "Literary Tree" subgenre you mention, by the end it has reached Le Guin's sort of forest. *Arboreality* describes the slow transformation of Vancouver Island through a new species—engineered or evolved—called the *Arbutus aurum,* which is uniquely suited to survive climate change, and overtakes the hillsides razed by wildfires. I imagined it not as singular organisms, but as a clonal colony, like the huge quaking aspen in Utah called Pando, a single tree that could be mistaken for a forest. And perhaps Pando gives us a reason for the popularity of Literary Trees: it is huge, ancient, easy to miss, and may have first sprouted shortly after the last ice age. Entire civilizations have lived and died within its lifetime, which inevitably shifts our sense of time from the moment to the millennia. You could also consider Le Guin's "Vaster than Empires and More Slow" where a neurodivergent explorer encounters a singular planetary consciousness, in which trees (or tree-like organisms) function as neurons. Trees are a way to think about these larger scales of space or time, while also being commodities we cut down to build imperial fleets or sprawling suburban neighbourhoods.

SO: "I am always following Le Guin into the woods"—I love that line. I wonder what would happen if more people followed you into Le Guin's woods?

When reading *Arboreality,* I was particularly struck by how trees assert their agency long after they have been cut down and become the bearers of

memory. The twists of the genetically modified golden arbutus "return" in a wooden bowl's "checks and splits and warps, like a memory" (59). The sound of a violin tells the story of the tree's prior life, and the ever-changing wood continues to shape the instrument's sound into the future. A cathedral of "living furniture" made in collaboration with humans and arbutus represents a kind of oral history; as Kit says when "the Canadians" come to the island to record his story of survival, "This is all I have to say" (106). After writing *Arboreality*, how do you think about trees? Do you see or relate to the world differently? I imagine your everyday life is full of books and other items made from trees. What is it about trees that you would like readers to take away from *Arboreality*, perhaps as they hold a print copy in their hand?

RC: I have a pretty uncomplicated love for trees and all the things we make out of them. It's rooted in childhood and my family: the heat of a wood stove on a rainy day; the smell of grand fir; the scent and texture of cedar as I caught boards off the planer while my dad fed them in at the other end. In many ways, *Arboreality* is just me evangelizing this early joy. There is a Garry oak tree I have observed since I was big enough to understand what it was, growing out of the rock along Saanich inlet. As a geeky, botany-minded eleven-year-old, I remember identifying and mapping the trees on my grandparents' property, finding west coast crabapple and cedar and arbutus and cascara and pacific yew.

I would love it if my readers could share some of that geeky childhood joy, and maybe understand how miraculous trees are: their toughness and versatility, their variety and their long lives. And, maybe, to think about tree-time the way we might think about cathedral-time. A slower kind of time, one that can encompass more than one human life. The Garry oak I mention above has hardly changed in forty years and is likely to outlive me. There's something satisfying about that.

SO: Your focus on tree-time allows *Arboreality* to explore the interconnected impacts of climate change, from the microscopic to the global, across multiple generations. Yet the narrative shows not only how environmental destruction in the present impacts the future, but also how the creative efforts of earlier generations help later generations survive, often in unpredictable ways. For example, characters like Bernard play an active role in rewilding suburban neighbourhoods, collaborating with nature to adapt to environmental changes. Years later, Benno explains to young Kit, "it's a collaboration between who we used to be, before settlement, and who we're going to become" (75).

But Benno does not end there: "But we're always a collaboration, Benno had tried to tell him: there's nothing we don't touch, nothing that isn't changed by our feet on the soil and our hands reaching into the new, soft needles of

Douglas fir in springtime. We have a heavy step, Benno said, not just the old settlers, but us too. The best we can do is hope that our footprints don't break anyone's heart" (75-76). This beautiful meditation on collaboration seems to articulate one of the novella's core themes, which is reflected by the book's expansive yet interconnected narrative structure. What do these lines mean to you? What does it mean to think and write about collaboration in this way?

RC: If there was one thing I wanted for *Arboreality*, it was to evoke that elusive sense of a connection and collaboration. So many of us are directed (by biology? By capitalism?) to focus on urgent threats and rewards: this water bill, that deadline, these quarterly profits, that wedding invitation. With all those immediate imperatives, it can be a struggle to think instead the way Benno does, and see ourselves as one temporary manifestation of a whole, gorgeous, disparate web of flows. Ecological, historical, personal, economic. I think the core characters in *Arboreality* are all struggling toward that understanding, as they try to extend their sense of "here" and "now" beyond their immediate lives. To become good ancestors in the tiny space we are afforded. Imagining that makes me hopeful, because there's a wonderful, profligate generosity in it: you know, planting a tree under which you will never sit, that will bear fruit you will never eat.

That sense of collaboration also extends to other kinds of connections. The place I write about—the southeast coast of Vancouver Island—is produced by so many interconnecting flows: salmon from deep ocean to high forest, highways and lumber and fishing fleets and settlers and real estate money. *Arboreality* is my attempt to locate myself and the places I love in those huge, historical flows, projecting them forward into a future where they have been changed, but not destroyed. Probably the most hopeful thing I wrote in *Arboreality* was the party that takes place in the final pages, because a salmon barbecue means that salmon are still running, despite wildfires and landslides.

SO: Speaking of trees and collaboration, in the Acknowledgements you thank Snuneymuxw Knowledge Keeper David Bodaly, who teaches children about the importance of xpey' (red cedar) on unceded Snuneymuxw territory in and around the Vancouver Island city of Nanaimo. In a recent interview with Anna McKenzie of IndigiNews, Bodaly says: "If you give away your first gift that you make, the next one will come to you faster." This philosophy seems to echo throughout *Arboreality*. What can you tell us about your relationship to Bodaly and his work? How did his teachings influence the novella?

RC: I was very lucky to connect with David Bodaly through a mutual friend who works in the Vancouver Island Regional Library system. Mr. Bodaly read

"An Important Failure"—the story that I expanded into *Arboreality*—before it was published in *Clarkesworld Magazine*. Since I was writing about the effects of settler-colonialism on local Indigenous people, it was important to me to connect with someone who belongs to that landscape and history. Maybe to recognize my own distance from it, despite the deep roots I have in that part of the world. I also admire Mr. Bodaly's work, especially his cedar hats, which are beautiful and functional. They give you this little glimpse into a very old tradition, where ancient craft and land management techniques make something that's both new and very old. And, to return to the idea of generosity: I love the idea of a gift as a way of both furthering your practice and defying the imperatives of capitalism.

SO: As a small independent Canadian press, Stelliform appears to be invested in supporting authors as they do this kind of relationship-building work. The press is expressly devoted to "address[ing] our world's most pressing problems: climate change, ecological destruction, and the effect of these issues on how we relate to each other and to the other beings that live with us in the world." Can you speak to the importance of publishing stories like *Arboreality* with presses like Stelliform? And to tie back to our earlier discussion, what is the importance of reading and writing genre (and genre-bending) fiction, which often exists at the margins of the Canadian literary canon—stories that might fall under the categories of science fiction, speculative fiction, horror fiction, CliFi, or what you often call weird fiction?

RC: Selena Middleton has undertaken something huge and ambitious with Stelliform Press, and set out very consciously to challenge the dominant narratives about climate change, which tend toward the apocalyptic. She has actively chosen to resist that fatalism, which is a struggle for everyone, and her press is part of her resistance. She's also actively searching for BIPOC voices and highlighting Indigenous contributions to the conversation about climate change.

Speculative fiction already offers us tools to talk about our relationship with technology, about revolutionary change, and about our deeply weird moment. It also has an audience willing to accept strangeness, curious about imaginary possibilities: ghosts, spaceships, and the end of capitalism.

SO: Rebecca, thank you so much for your time and your thoughtful answers. We look forward to your future work, and I hope that those reading this conversation will follow you into the forest with a similar level of care.

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Creative Writing

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Morning Ritual

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Someone posted a photo of a red squirrel, pine cones in soft focus all around
so it floats in the middle of the screen though it's perched on a branch.
Someone else thought a white-tailed fawn was catching a bit of sun
when it was probably doing just that. Three swans warp tissue-like
above a green lake I've never seen, a place I'd like to take you,
but I leave you to sleep, think of kissing you awake, don't do it
because someone added a photo of a blackbird and titled it "John." That's all.
This is bothering me because I am not sure if the bird would look regal
without being named. I am corrupt. Elsewhere snow has piled on dried twigs
in cones like cotton and light cuts the sky in shards so I think of God
on my Norton Anthology of Romantic Literature. The water is so pink
in Tadoussac that the uploader had to say it wasn't edited. But
we're getting too far away from what I've come to say. I dreamed of ten-feet waves
in slo-mo, all foam and no water, airing out against a shore, muddy
and brackish like holey sheets cut off a tired moon. Ghost waves.
Then a friend sent me a photo from work of the foamed beach
in your hometown and I wonder what it means to take root, how plants
endure shock being repotted. But I am not talking about displacement,
I am taking about home. Can a guest ask a question that is a gift? I want to ask
and ask and ask because I know we are at our best when we are leaving
happy and giving, like the people who take photos and upload them, and
the people who look at those photos not knowing why, possibly beauty,
possibly hoping to step outside their worlds for a few minutes each morning
like prayer, surrendering to life without our intervention – beside ourselves.

I watch, let you sleep, sip my tea in the belated sun. I prepare to leave.

Someone posted a photo of a knobby green bud and said spring is coming. Someone snapped a lighthouse dead centre in the snow so it looks lonely and clean.

Someone snuck their dog in. Someone caught the red shock of a cardinal and announced the angels are close by. Someone named John uploaded a blurry photo

of a robin, toothy smile emoji in the caption. Someone caught a turtle sunbathing in the lily pads. Someone saw a sparrow just chilling in the shrubs.

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Atmospheric Moon River

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December loomed
with its supply chain of moods
The plum tree's last medallions of golden leaves
its rivière of blue
light emitting diodes for Diwali
In my dreams
I could do no violence. No matter how
hard I tried
I'd no force to execute my attacks
I stomped
dream body after dream body
but no one
was ever hurt
as if something wanted
to remind me, even in my sleep
of my impotence
in global affairs, as if something wanted
to save me. *Westron wynde when wyll thow blow*
I listened
to *In a Sentimental Mood*
nightly. I borrowed a distinction between porn
and pornography
Mornings, the moon lowered itself
over the western mountains

and hung there
golden white
against the sky's cool complexion
not even looking at me
but looking at me
if you know what I mean. Tomorrow sex will be good again
is a phrase I read
and repeated via text to a colleague
working on affect theory
in Hungary
a person for whom I had indeterminate feelings
Psychic excess
they called it
quoting
Judith Butler Yeats
On the other side of the mountains
a thin river of water
poured like grief through the atmosphere
wiping out everything
bridges, hillsides, farmland
Only debt survived
barely
I got to thinking
how that cameo moon might look on me
with my undertones
of firebush and raspberry
my cobalt
disbelief in money
the thin tremulous needle of futurity
that fluttered
in all my poetry. I was in an elevator
ascending a glass tower
the floor numbers lighting up
like cigarettes
in the dark, like parts of my brain
when I sang
the smalle rayne downe can rayne. Across the province
we gathered
candles and sandbags
We prepared
to lose all

power
Above the building
beyond the many panels of tempered glass
a tower crane floated
in the river
of rain. Even then we knew abundance
Autumn's harvest
of darkness
in which tiny green lights grew
like mushrooms
along the jib of the crane
There's no such thing as an aesthetic death mudslide
Atmospheric moon river
I'm crossing you

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Canoeing the Milk River: A Theory of Lines

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I.
Muddy Milk River, morning sky.
Michael and I load the canoe,
strap down tarps, slip from stony shore,
hesitant red ark, sunrise on water.

We paddle. Ravens perch in poplar dew
hoarding shade for the coming noon,
points of light, lines of flight, silhouettes
of themselves in clutched wings.

A line marks
the minimal distance between
an act of inscription and
the place it makes.

The river is moving;
a raven flies downstream.

II.
On the horizon cumulonimbus
clouds accumulate, roll dark.
We land the canoe and nest
in a cup of cliff
under the blue tarpaulin
under bruised blue clouds.

A horizon is absolute, and absolutely
porous. Wind slips in through soil pores,
cottonwoods thrust up dappling ochre mud,
then rain–

droplets patter soft earth
drawing lines–intricate rivulets
of silt and sand that slide toward
the ever-changing river.

III.
Meriwether Lewis' Diary 1805:
The water of this river possesses
a peculiar whiteness, being about
the color of a cup of tea with milk
we called it milk river.

A domesticated line–

each movement becomes thing,
each thing, already a word,
is etched in place.

A peculiar whiteness–

The River that Shuns all Others
becomes a cup of tea with milk.
Living water, distant ritual.

A canoe moves bodies through space the way
a name moves a body through time.

IV.
We hunker among hoodoos
in the middle of a dead world at sunset,
driftwood fire flickers on sandstone strata–
each humble layer
ochre and umber
half a million years–
cliff and column flutter as if
the lumbering Jurassic beasts folded there
have come to dance out the sun.

A line is form carcass, system, skeleton.
A line is distinction border, horizon, stratum.
A line is time.

Our fire burns
at the bottom of an ancient sea.
Above, swallows dip and swivel,
limned in orange light they redraw sky
drawing in the night.

V.
Late afternoon we paddle into *Áísínai'pi*
land to wander a multitude scrawled in sandstone,
each image etched in a fissure of cliff.

See the line before you see the bison.
The line makes space the way a drum makes time.

This is not primitive-bison but line-bison.
It is made of the distance between
an act of inscription and
the place it marks. It makes

this place.

VI.
Michael's dad pulls up in the old Dodge
cracks a crow's smile, lifts the canoe
clattering onto the rack. Diesel chugs
up the valley, sputters over the cattle grate,
and out onto the grid of gravel and fence.

Windows open, river in our skin
we follow the sun's sky path
burning out on the horizon.

Near the road, a coyote yips and listens,
yips and listens, then slips
through barbed wire
and out across the field.

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Excerpt from *Siteseeing*

Ariel Gordon and Brenda Schmidt

Between February 2021 and March 2022, Ariel Gordon and Brenda Schmidt wrote a collaborative poetry manuscript, formatted like a call and response. Ariel intended to write about urban Manitoba, the city and its trees, and Brenda was to write about rural Saskatchewan and birds. Over the course of the year, the matter of place took over and the intentions branched and flew apart. They both wrote birds and trees but also moose and mushrooms, pronghorns and wild turkeys, and people making their way through it all. They wrote climate as it was manifested in drought-stressed trees and stunted crops covered in grasshoppers, in wildfires and wildfire smoke hanging over the prairies. They wrote home as they found it.

*

The goldenrod takes gold
in the floor routine.
I am floored

by how much it has spread
in spite of the drought.
Everything else is suffering.

Crickets cricket at my feet,
cricket in the pasture
where a cow lets out a moo.

A sad moo. No bull this year.
The cow is a cull soon
headed to market. I think

it knows. The herd of culls
grazes, their calves sucking,
bunting. The cows look tired.

The pasture looks tired.
I am too. I want the gold
to mean something.

*

I want it all to mean
something, the flooding/drought
of end times. On the mountain

yesterday, we heard people
yipping like coyotes, the landscape
otherwise empty,

& noticed how pristine
our windshield was. Time
was, a drive across

the prairies meant a wriggling
horizon of horror.
Strange, but I miss it. I miss

July thunderstorms like
a diminishing aunt
I haven't seen in two years.

*

These poems appear in *Siteseeing: Writing nature & climate across the prairies,* published by At Bay Press in fall 2023.

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Kit Dobson is a Professor in the Department of English at the University of Calgary. His most recent book, *Field Notes on Listening*, was named one of the CBC's top non-fiction books of 2022. His debut novel, *We Are Already Ghosts*, is scheduled to be published in 2024.

Ariel Gordon (she/her) is a Winnipeg/Treaty 1 territory-based writer, editor, and enthusiast. She is the ringleader of Writes of Spring, a National Poetry Month project with the Winnipeg International Writers Festival that appears in the Winnipeg Free Press. Her book *Treed: Walking in Canada's Urban Forests* received an honourable mention for the 2020 Alanna Bondar Memorial Book Prize for Environmental Humanities and Creative Writing from ALECC. Her fifth book, *Siteseeing: Writing nature & climate change across the prairies*, written in collaboration with Saskatchewan poet Brenda Schmidt, will be published by At Bay Press in fall 2023.

Carys Hughes is an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded PhD student in American Studies at the University of Nottingham. Her thesis explores U.S. and Canadian literary environmental activism since 1970 in Indigenous and settler fiction writing.

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Max Karpinski is a settler scholar. In Fall 2023, he will join the Department of Humanities at York University as a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow. He recently co-edited a special issue of *Canadian Literature* on the theme of "Poetics and Extraction." Other critical writing has appeared in venues such as *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* and *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*. His contribution to *Canada and Beyond* was supported by the University of Toronto Mississauga's Office of the Vice-Principal, Research.

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Brenda Schmidt was the seventh Saskatchewan Poet Laureate. Author of five books of poetry and a book of essays, her work has been nominated for Saskatchewan Book Awards, received the Alfred G. Bailey Prize for Poetry, and is included in The Best of the Best Canadian Poetry in English: Tenth Anniversary Edition. Over the years she has served on the board of directors of the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild and Sage Hill Writing, and more recently as poetry editor for Grain. She gardens on a dry hillside in central west Saskatchewan in Treaty 6 territory, and has several rain barrels.

Zahra Tootonsab is an Iranian poet and settler based in the Ohroìn:wakon region (Place in the Ravine/Ditch, so-called Hamilton, Ontario). She is the author of *The Aftertaste*, published in 2019 by The Soapbox Press, and received the James Patrick Folinsbee Memorial Scholarship in 2021. Currently, she is working on her Ph.D. dissertation on how weaving as a poetic technique can support Indigenous self-determination and water security in Canada and Iran. Her water ethics and poetics are inspired by her Bakhtiari ancestors.

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The journal is published annually by Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca and is housed in the English Department (Departamento de Filología Inglesa), Universidad de Salamanca. It invites original manuscripts all year round.

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Articles should be between 6,000 and 8,000 words, including abstract, keywords, and works cited. They should be clearly written and have a sharp and clearly-stated focus. They should follow the latest version of the MLA Formatting and Style Guide. A short (100 words) author bio-note is also required.
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