

GREENING THE GREEN SPACE:
EXPLORING THE EMERGENCE OF CANADIAN
ECOLOGICAL LITERATURE THROUGH ECOFEMINIST
AND ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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PERSPECTIVES**

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Abstract

According to Gaile McGregor, nature has largely been associated in Canada with a “violent duality,” that “is not accessible and [where] no mediation or reconciliation is possible.” Faced with an unexpected, unexplainable, and unimaginable wilderness, Americans, Annette Kolodny theorizes, fantasized the pastoral ideal—that nurturing feminine landscape—into daily reality, while Canadians, according to Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood, Tom Marshall, D. G. Jones, W. H. New, Coral Ann Howells, and McGregor, erased pastoral expectations, and replaced them with stories of disaster and survival. Margaret Atwood explores “the North,” within this tradition, as a place “hostile to white men, but alluring” (19), as a place explored, experienced, and colonized almost exclusively by men. Atwood challenges us to examine women’s wilderness writing in relation to masculinist texts that paint Canadian landscape as “a sort of icy and savage femme fatale who will drive you crazy and claim you for her own.”

In compliance with Kolodny’s theories of “pastoral impulse,” Lawrence Buell’s and Terry Gifford’s “post-pastoral,” and Murphy’s “proto/ecological literature,” Michael Branch theorizes how the “topological imperative” demonstrates an American “need to have a culture develop in the greatness of the landscape” (284). Canadians, in contrast, seem to have developed a ‘topological departure.’ Thus, for the Canadian scholar, ecocriticism poses many unique cultural and political complexities, and cannot be easily transplanted from Europe

or America and applied to Canadian literature. Though Canadians write profusely about nature, in general, they do not reflect an eco-consciousness in a nature-aesthetic that strives towards biotic community as Gary Snyder, W. S. Merwin, A. R. Ammons, and Wendell Berry have in the U.S.A.

I believe that an ecological consciousness can be found in the Canadian literary tradition—in both theory and literature—but that its continued love/hate relationship with nature stems from an inability to think outside of, or even aspire beyond, inherited European conventions. Focusing on, though not limited to women writers, this study explores the ways in which ecofeminist writers—as those who identify with the marginalized position of nature in society, and are likewise, identified with a mysterious and feared wilderness-environment—revisit the human-nature dynamic through an emerging Canadian (proto)ecological literary sub-genre.

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INTRODUCTION

Theoretical Overview: Feminism, Ecofeminism, and Ecocriticism

One of the central goals of the feminist movement, bluntly stated, is to work towards the end of the domination of woman by the patriarchy, and to seek the recognition of woman's valid and valuable contribution to society. Feminism, at its core, is a struggle for equality, not a movement that seeks the transference of power. It is proper then that feminism has developed into a movement that celebrates women's empowerment through multifarious approaches to issues of oppression, and that works against any dominant ideology that marginalizes or excludes difference. Feminism seeks an "equality in difference" that can only come from an informed sensitivity to the issues and concerns of woman, and their relationship to a number "isms"—imperialism, classism, racism, heterosexism, sexism, etc. It is not my intention here to offer an historical outline or critique of the feminist movement, but rather simply to begin by acknowledging that the issues which concern contemporary feminists are wide-ranging, and equally politically patulous, extending beyond the narrow agenda which is traditionally associated with feminism into all areas that are concerned with relationships of power, including the central focus of this thesis—the environment.

Ecofeminism, as an often-controversial branch of feminist theory, concerns itself with an extensive list of discriminatory practices that are rampant in Western patriarchal society. In particular, ecofeminism is interested in raising

animalism and speciesism to the same level of awareness and relevance that surrounds feminism's attention to sexism and racism. Like feminism itself, ecofeminism challenges the constructions of patriarchal thought that function largely unexamined in Western society and culture. These precepts include the myths of 1) the logic of domination which includes the logic of the hierarchical structure that grants man dominion over woman, the land, and all living things; 2) the logic of dualisms that polarize man and woman, culture and nature, white and black, civilization and wilderness, mind and body in such a way that confers on woman and nature the status of "other;" and 3) the logic of the mind/body split which allows for a denial of the importance of the body and the planet in the name of more abstract ideals such as spiritual transcendence and culture. This kind of dualistic thinking, some feminists have argued, leads to the feminizing of nature and the naturalizing of woman via a prevailing association of higher consciousness (the mind) with conceptions of the masculine, and instinct (the body) with the feminine. As Carol Adams points out, the logic of dualisms as social and intellectual constructions, when left unchallenged, commits Western culture to "several patriarchal theological tenets: transcendence and domination of the natural world, fear of the body, projection of evil upon woman [and], world destroying spiritual views" (Adams *E&S* 1). Ultimately, Adams contends, these tenets make "oppression sacred" (1).

Thus, it becomes unavoidably apparent that in Western society issues concerning woman and issues concerning nature are politically and conceptually intertwined. For this reason I intend to ground the theoretical approach of this

study on two fundamental positions: 1) that feminism is a valid and necessary addition to any environmental debate, and 2) that ecofeminism is a valid and politically necessary new feminism. It is from this theoretical foundation that I will argue my central critical contention, that expanding the feminist critique of Canadian literature, both canonical and emerging, to include issues of ecofeminism and deep ecology, will lead to a clearer understanding of the political implications of Canadian literature's much touted obsession with nature and wilderness.

With the ever increasing discourse of ecofeminism as a theoretical framework, I will endeavour to understand the various ways in which Canadian writers—most centrally, but not exclusively, Canadian women writers—have sought to interpret their experience of the feminine as “other” through their identification of the feminine with the environment. Many Canadian women writers attempt, in their work, to carve a position for themselves, in respect to nature, that transcends that of an outsider, that attempts to go beyond being an observer, or perhaps more accurately, a voyeur describing nature's beauty and power. Instead these writers seek identification with the natural world through a shared position of marginalization, and a willingness to struggle against a prevailing cultural logic that pits human civilization against nature.

Despite the many advancements won by twentieth-century feminism, attitudes, cultural beliefs, and residual language perpetuate the belief that ‘woman-as-vessel’ is necessarily more closely aligned with nature—her mysteries and her cycles—than with culture. According to Isaac Balbus, this constructed

In light of what ecofeminist critics have said about the historical, social, and imaginative/mythical links between women and the natural world, re-reading some Canadian writing, particularly but not exclusively by women, that explores the feminine identification with nature from a feminist perspective, makes it quite apparent that for many Canadian writers, the feminine identification with nature is as much political as it is poetical. Ecofeminists do acknowledge the destructive qualities inherent in not questioning the ‘essentialist’ link between women and nature, but they also recognize the empowering possibilities for women to be found in the re-shaping of this association to emphasize and promote its feminist aspects. It may appear contradictory to argue that the association of woman with nature is a dangerous idea, perpetuated by a patriarchal society and culture to justify the exploitation of both woman and the environment, but that a woman writer reconsidering that association in her work is a positive and progressive development. However, it is important to remember that a woman openly and freely exploring her personal or political links with the natural world is a particularly effective strategy for breaking through the silence that has often restricted women from defining or discovering their own political and cultural identities. The act of writing poetry, fiction, and drama concerned with the association of the feminine and nature from a feminist perspective offers a kind of cultural practice that can legitimize the celebration of feminism and environmentalism that characterizes the theoretical and political language of ecofeminism. At least this is what I will endeavour to show. Co-extensively the act of reading literature from an environmentally critical position is also a

productive and politically engaged kind of cultural practice, and it is my intention to explore the possibilities which ecocriticism offers feminism and feminist critical practice through my engagement with a variety of Canadian literary texts from a variety of authors (both male and female), genres, and historical perspectives. Of course before I can proceed to the reading of actual literary texts, there are many issues, terms, and theoretical positions that demand clarification. I will begin by expounding, in turn, on the two central critical terms of this thesis—ecofeminism and ecocriticism.

Ecofeminism

Because of the multifarious factions that are the result of any feminist movement whose mandate is to give voice to the silenced, defining ecofeminism requires an in-depth look at the various avenues of theory and practice which are gathered under the banner of ecofeminism. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies in their book *Ecofeminism* loosely define ecofeminism as “a term for an ancient [matriarchal] wisdom” (15) “that grew out of various social movements—the feminist, peace, and the ecology movements—in the late 1970s and early 1980s” (13). Patrick Murphy offers a more philosophical perspective by approaching ecofeminism as an extension of the study of ecology which he argues is a way of seeing the interconnectedness of all living matter not as the “external environment which we enter” but rather as “the recognition of the distinction between things-in-themselves and things-for-us” (*LNO* 4). Furthermore, Murphy describes feminism as “the difference between things-in-themselves and things for us” as it correlates with “us-as-things-for-others.” Thus ecofeminism can be seen as the

logical combination of two distinct ideologies—environmentalism and feminism—both working toward the abolition of the cultural denigration of the “other” in such a way that “we can begin to comprehend a gender hierarchical valorization” (5). While Shiva and Mies maintain that “the liberation of woman cannot be achieved in isolation, but only as part of a larger struggle for the preservation of life on this planet” (Mies & Shiva 16), others prefer to emphasize the feminist aspects of ecofeminism by even more strongly arguing that ecofeminism is “feminism taken to its logical conclusion, because it theorizes the interrelation among self, society, and nature” (Birkeland *WAN* 17-18).

Most ecofeminist philosophers argue the importance of ecofeminist theory and practice in relation to its relevance to social justice and global survival. Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy are typical when they explain that:

Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change arising out of the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities. These struggles are waged against the ‘maldevelopment’ and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism. They are waged for environmental balance, heterarchical and matrifocal societies, the continuance of indigenous cultures, and economic values and programs based on subsistence and sustainability. The foundation and ground of ecofeminism’s existence, then, consists of both resistance and vision, critiques and heuristics. Ecofeminism is not a single master theory and its practitioners have different articulations of their social practice. [...]

Such theorizing will do so through increasing the self-consciousness of its participants and representing its beliefs to those who are open to it.

(Gaard *ELC* 2)

However beyond exhibiting itself as a movement solely interested in social justice, as Birkeland explains, ecofeminism is:

[...] a value system, a social movement, and a practice, but it also offers a *political analysis* that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction. It is ‘an awareness’ that begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man’s attitude toward woman and tribal cultures, or in Ariel Salleh’s words, that there is a “parallel in men’s thinking between their ‘right’ to exploit nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of woman, on the other.” (Birkeland *WAN* 18)

Understanding the essential political aspect of the ecofeminist movement, as Birkeland above briefly sketches it, is vital for any investigation of ecofeminist theory or practice and thus demands a more detailed discussion.

Ecofeminist Genealogy

While many environmental historians and ecological theorists agree that the birth of ecological studies came out of the free-thinking era of the 1960’s, it was mainly Rachel Carson’s 1962 book, *The Silent Spring* which shocked the (Western) globalized village into a reevaluation of unchecked pollution; Carson urgently insists that “the public” demand more information concerning scientific manipulations (i.e. poisons, insecticides, biocides, herbicides, etc.) in order to

avoid completely falling “into a mesmerized state that makes us accept as inevitable that which is inferior or detrimental” by allowing “the chemical death rain to fall as though there were no alternative” (12). Ideas raised in this text brought to fruition the popular conceptions of conservation, ecology, and environmental ethics, which had been brewing throughout North America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, raised by early writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau, and followed by John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold, John Burroughs, Edward Abbey, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez, and W. S. Merwin, among others. In Canada, historical documentation of such liberated environmental thinkers has yet to be highlighted in Canadian literary and/or philosophical history. However, I would suggest that the writings of Susanna Moodie, Catherine Parr Trail, Anna Jameson, and later, Emily Carr reveal some of the most potent early environmental and ecofeminist preambles to a late twentieth century Canadian environmental ethics of care. Through the writings of visionaries such as Rachel Carson, the idea that scientific advances designed to “better” our world are actually seen as destroying it through silent killers—air-borne pollutants, poisonous by-products of production, contaminants released by the tonne into our waterways, pesticides, chemical plant and animal fertilizers etc.—revolutionized our ways of seeing nature.

The term ecofeminism or *ecologie-Féminisme* (Marks & Courtivron 25) stems from French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne who wrote such radical articles as *Le Féminisme ou la mort* (1974), and *Ecologie Féminisme: Revolution ou mutation?* (1978) in which the “destruction of the planet” is intrinsically

connected to the oppression of women as it is maintained through “the profit motive inherent in male power; she insists, “the liberation of one cannot be effected apart from the liberation of the other” (Tong 251). Nonetheless, ecofeminism itself did not “come into its own,” Rosemary Tong rightfully asserts, until the 1990’s in North America (Gates 15-16) after a mid-1980’s revival of the term was explored by Karen J. Warren. Warren reiterates d’Eaubonne’s theory that women and nature share issues of oppression in masculine-encoded societies and stresses an exploration of this link is fundamental to understanding either or both oppressions. Furthermore, she recommends that “feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective” and vice-versa (Tong 251). Early development of ecofeminism in the United States saw the emergence of writers such as Rosemary Ruether, Mary Daly, Susan Dodson Grey, Susan Griffin, and Starhawk whose understanding of ecofeminism maintained that “historical and causal links between the dominations of women and of nature are located in conceptual structures of domination and in the way women and nature have been conceptualized” (Warren *EFP* x). Karen Warren also cites Jim Cheney, Susan Dodson Grey, Ynestra King, Carolyn Merchant, Val Plumwood, Ariel Salleh and herself as ecological critics responsible for the forward movement of ecological feminist philosophy. Historical links, Warren argues, are the mainstay of current ecofeminist thought inasmuch as it argues for what Ariel Salleh claims: “the current global environmental crisis is a predictable outcome of patriarchal culture” (x).

Warren's outline of possible historical origins of a masculinist link to gender and environmental degradation suggests one school of historical thought marks "the invasion of Indo-European societies by nomadic tribes from Eurasia about 4500 BCE" as the point of change between matrilineal and patriarchal societies. Other ecocritics such as Susan Griffin, Val Plumwood, and Rosemary Ruether, Warren argues, trace the "development of conceptual dualism in classical Greek philosophy." While yet another popular investigation into a historical causal link which associates patriarchy with global environmental crisis—explored by Merchant and Shiva—is "an exploration of nature, unchecked commercial and industrial expansion and the subordination of women" (xi). Ongoing discussions about the relevance, the validity, and the legitimacy of ecofeminism have seen a clear development between critics in the pages of *Environmental Ethics* over the past three decades.

In a recent collection of ecofeminist articles, Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy, co-editors of *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, discuss the "eruption of ecofeminist literary analyses" since 1990.

They suggest:

Although individuals have been working in this vein for decades, the majority of ecofeminist literary criticism is being practiced by younger academics who have received their degrees since 1990 and doctoral students who are building on the wealth of materials. (ELC 5)

Gaard and Murphy explain that its development in academic circles in the 1970's and 1980's saw it "almost exclusively in departments of philosophy and women's

studies and on the fringes of environmental studies” (5). In the 1990’s, Gaard and Murphy acknowledge its invasive presence in:

[...] other departments, such as criminology, in conjunction with environmental justice in terms of both racial and gender oppression; political science, in terms of social movements and community politics; cultural studies, almost exclusively to the degree to which it engages postcolonial considerations; and English departments, in terms of women’s and environmental literatures. (5)

Their claim attempts to document the valid growth of ecofeminism in the 1990’s as a branch of ecocriticism that is “finally making itself felt in literary studies”

(5). Gaard and Murphy explain:

Critics are beginning to make the insights of ecofeminism a component of literary criticism. They also are discovering a wide array of environmental literature by women being written at the same time as ecofeminist philosophy and criticism is being developed. (5)

Ecofeminism and the Political

Noel Sturgeon has referred to ecofeminism as “one of the most popular and significant locations for radical politics today” arguing that:

It attracts people because of the seemingly apocalyptic nature of our ecological crises and the many ways in which environmental problems affect people’s daily lives, as well as the sense of its global relevance. (24)

Furthermore, Sturgeon maintains that ecofeminism is:

[...] a significant and complex political phenomenon, a contemporary political movement that has far-reaching goals, a popular following, and [yet has] a poor reputation among many academic feminists, mainstream environmentalists, and some environmental activists of color. (24)

Ultimately, she concludes that ecofeminism “can be seen primarily as a feminist rebellion within male-dominated radical environmentalisms” (25). Though ecofeminism offers valid criticism of anthropocentric environmental philosophies, it is also emerging with theories that stand independent from reaction-based ideologies.

Though ecofeminism can be seen as a movement that has developed in a largely theoretical direction, ecofeminism, as Sturgeon is quick to point out, was born in the United States primarily out of radical activist groups of women in the 1970’s who were “particularly concerned with nuclear technology, neocolonialist development practices, and woman’s health and reproductive rights” (25). Their concern, according to Sturgeon, was closely associated with “the nonviolent direct action movement against nuclear power and nuclear weapons,” and Sturgeon ambitiously and successfully traces the history of the movement in terms of its fundamentally “green” grass roots organization. Sturgeon’s historical survey highlights what she perceives as the essential points of convergence for ecofeminist thought and its development of various collective political organizations. Though my emphasis throughout will be on the philosophical and

theoretical aspects of ecofeminism, I by no means intend to dismiss the grass roots organizations engaged in ecofeminist activism.

As a movement that hopes to link environmental theory and practice with the development of new strategies for social change (Birkeland *WAN* 16), ecofeminist politics are currently generally understood as a:

[...] radical green philosophy [that] is premised on the conviction that the sources of the environmental crisis are deeply rooted in modern culture, and therefore fundamental social transformation is necessary if we are to preserve life on earth in any meaningful sense. (13)

Ultimately, ecofeminism aims to change “the cultural and institutional infrastructures—our frameworks of thinking, relating, and acting,” that are responsible for bringing us to our current state of environmental crisis. Birkeland speaks for most ecofeminists when she identifies these infrastructures and frameworks as being largely patriarchal in nature:

The glorification of what have traditionally been seen as “masculine” values and the drive for power and control are simply maladaptive in an age of toxic waste and nuclear weapons. Healing the powerful psychological undercurrents created by thousands of years of Patriarchy requires rigorous self and social criticism. (17)

Such self and social criticism has an inescapable feminist element since, for Birkeland, we “require a gender-conscious political analysis, because only through naming the invisible realities can we break ‘the silent conspiracy that upholds the status quo’” (17).

Ecofeminism, emerging as a constant theme in my examination of changing attitudes towards nature and the environment in Canadian literature, is a theoretical framework that encompasses human concerns for equality in difference, and not just the feminist struggle for equality. Since both men and women, along with animals and nature, are marginalized by patriarchal standards, ecofeminism cannot be characterized as a movement that is in the interests of women exclusively. Ecofeminist Charlene Spretnak suggests that:

[...] women seem to have an elemental advantage [...] but] biology is no destiny. All minds contain all possibilities. The sexes are not opposites or dualistic polarities; the differences are matters of degree, whether negligible or immense. (Spretnak *Healing* 130)

It is a central ecofeminist tenet that a healthier planet is of benefit to all of the groups mentioned above, and would mean a better, more harmonious, and sustainable life on Earth. Mies and Shiva explain:

Ecofeminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice. It asserts the special strength and integrity of every living thing. For us the snail darter is to be considered side by side with a community's need for water, the porpoise side by side with our appetite for tuna, and the creatures it may fall on with Skylab. (14)

Specifically focused on falsely constructed ideologies that have led women and animals to continued subordination, and nature to mass destruction, ecofeminism is a movement that blends feminism with a pragmatic essentialism that fosters political strength and offers resistance to the patriarchal positioning of

women. And though, as Shiva and Mies assert, ecofeminism is a “woman-identified movement,” it sees “the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors” connected not specifically to men but to the “same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality” (14).

Ecofeminist political thinkers strongly feel that “in denying this patriarchy we are loyal to future generations and to life and this planet itself” since a heightened and informed understanding of ecological destruction clearly and unmistakably reminds ecofeminists of the “connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature” (14).

The ecofeminist struggle for recognition and respectability among ecological theorist colleagues proves its fundamental point: deep ecology and ecological theory maintain a masculine-encoded ethic which, in its ignorance of women’s issues concerning subordination, cannot legitimately argue for a biotic community prospectus. Most ecofeminists advocate continued division from movements such as deep ecology, that they may (as Ynestra King asserts) “hold out for a separate cultural and political activity so that we can imagine, theorize or envision from the vantage point of *critical otherness*” (Slicer “Wrongs” 34). Ecofeminists thus believe their movement has a more enlightened ecological theoretical stand since it “recognize[s] and condemn[s] androcentrism in the world and in its own theories” (36): it labels male-centred ecological theories as androcentric in the ways in which they devalue women’s contributions, omit issues which are of special concern to women and exhibit overt misogyny (36).

And though ecocentrists stress similar boundaries outlined by Warren as ecofeminist—“narrative inclusiveness, contextualism, reconceiving interspecies relations nonanthropocentrically” (38)—ecofeminists such as Warren, Salleh and Slicer “recoil at that suggestion” since:

[...] androcentrism is still so deeply entrenched in so much work by environmental philosophers, including Deep Ecologists, and their response is either superficial or defensively shrill when this is pointed out to them. (38-9)

That said, most ecofeminists believe that any ecological movement is necessarily ecofeminist whether it is consciously recognized as such, or not: ecofeminists weave the tale of a tangled web of oppression which must be addressed if any social changes can be made. Otherwise, we are just spinning air, and it is an air unbreathable.

Multifarious Factions

Like feminism, ecofeminism is far from a singular theory; it embraces a variety of perspectives, ideologies, theoretical approaches, and political practices that share its essential feminist and environmental ethic. This openness of approach, and appeal to difference are so vital an aspect of ecofeminism that Karen Warren sees it as foundational, and she foregrounds this characteristic when she broadly defines ecofeminism as:

[...] the name of a variety of different feminist perspectives on the nature of the connections between the domination of women (and other oppressed humans) and the domination of nature. “Ecological feminist

philosophy” is the name of a diversity of philosophical approaches to the variety of different connections between feminism and the environment. These different perspectives reflect not only different feminist perspective [...] they also reflect different understandings of the nature, and solution to, pressing environmental problems. (EFP x)

Sturgeon calls this central ecofeminist principle a “differential consciousness” which, she argues, manifests itself within ecofeminism as a “form of mobile political subjectivity” (Sturgeon 176).

This open and differential approach to subjectivity reflects an emerging variety of feminist ideology that, as feminist historian Chela Sandoval describes, is one which:

[...] in constantly honing in on resistance to power relations rather than on constructing theoretical purity, concentrates on the process of political action and theory making, exploding categorical loyalties, and seeking coalitions, affinities, and allies. (Sturgeon 176)

Sandoval’s description echoes Maria Lugone’s cry for a “cross-cultural and cross-racial loving” as part of a politics she calls a theoretical “world-travelling” (176). This determination to maintain diversity, despite clear evidence that theoretical unity often brings greater political influence, particularly inside the academy, remains the cornerstone of an ecofeminist theory struggling to insure that all voices are heard and that no voice is left unconsidered.

In the groundbreaking collection of ecofeminist essays called *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, editors Gloria Orenstein and Irene

Diamond argue, in their introduction, that ecofeminism, like feminism, is not a “monolithic, homogeneous ideology” (2) but rather it is a theory that embraces “heterogeneous strategies and solutions” in order to improve the possibilities of positive cultural and social change. Ecofeminism is, after all, a constantly shifting hybrid of ecology and feminism, and it is natural that its principles of inclusion and consideration should reflect both the feminist focus on social equality and the beliefs that lie at the core of environmental theoretical thought—namely biodiversity and biotic community. Environmental theorist Christine Cuomo describes the ecofeminist approach as:

[...] social ecology, which combines an anarchist critique of hierarchy and economic exploitation with an ethic based on the realities of biological interdependence. Interdependent relationships within the biota are incredibly numerous and complex [...] When this diversity is disrupted, the entire web of life must readjust. (Cuomo 357-8)

In this way, Cuomo suggests that diversity, for ecofeminism, is more than just a theoretical principle, arguing that it also helps to characterize the environmental and social goals ecofeminism works towards. Diversity, for ecofeminism, is both method and end.

The result is, of course, the presence of factionalism within the ecofeminist movement. Sturgeon, however, is quick to point out that unlike the larger feminist movements whose factionalism has led to the construction of “radically exclusive categories of feminism” and other competitive and nasty divisions among feminists, the ecofeminist embracing of factionalism simply reflects the

belief that “all movements contain both essentialist and anti-essentialist moments within a process of political struggle in democratic organizational forms” (173). Sandoval makes a related point when she argues that “hegemonic feminists,” by which she means “the power elite of academic feminist theorists” (Sturgeon 174) who constantly create exclusive categories of feminism, “make activist alliances and coalitions difficult” (177). By “relegating most feminist activism to the (punitively inferior) category of radical/cultural feminism or liberal feminism” (176), and opposing it to the privileged position held by socialist and poststructuralist feminism, the “hegemonic feminists” create what is, especially when applied to ecofeminism, a condescending and dangerous division “between feminist activism and feminist academic practice” (177). The result is the too easy dismissal of cultural/radical feminism (a category in which ecofeminism is often placed) as “essentialist” or as located “in a feminist past” (177).

Noel Sturgeon, in *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*, comprehensively outlines the various factions of ecofeminism (with a brief mention of feminist ecologists who prefer not to be labeled as “ecofeminist”), with a complete study of how each division has been viewed as essentialist by academic feminism, and how that dismissive accusation can be reinterpreted and recategorized in order to create a more positive position of political strength for each respective ecofeminist faction, and for ecofeminism as a whole. My intention here is not to overlap her extensive and exhaustive discussion of “ecofeminist natures” but rather to draw on her theoretical

contribution to the developing field of ecofeminist studies, and to cite her as the source of the following list of the many divisions within ecofeminism:

[...] social ecofeminism, cultural ecofeminism, socialist ecofeminism, radical ecofeminism, transformational (ecological) feminism, nature feminism, critical ecological ecofeminism, papal ecofeminism, conceptualist ecofeminism, ecofeminine, nature feminism, feminist green socialism, feminist environmentalism, environmental feminism, and feminist political ecology. (179)

For the purposes of this thesis, whose intention is to raise issues concerning ecofeminism and deep ecology as a context for a politically engaged reading of the role of nature in specific Canadian literary texts, such precision would be unwieldy and superfluous. Thus, I do not make any major distinctions between ecofeminist factions and likewise, between deep ecological divisions, though broadly, both sections deal with social and cultural ecofeminism, while Section Two moves into radical ecofeminism. I would also like to point out that some environmental theorists, including some deep ecologists, write within divisions of environmentalism, and often define themselves as distinct entities within the environmental movement as a whole. For my purposes, all ecological critics that I cite will be referred to as ecofeminists, deep ecologists, ecocritics (usually referring to a literary ecological critic), ecological activists, ecophilosophers, ecotheorists, or ecological spiritualists/ecofeminist spiritualists. Though these “titles” overlap to some degree (I often use ecofeminist and ecospiritualist

interchangeably in the second section), the distinctions between them are, on the whole, fairly obvious.

Essentialism

In addition to finding strength in diversity and theoretical openness, ecofeminism asserts itself in the midst of an academic feminist community that dismisses its method of theorizing and its political practice as “essentialist.” Essentialism, as a fundamental issue for ecofeminism, demands consideration. Essence, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, is “all that makes a thing what it is; intrinsic nature [...] abstract entity; reality underlying phenomena” (329). Thus, to essentialize, particularly with regards to gender issues as contemporary theoretical circles consider them, is to base an argument on an ideological position that considers the idea of intrinsic male/female subjectivity to be both valid and possible. According to the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*:

[...] essentialism is a label for certain theoretical and artistic attempts to explore the specificity of ‘the feminine’ [...] as a strategic choice, these writings hope to escape the patriarchal straitjacket of sexual difference through an emphasis on the positive worth of either a biological, linguistic or philosophical female essence. (Waring 544)

Basically essentialism as “the idea that women have an essential nature” is considered in contemporary theoretical circles to be both ideological and strategic (Birkeland *EE* 443).

Issues surrounding essentialism and related controversies arising from the theorization of the nature of sexual difference have always held a problematic position among poststructuralist and postmodernist feminist scholars dubious of any ideology that entertains the possibility of a fundamental gender-specific subject position. These differences have developed largely in association with psychoanalytical theory and various strains of feminist thought engaged in the “valorization of woman’s biological or cultural essence as a force for change” (Waring 545). As leading ecofeminist theorist Val Plumwood explains, “a feminist account of the domination of nature [is] [...] controversial because the problematic of nature has been so closely interwoven with that of gender” (Plumwood *Mastery* 1). And indeed ecofeminism has proved a controversial theoretical development among those feminists who view the feminist project as the struggle to escape all modes of socio-historical essentializing of women’s identity, behaviour, and general characteristics regardless of their ideological origins, strategic intentions, or political pragmatism. Ultimately, though “ecofeminists agree the association of women with nature is the root cause of both sexism and naturism, they disagree about whether women’s connections to nature are primarily biological and psychological or primarily social and cultural” (Tong 252).

In the face of such resistance, ecofeminists remain committed to the notion that a theory which politicizes women’s subject position—whether social, cultural, or biological—is a necessary aspect of any program which hopes to effect social change, since pragmatically real shifts in power structures cannot

occur without a concrete and compelling demarcation between those that represent what is revolutionary and those who maintain control of the power structures in question. According to ecotheorist Noel Sturgeon, essentialism is vital to the success of connecting ecofeminist practice to ecofeminist theory. In a sense, attempts to define, justify, and include ecofeminist essentialism as part and parcel of the development of a feminist environmental politics, separate from the development of other environmentally engaged politics, establish ecofeminism as distinct from the so-called “gender neutral” positions that deep ecologists or “greens” take. As both activist and academic, Sturgeon continually points to the tension between theory and practice as a fundamental problem contained within any revolution, including the revolution of environmental ethics. She often refers to the various ways in which “feminist theory has created what might be pictured as an invisible moat between its most sophisticated and complex political critiques and various kinds of social movement practices” (6), making it perfectly clear that she believes that “debates around essentialism are at the heart of this problem” (7). As Deborah Slicer complies: ecofeminists ought to be “faulted for what they have said rather than for what the unread have said about them” (*ELC* 50).

The distinctly ecofeminist circumnavigation of the problem of essentialism is one that calls for the rethinking, recycling, and reusing of nature-woman images in a manner that forces the questioning of established relationships with women, with the environment, and most particularly with the construction of the connection of women and the environment. Birkeland explains that while

“ecofeminism is falsely labeled ‘essentialist’ [...] it is actually a deconstruction of patriarchal essentialism” (EE 443). As Ynestra King argues, a “practical essentialism” recognizes that:

Although the nature-culture dualism is a product of culture, we can nonetheless consciously choose not to sever the woman-nature connection by joining male culture. Rather, we can use it as a vantage point for creating a different kind of culture and politics that would integrate intuitive, spiritual, and rational forms of knowledge, embracing both science and magic insofar as they enable us to transform the nature-culture distinction and create a free, ecological society. (King EF/FE 23)

By positively reevaluating the patriarchal connection between women and the wild, women can begin liberating themselves from “the primordial realm of women and nature” as an “imprisoning female ghetto” and begin to “celebrate the life experience of the ‘female ghetto’ [...] celebrat[ing] what is distinct about women [...] rather than strategizing to become part of [male culture]” (King *Reweaving* 111).

Largely the notion of essentialism as it is applied to ecofeminism has become associated with the way in which ecofeminism has boldly linked women with nature in an attempt to work against a system which denigrates women and nature in similar fashions. Warren, who joins ecofeminists such as Ruether in saying that “women’s and nature’s liberation are a joint project” (Tong 247), asserts that “because women have been ‘naturalized’ and nature has been

'feminized,' it is difficult to know where the oppression of one ends and the other begins" (Warren *EFP* xv). Since "the demeaning of the natural, biological, and feminine was [...] internalized in the individual psyche" (Birkeland *EE* 443), the redressing of feminist ideologies is always a problematic endeavour. While Slicer argues that feminists "rightly" reject "the essentialist conception of women as 'other,' outsider, and, more specifically, as body, passive matter, and keeper of bodies" (*ELC* 57), she still supports an ecofeminist standpoint theory which advocates a "practical essentialism" such as Val Plumwood's argument.

Plumwood argues:

The way to untangle this construction is not to deny women's continuity with nature or to embrace it uncritically, but to make these categories more permeable—women create culture, too, and culture is not radically discontinuous with nature—and to think carefully about the normative standards that fall out of these radically different socially constructed ontologies. (54)

Sherry B. Ortner complies with Plumwood's assessment and adds that, "it will not be easy for women to disassociate themselves from nature, since virtually all cultures believe women are closer to nature than men" (Tong 254).

Earlier ecofeminists such as Susan Griffin, Starhawk and Mary Daly whose essentialism claims a positive link between woman and nature, simultaneously maintain a dichotomy which pits men against women in a woman-good, man-bad paradigm. Daly's "gyn/ecology" is the most overt, claiming that women contain "life-giving powers" while "parasitic" men with their "death-dealing powers"

“feed off of women’s energy” (Tong 256), thus producing “multiple fetuses/feces of stale male-mates in love with a dead world that is ultimately co-equal and consubstantial with themselves” (257). Decades of developing ecofeminist ideology has built on these earlier radical and gender dichotomous approaches to the woman-nature paradigm; current ecofeminist philosophy dismisses such black and white distinctions between men and woman as erroneous, judgmental, limited, and politically unsavory—namely because of its own fight against *masculinist* dichotomies reflected in these feminist dichotomies and the ecofeminist struggle to embrace multifarious factions regardless of gender, race, or creed.

In extreme theoretical contrast to Daly’s angry rants, the contemporary and technologically radical ecofeminist Donna Haraway’s theory of the cyborg emphasizes that women’s empowerment remains in the feminist fight for choice. Cyborgs embrace both medical and technological advances to find an unlimited woman in the ultimate of female bodies; in this way, she escapes the bonds of patriarchal essentialism by gaining more access and control over her own body. Furthermore, the cyborg also transcends masculinist culture, according to Haraway, by rejecting stereotypical and undesirable destinies of women (that affect their economic, psychological, and social status) when they lose “currency” in the aging process. Haraway asks us: why “quarantine women from the infections of biological sex” (134)? She argues that dismissing biology for ‘social constructionism’ has been “less powerful in deconstructing how bodies, including sexualized and radicalized bodies, appear as objects of knowledge and sites of

intervention in 'biology'" (134). Though her argument is not against essentialism *per se*, she criticizes the way in which essentialism tends to "obscure the categorical and overdetermined aspect of 'nature' or the 'female body' as an oppositional ideological resource' and hence, a "National Park nature," like the woman's body, is seen pedestalized, in preservation from "the violations of civilization in general" (134).

Sturgeon, in her reexamination of what has become the central *casus belli* of contemporary feminist theory, points to essentialist constructs—"notions of nature, women, or certainly radically defined groups, that use biological, universalist, ahistorical, or homogenizing ways of definition"—and rechristens them "ecofeminist natures." In this way Sturgeon hopes to draw attention to the untenable position in which poststructuralist feminism wishes to place ecofeminism, arguing that ecofeminism "seems to be situated in a history of feminism in such a way that it is required to solve the mystery of how to create an anti-essentialist coalition of politics while deploying a strategic politics of identity" (5). To this position, Sturgeon asks "why is this so? And can ecofeminism solve this mystery" (5)? Though critics will continue to argue about the problematic nature of any politics of identity, Slicer lists many of the important questions that remain on everyone's mind: "how have women been excluded from oppositional culture;" "what life choices compel a deeper discomfort with dualistic structures and foster a deeper questioning;" "how have women's lives been less directly oppositional to nature;" and "what qualities of care and kind of selfhood privilege women's experiences" (Slicer *ELC* 54)?

It is not surprising considering its difficult theoretical positioning vis-à-vis post-structural and postmodernist feminism as Sturgeon describes it that, as Val Plumwood points out:

Ecofeminism has been stereotyped in some quarters both as theoretically weak and as doubtfully liberated, and also as exclusively linked to what is often now termed cultural feminism. (Plumwood *Mastery 2*)

Dismissing ecofeminism as “essentialist” stems from a deep-seated conviction that any theory which embraces the notion of a connection between women and nature should be considered complicit in the patriarchal construction of femininity. Because of the long-standing association of femininity with nature in what is often perceived as patriarchal myth, culture, and literature many feminists cannot conceive of a positive and politically empowering re-conception of that association. Ynestra King sums up the argument thus:

Women have been culture’s sacrifice to nature. The practice of human sacrifice to outsmart or appease a feared nature is ancient. And it is in resistance to this sacrificial mentality—on the part of both the sacrificer and sacrificee—that some feminists have argued against the association of women with nature, emphasizing the social dimension of traditional women’s lives. (King *Reweaving* 116)

Despite this objection, ecofeminism, with its strategic embrace of essentialism, or perhaps more accurately put, its refusal to brand essentialism as an absolute

outrage to feminist principles, has managed to achieve some success in the larger culture and at the grass roots political level. As Sturgeon points out:

Ecofeminist theories are influential in several disciplines with a focus on “applied” scholarship, such as development studies and natural resource sciences. Feminist artists creating environmental art are reading ecofeminist theories. And young women, who frequently are deeply concerned about environmental questions, are often introduced to feminist arguments through exposure to ecofeminist theory. (7)

By engaging and strategically reconceiving the cultural development of the connection between women and nature, as well as between theory and practice, ecofeminism disseminates a political message that, by its very design and language, seeks an influence beyond the academy. Thus, as Sturgeon repeatedly and pointedly asserts, “WE CANNOT AFFORD TO DISMISS ESSENTIALISM” (8 my emphasis). Having debated and discussed this issue for almost two decades, most ecofeminist scholars and thinkers now hold to the view that the ecofeminist brand of essentialism bears no resemblance to the ancient and limiting patriarchal labelling which, by associating women with nature, allows for a distancing, an othering of the female from male-dominated cultural arenas.

Following certain Aboriginal philosophies, Western women are finding empowerment through a feminist attitude based on ancient spiritual philosophy and wisdom which claims that to be born a woman is to be born with innate worldly wisdoms concerning natural cycles and the preservation of life through a feminine creative ability. One may also argue, from a Jungian perspective, that

women are predetermined toward a gender-specific understanding of nature in the same way that we, as a society, experience a predetermined fear of snakes even when we have been raised, as most Canadians are, in an environment where poisonous snakes are not indigenous. As Slicer points out: “early feminists, proto-ecofeminists, and more contemporary ecofeminists suggest that: “the ‘feminine’ sense of self—in contrast to the masculine self—is relational rather than atomistic and has more permeable ego boundaries such that women more readily ‘see with’ and thus ‘feel with,’ rather than objectify, others, including nonhumans” (*EE* 165). Because this “feminine self” is largely concerned with upholding moral ideas of responsibility in the ways in which they serve to maintain the intricate and delicate harmony of “relational webs,” the feminine self is necessarily associated with an ideology that sees itself as “part of, rather than outside of, nature and natural processes” (165).

Ecofeminism and Spirituality

As Charlene Spretnak explains, the quintessential malady of the modern era is a free-floating anxiety, and it is clear to ecofeminists that the whole culture is free floating—from the lack of grounding in the natural world, as well as the lack of a healthy relationship between the men and women. One of the most cogent dangers inherent in patriarchal thought, some feminists have argued, is the manner in which dualistic thinking, along the lines of the mind/body split, leads to the feminizing of nature and the naturalizing of women through the associating of higher consciousness (the mind) with masculinist thought, and soulless matter (body) with the feminine. In reconnecting to issues of “ecology, peace, feminist

[issues], and especially health [... women] also rediscovered what was called the spiritual dimension of life—the realization of this interconnectedness was itself sometimes called spirituality” (Mies & Shiva 16).

For many feminists, identification with nature becomes as much political as it is spiritual. In seeking a transformation from transcendence to immanence in a spirituality that does not pass over life on this planet for an after-life, ecofeminists embrace “gynocentric spiritualities (such as Goddess worship and the practice of Wicca [that] share an earth-based focus and basic metaphysical assumptions with Native spirituality)” (Adams *E&S* 3). Ecospirituality is an attempt to “reshape our dualistic concept of reality as split between soulless matter and transcendent male consciousness” (21). As Carol Adams explains, “such a reintegration of human consciousness and nature must reshape the concept of God, instead of modeling God after alienated male consciousness, outside of and ruling over nature” (21). In what appears to be a kind of naïve optimism, spiritual ecofeminists trust in an eventual transformation of consciousness that will “radically change the patterns of patriarchal culture” (22). Ultimately:

Basic concepts, such as God, soul-body and salvation will be reconceived in ways that may bring us closer to the ethical values of love, justice, and care for the earth. These values have been proclaimed by patriarchal religion, yet contradicted by patriarchal symbolic and social patterns of relationship. (22)

What is urgently required, ecofeminists attest, is an “earth-honouring” rather than an “earth-disdaining” religion (Birkeland *WAN* 47). As Starhawk, one of the

central figures of ecological spirituality emphasizes, “power-from-within must be grounded, that is, connected to the earth, to the actual material conditions of life” (Birkeland 47).

In terms of developing an aesthetic and literary expression of silenced women’s and others’ voices, ecofeminist art and literature, in general, seeks to “explore the potential of ecofeminism for creating alternative languages [...] religious/spiritual symbols [...] hypothesis, theologies [...] and societies” (Warren *EFP* xiv). This artistic project, according to Patrick Murphy, often serves as a “background for developing an ecofeminist literary theory (1991)” (xiv). However, since the 1980’s the development of ecocriticism has gone well beyond merely examining the art and literature, which fit tidily into its theoretical concerns. Karen Warren argued in the late 1990’s that literary ecofeminist theorists “explore the symbolic connections between sexist and naturist language” thereby constantly questioning the continued subordination-potential of gendered male-identified language. Still other ecofeminists draw attention to the connections between the languages used to describe women and nature in a way that examines how the feminization of nature and the naturalization of women “describes, reflects, and perpetuates the domination and inferiorization of both by failing to see the extent to which the twin dominations of women and nature [...] are culturally (and not merely figuratively) analogous” (xv). In this way, feminists uncover a link between language and cultural assumptions which ‘naturalizes’ women by labelling them “cows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, pussies, cats, bird-brains, hare-brains,” and the ‘feminizing’ of

nature when it is “raped, mastered, conquered, controlled, mined, [and] penetrated” (xv). This kind of language, feminists and ecofeminists argue, perpetuates and disseminates the perception and description of women in relation to their biological usefulness, often using objectifying and sexual terms—“virgin territory” and “fertile/barren soil” are expressions that immediately spring to mind. Such an examination also serves to highlight the artistic pursuit of a kind of language that does not so greatly limit and skew the ways in which women and nature, and the connection between them, are perceived and represented.

Such a focus on language is indicative of a deeper concern with icons and symbols that represent ecofeminist values and feminine wisdom and power that have been devalued and silenced by derogatory attitudes towards nature and the feminine. Those who gravitate towards ecofeminism and particularly ecospirituality are committed to believing in the positive impact such symbols and personal ritualistic practices can have on the changing of a sexist society. As Warren explains, the ecofeminist project is the “dismantling [of] patriarchy” and the “developing in its place non-dominating and life-affirming attitudes, values, and relationships among humans and toward nonhuman nature” (Warren *E&S* 121). Noel Sturgeon, ecofeminist theorist, historian and activist in the antimilitarist direct action movement suggests that “the spiritual practices of these feminist reworkings of pagan traditions has been an important source of personal strength, community cohesion, and opposition modes of political action” (130). By defining eco-spiritualist practices as direct action, easily accessible to all who

are genuinely concerned for the well-being of this planet, ecofeminists too sidestep the theoretical issue of essentialism. King explains that we can:

[...] recognize that although the nature/culture opposition is a product of culture, we can, nonetheless, *consciously choose* not to sever the woman/nature connections by joining male culture. Rather, we can use it as a vantage point for creating a different kind of culture and politics that would integrate intuitive/spiritual and rational forms of knowledge, embracing both science and magic insofar as they enable us to transform the nature/culture distinction itself and to envision and create a free, ecological society” (Sturgeon 67).

Yet, as Warren argues in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ecofeminists disagree about the nature and place of spirituality in ecofeminist politics and practice. On the one hand, ecofeminists argue that “women’s spirituality is integral to ecofeminist theory and practice” (119) since, as the deep ecologists are eager to point out, “people do not change through reason alone” (Birkeland 49). Arguably, if people were compelled to act via reason through the onset of the ecocrisis, it would certainly already have brought about a widespread shift in cultural and political attitudes and practices. On the other hand, some feminist theorists argue that appealing to spirituality “reinforces harmful gender stereotypes about women and undermines the philosophical, political, and feminist significance of ecofeminism” (Warren *E&S* 119), presenting it as “a sentimentalizing religion of earth mother” (Sturgeon 68).

Feminist critics, like Patricia Mills, are concerned with the ramifications of such a “romantic” nature-centered stance that offers a conception of nature as “benign, co-operative, and sharing with humans a form of consciousness” (*EFP* 212). She argues that such a view “ignores important elements of women’s liberation by depoliticizing feminism, making it merely a handmaid of the ecology movement” (212). The notion of furthering the larger feminist project concerning the liberation of women, from the strictures of a patriarchal present, by revamping an ancient matrilineal past, troubles some feminists who are skeptical that anything like a “feminine principle” that “inhabits and permeates all things” can be some how separated out from the history and dogma of patriarchal spirituality. Ecofeminists, however, are keen to separate the notion of a feminine principle from the kind of benign new-age spirituality that worries Mills, just as they are keen to use the feminine principle to differentiate the ancient past from the more recent past. At the same time, however, it is a central project of the ecofeminist movement to work against the kind of logic which views the notion that spirituality can be both practical and irrational, both political and personal, both material and metaphysical, as paradoxical. “The spirit is inherent in everything,” writes Mies and Shiva, “and particularly our sensuous experience, because we ourselves with our bodies cannot separate the material from the spiritual” (17). Warren explains that most feminist philosophers have “avoided, sidestepped, or eschewed efforts to articulate a feminist philosophical position on spirituality” (*E&S* 119). It is not difficult to understand why.

Confronted with the dominant cultural and political paradigm of Western rationality, ecofeminists recognize the difficulties in embracing a kind of spirituality that sees itself as strategic, practical, and reasonable, but also unpredictable, indefinable, and mysterious. Nevertheless, ecofeminists continue to call for a conception of the spiritual as “the politics of everyday life, the transformation of fundamental relationships” as a response to Western rationality’s tendency to dissociate the spiritual from rational pursuits.

Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology

What seems to have emerged from almost two decades of debate amongst deep ecologists in the pages of *Environmental Ethics* regarding ecofeminism and its relationship to deep ecology is a position that ranges between willful neglect and the accusation that ecofeminism is a kind of radical androcentrism/ anthropomorphism; as such, it is a movement which must be approached with great suspicion and care. According to ecofeminist Deborah Slicer, this position held among deep ecologists is indicative of their hesitancy regarding the issue of gender and its link to environmental issues:

Deep ecology may espouse some sort of concern for gender egalitarianism of a liberal feminist sort, e.g. a concern for egalitarian social or political opportunities. Nevertheless, deep ecologists have not attempted, nor hardly acknowledged, the sophisticated sort of analyses of gender, or of gender and nature, or, especially, of the ways in which anthropocentrism is androcentric, which feminists and ecofeminists have undertaken. As a result, ecofeminists are unwilling to allow their

concerns or analyses to be subsumed under the rubric of deep ecology.

(EE 154)

Slicer, like a majority of ecofeminist theorists, maintains that there is a critical difference between the two movements. A common misconception assumes an intimate association between ecofeminism and deep ecology, usually with ecofeminism regarded as a mere division of the deep ecological movement. However, this uninformed notion is definitely not the case. Ecofeminism is a branch of environmental ethics that sometimes reacts to androcentric theories, but whose development remains quite distinct and separate from deep ecological ideologies.

Deep ecology, as a particular terminology, is generally considered to have been introduced by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in a series of published lectures delivered initially at the World Future Research Conference in Bucharest in September of 1972. However, according to ecotheorists Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue, the words “deep ecology” had already been connected and associated with the emergence of environmental consciousness in the early seventies after the first Earth Day in 1970. As Drengson and Inoue explain, “the term ‘deep ecology’ was barely referred to in North America until the 1980’s” when it became recognized and developed by environmentalists George Sessions and Bill Devall. Their text *Deep Ecology* (1985) was the first major deep ecological publication written outside of the Naess publication rubric (Drengson & Inoue xviii).

The confusion that has arisen regarding the exact meaning of the term “deep ecology” can most generally be ascribed to the conflict between those ecologists, like Naess, who use the term in a very broad manner to indicate a world-wide, grass-roots environmental movement, and those ecological philosophers who give the term a much more specialized usage by connecting it specifically to the kind of critical thought and practice that falls under the rubric of environmental ethics. Both uses of the term, however, embrace the distinction from the shallow ecology of resource-management oriented ecologies and “corporate environmentalism,” as central to its definition thus stressing the need to define ecology outside of the demands and pressures of economic exploitation. Jonathon Bate succinctly defines this division of ecological epistemology in *Song of the Earth*. He explains:

It has become customary to draw a distinction between what might be thought of as ‘light Greens,’ known as ‘environmentalists,’ and ‘dark Greens,’ known as ‘deep ecologists.’ Environmentalists are those who believe that the degradation of nature may be reversed by a combination of regulation, restraint, less toxic and wasteful modes of production, and various forms of technologically engineered—including genetically and bioengineered—intervention. But since the intervention of technological man is the cause of the problem, can a ‘technological fix’ also be the solution? ‘Deep ecologists’ are those who think not. They believe that our only salvation from impending environmental apocalypse is to return to the state of nature. They say

that we must renounce the idols that have set us apart from nature—
idols variously identified as technology; civilization; Enlightenment;
patriarchy (this is the ecofeminist variant); the quest for economic
growth; capitalism and militarism (this is the ecological socialist
variant); materialism; the consumer society; and so forth. (37)

Ultimately, as Salleh explains, the main thrust of deep ecology can be understood
as an argument for:

[...] a new metaphysics and an ethic based on the recognition of the
intrinsic worth of the nonhuman world. It [deep ecology] abandons the
hardheaded scientific approach to reality in favor of a more spiritual
consciousness. It asks for voluntary simplicity in living and
nonexploitive steady-state economy. (Salleh “Deeper” 339)

It is a movement that seeks to integrate the scientific rationale behind managing
and or disarming a current state of ecocrisis and what deep ecologists deem a
necessary “spiritual” or ethic of care element concerning ecological thought.

According to Michael Zimmerman, “deep ecology, a radical stream of the
environmental movement, maintains that the environmental crisis is the inevitable
outcome of the history of Western culture” and as such, “anthropocentric
hierarchies [must be] replaced by biocentric egalitarianism” (*Reweaving* 140).
Basically, as Zimmerman explains, deep ecologists do not see an “absolute divide
between humanity and everything else;” “deep ecology thinks nondualistically”
(140). One would assume that sharing such a deep skepticism regarding dualistic
thinking, deep ecologists and ecofeminism would find much common ground.

Indeed this is the case; however, it is on the issue of gender and its importance to fully understanding the environmental crisis of Western civilization that the tension between the two remains. Simply put, deep ecology is a movement that stresses a personal re-connection to nature in a “back to the land” sort of approach which relies not on an intellectual rational *per se* to combat environmental crisis but hopes to find earthly salvation and grace through a mass spiritual connection with the land in a manner that circumvents such complicating political issues as gender, race, and other forms of discrimination. Ecofeminism, of course, argues that political issues, particularly gender, lie at the very foundation of Western spirituality, and thus are unavoidable aspects of any attempt to spiritually re-connect with nature.

Defining Wilderness

Bringing to the surface the ideological assumptions inherent in Western civilization’s construction of the idea of wilderness is one of the defining ambitions of the ecocritical project. Wilderness expert Carl Talbot, while explaining the concept of wilderness as “invention,” suggests that:

[...] the process of civilization gave rise to a particular representation of nonhuman nature as ‘wilderness,’ as yet untransformed by human agency. The normative connotations ascribed to this conceptualization have, in the twentieth century, been revolutionized: the wilderness is no longer to be feared and vanquished but to be cherished as humanity’s spiritual homeland. The cult of wilderness, which emerged from nineteenth-century Romanticism, in the twentieth-century has found a

home in what purports to be the radical factions of modern environmentalism. (330)

And while Talbot argues that “the sensibility of this environmentalism may be offended by the vulgarity of some of the modern forms of wilderness consumption [...] the structure of the myth remains unchallenged” (331). In other words, despite the waxing and waning political and cultural fashionableness of environmentalism, the defining dichotomy which places the human and the natural in opposition, remains a powerful influence on the way that the West understands wilderness.

This culture/nature paradigm is not only anachronistic in terms of contemporary advancements in ecological consciousness, but it has also proven a further frustration for those dealing with the problem of wilderness preservation. Callicott points, by way of example, to the “The [American] Wilderness Act of 1964” as an official document that seems to only reinforce and give legal sanction to what contemporary wilderness specialists refer to as “the received wilderness idea.” Ghost-written by pro-wilderness lobbyist Howard Zahnizer, the Act includes Zahnizer’s now standard definition of wilderness as a space existing:

[...] in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, [which] is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man is a visitor who does not remain. (Callicott & Nelson 3-4)

Ecocriticism resists this anthropomorphic notion of wilderness, attempting instead to promote the hope that “we can envision (re) inhabiting nature symbolically”

(Callicott & Nelson 15). In an attempt to blur the dominant distinctions between human civilization and wilderness, or as Cronon would have it, the “boundaries between ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural,’” contemporary ecological critics advocate a new system of thought that asks us to incorporate wilderness into our daily lives, so that:

[...] the basic free nature/ sustainability/ reinhabitation idea does not deanthropocentrize the classic preservation approach to conservation, but tries to maintain or reestablish, as the case may be, a human harmony with nature, a mutually beneficial relationship between Homo sapiens and the ecosystems human beings inhabit. (Cronon 15)

To fashion it more simply, for ecocritics it is vitally important that we pay equal homage to both the tree in our own back yard and to the tree in the old growth forest, recognizing that any difference we may posit between wildernesses is only a matter of our perception of their value, not something inherent in the wildernesses themselves. We impose value—symbolic, economic, spiritual etc.—onto the wilderness, and thus we must come to terms with all wilderness spaces as environments that we are constantly, and simultaneously, inventing and inhabiting.

Ecocriticism begins by positing the familiar imperative that human beings are part of, not separate from, nature. As Callicott points out, “Since Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* and *Descent of Man* [...] we have known that man is part of nature. We are only a species among species, one among twenty or thirty million natural kinds” (“Idea” 350). Following this line of thought, ecocritic William

Cronon asserts that, "recent scholarship has clearly demonstrated that the natural world is far more dynamic, far more changeable, and far more entangled with human history than popular beliefs about "the balance of nature" have typically acknowledged" (24). He takes this argument a step further, asserting that, "ideas of nature never exist outside a cultural context, [that is, a human context] and the meanings we assign to nature cannot help reflecting that context" (35). Summing up his main point epigrammatically, Cronon declares: "THERE IS NOTHING NATURAL ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF WILDERNESS" (79).

By defining nature as "a profoundly human construction," Cronon is not denying the existence of wilderness itself, but merely pointing out that, "the way we describe and understand that world is so entangled with our own values and assumptions that the two can never be fully separated" (25). Rather than continue to attempt to define nature as if it existed independent of a cultural context, Cronon argues that the development of a functional environmental ethics depends on us actually becoming "less natural and more cultural" in our approach to the wilderness, since viewing:

[...] nature as essence, nature as naïve reality, want us to see nature as if it had no cultural context, as if it were everywhere and always the same. And so the very word we use to label this phenomenon encourages us to ignore the context that defines it. (35)

For Cronon, if we are ever to better understand nature, it is imperative that we first stop "pretend[ing] that we know what it really is and [...] imagin[ing] we can capture its meaning with this very problematic word 'nature'" (52). Nature is

always a signifier, and as such we must be conscious that we continually and unavoidably “encounter ‘nature’ through the lens of our own ideas and imaginings” (25).

Arguing in a similar fashion, wilderness critics J. Baird Callicott and Michael Nelson address the various dangers associated with taking “the concept of wilderness at face value” (4). Covering what is well-worn but important territory, Callicott and Nelson denounce those who “have innocently believed that the word *wilderness*, like the word *mountain*, was the innocuous and unproblematic English name for something that exists in the world independently of any socially constructed skein of ideas” (4). They argue that such an us-versus-them mentality which separates humanity from wilderness areas perpetuates a colonial mindset that insists on dividing humans from their landscape and from their experiences with nature. However, they also recognize the received wilderness idea as a site of an important and vital debate, highlighting the various political and theoretical entanglements that surround environmental ethics:

[The received wilderness idea is] the subject of intense attack and impassioned defense on several fronts at once. The wilderness idea is alleged to be ethnocentric, androcentric, phallogocentric, unscientific, unphilosophic, impolitic, outmoded, even genocidal. (2)

Callicott and Nelson call for sober-mindedness and objectivity in conducting the debate, reminding us that the historic wilderness preservation movement, though “from the point of view of biological conservation, misguided” (13), did produce

the foresight to designate areas not to be disturbed by human civilization, without which “there might be no great wilderness debate going on right now” (17).

This argument is, of course, not to take away from the force with which those resisting the received wilderness idea, particularly feminists and post-colonialists, point out that the conception “of wilderness as virgin, unsullied territory—expresses [...] an essentially male point of view, as well as an essentially colonial point of view” (19). Ecofeminists, in particular, are engaged in combatting the inherent injustices that stem from such a deeply ingrained wilderness ideology, applying both feminist and ecological critical and theoretical tools in order to call attention to, and scrutinize, the logic of dichotomies which prevent us from connecting completely, or even more appropriately, with the natural world, and the nature within each of us. From an ecofeminist perspective—Calicott and Nelson point out—critics such as Val Plumwood (see “Wilderness Skepticism and Wilderness Dualism”) offer an alternative vision, one that promotes harmony and unity, rather than segregation and opposition:

Both terms of the old nature-culture dichotomy need to be maintained, but not opposed. If one were to try to put their point graphically and succinctly, one might say that nature and culture can be united as the yin and yang. They are opposites, yet not opposed. They are two, yet together form one whole neither complete without the other. Nature and culture—like male and female or self and other—are, in a word, complementary. (Calicott & Nelson 20)

Plumwood thus criticizes the androcentrism (defining man outside of and opposed to nature), and ethnocentrism (ignoring the historic presence of aboriginal peoples), that lies at the heart of the received wilderness idea, while recognizing that attempting to deconstruct the difference between nature and culture is reductive. (Plumwood "Skepticism" 671-8).

Wilderness, for ecofeminists, cannot be adequately understood in the absence of the human, just as human society and culture, when defined as oppositional to wilderness, only limits our experience of the presence of nature and thus distorts our conception of it. Cardinal to the ecofeminist critical enterprise is the recognition of the need to create "conceptual space for the interwoven continuum of nature and culture, and for that recognition of the presence of the wild and of the labor of nature we need to make in all our life contexts, both in wilderness and in places closer to home" (Plumwood 684). It is this revisioning of the relationship between wilderness and the human, defined within a context that emphasizes the mutuality of presences rather than alterity defined by absence, that Plumwood contends, may "be what we need to help us end the opposition between culture and nature, the garden and the wilderness, and to come to recognize ourselves at last at home in both" (684).

Ecocriticism

Despite their differences, it is particularly important for literary scholars to consider ecofeminism and deep ecology as part of a larger project that has come to be known as ecocriticism. Though, as an academic pursuit, ecocriticism is only now gaining respect among colleagues in literary circles (i.e. official recognition

of Ecocriticism by the Modern Language Association at the 1998 Conference in San Francisco) those working in the field of ecology and literary studies are not at all surprised by its increasing support and popularity. Jonathan Bate explains:

We live after the fall, in a world where no act of reading can be independent of the historical conditions in which it is undertaken. It is therefore not surprising that ecocriticism should have emerged at a time of ecological crisis; it is to be expected that those who practise this kind of reading should be sympathetic to some form of Green politics.

Marxist, feminist and multiculturalist critics bring explicit or implicit political manifestos to the texts about which they write. (266)

Likewise, William Howarth defines the ecocritic as one “who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action” (69). And although we are, as Howarth rightly points out, “stuck with language” in which we “cast *nature* and *culture* as opposites, in fact they constantly mingle, like water and soil in a flowing stream” (69).

Ecocriticism, then, tries to work “within a set of informed, responsible principles, derived from four disciplines: ecology, ethics, language, and criticism” (71), in a way that provides an entry into literature that not only celebrates the aesthetic value of the natural world but also suggests a political interaction with nature as a means towards a healthier and more sustainable life.

To avoid confusion I will, as other ecotheorists have, draw a distinction here between ecological writing, or ecopoetry, and ecological literary theory, or

ecocriticism. The former, which I will outline in a later section of this introduction, stems from a body of writing, written in the late twentieth century, which is based on a number of criteria intended to shift nature poetry into the realm of nature writing that embraces an ecologically aware political consciousness. The latter—ecocriticism—broadly speaking, encompasses any study of literature that deals with nature and images of nature that might communicate something regarding the state of our relationship to nature, keeping in mind our place as members of a biotic community.

Considering the importance this emerging theoretical movement places on examining nature's "otherness," it is hard not to draw parallels between the language of ecocriticism and the discourse of feminist theoretical practice. Ecocritic Christopher Manes does not shy away from the implications of this connection and in fact whole-heartedly embraces it in his pointed use of language. He stresses:

Nature is silent in our culture (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative [...] [since we currently speak a language that] veils the processes of nature with its own cultural obsessions, directionalities, and motifs that have no analogues in the natural world. (Manes 15-16)

His argument, like the French Feminist cry for a presymbolic discourse—a kind of mother-tongue—demands a "language of ecological humility that deep ecology, however gropingly, is attempting to express" (17). While Manes often

goes too far with his language-centred approach—such as when he romantically connects “learning the language of animals” with “knowing the secrets of nature”—he is right to bemoan how “nature has grown silent in our discourse, shifting from an animistic to a symbolic presence, from a voluble subject to a mute object” (16).

Ecocriticism, whether its essential philosophy stems from a perspective more sympathetic to deep ecology or ecofeminism, seeks to understand that voice which attempts to recognize a silenced nature unable to express or protest its exploitation, abuse, and destruction and humanity’s largely self-imposed marginalized relationship with that biotic community. It attempts to shift environmentalism into the politically charged arena of language and cultural interpretation in a manner that aims at giving voice to nature in a way that does not anthropomorphize that voice for the sake of human gain. As Manes asserts:

To regard nature as live and articulate has consequences in the realm of social practices [...] we can, thus, safely agree with Hans Peter Duer when he says that “people do not exploit a nature that speaks to them.” Regrettably our culture has gone a long way to demonstrate that the converse of this statement is also true. (16)

Ecotheorists hope that developing such a theoretical framework will have an effect, not just on the way that texts are interpreted, but also on daily human actions, though attitudes towards the environment which effect cultural practice and production.

In terms of academic practice, perhaps the most passionate expression of the aspirations of ecocriticism is that of Glen A. Love when he writes that the academic profession:

[...] must soon direct its attention to that literature which recognizes and dramatizes the integration of human with natural cycles of life [...] [in] reassess[ing] those texts—literary and critical—which ignore any values save for an earth-denying and ultimately destructive anthropocentrism. And it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the potential significance of such an awareness for the reinterpretation and reformation of the literary canon could be far greater than any critical movement which we have seen thus far. (Love 235)

Ecocriticism hopes to counteract the alienation from nature that defines much of modern life and cultural practice. As Scott Russell Saunders articulates the problem:

We do not feel the organic web passing through our guts, as it truly does. While our theories of nature have become wiser, our experience of nature has become shallower. And true fiction operates at a level deeper than shared intellectual slogans. Thus, any writer who sees the world in ecological perspective faces a hard problem: how, despite the perfection of our technological boxes, to make us feel the ache and tug of the organic web passing through us, how to *situate* the lives of characters—and therefore of readers—in nature. (192)

Of course, in Canadian literature, the inherited presence of wilderness is so strong that there is no need to go in search of it.

Inherited from our literature and its attitude towards nature is a consciousness best described by Margaret Atwood as a “violent duality,” which, in Canada, tends to pit comforts of the European pastoral and old world nostalgia against a vast, terrifying, and disparately alienating Canadian wilderness. Critics of American literature also identify early confrontations of the wilderness frontier as revealing of a “divided consciousness” (Sanders quoting D.H. Lawrence 184). Faced with an unexpected, unexplainable, and unimaginable wilderness, Frye’s interpretation of the Canadian consciousness tended to seek necessary security in building psychological and physical garrisons, while the American consciousness longed for the profound comforts of “civilization” but found *liberation* in the unbridled wilderness. With statements describing the concerns of a larger North American writing community which includes Herman Melville, J. Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hector St. John Crevecoeur, and Henry David Thoreau, Lawrence found, “on the surface they were concerned with the human world, with towns and ships and cultivated land, with households and spider webs of families; but underneath they were haunted by nature” (Sanders 184). Confronted by the vast wilderness of the American landscape which is quite unlike the cultivated gardens of England, with its appearance of control in and over nature—“where nature had long since been cut into a human quilt” (186)—Lawrence argues that the divided consciousness arose because of the general perception that, “in America there is too much menace in the landscape” (184).

What Lawrence called the American demand for “a culture that would be commensurate with the greatness of the land,” Michael Branch has termed the “topological imperative” (284). Branch, borrowing from Leo Marx, explores the early new world environmentalists and their attempts to resist this imperative in order to replace old world melancholia with new world sympathy for the natural world. In particular he focuses on the nineteenth century environmentalist Audubon, calling his expression of ecological anxiety an “episode of the interrupted idyll”—a narrative moment in which the pastoral enjoyment of nature is invaded, in this case by “a disconcerting awareness of its inevitable disappearance” (295). Audubon recognized that “the impulse toward domination and determination of wild nature [was] fast becoming the ecological legacy of the American frontier” (296). Yet, as Branch is quick to remind us:

Although the environmental ethic of these early romantic naturalists would not be considered ecocentric by the standards of contemporary ecophilosophy, it is important to recognize that their sensitivity to the natural world and their concern for its preservation is an essential precursor to the ethics of modern American environmental concern.

(296)

Lawrence Buell explores the ways in which New World pastoral literature cultivates imperialism and its justifications for conquest, destruction, and exploitation. Nonetheless, he concludes, “with all of its shortcomings, the pastoral is an ideologically sound mode of representation for its referential and experiential character, which may foster ecological consciousness” (Frazier on

Buell 17). "Naturism," Frazier explains, "is simply too large a category, containing too many conflicting or disparate concepts, to dismiss as hegemonic" (Frazier 17). Patrick D. Murphy calls this distinction between writing that is sensitive to ecological values and writing that is—from a late twentieth century perspective—sympathetic and knowledgeable about ecology, the difference between "proto-ecological" and "ecological" writings. In the same vein as Murphy and Buell, Terry Gifford defines what Murphy refers to as "ecological" literature as "post-pastoral" (*Pastoral* 5). This concept is a term which will be further discussed in Chapter Two with regards to Marian Engel's novel *Bear*.

In an attempt to resist colonial inheritance, women's nature writing has the potential to challenge the colonial paradox—a contradictory vacillation between the desire to interpret the physical environment as a paradise and a tendency to treat it as a hostile, exploitable, or conquerable wilderness. Though engendering one's landscape dates back many centuries, ecofeminist critic Annette Kolodny, in "Unearthing Herstory" (1984), an article reprinted in one of the first anthologies of ecocriticism—*The Ecocritical Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996)—argues that settlers and explorers of this new continent transposed a literary landscape onto the natural environment of America (176). By questioning whether there was a need for explorers and settlers of the New World to see it as "a nurturing, giving material breast because of the threatening, alien, and potentially emasculating terror of the unknown" (176), Kolodny begins to explore how American literature developed from the colonial paradox. She argues:

Eden, Paradise, the Golden Age, and the idyllic garden [...] all the backdrops for European literary pastoral, were subsumed in the image of an America promising material ease without labor or hardship [...] at the deepest level, the move to America was experienced as the *daily reality* of what has become its single dominating metaphor: regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape. (173 my emphasis)

In what Kolodny describes as uniquely American (and to which I concur), the American colonial response to an environment that is so obviously not reflective of the tamer, more 'civilized' European nature, "hailed the essential femininity of the terrain in a way European pastoral never had," by "explor[ing] the historical consequences of its central metaphor in a way European pastoral had never dared;" essentially, Americans "took its metaphors AS LITERAL TRUTHS" (173 my emphasis). Thus, in a kind of utopic fantasy, or wish fulfillment, Americans, according to critics such as Kolodny, Kovel, and Branch, moved from the hope that "instinctually-based fantasies may come true" to the actual "experiencing [of] those fantasies as the pattern of one's daily activity" (Kolodny quoting Joel Kovel 173). Given this perverse development in cultural perspective, "the pastoral impulse"—aptly named for the unavoidable response to New World wilderness frontiers—revealed irresolvable extremes in wilderness-interpretation, exposing the division between those "master[ing] the land" and "those who had initially responded to the promise inherent in a feminine landscape;" both were faced with an extinguishing environment but the latter

were now faced with the consequences of that response—“recoiling in horror” or “succumb[ing] to a life of easeful regression” (174).

Kolodny’s labeling and defining of a unique American phenomenon as the “pastoral impulse,” unidiomatic of colonial responses to the wilderness codifies ecofeminist theory of American nature-writing and, by extension, American consciousness (or vice-versa). Ultimately, she maintains that it—“the dream and its betrayal, and the consequent guilt and anger”—is neither “terminated nor yet wholly repressed” (175). From this ecocritical perspective, Kolodny agrees with Gary Snyder, that the American dream is “eating at the American heart like acid” (175). Kolodny further asserts: “we can no longer afford to keep turning “American the Beautiful” into *America the Raped* (178).

By examining the various ways in which nature is represented in literature, as ecofeminist Cheryll Glotfelty explains, our attention is drawn towards the identification of stereotypes such as “Eden, Arcadia, virgin land, miasmal swamp, savage wilderness” and the power that their presence and their absence hold on our consciousness. She explains, “nature *per se* is not the only focus of ecocritical studies of representation. Other topics include the frontier, animals, cities, specific geographical regions, rivers, mountains, [...] technology, garbage, and the body” (xxiii). By extending ecocriticism to include, not only these issues, but also feminist literary criticism, the birth of ecofeminism raises political awareness of deeper issues of women’s voice in literature, their marginalization, as well as the contribution that these voices can offer to the various concerns raised by environmentalists.

Murphy explains that “for some two centuries, nature writing itself has been one of those “marginalized” genres of modern writing,” in part because “it fails to fit neatly [into] any of the ongoing genre categories that organize criticism” (31). He criticizes American nature writers such as Thoreau and Dillard for their perpetuation of the conception of nature writing as “a highly romantic, author-self-centered conception of the didactic text, with a concomitant definition of the audience as passive recipient, very much in the encode-code-decode mode of communication models” (33-4). He further criticizes the contemporary academic realm for continuing to perpetuate what he sees as the Enlightenment tendency to see nature as:

[...] primarily an object of attention or a site of human endeavors rather than an entity in its own rite, a speaking subject, a hero in the Bahktinian sense, or a locus of sacred power [...] [it] remains generally limited to white males who write a particular type of prose, women who imitate them in that endeavor [...] frequently heavily ego-bound.

(31)

These male writers (and their female imitators) go to nature, in other words, “to observe rather than to participate, forever aloof and transcendent, and to escape that art of nature known as human society” (32). Because of the canonization of such a tradition, the genre of nature writing has become an outdated one, “a ‘dead,’ rather than living genre” that perpetuates only “imitation [...] rather than innovation” (32-3). In distinguishing between a Romantic-like poetics of reverie

and transcendence in nature-writing and ecopoetics, Jonathan Bate succinctly “updates the terminology,” by suggesting:

The Rousseauistic motions of reverie, of solitude and of walking are conducive to what I shall call ‘ecopoetic’ consciousness but not necessarily to ‘ecopolitical’ commitment. They are motions which may well lead to environmentalism—the desire to conserve green spaces (parks, wilderness areas) in which to walk, dream and find solitude—but their connection with radical ecology’s project of wholesale social transformation is more abstruse. (42)

One may question then, the direction of ecopoetical literature: if it is not simply about nature and the ecopoetic purpose—“to turn [...] reverie, solitude, walking into language” (Bate 42), and not, on the other hand, an ecological political manifesto, then what is it? In brief, Bate draws our attention to these extremes inherent in the call for ecopoetical literature and suggests that despite the obvious separation between experiencing the world and translating it to word, ecopoetry is not merely “a description of swelling with the earth, not a disengaged thinking about it, but an experiencing of it” (42)—as poet, philosopher and reader experience the genre. As such, he recommends that:

Ecopoetics should begin not as a set of assumptions or proposals about particular environmental issues, but as a way of reflecting upon what it might mean to swell with the earth. Ecopoetics must concern itself with consciousness. When it comes to practice, we have to speak in other discourses. (266)

Ultimately, Bate contends: “the dilemma of Green reading is that it must, yet it cannot, separate ecopoetics from ecopolitics” (266). In his own struggle between the need for ecocritical awareness and the way in which we ‘murder to dissect’ the written word in an exercise which seems to abandon the more ephemeral goal of the ecopoet, Bate cautions us against “Nazi Ecology”—not unlike “Nazi-feminists”—those radicals of a movement which in their zealousness, neglect to recognize that sometimes extreme point-making is alienating. In prescribing a certain necessary balance—an Aristotelian ‘mean between extremes’—between ‘ecopiety’ and ecopoetry, Bate cautions:

When ecopoetics is translated into political system, its case, too is hopeless. It may become fascism (Darre), or romantic neofeudalism (Ruskin), or utopian socialism (William Morris, Murray Bookchin), or philosophical anarchism (William Godwin, Peter Kropotkin).

Whatever it becomes, it ceases to be ecopoetics. (268)

Though no one critic offers a clear vision of the scope and limits of emerging ecological writing, a loose outline of possible parameters and perimeters is given in the section concerning ecopoetics—an assemblage of ideas largely based on Lawrence Buell’s theories in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) and put together for a panel discussion at the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) Conference (June 1999). Murphy’s call in *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques* for an emerging (eco)feminist literature is indeed a call for experimentation with both genres (especially nature writing) and critical practice. And though one might interpret

Murphy's plea for a new kind of nature writing as exclusively directed towards women's writing, in fact his focus is broader. It is the general perceptions of nature perpetuated by nineteenth and twentieth century male writers that Murphy wishes to resist. Just as Kristeva does not limit presymbolic writing to woman, it is important to make gender not a limitation, but an edifying force behind a new kind of nature writing. It is not enough to say that men write from a deep ecological perspective and women from an ecofeminist bent since any writer can feel and express a spiritual and political connection to a biotic community or a kinship with an "othered" entity.

Ecopoetics

The question of defining ecopoetry and ecopoetics was raised at an ecopoetics panel at the June 1999 ASLE Conference in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Little was definitively settled but one clear distinction seemed to achieve consensus—ecopoetics as the study of nature and nature imagery in literature from an ecocritical perspective is not the same thing as ecopoetry. Ecopoetics offers an ecocritical framework from which to approach literature. An ecopoetical approach can take into account any literature taken from a broad spectrum of time and space, nation and genre. It allows us to revisit many different literatures and question their content in terms of an ecological consciousness formed via an evolving contemporary intellectualism and spiritualism founded on the philosophies of both deep ecology and ecofeminism.

Ecopoetry, on the other hand, concentrates on a particular nature or wilderness, or ecological subject matter, within the poetic form. Despite the

rather broad range of what might simply be considered “nature” poetry, the panel agreed that it was important to make explicit criteria that divide ecopoetry from nature poetry. From this discussion panel-coordinator Matthew Cooperman offered suggestions, based on Lawrence Buell’s criteria for discerning ecopoetry, for consideration. Briefly stated, tenets central to the ecopoetic project demand that the nonhuman environment must exist in the text: 1) as more than mere landscape; 2) treated with awe and respect, without privileging human interest as exclusive; and 3) understood as “a process rather than a constant or a given” (Buell), thus, ultimately narrowing the gap [...] between the beautiful and the useful” (Cooperman). Thus “deliberate” (Thoreau) ecopoets must be responsible for revisionist mythmaking and a revisited human-nature paradigm in which s/he acknowledges: 1) a concern for the “other”; 2) the physical body; 3) Western dualistic ideological constructions as inherently destructive; 4) experience of the world as “intersubjective,” minimalizing the separation between space and place; 5) an environmental ethic that works “towards sustainable, cooperative, and environmentally material practices.” Ultimately, Cooperman succinctly adds: “it don’t mean a thing if it don’t sustain being.” While many of these tenets certainly raise at least as many questions as they answer, they offer a framework with which to differentiate “nature” poetry from what is now emerging as the ecopoetic.

Other ecocritics have struggled with the identification of emerging forms of environmentally concerned literature and criticism and have developed their own naming strategies. Murphy discusses the difference between the ecological and

the protoecological as a means of distinguishing between literature that can be discussed from a contemporary ecocritical perspective—the protoecological—and that writing which fits within the parameters of an ecopoetry yet to be adequately defined—the ecological. Other ecocritics, such as Terry Gifford, have responded to Buell's "specific set of obsolescent conventions of the ecologic tradition" which propose "pastoralism" as an alternative to the pastoral tradition, by proposing a new critical category—the "post-pastoral." At the same ASLE Conference in which Cooperman, Scott, and Voros were attempting to define ecopoetics, Gifford presented a lecture directly commenting on the conference's named general focus—"What to make of a diminished thing." Gifford explains the rationale behind the term thus:

What is needed is a term for writing that takes responsibility for both our problematic relationship with our natural homeground (from slugs to our solar system), and our representations of that relationship. This is not postmodern. It is in Blake as well as Rick Bass's *Fiber*. But it might be characterized as the 'post-pastoral.' (Gifford)

He offers a more condensed grounding of the term with the following six characteristics of writing that might be considered "post-pastoral":

- 1) Awe leading to humility
- 2) Recognition of the creative-destructive universe
- 3) The inner replicated in the outer
- 4) Culture is nature/ nature is culture; the imagination is our tool for healing our alienation from nature

5) Consciousness is conscience is responsibility

6) Exploitation of the planet parallels that of people; both need to be addressed together

What all of these approaches attempt to identify is the emergence of a new kind of writing and criticism that the post-pastoral must necessarily recognize; though vague, these suggested criteria, notably isolated within an emerging subgenre of literature and literary criticism, allows in its seeming indecisiveness, for *new* ways of relating, respecting, and identifying with nature, animals, and biotic community in general. Thus, necessarily abstract, these tenets call for an ecological consciousness that goes beyond nature writing or the pastoral, with a sensibility that is more radical, more political, and most importantly, more engaged with the environmental crisis of the contemporary world. Though not necessarily contemporarily written, the post-pastoral employs the kind of language which is part of the search for an adequate response to the philosophical, social and economic complexity as well as the political urgency of that crisis. Ecofeminist Karen Warren expands on the general consensus of what constitutes ecopoetics or ecological writing by listing the criteria for ecofeminist ecopoetics. Her list of considerations is contained within Chapter Two. This thesis highlights aspects of Canadian writing, contemporary, traditional, and critical, that can be said to be a part of this emerging political, ethical, and compassionate environmental consciousness within the literary.

Canadian Ecocriticism

When Northrop Frye influentially observed that the question of Canadian identity is not “who are we?” but rather “where is here?” he focused an investigation into the Canadian wilderness, the Canadian wild, and the Canadian relationship with nature that has come to be understood as intricately tied to issues of what it is to be Canadian. For Canadians, “wilderness is defined as wild uncultivated land, which in Canada includes vast tracts of forest and innumerable lakes and also the Arctic North,” but it also has “multiple functions,” not existing exclusively as a thing-in-itself (Howells *Atwood* 21). As Canadian literary critic Coral Ann Howells explains, nature in Canada serves “as geographical location marker, as spatial metaphor, and as Canada’s most popular myth” (21). Canadian literary critic, W. H. New in *Articulating West* notes Frye’s challenge to Canadian authors (that is, “where is here?”) as a starting point for identifying Canadian culture. In response, New suggests, “the land becomes a stronger presence than the human figures in Canadian fiction, a character in its own right, an actor as well as an activating power in the psychological and metaphysical dreams being unveiled” (xii). Finding “a rhetoric landscape” (xii); articulating the environment; “sentencing” Canadian identity (xii); or seeking “the voice that demands to be heard [...] the voice of the land” (Jones 6), became popularly identified and documented by critics such as Atwood, Frye, McGregor, Howells, Jones, and New as a predominant characteristic of Canadian literature, depicting a uniquely Canadian sensibility. In a sense, Frye’s thought-provoking question— “where is here?”—solicited responses from such literary critics as Atwood, New, Moss, Northey, Jones, and eventually Marshall who set in motion attempts to express—

imaginatively and critically—the being-ness of being in Canada. Ultimately tied to wilderness and human-nature relations, the Canadian identity manifested itself in a quest for interpreting this New World home-front as more than a receptacle for the exploitation of indigenous peoples, resources, and animals.

McGregor claims that wilderness, fundamentally described as alien and “other” “is not accessible and no mediation or reconciliation is possible in the Canadian confrontation with nature” (27). Unlike their North American counterparts to the South, who (as Kolodny claims) began living the daily fantasy of the idyllic pastoral, Canadians, according to Frye, faced their non-pastoral *in esse* as dystopic and proceeded to “garrison” themselves against it. For McGregor, Canadians are “reluctant or unable to get past its immanence, the obtrusive ‘thereness’ of the thing-in-itself” (27). If Frye is right to closely identify Canadian identity with nature, and Howells and McGregor (among other above-mentioned Canadian cultural and literary critics) have identified a fundamental tension in the relationship between Canadians and the wilderness they inhabit, then surely Margaret Atwood makes an urgent environmental point when she defines Canada as “a state of mind [...] the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It’s the kind of space in which we find ourselves lost” (Atwood *Survival* 18). To critics like Margot Northey, the Canadian reaction to “the haunted wilderness” manifests itself appropriately in gothic literature since “the dark wilderness of the mind can be haunted by as fearful presences as ever stalked the forests and castles of old” (61). Canadian literature is very much a coming to terms with “Canada [as] an unknown territory

for people who live in it," a people confronting an environment from which they are alienated (Atwood *Survival* 18).

Frye claims that what lies behind the Canadian alienation from nature "is not a terror of the dangers or discomforts or even of mysteries of nature [...] but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest" (Nicholson 31).

Atwood concurs with this view, telling us that, "Canadian writers as a whole do not trust Nature" (*Survival* 49). D. G. Jones in *Butterfly on Rock*, a critical examination of Canadian literature published two years prior to Atwood's *Survival* and in the same year Atwood published *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, in which her "Afterword" identifies the "violent duality" of Canadian consciousness, interprets what he likewise deems "a division between their [Canadians'] conscious aspirations and their unconscious convictions, which undermines their lines and words to the development of a profoundly negative outlook" as "a kind of cultural schizophrenia" (14). This possible division, for Jones, stems from "a sense of exile, which in turn triggers an "estrang[ement] from the land and [a] divis[ion] within oneself" (5).

While Tom Marshall warns of the dangers of labeling a particular tendency or characteristic as "*peculiarly Canadian*" (xi) in *Harsh and Lovely Land* (1979), he concurs with Jones' "cultural schizophrenia," Atwood's "violent duality" and New's recognition of Atwood's distinction as "the simultaneous praise and blame of a beautiful and destructive landscape" (xviii) that "the obsession with space, with enclosure and openness, that persists in our poetry is surely Canadian in the form that it takes, even if it may exist as well in other literatures" (xi). Jones

insists that while many critics see Canadian poetry as essentially “negative to the point of being neurotic,” “a closer study [...] reveals both positive and negative characteristics” (14), an often simultaneously expressed love/hate relationship Canadians have with their environment. It is this “violent duality,” with its origins in the pastoral impulse and a colonial response to a harsh New World wilderness, which created a need to garrison communities and selfhood against the threat of not surviving (physically, and psychologically) that critics agree, makes Canada unique. W. L. Morton in *The Canadian Identity* explains:

The heartland of the United States is one of the earth’s most fertile regions, that of Canada one the earth’s most ancient wildernesses and one of nature’s grimmest challenges to man and all his works. No Canadian has found it necessary to revise Cartier’s spontaneous comment as he gazed on the Labrador coast of the Shield. It was, he said in awe, ‘the land that God gave Cain.’ The main task of Canadian life has been to make something of this heritage. (Morton 4-5)

As Atwood points out in *Survival*, the central cultural “unifying and informing” symbol in the United States is the “frontier,” while for Canada it is based on survival, for “unlike the US, our stories are not tales of those who made it but of those who made it back from an awful experience—the North, the snowstorm, the sinking ship—that killed everyone else” (*Survival* 33).

Frye questions—searching for the mythopoetic image of the pastoral in Canadian literature, that reflects a “terrifyingly cold, empty and vast [environment ...] increasingly affected by Darwinism, of nature red in tooth and claw”

(*Reflections* 90)—“how the sentimental pastoral myth ever developed at all” (92). He concludes, however, that “if not in Arcadia, at any rate [it is] a land where empty space and the pervasiveness of physical nature have impressed pastoral quality on their minds” (94). Likewise, Carol Ann Howells suggests:

The vastness of landscape seems to have affected the Canadian imagination differently from that of their American neighbours, for there is much less of the challenge of frontier experience and individual conquest and far more of the feeling of ‘wilderness,’ disorientation, and a sense of human inadequacy in Canadian literature—just as there is a stronger awareness in modern Canadian writing of the regenerative powers of landscape and the possibilities it offers for psychic and spiritual renewal. (Howells, *Ariel* 107)

Frye’s own topocentrism leads him to conclude, as Linda Hutcheon points out in “Postcolonial and the Eco” that the “historical and physical reality of a ‘vast country sparsely inhabited’” (*ECW* 154) meant “a national consciousness with an immense amount of ‘the unknown, the unrealized, the humanly undigested’ built into it” (154).

Defined by American ecocritic Michael Branch, the “topological imperative,”—“a social need to have a culture develop in the greatness of the landscape” (Branch 284)—further problematizes unrealistic expectations established by the pastoral impulse since “Canadian writers as a whole do not trust Nature [because ...] an often-encountered sentiment is that Nature has betrayed expectation, it was supposed to be different” (Atwood, *Survival* 49).

Canadian literature lacks “topological imperative,” at least inasmuch as American literature boasts of its vast and great land as a kind of metaphor for its own economic empire. Verena Buhler Roth cites Patricia Hunt as a critic who believes that unlike American literature, “the middle ground, the pastoral idyll, is missing in the Canadian pastoral, and that no reconciliation or regenerating integration is possible or is even attempted” (Roth 22). Thus, it becomes clear that, in contrast to Americans, Canadians developed a “topological departure” reflected in a constructed pastoral impulse that hostilely rejected the wilderness as “maternal garden” in a “reactivation of what we now recognize as universal mythic wishes” (Kolodny 172), (as Kolodny argues was the case for Americans). Instead, Canadians chose retreat from the “unnatural” wilderness as non-nurturing mother into the garrisoned confines of a traditional Mother-country’s psychological and physical fortresses. Nonetheless, despite the Canadian unwillingness to make maternal the wilderness they were confronted with, genderfication, ‘naturally,’ took place, wherein like the U.S.A. and Europe, “topography and anatomy were at least analogous,” regardless of whether (as Kolodny half seriously and half tongue-in-cheek questions) “the world *is* really gendered, in some subtle way we have not yet quite understood” (176). As Atwood describes it, the Canadian North was collectively internalized as “a sort of icy and savage *femme fatal* who will drive you crazy and claim you for her own” (*Survival* 89).

The green movement gives us the tools with which we can investigate the seemingly irreconcilable differences between what Frye describes, for Canada, as “the garrison mentality” born out of a “[confrontation] with a huge, unthinking,

menacing, and formidable physical setting” (*Reflections* 76) and what Kolodny terms, for America, “the pastoral impulse”—a yearning to know this new land as a safe haven of innocence, a Promised Land. In her article that explores this very tension in the Canadian imagination, Linda Hutcheon explains that:

Canada’s colonial identity was not separable from the riches of its physical environment, its beaver pelts and softwood forests. The Cartesian view that the nonhuman felt no pain is what Frye sees in the ‘attitude of the Canadian fur trade, spreading traps over the north to catch animals’: for it, the mink, the beaver, and the silver fox were not living creatures but only potential fur coats.” (*ECW* 154)

Hutcheon interpreting Frye suggests that it is this “where man is not, nature is barren” mindset, through the “overwhelming of human values by an indifferent and wasteful nature” (155) that determined the shape of the Canadian imagination. Whether born out of a “colonial mentality” or, to use Branch’s term, a “topological imperative,” and Canada’s need to develop a man-made technological culture equal to the expansive grandeur of the Canadian landscape, the Canadian pastoral garden was quickly paved “by an intelligence that does not love [nature]” (Frye, *Reflections* 75). Regardless of whether critics Atwood, Frye, Hutcheon etc. are correct in speculating that Canada’s “green” tendencies stem from a “national guilt” since “Canada was founded on the fur trade” and thus “Canadians are as bad as the slave trade or the Inquisition” (Atwood, *Survival* 79), significantly, as Hutcheon concludes, “the feelings of Canadians toward

nature changed over time from terror to guilt as we ‘polluted and imprisoned and violated’ but ‘never really lived with’ nature” (*ECW* 156).

While Atwood can be pointed to as an important contributor to the exploration of the roots of our current truculent relationship with nature, Gaile McGregor rightly argues:

[...] no one has satisfactorily explained the causes or noted the ramifications of these recurrent images of a hostile wilderness—or [...] fully traced the extent to which such an image, mediated and mutated, pervades and dominates not just Canadian literature but Canadian culture as a whole. (9-10)

As part of, rather than a definition of, a developing Canadian literature that is self-conscious of its attitudes towards nature, Tom Marshall’s *Harsh and Lovely Land*, published in 1979, actually chronologically categorizes the development, in poetry, of human-nature relations. Though he does not formally acknowledge this organizational strategy, nor does he label it as ecocritical in the ways it traces changing attitudes towards nature in its historical progression, it is precisely what he accomplishes, if only, from an ecocritical perspective, cursorily. Since it is not my intention to delve into a chronicle of Canadian nature poetics and how they build the foundations in Canada for an emerging ecopoetic genre, (a point that Marshall might have made, had he access to a new critical vocabulary, developed decades later), I wish only to briefly note how Marshall’s contribution to the study of nature poetry in Canada may serve as a precursor to a more extensive ecocritical study. In brief, he separates literary modes of wilderness interpretation

in Canadian literature into roughly twelve categories that examine, generally, human-nature conflicts and their outcomes.

McGregor's book, *The Wacousta Syndrome* (1985), D. M. R. Bentley's "*The Gay]Grey Moose: Essays on the Ecologies and Mythologies of Canadian Poetry 1690-1990* (1992), Verena Buhler Roth's *Wilderness and the Natural Environment: Margaret Atwood's Recycling of a Canadian Theme* (1998), and Diane Relke's *Greenwor(l)ds: Ecocritical readings of Canadian women's poetry* (1999) all individually attempt to address what Canadian critics in the 1960's and 70's—Frye, Atwood, Jones, Northey, New, Moss, and Marshall—initially explore in their calls for a deeper understanding of the Canadian relationship to nature. McGregor, who, unlike Roth and Relke, does not focus exclusively on women writers and their unique perspective within the wilderness-feminine-other paradigm finds the Canadian attitude, particularly as it is expressed in Canadian literature, frustratingly resistant to a project that seeks the possibility of positive new directions in the human-nature dynamic. McGregor writes:

Where the American typically imaged the wilderness as a repository, a spawning ground, for some specifically human value—as a temple or cradle, a schoolroom or arena—the Canadian seemed reluctant or unable to get past its immanence, the obtrusive *thereness* of the thing-in-itself. (27)

Even though, for McGregor, it is not unreasonable to expect that Canadians ought to have outgrown the predictable pioneer "reaction to [wilderness] of disappointment or unbearable nostalgia," McGregor concludes that Canadian

literature continues to be fraught with a garrison mentality—of building physical and psychological fortresses that protect the ‘civilized’ from the wilderness—that limits the depth of its exploration of the Canadian interaction with nature (28).

McGregor calls this continuing mistrust of the wilderness on the part of Canadian literature, “the Wacousta Syndrome,” so named in recognition of John Richardson’s Gothic romance—*Wacousta* (1832)—in which the garrison-versus-wilderness theme is best displayed in a nightmarish vision of early Canada, the land of incredible beauty and fantastically horrific wilderness terrors.

McGregor’s scrutiny of Canadian attitudes towards nature begins with the hypothesis, which she terms “simple avoidance,” that early Canadian writers often reveal “a reluctance to view the human element *in actual contact with the* inhuman one, whatever their chosen genre or even their own conscious intentions might demand” (31). McGregor muses about explorers “whose business it was actually to enter into and describe the wilderness [but] [...] apparently avoided to a great extent having to focus on nature *qua* nature at all” (29). Ultimately, as McGregor argues, this tendency towards “simple avoidance” has had an unfortunate influence on the development of Canadian literature, insisting that:

There is patently nothing wrong with taking nature, in and by itself, as a literary subject, but when the writer claims to be concerned quite specifically with man-in-nature and then fails to place him there, there is obviously an ambivalence, an unfronted fear, underlying his whole vision. (32)

wilderness created, as McGregor argues, a nineteenth century poetics that, “has a kind of strained undercurrent, visible in sudden disconcerting glimpses or equally disquieting ambiguities of tone, that accords ill its decorous surface” (36).

The literature many of these pioneers produced, particularly the poetry, reveals an early New World Canadian attitude towards nature that, in its own inability to interpret the wilderness, leads to a “splitting apart different aspects of the writer’s own vision”—a “violent duality” indeed. The result for settlers such as Susanna Moodie is a feeling of violence against a natural space that continued to remind them of its failure to live up to the pastoral ideal they brought with them from Europe. Like Kolodny who argues the “pastoral impulse,” and Canadian critic W. H. New who theorizes an East (civilized, European) versus West (wilderness frontier), where the “West” shifted to accommodate the “Eastern” need for liberation against the paradoxically much-needed strictures inherent in the civilizing process (xiv), D.M.R. Bentley, in his text, *The Gay]Grey Moose: Essays on the Ecologies and Mythologies of Canadian Poetry 1690-1990*, explores the traditional baseland/ hinterland argument from an ecocritical perspective. He argues that the mimetic nature of literary form demands a writer to write either towards or away from a more open relationship with nature. Bentley explores how this “violent duality” manifests itself within poems and texts, often calling attention to way that the baseland/ hinterland dichotomy reverberates, not just in the subject matter of a poem, but in the shape and technique it ultimately takes. Bentley writes:

Although poets' preferences for order or disorder in the landscape or in social relations may not necessarily be reflected at the formal and technical level in their poems, [...] when celebrating a high degree of openness or, conversely, organization in and through a particular Canadian landscape (or some other subject), poets are more likely than not to embody the same preferences in the form and techniques of their poems. (9-10)

Though much of Bentley's argument focuses on the way that the developing Canadian relationship with nature is reflected in the formal aspects of early Canadian writing, he also makes it a point to urge Canadian critics to move away from the narrow linguistic obsession of much recent criticism in Canada, (what Lawrence Buell calls "the hermeneutics of skepticism") particularly the Saussurian approach to language advocated in much deconstructivist and post-structuralist criticism. By suggesting that theory-laden critical approaches "have done literature a disservice by placing it in a realm remote from its physical, emotional, and moral contexts," he contends that the result is a poetics that is included in a "verbal universe but not one that is independent of the physical world" (10). In other words, words, Bentley maintains, "do not create reality" but reflect it, and in so doing, "they can help us to think and they can make us act, but it was not the word "bomb" that destroyed Hiroshima. Nor was the *Exxon Valdez* merely a proper noun that exuded a floating signifier" (10). Thus, in their attempt to define our world, there must be a connection between poetry and philosophy, the word and the world, thought and action.

Finding such a critical approach politically problematic, Bentley advocates instead a return to, or concentration on, the:

[...] equivalences between Canadian poems and the external world of which they are in their very nature as analogous representations, cultural artifacts, and human productions, an integral and inescapable part. Poems are not possible without matter: the matter of which they treat, the matter upon which they are inscribed, the human matter that creates and apprehends them. (10)

Bentley moves toward pointing out how the discord between external reality and the form, content, and criticism of Canadian literature can be a negative influence on Canadian attitudes toward the environment in what he calls “past-modern writers” (287). The ultimate aim of the book, as Bentley himself formulates it, is:

[...] not only to reawaken attention to the mimetic and analogic qualities of Canadian poems, but also to raise questions about the possible origins and consequences of the contemporary emphasis on the non-realistic and non-emotional aspects of Canadian poetry. (10)

Though it may never have been his intention to write an ecocritical interpretation of early Canadian literature, judging from his own understanding of his aims and intentions, it is clear that Bentley’s text clearly marks the first book-length publication by a Canadian critic that attempts to explore the history of Canadian nature literature, both in form and content, from an ecocritical perspective. In his optimism for the potential of such a new critical approach to Canadian literature, Bentley argues:

[...] it promises to cast in a new light its fabled “mooseness” or “mapleness,” to show how poetry in Canada, like the *flora* and *fauna* (not to say the people) that have migrated, survived, and evolved here, fit into physical and social environments that can be both distinctively regional and distinctively Canadian. (19)

In Search of the Canadian Thoreau

In McGregor’s “Frontier Antithesis,” she asks why “Americans have generally viewed nature as a source of inspiration, natural wisdom, moral health, and so on, [and] Canadian writers seemingly do not even like to look upon the face of the wilderness” (47). Her attempt to answer this compelling question begins, in the first place, with geography, by pointing out that the reason Canadian wilderness “seems more hostile to the Canadian [is] because it *is* more hostile” (47), or in the very least, the Canadian “perceived nature as being more of a threat that did his [*sic*] neighbour” (48). Also, McGregor makes the point that the “conceptual vocabulary” brought to the new world was largely dependent on the time-frames of settlement patterns. This is an important point because Americans, “under the influence of the millennial expectations of the seventeenth century [...and who] borrow[ed] concepts from scriptural explications” tended to resort to Biblical superimpositions onto the environment. Thus, for early Americans, the wilderness was seen as “a moral waste but a potential paradise,” “a place of testing or even punishment,” and “a place of refuge (protection) or contemplation” apart from a sinful secular world (49). Canada, on the other hand, was settled, according to McGregor’s research, during a period with a markedly

different way of talking about nature, and thus a different dominant understanding of wilderness. McGregor explains:

The simplistic Shaftesbury-Wordsworthian image of nature which had come to dominate cultural expectations by the time English Canadians were attempting to come to terms with the wilderness experience was inadequate for comprehending the colonial situation. The impact of nature was too frightening to be seen as potentially benevolent and too immediate to be aesthetically distant. And since the late-eighteenth, early nineteenth-century cultural milieu did not offer any appropriate alternative models, the result was that the man/nature relation in Canada became, quite simply, a conceptual impossibility. (49-50)

In effect, what McGregor is saying here is that one of the reasons Canadians and Americans have always expressed a conspicuous difference in their attitude towards wilderness is simply the fact that they were founded with different “conceptual languages”—Americans confronting their wilderness with religious concepts which embraced the contradiction of beauty and danger which they found in North America, and Canadians struggling and failing to impose onto the wilderness a European pastoral poetics, which was simply too naïve and romantic to adequately encompass the rugged and dangerous landscape of the North.

McGregor’s musings may not fully explain the Canadian “desire for and fear of reconciliation with nature,” but it does provide a background against which stands what many critics see as the perpetual manifestation of Atwood’s

“violent duality” in Canadian culture, a background from which to understand why Canadians, as Douglas Cole summarizes were,

Smitten (at least superficially) with America’s mythicization of its pioneer forebears, Canadians embraced enthusiastically a romantic cult of primitivistic wilderness worship that expressed itself in such diverse phenomena as ‘the creation of wilderness parks, like Algonquin and Garibaldi, [...] children’s woodcraft camps, [...] Grey Owl, [...] the animal stories of Ernest Thompson Seton and Charles G.D. Roberts, the summer cottaging movement, [and] the art of Emily Carr and the group of seven.’ (Cole 69)

McGregor, however, is quick to point out that pretending that the ideological implications of the frontier played or should play a positive role in the Canadian experience “could only exacerbate the problems of coming to terms with nature” (59). And though numerous Canadian writers and commentators have attempted to sanctify the so-called pristine ideology of the Canadian wilderness as an exclusively Canadian cultural trope, particularly set against American cultural influences, McGregor argues that the wilderness still symbolically represents something “monstrous rather than inviting” to the Canadian cultural consciousness.

If we look more closely, in fact, it would seem that while the intentional and especially the rhetorical levels of such productions are dominated by a:

[...] specifically American version—a B-movie image of Canada as ‘God’s country,’ a primitive snow-covered wilderness where one goes

to find moral, physical, and spiritual rejuvenation (see Pierre Berton's *Hollywood's Canada*)—the more spontaneous elements, from modes of composition to iconography, tend to communicate something quite different. (52-3)

While, for McGregor, the myth of the American self-made man was born out of the conception of the American frontier as a limit of knowledge and control that is “a temporary and arbitrary boundary that may not only be transcended but actually redefined—moved, advanced, or even eradicated—by human effort,” the disorderliness and lawlessness of the Canadian “Prairies” and “Rockies” was conceived by British immigrants to Canada, not as an opportunity for transcendence or individual redefinition, but rather as a challenge to the social order they brought with them from Britain. Thus, for early Canadians, wilderness represented, not just a threat to one's life, but to one's cultural and social values as well. Ecocriticism then, for the Canadian scholar, poses many unique cultural and political complexities, and cannot be easily understood as just another critical approach transplanted from Europe or America and applied to Canadian literature.

If we reexamine Annette Kolodny's theory that Americans internalized and practiced the “pastoral impulse,” as a means of belying wilderness fears by placing them within the care of a nurturing feminine landscape, and Michael Branch's further theorizing of the “topological imperative” as a “social need to have a culture develop in the greatness of the landscape” (Branch 284) from a Canadian perspective, given the above-mentioned cultural, geographical, historical, social evolution, and interpretive differences, it becomes clear that

Canadians developed, in contrast to Americans, what I would call a “topological departure” reflected in a kind of “pastoral impulse” that manifested itself in a retreat from the “unnatural” wilderness-terror (feminine or not) into the garrisoned confines of traditional Mother country, psychological and physical, fortresses. While Americans, Kolodny theorizes, fantasize the pastoral ideal into daily reality, Canadians, faced with the tabula rasa of pastoral expectations erased by actual experiences with wilderness that may have been more violent than what the Americans witness (or at least perceived as such) fostered a “violent duality” within the literary imagination that sought “the beauty of terror” (F. R. Scott).

Bentley largely concurs with McGregor’s views on the development of human-nature conflict in a Canadian sensibility, but takes the argument further, examining why this dichotomy has persisted in Canadian cultural attitudes and more specifically in Canadian literature. While early writers, he contends, worked necessarily within the limitations of the European tradition, Canadian modernists, or members of “The Montreal Movement,” can be offered no such excuse. Bentley essentially attributes the perpetuation of unacceptable attitudes of indifference or hostility towards nature to the insistent values of those poets and critics who, in their attempt to validate Canadian poetry internationally, “shape[d] the creation and study of Canadian poetry for decades to come [with] deep ambivalence towards the Canadian environment and its representation in poetry” (252). Bentley suggests that we should:

[...] recognize that the simplification, devaluation, and decontextualization of reality that is widely evident in high modern

Canadian poetry participates in the industrial and capitalistic enterprise whose most obvious effects in the present century have included the degradation and homogenization in Canada and elsewhere of distinctive natural and social environments. (265)

Originating with A. J. M. Smith's article, "Wanted—Canadian Criticism," Bentley offers pointed ecocritical commentary on an historic literary movement born out of an understandable distaste for the gushing sublimations of borrowed "Romantic delusions" (263) in Canadian poetry, and offered instead a poetics that followed American and British Modernist examples of "cosmopolitanism" which advocated "particulars in favour of universals" (257). According to Bentley, Smith and his cronies condemned contemporary poets who did not acknowledge external nature as neutral, resulting in the profoundly damaging attitude that nature:

[...] has nothing to offer man beyond the materials of existence, that there are no impulses from vernal woods, no messages in wayside flowers, no moral in maple leaves. That birth, copulation, and death are universals is the only information worth having from nature. (263)

In the final assessment, as Bentley argues, in order to understand the development of the Canadian attitude towards nature in twentieth-century literature, it is important to comprehend, as Jonathan Bate does, that "the high Modernist is the very antithesis of the bioregionally grounded poet" (234).

Canadian Modernists, namely the poets of the McGill movement, attempted, if one accepts Bentley's characterization, to gain international favour

by championing a poetics based on the neutralization of ‘nature’ with the idea of rendering it a kind of ataractic backdrop to humankind’s civilizing impulse. In both theory and poetry, the McGill movement aimed at replacing a “Canadian poetry” which Leo Kennedy described as:

[...] a colony of shoddy late-Tennysonian poets [...] miraculously preserved here in all the drab bloom of their youth, cut from improving contact with the outer world [...] No Walt Whitman sauntered on Montreal quays; no Poe fretted his life in a Toronto newspaper office. For generations Canadian poetry was the off-hour killcare of Empire Loyalist parsons, who pursued their halt iambics and cornered their unresisting rhymes with all the zest of professional soul sleuths.

(Stevens 13-14)

The Modernist effort to eradicate what the Montreal poets characterized as an exhausted pastoral impulse led to a radical change in the way that nature was defined in the Canadian literary imagination. Ironically, though their attempt was to shout down what they saw as a naïve poetics and create a more “cosmopolitan” approach to literature by replacing dichotomous interpretations of nature (Atwood’s “violent duality”) with a nature-as-pocourante, this early Canadian Modernist movement may have actually shifted Canadian poetics into a literary phase through which ecopoetics was made possible (Tom Marshall cursorily concurs by pinpointing this movement as the breaking point for a changing human-nature dynamic). For it was the shift away from a highly anthropomorphic Romantic tendency in the literary imagination begun by the

Modernists that set the stage for the kind of ecologically conscious approach to culture that, a half-century later in a post-postmodern climate, “respect[s] nature as it is and for itself, while at the same time recognizing that we can only understand nature by way of those distinctly human categories, history and language” (Bate 65).

In his ecocritical response to A. J. M. Smith’s characterization of the beauty of nature as “either deceptive or irrelevant,” Bentley nonetheless bemoans that time in the development of Canadian criticism when literary trends favored a dismissal of any reference or evidence of a relationship between literature and a biotic community. He writes:

Why bother with maples and sumachs when there were golden boughs and multifoliate roses to be had? Perhaps the most telling and certainly the most amusing passage in “Wanted—Canadian Criticism” is a contemptuous dismissal of Canadian poetry that contains “French and Indian place names” and “allusions to the Canada goose, fir trees, maple leaves, northern lights, etc.” (252)

Scholars specializing in Canadian literary history can attest to the kind of power this movement had, dominating literary magazines and attitudes at a time when the country seemed to crave scholarly validation of its own literary and cultural advances. One has to wonder whether the McGill movement had the kind of negative power that Bentley claims it had over generations of Canadian critics and writers. Did it open the door to ecopoetry or stall its development? By Bentley’s own admission, Smith and Scott, two prominent leaders of the movement, waffled

in their views on technology, nature and cosmopolitan poetics by the 1950's, as, in particular, "Scott had begun to graft an ecological awareness onto his international imagination" (265).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite the "ecologically attractive" efforts of some poets, most prominently "Canada's low Modernists, particularly certain members of the *Tish* group," and their championing of proprioceptive verse (the seeking of life-rhythms that emanate from the source of the thing-in-itself), the general tendency of the development of Canadian poetry, according to Bentley, still worked against any poetics that sought to strengthen a human-nature dynamic (281). Thus Canadian poetics cut a path divergent from the development of an ecopoetics in two important directions:

The first of these is towards a concentration on the experiencing mind that has led many writers into a self-centeredness that is, by turns, banal, solipsistic, and aesthetic—disconcertingly oblivious to large moral, social, and political issues in its heavy emphasis on the subjective and personal. The second is towards a concentration on language as an isolated and uniform system that is not continuous with life but, as some literary theorists would have it, constitutive of a reality that has little, if any, connection with what exists outside of words and texts. (283)

And yet, as ecocritics and ecophilosophers attest, there is a new movement afoot in our age, a movement of new-ageism, healing, and spiritual growth that seeks to create a space for a revamping of attitudes, both political and cultural, towards the

environment. And thus, as Bentley argues, if we can “accept that to inhabit a linguistic realm detached from the world is to court fatalism,” and that “to think of language as a system that dictates utterances is to deny responsibility for one’s own words,” then the stage may be set for a rediscovery of literature as a way of discovering and connecting with a biotic community.

Indeed this is exactly the cultural and literary movement that critics such as Gaile McGregor, D. M. R. Bentley, Diane Relke, and Verna Buhler Roth see emerging around the edges of Canadian literature. Born in reaction to the Modernist and post-Modernist movements which aim towards a “sublime escape,” by employing “metaphysicalism, Frygian Archetypalism, Derridean deconstruction,” and other such critical approaches, Canadian poets, as Bentley argues, have come to recognize that “willy-nilly they are dependent upon the very ‘reality’ from which the ‘reversed Odysseus’ attempts to escape,” and contemporary critics are beginning to realize that, as McGregor puts it, they are witness to “the emergence of a distinctive and potentially powerful literature” that is struggling to revitalize all of the issues which surround the relationship between human beings and nature (Bentley 271, McGregor 71). This emerging project, this attempt to “bring poetry back to earth,” is, for Bentley, “necessary if poetry is to have a part in reintegrating humanity and nature” (271). It is, however, not without pitfalls and problems, as Bentley rightly points out, remarking that “to many people the moral dimensions of an ecological approach to Canadian poetry will doubtless be distasteful” (276). He is, of course, plainly referring to the adverse reaction that such a project will receive in the academic ivory towers.

Nonetheless, there is for these critics, something both timely and exciting connected with ecopoetics and ecopoetry, an opportunity to affirm a “moral awareness born of sensitivity to the grave dangers that post-Renaissance man has come to pose to himself and other living things,” and to theorize and create in response to the growing critical sense that there is a need to approach literature “with an awakened ecological sensibility” (276).

Interpreting Nature: Canadian (Eco)Literature

If Relke’s investigation is correct, Canadian ecocriticism was first mentioned as a possibility in Laurie Ricou’s article, “So Big About Green” (*Canadian Literature* 1991) wherein he deemed Canadian ecocriticism as “almost an underground phenomenon” (3). Ricou observed, “Canadian critics have been loud [...] on landscape [...] But in the apparently closely related matter of environmentalism, critics on Canadian literature lag behind” (3). With 1991 as the formal beginnings of ecocriticism in Canada, Relke argues that the history of Canadian ecocriticism is thus, relatively short. Nonetheless, tracing this history is, as Relke and I concur, no easy task. Canadians have always written about a human-wilderness dynamic; nature writing whether textually foregrounded or not, is an identifying characteristic of much of Canadian literature. Relke astutely argues that Frye’s profoundly influential suggestion that Canadians view nature with “a tone of deep terror” instigated a critical war through which, many critical and creative writings were “suspicious[ly]” lost (*Green* 206). Relke cites Phyllis Webb and P. K. Page as writers of early ecological poetry that “establish[] the necessary preconditions for an emerging feminist and ecopoetic consciousness in

Canada” (206). In the absence of and resistance to certain feminist criticisms, ecofeminism, and ecocriticism, Relke maintains that Canadian critics sustain an “ecophobic” approach to Canadian literary studies.

Like Relke (see *Greenwor[l]ds*, pages 218-220) I believe an early ecological emergence in Canadian literature begins with late modernist women writers publishing initially in the 1940’s—particularly Miriam Waddington, P. K. Page, and the much-neglected Anne Marriott—whose struggles against the strictures of high modernism, as an elitist measure of civilization and its art, provide interesting insight into an essential aspect of Canadian women’s poetry in which the human-nature dynamic is not as easily dismissed as it appears to be more in the more progress-oriented world of men. Critics may argue that the thematic history of Canadian poetry is essentially a collection of nature-oriented poems. What, then, makes these writers unique? Future Canadian ecocritics are likely to reveal much of Canadian Modernist poetry as protoecological, or, at the very least, worthy of ecocritical study. I have focused on women writers herein because, I believe, their cultural link to nature differentiates them from male authors whose often Romantic explorations emphasize gender and class distinctions in an exploitation of nature for self-serving purposes. Having said that, I do not wish to assert that women poets of what I have defined as the first wave of protoecological writing in Canada veer far from the male-identified course of literary reflection.

A second wave of late modernist/early post-modernist writers such as Gwendolyn MacEwen, Pat Lowther, Margaret Atwood, Joy Kogawa, and Lorna

Crozier, with continued contributions from Waddington, Page, and Marriott, emerges in the 1960's to establish Canadian (proto)ecological poetry (poetry which may be interpreted as ecological or a precursor to this more conscious look at the human-nature dynamic) through their attention, generally, to the fusion, the identification, and the revisionist mythmaking of women's link to nature, landscape, wilderness, animals, and pastoralism. Broadly speaking, these poets establish a woman-nature identification in Canadian literature that recognizes women's historical connection to the Canadian literary landscape and embraces, even if only metaphorically, that identification with elements and entities of the wilderness. In other words, by asserting a subjective feminine voice, through an instinctual and intellectual movement away from the tenets of high modernism, these women poets all find some form of empowerment through nature-metaphors that define a new course for writing by women in Canada.

Used largely for metaphoric purposes, nature-as-landscape is often internalized by these writers as a profound reflection of the Canadian experience. Broadly speaking, women writers in this period of second wave (proto)ecological writers have a tendency to identify strongly with nature, choosing to reveal internal struggles through nature-metaphors that often personify their own position as an element of nature. Even if a subjective identification is not made apparent through direct first-person narrative, these poets oftentimes reveal a symbolic sympathy through which the reader negotiates his/her response to both the narrator and the 'misunderstood' wilderness entity. Both Waddington and Page explore the mindscape-landscape link to a simpler, more 'natural' internal

pastoral—that personal Greenworld, the sublime found by observing nature and internalizing personal wisdoms gained from the experience. In “Green World”, Waddington’s poet-speaker may “Step out and feel the green world [...] hold [her]” but she is really stepping inside herself, “beyond all geography in a transparent place/ where water images cling to the inside sphere/ move and distend as rainbows in a mirror/ cast out of focus” (Collected 1). Page only *dreams* of becoming a bird with the ability to fly in “Cry Ararat!”

Nonetheless, prior to the 1960’s, Page’s poetry clearly intuitively ecopoetics with a delicate blending of a non-violent human-nature dynamic in “Journey Home”, “Now This Cold Man...”, “Stories of Snow”, “Christmas Eve—Market Square”, “Vegetable Island”, “After Rain”, and “Cry Ararat!” “Vegetable Island” (*Collected* 48-9) and “Now This Cold Man ...” (41) establish gender divisions through a consistent feminist voice that attaches ecological sympathies to women. In ecofeminist studies, this ideological shift in the human-nature dynamic is worthy of investigation. Obsessed with order and control, men may visit “Vegetable Island,” owned by the flowers, wherein, “the deep woods are stormed/ and trees throw bouquets to each other, pass/ petals along from bough to bough./ It is theirs”, but he cannot stay long since the need to cleanse himself of the wildness of wilderness overcomes “the hedges calling/ coyly as they advance,/ the bright grass/ silently leaping” (48). Ultimately:

[...] a man must strip and throw his body
into the acid ocean to erase
the touch and scent of flowers, their little cries
like sickly mistresses, their gentle faces

pleading consumption.

Sometimes he has no strength to meet a tree
debauched with blossoms.

Women, on the other hand, intuitively embrace the chaos and join, not fight it, as they “wander unafraid as if/ they made the petals” (49). Likewise in “Now This Cold Man...” the male subject exists, once again, in resistance to nature until he enters the garden and “feels the ice/ thawing from branches of his lungs and brain” (41). He is unable to be fully alive, to create, Page suggests, “until he is the garden; heart, the sun/ and all his body soil”; then, “glistening jonquils blossom from his skull,/ the bright expanse of lawn his stretching thighs/ and something rare and perfect yet unknown,/ stirs like a foetus just behind his eyes.” While seemingly ecopoetic, Page’s work, particularly her use of nature-as-metaphor is, arguably, more feminist than ecofeminist.

Waddington also writes about nature prior to a more environmentally conscious voice in the 1960s, but it is the exceptional poem that approaches ecopoetry. For example, “Inward Look the Tree” (1955) Waddington ‘grounds’ the notion of stability in an unwavering tree but creates an anxious internal dialogue within herself when the tree, formerly serving as a shelter, can no longer protect her from post-war fear of the manmade atom bomb (created, ironically, for protection). This poet’s ecological vision is somewhat limited, as one might expect from a writer making a place for the feminine voice in Canadian poetry. Marriott’s poetry, which leans more towards direct narrative observations of the natural world, contrasts Waddington’s and Page’s individual quests for self-knowledge and women’s voice by avoiding symbolic representations of ‘nature’

and 'landscape.' Among these three modernists, Marriott comes closest to an ecological approach to writing the human-nature dynamic. Page and Waddington may be responsible for "establishing the necessary preconditions for an emerging feminist and ecopoetic consciousness in Canada" (Relke *Green* 206) but they remain protoecological, until shifts in their perspectives (late 1960's) regard the complexity of nature with the politics of ecology.

I believe that knowledge of ecological theories, even if rudimentary and popularized, is mandatory for the emergence of ecopoetry. Thus, it comes as no surprise that with a second wave of women poets writing on nature, emerging in the 1960's, perspectives shifted to better embrace new ecological philosophies. One of the more noticeable changes made in women's thematic nature poetry is the bold assertions of the subjective "I" as a natural entity. These transmogrifications of women into wilderness entities empower emerging feminist voices by transforming existing language and realities to embrace new emotional, experiential, and psychological frontiers. From an ecofeminist perspective, these metamorphoses can be equally engaging; however pseudo-surreal dream sequences may also dismiss ecological realities for a more fantastical psychological or symbolic meaning. Page explores this spiritual/symbolic exploration of selfhood through animal and plant metamorphosis in such poems as "Element" and "Summer" wherein, "I sang the green that was in my groin [...] the song stained with the stain of chlorophyll/ was sharp as a whistle of grass/ in my green blood."

Marriott maintains her focus on describing the nature-aesthetic but begins in this twentieth century decade of radical changes to intermingle human observation with an attempt to recognize her place in the bioregion. Rarely transmigrating her poet-speaker into non-sentient form, as Page, Atwood, Crozier, and Kogawa do, Marriott makes the exception when describing esoteric states of intense human emotion. In “As You Come In” (1973), the poet-speaker experiences, “a huge flower opening / inside my skin” when she initially declares love for a romantic partner; she ultimately predicts her growth, with or without the return of that love into “a rich stalk/ a honeyed pole/ a tree thick with leaves/ long closed/ opened by this new sun” (52). More commonly, Marriott identifies animal or plant aspects within a poet-speaker’s consciousness in a sensitive placement of oneself in the biotic community. In “The Circular Coast” (1969-79), the poet-speaker connects her earthbody with the planet Earth, giving herself “stuck peg in sand/ my own axis” thus gaining intuitive ‘access’ to “the unseen worm’s tube in the log and sand/ my infinite centre/ and the worm in me” (18). By maintaining a consistent first-person narrative throughout *The Circular Coast*, Marriott does not compromise, through narrative distancing, the speaker’s position as one who respects the biodynamic between self and nature. In what serves as an ecocritical strategy, Marriott resists allusions to historical and literary figures and places that might obfuscate a sincere and deliberate attempt to make a human-nature relationship respectful but enriches her poetry with obscure local place names as a reflection of recognition of her bioregion.

Waddington's poetry likewise makes a shift in perspective in the 1960's with the publication of *Say Yes* in 1969. Poems such as "Understanding Snow", "Looking for Strawberries in June", "Swallowing Darkness/ Is Swallowing Dead Elm Trees", and "Driving Home" as well as poems from the 1970's and 1980's, to name a few, "Dead Lakes", and "Totems", "The Secret of Old Trees", "The Big Tree", and "The Milk of/ The Mothers" all mark a thematically ecological shift in Waddington's work. In particular, *The Last Landscape* (1992) shows a sophisticated move towards a respectful biotic communal celebration of self *and* other. This thematic change in Waddington's voice shifts her focus on social injustices onto the iniquities within the natural realm and those contained within the human-nature dynamic. The above-listed poems from *Say Yes* and *Driving Home* all nostalgically explore a loss of 'home' described as a kind of Greenworld and "green" world that is vanishing psychologically, emotionally, and physically: "I knew a certain/ leaf-language from somewhere but now// it is all used up"(Collected 169). What remains of a world that is rapidly destroying itself, evidenced by the disappearance of wild strawberry fields, inland lakes, and magnificent elm trees is a diseased world without cures. Herein, while "search[ing]/ for a living element/ in the dead places/ of my country" (234), "I// don't recognize the landscape it is all/ grey feathery the /voices of birds are/ foreign" (169) as "the divine arm/ that in our world/ has darkened everything/ then choked our breath/ away/ and drowned/ and drowned/ our green" (189).

Connected through a national consciousness and similar socio-political and cultural influences as Canadian women living in the information age, these

women have inherited a certain struggle against masculine-encoded mainstream interpretations of the Canadian experience; their own quest, as writers, involves voicing these experiences from a woman's perspective. Furthermore, these poets clearly work from within a well-defined history of published and accessible Canadian nature writing in which nature—vengeful, helpful, or indifferent—has yet to be clearly defined as a space of mutual benefit and respect. Though it is impossible to locate a poet's influences clearly, their poetics reflect a society in which ecological theories of the sixties and seventies have moved into popular consciousness and common everyday practices in the eighties, nineties, and the new millennium.

It has been my intention to focus particularly on the emergence of a feminist ecopoetic consciousness and writings in Canadian literature; as such, and for obvious reason, most of my material is literature written by women. Nonetheless, re-reading Canadian literature that approaches the feminine identification with nature is not exclusive to women writers, as I have shown in Chapter Two with playwright Michael Cook's dramas. Section Two attempts to show how a more ecologically conscious nature-writing makes this feminine identification with nature as much political as it is poetical. As such, Chapter Six deals briefly with how late twentieth century male poets reconcile cultural, social, and historical placement of man-the-hunter with current trends toward ecological consciousness that demands compassion for that which men have, for centuries, sought to conquer. This position is further complicated by possible psychological and instinctual remnants of the "primitive" man, (of Robert Bly's *Iron John* fame)

considered in some circles as the empowered male counterpart to the ecofeminist “goddess”.

Male writers, generally speaking, struggle with their own responses to traditional survival narratives through which nature, they are taught, and as their ancestors experienced in the Canadian wilderness, has always been the enemy. A feminist sympathetic connection to nature as an innocent by-stander, oppressed and silenced by a greater patriarchal force of will, ideology, policy-making, and exploitation insures a place for modernist women writers in any theorizing of the beginnings of ecological writing in Canada since it profoundly contrasts the man-versus-nature poetry of the 1940’s and 1950’s made popular in Canada through the poetic explorations of E. J. Pratt. A closer ecocritical study of Canada’s late male modernist writers—particularly Irving Layton and Earle Birney—reveals a complexity of fears, reverence, and guilt that, like the above-mentioned ecologically influential women poets, one may argue, help to set the preconditions for an emerging ecological consciousness in Canada through their poetry. Future studies in this area of Canadian ecocriticism ought to include a “second wave” of Canadian male writers whose compassion for their biotic community places their poetry within the realm of (proto)ecological and early ecological literature. My list includes: Don McKay, David McFadden, John O’Neill, Tom Wayman, Tim Lilburn, Chris Dewdney, bill bissett, David Waltner-Toews, and Joe Rosenblatt.

Structurally, I have divided this thesis into two sections, each focusing on a major ecofeminist theme, and each discussing that theme as it applies to the reading of specific works of Canadian drama, fiction, and poetry. Section One

examines works which revisit the well-noted Canadian preoccupation with nature-as-enemy from all manner of ecologically aware and feminist perspectives. The intention is not simply to present an ecofeminist interpretation of specific works, though certainly this is a major component of each section, but rather also to investigate the broader effects that both the ecological and feminist movements have had on the way in which Canadian writers approach the subject of nature in their work. In particular I include chapters on Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Michael Cook's *Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance*, and *Jacob's Wake*, as well as Marian Engel's *Bear*. Framing Section One will be a wide-ranging discussion of the concept of "getting bushed," which has developed as a major theme of Canadian literature, and how this concept can be understood from an ecofeminist perspective.

Section Two is centered on the roles that spirituality and mind-body-spirit unification have played in the contemporary ecofeminist movement, and how it has impacted on the possible readings of contemporary Canadian women writers. The notion that the current ecological crisis is as much spiritual as it is economic or political is an essential touchstone of ecofeminist and deep ecological theory. Chapters Four and Five focus on Nova Scotia playwright Cindy Cowan's *A Woman from the Sea*, and a discussion of the rediscovery of the relationship between woman, nature, and the sacred in contemporary Canadian poetry. Chapter Six deviates slightly to incorporate more radical ecopoetry that centres on politically motivated ecological issues that affect a mind-body-spirit unification of one's earthbody and how actions against the "sacred body" harm the body-Earth.

These chapters explore the ways in which Earth-centered and matriarchal spiritualities are being offered as alternatives, by Canadian writers, to more mainstream and less radically environmentally concerned traditions. By challenging masculine-encoded dichotomous constructions that divide man from woman, civilization from nature, and the transcendental spirit from the earthbody, these women writers reconnect with selfhood, and the spirit through a mind-body-spirit integration. From an ecofeminist perspective, respect for the individual body-as-biosphere is paramount to instigating necessary changes in attitudes towards the Earth-body as sacred space, both psychologically and physically. I use the term “earthbodies” instead of “bodies” throughout to distinguish the body as the site of division and denigration from the revised ecofeminist earthbody that strives for renewed respect and holism through mind-spirit-body unification. Likewise, when I refer to the body-Earth, my intention is to make explicit the notion of Gaia—the planet Earth as a limited biosphere—functioning as a web of intricately connected life forms, macrocosmic to the microcosmic human body. This shift in consciousness of place (a landscape-oriented concept) towards space (a geographical place that involved a more complex integration of the psychological and emotional with the physical) embraces a more ecologically minded system of bioregion in literature. Bioregion, a term borrowed from Edward O. Wilson’s *The Diversity of Life*, refers to “a place that has its own distinctive natural economy” (Bate 54) and is, within ecocritical circles, in the process of integrating itself into the “geopsyche” (Murphy WTE 42) of the author,

narrator, and/or reader as a simultaneously physical space and psychological location.

In Chapter One, I begin the exploration into an ecocritical examination of Canadian literature by looking at Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* in relation to other canonized writers writing about the phenomenon of being "bushed" in a Canadian context. With little regard for its mythical origins, the term "bushed" is commonly used to describe a wide range of psychological disorders that result from time alone in the wilderness. From insanity to living a "simplified" wilderness lifestyle, sometimes referred to as "going native," Canadians have a long and continuing history of bushing incidents. Chapter one deals with how this colonial mentality, this "us versus nature" mindset continues to be the focus of our strained relationship with wilderness within late twentieth century literature.

Specifically in Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Susanna Moodie—as the symbolic embodiment of conflicting attitudes towards the Canadian wilderness in *Roughing it in the Bush*—resists a strong and direct spiritual connection to "the bush" even though, as Atwood observes in her poetic revisiting of Moodie's difficulties, she had every opportunity to discover the liberating feminist possibilities that an untamed landscape had to offer.

Nonetheless, Moodie's own fear concerning the possibilities tied up with liberation leaves her regretting that "there was something they almost taught me/ I came away not having learned" (*Journals* 27). According to Atwood, Moodie continually refused "to look in a mirror" to see her own "wolf's eyes"; eyes that

are required not only to survive the pioneering experience but also to “see the truth”, that is to become aware of the possibilities inherent in the liberation of the colonial lady. For Atwood then, as a writer who embodies a contemporary view of post-colonial feminism and environmentalism, Moodie needs chastising for her resistance to learning these lessons fully. By arguing Moodie’s lack of identification with her landscape throughout this collection of poems, and by seeking to expose Moodie’s unconscious symbolic connection with trees, Atwood displays a sympathy with Moodie as a woman working through a deeply rooted patriarchal hegemony and finding, for all of her efforts, that she is finally very tree-like—voiceless against patriarchal restrictions, deaf to new lessons concerning the power of the feminine, and powerless against the destructive forces of mankind.

I join Diane Relke (as she asserts in *Greenwor(l)ds*) in recognizing Margaret Atwood’s *Journals* as a kind of pivotal point of an emerging interest in published early Canadian (proto)ecological literature. As (eco)feminist, Atwood thus sets the tone for future ecopoetic writings which, as Relke and I concur, have a strong presence in Canadian literature. Despite Relke’s publication of *Greenwor(l)ds*, in 1999, (after my own study of *Journals* was completed) I believe my investigation is distinct, emphasizing a more recent emergence of ecological writings as opposed to Relke’s concentration on a variety of exclusively women poets whose publications span Canadian literary history from Marjorie Pickthall (1884) and Isabella Valancy Crawford (1927) to the more recent Phyllis Webb and Jeanette Armstrong. Though I initially considered

Pickthall, and Armstrong in planning stages of this study, I opted to focus on the emergence of ecological writing as a response to ecological crisis brought into popular consciousness through the mass appeal of Rachel Carson's 1962 classic, *Silent Spring*. In this way, my examination centres on an emerging literature through a new critical perspective and not, as Relke's text reads, an exploration of a Canadian human-nature perspective reread through an ecocritical perspective. Likewise, Bentley's *Gay]Grey Moose* employs a similar strategy without the emphasis on feminism.

Continuing on the theme of literature that examines the severed link between humans-as-animals living in civilization and their fellow/sister members of a greater biotic community that is introduced in Chapter One, Chapter Two revisits nature-as-enemy via another canonical writer of drama, Michael Cook. Though it may appear peculiar to include such a male-identified writer in this thesis, Cook's unique awareness and concern regarding the environment-in-crisis—particularly since his writings eerily predict the demise of the Newfoundland fishing industry roughly two decades prior to the moratorium on ground fish off Newfoundland's coast in 1994—and his sensitive treatment of the nature of exploitation make his work a fascinating site for the exploration of the socialized links between violence and woman/nature. Though Cook has been criticized by some of his reviewers as a blatant misogynist, mainly because his plays are full of nameless women being cursed, beaten, and blamed by male characters for masculine failures, Cook's strategy of essentializing woman as a "conventionally female life-force" dramatizes the feminine as "an ideal of

spiritual Wholeness” (Walker “Elegy” 200-201), and thus actually highlights a failed masculinity made barren by an arrogant attempt to conquer the “natural” through ultimately self-destructive technological creation. What seems to remain, for Cook’s male characters, is their women for whom they harbour resentment, largely directed towards their biological ability to create life. What makes this presentation of resentment particularly potent is its stark characterization of men facing failure in a world where they are no longer linked to the process of sustaining life, but rather see their masculinity linked only to processes of death and failure. Women too are diminished by the actions of the patriarchy, though the ideal of their creativity, their natural connection with life somehow finds resonance in Cook’s plays. In this chapter entitled “Pregnant(Sea) Miscarried,” the natural cycles of life and death, and the part they play in contemporary social roles, are examined with an eye towards their relationship with ecological crisis, particularly the over-fishing crisis in the Grand Banks which is such a vital aspect of Cook’s dramatic perspective.

Chapter Three extends the discussion of the colonial (pastoral) response, so central to the Canadian critical tradition of Northrop Frye and Atwood, as it focuses on the ecocritical implications of Frye’s haunting question “where is here?” (*Reflections* 71). In Atwood’s *Survival* and *Strange Things*, she asks us to consider “The North” as “a state of mind [that] can mean ‘wilderness’ or ‘frontier’ [...] We know—or think we know—what sort of things go on there” (*Strange Things* 8). As a place in “popular lore and [...] literature” we know it as “uncanny, awe inspiring in an almost religious way, hostile to white men, but

alluring,” a place “that would drive you crazy, and finally, would claim you for its own,” the North is a place explored, experienced and sometimes colonized almost exclusively by men (19). Its central place of this characterization of the North in the Canadian literary imagination silences and marginalizes any feminine experience of an environment which understands that, like her, it follows “natural” cycles of birth, creation, and death.

It is within this Canadian literary context that the emergence of *Bear* and *Surfacing*, novels in which a female protagonist matches the Canadian empathy with animals to the “pastoral impulse,” as a yearning to know the landscape as feminine, signify a timely shift in a masculine-inscribed consciousness to a new (eco)feminist order. By answering Atwood’s call for a feminine response to texts that construct the North not as “nurturing mother” but as “a sort of icy and savage *femme fatale* who will drive you crazy and claim you for her own” (*Survival* 89), these women authors reverse the nature-as-enemy paradigm in revising the pastoral impulse from a non-masculinist perspective. This chapter examines Marian Engel’s quintessentially feminist-Canadian novel, *Bear*, but also points to novels written in a similar vein as women’s wilderness quests, such as Aretha Van Herk’s *Tent Peg*, Ethel Wilson’s *Swamp Angel*, and, and Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*.

For many writers and theorists, Earth-centered spiritualities provide an opportunity for women to rethink, rediscover, and reshape sacred cultural symbols and personal mythology into empowering images and ideas. By examining Canadian female poets in Chapter Four who explore tenets of neo-paganism, I

have found a wealth of spiritual concerns for women, all linked to the health and well-being of the environment, and the natural world as a temple of women's self-discovery. Poets such as Karen Connolly, Gail Fox, Anne Szumigalski, Eva Thiyani, Kristijana Gunnars, Gwendolyn MacEwen, Lorna Crozier, Daphne Marlatt, and Erin Mouré, who attempt to connect the language of nature with a place of spiritual fulfillment, seek to define themselves within spiritual traditions that better attend to the concerns of women and environmentalists. I have chosen to attend to their ideas and work in this chapter because of the way that their poetry, as possibly the most personal, and hence political, genre, attempts to inspire changes in thought and action. Though the majority of poets in Canada address nature in one way or another—as a central characteristic of their poetics—I limited my choice, after a decade-long search, to women poets who I believe to be writing within the so-designated field of ecopoetry (see my section on ecopoetics). I've restricted the poetry of Chapter Four, and for the most part, this entire study, to women authors since I think, (and as ecocritic Diane Relke who examines Canadian female poetry exclusively concurs) their marginalized status in Western culture, and their historically constructed connection to nature-as-other gives them a unique perspective from which new feminist and ecologically minded practices and ideologies are possible.

Given these parameters, this chapter examines Canadian ecopoetry by women writers that reflects a certain aesthetic and politic of the ecospiritual and/or the ecofeminist in "nature poems." As a "branch" of ecopoetry, these poetics rewrite nature into an everyday earth-centred spirituality, a grounding

which makes absurd the idea of separation between the Christian transcendental privileging over the earthly woman-as-body and earth body as sacred. My most non-traditional, and 'groundmending' examples of ecopoetry focus on the earth-rhythm poetry (falling into the category of matrilineal art) contained within the limited selection of poetry by Eva Tihanyi, Kristijana Gunnars, Lorna Crozier, and Daphne Marlatt. I have, no doubt, overlooked many appropriate and deserving Canadian poets falling intentionally and peripherally into the category of (proto)ecological writing. Space permitting, I also would have included poetry by Joy Kogawa, Meira Cook, Penny Kemp, Jan Zwicky, Jane Southwell Munro, Patricia Keeney, Deborah Keahey, Lyn King, and more recent works by Miriam Waddington. It has not been for lack of love or appreciation of First Nations' (eco)poetry that I have excluded it: I strongly considered the works of Annharte and Jeanette Armstrong for this study.

For many writers and theorists, earth-centered spiritualities provide an opportunity for women to rethink, rediscover, and reshape sacred cultural symbols and personal mythology into empowering images and ideas. Cindy Cowan's decidedly earnest ecofeminist approach to staging feminist ideas, allows for an aggressive examination of the spiritual and political crisis that lies at the heart of Western civilization's wasteful and self-destructive relationship with the natural environment. In *A Woman from the Sea* Cowan identifies, quite forcefully, exploitation and destruction as fundamental characteristics of patriarchal society, and advocates the rediscovery of a pre-Christian goddess-centered understanding of the natural world as a strategy for reconnecting humanity with the environment

and women with their instinctive power to survive, create, and to sustain life on this planet. In Chapter Four, I look at the ways in which wanton environmental destruction, in Cowan's eyes, exists as more a spiritual crisis and a patriarchal sickness than just another economic/political problem. She explores, through Almira and the selkie-Sedna, a woman's power to revision culture, literature, and social/spiritual traditions as a method for resisting patriarchal hegemony and its destructive attitudes towards nature. This spiritual quest ultimately recovers, for Almira, her self worth as creator and potential mother within the embrace of a greater global politics of "mothering." An ecofeminist reading of these texts reveals how the feminist quest to control one's own body is problematized by the ways in which manipulation and exploitation (technologically, medically, socially, and psychologically etc.) of the female body have changed the dynamic of the issue of "choice," particularly given that women are falsely taught that their earthbodies are the enemy or the sole agency of women's success in corporate [North] America.

The final Chapter, Six, expands on the notion of evolving eco-poetical ideas in Canadian poetry by sampling emerging themes in nature poetics that affect the earth-body both in the killing of animals and in the use of their bodies—unnecessarily, we are told—as luxurious dining, status symbols etc. In this way, personal choices amalgamate with public well-being in a highly politicized issue of how degradation of the biotic community affects the individual spirit (dead animal corpses in our bodies) and all members of the biotic community, particularly those animals sacrificed for human luxury. As an emerging new

poetics of nature, I will explore differences between what many academics deem environmental ‘propaganda poetry’ and ecopoetry. These poems focus on the theme of animal trafficking for human consumption, the most common of which is eating meat but extends to medical and makeup experimentation on animals, and the wearing of animal furs and leathers. Most of the poems chosen for this chapter focus on the theme of eco-vegetarian (Strecker, Jaffe, Bluger, Shreve, Forsythe, Ford, Mouré) but extend, briefly, to the theme of hunting and male ecological guilt (O’Neill). Literary merit was not the sole criteria for my selection; so, many of these poems, particularly the ones I have labeled “propaganda poems” oftentimes read more political than poetic. This chapter includes both male and female poets, all writing consciously from an ecological perspective, within an ecofeminist ideological framework.

As an introduction to applied ecocriticism in contemporary Canadian literature, I have chosen a variety of texts, authors, and genres to illustrate the pervasiveness of a concerned ecological consciousness held generally within the collective Canadian literary imagination. Because of the nature of this project, I found it necessary to begin with established Canadian authors such as Atwood, Engel, and Cook in order to establish a decades-old emergence of a new kind of challenge to the relationship Canadians have with nature and how the linguistic and literary construction of that relationship is evolving within mainstream Canadian literary imagination and marketplace. Recognizably, Part Two examines lesser known writers; though many—MacEwen, Szumigalski, Connelly, and Mouré—as recipients of the Governor General Award, are viewed, in the very

least, as having a permanent place in Canadian literary history. As previously stated, literary merit was not my primary concern for this selection; I sought to demonstrate some of the major components of (proto)ecological literature as I feel they are emerging in Canadian literature and criticism. In my own decade-long search, I was fortunate to find exceptionally fine writers whose skill and subject matter will meet, in my opinion, with many future accolades in literary and ecologically minded literary circles. My intention was never to survey (as Relke and Bentley have attempted) the historical development of Canadian attitudes towards nature and how they have evolved in a reflecting literary milieu. This study of ecological writing and literary ecocriticism provides, instead, a critical analysis of an emerging genre in Canadian literature, unique in many ways to Canada. This new critical perspective affords the opportunity to explore how these texts, and many others, may be brought into critical fruition through a new way of communicating human-nature relations. In this way, the ecological writer-optimists hope to forge new awareness (some not yet imagined) that may assist in changing damaging ideologies, so obviously constructed for human physical, emotional, or psychological consumption.

Ecocritics slowly emerging in Canadian letters (namely Bentley, Roth, Relke, and McGregor) take an ecologically oriented approach to studying the human-nature relationship in Canadian literature but fall short, with the exception of Relke, of incorporating ecological philosophies, criticism and a consequent critical vocabulary necessary for the continued academic study of ecological writings. My goal in this study is to define some of the fundamental principles in

ecological philosophies (Introduction) and show how they contribute to a growing critical perspective—ecocriticism—that recognizes an important connection between the personal and the political, the aesthetic and the critical (Sections One and Two). By surveying the emergence of an ecological literary movement in Canada, I have attempted to show how the development of such an approach to the human-nature dynamic can be fostered, furthered, and read, through this informed critical perspective.

In this way, ecological writers may be recognized for their literary and cultural contributions while academics and critics may learn to identify and discuss changing social, cultural, and scientific attitudes concerning a psychological connection to geographical space taken within any number of biotic communities. While I have limited my focus of ecocritical discussion to Canadian literature published after *Silent Spring* (1962), other ecocritics apply these theories to earlier nature writing, urban narratives, postcolonial/indigenous literatures, and writing of the body and the planets in a technological age (i.e. science fiction), to name a few. Ultimately, this study hopes to show how the political and the personal meet in ecopoetry and ecopoetics that seek ideological and cultural changes (both subtly and overtly), which, on a practical level, marry theory with practice against mass global (but particularly Western influenced) ecocidal actions, attitudes, and hegemony.

SECTION ONE

Moving beyond nature-as-enemy: Pioneering Canadian proto-ecological literature

“I have long been impressed in Canadian poetry by a tone of deep terror in regard to nature [...] It is not a terror of the dangers of discomforts or even the mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest. The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values” (225).

Northrop Frye *The Bush Garden*

“We are not/ a simple people and we fear/ the same simplicities we crave. /No one wants to be a terminal/ Canadian or existentialist or child, dumbly/ moved because the clouds are bruises,/ crowskin coats through which invisible/ bits of rainbow nearly break. //The clouds look inward, thinking of a way/ to put this. Possibly/ dying will be such a pause:/ the cadence where we meet a bird or animal/ to lead us, somehow,/ out of language and intelligence” (60).

Don McKay *Night Field*

As if to answer Atwood’s original question in *Survival*, concerning women’s reaction to a masculine-encoded notion of the Canadian North as “a sort of icy and savage *femme fatale* who will drive you crazy and claim you for her own” (*Survival* 89), Canadian women writers have begun to embrace ecopoetics as a way of excising their essentially masculine-encoded link to nature-as-landscape (through which nature and women become falsely static) *and* revising a connection to the environment from within women’s experience. By challenging what Kolodny refers to as the pastoral impulse—a yearning to know the new world environment as feminine—women writers fundamentally explore selfhood, femininity and the woman-nature bond by deconstructing their stereotypical associations within their perceived place in nature as either the fecund garden or the disgruntled and vengeful Windigo. In defiance of

masculinist nature mythologies that inextricably link women with wilderness as “features in that landscape” (Relke 50), Canadian female poets “whose pursuit of the theme of reconciliation of the culture-nature conflict” still, nonetheless, face “considerable critical bewilderment, even hostility” (32). By foregrounding women’s gender, race and sexuality within writings that explore the woman-nature dynamic, authors chosen for this section challenge falsely constructed perceptions of women (from a feminist perspective) and the environment (from an ecofeminist perspective).

The emergence of a new environmental consciousness, as it is progressively reflected in Canadian literature, reveals a “refut[ation of] Frye’s terrifying view of nature as “other” [... which is] irreconcilably opposed to human consciousness” (Relke *Green* 25). Canadian ecocritic Diane Relke, whose recently published text, *Greenwor(l)ds* (1999) marks the book-length beginnings of theoretical recognition of ecofeminism in Canada, views this particularly new area of interest in Canadian literature as almost exclusively addressed by Canadian women since their work “remain[s] on the peripheries of Canadian myth criticism or [is] subjected to the imposition of this dualistic way of knowing nature” (25). Through her effort to establish feminist ecocriticism as a valid approach to Canadian literature, Relke despairingly expresses what she claims is a lack of published women’s nature writing in prose; the exception is Helen Buss’s recovery of pioneer autobiographers and their settlement journals. Citing literary critic and editor of the first anthology of Canadian nature writing, *Living in Harmony: Nature Writing by Women in Canada* (1996), Andrea Lebowitz, Relke

adds that the myth of the garrison has “obscur[ed] a ‘second story’ about nature—the one told by the women who find that “the natural world offers an alternative way of being human through harmony with the land”” (126). This neglected aspect of Canadian history and literary publications is, however, not strictly divided along gender lines; Lebowitz connects “the story of the garrison” with a masculinist agenda, but argues for a division between the favoured man-versus-nature narratives and the male nature writers who do not share this view. Ultimately, however, Relke and Lebowitz agree—on what is essentially, a lost Canadian nature writing tradition—men and women exhibit very different perspectives. Thus, it is important, Relke reminds us, to:

[...] explor[e] the alternative myths of nature evident in the poetry of women, myths that acknowledge a two-way relationship between text and context, myths informed by self-reflexivity and a sensitivity to the feminine. These alternative myths constitute an epistemology of knowledge which operates as a corrective not only to the hierarchical and oppositional model of nature identified by Frye but also to the view of poetry as detached from its “physical, emotional, and moral contexts. (26)

Like Relke, I have selected mostly women writers for my ecocritical study, though I commit less strongly to the pursuit of nature-identification as fundamentally feminine. While Relke does not entirely omit male writers from her text, her focus within *Greenwor[l]ds* clearly does not make room for them. I have included male writers, even if only in a limited manner, to reduce the risk of

alienating men from an emerging ecofeminist and ecocritical study within Canadian writings and its application to Canadian literature. Since elitism and ostracism run counter to the basic principles of ecofeminist thought, the inclusion of ecological literature written by men avoids such labels which can preclude multifarious perspectives, particularly those simpatico with ecofeminist ideologies. My own research has revealed essential differences in ecological literature written by Canadian men who speak less about identification and more about ecological guilt; though their tentative entry into restoring nature-human conflict is genuine, direct identification with nature—which women writers abundantly articulate—necessarily becomes hypocritical to both the writer and the critic.

Relke's selection of female poets ranges from early Canadian writings (such as Isabella Valancy Crawford) to the writings of First Nations authors—none of which, with the exception of Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, overlaps with my particular choices for ecocritical study. In this way, Relke's inaugural ecofeminist text reads like a survey of possible ecofeminist literature within the entire Canadian tradition. Because I have chosen authors writing after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and the resulting fruition of environmental concern to the populace, my study aims at literature directly influenced by this change in consciousness. For this reason, I have not limited my study to poetry, as is the focus in both Relke's *Greenwor(l)ds* (1999), and D. M. R. Bentley's *The Gay]Grey Moose* (1992); nor have I concentrated on one author as a harbinger of ecological merit as Roth tends to in *Wilderness and the Natural*

Environment: Margaret Atwood's Recycling of a Canadian Theme (1998).

Instead, I have included fiction and drama to show the scope of the emergence of such a newly forming critical perspective within Canadian literary studies. Unlike Relke, Roth, and Bentley, who attempt to forge readings of Canadian literature from an environmental perspective, I have extensively researched the study of ecofeminism, ecocriticism, and theories of deep ecology from outside a Canadian focus to clearly define emerging criticism and terminology as a basis for future readings in Canadian ecocriticism and of ecological literature. My study uniquely embraces ecofeminist theories within the umbrella of ecocritical studies, largely developed and developing in the U.S.A. Thus, the human-nature dynamic becomes, largely, the focus of my study and not exclusively how women connect with new nature metaphors.

In this first section, Margaret Atwood and Michael Cook attempt to create a harmony or desire for harmony between civilization and nature without reducing nature to bystander, enemy, or victim status. Thus, the authors of the first two chapters show a collapsing of the kind of “violent duality,” that “dangerous obsession” within the Canadian psyche, which sets humanity against members of a wilderness community. As proponents of necessary political, psychological, intellectual and spiritual change, both Atwood and Cook bravely pioneer unique contributions to Canadian ecological literature; in so doing, these writers establish a break from traditional Frygian notions of the wilderness as psychological enemy, manifest in Canadian literary mythology. Instead, their writings strive for a reconciliation of the human-nature conflict, practically and ideologically.

In an interesting feminist variation of this nature-human dichotomy, Marian Engel's female protagonist in *Bear* enters—in ignorance—a wilderness as “green world” through which nature-as-enemy is replaced by nature-as-lover. Though Atwood and Engel attempt feminist shifts in the human-nature literary paradigm (Engel more radically so), an ecofeminist reading ultimately exposes *Bear* and *Surfacing* as texts that fall short of recognizing “revisionist mythmaking” (Murphy) or “the post-pastoral” (Gifford) or the ecological novel. In these pseudo- (eco)feminist novels (“eco” is bracketed throughout to demarcate literature that employs aspects of ecofeminist tenets but does not fully comply with the characteristics of ecofeminist literature) wilderness may be a place of learning but the relationship between humanity and “animality” is simply a temporary escape from the inevitable “civil” human-centred society. These texts rightly assert that the wilderness is a place of atonement through escape from the complications of a highly politicized and power-oriented society. However, by discarding the wilderness, once the human psyche has achieved its desired harmony, Atwood and Engel fail to acknowledge a mandatory tenet of ecofeminist ideology: members of a biotic community—urban or rural—must strive to integrate culture and civilization with wilderness.

From an ecofeminist perspective, Engel's *Bear* explores the pastoral impulse—essential to Atwood's central notion of patriarchal control in defining women and wilderness developed in Chapter One—as a radically altered idea taken from a feminine perspective on desire, security and selfhood. For ecofeminists, there can be no theoretical binary opposition between wilderness

and civilization that falsely establishes an unhealthy segregation of the human-animal from non-urban communities and from urban-dwelling nature. As a survey of the origins of ecological writing in Canadian literature post 1960, Section One concentrates on protoecological literature written in an early period of emerging cultural ecological awareness and theories of practice. Texts chosen for this section are taken largely from well-known, established, canonical Canadian authors to establish a kind of grounding for my examination of lesser-known writers of ecopoetry, and ecological drama explored in Section Two. These writers report, with surprising and unique perspectives on nature, bringing into fruition necessary changes in the human-nature dynamic, not yet wholly conceived of in popular consciousness.

Ecodrama and the wilderness hero

Given the historical and cultural difficulties Canadians have had in their dealings with the wilderness, one may question how compassion towards nature, respected in its difference, could ever evolve into emerging genres such as ecopoetry, the ecological novel, creative non-fictional nature-writing, and ecodrama. Northrop Frye reminds us that despite not finding “Arcadia,” Canadians live “in a land where empty space and the pervasiveness of physical nature have impressed a pastoral quality on [...writers’] minds” (*Bush* 247); after all, Frye sites as evidence to his theory, “everything that is central in Canadian writing seems to be marked by the imminence of the natural world” (247). If, as he and many other Canadian critics and artists have suggested, nature speaks to the poetic and spiritual consciousness, then finding the capacity to revisit wrongly

constructed notions of human-nature relationships wherein a poet is more likely to “take one horrified look at the country and [flee]” (*Reflections* 50) is challenging. This continuing trend in Canadian literature— wherein the harmony among god(s), nature and society remains unstable— problematizes traditional notions of literary tragedy from the outset. Ultimately moving Canadians—politically, emotionally, or spiritually—through unromanticized poetics that put a more positive and yet, realistic ‘slant’ on “this faceless mask of unconsciousness not all glacier and iceberg and hurricane” (35) becomes one of the ecological writer’s many challenges. In a literature that necessarily reflects “equality in difference,” interpretations of nature as a god-like entity (vengeful, loving or indifferent) must cease in order to foster positive changes in the human-nature dynamic; likewise, and most obviously in this ecofeminist formulation, hu/mankind can no longer claim superiority over nature.

Fundamentally, human arrogance disintegrates that ancient social order which allows for the participation of god(s), nature and human civilization in a harmonious biosphere; ecological drama (as it unfolds in Cook’s plays) predicts the fall of Western civilization (once considered a social-spiritual-physical harmony) through its unwillingness to change. In this way, ecodrama challenges its readers’ expectations with newly constructed ideologies, theories, and connections that alter, subtly and massively, formulaic anticipations. This emerging literature is thus post-tragic in the way it exposes ‘civilization’ as failed, ironically, for 1) worshipping the golden calf of industrial, technological, intellectual, and scientific progress, in a world wherein “god is dead” and 2)

obliterating its own biosphere in the process. Thus, civilizing tendencies become problematic when creatures of comfort essentially make their home front toxic.

Strengthened through the power of a centuries-old genre tradition in tragedy, ecodrama that is post-tragic attempts a placement of nature on a level playing field with humankind, making it equivalent within its divergences and imminently grounded within a physical reality. Strategically, this alteration of audience-expectations may solicit stronger sympathies from Canadians willing to explore their affinity for wild animals and the wilderness homestead, which, Canadian critics Frye, Jones, and Atwood concur, is paradoxically held together in the general Canadian psyche as a kind of “violent duality.” Defined by Frye as a “second phase of Canadian social development,” authors begin to reflect an emerging post-pastoral (Gifford) notion of nature that is “still full of awfulness and mystery,” but contains the conventional “idyllic half of the myth” (*Bush* 245). In this way, nature-as-spiritual-force, which humankind has clearly violated, expands the conflict between man and nature into “a triangular conflict of nature, society and individual [...wherein] the individual tends to ally himself with nature against society” (245). Through this very tension in the nature-human dynamic, in which the individual battles the notion of nature-as-enemy within a paradoxically obvious identification with animals, a cultural ecological and moral dilemma results. After all, as Atwood asserts (quoting Ernest Thompson Seton), “we and the beasts are kin” (*Survival* 75).

(Eco)engenderfication of landscape: objectification versus identification

The range of animal use and exploitation in the literature chosen for this section includes senseless and scientific torture of wild and caged animals (Atwood's *Surfacing*); sexual exploitation and colonization of a wild animal for human pleasure (Engel's *Bear*); and the surreal misunderstanding of seals and cod-as-enemy (Cook's *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* and *Jacob's Wake*). In a continuation of the nature-as-enemy theme, Cook's illustration of the importance of the hunt to mankind's primal instincts shows an enormous mistrust for animals and the wild kingdom. As a popular (mis)conception (see Zeiss' *Woman the Hunter*) of primitive "man," the hunter-gatherer theory divides along gender lines, the duties of woman-creation/nurturer and man-death/hunter. Given that women hunt, kill, and maim while men nurture in a contemporary Western society, it seems right to question the validity of this masculinist and exclusionary theory. Ultimately, on many levels, authors in this section show us relationships between humanity and nature that are morally and intellectually bankrupt.

In *Bear* the relationship—though intimate—is limited to a physical nature, as Lou is temporarily exposed to a surreal pseudo-wilderness community where animals (or animal) can enter into one's life as a means to an epiphanic self-knowing end. And though Lou uses the bear for a self-interested quest, the bear ultimately remains physically unharmed regardless of possible psychological overtones. Cook's dramas are not entirely misanthropic, but strive to illuminate the corruption that exists within human greed, intellectual indolence, and suppressive mastery. In Cook's plays, the sea-man whose use of wild animals is equated with destruction, and trophies of a death-oriented hunt, does not

experience epiphany through a biocentric understanding of depleted fish stocks; instead, he reinforces the constructed division between mankind and the wilderness. It is the primal urge of the hunt, like Lou's primal urge to reproduce, which justifies acts of killing and sexual exploitation. Tragically, Cook's sea-men perform empty rituals reflective of the loss of life's meaning, when the men's blind obedience to the rituals cause them to ignore, be deaf to, or become accustomed to the necessity of death (as in the killing of fish for sustenance) or the offering of the drowned boy to the sea in exchange for some of their own young (cod fish). Ultimately, as Canadian drama critic Robert Wallace attests, "figures such as Skipper Pete and the Skipper who are either not willing or not capable of adapting find they achieve 'order for the sake of [their] own humanity'" (Wallace, *Work* 27). Thus, this mutual exchange of bodies seems perhaps fairer than Lou's sexual exploitation of Bear in *Bear*, though remarkably, rape and sexual exchange still seem more acceptable than murder and human sacrifice.

By examining Cook's *Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* and *Jacob's Wake*; Atwood's "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and *Surfacing*; and Marian Engel's *Bear* through ecofeminism, one must necessarily question the link between patriarchal strictures that link woman to nature where both are understood as "the enemy." It is that same logic that destroys the environment seen simply as a disobedient "other." Authors chosen for this section bridge that evolutionary gap in Canadian literature between a historical pioneering attitude, which pits mankind against nature, and an emerging

ecopoetic that aims to create new forms and new visions through which our relationship within the biotic community may be renewed by women and men, for all members, speaking and silent.

Chapter One

Be(at)ing around the bush: Exploring a “violent duality” in Atwood’s poetics

Women are devalued by virtue of their perceived association with nature rather than vice versa or for some other independent reason.

Deborah Slicer (“Wrongs” 31)

Explorer, you tell yourself this is not what you came for
Although it is good here, and green;
You had meant to move with a kind of largeness,
You had planned a heavy grace, an anguished dream.

But the dark pines of your mind dip deeper
And you are sinking, sinking, sleeper
In an elementary world;
There is something down there and you want it told.

Gwendolyn MacEwen, from “Dark Pines Under Water”

Early Canadian literary criticism focuses its attentions on the “heroic explorers” of Canadian letters as men who have “identified the habits and attitudes of the country, as Fraser and Mackenzie have identified its rivers” (Hutcheon, *ECW* 151). The “literary cartography,” Linda Hutcheon points out, tends to valorize this colonizing act as a “science.” Within a masculine-encoded literary tradition, where “women are presented as [geographical] features in that landscape” (Relke *Green* 50), women writers (re)defining the “otherness” of wilderness likewise connect literary landscapes to selfhood. Feminists re-appropriating literary cartography as a spiritual and physical journey into uncharted feminine territory resist the continuing patriarchal colonizing of the feminine. If, as Atwood suggests in *Survival*, we consider “Canada [as] a state of mind [...] that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost” (18), then the ‘mapping’ of open and wild spaces—figuratively and literally—is fertile ground

for forging a new conception of the [eco]feminine (Thompson 48). Exploring a uniquely feminine approach to wilderness runs counter to the traditional understanding, as F. P. Grove describes it, of the “pioneering world [... as] a man’s world” where “woman is the slave” (8).

From an ecofeminist perspective, early women writers who validate aspects of the feminine that denounce the all-too-prevalent understanding of pioneering as a process of “civilizing” approach the pioneer experience as a negotiation, as a working out of the tension between resisting the lessons of nature (particularly in Susanna Moodie’s writing) and embracing them (such as critics argue that Susanna Moodie’s sister, Catharine Parr Traill, did by embracing the adaptation process). Relke explains that since:

[...]Canadian poetry by women tended overwhelmingly to refute Frye’s terrifying view of nature as “other” and irreconcilably opposed to human consciousness; hence the work of women poets either remained on the peripheries of Canadian myth criticism or was subjected to the imposition of this dualistic way of knowing nature.

(Green 25)

Unfortunately for Susanna Moodie, though her pioneer experience becomes less about conquest than about personal liberation, she too awkwardly hangs onto a European ideology that forces her to face a “violent duality” within herself; she strives towards a personal interpretation of the healing wilderness and its ability to destroy with indifference. Thus, it is through Atwood’s late twentieth century poetic revisioning of Susanna Moodie’s interaction with the Canadian wilderness

that bush-madness can be investigated from a female perspective; that is, by establishing a connection between women and the environment, both as ‘others,’ Atwood proceeds to both expose and challenge masculine-encoded ecological and sexist hegemony and offer imaginative possibilities for change. To avoid confusion, I have named Atwood’s character, Moodie, and Moodie’s self-character in *Roughing it in the Bush*, Susanna; when discussing Moodie as a historical figure, I refer to her as Susanna Moodie.

From an ecofeminist perspective, the critical retracing of Atwood’s poetics, in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,” reveals how early ecopoetics speak to members of a postmodern political climate, open to ideological changes. Through what is commonly interpreted, and by Atwood’s own admission, as a feminist examination of exploitive patriarchal practices and ideologies, Atwood’s poetry dispels the myths of the logic of masculinist hegemonies that contaminate positive possibilities contained within the emancipation of gender, racial, species, aesthetic, and cultural differences when they are no longer associated with an inferior and denigrated ‘other.’ Atwood considers the practical application of abolishing oppressive attitudes and practices before the unbalanced rulings of patriarchal power strictures permanently destroy a better, more shared, quality of life. From feminist and post-colonial perspectives, Atwood explores how the obliteration of cultural, racial, and gender distinctions discounts both similarities and differences of the ‘other’ forced to conform to a homogeneous European male standard. An ecofeminist reading of these same texts necessarily explores an identification

between women and nature, largely neglected to date by Canadian literary critics (with the exception of Ricou, Lebowitz, Pratt, Roth, and Relke). Likely Canadian critics have resisted this approach to Atwood since it indulges a historically essentialized woman-nature position, scrutinized since the beginnings of popularized feminism. Furthermore, a lack of ecocritical perspective and vocabulary—until their emergence in the late twentieth century—has made such an academic critique virtually impossible.

As a launching point for ecofeminist discussion in Canadian literature, Atwood's poetics—namely *Journals* and “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer”—confront masculinist ideological and cultural aggression towards women, nature and ‘other’ thus creating the theoretical possibility for biospheric unity which fights against “dilemmas common to masculine identity formation” (Wright 325). Feminist, ecofeminist, post-colonial and feminist psychoanalytical theories all identify racist and speciesist hegemonies that “affect both the content of and the methods favoured by male-dominated philosophy, literature and cultural ideologies” (325). I will employ a variety of these critical theories since I strongly believe that the evolution of feminist studies, particularly amongst feminist scholars, continues to respect multifarious perspectives, and a corresponding vocabulary developed primarily to clarify newly emerging perspectives.

Canadian cultural and literary theorists agree that nature betrayed the New World expectation of the idyllic pastoral (see my Introduction), thus creating tension in a potential Canada between the “world you’re living in and the world

you want to live in—a human world” (Frye, *Educated* 4). It is no surprise then, that the male explorer or settler internalized the Canadian landscape as one that is “often dead and unanswering or actively hostile to man; or seen in its gentler spring and summer aspects, unreal” (Atwood, *Survival* 49). Immigrants who ‘settled’ the Canadian bush were forced to “confront both the beauty and the terror of a world in which violence and love co-exist” (Marshall 23). Kolodny theorizes, and Atwood concurs, that pioneers entered a world of untruths, of mystery in a complexity of possibility too large, too foreign, and too vast for the regulated European mindset, and too overwhelming for conventional paradigms that privilege a masculine-defined human perspective. The result—at least in Canada where the myth of the idyllic was not, apparently, strong enough to combat wilderness horrors and the threat against survival—was an insistent need to control, tame or destroy the unidentified ‘other,’ and oftentimes, a corresponding ‘bush-madness’ associated with being overwhelmed by the incredibly unpopulated and immense Canadian space.

“Bush” in present-day usage of the term ranges anywhere from “a wooded area” to a derogatory term referring to something substandard or inadequate, to the slang word for female genitalia. To be “bushed” is traditionally defined as an Australian colloquialism meaning “lost,” “confused,” “bewildered” or “tired out”—all of which read as euphemistic versions of the more extreme Canadian rendition. *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* recognizes this distinction by defining “bushed” as “Canadian informal (of a person) a) living in the bush; b) crazy, insane (due to isolation)” (Barber 190). Through such Canadian literary

theorists as Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood and poets such as Earle Birney (“Bushed”), Gwendolyn MacEwen (“Dark Pines Under Water”), Douglas LePan (“A Country without a Mythology” and “Coureurs de Bois”), Charles Lillard (“Bushed”), and Barry McKinnon (“Bushed”) who have interpreted this phenomenon in their work, we come to understand getting “bushed,” in a Canadian context, as a more serious condition than being “tired out.” In Frye’s own musings, to be Canadian is not to ask “who am I” but “where is here?” To be bushed is to discover that the reality of ‘here,’ outside of imaginative and archetypal musings, is recognizing the relationship Canadians necessarily have, positive or negative, within a biosphere of wilderness, historically perceived as speaking “a foreign language” (Atwood, *JSM* 11). From an ecofeminist perspective, being “bushed”—a psychological phenomenon largely associated with the masculine psyche—is politically incorrect: it is a slang term, which connects women’s sexuality with nature’s hostility. While “being bushed” derogatorily names the wilderness as a place that will drive men mad, the term “bush” like the “beaver” (whose pelts are likewise traded as commodity) labels female sexual genitalia as a place of dangerous and unknown psychological mystery. This common perception of the wilderness, named in conjunction with female sexuality as a place capable of destroying one’s mind, leaves ecofeminist critics and Canadian women writers with an interesting Canadian conundrum.

Atwood’s poem, “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,” like *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, examines this Canadian phenomenon as a starting point for masculinized Canadian cultural heritage. Published in 1968, and as ecocritic

Diane Relke reminds us, “long before feminist analysis had properly got round to the question of the relationship between women and nature and ecology” (“Double” 45), this poem has attracted many critical interpretations which now seem out-dated and oftentimes mistaken. In paying homage to Canadian “nature” writers, many critics have lumped Atwood’s postcolonial poetics mistakenly with colonial male poets such as Earle Birney, E. J. Pratt, and F. R. Scott. Critic Sandra Djwa simplistically deems “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer” “a contemporary version of Birney’s “Bushed” (29), in what might have been read more fully as a contemporary feminist poem that examines the Canadian “bushing” phenomenon as Earle Birney visits it in “Bushed.” While one may argue that Atwood’s poetics further perpetuate a Canadian literary obsession with nature, hers clearly run counter to Darwinian ethics, which focus on mankind and *his* fight to survive. Colin Nicholson explains:

[...] a pervasive Gothic element in Atwood’s verse thematises both the discursive pressures of British literary antecedent upon post-colonial self-definition, and a Canadian attitude of ‘deep terror in regard to nature’ noticed by Northrop Frye. (31)

While both serve to negotiate “a consciousness shaped by an experience of the land” (Grace, *City* 193) from a masculinist perspective, Atwood’s interrogation of the “bushing” phenomenon radically differs from Birney’s not inasmuch as it is “updated” (it concerns a pioneer, while Birney’s poem focuses on a more contemporary figure) but that it calls into question the “static model of dichotomies that fosters and relies upon hierarchical power structures” (Grace

LTS 8). Djwa argues that “unlike Birney, Atwood articulates the moral” (32), but fails to recognize that Birney’s “Bushed”—upon close ecocritical reading—challenges the ethics of a perceived wilderness idea that is predisposed to a masculine-encoded concept of nature-as-enemy.

As a place divided along gender lines—where men often go mad and women find liberation—Atwood’s mythological wilderness becomes, for feminists, a ‘safe’ place for challenging masculinist ideology and culture in its “capacity to resist the destructive ordering of a masculine identity” (Nicholson 16). Critic Frank Davey observes Atwood’s “sense of male and female space” as “the most pervasive element” in her work. He explains:

Male space is not merely inherited [...] but [...] is mathematical [...]
Female space is its Other [...] Male space is substantial, ostensibly
unchanging; female space is unsubstantial [*sic*] anonymous, subject to
time, and often expressed as organic matter. (17)

Furthermore, Davey argues, “ultimately, female space—space that exists in time—prevails” (23). He believes, “purely spatial aesthetics, the humanist ordering of space, and the patriarchal myth of the hero who conquers disorder are also discredited” (23). Thus, at the heart of Atwood’s poetics is “a world of feminine alterity [that] discomposes the male attempt to lay static systems over it” (Nicholson 21). These earlier interpretations of *Journals* saw the author’s attempt to place Moodie as a fellow-colonizer and not, as an ecofeminist reading of the text suggests, a sister-settler. Relke argues that “Atwood could hardly be clearer

about the insanity at the heart of Western Epistemology and, by extension, Frye's masculine myth of nature" (*Green* 44).

As a point of departure for contemporary environmental consciousness in Canadian literature, Relke and I both—independently and simultaneously—chose Atwood's poetics for her obvious connections between women and nature, particularly in *Journals* wherein both the pioneer wilderness woman and the urbanite exist. While Relke and I both take an ecofeminist approach to reading Atwood, Relke centres more on a feminist agenda in exploring the human-nature (largely, woman-nature) connection, while my strategy deviates from hers in the ways it attempts to harmonize the nature-woman potential. In this way, for Relke, Atwood's text(s) become a model for proto-ecological literature, while my critique considers how they fall short of expected criterion for a committed ecological poetic. Relke criticizes Davey's suggestion in *From Here to There* that *Journals* is "just another nationalist poem" simply because "[Moodie] cannot help trying to impose some order on the green chaos she senses around her" ("Double" 35-36, *Green* 46). Relke rightly argues for a sharp fundamental contrast in Atwood's poetic perspective on bush-madness between a male antagonist in "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer" and a female protagonist in *Journals*. The male pioneer strives to impose order, while Moodie "[tries] to come to terms with the landscape and thus with herself" ("Double" 39, *Green* 46). Critic Sherrill Grace explains:

By casting himself as the 'square man in a round whole' in the belief that he must impose his reason, order, culture, in the form of straight

lines, upon an utterly separate, disordered, irrational force known as Nature, the pioneer causes havoc in one of two ways: if he wins the battle with nature, he will destroy something essentially human which he has also denied; if he loses the battle, he will be overwhelmed by a world he has not understood and will be driven insane. (*LTS* 9)

Coral Ann Howells likewise asserts, “the only way the [male] speaker could actually get into the landscape was by dying” (i.e. the protagonist’s father in *Surfacing*) (*Margaret* 30).

Relke argues that Atwood happily essentialises nature and women, as culturally divided from masculine-encoded civilization, in a way that “updates” the pioneer experience read conventionally as male. Because of the long-standing relationship women have shared biologically and culturally through their associations (good, bad, and indifferent) with nature, which, in opposition to men makes women’s identification with nature stronger, Relke argues that “it is hardly surprising [...] that in a poem which presents a woman as the central figure, landscape is not ‘other’ but ‘self’” (“Double” 39). Relke astutely observes that Mr. Moodie is written out of *Journals* (40), further focusing the attention on Moodie’s own quest. Described as a “wereman,” Mr. Moodie “swerves, enters the forest/ and is blotted out” (Atwood, *JSM* 19) as though he is already a foreign amalgamation of wilderness terror through a gendered male essence. With the exception of Brian, men in general play only small two-dimensional roles in *Roughing It*, thus further suggesting an inherent feminist agenda in Moodie’s

writings, prior to Atwood's refiguring of her feminist imagination. Relke explains:

To Moodie, who "lives there—indeed, *is* the wilderness—it is very real. Men however, as she discovers in a sudden flash of recognition, "deny the ground they stand on" and thus deny here. Her husband and the other men live in a phallogocentric world of pretense and "illusion solid to them as a shovel" in that they refuse to "open their eyes even for a moment" to female presence in the world. ("Double" 40)

Where the male pioneer hero finds madness in the bush, and where women find liberation, women like Moodie who cannot fully escape patriarchal social strictures find themselves mad, not within the lack of apparent humanist ordering in the wilderness, but with the lack of fulfilling options for women. Relke argues that without the physical reminder of masculine rationality, without Mr. Moodie, "Susanna is left in the bush to make her greatest self-discoveries [but] in his absence she suddenly recognizes the extent to which she is imprisoned in the cage of male logic" (*Green* 52). Symbolically trapped within the confines of the homestead, her forest-walking husband, "an X, a concept/ defined against a blank" returns with the power to change her "with the fox eye, the owl/ eye, the eightfold/ eye of the spider" (Atwood, *JSM* 19). Significantly, Atwood links masculine power to night-hunting animals such as the cunning fox, the wise owl, and the eternal spider, all culturally connected—not surprisingly—to unnatural death: the fox is hunted in British sport; many species of the owl are extinct or near extinction; and the poisonous spider's small bite can be deadly to humans.

While his logic seems organized through myth and legend, her potential transmogrification has no model that makes sense to Moodie or to her husband. She explains: "I can't think/ what he will see/ when he opens the door" (19). Parts II and III of *Journals* take us through some of that Moodie-madness; yet Moodie does not, cannot reach any sort of wilderness epiphany until she leaves the woods, finding ultimate liberation of selfhood beyond masculine-defined roles of womanhood—in death. In the resurrection of her spirit, Moodie discovers: "god is not/ the voice in the whirlwind// god is the whirlwind// at the last judgment we will all be trees" (59).

Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer

By exploring the male pioneer need to impose a "garrison mentality" on to what is naturally wild, Atwood suggests that it is this mindset that has hindered the natural growth potential of the land, the wilderness, and the resources. It is, as Michael Cook strongly implies in his dramas, a blind and dangerous masculine power that is already in decline because of its failure to recognize and respect nature and the feminine "other." Her critique exposes the limitations of a close-minded and tight-fisted colonial attitude, largely responsible for a sense of dislocation and alienation from both nature and civilization common to early Canadian settlers. Thus, this "violent duality" ("Afterword" 62), this paradoxical feeling towards Canada's wilderness is typical of the pioneering experience but is, as Atwood stresses, an unfortunate cultural manifestation that "reflect[s] many of the obsessions still with us" (62).

In “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer” Atwood gives us an initial sense of the “violent duality,” that paradox of Canadian cultural identity, by creating a character that is both ego and androcentric in his attempt to define the natural environment. The action of the poem tangentially grounds this character to his surroundings as “he stood” (i.e. his ground) even though his control is necessarily one that he must insist on by “proclaiming himself the centre” of a shapeless, limitless space “with no walls, no borders/anywhere; the sky no height above him.” Yet, we find this figure painfully aware of his own limitations as he commands, “let me out,” itself a paradox in a space that has only mental confines. He is a figure filled with hope, a vision that appoints himself dictator in a land void of class hierarchies; yet, ironically, it is that same vision, contained within an old-world class system that he seeks to escape in the New World order. This pastoral impulse paradoxically shapes his dream of personal success in the New World while it simultaneously destroys his chances for satisfaction. And though he seems to stand strong (his imperative command sits on a line separate from the rest of the stanza), within the poetic construction, he is alone with his belief of superiority to a believed vindictive landscape.

Clearly, for him it is better to have a vengeful god represented in a hostile landscape than to live in a chaotic universe without meaning and predictability. Thus, when he implores: “let me out,” he is really pleading to be let in. Through his attempt to order his universe in stanzas ii - iii as he “dug the soil in rows, / imposed himself with shovels”—pitching a house and staking a plot, the poet-speaker builds his surroundings, hoping to assert “into the furrows, I / am not

random.” And though nature attempts to enter into dialogue with him, replying “with aphorism: // a tree-sprout, a nameless/ weed” they are “words/ he couldn’t understand.” He is “disgusted / with the swamp’s clamourings and the outbursts of rocks” (iv). Driven by what he has learned is his only means of survival, warring, he ignores the language of the land as he palimpsestically writes his own order onto the wilderness-enemy.

Atwood’s male pioneer-protagonist in “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer” shows a gradual descent into paranoia, at odds with what he perceives as a warring landscape, against which, he is losing his ground (pun intended). In part three he begins to perceive himself as the defeated one when “the fields / defend themselves with fences / in vain: / everything/ is getting in.” The epistrophe “in the middle of no where” further emphasizes his isolation while simultaneously connecting the physical world—the one in which he has dug, and pitched a house and shoveled—with the intellectual world as the “idea of an animal / patters across the roof.” Where he initially refuses to understand the environment in parts i and ii, here, his ability to understand is “at night the mind / inside,” and what was once an outward command, a shouting of “let me out” is internalized: “everything is getting in.”

Gradually, in the remaining sections of this poem, “he” simultaneously with his syntactical placement (he moves from subject to direct object, becoming “him”), falls, indicating a progressive loss of a battle of his own making; nature shows itself to be the only consistent force in the poem. Atwood’s inversion of the “absence of order” and “ordered absence” again plays with the paradox of

human desire to construct order on the seemingly chaotic. The opposing voices of nature in the poem reply that his exercise is futile since they have their own order, which remains 'absent' from human understanding. Atwood illustrates a masculine arrogance that essentially invokes an ecofeminist reaction against patriarchal hegemonies. Such a theoretical revelation exposes the hazardous nature of any system of power that neglects or degrades the opinions, ideas, and perspectives of those outside of the circle of control. In this case, Atwood's patriarchy destroys, physically and psychologically, both the environment and women when treated simply as property. Bushed, and reduced to wormness, this character continues to struggle against the wilderness-as-perceived-chaotic enemy. By not recognizing the celebration of natural cycles, he remains unchanged by the land, and predictably insane: he concludes, "things / refused to name themselves; refused/ to let him name them." Atwood's didactic voice, albeit from a twentieth-century eco-knowledgeable vantage point, stresses that these obsessions, still with us, must be readdressed if we are to have "the green / vision, the unnamed / whale" left.

Susanna Moodie and the Pastoral Impulse

In contrast to her male settler in "Progressive Insanities," Atwood's refiguring of the pioneer woman through *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* shows a connection to the land that is essentially (eco)feminine as she explores Moodie's link with the life/death cycles of the forest, the seasons, and the landscape. As such, Atwood attempts to disclose the pioneering woman's approach to the pastoral ideal through a feminist examination of "the pastoral impulse"

(Kolodny). I will attempt to explore how women's nature writing (herein explored by Moodie and Atwood), offers an alternative literary history and perspective of the nature-human dynamic to the commonly accepted garrison myth and how this alternate view of the nature-human dynamic is able to embrace biospheric harmony instead of a man-versus-nature dynamic. By first exploring the Canadian "violent duality" as a pastoral departure (in opposition to the pastoral imperative), I hope to unearth layers of environmental awareness contained within Atwood's diagesis and extradiagetic narrative(s). In making a case for women's unique perspective with regard to nature, I will endeavour to examine the complexities of how psychoanalytical, feminist and ecofeminist critiques of *Journals* interact.

Kolodny labels and defines as uniquely American, "the pastoral impulse" as a "yearning to know and to respond to the landscape as feminine" (175) which has been largely pursued, in Canada and the U.S.A., from a masculine perspective (see my Introduction for a discussion of differences in the masculine-encoded responses between American and Canadian writers). For women, this need to respond to the landscape as feminine, in a world that has transported and translated a strict social, psychological, economic, and emotional patriarchal code from its own "mother country," remains potentially more imprisoning, and paradoxically more liberating, than a restrictive social code of behaviour. Her link through patriarchal gender apartheid to the 'otherness' of literary landscapes and the mysterious cycles of the wilderness, grants the woman artist a unique

perspective necessary for illuminating discriminatory myths that degrade women and nature, making exploitation, oppression, and denigration seem “natural.”

In response to critics such as Kolodny and Frye, archetypal critic, Annis Pratt in “Affairs with Bears” questions whether there is an essential difference between men’s and women’s writing on nature. Though she openly admits—as a feminist critic—to hoping to find a particularly unique archetypal division along gender lines, ultimately, Pratt sees *archetypal* images between sexes, at least within a Canadian wilderness context, as similar. Pratt argues that the essential difference she initially suspected was the “otherness” that women feel having been:

[...] alienated as *women*, from *their own bodily nature*, because of society’s opprobrium for femininity [...] women internalize culture’s splitting up of sexuality from intellect, political power from feminine force, of virgin from mother crone. (“Affairs” 164)

Thus, Pratt suggests—like Kolodny who argues a unique perspective for Americans, resulting from an disjunction between the myth of the pastoral expectations in a natural setting, and the reality of living in the wilderness—that Canadians have a “tendency to leap from the cultural to the unconscious realm without as much respect for the former as Frye would have us believe typifies human beings in general” (164). In contrast to the American response to the pastoral impulse, however, is the typical inability of Canadians to mythologize the landscape in idyllic form. The result is a much discussed and theorized “violent duality” inherent in the Canadian consciousness.

The gender-difference in nature-writing is not a relational difference, according to Pratt, but a distinction based on the social distancing of woman from her own “bodily nature.” However, what Pratt fails to examine is how this difference changes women’s perspective with regards to nature. Specifically, early Canadian writing by women shows a literature born of out tradition, yes, but it also shows moments of archetypal connections to nature-myth. For example, Susanna Moodie occasionally identifies with the enduring cycles of nature that arguably connect her to feminine archetypes that are not easily simplified by the human mother/crone/virgin triage. Atwood extracts this tendency in Moodie’s original writings and revisions traditional feminine mythological archetypes by connecting a New World Moodie with ancient sacred Aboriginal associations with animal wisdom, manifest in Moodie’s desire for “wolf’s eyes.” From an ecofeminist standpoint, this movement towards the blending of female and animal forms suggests an ancient revival of iconoclastic metaphor, which once helped humanity interpret and survive a closely woven interaction between humankind and the wilderness. Through these feelings of otherness and alterity, the pioneer woman finds herself closely linked with a subconscious that taps into distant archetypes, and/or a mind that necessarily (re)invents symbols needed for her own sanity in the wilderness. Ironically, while working within a masculinist culture, (which historically attempts to destroy feminine-centred images of power) the women-nature link becomes a source of empowerment for (eco)feminist revisionists.

Woman's identification with the bush as an undefined, and clearly unqualified place of biological function and mystery manifests itself oftentimes in literature that posits it as a place of rebirth or escape from patriarchal strictures. In contrast to a masculine-encoded dissociation with wilderness, generally speaking, women's unique identification naturally problematizes exclusionary descriptions of the Canadian wilderness that deem it 'alien,' 'barren,' and/or 'vast,' where "even the mosquitoes have been described as 'mementos of the fall'" (Frye, *ConI* 75). By identifying with the bush in a counter-masculine way, the early Canadian woman—not unlike pioneering writers exploring new possibilities for literature and political and social change through an emerging ecopoetry—alienates herself from the only "civilization" she has ever known and enters into moments of courageous uncertainty. Though perhaps critically naive, or unfashionable to essentialize women (see my Introduction) with regards to an historical and often derogatory link between women and nature, revisiting the possibility of an early ecologically sound link to the Canadian wilderness through literature becomes itself essential for devising practical measures of sustainability.

Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* is a feminist refiguring of the pioneer experience—so important to Canadian cultural heritage because of the focus it gives to an historically squelched perspective. Coming to Canada with her own male-conditioned European ideology, Moodie is initially threatened by the Canadian landscape; she is "a word in a foreign language" (*Journals* 11). Nonetheless, Moodie journeys towards a self-discovery that uncovers identification with the landscape that guides her towards personal liberation.

Earlier critics of *Journals*, without the linguistic and conceptual tools of ecocritical theory, are understandably quick to explore it from a psychoanalytical perspective (at Atwood's suggestion in *Journal's* "Afterword" which was omitted in future printings) and thus match it to a dualistic and reductive understanding of the quest for selfhood. When *Journals* is read as a quest for identity, Atwood's Moodie "is a split person containing both a conscious self and an unconscious self" (Simmons 140).

From an ecofeminist perspective, the problematic assertion of selfhood reduced to a binary opposition is consistent with an underlying philosophy of degradation. That is, when a theoretical image of the self as the amalgamation of two opposites is created, the range of possibility between black and white, man and woman, good and evil becomes limited, if not impossible. Furthermore, particularly in the Canadian cultural mindset, "the guilty greys" result from pathological pastoral impulse that desires to see the landscape as feminine, nurturing and idyllic but which cannot reconcile itself with a radically opposing actuality of a harsh environment that threatens survival. This radical swing to opposing interpretations of wilderness likewise problematizes a respectful human-nature dynamic as it anthropomorphically manifests a hostile wilderness equal in vengefulness as the pastoral is nurturing.

The pastoral impulse exists in ecofeminist terms, at the same ideological core of discriminatory practices that denigrate women, animals, nature, and minorities. Reading Atwood's poetry from a feminist perspective forces an interpretation which sets man against women, and wilderness against humanity,

while psychoanalytical investigations likewise presume an ideological “given” that “naturally” divides consciousness instead of either fragmenting it, or seeing it within a new complexity. Interpreting these kinds of arguments as reductive, ecofeminist philosophy insists that theories based in dualistic logic violate its fundamental tenets, which strive for harmony instead of balance, and multifarious factions within a unified identity rather than the construction of the self as a consciousness consisting of “two opposing selves.”

It is easy to see, when reading *Roughing It* and *Journals*, how one might interpret the “violent duality” Atwood speaks of, as “the obsession still with us” (“Afterword” 62). As a working out of an internal “*dichotomy* in Moodie between the sublime view of nature at a distance and the ‘disagreeable things in her immediate foreground, such as bugs, swamps, tree roots and other immigrants’” (my emphasis, Friedman 66), language mirrors this division between the aesthetically beautiful, the sublime (which is consistent with the pastoral ideal) and the physical and psychological ugliness not easily ignored and necessarily endured in the human-wilderness interaction. In essence, Atwood explores Moodie’s own pastoral impulse that is ultimately transformed by her inability to dismiss “the animals/ [who] arrived to inhabit [her]” (*JSM* 26) and as such, celebrates her feminine ability to adapt. Critic Susan Johnston describes the tension inherent in a colonial paradox by explaining that:

[...] the aesthetics of the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain [...] is] concerned with surface appearances; the object of the picturesque gaze is almost devoid

of value, of transcendence, of any power to inspire the passions, but is instead formed, literally and figuratively, by the human subject's ability to comprehend it as art. (Johnston 29, 32)

She argues that Moodie eventually comes to appreciate “the row of corn rather than the decorative watercolour” (30) since “real physical danger inhibits aesthetic appreciation” (30). For Johnston, Moodie's transcendence in practical terms appears to be an exercise in trust within her relationship with the environment; after all, “nature [initially] betrays expectation because it is not the daisy-covered fields of England, it does not reflect the natural order and human supremacy presuppose by British landscape paradigms” (49).

Yet, one might argue that Atwood's choice of the word “duality,” with which she has become strongly associated, is in fact misleading, and unfortunate since her treatment of nature supports an ecofeminist critique of the logic of dualisms. Ironically, however, her radically feminist poetics divide men and women in a culturally historic opposition— a necessarily decentring and recentring of cultural identity in order to find definition, voice and placement in a society otherwise deaf to minority perspective. It is Atwood's pursuit of the feminist fight for equality in difference that allows for recognition of a non-dualistic utopia or ecotopia in her works. By her own admission, her language (albeit limited by convention) forces readers to examine opposite ends of culture—split along gender lines—vacillating between one and the other. In the “Afterword” of *Journals* Atwood argues, conflicted, on this subject that “the

national mental illness of [...] Canada is paranoid schizophrenia” (62). She explains:

Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle: she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her; she dislikes the people already in Canada but finds in people her only refuge from the land itself; she preaches progress and the march of civilization while brooding elegiacally upon the destruction of the wilderness. (62)

According to critic Diana Brydon, Canadians, women, and those who are ‘othered’ are “torn between alternative interpolations” yet simultaneously “exist only in process” (Brydon 51). Brydon confirms this confusion among critics who have wavered on their interpretations of Atwood’s explorations of the logic of dualisms when she cites Sherrill Grace as one who initially (in *Violent Dualities*) “shows the Hegalian pattern structuring Atwood’s work” but “later revises her focus to argue that “from the beginning of her career, Atwood has tried to find a third way, a non-Cartesian way, to think of and structure images of personal and social life” (51).

Relke argues that Atwood’s interpretation of *Journals* in its “Afterword” is a “somewhat reductive interpretation of all the varieties of doubleness that inform the poem” (46 *Green*). Patriarchal conventions posit such a split in Moodie’s moods—as a writer and woman—simply because of her feminine-gendered social placement as inferior to mankind. Because she identifies with landscape as other, thus seeing herself in wilderness, Atwood’s Moodie accomplishes what Susanna could not, given discriminatory practices against women during the nineteenth

century; by finding herself ultimately in nature, thus shedding the restrictive confines of a male-determined society, both Moodie and Atwood—subject and poet—“become fully integrated and Atwood restores formal structure to the work by making it circular” (49). In so-doing, Relke argues, Atwood undermines the very “double vision” she speaks of by embracing the cyclical over the dichotomous, when her omniscient spirit remains earth-bound and not heaven-sent.

Critic Sherrill Grace’s later work finds Atwood revealed as a feminist writer against the logic of dualisms in a masculine-encoded system, as one who recognizes the “violent dualities” of a colonial patriarchy but who does not celebrate that particular obsession as a healthy one. Grace quotes an over-generalizing Atwood who says, “unlike the empirical British and analytic American, the Canadian ‘habit of mind [...] is synthetic’ and likely to produce ‘all-embracing systems’” (Grace, *LTS* 1). By resisting dichotomous interpretations of Canadian social and psychological ideologies, Atwood, among many other critics such as Armour in *The Idea of Canada*, feels that Canadians must “discover a theory which preserves history and traditional values while providing at the same time a model for a society which is flexible and pluralistic” (Grace, *LTS* 2). Grace sees Atwood’s *Survival* as a text that “rejects the bifurcation of reality which permits an ideology of ‘power politics,’ of strife and domination” (3). In defense of Atwood’s obvious indulgence in thematic dualisms, Grace argues: “Atwood is not simply rejecting duality but working with it, from it” (4). Furthermore, Grace asserts—taking nature for example—

that “Atwood manipulates the inescapable tension between the artificial and the natural, a tension not merely destructive but also dynamic, [as] a tension which enlists language in the process of recognizing and healing the polarities and divisions of a ‘Cartesian hell’” (4). In other words, Atwood’s unfortunate labelling of the Canadian “violent duality” may be an “obsession still with us” but what may not be clear is that it is an obsession that must change. Grace explains:

What [Atwood] continues to offer is a system embodying dualities, but dualities understood as mutually interdependent aspects of a continuum of relationship, functioning dialectically and modelled upon natural life processes. The walls and fences which are set up to divide culture from nature, male from female, logic from intuition, and which facilitate domination and devaluation, must come down, not in order to change a culture-male-logic dominated system into its opposite, but to facilitate the harmonious process of inter-relationship. Hence, to read Atwood correctly is to understand her as breaking imprisoning circles, not as resolving (cancelling or transcending) polarities altogether, not as transforming myth into reality or as reversing the power structures in the dichotomous system. (13)

Critic Laura Groening does not give Atwood enough credit for being intrigued by early reactions to the Canadian wilderness, which, in Atwood’s opinion, are still prevalent in present-day Canadian society. She views Atwood as “*surprised* that Mrs. Moodie can speak in the same breath of the Divine Mother and the swamps and bugs” (Groening 176, my emphasis); yet thorough

examinations of *Journals* reveals a much subtler approach to the dualistic nature clearly supported by the tension between Susanna-as-character and Susanna-as-narrator in the original text, *Roughing it in the Bush*. Criticizing Atwood for not appreciating Susanna's embodiment of these extremes, Groening notes:

[Susanna Moodie's] appreciation for progress in no way undermines her dismay that the "Canadian cuts down, but rarely plants trees, which circumstance accounts for the bland look of desolation that pervades all new settlements." It did not occur to Mrs. Moodie, living in the thriving metropolis of Belleville in the middle 1800s that she could not have it both ways. She may have been wrong, but she was not schizophrenic. Again, Atwood has read a social contradiction as if it necessarily entailed a psychological split. (180)

Since Atwood describes Susanna Moodie's "schizophrenia" not in terms of personal dementia but as a "national illness," an "obsession still with us," Atwood virtually erases Susanna Moodie's documented personal struggles with insanity with a greater Moodie-myth contained within the more privileged symbolic value of her bush "schizophrenia." To read *Journals* as one which focuses narrowly on the 'reality' of Moodie's stay in the Canadian wilderness, and not on the imaginative possibilities contained within a creative exploration of Susanna Moodie's psychological, and emotional depths, is to miss Atwood's literary exercise entirely. While this separation does not occur consciously for Susanna in *Roughing it in the Bush*, Atwood forces Moodie into a self-reflective consciousness; Moodie, from her first moments in North America, recognizes the

“incongruous pink of [her] shawl;” she knows she is in a “space [which] cannot hear,” where “the rocks ignore” (*JSM* 11), and even the “air [speaks] a twisted dialect to [her] differently-/shaped ears” (14).

According to Simmons, “Canada’s harsh wilderness proves an excellent *counterbalance* to the refinement of the England which Moodie knows” (my emphasis, 140), where Moodie’s opposing Canadian self is a “yet-undiscovered harsh, wilderness self” (140). While it may be valid that “a wilderness self” is foreign and invisible—undesirable in fact, to Moodie—viewing nature as an opposing self, an opposition in any way, particularly for women, is to an ecofeminist scholar, equally disdainful and wholly inaccurate. Verena Buhler Roth in her examination of Atwood’s *Wilderness and the Natural Environment* argues that Atwood’s exploration of wilderness and other:

[...] always keep[s] the reality of the empirical natural space in perspective, [while] she examines the imaginative possibilities which nature and the forest offer, [...] consequently develop[ing] a variety of differentiated ways for her characters to relate to the natural environment in their search for themselves and for the other. (1)

Likewise, in *Greenwor(l)ds*, Relke recognizes Atwood’s attempt to expose a dualistic “tension between woman as cultural artifact and woman as uncultivated landscape” (51) but ultimately sees Moodie’s quest as a “shift in self-perception” that links her to the “landscape [that] is not ‘other’ but ‘self’” (50); thus, her role as (eco)feminist hero begins by dismantling a masculine-encoded logic of binary oppositions which have “unnaturally” constructed limited definitions of

womanhood; emancipated physically from a masculine-encoded society, the hero Moodie moves into an unending quest, and paradoxically, also a new beginning in which Moodie is psychologically, spiritually, and emotionally liberated from the confines of such a paradigm.

In dividing Moodie into two, making a division between the masculine-constructed social self and the biologically determined 'natural' self, Simmons suggests, "the self is directly involved in experience. Unlike the refined, non-physical, and somewhat self-centred societal self, the wilderness self is crude, very physical, and practical" (145). Yet, by establishing a pattern of dualistic natures inherent in the process of self-discovery, Simmons perpetuates the divisions that exist prior to Moodie's necessary intricacies with the wilderness that ultimately keep her from that very integration. Atwood insists she must seek (and does daringly in *Journals*). However, Simmons never fully defines what a "harsh, wilderness self" might be; she explains unsatisfactorily that "the societal self lives life; the wilderness self is life" (145). In addition, the over-use of "harsh" indicates an assumed subjective bias towards what Callicott and Nelson asserts is "the wilderness idea" (see "defining wilderness" in my Introduction) which impedes the progressive evolution of human integration with the biosphere. Clearly, *Journals* is the story of a woman's attempt to dispel the unnatural hold dualistic ideologies have on the feminine psyche; however, an ecofeminist reading of the text further exposes it as an attempt to show how integration between humanity and wilderness harmonize feminist and ecological beliefs that refuse to discriminate against woman-other and animal-other. While Simmons'

interpretation of the nature of dualities in Atwood's text suggests a perpetuation of the "Cartesian hell" that Atwood herself claims to be dissolving, a current ecocritical reading pushes the simplicity of such a claim further through an investigation that calls for the elimination of the logic of dualisms which claim ownership over gender and species apartheid.

Although Atwood establishes a clear division—in Moodie's mind—between civilization and wilderness, which puts forth the very dichotomy she claims to want to abolish, it is a necessary strategy in order to expose the narrow-mindedness of Moodie's vision, a time-honoured patriarchal misconception of this particular power-dynamic. Moodie's possible emancipation from the ideological hold these dichotomies have on her renders her 'natural' ability to adapt nearly impossible. Initially, in questing for meaning, she finds "that England/ [is] now unreachable, [has] sunk down into the sea/without ever teaching [her] about washtubs)" (Atwood, *JSM* 14), where the discovery of new meaning seems unlikely since, "the moving water will not show [her]/ [her] reflection." In *Roughing It in the Bush*, the bush has a language of its own that Susanna resists learning and which in and of itself presents difficulties for her:

The voice of waters, in the stillness of night, always has an extraordinary effect upon my mind [...] and looking upon them [...] hoarsely chiding with the opposing rock, now leaping triumphantly over it, creates within me a feeling of mysterious awe. (Moodie 100)

Here, in the original text, Susanna mixes her sense of sight ("looking upon them" with sound ("voices of waters" "hoarsely chiding"), thus illustrating how

indeterminate a chaotic and over-stimulating environment can be for someone unfamiliar with untamed wilderness. Filled with a “mysterious awe,” Susanna envies the communicative relationship between the “opposing rock” and the stream, which “triumphantly leaps over [it].”

In an effort to understand, Susanna personifies these natural elements as an experience of the sublime; yet read from an ecofeminist perspective, her personification accentuates her own emotional distance from the wilderness by exposing an imposed internal conflict between rock and water. This natural mirror (one which previously existed in “stillness” and had an “extra-ordinary effect upon [Moodie’s] mind”) is, in Atwood’s poetic interpretation, a “moving water” incapable of showing her her reflection. The mirror, as instrument for seeing herself reflected in the nature-other, herein becomes stormy, opaque, and unable to sustain any constant reflection. Significantly, Moodie’s actual experience with the moving water does ‘move her,’ and does display back to her an image not clearly identified by sight, but by sensual self-awareness. While Atwood confirms Moodie’s original expression for the loss of self, she inadvertently also seems to dismiss Moodie’s moment with “the moving waters” (*JSM* 11) as an initial connection with a new Moodie-self. Atwood explains that the waters which once held self-defining articles of comfort—her “stiff lace,” “pink shawl,” “china plates,” etc.—that is, the sea, becomes that which swallows her social identity by “black[rotting]/ off by earth and the strong waters” (*JSM* 24-5) a misguided faith in soothing possessions. Ultimately, however, this “moving water,” which does not show Moodie her reflection, is not to be read despairingly

as a mirror-lack but as a gain for Moodie who, through her senses, and natural insight, attempts to rewrite herself out of a masculine-encoded definition of womanhood, into a more satisfactory adaptation.

Simmons describes Moodie's "unwillingness to look in the mirror" as "cowardice" (141); significantly, however, Moodie does actually *look* to find "the moving water will not show me/ my reflection / The rocks ignore" (Atwood *JSM* 11). By stripping Moodie of her courageous willingness to look, Simmons neglects to make a distinction between her fear of 'emasculatation' from society and a curiosity to know alternative feminine lifestyle choices and philosophical teachings. According to Atwood, Moodie does *look* though she does not *see*, thus displaying a brave willingness to explore aspects of a fragmented self. What she lacks is "wolf's eyes"—the knowledge, wisdom, and the insight to adapt to a wilderness-self. Moodie exposes her wilderness naïveté by choosing moving water in which to view her own reflection; clearly, she might have seen her figurative "wilderness self" had she chosen a more appropriate still water for reflection-viewing. Moodie misses the mark to be sure, but her lack of self-awareness and bush-confidence seem more out of self-preservation than cowardice. Ironically, Susanna/Moodie fights against immersing herself into the water, and thus, initially resists a clear connection with the wilderness-other; as it all "[floats] dimly on [her] sight—[her] eyes [are] blinded with tears—blinded by the excess" (Moodie 22).

Feminist psychoanalytical critics ask us to question such limitations in defining and interpreting the quest for selfhood. As Jung astutely notes, and

Simmons reminds us “individuation is impossible without a relationship to one’s environment” (Simmons 142), though environment-as-nature is not likely what Jung had in mind. Simmons strongly argues that Moodie is initially “a minor invalid” since “nothing in the Canadian wilderness is able to be used by Moodie” (142). “To understand the wilderness,” Simmons asserts, “she must be at home in it be integrated into it” for which Moodie “yearns” (142). It is a process in which Moodie is to find “her true self” by “respond[ing] to this environment like all animals inhabiting Canada’s woods [...] alone and [...] from within” (143). Simmons’ critique of Moodie’s vision quest, vaguely describes Moodie’s process of individuation as a humanist-centred quest for “her true self” which privileges completion and wholeness as a kind of ultimate goal over a standard feminist and ecofeminist conviction to celebrate the evolving self in an ever-changing and adapting life-process.

Furthermore, all quests for self-identity are solitary; however, Simmons neglects to recognize the assistance of a wilderness-other which, in ecofeminist terms, serves as a community less alienating than our forefathers have dictated. Moodie repeatedly tries to “adapt,” falling back into old habits of identification by resuturing herself into a masculine-defined role. She discovers that she needs “wolf’s eyes to see” but unfortunately for her, neglects in her lifetime to become—to Atwood’s satisfaction—Windigo, monster, wilderness creature, or Medusa. Nonetheless, it is her attempt to convert that ecocritics view as a progressive environmental lesson since animal transmogrification, albeit literal or symbolic, risks colonizing a wilderness-other in its anthropomorphism. From an

ecofeminist perspective, the process of becoming or the attempt to break free from patriarchal strictures is equal to the ultimate goal. In fact, any privileging of product over process, particularly when it is ascribed to identity-quests, reeks of masculine-encoded ideologies. This mindset, which diminishes worth from any process that fails to meet a satisfactory conclusion is the very masculinist expectation that the feminist poet, Atwood, works to defeat. In overlapping feminist and ecological principles, the ecocritic observes how the masculinist propensity towards “capturing” wildlife conservation simply, and easily in the National Parks system inaccurately makes stagnate conceptual interpretations of wilderness through its misrepresentation of confinement, and predictability (see “defining wilderness” in my Introduction). Likewise, Moodie may not ever reach the ultimate status of bush-woman healer, or bear-lover (as Lou is portrayed in Engel’s *Bear*) but her attempts to evolve have warranted extensive exploration among historical and literary critics. Atwood’s final sections of *Journals* reveal how limiting oneself to boundaries—even death—is counterproductive to an (eco)feminist mission.

According to Frank Davey, a repeated idea in Atwood’s poetics is the “Adamic giving of names” which “fails” where “nature refuses to receive, refused, we might say, the traditional female role” (23). He suggests a necessary feminist reading of Atwood, which demands a look at the unquestioned use of linguistic codes. Like identification which Atwood defines as “liquid” (not dualistic) where “substantiality—the basis of static form—is an illusion which Adamic men have invented through their fences and their camera eyes (Davey

25), language slips through a woman's experience of the world with only the use of a man-made language to articulate, to create her subjective findings. As Davey asserts: "Atwood's recurrent concerns with feminism and ecology merge" separating a male space (concrete and static) from a feminine space of liquid process where "woman's body is also the world's body" (29). He explains:

[...] the male desire to have woman mirror back to him his own needs
[...] is merely another form of the humanistic male will to have the
planet mirror back his utilitarian purposes. (29)

For Atwood's women, identity is a process of unlearning, undoing, and un-understanding the feminine and feminine space as it has been defined by masculinist culture. Atwood challenges such coded understandings of the self that are erased by the tide of a nature (as we have already seen in "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer"), unwilling/unable to adhere to them, unaware. Thus language, as it is associated with the wilderness-self, raises the question: what is it that Moodie must find? As a woman, without language and without wolf-eyes, how will she ever hear it, know it?

In critical discussions that examine Atwood's idea of wilderness as a woman's escape-space, a "feminist green world," "city/ pseudo-wilderness/ wilderness continuum" (Murray 77), or "wild zone" (Showalter 30), "nature" becomes associated with quest for identity, "independent and undetermined [...]" opposite the culturally dominant male space" (30). As such, "the wild zone is the country of utopian dreams, the land of feminist mythology, the construct of metaphysical speculation" (30). As a place of renewal, clearly the pseudo-

wilderness of women's Canadian literature is limited in terms of non-mythical connections with the environment in that it is merely a stepping stone, a temporary retreat, corresponding to the "role of woman in society [who have] a strong affinity with the in-betweenness and the doubleness of the pseudo-wilderness space itself" (Roth 35). As Verena Buhler Roth reminds us, "for women who grew up in the forest [...] it is a cold, isolated and hostile environment" (33). With wilderness generally represented in women's writing as a place of renewal, identification, and connection against a commonly constructed masculinist literary tradition of nature-as-enemy, Canadian literature may seem to divide wilderness writing along gender lines. Heather Murray's argument that the pseudo-wilderness is a "third space and thus break[s] up the duality or opposition of nature and culture" (Roth 35), problematically assumes that wilderness-the-good is something to enter in and out of, something which is essentialist in an exclusionary, unhealthy way. Omitting men from the kind of community one finds in/with wilderness is to perpetuate gender divisions associated in feminism with the limitations of patriarchal androcentrism. Thus wilderness-the-good, which supposedly attempts to escape masculinist logic of dualisms that limit women's role in society and culture, becomes another extension of that very essentialism, where it is "good" insofar as it is without masculine intervention. Defining wilderness in a literary pseudo-wilderness pattern restricts nature to its already limited cultural definition as "other."

Nonetheless, where do women find a mediating space of reflection, renewal, and reconstruction of the self if not outside civilization in the

“wilderness?” Roth explains Heather Murray’s model as a “feminist re-interpretation of the pastoral, in which the female is associated with the (potentially) positive middle ground, rather than identified with the civilizing force or the unknowable wilderness” (37). In this way, feminist critics can explore the possibilities of women in wilderness without running the risk of essentializing nature, (seen as a limitation for feminists) and yet, they can simultaneously enter that realm of counter-culture to explore its possibilities as a alternative to masculinist civilization. Unfortunately, this kind of middle ground may not allow for a revisiting of an essentialized woman in positive ecofeminist terms; that is, in avoiding the patriarchy, female protagonists often mis-see the forest for the non-masculine trees.

So, where Moodie initially quests for structures, she begins imposing structures in order to suture herself into the Canadian experience; like the protagonist in “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,” she isolates herself in a space outside nature. The first poem in *Journals* “Disembarking at Quebec” attaches Susanna Moodie’s feelings of alienation to the “incongruity,” the trappings of her former materialistic society. This poet-speaker’s ties with material objects (clothes, book, and bag) bind her to a former British world and therefore prevent her from feeling free in Canada where nothing belongs to her. It also suggests a subtext of tension between European values and Aboriginal philosophies that do not recognize the planet earth as something to be divided and “owned.” Susanna’s handmade objects, in contrast to the following stanza’s natural “barren sand,” and “the bone-white driftlogs,” immediately suggest a tension between the

ordering principles in her former world and the chaos to which she is forced to submit: the wild “omens of [the Canadian] winter” (11).

As a consumer, Susanna/Moodie is alienated from all wildlife except, not surprisingly, what does not, in her perception, belong in the bush—namely, flowers. Susanna chooses to paint flowers, but not the landscape (Moodie 127). This mirror/canvas allows for an interpretation of Susanna’s violent duality plagued on one hand by her loyalty to a European ideology and exposed on the other hand as her deep psychological connection with an ecology that, like her, is oppressed by male exploitation. These blooms painted by Susanna are “God’s pictures [...] hid away in the wilderness, where no eyes but the birds of the air, and the wild beasts of the wood, and the insects that live upon them, ever see them” (127). Clearly, she identifies with these flowers, or is at least soothed by the aesthetic comfort they represent. Susanna’s friend, Brian, questions whether or not, “God provides for the pleasure of such creatures [...] whom we have been taught to consider as having neither thoughts nor reflection” (127). Susanna does not comment: her excuse—“to argue with Brian was only to call into action the slumbering fires of his fatal malady.”

Ironically, Susanna’s painting both undercuts and supports Brian’s statement. By painting these flowers, Moodie documents her access to what only the wildlife normally sees. On the other hand, by painting flowers, Susanna becomes speciesist in her neglect of less aesthetically pleasing, less tamed European aspects of the wilderness. Also, by committing it to canvas, Susanna metaphorically attempts to ‘capture’ the wilderness in a way that both celebrates it

and stagnates it. Effectively, she becomes this wildlife through her identification with it; however, in support of Brian's statement, the painting itself, as a metaphor for the English/literary garden, establishes Susanna's desire to artistically arrange what is traditional anthropocentric beauty, chosen from the chaotic wild. Ironically, Susanna's resistance to consider the "thoughts [and] reflection[s]" of wildflowers, even though they symbolically reflect her own consciousness as portrayed by her art, points to a lack of self-awareness to which Atwood's *Journals* responds.

Atwood's interpretation of this incident exposes Moodie's attempt to displace her feelings of alienation and inadequacy in the Canadian wilderness. Moodie claims she "got use to being/a minor invalid" and,

Finally I grew a chapped tarpaulin
skin; I negotiated the drizzle
of strange meaning, set it
down to just the latitude;
something to be endured
but not surprised by. (*JSM* 14-15)

Moodie recognizes her own desire to project herself into the violets; however, their beauty is fleeting, and their lifespan, limited. While symbolically, and sadly, Susanna/Moodie falsely identifies with the superficiality of beauty, Atwood's Moodie has the foresight to reach beyond typical masculinist worth to find a more meaningful replacement for a limited identification strategy. In "First Neighbours" Moodie casts off her earlier stronghold in materialistic trappings (shawl, purse) and grows a more necessary "chapped tarpaulin / skin," a direct contrast to the primed Moodie who arrived in Canada, unprepared—emotionally,

intellectually, and psychologically—for the wilderness. While adapting for Moodie is equated with finding the means to escape, an ecofeminist reading reveals a cry for help, a wanting to “go wild” herself, but fearing “the horror, the horror” likened to Joseph Conrad’s centre of chaos in *Heart of Darkness* that she feels would result.

Her own paranoia, her own bush-madness asserts a resistance to the voices of the woods, the healing power of native plant-life (as some argue her sister Catherine Parr Traill embraces). Her determination not to be suppressed by the wilderness is, as Moodie states:

Inaccurate. The forest can still trick me:
one afternoon while I was drawing
birds, a malignant face
flickered over my shoulder,
the branches quivered.

Resolve: to be both tentative and hard to startle
(though clumsiness and
fright are inevitable)

in this area where my damaged
knowing of the language means
prediction is forever impossible (15)

Herein, Moodie is not flower but bird. Atwood gives the historical Moodie the potential to be a mythological figure in this text and in future Canadian feminist writings, giving her wings to fly, figuratively, from the metaphoric English country garden-as-patriarchal-society, or better, the reductionist literary linking of women and nature wherein women become the garden. The canvassed birds, as a

reflection of herself, are a “malignant face:” thus Moodie metamorphosizes into a bird as she resolves, “to be both tentative and hard to startle.” Atwood’s sudden return, grammatically, to the present-tense from the past with the word, “Inaccurate,” (capitalized and isolated as a one-word sentence) itself startles the reader—it unsutures Moodie and the reader away from the flower/bird as though any significant changes in Moodie are tempered with her resistance to it. Following “Inaccurate,” Atwood’s poetics enable Moodie to reflect on her conclusion as an intellectual luxury she lacks in *Roughing It*. Unsure of herself and her ability to “adapt,” to psychologically transmogrify, she states, “the forest can still trick me” and proceeds to explain that a bird she was drawing turned into a “malignant face / [flickering] over [her] shoulder” (*JSM* 15). If we read the canvas as mirror and Moodie’s artistic progression from earth-bound flowers to a bird capable of movement and flight, then her own metamorphosis reflects the terror of the wilderness, within and without Moodie. While striving for a harmonious existence in the bush, she resolves, “to be both tentative and hard to startle” though “clumsiness and fright are inevitable” (15). Atwood reflects Moodie’s transformation into madness or animal-consciousness by blending the dichotomous extremes of Moodie’s self-awareness into each poetic cadence. For example, the word “resolve” (as a definitive statement) begins this sentence, and it is completed with “inevitable,” clearly an absolute; in the middle, however, the word “tentative” undermines Moodie’s “inevitable” “resolve.” Similarly, the poem ends with juxtaposed extremes: “prediction is forever impossible.” “Forever” (synonymous with always) is played against “impossible”/ never.

Though her confusion and contradictory nature suggests a kind of bush-madness, an (eco)feminist reading of the text exposes how she is conditioned to resist but desires to transform. In this way, Moodie's quest illustrates a pioneering Canadian ecofeminist quest into the wilderness-as-haven; her attempts to make necessary changes to her psyche in order to serve as a viable member of the wilderness biosphere is the process that is herein celebrated—regardless of whether she actually ever accomplishes a complete and satisfactory integration. Despite the difficulty, Moodie leaves the wilderness with her identity fractured: after seven years in the woods, Moodie's "heirloom face [she] brought / with [her] a crushed eggshell / among other debris" (24), can be cut out with "sewing scissors" to make it "the shape you already are/ but [. . .] have forgotten [. . .] or never known" (25). It is a cut and paste solution, however, since leaving her bush-psyche behind to return to civilization is impossible.

From "heirloom face" (24) through "chapped tarpaulin skin" (15), and finally, "crushed eggshell / among other debris" (24), Moodie's previous identity, so strongly associated with masculinist culture, may have attempted to adapt, but in its transformation, leaves Moodie, faced with re-entry into civilization, with nothing of organic or materialist substance. The "crushed eggshell" suggests that she was once a fertile, viable woman; ironically, however, though she sees her "heirloom face"—beauty, and youth—as necessary currency for women in masculinist culture, by trashing this definition of womanhood, sending it "among other debris" (24) she liberates herself from predisposed expectations of femininity and the trivialities of cultural status. Emptied of what once gave her

comfort, and offered her meaning, now, for Moodie, “Every-/thing appears” where these eyes were, these “eyes bewildered after/ seven years, and almost / blind/ buds, which can see/ only the wind” (25). Where the unstable Moodie wobbles from English teatime to Canadian incongruity, her final departure from the woods leaves her with the beginnings of a sense of belonging, though she is still “frightened by their eyes (green or/ amber) glowing out from inside [her]” (27). Reading Atwood reading Moodie—still resistant to changes that render either as inconsequential in a masculinist society—exposes a feminist victory in the dispelling of essentialized notions of womanhood. From an ecofeminist standpoint, the crushed eggshells might symbolize a loss of feminine (biological) power, (which, ironically they do here); however, more likely, eggshells serve as a natural and thus, more appropriate substitute for a traditionally symbolic porcelain doll, whose shattering monumentally reflects a necessary loss of naïveté concerning the feminine mystique. For men who pedestalize and for women who do not question the limitations of its existence, this loss of innocence which ‘protects’ adult feminine figures in an unnatural state of perpetual girlhood, becomes everyone’s ultimate gain.

Dissolving “violent dualities”: Moodie’s return to “civilization”

Simmons, like most critics, agrees that “[Moodie] dies without ever achieving individuation” (150) and, thus, gives way to Atwood’s reading of the failed Moodie in *Journals*. Part II of *Journals* reveals a Moodie much haunted by horrific dreams of the wilderness, the wilderness within her still, and the wilderness she regrets not knowing, granted by her physical distance from the

wilderness. Moodie's three nightmares ("Dream 1: The Bush Garden" (34), "Dream 2: Brian the Still-Hunter" (36), and "Dream 3: Night Bear Which Frightened Cattle" (38-9)) all reveal a sub-conscious unraveling of Moodie's fear of violent death by wilderness-related mutilation mixed, finally, with a compassion for nature and natural life-cycles. Consistent with Atwood's attempt to push dichotomous boundaries of male/female, civilization/wilderness, rational/mysterious, Moodie's return to urban society after years in the bush exposes a dissolving of her "violent dualities" by blending, through dream-visions, Moodie's extreme interactions with wilderness. Moodie's post-bush urban life reads like an ecofeminist triumph since Moodie, though haunted with fear by the wilderness, takes a nature-consciousness of compassion and understanding with her into the city. In this way, wilderness and urbanity are no longer divided psychologically for Moodie and as so, she becomes potentially capable of maintaining membership, through a newly evolving interpretation of the civilized human, in a biotic community. On the other hand, Moodie's need to physically distance herself from the bush in order to experience this revelation problematizes the ecofeminist position. Although Moodie's move to the city—a tropological return from the underworld—serves as a feminist success, her ecofeminist subconscious insights are remarkable as evidence of having been "bushed." By recognizing a natural wilderness hostility the bushed Moodie resists madness and incorporates it into a harmonious appreciation of its aesthetic beauty and its healing potential.

Moodie's afterlife dreams are profoundly ecofeminist in their degree of positive interaction with the wilderness. For example, "Dream 1" makes Moodie a visionary of the wonders of the earth-as-nurturer, and a co-creator of such vegetables and luscious strawberries as the gardener. Nonetheless the potatoes are grotesquely "curled/ like pale grubs," the radishes are "thrusting down/ their fleshy snouts," while the beets are "pulsing like slow amphibian hearts" (34). Though alive with conventionally creepy grubs and fear-instilling moles and reptiles, what inhabits this soil is of no negative consequence to Moodie: she still sees the seemingly exotic luxury of strawberries "around [her feet [...]] surging, huge/ and shining" in her desire for them. Her interaction with the garden serves as a kind of ecofeminist celebration (previously unsustainable) since she does not privilege the aesthetically beautiful, nor does she fear nature's aberrations. Not silenced, subconsciously, by social conditioning, she releases her own need to define gender roles, species-value, and predisposition to fears associated with feminine weakness. Moodie, enticed into the "horrors" of the wilderness, attempts to enter—via her dreams—into this microcosm; herein she gets her own hands dirty (a figurative and literal distinction Susanna Moodie was unwilling to make previously) by picking the fruits of her labour. Furthermore, by pulling those same hands—"red and wet"—out of the natural world, Moodie is implicated in a soil-birth-harvest amalgamation of cycles. Though the image is both horrific and promising, Moodie's interpretation is still slanted against the wilderness-positive. She explains, "I should have known/ anything planted here/ would come up blood" (34). Where a bush-living-Moodie would have expressed fear, a

transcendental Moodie understands the life-blood, taken from the fertile soil, from her own fertile existence (literal and figurative) as a positive shift from “a crushed eggshell / among other debris.”

In “Dream 2” Moodie enters into this connection with the bush one step further. She admires and identifies with Brian’s relationship with the land when he explains:

I kill because I have to

but every time I aim, I feel
my skin grow fur
my head heavy with antlers
and during the stretched instant
the bullet glides on its thread of speed
my soul runs innocent as hooves [...]

I die more often than many. (36)

Atwood concludes the poem with Moodie waking, remembering: “he has been gone/ twenty years and not heard from,” thus suggesting a pre-dream dismissal of Brian as “gone” while simultaneously intimating that a post-dream interpretation of his disappearance might be answered by a mystical spiritual and physical transformation of himself into animal, either hunting or hunted. Brian is “gone” but Moodie entertains the possibility of a kind of spiritual/physical metamorphosis which, in her mind, is more likely than death in the bush where bodies are seldom found when “lost.” In this way, Moodie’s first-narrative tone implies a kind of jealousy for what Brian is able to accomplish, since she is limited to the messages sent subconsciously to her in the sub-reality of dreams.

What she envies, thus, is the actual impact of a conscious awakening to the wilderness as a kind of enveloping entity that is to be neither romanticized, nor feared.

Brian's transmogrification may be compared to the narrator's interpretation of her father's own spiritual wilderness enlightenment in Atwood's *Surfacing* wherein a life-force "with its yellow eyes, wolf's eyes, depthless but lambent as the eyes of animals seen at night in the car headlights" replaces her "dead" father. "Reflectors" she realizes, are not just "the thing you meet when you've stayed here too long alone" but are also "not [what] my father [is, but] what my father has become" (*Surfacing* 201). This novel's narrator too happily anticipates the growth of fur on her body, her own metamorphosis, but does not fully enter the insanity she recognizes as full revelation. Instead, she finds, "a creature neither animal nor human, furless, only a dirty, blanket, shoulders huddled even into a crouch, eyes staring blue as ice from the deep sockets the lips move by themselves" (204). Atwood does not limit the environment to a landscape backdrop but positions the protagonist of *Surfacing* in a spiritual psychological and physical space, in which time and biotic community interact in a time-space continuum or "geopsyche" (Murphy). Moodie's best ecological epiphany comes at moments when she achieves distance from the wilderness and feels haunted by her presence in the wilderness and its presence within her: "I lean with my feet grown intangible! because I am not there" (Atwood, *JSM* 38).

Moodie's post wilderness life dream-explorations transform the split Moodie, into an integrated spirit, in "Daguerreotype Taken on Old Age," bringing

together the pieces of a fragmented bushed woman. Whether dead, or virtually dead, the “vapid face/ pitted and vast” (a direct contrast to her “heirloom face”) old-aged Moodie “orbits” the garden, far from the reality of getting her hands dirty with dirt or with blood. “Being/ eaten away by light” (48), Moodie’s “Wish” in the poem following “Daguerreotype taken in Old Age” is a “Metamorphosis,” a recognition that she will finally connect—through dying—with a much longed for earth. Another boundary is pushed by Atwood; death does not diminish Moodie’s quest for self-determination. Her wish:

On my skin the wrinkles branch
out, overlapping like hair or feathers [...]
I will prowl and slink
in crystal darkness
among the stalactite roots, with new
formed plumage
un corroded

gold and

Fiery green, my fingers
curving and scaled [...] (49)

Once Moodie sheds her physical earthbody, which is intricately connected to her masculine-encoded self and social definition of ‘woman,’ she is able to free her discomposed mind and spirit. By breaking another dichotomous boundary — life and death—Atwood successfully celebrates a feminist triumph. This success, however becomes problematic from an ecofeminist standpoint since ecospirituality strives for the return to earthbody reverence as a kind of rebellion against extremist religious positions which honour transcendence, at the expense

of the physical. Nonetheless, like the symbolic pseudo-wilderness as the “green world” of feminist retreat, this out-of-body afterlife is yet another dimension of escape, of bird-flight for Moodie’s questing psyche, escaping the bonds of patriarchal hegemony; both feminists and ecofeminists agree that these lessons are better learned late than never.

When the dead spirit-Moodie moves through the city-scape of present-day downtown Toronto in a concluding poem, Atwood reveals Moodie’s ultimate ecological intentions. In this poem, Moodie still haunts Toronto and despite progress and technological advancement, she insists it “will take more than that to banish/ me: this is my kingdom still” (60). Here, as all members in a biotic community recognize, she speaks of a wilderness unwilling to be “buried [...] in monuments/ of concrete slabs, of cable.” Instead, “there is no city; / this is the centre of a forest // your place is empty” (61). The earth, as an ecological consideration, is not violently separated from Moodie in a wilderness versus civilization dichotomy. Relke interprets *Journals*’ ending as a synergy of women-as-landscape on both a metaphorical and literal level (*Green* 58). She explains:

Gradually the persona “shifts” to exclude the patriarchal voices and listens instead to “those who have become the stone/ voices of the lands.” She makes a further “shift” to become one of those voices, a strong voice free at last of all doubleness. In this new single voice she speaks out against a humanist/androcentric ideology that insists upon the supremacy of man and his god over nature [...] Significantly, she ends by triumphantly declaring that “at the last/ Judgement we will all

be trees,” *not* angels. The term “last judgement” has been stripped of all its patriarchal overtones of authority, damnation, salvation, and becomes merely a term that marks the point of metamorphosis into vegetation of all dead creatures. (63)

Like Moodie herself, suffering a violent duality, Atwood’s poetics also celebrates a resistance to the limitations of completing a process. Because Moodie’s spirit does not die, nor does it enter heaven (a masculine-defined afterlife that serves in dichotomous opposition to the physical earth realm) effectively, Moodie’s post-death consciousnesses create a newly defined space for Moodie, more easily entered because of her experience in the bush than a patriarchal afterlife which defeats cycles and maintains another division between body and spirit, the earth and heaven. By embracing death and post-life possibilities, Atwood abolishes the limitations inherent in the dichotomous life/death and earth/heaven constructions. Thus, this cyclical process of life, carried through to Moodie’s afterlife, reveals certain ecofeminist tenets within the conclusion of *Journals*: 1) by releasing Moodie from social conventions and, ironically, her earthbody, Atwood unites her with a biotic community within which she is emancipated from her lack of opportunity to fully explore her “natural” self; and 2) in her metaphoric death, Moodie’s link to natural cycles as an alternative to constructed and limited dualisms that defined her existence within the confines of Western patriarchy, begins a starting point for ecofeminist literary/social Canadian history. In this case, Moodie does not appear, as critics would have us believe, as a pioneering loser, nor does she fail to attain

individuation since understanding of consciousness shifts to include the afterlife as part of the life process. In essence "the harsh wilderness self" is thus not as much "harsh" as it is emancipated, freed to embark on a quest for self-discovery that is both personal for Moodie and social for womankind. The greater quest is not to see nature as a mere metaphor for the unconscious self nor as a reflective tool for understanding but as an "other" equally silenced and to be joined in a greater definition of self-in-community.

Chapter Two

Pregnant(Sea) Miscarried: Ecofeminism and Michael Cook's

Poetics of Denigration

Certainly he [western man] has enlarged his understanding of nature to an astonishing degree, but more often than not he has used this understanding to consolidate his power over nature rather than to extend his communion with her. [...] In extremes he has declared total war on the wilderness, woman, or the world of spontaneous impulse and irrational desire. At the least he has sought to subjugate these unruly elements within himself by force of will. More largely, he has sought to bind them in the body politic by force of law. And more ambitious still, with the increased confidence in his power, he has sought to control them in the world around him and even to eradicate them from the earth.

D. G. Jones *Butterfly on Rock* (57)

He stood up and felt himself enormous./ Felt as might Donatello over stone,/ Or Plato, or as a man who has held/ A loved and lovely woman in his arms/ And feels his forehead touch the emptied sky/ Where all antinomies flood into light. [...] Yet they [the wind] returned, bringing a bee who, seeing/ But a tall man, left him for a marigold.

Irving Layton "A Tall Man Executes a Jig"

We keep the same rituals still.

Cindy Cowan *A Woman from the Sea* (374-5)

Michael Cook's plays are known for the tension he creates between technological development and the resulting fracturing of male identity through the loss of livelihood. *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* and *Jacob's Wake*, read through the practices of ecofeminist theory, reveal a chilling prediction of a techno-ecological crisis that becomes increasingly apocalyptic as a developing social awareness of environmental concerns emerges in mainstream culture. During the original production of these plays in the 1970's, critics responded to them as human nightmares; three decades later, however, the ecocritic destabilizes the text through an evolved political and intellectual identification with the idea of human beings as members of a biotic community

and not enemies of it. After a moratorium on ground-fish in the Northern Atlantic Ocean was called in 1993, these plays foreground the politics of his ecopoetics since they predict actualized ecocrises.

I hope to show how an emerging new dramatic genre through Cook's plays—namely *Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance* and *Jacob's Wake*—integrates the dramatic with the political through ecological theatre. By obliterating any possibility of human reverence, environmental healing, or religious redemption, Cook creates a kind of post-tragic form that renders a strictly human-oriented tragedy obsolete. While the main thrust of this chapter focuses on the masculine-constructed tension between man and nature, ultimately the audience's sympathy shifts to a once magnificent ocean whose resources are culturally and historically deemed everlasting and how the emptying of that life-force is exposed as a heinous crime. Though Cook blames mankind's arrogance and greed for the ocean's demise, he explores, as I will systematically reveal in this chapter, factions of guilt—government, technology, religion, war-ideologies—as an intricate complexity of forces vying against nature. Cook's unacknowledged ecofeminist linking of ecocrisis and the decline of masculine power to attitudes and practices that degrade women and by extension, nature, becomes the final and most comprehensive reason for man's ultimate stripping of a once endlessly abundant ocean. In this light, it becomes clear that nature, as the recipient of illogical gender encoding, faces extinction in the same way that women face degradation, as the result of sexist, racist, and exploitive attitudes towards the feminine.

Interpreting Cook's drama as ecodrama

Within a culture emerging into environmental awareness, and appreciation, the likeliness of animal identification and compassion is not wholly surprising. What is surprising, however, is how the critics reviewing *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* and *Jacob's Wake* in the early 1970's, either missed, avoided, neglected or felt it unnecessary to include Cook's profound prediction of environmental crisis as though it were a "theme" largely related to Cook's surrealistic tendencies. In his own articles written on or about Canadian theatre in the late 1960's and early 1970's, Cook is more concerned with the extinction of Canadian theatre than he is about the cod stocks (for example, "Trapped in Space," "Under Assault," "Ignored Again," "The painful struggle for the creation of a Canadian repertory"). He complains about the types of responses he received from the airing of *The Head Guts and Sound Bone Dance* on network television, saying:

Apart from happy threats of tarring and feathering which characterized open line programs on the topic and milder asides about being thrown into the harbour; apart from two months of ongoing correspondence in the papers including priceless items that suggested some form of legal censorship or control over my person; comments about my sanity and general harassment, there is a hardening of attitudes which seems to herald the birth [... of a new age] in which the worst excesses of sentiment and hypocrisy are pursued at the expense of truth, of life itself. ("Under Assault" 138)

Again in an article entitled “The painful struggle for the creation of a Canadian repertory” (1976), Cook complains about the responses to his writing which range from “vengeful comments that [he give] up writing entirely, to a more personal proposition that [he] be dumped, together with a few stones, in St John’s Harbour” (25).

Nonetheless Cook does not seem to consider all the possibilities for why his plays raised the hackles of Newfoundlanders. After all, he criticizes fishermen and seal-hunters, both representative of age-old Newfoundland livelihoods, within Newfoundland and condemns traditional masculinist values in what he deems the decline of patriarchal power within a conservative community. By taking an extremist position as feminist and cultural commentator, Cook brazenly appropriates the voice of Newfoundlanders since he is considered by Newfoundlanders a mere CFA (come from away). In addition, Cook insults the intelligence (as it turns out, rightly so) of all members of Canadian ocean resource industries, by predicting a communal, governmental, and technological mismanagement of the fish and seal stocks. Regardless, Cook’s plays raised predictable controversies, the least of which was a resistance to watching the eschatological ruin of masculinist culture and prosperity built at the expense of the exploited “other.”

Critics failed to interpret these plays, staged initially in the early 1970’s, as ecodrama, even though Cook admits to his conscious foregrounding of the environment as another character. Production notes explain: “it is essential [...] that the storm becomes a living thing, a character, whose presence is always felt,

if not actually heard, on the stage.” *Montreal Star* reporter Myron Galloway, like others who concentrate on human character in the plays, claims that Cook “hacks his characters out of cold stone without compassion” (*Wake* 188), while other critics such as Audrey Ashley (*Ottawa Citizen*) agree that Cook neglects to give them any real dimension. Marian Owen-Fekete despairs over whether a “good tragedy” can have “a hero who’s pretty lousy” (Owen-Fekete 121). St John’s *Evening Telegram* theatre critic Patrick Treacher likewise observes how he has “never sat on a stage-head and watched a people die, but I think I did last night” (*Critics* 119).

Ultimately, Cook’s literary dramatic form challenges audiences not to simply sympathize with antagonists who have lost their economic and psychological livelihood (though Cook evokes sympathy for the wives and children) but to look in this satirical mirror at their own environmentally irresponsible actions. In what brings chills to the present-day environmentalist’s spine, Cook begs us to reconsider our actions before it is too late. In other words, his drama, based on a minority conception at the time, predicts a moratorium on ground-fish which ultimately does leave Newfoundlanders in a dystopia not far from Cook’s “fantastical” presentation.

Significantly, Cook’s innovative exploration of the dramatic genre, from an environmentalist’s point of view, leaves the audience with a post-tragic form that attempts to eliminate a constructed myth of human privilege. By giving nature the same respect humanity has reserved for itself by putting environmental concerns on par with humanity’s purpose and evolution, Cook calls for a non-

mutually exclusive biosphere in which humans and the environment are recognized as interconnected. Cook's *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* uniquely takes into consideration the ecological disaster that is both part human and part environment, because of human miscalculation. In this way, Cook recalls antiquity—in a revisioning of a once harmonious integration of the gods, humanity, and nature—in a kind of post-tragic ecodrama that eliminates utopian possibilities. Thus, Cook condenses the imaginary into reality forcing issues of environmental urgency and human survival to the forefront. What has been lost, Cook reminds us, is nature's legitimacy as a respected entity in humanity's personal and social history. Cook asks us to reexamine "humanity" and its unnatural tendencies toward isolating itself from the natural "animal" realm of instinct, and impulse as a way to challenge rampant and destructive human practices, beliefs, and ideologies which will inevitably lead to extinction. Cook, I argue, accomplishes a new complexity of the dramatic genre in a kind of ecological drama or ecodrama that is necessarily post-tragic in the way that it challenges the relevance of the tragic form in a post-industrial, post-modernist, and possibly post-humanist age.

Technological wasteland

As a community whose own sense of self-worth is based on an over-fished fishing industry, endangered largely by male-industrialist consumers (with their advanced technology) and policy-makers, Cook's barren and nihilistic setting accurately reflects the outcome of a community in which increased violence against women and nature is not only inevitable, it is co-existent with a masculine

loss of power. And though it may appear that Cook is singling out Newfoundlanders and Newfoundland culture as an abhorrent example of the decay of masculine power, a closer reading of these texts reveals that this “Newfoundland obsession,” a twentieth-century powerlessness, is consistent with a more general aspect of contemporary Western culture. Rarely, as critics such as Treacher point out, is this crippling of masculinist strength more definitively linked with environmental crisis than in the Newfoundland situation. Cook suggests that Newfoundland offers the necessary elements in one place to explore the implications of the decline in masculine power, particularly as they affect the marginalized women, animals, and ecosystem whose choices and opinions concerning lifestyle and sustainability continue to be silenced by the dominant patriarchal community.

Modern fishing technologies serve as a god-like force, as Cook’s characters attest, that has destroyed the animal populations, yet, its popular scientific conceptions, as portrayed by the media, leave Cook’s entire Newfoundland community unnaturally and unhealthily distanced from a centuries-old tradition. Relying on supposedly objective scientific findings, fishermen—bullied into dismantling cultural beliefs, practices, and observations employed for centuries within the fishing industry—were forced to accept the logic of science to define limitations, controls, and expansions. Unfortunately, however, as both Mark Kurlansky and Michael Harris, whose respective treatises on the collapse of the Atlantic cod fishery attest, the lack of communication between a Canadian government vying for political and economic gain, scientists whose reports could

be bought and silenced, and the Newfoundland fishers whose practical knowledge of cod—deemed superstitious and unscientific—eventually formed an industry overly dependent on scientific model and thus, open to human error and political corruption.

Because of this continued popular belief in science as “fact,” supposedly not open to human interpretation and political corruption (after all, why would the government ignore blatant warnings from the scientific community of impending ecocrisis?), the cod fishing industry in Canada learned a costly lesson too late, if it learned it at all. Harris explains:

Five years after the Earth Summit in Rio, the Sierra Club of Canada did a report on Canada’s progress. It gave the federal government a D for protecting marine biodiversity and criticized the DFO for blocking effective endangered-species legislation, lobbying international scientists to remove the northern cod from the IUCN red list, preventing COSEWIC from listing Atlantic cod as an endangered species, and opening the food fishery in Newfoundland just before the 1997 election. The report minced no words: “This pattern of irresponsible decision-making, placing the survival of a species at risk, borders on the criminal.” (234)

In a kind of catch-22, technology creates a more efficient fishing industry which, destroys the fishing stocks and, hence, brings the industry it had hoped to bolster to the brink of failure; yet it is the science of environmentalism that hopes to solve the problems caused by the limited focus of the science of technology. Cook’s

male characters, sadly haunted by the decline of masculine power, choose not to act in a way that protests against the technology that killed their livelihood, nor do they embrace popularized notions of environmentalism. Cook's extreme reflection of a primitive and unsophisticated Newfoundland exaggerates elements of a patriarchal heyday in order to universalize the setting as a place largely untouched by time, technology, science, and media. In this way, the audience witnesses the fallout of patriarchal decay through the ways in which "advancements" in human civilization destroy the nature and the human-animal, both physically, and psychologically.

The setting itself seems disembodied, dismembered, and free-floating as a world disconnected from its environment, yet, ironically, surrounded by it. The dystopic setting in *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance*, a play first produced in St. John's in 1973, shows the prediction of a fished-out Newfoundland fishing village whose residents are forced to consider "applying for membership in a biotic community [...] ceasing to be exploiter" (Plant 157). A resistance to necessary change by the male patriarchs leaves the audience with a place overrun by a pathetically empty sea, spanning the whole length of the stage, with a small dilapidated fisherman's hut built, significantly, over top of the water. As an ecodramatist, Cook carefully avoids condescendingly sinking to appropriation of the ocean-voice while he simultaneously constructs a setting-as-character; this strategy creates a staged atmosphere wherein the ocean is paradoxically both powerful in its unending presence and profoundly pathetic as a constant reminder that humankind has taken and destroyed all of its contents.

Visually creating a tension between the all-encompassing sea and an all-too-powerful humankind, Cook symbolically locates the fishermen's small dilapidated hut over top of the water. Cook explains:

The whole effect must be one of apparent mess and confusion, an immense variety of gear representing men, and fish, and the sea in a tottering, near-derelect place, and yet also reveals, as we become accustomed to it, an almost fanatical sense of order. (*Head 7*)

As a fragment, a microcosm of a greater global crisis, Cook's setting itself suggests a masculinist obsession with control, which alienates men from important "humanizing" interaction with their community, family, and environment. This selfishness serves as a symptom of the factors contributing to ecocrisis. Though clearly, from the play's outset, male greed has destroyed the environment, the fishermen, as symbolic representations of the total masculine culpability, do not recognize their role in this ecological disaster; Skipper Pete entirely blames "the Governmint wid its eddication and its handouts and the women snivelling after hot air stoves and 'lectric ovens and motor cars" (*Head 14*). John, in contrast, voices a learned willingness to accept responsibility for mankind's fate, though his actions hypocritically perpetuate the male desire for that destruction. His post-tragic vision reflects a loss of natural order in a world void of a participatory God, a viable environment, and a despotic human community. In his own reduction of events, Pete believes "they was either hypocritical God-driven old tyrants like ye or wild men like me fader who cursed God and man and the sea until one o' the three took'n" (14). In Cook's

misanthropic vision, it is either sadly, too late to change, or not in man's ability to make the necessary psychological, and/or spiritual adjustments for change.

The government's war on/for cod

Though we interpret Skipper Pete as a man whose ultimate downfall stems from his own inability to accept responsibility either himself, as part of the larger industry, or as a man through humanity's symbolic representative of its industrious yet destructive environmental practices, Skipper Pete's gripes about the government, according to cod-biographer Mark Kurlansky, and political cod-historian, Michael Harris, are not unfounded. The tension between government officials, their commissions and condescending reports and recommendations to the fishing community reflects dangerous so-called 'educated' perceptions born out of inflated self-worth and self-interest that ultimately factored greatly in the most recent desperate call for a moratorium on fishing ground-fish on the Grand Banks in 1992. According to Kurlansky, a 1883 International Fisheries Exhibition in London, in response to fishermen's concerns in the drop in fish stocks, records British scientific philosopher, Thomas Henry Huxley, as saying: "overfishing was an unscientific and erroneous fear" (122). After all, his 1862 commission wrongly reported that, "fishermen, as a class, are exceedingly unobservant of anything about fish which is not absolutely forced upon them by their daily avocations" (122).

This condescending attitude towards a "rural way of life" (Harris 110) underwent little change in four hundred years: in the 1980's fishermen were still told by the Canadian government's Department of Oceans and Fisheries (DFO)

that they were wrong in assuming that “fishing on the spawning grounds does measurable damage to the cod stocks” (Harris 125). Tired of “complaining to the wind” (Kurlansky 183), Cabot Martin, Tom Best and Sam Lee among others, gathered enough interest from fishermen frustrated by non-conservationist government policy, to form the Newfoundland Inshore Fisheries Association (NIFA) in the late 1980’s. NIFA, confused and infuriated after taking the federal government to court for continuing to allow fishing on the spawning grounds, and losing, explained that their defeat was “not because the DFO had studied the question, but rather because no one had ever bothered to do the research” (Harris 111). NIFA’s Wilfred Bartlett expressed the collective’s outrage, succinctly explaining:

[...] we don’t catch lobster when they are spawning, the season is closed. You are not allowed to catch salmon when they are spawning. They are left alone to spawn. We don’t hunt ducks when they are mating. We don’t kill moose when they’re having their young. But still for all, it seems okay to kill the fish when they are trying to reproduce. (Harris 125)

The NIFA became instrumental in raising informed awareness in their collective, concerning how “the total mismanagement of the northern cod stock told Newfoundlanders something about the way they had allowed powerful bureaucracies to govern their lives” (110), and in turn, exposed a popular misconception about and oversimplification of reasons for the depletion of ground-fish stocks (namely cod and turbot) which unfairly laid most of the blame

on local fishermen who were on the one hand, supposedly too 'uneducated' to have a valid opinion, and on the other hand, greedy to an exploitive fault.

Cook, better known to Newfoundlanders as a CFA ("come from away"), assimilated his fictional Newfoundland with the mystique of the final frontier, since it has an attractive "mythic quality, a kind of elemental quality, very primitive, very brutal, and yet with immense community and tribal strength which we have just about lost everywhere else" (Parker 23). In an article appropriately titled "Trapped in Space," Cook describes Newfoundland as "an environment of immense menace and fluidity, subject at any moment to explosive and deadly change" ("Trapped" 117). He confesses, in a casual discussion of his own work, that he borrows such ideas from E. J. Pratt as "man's cupidity or greed, or simply desertion of the instinctive laws of nature that bind each to each, will result in disaster" (*Stage* 227). In a desperate Darwinian battle—be it social, emotional, physical or psychological—for men, women, children, the environment, or non-sentient beings, Cook's plays *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* and *Jacob's Wake* explore a unique pocket of the New-found-land as every-land wherein "somewhere in the transition between rural and industrial man they left behind a portion of their souls" (Parker 23).

Cook attempts to show how complicated an issue it becomes when a community, once dependent on the exploited-to-the-brink-of-extinction ocean resources, is forced into redefining gender roles and outdated attitudes. In such a transition zone where the failure of masculine power to sustain life becomes apparent, people continue to struggle for traditional masculinist notions of honour,

wherein questions of “worth and identity [face] an environment which would kill them if it could” (23). Theatre critic Robert Wallace suggests that figures such as Skipper Pete and the Skipper, who are either not willing to adapt, or not capable of it, find they achieve “order for the sake of [their] own humanity” (*Work* 157). Wallace argues Cook’s plays, “are not just about survival [...] but the price of survival” (156), to which Cook adds: “the only way you learn to go into the future is to recognize everything that existed before” (156). The key word here is “recognize” as Cook’s plays present their own battles between the audience’s recognition of the plays’ horrific human *and* environmental disasters. In addition, the informed audience must look beyond the starkness, the tricks, and the oversimplification of Newfoundland culture, for which Cook has been criticized, to understand a magnificent challenge to human heroism.

Empty vessels, and empty rituals: connecting losses to a spiritual absence

The setting in *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance* represents Western civilization in decline, while *Jacob’s Wake*, a play produced twenty years after *Head*, introduces a dismantled human community, a vanquished wilderness in a world seemingly abandoned by God. While the possibility of restoring social order in this Newfoundland community is equal to the dismal prospects of reviving the fruitful bounty of the sea, the family lives in what is repeatedly referred to as “hell” ablaze in the dogfish battles of power, dominance, and destruction. With all three participants of cosmic and earthly order—human community, the gods, and nature—in absentia or chaotic corruption, this fictional post-tragic realm seems pathetically beyond redemption.

Symbolic of the decline of basic human needs, the setting in *Jacob's Wake* does not reflect a home; instead the skeletal frame of a house is papered with "that bulky consistency that comes from placing layer upon layer over the years upon wooden walls" (*Wake* 215). Without permanent solutions or adaptation to a world gone awry with human technological experimentation, this house becomes the microcosm of a greater Earth-presence, maintained with short-term and non-wholistic band-aid solutions. Though Cook initially calls for realism, his alternative vision is perhaps a more cutting vision that is a "stark, skeletonized set [...] a structure as white as bone, stripped of formality, the house equivalent of a stranded hulk of a schooner, only the ribs poking towards an empty sky" (*Wake* 215). There is no place here for imagination; Brad's clear separation from the family community stems from the imagination-as-medical-condition (226), whereas Skipper's creative powers are relegated to the confines of his bedroom, where he "dreams the ghosts of a seafaring community of men in a world once bathed in the glory of the blood and destruction of 't'ousands of swiles."

Cook's *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* is based on a world where religious-like ritual is all that is left of a patriarchy that has no thing, nobody and no world left to dominate, control, and manipulate for its own success and self-defined manhood. As John explains, "the trouble is the god damn place has died afore us. We can't git that out of our guts, can we" (*Head* 27)? As though they are acting out a play themselves, or, like children, playing make-believe, Pete and John mime and gesture all duties associated with their former occupation as fishermen, regardless of the fact that there is no necessity in their actions.

Manifesting Cook's own admitted fascination with "what people do with their hands" (*Stage* 225), Skipper Pete and Uncle John perpetuate a cycle of spiritual and practical rituals from "net-mending, splitting fish, making tea, to making a killick" (225) that support their dominant role as patriarchs in the community. Nonetheless, these empty human rituals both isolate them from their own adaptive human counterparts—namely the women and children—while simultaneously emphasizing the men's clear separation from an equally suffering biosphere. In this way, both men perform now-senseless daily rituals in a deluded state of existence since they recognize neither commitment to civilization, nor to membership in a greater biotic community.

While Cook has been criticized for overtly grotesque and unnecessary gestures, I register them as essential to the play's message, since they reflect Cook's vision that "these things, dying things, would be as fascinating to the audience to whom they were relevant as they would to those not familiar with them" (225). Instead of reading Skipper Pete's and his crew's actions as the "dance" that resonates with tragic overtones of a dying (and now near dead) cultural livelihood, critics have chastised Cook, calling these actions "visual gimmicks" (Galloway 120) used only to "maintain our interest" (120). Critic Marion Owen-Fekete echoes Galloway's disgust by commenting on "the stench which permeates the theatre [as] sickening," warning theatre-goers of the "a smell to low Hell [where] one's nostrils are assailed" and "the fear of getting splattered with an innard" (Owen-Fekete 122). However, interpreting these "gimmicks" as seemingly superfluous dramatic "tricks" changes when history strips the

impossibility out of Cook's futuristic dystopia, thus bringing it into the realm of actuality. For *Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* to be staged now, post-ground fish moratorium (1993), the "waste" of dead-fish stage props, scattered into the four corners of the audience, would likely solicit a greater moral and intellectual disgust than the mere smell did to an audience accustomed to the endless bounty of ocean resources. After all, in March, 1995 Brian Tobin, Canadian Minister of Oceans and Fisheries, told journalists at the United Nations Conference in New York, "we're down now finally to one last, lonely, unloved, unattractive little turbot clinging on by its fingernails to the Grand Banks of Newfoundland" (Harris 26). The northern cod, of course, were already gone.

While there is plenty of blame—both in the fictional and the actual communities of Newfoundland—for the disappearance or extinction of ground fish, Cook suggests that corruptions contained within man-made religions (or religions denigrated through patriarchal hegemonic power) is an important component in the continued arrogance contained within the ideological construction of liberal humanism and is ultimately responsible for the decay of masculine power and identity. Cook's "sound bone dance" ultimately parodies religious rituals, in an ecodrama that explores outdated masculine-encoded constructions of moral transcendence that, in dividing the body from the spirit, justifies continued exploitation of the environment and members of its biotic community. Ultimately, Skipper Pete and Uncle John demonstrate how futile their existence is, void of a self-sustaining environment, when their inability to

adapt (as the fish and seals' could not adapt to modern technology) renders them obsolete in a post-industrial, post-modern, and post-humanist age.

The complex and ritualistic “sound bone dance” illustrates the ways in which men maintain social control through long-standing patriarchal traditions and ideas socially verified; also, it suggests the ways in which man makes God in his own image since this sacrificial lamb—Absalom’s six fish—is treated with religious reverence. After all, Pete and John’s dilapidated fishing hut borrows a “ragged window [...] saved from an abandoned church somewhere and put to use by a crude insertion into the room” (*Head 7*). Brian Parker reminds us that “it is through this window that the Skipper gazes as he rhapsodizes about the past and envisions its return. At the end, when he is left alone, the setting sun dies through it to conclude the play” (32). Theatre critic Brian Parker explains that:

[...] on the surface, the Skipper is an intolerantly conservative Catholic who will not attend his sister-in-law’s funeral because it is to be held in a Pentecostal church, nor welcome the visiting bishop because he has come by car instead of boat and the traditional floral arches have not been built to welcome him. The Skipper’s orthodoxy is wholly superficial, however. He warns Uncle John that, “God is not merciful. Don’t ye ever forgit that,” and seems to substitute his own authority for the bishop’s when he defends the sternness of his regime by claiming “I made an arch for ye.” (32)

Both Uncle John and his wife, Skipper Pete’s daughter, draw parallels between the Skipper having “something in common” with the Pope and being “only one

breath away from God or the Devil himself” (32). Yet, as Parker further explains, Skipper Pete’s pagan tendencies complicate his relationship with Christian orthodoxy and religion, thus creating a hodge-podge of belief systems that both accurately assess the ideology of a “tribal” Newfoundland culture and simultaneously allow for a reading of the wholly masculinist patriarch who maintains the rigid code of Christian dogma but who also makes the rules up as he goes along (not unlike Timothy Findley’s Dr. Noyes in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*).

Throughout *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*, both men lean on fragments of a Christian tradition in an attempt to grasp a doctrine which allows them to hang on to a more glorious past that boasts of an endless hunt for animal blood. Nonetheless, these rituals and fragments are symbolic of a God that is truly dead since they are as shallow as prayers to a deaf God and meaningful only to the few believers left—Pete, John, and Absalom—who claim “it’s [no longer] the same” but continue the motions anyway (*Head* 7). While Absalom is too young to connect the rituals to results, both Pete and John remember when the rituals “might a meant something then” (7). Clearly, a dead sea is a dead God when they question, “confirmation by car” rather than by sea: “where’s the God in that I’d like to know” (7). They live in a dream world, imprisoned by their own need to hang onto traditions that have evolved androcentrically for centuries. They know no other world, nor can they since they “never change a habit or an opinion until someone proves there’s a better one” (21). As Cook points out, no one answers that call. They require a new God with a new philosophy for living

in the twentieth century, one who does not continually banish the body as that which is unclean, like the (dirty) Earth itself.

Where Pete and John perpetuate empty ritual in *The Head Guts And Sound Bone Dance*, the characters in *Jacob's Wake* see a much more disturbing view of shattered Christianity when spiritless atheists isolate believers from the community by deeming them mad. In this way, rather than perpetuating empty ritual through which the characters look for meaning, the family in *Jacob's Wake* rewrites Christian ritual, not as a positive adaptation of Christian ideologies in the mid to late twentieth century, but as an attempt to meet its selfish needs. The uncompromising nature of authentic Christian strictures does not allow for the reproduction of male power within a socio-economic patriarchy. Brad, one of Skipper's grandsons, becomes marginalized in the family's struggle-for-power when they discover he no longer has any outside influence. Like his politician brother, Brad tries devious ways of finding justice for his parish, but his criminal behaviour results in his expulsion from the priesthood. His visions of hell and damnation realistically speak of the family's spiritual and psychological state but they are redefined under a scientific paradigm and thus, dismissed as a "medical condition." In addition, the family celebrates Good Friday, traditionally a time for mourning Jesus' death, with a drinking binge. When reminded that a holiday is a holy day, no one cares and in fact, family members do everything in their power to stop Wayne from taking his Aunt Mary to church. Their virgin Aunt Mary is condemned for her resistance to the "natural" flow rather than being admired for living closer to God by resisting physical urges.

Clearly, all remnants of Christianity have been stripped of their meaning, and Skipper's family flails in response, exhibiting behaviour that suggests boredom, frustration, and to some degree, existential angst. What is left is a community whose faith is put in one's own ability to succeed in a capitalist society without the restrictions of a senseless moral or ethical code. Its faith is as dead as the sea itself. Skipper laughs when the women fret over his soul, for he has more faith in the ghosts of his former sea-faring community than in God's angels. When Brad tries to pray for him, Skipper responds violently saying, "curses, boy. I wants the curses of men. Not the piddlin' prayers of a mewlin' pup" (*Wake* 232). He further curses Brad as part of the entire dysfunctional family, dysfunctional in Skipper's eyes because they do not meet his expectations when he rails: "I niver took to the idea of bein surrounded by a bunch o' damn fairies singing hymns day and night [...] what you calls blasphemy I calls common sense [...] when I goes, I'll go wit' what I knows" (240). With faith only in himself, the fate of the world seems dismally to reside in the power-consumed mind of a mad man, freed from all moral responsibility.

Breaking/making cycles: essentializing the (empty) woman-womb

In Michael Cook's *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance*, and *Jacob's Wake*, in which the ocean, "unwavering and eternal, infinite in its evil power and patience" (O'Flaherty 69), "dream[s] of the bodies of men" (Duncan 122), Cook establishes a division between the feminine and the masculine; herein, men isolate themselves from nature and the essentialized woman who is historically, culturally, and biologically linked to nature. Cook links women—as marginalized

“others”— to nature through constant verbal and physical abuse. Like Cook’s nagging women, his sea also endures despite a perpetual degradation. “She” is the pervasive enemy: “the storm becomes a living thing, a character whose presence is always felt, if not actually heard, on the stage” (*Wake* 215). The sea, like a woman, with its constant unwavering presence, threatens to mutiny against masculine order. Paradoxically, both women and sea, as characters, are underdeveloped, serving as foils to these familial male autocrats; yet, the potential for fertility becomes overpoweringly eternal in comparison to their closed-minded, closed-fisted, and closed-in existence. Ultimately, each man is the sole destroyer of his world, functioning within a larger, careless masculine-orchestrated destruction of the ecology. In this way, Cook consistently asserts dichotomies, hostile in the ways that they manifest unhealthy stereotypes. Mankind’s own creation—modern technology—as the unnamed force responsible in Cook’s plays for over-fished Newfoundland waters and the destruction of its traditional fisher-working class, serves as a kind of over-compensation for men’s inability to give birth; as such, it “naturally” becomes the ultimate force of destruction.

Ironically, while Cook presents his audience with a fracturing of male identity, as a result of man’s conscious choice to distance himself physically and psychologically from nature, women, who are both human and animal become the ultimate survivors because of their “instinctual” (or culturally conditioned) abilities to adapt, nurture, and sustain life. While men ignorantly continue to battle wilderness entities that have virtually disappeared (i.e. seals, fish, etc.), the

human community is likewise divided along gender lines. Women and children function on the margins of social and cultural control, and thus live fully in neither the world of men nor the natural realm. Ironically, however, the survival of the species depends upon that same denigrated “natural” strength of adaptability attributed in Cook’s plays solely to women. Thus, the ecofeminist tenet connecting ecological crisis with the “denigration of women and nature inherent in the market economy’s use of both as resources” (Merchant 100) makes Cook’s work both unique and ideal for ecofeminist study.

Though Cook has often been criticized by reviewers for his blatant misogyny whereby nameless women are cursed, beaten, bruised, and blamed for masculine failures, he paradoxically essentializes woman as a “conventionally female life-force” (Walker 200), thus suggesting “an ideal of spiritual Wholeness” in the image of women as part of nature (201). It is a hollow victory for Cook’s female characters, however, since they possess the skills for survival but cannot escape the controlling hands of a masculine-led hierarchy in which women are simply vessels, only successful if they can produce a son who is, by man’s law, socially and politically worthy of celebration. Cook, despite what may appear to be rampant sexist discrimination against women, serves as an honorary ecofeminist who stands to expose political and social cultural practices, that are proving anathematic to sustainable life on Earth, as wanton; he does so in a way that subtly implies the necessity of feminine power in the presence of universal masculine decay.

What comes into question is the role women play in such a patriarchy where their power consists of their own ability to reproduce a male heir. Clearly, hope for the future is nonexistent in *Jacob's Wake* when the only baby, an illegitimate boy begotten by Skipper's corrupt priest-grandson, is found frozen to death in the spring thaw, stuck to his mother's breast. The boy is found underneath Skipper's moored boat, which is, likewise an empty and futile vessel. This image of the Madonna with child is symbolic of both a barren livelihood and of the interruption of 'natural' human cycles of birth and survival. This 'voiceless' child dies for "political" rather than "natural" reasons, and as such, bridges the gap between humanity and wilderness while simultaneously pointing to how masculinist politics redefine social order—both human and ocean-animal—to an ultimate sabotage of human and animal survival. Skipper's own loss resides in his failure to save his favorite son, Jacob, who was neither the "disappointment" Winston is, nor the barren spinster his daughter Mary is. Jacob's wake is the Skipper's own funeral since he, though he denies it, is responsible for sacrificing him to greater powers. He explains: "as God is me witness, I couldn't move. When the starm came it wor like the Divil had the ship in his hand" (228). After all, the Old Testament Jacob was, as Parker reminds us, "the favoured son who wrestled with the angel and who, by fathering twelve sons, established the tribes of Israel; thus Jacob's death is clearly the loss of Elijah's hopes for the future" (Parker 39). As Jacob is long-since dead, the symbolic significance of his representation of future "hope" is likewise buried. Birth and rebirth may be

possible here but they cease to enter a place of nurture and growth without the sanctity of the patriarchal order.

Where their role is continually reinvented to fit into the struggle for ultimate social control, the female characters in both texts move from a traditional powerlessness to violent physical and emotional abuse. Characterized as subservient, these women scramble from one demand to another with the unsaid expectation that they ought always to anticipate the men's needs or desires (and not just their respective husbands'). In *Jacob's Wake*, for example, Rosie, the wife of Skipper's son, is a "good ship" as she puts up with the sexual advances of her dying and legless father-in-law. After she serves him, the contented Skipper lasciviously utters, "what a tumble we'd have had sixty years ago" (*Wake* 234), to which she simply replies, "ye'd have been tumblin' by yerself, yer bad minded ould divil [...] I werent t'ought of den" (234). And though she has a household of men to wait on, she stays, upon his request, to read to him from his ship logs—the only remaining legacy of his days in power. Since male ritual empowers man with a hegemonic gendered moral code, Cook's female characters have no choice, within that system, but to respond to his definition of "womanness." Though Rosie is central to the action of the play—she never leaves the stage—she becomes foil to the 'real' fight for domination.

On the surface the unnamed wife in Cook's *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* likewise responds magnanimously to her role as nurturing mother. She minds the home, respects social obligations to a dead aunt, and notes her priorities with her grandchildren. Furthermore, she understands her wife-role in

recognizing her husband's role as provider by only coming into his fishing-space when "it has importance" (*Head* 15). Still, John's wife is subjected to repeated mental abuse from her own father, who berates her with unjustified abuse. When she comes to their hut, Skipper "cocks his head, [and] spits with disgust" calling her as "useless as the day ever was. God damnest child I ever did raise. Glad to be rid of 'er'" (5). To her face she is the "Divil's daughter" (15) and a "useless bitch" (17) when he attempts to strike her. Learning through his example, she accuses her father, Skipper Pete, of not changing, "not one bit [...] one breath away from God or the Divil hisself and still as spiny as a whore's egg" (16). Verbally, she is a match for her father and yet, because she is as a woman, she is socially condemned to a life without power or respect. Pete explains: "I niver wanted ye in my house. When ye were born. And I still don't want ye" (16). Skipper Pete prefers Absalom, a mentally delayed child who is, however, male and thus inherits Skipper's place in the chain of life as sea-commander. Furthermore, Skipper Pete maintains control over his daughter's own husband, John, in what reads as a subversion of the "natural" order of pairing, despite Pete's futile attempts to hold onto a livelihood already made extinct.

Skipper's daughter, in contrast to Cook's male characters, serves as an anti-ritualistic figure who speaks against Skipper's male ascendancy and for new ideas through her essentialized feminine role as potential creator. All blame for chaotic interruptions in Pete's highly ordered world is projected specifically onto the woman who, in the short term, causes John to be late and, in the long term, causes the death of John and Pete's livelihood through *her* greed. Pete explains:

It's all of it. It's ye and the Governmint wid its eddication and its handouts and the women snivelling after hot air stoves and 'lectric ovens and motor cars and Bishops goin' from alter to altar and seein' nothing between. (14)

However, Skipper Pete's daughter is the only one who grounds the world of this play—a fisherman's hut sustained by Pete, John, and Absalom's strong-willed imaginations—in a life-sustaining reality. She rails at them for not rescuing the drowning boy and repeatedly repudiates their senseless rituals as a waste of time: “talking about things that once were and will never be again, thank God” (15). According to her, “theys anything more foolish than a fine young man thinking he can make a living from the sea, 'tis an old man who can't stop lying to himself about the living he used to make” (17). Ironically, as the voice of reason (an intellectual domain reserved, in a patriarchy, for men) Skipper Pete's daughter may “nag” the men but her voice, in its persistence, echoes the constant sound of the sea.

By establishing this fictional Newfoundland community ultimately as a place of decay of masculine power, Cook asks us to consider the options for survival: though he swings swiftly to the essentialized woman for answers, he bravely makes a feminist suggestion that masculine power is destructive when it ignores feminine vision and wisdom. If women and the sea are here connected in a universally symbolic light, then women's essential power to create life, and their instincts to nurture well-being are as eternal as an undying ocean nagging patriarchs who are as apathetic towards death as they are towards life. While

Skipper Pete's daughter recognizes the men's culpability in letting the young boy drown, likewise the sea seems to accuse mankind of bringing the fish and the seals to extinction. What is left in these plays, when empty masculine-encoded ritual is stripped away, is a scrambling for male dominance largely at the expense of the female characters and the environment, if it were not already destroyed. Are women next, particularly if they are unable, like the sea, to produce children? The Skipper objectifies woman-as-vessel and links her to the barren sea when he wonders why his own wife could not give him another son after Jacob drowns: "what makes a woman dry up like that [...] like an ould cod" (*Wake* 228)? His answer is profoundly chilling: "Cold seas. Cold land. Nothing growing. Only the harp, the whitecoat. Rust and blood and iron" (228). Though women hold the key to survival of the species through their ability to produce offspring, they are not revered for their creation-status, but denigrated for their base link to the natural world. From an ecofeminist perspective, Cook's women are commodity, useful in a patriarchy, like the seals and cod, if they can reproduce.

Clearly, women in Cook's plays are defined by their patriarchal production value. In essence, though they strive to change the consciousness of destructive patriarchal logic through their words and actions, Cook's female characters fail to gain the political power necessary for social and thus environmental change. Without an overtly ecofeminist conviction, Cook stands on shaky ground when he appropriates an already silenced woman's voice and perpetuates verbal and emotional abuse of women through dramatic mimetic gestures. By aligning women's sustainability with the ocean's eternal mysteries on the one hand, and by

simultaneously recognizing woman's body as a site of subordination in a patriarchy, Cook clearly visits both possibilities; in this way, Cook is paradoxically misogynist, feminist, and ecofeminist. While feminists may criticize Cook's ecofeminist essentialism, within the parameters of Cook's play, 'woman' is still uniquely celebrated both for her non-technology dependent ability to create and her power to adapt. As the only human members of a community vying for bioregionalism, wherein elements of the natural world, animals, and humanity live with respect for one another's differences, women in Cook's plays become ecofeminist saviours, heroines in a stark world of what was once a masculine technological territory of success. Ironically, however, these female characters' chameleon-like qualities stem from their ability to survive within a system in which women have no real power and, to which women are forced to adapt.

The diminished return? Existential angst in the face of ecocrisis

In *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* and *Jacob's Wake* derelict environments reflect the future of humanity incapable of instinctual adaptation. Cook's Newfoundland heroes co-exist in a coastal wilderness "more defiant than despairing" (Malcolm Page 164), wherein man is alienated, by choice, from nature through his own arrogance and pride. The struggle for survival against nature is over: man has won. And it is the Skipper's mournful cry at the end of *Jacob's Wake* that we respond to not as triumphant but as pathetic, as sickly, and as feeble as the death of the outdated trappings of war and the endangered opposing forces of nature. It is a cry that sounds outside the human communal

and linguistic code of meaning, which integrates mind and body, animal and human. Cook's ecodrama shocks the audience into a profound realization that herein, the poetic is the political and perhaps the mimetic force required for actual cultural changes for survival. War, a conventionally noble gesture, is equally stripped of its valour when the hero still marches on "at 'ome too," against an extinct nature-as-enemy. The tyrant Skipper's attitudes are ignorant, misinformed, and reflect little compassion for life; he replies, "the hell ye can. It's not the same. Fightin' nature and fightin' yer brother [...] how can that be the same" (*Wake* 227)?

In what reflects a conventional Canadian literary theme of survival, Cook's plays attempt to marry theoretical dichotomies of man /nature, man/woman, civilization/wilderness, intellectual/physical, inner/outer struggle. Where Skipper argues that "a man's enough to do fightin' nature" (225), Cook suggests that nature is not the source of the conflict. After all, the men in both plays have nothing left to do but what they know: they continue the ritualistic animal-hunt/sacrifice when the very last of the cod are caught by Absalom as a way of pathetically gaining control over the allegedly strategically hidden animal-enemy. In their attempt to assert control of the natural creative process, the male figures in Cook's plays valorize the hunt, and the silencing of women as a grasping at failing masculine power. Clearly, the traditional marine-lifestyle is gone, as the sea has "nothing but living galls and fog and no fish" (*Wake* 225). And though Winston and his boys have given up hope for a seafaring livelihood, Skipper maintains that it is the hunt that makes a man:

Fish [...] was necessary. On account o' them, we took to the salt water.
An' we shovelled them into our guts till our blood were colder'n theirs.
That were schoolin' ye might say, but the hunt, that's different. Every
man, once in a lifetime, has to know what it's like. To hunt. To kill.
To risk yerself, yer ship, yer sons. Aye, and to lose sometimes. (227)

In the same way that Cook's characters divert responsibility for the decline of male power onto women, so too is the sea accused of holding their front line as though it were employing mankind's strategies for war. This process of anthropomorphism, which herein reveals nature as the enemy, is offensive to an environmentally conscious audience; nonetheless, it reflects attitudes and obsessions still held today. As Skipper hits home in a climax of spiraling abuse, he describes sea-storms as "like the Divil" for whom:

Dis is their starm! The starm fer the young swiles! Oh, they'll love it.
Swimming up in their t'ousands, looking for the pack ice to breed on.
Fierce mother, boy. Fierce and proud, I tell ye [...] it's their element,
boy. Not ours. Our gaffs is their enemy. The nor'easter and the ice is
our enemy [...] they'll come back. The swiles'll come back in their
t'ousands and when they do, I'll go greet 'em just like in the old days.
(228)

Like Cook's female characters, who are perceived by the men as always having a destructive and hidden agenda, the sea likewise battles mankind, with waters that are, "grey and ugly. Like an ould hag [...] a quick trip to hell" (228).

Though Cook's depiction of the 'man versus nature' theme falls easily into a Canadian 'garrison mentality' with his use of war-imagery, surprisingly, cod-biographer, Mark Kurlansky reveals a Newfoundland mindset concerning cod which makes both Skippers' obsessions with the return of the cod and 'swiles' less fatalistic. Kurlansky's complete history of a longstanding (over four hundred years) and bloody battle among European and North American governments over cod details how cod stocks instinctively rotate, and how this unpredictable nomadism prevents accurate readings of these fish schools. The findings of how "calculating" the cod's survival instinct is, are staggering, both in terms of how fishermen have come to see them as the plotting enemy and in how impossible it was that humanity could have made virtually extinct such a virile species. Kurlansky points out that since "cod [...] will eat anything. It swims with its mouth open and swallows whatever will fit—including young cod" (33); thus, ironically, "the cod's greed makes it easy to catch" (33). Nonetheless, even cod's greed is no match for that of its predator, humankind, whom Kurlansky, a cod-sympathizer, accuses of being, "an open mouthed species greedier than cod" (45).

Through his own cupidity, mankind has depleted a species of fish, northern cod that was "made to endure" (45). One repeated motif in *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* (with the cod) and in *Jacob's Wake* (with the seals) is the military imagery used to describe nature's actual extinction as a perceived strategy of war wherein the animals have retreated to prepare for ambush. Yet, cod have managed to bewilder scientists, and fishermen repeatedly with their

instincts to rotate—without apparent pattern—feeding and breeding grounds.

Cod's survival skills are remarkable: not only are they “particularly resistant to parasites and diseases, far more so than haddock and whiting” (45), they also:

[...] manufacture a protein that functions like antifreeze and enables the fish to survive freezing temperatures. If hauled up by a fisherman from freezing water, which rarely happens since they are then underneath ice, the protein will stop functioning and the fish will instantly crystallize. (42-3)

Also, the cod is “amazingly prolific” (104). According to Kurlansky, the *Cyclopedia of Commerce and Commercial Navigation* (1858) cites Leewenhoek's findings of “9,384,000 eggs in a cod-fish of a middling size,” a number, we are reminded that “will baffle all the efforts of man to exterminate” (109). Michael Harris cites a discourse on Newfoundland published in London, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as stating that the cod were “so thick by the shore ‘that we heardlie have been able to row a boate through them’” (Harris 43). Add these astounding instincts of survival to the cod's propensity of finding safety on the ocean floors (Kurlansky 10), and their disarming “temporary shifts in migratory patterns” (185) with reports in 1857 and in 1874 of their disappearance, only to be proven wrong as “they would always show up somewhere the following year” (185). Nonetheless, as Harris notes:

As early as 1965 ICNAF was voicing concerns about overfishing and the need for quota. Nothing was done until national quotas were set for haddock and American plaice in 1969. By 1972 [...] it hardly

mattered. Stocks off Newfoundland had been so depleted by then that the actual harvest was far below the established TACs. (72)

Apparently, based on the well-known theory that cod disappear one year and reappear the next, the Canadian government continually dismissed a noticeable reduction in cod stocks, as was reported to them by the fishermen, and scientists since they “assumed that Newfoundland waters were again experiencing this well known phenomenon” (Kurlansky 185). It is not entirely clear whether the majority of fishermen and scientists actually believed the stocks simply migrated in an attempt to “outsmart” fishermen but the cod continued to employ evasive maneuvers. Their final retreat to the ocean floor was ultimately defeated with the advent of radar, which could easily find “remaining cod populations” and “systematically clean them out” (185). Marine biologist Ralph May suggests that the threat against the survival of cod and cod-like species continues to be a cultural problem of perception where “you see some cod and assume this is the tip of the iceberg. But it could be the whole iceberg” (185). This problem of perception, Kurlansky maintains, is further challenged by the common idea that the missing cod are simply an optical illusion. Though cod-industry critics Kurlansky and Harris recognize the complexity of the reasons for the depletion of cod stocks, Kurlansky points harshly to social attitudes in Newfoundland that reflect how closely linked Newfoundlanders are to the ocean biosphere. He emphatically states:

Whatever steps are taken, one of the greatest obstacles to restoring cod stocks off of Newfoundland is an almost pathological collective denial

of what has happened. Newfoundlanders seem prepared to believe anything other than that they have killed off nature's bounty. One Canadian journalist published an article pointing out that the cod disappeared from Newfoundland at about the same time that stocks started rebuilding in Norway. Clearly the northern stock had packed up and migrated to Norway. (204)

Naturally, discussions concerning government-imposed moratoriums on ground-fishing raised Newfoundlanders' hackles. Former Newfoundland premier Clyde Wells succinctly summed up the state of Newfoundland in the mid-1990s when he said, "if the fish don't return, the Newfoundland that we've known can't continue" (Harris 180).

Cook examines how language and war-oriented metaphors build false perceptions that infect the belief systems of everyone from the community-based fishermen, to the government's scientists. According to the Skipper in *Jacob's Wake*, the seals, like the cod, will return in a war where they have the upper hand. The storms from the sea, Cook explains, initially, are on stage "a living thing a character whose [foreboding] presence as always felt" (*Wake* 215). And though Cook may be praised for his recognition of sea-as-character, it is still cast in the darkness of the same arrogance attributed to *his* male characters. This sea is not two-dimensional but its voice is understood as part of an environment "no longer responsive to the timeless bonding between itself and man which makes communion upon this earth possible" (215), as though suggesting a time when this harmony existed; more likely though, Cook hints at a time when the sea, like

women, complied with male orders. In *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance*, the sea becomes a place for man's dreams of a perfect past where "mackerel thicker'n on the water than moonlight whispering together" (9) as though there is a code of destruction, equal to theirs, that plots in a language they cannot decipher. Effectively, the sea is further separated from man, described as a "big place" (11) that they cannot conceive of as having any limits (a mindset that is alarmingly still viewed today as sewage is still dumped into St. John's harbour, not far from shore). After seeing John unconsciously urinate in the sea, Pete is not "pissed off" about his blatant act of polluting the sea, nor does he realize the greater symbolic meaning in such an act but rather criticizes him for lacking self-discipline. Pete explains:

I 'low the sea's a big place. Now a man's a small place. You've got to have order. Decency. There 'as to be a way of doing things. A man's way. That's why we're here isn't it? They's only we left. (11)

In the original production of *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* critics and audiences responded more to a moral lack of decency—men urinating on stage—than to the greater symbolic significance as 1) a measure of the decay of patriarchal order; 2) an act of denigration of the natural world; or 3) remaining male connection to the "nature" through natural cleansing cycles.

John's lack of reverence for the sea, in contrast to the Skipper Pete's more traditional perspective, is that it is "like a bloody pond." By calling the ocean "a bloody pond," Pete's son-in-law, John, recognizes its limitations and as such, ironically conceptually places nature within a biosphere, a first step in achieving

environmental consciousness. Skipper Pete, in contrast, is blind-sided by his romanticized conception of the ocean-as-god. Nonetheless, John still chooses to “pollute” it through a last act of dishonour. Though urinating is a “natural” process, and may be interpreted as a kind of connection between man and sea, it is an unconvincing interpretation of the text, given popular symbolic conceptions of human waste that plague our attitudes and coinciding vernacular. Thus, even though ecofeminists redeem natural human processes—childbirth, “passing water,” sex, bowel movements, and menstruation—by asking us to rethink the shame culturally associated with these bodily functions, most do not relish talking about it, seeing it, touching it, smelling it, or having it foisted upon them in any form. Regardless of whether it is a literal or figurative act, urinating on someone is equally degrading, devaluing, and disrespectful to its recipient. Since Cook stresses the sea is a character rather than a setting, it is important that we identify with the sea in our own unwillingness to be defecated upon.

Interpreting John’s action as an attempt to reconcile the division between man and sea, even symbolically, lacks credibility when John’s attitude reveals a common misconception that abuse against nature reflects man’s right of passage. John’s random act of urination, if anything, is derogatory. Clearly, he is “pissed off” at a sea that fails him. By “polluting” the sea with yet more discarded human waste, John attempts to express his rage through non-verbal communication. He recognizes its limitations as “a pond” but still urinates into it, further illustrating mankind’s unwillingness to make adjustments in thought and action which might help save his own biotic community. Though his own body is capable of

cleansing and renewal through this natural process, John refuses to identify with the sea's cleansing and hopeful potential. Unlike Skipper Pete, John has given up: he describes the ocean as "bloody"—like a warpath, a killing field—so why not pollute it? Alternatively, the sea is "bloody" like a fertile woman: why not rape it? Who is stopping him? An ecofeminist reading of this "act" (as opposed to ecocritical) would likely view the phallus as a universal and symbolic tool of destruction whose actions in a literary form—urinating, masturbation, sexual acts/intercourse, and rape—expose a misconception of hegemonic masculine power as "natural."

As in *Jacob's Wake* the main male characters in *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dancé* valorize the hunt as a process necessary for defining manhood. Absalom knows there are no more fish but, we are told, "e 'as te go" (*Head* 9). Pete's own explanation for his lack of nurturing in fatherhood is that he claims, "ye had to bring 'em up 'ard else they wouldn't survive." Now, without that trial by nature, he is disgusted with their "fear of animals;" "look at 'em now—they's nothing to survive against" (9). Given a decline in masculinist power, communities existing outside the exclusionary men's club—namely, women and nature—are perceived as enemies, conspiring against male success. Though Pete chastises John for urinating in the sea, he equally disrespects members of his biotic community by railing against startled seagulls as though they "do be mocking a man. All the time" (9). Defined by their lack of capitalistic value in a man's world, they have no place, except as "bait on a bobber." Ironically as the last vestige of sea life—and as scavengers, akin to Pete and John's own fate—

they would have them dead too. Ultimately, theirs is a world of silence, filled only with ritual and order. And though this world kills chaos, it simultaneously kills life. Blame, once again, is deflected onto the seagulls whose lonely cry warns of eco-crisis, yet the men brag with revenge stories of eating seagulls, “tame as chickens” and “fat as a goose.” Ironically, the men claim, it “got worse since they was protected [...] a damn sight worse” (10).

By defining masculinist culture as one kept inviolate by rituals of degradation against the “other” (women, animals), Cook’s plays point to the necessity for revamping wanton patriarchal practices. Ironically, these men, whose mental and emotional well-being are dependent on a false belief in the logic of dualisms and hierarchical order, ruin the biosphere through centuries-old destructive habits, that is necessary for their sanity. For them, saving the order of patriarchy is more important than rescuing a nearly extinct animal species. For example, Absalom should be punished for not allowing the fish stocks to replete; instead, he is given credit for his attempts and practically given a medal for bringing the last fish, the last supper, to Pete. Like Judas who betrays Christ with a kiss, Absalom captures the last fish (symbolically a figure for Christ as a fisher of men), whereby sending this would-be saviour of the stocks to its sure-death. His triumphant catch ironically reinstates man’s control over what he perceives as the ‘mysterious’ disappearance of the cod. Yet Pete’s theory is that “if there was just one fish left in the ocean he should be able to find it” since “[he] taught him all he knew.”

Like a series of Chinese boxes, Cook's drama reveals how the many complicated layers in the race for masculinist power—individually and collectively—are to blame not only for ecocrisis, but also ultimately, for the demise of a false patriarchal privilege. Predictably, while the women fight for the nurturing and sustainability of life, Cook's men are preoccupied with death. In this light, living becomes a competition to see who can last the longest, at the expense of quality of life. John explains to Pete, and to those members of the audience who may have missed the point: "we're playing a game, that's all. A death game, the woman's right" (26). To them, the sea is revered like an Old Testament God who is full of fury and revenge. They fail to help a drowning boy, Jimmy Fogarty, since:

[...] the sea wanted him. Old Molly she took him in her good time. She marked him down. Today, tomorrow next year [...] it doesn't matter. She touched him the day he was borned" (30).

In a superstitious balance where nothing is given without exchange or sacrifice, the loss of the boy is simply necessary, as a price for the fish Absalom brings home. In their experience, he is just like the boy who "fell over into a school of dogfish [...] stripped clean in ten minutes" (19). Always described as female, this "sea raging like a barren woman [...] got fed that night" (12). Scorned, she leaves no trace of the body—"not a spar" (12). Like cod which do not join larger cod-schools until the age of three (Harris 199), Jimmy Fogarty symbolically represents how human patterns of ignorant behaviour interrupt the possibility for restored social order to either the human community or the biosphere.

Like *Jacob's Wake, The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* also speaks of a sea that is strategically waiting to wage war on mankind. Pete explains:

It's not a game. Ye cursed blind fool. We gits ready fer the fish year after year, that's all. And we waits. And out there they knows we're waiting. And one day, they'll come back, in their t'ousands, when all the boats has gone away, and nobody thinks they's anymore. They's waiting for the old days like we is [...] We took what we could get. They knew us, and we knew they, and they bred faster than we could take them [...] We understood each other—the sea and the cod, and the dogfish, and the sculpin, and the shark, and the whale [...] And if we keep ready, and we keep waiting, they'll come again. (25)

Tragically, Pete's plea to John to stay active in the war is the closest link Pete ever has to the biosphere, yet this connection can only be read in terms of a bond formed in war.

Defining ecodrama

Identification with the persecuted environment becomes increasingly possible in any literature as the Western audience develops a widely acceptable environmental prehension and compassion. In the past three decades, Cook's ecodrama informs an audience much more cognizant of the threat of ecocrisis, having already witnessed an inconceivable moratorium in 1993 on ground fish. Accepting ecodrama as an emerging sub-genre within the theatrical spectrum allows for shifts in consciousness, already underway within popular conceptions, to be explored in ways that challenge liberal humanism and its tendency to

privilege human concerns, ideologies, wants, and desires. In Cook's vision, humanity—through a conditioning of privilege which has allowed for the formation and maintenance of a centuries-old greed left unchecked—becomes the main instrument of destruction in the microcosm of a community unable to separate the past from the present, the ritual of the catch from the catch. Cook's men symbolically represent the downfall of all humanity; they, in viewing nature as the enemy and as the exploitable, have created their own inevitable extinction. In the face of a horrifying reality, Cook's plays take on another layer of tragic irony when, three decades later, his plays reveal his fictional prediction of an inevitable cod-moratorium. By not privileging humanity Cook creates a kind of futuristic science fiction, an ecodrama that represents a post-tragic state; herein, tragedy—as a dramatic form in which humanity, nature, and the gods find a harmonious state—loses its traditional denouement. Instead, humanity survives without the possibility of redemption since the trilogy is broken: nature and the gods appear extinct, as humanity seems to have destroyed civilization, the environment, and any meaningful spirituality.

By revisioning nature as an entity worthy of fair, equal treatment, and not as a force and resource to be exploited (like women and animals), Cook challenges religious notions of stewardship which have fundamentally trusted the Earth's care to an easily corruptible species. As such, how God appears made in man's image, instead of man in God's image, shows how men like Skipper Pete—who have lost meaning in their rituals, value in their beliefs, and hope for their god-given biosphere—reflect a corrupt stewardship. Without the ability to adapt to

the rapid changes of technology and ideologies, these men and their god are equally unchanging traditionalists who privilege the afterlife over the earthbody. Thus, what is needed is fundamental changes in religious, social, and cultural systems that are not tolerant of the important voices of others; a newly perceived spirituality might then be described as a genderless organic collective of multifarious philosophies that present themselves as tolerant and adaptive to varying cultural, religious, and personal ideologies.

By placing man, women, and nature on equal footing, Cook asks us to consider: 1) There is either no God or the masculinist God commonly perceived in Western civilization is man-made to suit exploitive male desires. If there is no God, we have only our actions for and against members of a greater biotic community to be accountable to. 2) The myth of the logic of hierarchical order is dangerously destructive since it leads to absolute power corruptions, which in this case, exist within any organized or loosely assembled human community (i.e. government, church, family, etc.). 3) The lessons learned from natural cycles of respect and sustainability may be necessary for human survival, and may or may not redefine spirituality to include those excluded by an outdated spiritual belief-system. From this perspective, humankind is not perceived as superior to nature or vice versa. Thus, in setting a new template for environmental literature, Cook allows, critically, for us to consider options for this kind of genre. Though clearly Cook's literary product is not the only means of staging environmental disaster, he offers the ecocritic entry into the possibility of an evolving dramatic future.

If Cook is, as I believe he is, a pioneer of ecological drama in Canada, his plays may serve as a springboard for the direction of an evolving ecodrama. Through Cook's art, questions of how we (re)interpret the human relationship with nature are raised. I propose that various interpretations of Cook's poetics—namely four options—suggest new possible direction for ecological drama in the tragic form.

1) The post-tragic form

If we view Cook's play as a post-tragedy in which nature is elevated to a god-like status, then pathetic fallacy, as a literary construct, must necessarily be reconsidered obsolete. As plays plagued with human ritual set in comparison with and against natural cycles, Cook's dramatic art questions "solemn sympathy" and its empty worth when ritual has no purpose and natural cycles of death have no hope for rebirth. Since humanity herein is not alone in grieving the terror or pity of the agent of tragic forces; as a construction based solely on the mirroring of human emotions to a metaphoric natural universe, fallacy becomes an inaccurate trope since "all creation" weeps at their death. In Cook's own "realistic" drama, a sympathetic tension is created between the mythic and the fallacious in which the reality outweighs any fantastical imaginings. Myth seems unnecessary when the disappearance of actual oceanic residents (as opposed to mermaids and selkies in more ecofeminist interpretations of ecodrama such as Cindy Cowan's *A Woman from the Sea*, further explored in Chapter Five)—the fish and seals—is as mysterious as the invention of any mythical creatures.

Ironically, because there are none left, and no one has seen any, sea creatures become mythical in Cook's futuristic vision.

While Cook's raising of the sea to god-like status is nothing new, the reduction of its vastness to a pitiful pit of barrenness raises questions concerning any empirically defined belief system possible of creating such destruction. In other words, Cook asks us to consider the paradox of two possibilities: 1) if God is created in man's image, and not vice versa, then man-made religions have clearly failed and are, themselves, as obsolete as livelihoods for Skipper Pete and Uncle John. 2) If the sea is God, and mankind in its war against nature has killed it, what kind of satanic ruling entity is the world left with? Once read as stranger than reality, three decades later Cook's plays blend fact with fiction, thus ushering in a new wave of ecological literature and ecocriticism

2) Revisioning the human hero

Environmental drama—by isolating 'civilization' just as conventionally the human hero remains the focus of plays, and novels—asks us to redefine humanity's perceived privileged placement in the biosphere. In light of this consideration, ecodrama asks us to rethink the individual importance of the hero by placing 'human civilization' on par with 'wilderness community' to illustrate the necessity in dispelling the myth that 'nature' is inferior. The ecodramatist ultimately asks us to view—much as feminist theory postulates—that we recognize equality in difference.

3) Nature as character, and not setting, backdrop, pathetic fallacy

The popular convention of mirroring human emotion to natural setting is exposed as a literary convention that clearly lacks respect for the wilderness or animal-other. By lessening the distance, at least in literature, between humanity and nature, ecodrama hopes to create a kind of deep ecological example wherein humanity can imaginatively bridge the us-versus-them gap with the natural world with the hopes of ultimately actually bridging the ideological and/or spiritual divide. The biosphere becomes paramount when presenting the audience with this option: there is no dichotomous division between human and natural communities; heaven and hell; intelligent-man and emotional-woman; earthbody and transcendent spirit. New ecological literature would thus prioritize life and “all creation” in a celebration of the earthbody, both personally, and publicly on a cosmic scale.

Though Cook’s poetics do not take the audience to this imaginative or ecospiritual extreme, his plays do pave the way for future dramatists and writers of environmental literature to explore that ways in which a revival of nineteenth century nature writing might echo, in a more practical way, the human-nature connection. Instead, Cook establishes the ocean as a character, infused in the play’s production as a constant. In this way, human-characters are not privileged but enter and exit a biosphere, a “home” in which the ocean-as-character is the host/ess.

4) Radical revisionist ecodrama

Briefly stated, Cowan’s main character, the pregnant Almira (“the sea — mother of us all”) journeys on a seaside quest for self-discovery in the face of a

conscious hatred (she and her husband, George are environmentalists) for humanity's creation of ecocrisis. While the division between man and nature is perpetuated in patriarchal pigheadedness, that same separation becomes incredibly blurry as Almira's feminist quest teaches her about rebirth, and hope in future generations. Ultimately, the tragedy begins with Almira's hesitation to bring an already conceived fetus into the world; the natural order between nature, human community and the god /dess is restored when she is able to come to terms with all of these life-participants within her own earthbody.

Thus, like Cook's plays which stress man's ironic inability to adapt to his own inventions, Cowan's drama finds resolution in woman's natural cycles and their inherent ability to recognize the need for change, and to attempt necessary alterations to theories and to practices. In this way, Cowan's play is precisely the opposite, in conventional terms, of Cook's dramas. However, in this ecodrama, the goddess-like selkie, Sedna—in true feminine cooperative spirit—sacrifices her life for Almira's unborn child and the potential for ecological cooperation that it carries with it. Sedna's own fate is determined, repeatedly as her stories show, not by acts of god(s) *per se*, but by the perpetually destructive and unjust hands of the patriarchy. In fact, patriarchal forces, in a story of origin, literally take her hands, which become the sea creatures; additionally, she completes her life cycle as she is cast out to sea, mistaken for a dead and rotting carcass by the hands of Almira's husband.

While Cook creates a mythological dystopia in the future, filled with barren despair, Cowan reaches to an ancient matriarchal past for solace and hope for

rebirth. In this way, Cook and Cowan present us with two possible starting points for ecodrama: the apocalyptic future wherein the ultimate destruction of the physical environment may or may not yet be realized by its human participants or the present-day exploration of current environmental theories that warn of ecocrisis and how those seemingly purely academic pursuits are internalized emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically within the individual and the community.

Those interested in ecodrama will find interesting developments in ecodrama, not surprisingly, through alternative, marginalized voices—namely feminist and gay/lesbian writers—who, by positioning themselves within a context of nature's voicelessness in society, create compelling extended metaphors for seeking equality in difference. While Cowan's play is an excellent example of revisionist ecofeminist mythmaking, Bryden McDonald's *Whale Riding Weather* attempts the nature identification trope with a more "natural," self, as a way of challenging a common social perception of homosexuality as "unnatural." Aligning a gay man with a whale has its own set of metaphoric implications: whales need a specific biosphere in which to survive (salt water) but, as mammals, cannot breathe underwater. Thus, they while they bridge the gap between land and sea dwellers, they are simultaneously "out of place" in their own milieu. In addition, whales are highly intelligent, have a developed system of communication, and are one of the largest, most magnificent mammals. McDonald's main character is a gay man who, quite literally, will not come out of the closet; his paranoia of social condemnation keeps him prisoner in his own

apartment, wherein his own pets are kept caged. With cages within cages, both symbolic and literal, McDonald shows how the “unnaturalness” of a gay lifestyle is created more by society than the individual. Ultimately, his identification with the whale, whale song, and dance shows the emergence of a self-actualized man, gay or otherwise.

Betty Lambert’s *Jennie’s Story* (1981) sets “natural” neo-pagan law against Christian laws when masculinist corruption allows for the sterilization of a woman against her will and knowledge to hide a priest’s sexual deviances. Other more obscure (eco)dramas include Mary-Colin Chisholm’s *Safe Haven* (1992), wherein “natural” life-cycles are celebrated (kittens and puppies), and set against the hypocritical killing of mice seeking sustenance in the food cellar; these actions that decide the fate of smaller animals become questionable (as does power, and godliness) within Chisholm’s context of an AIDS epidemic wherein human beings are likewise, willy-nilly, either killed or spared. Also, Wanda Graham and Kent Stetson’s *Woodlot Rap* (commissioned by Stage East for the Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forests), and Catherine A. Banks’ *The Summer of the Piping Plover* (1991) review mainstream ecological agendas within a dramatic context.

Other considerations for (eco)feminist dramatists include First Nations’ writers. George Ryga’s plays—*The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* and *Grass, Wild Strawberries* among others—examine the tension between a recognition of wilderness teachings and a growing European urban and technological influence on Aboriginal culture. More ecofeminist-centred plays include Shirley

Cheechoo's *Path with no Moccasins* (1991), and Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1990), and *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes* (1991). From an ecofeminist standpoint, the evolution of ecodrama (years after Cook's productions)—not surprisingly—consistently comes from minority writers; it seems that the social identification of racial minorities, feminists, and others marginalized by mainstream masculinist voices find a link to nature that addresses the injustices of those “othered” by cultural/social denigration.

I have attempted to argue that these plays are environmental dramas—a new kind of genre—that combines both humankind and animals in a biotic community that insists on not separating the tragic elements between human and nonhuman worlds, between the “civilized” and the “wild” other. As Cook illustrates, human greed and ignorance is the cause of the community's downfall yet the male characters, recognizable as microcosm for the greater patriarchy, blame everyone—the government, the women, the technology, the fish, the seals—except, themselves. Cook's futuristic vision ultimately warns humanity against the destruction of a pregnant sea—full of possibility—through how it is miscarried, mistreated, and misunderstood by masculine-encoded ideologies and cultural practices.

Chapter Three

Bearing her b(r)east: Women on (eco)feminist pseudo-wilderness

spiritual quests

Through poetry and other savage/ poignancies we glimpse/ the hinterland—a group of moons/ with pockets, Karst topographies inscribed with streamless/ valleys, sinkholds, caves, and disappearing/ rivers. No one lives there/ yet the rock is rich with loss. [...] Somehow/ we grow the animals we need, cunning, watchful,/ cowardly, with the survivor's sidelong grace.

Don McKay *Night Field* (46)

I know no woman—virgin, mother, lesbian, married, celibate—whether she earns her keep as a housewife, cocktail waitress, or a scanner of brain waves—for whom her body is not a fundamental problem: its clouded meaning, its fertility, its desire, its so-called frigidity, its bloody speech, its silences, its changes and mutilations, its rapes and ripenings. (Slicer “Body” 108).

Adrienne Rich

sitting simply ‘this/ human body’ vivid &/ ‘at last attained’/ (fuchsia perfect fragile & changing/ with each breath/ (large as a laugh/ & flutter-brief/// wind-, lake-, pine-/ mothers all round/ *tsombus, devas, pretas*/ all breath-beings & non-breath sky// offered thus.

Daphne Marlatt *This Tremor Love Is* (110)

In a literature that, according to Coral Ann Howells, necessarily “registers change and slippage from historical origins,” from a “colonial inheritance [that is] to be both recognized and resisted” (*PFW* 12), Canadian postcolonial women writers “register[] both awareness of displacement and the urge towards the definition of an independent identity” (12). Marian Engel’s *Bear*, like Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*, Aritha Van Herk’s *Tent Peg*, and Ethel Wilson’s *Swamp Angel*, explores “wilderness” as a necessary underworld which runs counter to codified masculinist expectations of feminine strength and womanhood. While these texts reflect an early movement towards environmental literature—a “post-pastoral,” of sorts—in which women explore their own connections with nature, an ecocritical reading also reveals the use of “wilderness” simply as a space

where distancing from gender apartheid becomes possible. These novels of retreat reflect a pseudo-wilderness continuum that addresses how women authors react to a colonial paradox—that conflict between interpreting the wilderness in terms of the pastoral ideal while being simultaneously aware of the wilderness as “vast areas of dark forests, endless prairies or trackless wastes of snow [...] written into the history of Canada’s exploration and settlement” (Howells, *PFW* 12). The literary identification of mapping the self against, and with, the metaphor of such a landscape, is not only irresistible for feminists, it is necessary. By reading *Bear* ecocritically, nearly three decades after its initial publication in 1976, the leading question emerges: is this brand of wilderness quest an attempt to live *in* the wilderness or *with* it.

Informed by Frye’s garrison and nature/culture models (Murray 78), Canadian women authors on spiritual literary quest who engage in wilderness escapism as the model for feminist self-triumph, find more solace in a space outside civilization than through any exclusive connection to the natural world, itself. As Annis Pratt suggests, “if the belly of the feminine whale encloses and entraps the male hero, to the female hero society is the engulfing monster” (“Affairs” 161). Heather Murray’s “Women in the Wilderness” examines the hypocrisy of a culture that not only valorizes nature and natural values in art but ultimately “privileges ‘culture’ and disenfranchises those who are seen as being actually close to nature—women, women authors by extension, and Native people” (74). Murray argues that women writers on pseudo-wilderness spiritual quests, through iconoclastic fictional writing (as opposed to diaries, letters, etc.),

break “these land patterns” by “calling for a redefinition of the ‘natural’ itself” (75). Thus, in answering Atwood’s call for a feminine response to texts that the paint the North as “a sort of icy and savage *femme fatale* who will drive you crazy and claim you for her own” (*Survival* 89), women authors such as Engel, Atwood, Van Herk, Wilson, etc., despite ecological shortcomings, nonetheless attempt a reversal of the nature-as-enemy paradigm in revisioning the “pastoral impulse” from a non-masculinist perspective.

Pratt maintains that while Canadian women writers experience “othering” from a female perspective, from “*their own bodily nature*, because of society’s opprobrium for femininity” (164), Canadian writers in general understand alienation and “othering,” having been squeezed historically and culturally by superpowers, Britain and the USA. Pratt agrees with Atwood’s suggestion in *Survival* that “Canadians feel more in common with animals’ specific experience as animals than they do with the hunters and exploiters, and this alone would place them in a position much closer to that of women than of men” (Pratt 166). After all, Howells attests, the “politics of imperialism and of gender have much in common” (*PFW* 4). In the new millennium, however, this argument is weakened by the continuing rise of international awareness and respect for Canadians—distinguished by a unique cultural heritage that is not American—stemming from accolades in areas such as social interaction (‘polite’ behaviour in international travel, voted number one place to live in the world by UN survey, sports); politics (peacekeeping), creative leadership (art, film, music, performance, literature), culinary endeavours (wine and beer-making, maple syrup), and maintaining

cultural heritage (CRTC, national artifact protection, National Parks). Notably, as I mention in Chapter Two, Canadian ecological literature appears to have its post-ecological revolutionary beginnings in the literature of minority writers whose literary expression identifies closely with ecofeminist tenets. While *Bear*, and *Surfacing* are not exceptions, more evolved protoecological writings begin to emerge in Canadian literature a decade later in the late 1980's (as I will explore in Section Two).

As Pratt, and Murray argue, Canadian women writers are "particularly socially placed to examine the problems of nature/culture mediation, which seem to characterize the literature" (Murray 81). Because women are viewed historically in terms of their identification with the natural world and thus are culturally considered less evolved than men, their "symbolic ambiguity of the middle ground helps us to see how representation of woman is always double" (Murray 82). Relke argues a similar point as justification for her focus solely on women writers; she claims, "Canadian poetry by women tended overwhelming to refute Frye's terrifying view of nature as "other" and irreconcilably opposed to human consciousness" (*Green* 25). As a result, "the work of women poets either remained on the peripheries of Canadian myth criticism or was subjected to the imposition of this dualistic way of knowing nature" (25). Thus, Murray and Relke both argue in favour of the Canadian woman's unique position as mediator since "the situation of the woman author in Canada clearly displays the position of woman, within and without culture, within and without discourse" (82).

S. A. Cowan makes this comparison between masculine and feminine-oriented wilderness quests apparent in "Return to *Heart of Darkness*: Echoes of Conrad in Marian Engel's *Bear*"; herein, Cowan notes, "Conrad's lover instructs, but also tempts and destroys; Engel's teaches and heals" (Cowan 81). Cowan further suggests, however, that Lou may be 'confused' when she attempts to mate with a wild animal but "Marlow is never that stupid to presume he can manage the wilderness" (88). Nonetheless, as this critic fails to point out, Lou does not fundamentally change for the worse; she does not go mad; nor does she get killed: she *returns* to 'civilization' with a personally unprecedented renewal of spirit and selfhood (in the very least, she is at peace with its fragmentation). Her body, correspondingly, boasts of a permanent and empowering souvenir-tattoo.

Howells describes *Bear* likewise as "a response to the strangeness of Canadian landscape [... that] is finally not about hostility and victims but about the inviolability of natural order and the healing corrective power of nature to save us from ourselves" (*Ariel* 107). Though *Bear* challenges traditional notions of the idyllic literary pastoral, Margaret Osachoff warns of the novel's tendency to dangerously romanticize nature by "looking there for signs and patterns that have meaning for the human mind" (13). For many critics, these feminist wilderness quests celebrate nature from a positive and non-masculinist (i.e. non-competitive) perspective. Though they recognize this contribution to a shifting ecologically-minded social consciousness, ecocritics criticize the genre as a literature of contradiction, and oversights. Thus, as proto-ecological, these texts do instigate changes in the human-nature dynamic, but they never fully address

the potential of a human-nature biosphere. While these texts may give some answers to Atwood's interrogation, they do not go far enough; their revisioning of nature is often, unfortunately, no deeper than the pseudo-wilderness they venture into.

Notably, Murray advises that this apparent wilderness as a place of influence is never "a deep bush or far north country" but is instead in a "pseudo-wilderness" such as a rural area or camp. These are not fictionalized versions of the romanticized survival story—woman versus the elements in a tale of life versus death—but psychological and spiritual quests in which women narrators find the escape from social pressures and the strictures of a male dominated society equal to, if not more important than, lessons learned from and in a wilderness space. Murray argues for a "city/pseudo-wilderness/wilderness continuum" as the "basic framework underlying English-Canadian fiction in which 'land patterns' reflect certain destinies of psychological and spiritual balance, depending on the 'wilderness' perspective" (76). As Howells points out: a fictional wilderness "is not presented as an alternative to twentieth century existence but rather as a place to be emerged from with strength renewed" (*Private* 18).

In this way, (as Murray reading Kroetsch attests) it is a "literature of dangerous middles" (75). From an ecofeminist perspective, it is both 1) a literature of 'safe wilderness trails' where the wilderness—albeit a pseudo-wilderness—is exploited as it serves once again as a tool for human expression and expansion without any regard for its own oppression and expression; and 2) a

brave venturing into wilderness space as a place of rejuvenation and renewal—a significant inversion of the traditional Canadian nature-as-enemy, human disaster story. *Bear*, itself, fails in its ecological expression when, by targeting nature with romantic notions and anthropomorphism, Lou neglects “the beariness of bear” (Osachoff 20). However, as Osachoff further asserts, “maybe Lou has learned [...] not to expect [the bear] to be a human being and have human qualities and not to expect him to serve as a symbol [...but can] simply see him as an ‘entity’—bear” (20).

Recognizably, making gender distinctions concerning the wilderness quest motif is as problematic as an ecofeminist reclaiming of the essentialized female-subject position. Annis Pratt, whose exploration into Canadian literary archetypes began as a self-professed feminist inquiry into women’s “essential difference from men in regard to nature,” decided “there is something in common between women and Canadians that creates a unique affinity in nature archetypes” (161). Where the wilderness is conventionally seen as “an environment of alienation, a sub-moral and sub-human world” (161), Canadian writers—men and women—act against the popular conception that man identifies with the positive, civilized and rational side of cultural dualistic thinking in which “man feels uncomfortable with nature [... as] a closed cycle that he is trapped in” (161).

The question still remains, however, for those “othered”—women, people of colour, animals and wilderness—by colonial hegemony: if “we are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here” (Howells, *Private* 19) what does it mean to reside in a “literature of dangerous middles” in which an

“attendant doubleness of vision is always a feature of [their] wilderness narratives” (Howells, *Ariel* 107)? Ecocritical studies of texts such as Atwood’s *Surfacing*, and Engel’s *Bear* that venture towards (eco)feminist evolutions of attitude towards nature, wilderness, ‘other’ and woman-self, reveal a gender-distinction between the masculine quest for the pastoral *outside* of himself and the feminine findings of the pastoral *within*.

The feminist pastoral impulse: seeking the post-pastoral

By conforming to Michael Branch’s notion of the ‘topological imperative’ as a social need to have a culture develop in the greatness of the landscape (Branch 284), Marian Engel uniquely explores “the feminine” in the wilderness as it manifests itself in the menacing greatness of the black bear. From a feminist perspective, the bear is fitting, since, symbolically, it threatens humankind in ways that profoundly outweigh the fear associated with bush madness. Donald Hair likewise contends, “if there were to be a Canadian bestiary, the laughing bear, standing or sitting upright, would have a central place in it [since . . .] In the bear [...] body and mind are thoroughly integrated” (38). Branch associates the “topological imperative” with the magnitude of the American landscape; Engel, instead, inscribes the enormity of the wilderness and its myths within one of Canada’s largest carnivorous land animals. As I have explored in more detail in my Introduction, Kolodny’s theory of the “pastoral impulse” suggests an American need, linked to their New World legacy, to experience the land as nurturing, despite its apparent hostilities. In contrast, as I have defined it, the “topological departure” is the *Canadian* tendency to garrison *against* the

environment; this perspective, which has become, unarguably, part of a Canadian cultural inheritance is unique to Canada since it deviates from the romance of American frontier myths. Within this theoretical context, Engel simultaneously parodies the American pastoral impulse by making the most threatening of North American wild animals gentle, serene and caring, and inverts the topological departure, similarly, by inviting 'the bush' into an obvious wilderness garrison, Colonel Cary's Pennarth.

Engel, borrowing from myth and Aboriginal legends, chooses the bear as a creature symbolic of a profound ancestral link to a past that recognizes, if only fantastically, a necessarily physical and psychological connection to animals within and without the human mind and body. So-favoured is the bear, as Lou discovers, that in Ireland they "not Adam and Eve, were our first ancestors" (73). Admitting to extensive knowledge concerning bear folklore and myth, and as Verduyn points out, "the archetypal potential and capacity of the bear" (*Lifelines* 130), Engel includes thirteen fragments of this history in Colonel Cary's books, discovered by Lou randomly. Clearly, Engel has "tapped into a very old and rich tradition" (131), including a connection to ancient matrilineal goddess myths (that ecofeminists are so fond of). Citing Pratt's "Affairs with Bears," Verduyn adds, "bears are among women's nature archetypes, to be found in [cultural artifacts and artworks ...] perform[ing] such archetypal functions as transformation and empowerment" (130). Pratt likewise contends, "women turn to bears when men turn to cruelty, or when men expect them to sit at home rather than roam the forest at will" (130).

With *Bear*, Engel joins the ranks of the many Canadian women writers on spiritual quest whose protagonists take “green world lovers,”—“the marginal eccentric outsider, who is necessary to the full expression of women’s socially repressed sexuality and eroticism” (Verduyn on Pratt *Lifelines* 130)— in the pseudo-wilderness continuum where self-knowledge eventually prevails over social sexist injustice. Described by many critics as “the perfect example of a modern pastoral idyll of the primitive type” (Osachoff 13, citing Montagnes, Amiel, Oates, Knelman, Appenzell, Kennedy, Taylor, & Cameron), *Bear* is better described as “writing [that] probes the edges of so-called reality and its fictions, striving through fiction toward another reality enlightened by authentic, women’s perspectives and experiences” (Verduyn “Ex” 16). As UK ecocritic Terry Gifford explains, British pastoral literature employs Roger Sale’s five R’s: “refuge, reflection, rescue, requiem and reconstruction” (Gifford, ASLE). So does Marian Engel’s *Bear*. Gifford, through his exploration of Lawrence Buell’s criticism of American pastorals considers “multiple [pastoral] frames of ‘counter-institutional’ texts of retreat” as being consistent with a “pastoral movement.” However, rather than seeing the twentieth century pastoral in literature as static, as Buell does, Gifford theorizes that through its organic movement away from the traditional aspects of the pastoral we come to know a new literature of the late twentieth century that he calls “post-pastoral” (see my Introduction).

While *Bear*, as an “alternative’ reality (Verduyn “ex”), or “inversion or ironic treatment of such [wilderness] myths” (Osachoff 13), clearly qualifies as post-pastoral, according to Gifford’s general definition, it nonetheless fails to

meet his particular expectations of the evolving post-pastoral for two reasons: 1) environmental consciousness was in its infancy in the 1970's (particularly in Canada) and therefore, it lacks formal recognition from the outset of the politics of ecological thought, theory, and practice, and; 2) standard practices of inversion in feminist texts often offer a feminist agenda at the expense of ecofeminist concerns. Nonetheless, had Gifford recognized the unique position and patterning offered by such feminist pseudo-wilderness writers (i.e. Engel, Atwood, Van Herk, Wilson etc.) in post-colonial Canadian writings, no doubt, their contribution to the post-pastoral would have been detailed in their own division of this evolving genre.

Like Atwood's Moodie in *Journals*, *Bear's* Lou quests for self-knowledge and liberation from gender stereotyping; sections of its narrative reveal an awe-filled respect for nature, but instead of "leading to humility" as Gifford demands from the post-pastoral, they lead instead, to the opposite conclusion—to self-empowerment, oftentimes with indifference to, or at the expense of, ecological concerns. This kind of liberal humanism in traditional masculinist texts is the dénouement that both ecopoets and feminist writers seek to avoid; however, women's narratives, which encompass a significantly different political agenda, are complicated by their paradoxically liberating and restricting social, psychological and cultural link to nature. Furthermore, if, as Gifford's post-pastoral mandate dictates, the "inner replicate[s] the outer," then the animal in *Bear* is more male-other than animal-self. In this way, the text examines

symbolic representations of wilderness in a feminist allegory, and not as much in an animal-privileging, post-pastoral manner.

In addition, one may argue that Lou's feminist journey falls short of the "imagination" required as a "tool for healing our alienation from nature" (Gifford); instead it sutures Lou's physical and psychological selves, left paralyzed by isolation and lack of feminine identity within a patriarchy. Even though Howells claims *Bear* is about "the healing corrective power of nature to save us from ourselves" (*Ariel* 107)—wherein Lou's 'healing' ironically involves the complicated metaphoric and psychological interpretations of a physical scar imprinted, likewise, on her psyche—it fails to address how Lou and Bear mutually benefit when Lou, once scarred, distances herself psychologically and physically from the bush. Howells argues that "[Lou] is free to interpret as she pleases" (108), just as Bear, though seemingly tame, is at liberty to respond 'knowingly' or 'instinctively' to Lou's external stimulus. For Howells, however, "the bear's action is as neutral as a flood or a snowstorm [. . . wherein Lou] chooses to read the indifference of nature as benign" (108). Ultimately, the tattoo serves as a reminder not to succumb sexually, emotionally, physically, or psychologically to the will of another (male) entity; in remembering *that* lesson, Lou heals a wounded feminine self, crippled by cultural expectations and stereotypes, and in so doing, sets an example for redefining womanhood but does not allow for the possibility of a continuous woman-nature relationship. The key word herein is not nature's "connective" healing power but its "corrective" abilities since the novel's priority remains pinned to the human's well-being.

Nature's healing is not, ultimately, insignificant since it, importantly, connects Lou to her process of defining womanhood and selfhood. As Patricia Monk contends, Lou's self-development is illustrated by her own reflection in the bear. Thus, "the punishment is for [...her] relapse into passive behaviour" (33). In a similar argument, S. A. Cowan suggests that Lou's self-exploration is stimulated and structured by "her desire to cleanse the wilderness" (77). Cowan maintains that this action confirms Lou's need to "suppress[] truths about herself, or of gliding reality to make it appear acceptable" (77). Nonetheless, whether 'the water is fine'—interpreted as a place of rebirth, as a place of hidden truths, or as a place of narcissistic teachings (all of which apply to the symbolic presence of water in Atwood's *Journals*)—it has transformative qualities, for better or for worse, when Lou and Bear "mutually rejuvenated" become half wild and half civilized. Lou emerges, according to Cowan, "herself an image of the wilderness" (77). The moments shared between Lou and Bear may suggest, as Cowan argues, a 'mutual rejuvenation' since the bear is "freed [...] from the unnatural restraint of the chain" and Lou is "reborn"; however, Bear is only liberated insofar as Lou's requirements dictate. Furthermore, his destiny is obviously limited to the whims of whatever colonizer currently controls him. He is never returned to the wild, nor could he be, since 'civilizing' forces have changed him, one may argue, for the worse, leaving him somewhat helpless. Nonetheless, arguing against *Bear* as a text that attempts to link woman with a wilderness-other would arguably be inaccurate, even though *Bear*'s link to an ecological imagination is tenuous.

The feminist agenda apparent in *Bear*, as is the case with other pseudo-wilderness continuums, limits the extent to which women identify the exploitation of self with the exploitation of wilderness. The exception is Atwood's *Surfacing*, which hints at an ecofeminist agenda by linking a first-person narrator's oppression symbolically with 'otherness,' namely victim-animals. She can be: shot like the loon; useless since "our proper food was in cans" (*Surfacing* 129); hung by her feet from a tree like the pointless killing of the heron (124, 197); or exist as "a new kind of centrefold" placed in "the hospital or the zoo" (204). However, like *Bear*, *Surfacing* fails to meet the criteria necessary for classification as a post-pastoral novel since the focus remains heavily on a symbolic nature to illustrate feminist politics of denigration through animal imagery. For example, David degrades Anna by objectifying her body, and further, by casually "reducing" her to animal-status. For *Random Samples*, a film produced only by the men in the group (even though "an idiot could do it" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 87)) David suggests, in the production of the pornographic image of Anna's naked body (to which she is opposed), that it could "go in beside the dead bird, it's your chance for stardom [...] You'll get to be on Educational T.V." (144). Meanwhile, David also jokes about "hook[ing] a beaver" and a "split-beaver," derogatorily aligning woman's genitalia with the "national emblem"(128). Atwood's female narrator's response is that it is no joke; "it was like skinning the cat, I didn't get it" (128).

Bear perfectly illustrates how feminism and ecofeminism can contradict one another. For example, Lou rejects social domination by freeing herself from a

patriarchal sexually-harassing director and by fleeing, independently from the oppressive—personal and professional—confines of her life in the city. Her sexual affair with Homer, in contrast, exists outside social confines and sexual limitations since its parameters are wholly defined by her and as such, represent the manifestations of Lou's "natural" desiring woman-self. Furthermore, she engages in a non-traditional, cross-cultural heterosexual relationship with a black bear. Clearly, Lou seeks power and/or control (in contrast to a powerlessness she felt before leaving the city to venture into the wilderness) through her attempts to have his actions reflect *her* notions of civilized social and sexual behaviour. Because in *her* quest for self-discovery she comes from a place of inadequacy, she does not involve herself in a preferred love affair within a respectful partnership. The impossibility of such a union suggests a hidden racist and/or sexist narrative, as her role emulates the same dictatorial strictures imposed on her by the director. And though she reaches an epiphany that teaches her to stand by the power of her own convictions (as powerful as saying "no," as scarring someone with actions or words) through Bear's violent teachings, he appears tropological in the way he is so easily dismissed in novel's resolution. Ultimately he becomes a wilderness motif in a text that reads as feminist in Lou's self-absorbed quest for selfhood; as a feminist novel with proto-ecofeminist aspects, Engel's text continues to support a nature/culture split—which ecofeminists strongly oppose—in its resolution. In an attempt to argue in favour of Canadian pseudo-wilderness continuums or Canadian women's spiritual wilderness quest novels as post-pastoral, one must recognize that shortcomings which celebrate feminism fail to meet important

ecofeminist criteria: the wilderness still serves as a tool for self-discovery and not as an entity with which healthy new relationships must be discovered, defined and forged.

Ending fairy tale(s) endings

The sexual and birthing-essentialized focus of *Bear* makes comparing it with Gifford's second aspect of the post-pastoral—"recognition of the creative-destructive universe"—possible. Where Lou fails to fully recognize this greater wisdom by trying to mate outside her own species and by failing to respect the bear's own natural violence and propensity for savage killing, she wants to see it in "mythological" terms, as "civilized;" she explores bear-as-wilderness as it has been "imagined" for centuries by philosophers, historians, ancient societies, and writers and not as it may actually exist. Her purpose for mating with the bear is as much fantasy as it is erotic since she aims at having fantastical offspring: she wants him for all the wrong reasons. The end result is that her story is as much fairy tale as the written history of the relationship between humanity and bears, as it has been shown to her in the bookmark snippets found in the estate-books.

Within this feminist narrative, one cannot help but compare the bear with a prince since it hints at the kinds of expectations girls are taught to have with respect to potential husbands. Bear? Prince? Frog? What's the difference? Coming to terms with *Bear* has left critics discordant with one another, deeming Lou's wilderness retreat everything from 'primal/primitive rebirth' (Cameron, Monk, Cowan), 'mythological' (Howells, Hair, Monk), 'allegorical' (Cameron, Cowan), 'alternate reality' (Verduyn), to a 'fragmented pseudo-rebirth' (Katz).

It is a text that has critics debating whether it is pastoral, anti-pastoral (Gadpaille), parody (Turcotte, Osachoff) or, as I hope to add, post-pastoral and/or protoecological. Many critics such as Monk, Cameron, Gadpaille, and Turcotte agree that *Bear*, for obvious reasons, reads as fantastical; Turcotte, quoting Rosemary Jackson, comprehensively explains that fantasy necessarily “recombines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real” (Turcotte 74). More to the point, *Bear*, from a feminist perspective, reads as an ‘alternate reality’ placing fantastical elements into the realm of reality and literary realism in a reflection of women’s unique experiences with reality as a kind of fiction (Verduyn “Ex” 16). Nonetheless, elements of “wilderness as a place of uncompromising reality” (Cowan 75) become problematic to the ecocritic reading Engel’s text since Lou’s naïve and romantic perspective, captured by the narrative, focuses more on nature as a tonic for the soul (Osachoff 17), thus forgetting “the ‘bearness’ of bear,” and “infring[ing] on his identity and mak[ing] him her ‘lover, God or friend’ or Canadian archetype” (20).

Nonetheless, all critics agree that *Bear* is a feminist narrative, inverting patriarchal strictures on women in its attempt to resolve “not just male power, but the equation of sexuality, voice, and power, and the rejection of them all as male” (Fee 26). Thus, as a pseudo-fairy tale or parody, *Bear* does become Lou’s prince (much more so than Homer who effectively “saves” her by riding a modernized “white stallion”, his motorboat, to her island, to bring her food and to instruct her on methods of common sense survival); however, Bear is a prince who, through

his “mark of Cain” likewise rescues her from any number of undesirable destinies including “pretense [...] the violation of biological law and the denial of human identity” (Cowan 82); “disillusionment that results when the real world contradicts impossible expectation” (Cameron 90); a “relapse into passive behaviour” (Monk 33); a “sacrificial death” (Hair 44), and becoming masculinized in her lust for sexual domination (Fee 24-5). Ultimately, the bear saves Lou from her passive and paradoxically, aggressive self, simultaneously. Thus, by revisioning, from a feminist perspective, the fairy tale myth of earthly-salvation for women, Engel finds, for her protagonist, a self-empowering victory, of sorts.

Bear, like other fairy tales, exhibits a traditional blurring of social, cultural and physical boundaries, that lends itself ideally to a narrative that attempts—though it does not always succeed—to challenge masculine-encoded dichotomies that have limited, in their categorical labeling, ‘womanhood.’ As well, the body as a place of transformation and possibility itself becomes an intermingling of the actual with the unlimited. Without hesitation, fairy tales challenge boundaries between life and death (*Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*); rich and poor (*Cinderella*); humanity and nature (*The Frog Prince*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Pinocchio*, *Hansel and Gretel*), within the everyday and the extraordinary. As Cameron argues, “Engel blurs the boundaries between man [*sic*] and beast in an attempt to right the balance of a society which has alienated man [*sic*] from his primitive natural self” (92). As a feminist revision of masculinist fairy tale-allegories, Engel’s narrative challenges lessons which teach young girls that their adult life begins with a

man's promise to wed and, by extension, that their identities are issued and defined by his professional, economic, intellectual, creative, and moral activities. Engel's bear-tale, according to Margery Fee, manages to "debunk the colonial mentality, the male, literary tradition, and even that representative of the wilderness, Nobel Savage, Demon Lover and fairy tale Prince, the bear" (Fee 20). Ultimately, however, she cannot "debunk the patriarchy" and as such, "at the level of female identity [...] the novel becomes serious, deformed by irreconcilable tensions" (20). Fee argues against the common critical perception of *Bear* as a text that "unifies" Lou into complete selfhood, that unrealistic ending that flaunts a mutual benefit for the "happily ever after" partners. Instead, Lou fails at an ecological connection ("she only thinks she understands the bear, because she has been anthropomorphizing him" (21-2)) and fails, ultimately at finding an identity that is "somehow 'out there' or even 'in here' just waiting to be found'" (22).

Like Atwood's *Surfacing*, Engel's feminist novel leaves a very open ending for the future of the protagonists since, as feminist philosophers stress, this quest is more about understanding how one responds to process, evolution, and the need for adaptation as an on-going life-path (particularly for women who have only "[male] social models" (22)) than a convenient, "found" or "integrated" identity might represent (22). "After all," Fee asserts, "Lou's experience is as much one of disorder and fragmentation, of violating norms, as of fulfilling the social expectation that she will finally get her act together, find herself a good man, and tidy up her mind, messy as her basement office" (22). Just as the bear leaves

physical scarring, the myth of the prince-tale perpetuates emotional scarring for women taught to expect to be “saved” in life, or from it. Neither fairy tale—staying with the bear, or being rejected by him—herein satisfies Lou’s hunger for self-actualization. Most importantly, however, if we read *Bear* as a progression wherein the protagonist moves from a man-seeking “romantic extremist” or Platonic idealist (Osachoff 17, 19) to a wilderness-respecting moderated realist, then it makes that ecofeminist bridge between women and nature, wherein women’s sense of identify can be found, respectfully reflected in the camaraderie of the woman-nature link, since both women and nature-elements are marginalized by masculinist ideologies. Given this particular interpretation, *Bear* clearly defines, if only in a limited extent, the feminist post-pastoral.

Remythologizing the wilderness: women on spiritual (eco)feminist quest

The question persists: does this woman, on spiritual quest, identify more with Bear as a “wild” animal, closer as the essentialized ‘woman’ may be to nature; or does she identify with Bear because he, like her, has become tamed and silenced in order to live within a patriarchal society? Bear becomes an ecocritical question of whether Lou lives in the wilderness or with it. I have drawn this distinction in an attempt to interpret Lou’s wilderness identification strategy (i.e. how she is “othered” in this text) to show, in particular, how her position pertains to pedagogical differences within ecofeminist, feminist, and deep ecologist milieus. Does Lou identify with Bear because he is, like her, wild and ‘natural,’ or does her recognition of him become too closely linked to his captivity to be anything but ecofeminist? *Bear*, since it explores women’s connection with the

wilderness-space in a way that conforms to historical literary values already established for women by male writers, effectively becomes ecofeminist (and herein, by association, post-pastoral) by challenging “the repeated mimetic gestures of women nature-writers who trace masculinist notions of wilderness” (Murphy, LNO 119).

Engel draws attention to a masculinist survey of literary and cultural mythology as Lou repeatedly finds (serving metaphorically as an appropriate constant reminder for women) slips of paper that trace the bear’s fantastical appearance in the history of human imagination. Many of these references link woman and men with bears in unions that conjure pre-Christian matriarchal associations with nature. Ironically, while many read *Bear* as a feminist quest for equality with men, the subtext of a mythological link between the bear and human civilization tells a different, more ecofeminist story. Though Mary Zeiss Strange strongly opposes any theoretical association with ecofeminist philosophies in *Woman the Hunter*, her concluding chapter connects her to a basic ecofeminist tenet when she revisits the figure of Artemis as a source of empowerment for women on spiritual and practical quests for equality in sameness and in difference. Strange wrongly asserts: “the implications of Artemis as a goddess of women are [...] lost on contemporary feminists to the extent that in current goddess spirituality her ‘bad’ (i.e. destructive) aspects have been split off from her positive (‘nature-loving) side” (136-7); the majority of ecofeminists celebrate the non-dichotomous cycle of birth and destruction in addition to a recognition of multifarious factions, practical and theoretical, within the movement. In that very

vein, Artemis (as a subtext to *Bear*) suggests a woman's emergence into what Strange considers an Artemis-inspired "crossing of gender-boundaries" as a kind of "unleashing of female energy" onto "Western patriarchy [which] might be said to be the history of attempts to kill or bridle that energy, or to trick it into submission" (149). From an ecofeminist perspective, however, Engel's Artemis subtext reveals a much-celebrated revisiting of the kind of 'natural' empowerment women have lost in a patriarchal defining of womanhood, which limits women to procreation. As an ancient Greek symbol of both motherhood and hunting, to "act the she-bear" (during the documented festival of Artemis at Brauron) and which, one might argue Lou does in this novel, is to "propitiate both Artemis, mistress of wild animals, and Artemis the virgin goddess" and to accomplish this "transition from parthenos [virgin] to gyne [woman] with the "protection of Artemis Kourotrophos, patron goddess of childbirth" (Strange 144-5).

Not surprisingly, Lou documents her findings in a professional manner, but fails to identify emotionally with any of the mythological "facts" left on the colonel's bookmarks until she reads one that connects bears with women in the procreation of a hero-offspring. Because in Lou's mind these slips become her possible *I Ching* and because, in her mind, she begins to imagine the possibility of these absurd connections between humankind and beast as "reality," Engel both parodies historical construction of the human-wilderness link and supports a possible interpretation of how Lou's quest is akin to goddess-oriented rediscovery of an ancient woman's wisdom. On one hand, Engel's selection of the wilderness bear and the conscious placement of clues which reveal a mythological past

linking humans to bears is an ecofeminist triumph; by “acting the she-bear” Engel’s woman on spiritual quest becomes empowered by a non-dichotomous redefinition of woman empowered by an ancient symbolic figure—Artemis—who is both pursuer of her individualistic desires as hunter and the goddess who assists with the feminine spiritual and physical metamorphosis between virgin and mother. Yet, on the other hand, because Engel does not fully develop the goddess-spirituality motif, Lou reads as a character living *in* instead of *with* the wilderness. Like a colonial constructivist herself, Lou transplants urban/colonial human ideology into the woods as she becomes emblematic of human power over our defined relationship with nature.

Ecofeminist Marti Kheel explains that the “beast” as it appears throughout cultural history is the ultimate alien force (a force also associated with femininity). It is:

[...] conceived [of] as a symbol for all that is not human, for that which is evil, irrational, and wild. Civilization is thus achieved by driving out or killing the Beast. On an inward level, this involves driving out all vestiges of our own animality—the attempt to obliterate the knowledge that we are animals ourselves. Outwardly, the triumph over the Beast has been enacted through the conquest of wilderness with its concomitant claim to the lies of millions of animals driven from their lands. (245)

Lou is handed a simple key to training the bear when Lucy tells her to: “shit with the bear. He like you, then. Morning, you shit, he shit. Bear lives by smell. He

like you” (Engel 50). Though Lou describes it as a “humiliating act” (51), she follows Lucy’s advice ultimately using Bear’s propensity for smell to perform sexual acts on her. Engel pursues the act of defecation as a reversal of the kinds of anti-nature, masculinist myths Kheel describes, which pit animals against humans. In contrast to Cook’s fishermen who urinate into the sea as a kind of personal and final act of denigration, Engel’s female protagonist defecates *with* the bear instead of *on* him. Ironically, in her attempt to alter the traditional masculine-encoded mythology, excrement becomes associated with femininity—an absurd connection considering how femininity has been socially determined. That is, civilized ‘femininity’ is closely connected to a moral and physical high-ground of cleanliness; on the other hand, the ‘natural’ or ‘wild’ woman, who exists outside the confines of masculinist society, is linked with “dirty,” bad-smelling bodily purgation and desires. For Lou, a woman, that inner animality is what makes her human; ironically, however, her humanness comes at the expense of nature, herein symbolized by the bear who becomes more unnatural in his tamed state in order for her to learn lessons of wilderness liberation from him. Engel’s text, as a kind of parody of masculine-defined essentialism, reduces and revives this over-simplified notion that women are less cultured, and less civilized than mankind since they exist “naturally” as human agents closer to nature. In fact, a feminist reading of *Bear* can potentially expose Lou and Bear’s relationship as a parody of women on pseudo-wilderness quest, showing how a patriarchal definition of womanhood is as outdated and as unreal as a woman mating with a bear in the woods.

Revisiting the colonial paradox: non-exploitive values in the feminine pastoral impulse

If we consider, as Diana Relke reading Atwood does, that a fiction which “presents a woman as the central figure, landscape is not “other” but “self” (39), both protagonists move through *Surfacing* and *Bear* respectively allowing themselves, to some extent, to become part of the landscape. The protagonists replace patriarchy with neither a wilderness colonization nor a bushed madness (though a degree of insanity in both texts is part of the feminine quest for self-discovery); they attempt to harmonize with their surroundings as though a subconscious identification with the self-as-nature was already in place. Unlike Atwood’s male protagonists who “deny the ground they stand on” (Atwood, *JSM* 16), women on spiritual quest become more closely involved, more closely integrated with a landscape with which they have conventionally already been associated. In what is perhaps an unfortunate word choice, Marlene Kadar suggests, “Susanna Moodie is both colonizer (British) and metaphorically colonized (by the foreign wilderness)” (Kadar148). When reading Moodie from a feminist postcolonial perspective one might take umbrage with the defining of Moodie as colonizer; as a woman—herself colonized by the patriarchy—she is more closely identified with a nature-victim than with those who maim, kill, hunt, murder, exploit, slash, and destroy the wilderness and its inhabitants.

If we examine the social lexical implications of the word “wild-er-ness” or “wild-ness” with respect to the way it is used in *Bear* and *Surfacing* to reflect the social values of western civilization, we find a word that is applied to both women

and animals and which, in differing meanings, still overlaps in those perceptions. According to the Oxford dictionary, “wild” refers to a plant or animal that is neither domesticated nor cultivated—not civilized, and barbarous. A “wild” man, on the other hand, is similarly unrestrained, and disorderly, but, like the beast he imitates, he is deemed “mad” or savage. What is missing from Oxford’s definition is how “wild” is associated with women through their connection (rather than the male ‘disconnection’) with natural cycles and elements. Because women are still considered “closer to nature,” their association with “wildness” becomes less a term that deviates from the norm as it refers to mankind and more a derogatory term that has come to fruition as acceptable terminology for “excusing” women’s unexplainable passion, madness, or hysteria. In this way, the “wild” woman is one who is sexually liberated as though social restrictions are notions she is “naturally” incapable of adhering to. As the “wild” sexual woman, she is both exonerated and abhorred, within the same culture and oftentimes, by the same man.

This “violent duality” inherent in woman’s sexual expression is reflected in *Bear* while masculine-encoded social definitions of a love-hate link with women’s diffuse sexuality is more the focus in *Surfacing*. In this way, Atwood critiques patriarchal limitations associated with female stereotypes, while Engel obliterates sexual stereotyping altogether by depicting an absurd extreme in displacing inaccurate definitions of womanhood, as it pertains to her independence, self-worth, sexual desire, and biological link to creation and natural cycles. Not surprisingly, both protagonists find sexual freedom and/or their own “wildness”

with an actual “animal,” either figuratively, or literally. Female sexual liberation, largely association with the natural, indicates a recognition of the sexual self apart from masculine-encoded fears of feminine sexual energy and places them in a physical and psychological (eco)feminine space wherein a woman’s body and its desires are able to function fully, uninhibited.

Clearly, a wild-ness, connected to both woman’s sexuality and the Canadian bush come together more so in *Bear* than in *Surfacing*. On a deeper level, Engel examines a fantastical reality behind the injustices of women’s essentialist link to nature; nonetheless she also seems to celebrate women’s essentialized link with nature in the way that her female protagonist subverts cultural wilderness expectations. Ironically, while Engel recognizes this link between women and wilderness, liberation and sexual freedom, in a way that illuminates wild-ness (freedom from imprisonment) as natural to animals and wild-ness (freedom from sexual entrapment) and as equally natural to women, she fails to deal with the issue of ecofeminist and postcolonial power politics inherent in such an exploration. In other words, there can be no rewarding sexual freedom for Lou without the captivity and domestication of the so-called “wild” bear; her brief encounters with Homer lack the emotional and psychological intensity she finds, ironically, with Bear. While Lou battles sexism with regards to her own definition of self, her own treatment of the colonized “black” bear is critically overlooked. One may argue that Lou did not train the bear, the bear was not harmed, nor did he suffer any emotional or psychological turmoil when she left. In fact, one may contend that she improved his lifestyle with refreshing and

playful trips to the lake, extra-special food (what she ate, “honey,” and the fish she could not clean), as well as the warm cozy sleeping quarters in the house by the fire. Yet, colonizers before have made this argument, to the disadvantage of the subaltern.

Patrick D. Murphy in *Literature, Nature, and Other* calls for a “revisionist mythmaking” in nature-writing to stop the repeated mimetic gestures of women nature-writers who trace masculinist notions of wilderness at the expense of a more innovated, less alienated relationship with nature (Murphy, *LNO* 119). If we read Lou’s relationship with Bear in a masculinist light, in which Lou is more male-identified than female (a difficult argument to suggest since *Bear* is so sexually charged) then *Bear* becomes yet another story of the empowered white conqueror (in this case Southern Ontario-ite invading the unknown, uncivilized and often forgotten settlement of Northern Ontario) coming to exploit what s/he has already categorized as the lesser “other.”

It is not difficult to see Bear as Lou’s slave; after all, as Canadians, we all fear the black bear as the greatest wilderness danger, a man-mauling wilderness beast. Yet Lou’s bear, Bear, is depicted as more of an old woman, more of a sister to Lucy than a potential lover, man, beast, or threat. The text contains no sexual innuendoes between Lucy and Bear, though she seems to have fostered a long-standing friendship. Homer makes a racist link between Lucy and Lucy’s kinship with the bear when he explains to Lou, upon her arrival to the island, that:

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, and if she says it's a good bear, maybe I can ask you to feed it.

(Engel 23)

Moreover, Homer explains that:

“On a fine day [Mrs. Leroy will] sit there and talk and knit a mile a minute. The two of them together, they were a sight to see.” His eyes got shifty again. There was something he had thought of, but didn't want to say. (39)

One might interpret Homer's silence, or self-stifled intention to speak, as a narrative hidden by social taboos: he may suspect Lou's sexual interaction with the bear, or he may have prior knowledge of the bear's sexual prowess.

Regardless, his silence is suggestive of a kind of racial and/or cultural “given” that mixed (sexual) relationships are spoken of disapprovingly, in hushed tones. However, Homer may be resisting making racial slurs rather than discussing sexual taboos since, to Lucy, Bear is much more like a sister than a lover. Simply put: Homer might not want to say that they look like two sisters of colour.

In fact, when Lou leaves, and Bear is finally taken away by Lucy, Bear-as-social-chameleon settles into a sister-role with her, not unlike how a colonized race of First Nations people appear, historically documented, as a *tabula rasa* to imperialist claim. His behaviour displays what is unspoken—the pathetic stripping of any will or desire of his own, as though he has been beaten into submission. His own identity does not seem to come from within his individual bear-spirit, or beariness, but is picked for him by whatever transitory human counterpart associates him/herself with him. Described as “a fat dignified old

woman with his nose to the wind in the bow of the boat” (164) when he leaves with Lucy, this bear (the same bear?) is an odd contrast to the sexual stud Lou wants him to be. A postcolonial reading of Bear exposes him as the harsh symbolic representation of the “brainless brown women” (Heller 225), the native-other exploited by the “cult of romantic love” (219). On the other hand, from a feminist point of view, Bear could be symbolic of a more evolved man who harmonizes feminine/masculine strengths; ironically, if this is the case, Lou finds “perfection” in the savage beast, or rather, reflected in herself as she finds a space where social hegemony is suspended. In this way, the very definition of Bear’s selfhood is called into question as a decolonization of his “nature” may reveal the same kind of limited definition of “womanhood” that women have encountered by living within a patriarchy.

As one postcolonial theorist argues, “these structural and ideological barriers facilitate the condition of social alienation” (Heller 229) and as such, in *Bear*, Lou is no more closer to identification with Bear than she is with her own reflection in the lake as Atwood’s Moodie is initially in *Journals*. Lou, in a late-twentieth century context, understands patriarchal sexual and psychological subjugation; yet she still pursues a “relationship” with a wild bear that necessitates exploiting him. Her own self-expressed “history” with animals (a three line summary) reveals Lou’s lack of concern for or interest in animals. The reader is told: “she was not fond of animals” (Engel 29); she did not miss a road-killed puppy; was annoyed by kittens; and had seen a bad movie about bears (34). In short, she is not one who tolerates, embraces, attempts to understand, or

respects the animal-other. Given Lou's lack, her attraction to the bear is, itself, fantastical.

In an attempt to enter his world, Lou mistakenly commits anthropomorphism by interpreting Bear's every gesture and expression. Initially, she speaks of the bear with "small sad eyes, not menacing, only tired and sad," a "hump" (32). When she begins to settle on the island, the bear begins to mimic her own expressions: when she laughs, "he looked as if he was laughing too" (50), thus suggesting a kind of symbolic mirroring, a clear process of self-identification through the bear's image. Because her quest is more self-fulfilling than wilderness-seeking, Lou finds that, ultimately, she knows nothing about the bear. Fee argues that Lou "comes to terms with [her problems] in the wilderness only to the extent that she projects a society on to it" (22). Monk likewise suggests that Bear serves as Lou's psyche-mirror; she states: "when it seems to her that the face (image) she has given him is appropriate, it is so because it reflects her own level of development stalled at that point" (33). When she achieves self-awareness, unfortunately, the bear has nothing left to show her: "she could see nothing, nothing, in his face to tell her what to do" (155).

Ecological literary critic Jane Frazier suggests:

We fail when we try to anthropomorphize, when we attempt to use animals as mirror to ourselves. For the modern ecotinker, the position should be one of recognizing shared attributes as well as differences and not ascribing the humanlike animals in order to validate them

through a sort of narcissism [...] [we must instead] derive from them what can legitimately be ours—not ownership but kinship. (36)

Thus, Bear reflects Lou's own potential masculine strength in her quest to find and define 'feminine' sexuality. For Lou, sex with Bear is strangely masculine, conforming to the rules of conquest, balanced in a dualistic internal convergence with wild feminine passion. Thus, sexual androgyny born out of the author's clear feminist agenda, is manifested in the bear who exists unencumbered by social and cultural strictures. Nonetheless, though Lou comes away from the woods like Atwood's Moodie, "having not learned" (Atwood, *JSM*), she concludes her quest with the realization that she is not an invaluable product (as society suggests for women who exist outside of the social norms of "wife" and "mother"), but part of a self-defining process. And though Bear did not teach her, as he might have, through his own ability to be both lover and sister, both wild and tamed, both bear and human, both woods-sleeper and house-dweller—about anti-dualistic thought—he teaches her about selfhood through, ironically, a socially "safe" yet complex sexual experience. Herein equality—physical, spiritual, intellectual, psychological, and emotional—becomes paramount. Lou's own needs become apparent when, ultimately, neither Bear nor Homer meets the elements necessary for sexual and/or emotional fulfillment. Physically, she is no match for the Bear, but more importantly, his vacuous, chameleon form may have allowed her the luxury of pursuing the meaning of personal power. Ultimately, Engel suggests, heterosexual partnership potential requires that neither he (as Bear was to Lou) nor she (as Lou was with the director) be used—emotionally or

physically—as a vessel of personal fulfillment. One may argue, as Fee does, that Engel’s resolution comments profoundly on Bear’s scarring of Lou as a lesson against women, within certain power-dynamics, becoming male-identified controllers. Fee interprets “the text’s attempts at resolution” through Lou’s Bear-back-scar as an equalizing of masculine violence. In other words, “his ‘male’ violence also means she is free of any guilt resulting from her ‘male’ domination. They may not be equals, but accounts have been squared” (25).

Reading *Bear* as an allegory allows us to sidestep the question of sexual morality by dismissing literal readings of the text as bestiality, though notably, a strictly figurative reading of this text, which explores a redefining of the female body and its desires from a non-masculine perspective, is highly problematic. If *Bear* is truly allegorical, however, what prevents Lou from having actual intercourse with the bear? Cowan argues in favour of the scarring incident as a mutually necessary moment wherein, “nature will not tolerate pretense” and “full union with the bear would symbolize both the violation of biological law and the denial of human identity” (86). Readers and critics cannot have it both ways: if the text is fantastical or allegorical, and the bear’s presence, symbolic, then union is not only possible, it is probable. After all, Lou seems to prove that Bear is, in many ways, a better choice, at least for some women, than a man. From an ecocritical perspective, the commitment to consummating the human/animal bond is more rewarding than *Bear*’s actual outcome of severance between woman and animal. The whole issue of bestiality is instead downplayed, as though the ultimate act of desire of connecting spiritually, emotionally, and physically with

nature is either impossible or so abhorrent in the human “civilized” mind that Engel cannot bring them together, even fictionally.

Her inability to become part of this wilderness biotic community—whether ‘natural,’ (i.e. species cross-breeding) or constructed (i.e. too far removed from the natural self)—prevents Lou from conceiving, figuratively and literally, a hero offspring. The impossible hero, thus, reflects Lou’s earlier need to be rescued by a male prince/hero, and her equally conditioned belief that women are defined by through their male counterpart, and furthermore, by the quality of their male offspring. By dispelling these myths associated with women’s stereotypical roles, Lou’s “empty vessel” bulges, instead, with personal possibility. From a feminist perspective, Lou becomes empowered by this epiphany; however, ecofeminists might envision the more imaginative possibilities in the co-creation of a wilderness hero/ine not for the sake of self-definition, but in the interest of connecting woman with nature in a non-destructive way. Thus, from an ecofeminist standpoint, Lou’s scar serves as an unhappy reminder—like the scar of industry and environmentally exploitive practices (i.e. clear-cutting) of the division between nature and civilization. Perhaps, then, the ecofeminist lesson is that “natural” species fidelity exists through an “instinct” that runs deeper than human “logic.”

Furthermore, it is impossible to correctly interpret Bear’s aggressive swipe on Lou’s back. It could have meant that he *did* want her sexually; she was in his space; it is not her place to pursue sex; or simply, it could have been a random act of wild “natural” behaviour. That we cannot know his message—is there is any

message at all?—is one lesson. Clearly in this text, understanding *Bear* is to ask the *wrong* questions: more importantly is the feminist treatment of Bear—as she continues to exert power and control over this bear-other—a speaking out against past patriarchal injustices? Bear may not be a man but he is, at least symbolically, male. She punishes him by kicking him out of the land of imperialist luxury through bold gestures and loud verbal abuse. In addition, she bans him from their relationship indefinitely. Effectively, she wins the psychological power struggle, but at what cost? The feminist interpretation of this dénouement might argue that there is a significant gain for Lou, who returns (granted, still alive) to civilization, “having learned” at least something about herself and the unnecessary dependence on a male-other. Ecofeminist scholars, however, might argue that the cost is much greater than we might have initially considered.

Because Lou does not actually consummate her relationship with Bear through sexual intercourse, this text is understood more clearly as feminist than ecofeminist. Given the extremely menacing presence of Bear, Lou symbolically learns to stand up to her own fears by facing him. The scar she receives is a reminder to seek her own path, without relying on a masculine life-force to define her existence. Nonetheless, this interpretation asks us to shake our heads at the kind of extreme measures it takes to have women regain their common sense. Still, in what might be interpreted as a rape of her own volition (since Bear has no language to consent to this act) the fact that she listened (albeit not tenderly) to his “no,” contained within the swipe on her back serves as a reminder that she is not an imperialist. On the other hand, it also informs us that we are still the

imperialists, regardless of our intentions, that we can never know the beariness of bear and that a healthy respect is needed to embark on developing more life-sustaining policies and practices.

Lou's choices are easy: she either "goes native," itself a derogatory term referring to "the colonizers' fear of contamination by absorption into native lives and customs" (Ashcroft et al. 115), or she is bushed. To Engel's credit, Lou (who battles with dualistic gender categorizations throughout the text) resists this kind of reductionist defining of her experience (which is more feminist than ecofeminist); though she misses the lessons of the wilderness, living as an imperialist in the woods, she is not bushed (though one might argue that the desire to mate with a bear is indicative of a feminine bushing) nor does she go native (she tries to fish and eat off the land, but fails) thus resisting the dualistic trap. Ultimately however, like the protagonist in *Surfacing*, Lou realizes that a return to civilization, after regrouping in a pseudo-wilderness away from men, is a necessary and 'natural' conclusion.

Like *Bear*, Atwood's *Surfacing* raises issues of interpretation when it challenges a feminist examination of the text from an ecofeminist perspective. Emerging, like Lou, from a dead man's empty house, Atwood's narrator-protagonist finds personal spiritual and psychological answers on a quest for self-knowledge. Fragmented by previous interactions with the masculine counterpart of her own species, both Lou and Atwood's protagonist surface to new heights of feminist wisdom. The fracturing of surface is instigated by Atwood's textual "break sur-/face" after which she is "standing now; separate again" (*Surfacing*

195). After coming to the conclusion that she is “not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which/ the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place” (195), she moves sur = above a face-mirror identity, outside herself to a greater earthly self. What this protagonist is “facing” is the sur, the man, the patriarchy, the paternal past, her father, and her heterosexual relationships; by facing them, she can be herself-as-woman living in harmony in civilization and not as she identifies herself with a chased animal, holding her thoughts and desires secret. She explains:

They won't be able to tell what I really am. But if they guess my true form, identity, they will shoot me or bludgeon in my skull and hang me up by the feet from a tree [like the pointless killing of a blue heron].

(197)

A feminist reading of such texts reveals female heroes facing identities created for them by masculinist social conventions for women, and by the men who they have allowed to make [bad] choices for them. In this way, Lou's inability to procreate with the bear symbolizes the emergence of a new feminist hero, even if it is at the expense of a new ecofeminist order.

Though both texts celebrate the finding of womanhood, through the essentialist notion of woman-as-creator, the protagonist in *Surfacing* does have intercourse with the bear, or at least, she actively pursues impregnation (which had earlier been considered a thing to avoid) in an outdoor healing seduction of her ex-lover who she would have be a bear: “he needs to grow more fur” (Atwood, *Surfacing* 172). Like feminism, ecofeminism continues to examine

those persistent questions of feminine identity: What is woman? What do women want? What are ‘natural’ instincts and desires for women? What happens when we lose our connection to civilized instincts? Are the reactions that result (i.e. *Surfacing* protagonist’s descent into an underworld madness as a component to self-discovery) considered “unnatural despite what might very well be a closer link to our natural” selves?

As readers, we have come to expect women-on-spiritual-quest novels to end with the woman’s return to civilization—stronger, and healthier and more in control of her own body and her own destiny. But has this standard of dénouement lulled us into tired expectations? It seems no ending is satisfactory: she goes insane and, by social standards, effectively loses her right to make choices, or she stays in the wilderness and vanishes in some sort of fictional “never never” land of escape from responsibility; or she returns to civilization to find her options still limited, living in a world largely created and maintained by men. The protagonist in *Surfacing* emerges from a bushing that reverses expectations of bush-madness as a negative encounter having learned something about herself and her past. And though Atwood implies a return to civilization with an ex-lover the protagonist is now prepared to love happily, she leaves the ending open. Because the protagonist does not actually leave the island by the conclusion of the novel, the reader is forced to question what her best option is. Where does a life-creator belong? Her option to return to the city is bleak since her narrative describes a civilization that kills animals for pleasure, hunts for sport, murders fetuses, bludgeons what it does not understand, conducts

“experiments” on women and on animals, and continues to manipulate, bully, and destroy women’s will and desire. If she stays in the bush and is not forgotten, she will continue to be hunted like a wild animal by men and forced to live imprisoned like a zoo-animal. She explains, “that is the real danger now”:

They would never believe it’s only a natural woman, state of nature, they think of that as a tanned body on a beach with washed hair waving like scarves, not this face dirt-caked and streaked, skin grimed and scabby, hair like a frayed bathmat stuck with leaves and twigs. A new kind of centerfold. (204)

Her own conclusion is that “withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death” (206), since above all, she “[refuses] to be a victim” (206). Ironically, the narrative itself, we assume, is written from an urban space thus suggesting an imminent return; however, its employment of the feminine sentence and unnamed narrator suggest a certain rebellion and hope for change from within the patriarchal system.

Like Lou, who feels it is time to leave and returns, without Bear, to the city, Atwood’s protagonist leaves us with similar disappointments. Her spiritual epiphany turns her into a “creature neither animal nor human, furless, only a dirty blanket, shoulders huddled over into a crouch, eyes staring blue a ice from the deep sockets; the lips move by themselves” (204), demanding—as Atwood does throughout the entire spiritual-bushing passage—the differences between what is “real;” what she imagines; and what exists in a wilderness time continuum beyond subjective interpretation. She meets her [drowned] father in the garden,

seemingly not dead after all but living [in her imagination] like a “real” animal-figure. The vision of her father is particularly ironic since she identifies him in life as one who tortured and imprisoned animals for scientific gain. In this way, his appearance in the garden suggests purgatory for him and purgation for her in revisiting him as a life-force who has moved to new levels of spiritual understanding, strongly associated—as it is for her—with the natural world. Her mother appears like a ghost-vision amongst the bluejays; when she vanishes, her daughter “squint[s] up at them, trying to see her, trying to see which one she is” (196). She watches her father shape-shift, which to ordinary eyes might only be a fish jumping out of the water (201). Perhaps Atwood challenges us to consider how the fantastical exists within the realm of the ordinary or how the ordinary strips the fantastical of any validity with its staid scientific evidence—another argument for escaping the fact-based world of men.

We are disappointed as women, and as ecologists when the resolution of women on spiritual quest novels points to a return to civilization without much attempt to coordinate wilderness, psychologically or physically through recognition of city nature, into an urban bioregion. We wonder if the protagonist, or if women in general has the power to change anything, even their own lives. Did Lou or *Surfacing*'s protagonist not have another option to stay within the wilderness, learning what she had only begun to understand? Isolating city from wilderness is a dichotomous extreme that hinders connection with biotic community and it is a division that becomes amplified in these kinds of textual contexts. A more rewarding ecofeminist post-pastoral is still to be written;

however, it necessarily needs to reconcile the physical and psychological division frequently made between urbanity and wilderness, body and mind/spirit, men and women. A more appropriate revisionist mythmaking calls for an integration of these relations.

SECTION TWO

Emerging ecological literature and revisionist mythmaking

Thoreau says ‘give me a wildness no civilization can endure.’ That’s clearly not difficult to find. It is harder to imagine a civilization that wildness can endure; yet this is just what we must try to do. Wildness is not just the ‘preservation of the world,’ it *is* the world.

Gary Snyder *The Practice of the Wild* (6)

Amidst our postmodern uncertainties, the sacred is nowhere and everywhere. But for Canadians for whom even the question “where is here?” raises a puzzle, it is not surprising that the sacred should be equally, or even more difficult to locate.

William Closson James *Locations of the Sacred* (xiv)

The only bioregion that we can claim strict identity with is the body. A human body is sixty electrical jolts a minute, at rest; twenty-five feet of gut, continuing a virtual hothouse of microbes, each with its own diet; ninety square yards of alveoli, all performing the elegant exchange of oxygen and carbon; a mind that blips continuously up and down an eighteen-inch rope of salty brain-stuff the thickness of a man’s finger. To be “home” is first to inhabit one’s own body. We are each, as body, a biological ecosystem as complex, efficient, and as fragile as the Brooks Range, the Everglades, a native prairie.

Deborah Slicer “The Body as Bioregion” (113)

As I have attempted to show in Section One, decentring the notion of power—textually, and culturally—is fundamental to principles of feminism, post-colonialism, and ecofeminism. Writers entering into the dynamic of political ecology—sensitive to “appropriation of voice”—face challenges in their attempts to respectfully reflect a human-nature paradigm without making it anthropomorphic, tropologic, or metaphoric. According to ecocritic Dominic Head, reconciling “the premises of ecological thinking” with “an increasing rarefied discipline [of] literary study”—that “imprisoned manifestation of late capitalism”—makes an ecocentric agenda within contemporary literary studies “(im)possi[ble]” (Head 27). It is, however, a necessary translation. Section Two

explores how some Canadian (proto)ecological and ecological writers attempt to bridge this gap.

Nature, as “semiotic,” Berland and Slack argue is as much a “cultural construction” (22) as civilization itself; nonetheless Relke argues against this general notion that “as the successor to literary modernism, postmodernism confirms the death of nature” (Relke *Green* 22)). The problem, Relke surmises, is that, “postmodernism has liberated poets from responsibility for the green biomass that supports human life because that biomass is beyond the reach of accurate linguistic representation” (22). Regardless of seemingly irreconcilable differences (as Head citing SueEllen Campbell points out) between “theory’s stress on textuality set against ecology’s call to action” (Head 28), postmodern expression has created an ideological space, “a mode of expression which creates the possibility of a grass-roots micropolitics in which previously marginalized voices can be heard” (28). Head explains:

The process itself is characterized by a paradoxical combination of decentring and recentring: traditional given hierarchies are overturned—the assumptions on which they are based decentred—and a new, provisional platform of judgement is installed in a qualified recentring. A particular construction of ecological thinking can be shown to be based on this same paradoxical combination. This is important because it is easy to assume that a new ecological grand theory—the planet as limit—must provoke the postmodernist’s incredulity [...] prescriptions for the best action, from an ecological

perspective, are necessarily provisional, continually refashioned as the scientific ideas on which they are based are contested and transformed.
(28)

Unarguably, “the construction of political ecology” which includes ecological literature as a voice of ecologism “depends upon a recentring of the enlightened subject, as instigator and agent of change (in ideology and in policy)” (29). Thus, by taking “a position of informed recentring” the literary critic, the ecological writer, and the environmentally minded reader may plot “a meaningful path *through* literary theory” as a means of potentially discovering and reinforcing ecological understanding (29).

Of course, from a (post)modern perspective, decentring and recentring the writer-subject, with regards to his/her ecological position raises the question of how tenets of twentieth-century ecopoets (particularly the ecopoet-as-prophet) differ from those articulated by nineteenth-century Romantics. By placing “nature” on a pedestal as the model for human harmony, particularly within social and artistic endeavours, Romantic theoretical and literary impressions of nature popularized the pastoral ideal—that new natural Eden—as pathway to preexisting Truth and God. Necessarily, this perspective according to Frye et al. also favoured the individual, particularly the poet-prophet who sought perfection in the natural innocence of the primitive man. (Frye *Harper* 403-406). Though the Romantic poet’s emersion into the tropological wilderness as sacred meditative space may bring moments, however brief, of Truth and mysticism, his privileging of self-enlightenment as the end goal negates an egalitarian wilderness-human

dynamic, essential to the ecological mode of thought and its representation. In this way, as Jane Frazier reminds us, nature is not “transcended; its value is inherent” (Frazier 16). The eco-poet needs to “reconceptualize[] this relationship, and the human responsibility for maintaining and supporting the ecosystem in which we exist” (13). In so doing, the eco-poet shifts from temporary wilderness excursions wherein a dichotomy between urbanity/civilization and wilderness is reinforced, to on-going and daily experiences of cooperation, reverence, and respect for nature and self-in-nature within one’s own bioregion. As Patrick Murphy points out: “Thoreau [...] did not inhabit Walden Pond the way that Mary Austin lived in the California desert or the way that Simon Ortiz hails from Deetseyamah” (WTE 43). Murphy cites these particular authors because of their popularity amongst ecocritics and readers of American ecological literature. Conforming to the status quo of American ecological writings, both Austin (author of *The Land of Little Rain*) and Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz (author of *Woven Stone*) present their respective regional environments in ecologically sensitive forms of literary realism.

This ideological shift is what Murphy theorizes must occur for reconceptualizing the human-wilderness dynamic in more ecological terms; he suggests a dispensing of ideological models of the aggressor/victim or self-other paradigm in a way that is more cooperative by embracing, instead, the idea of “anotherness” (WTE 40-51). In this way, “the ecological process of interanimation—the ways in which humans and other entities develop, change and learn through mutually influencing each other day to day—can be

emphasized in constructing models of viable human/rest-of-nature interaction” (42). As Bate points out in *Romantic Ecology*, reading Wordsworth metaphorically at the expense of the referential compromises an ecocritical perspective since (proto)ecological poems may contain symbolic meaning but they must also be taken literally—that is, about nature (Bate *RE* 5). Other ecocritics agree that such on-going goals ought to include: “a better science of nature, an improved understanding of the natural world’s complexities and energies, and a deeper analysis of human priorities” (Frazier 24). Clearly, writing nature from an ecological perspective requires reestimations of such ideological models of nature to “facilitate[] the generation of a different paradigm for conceptualizing environmental writing that focuses on relational inhabitation as a fundamental world-view” (Murphy WTE 43).

From an ecofeminist perspective, the notion of the Romantic poet-prophet is further problematized by the Romantic poet’s “potently male” ego (Mellor 8), that “anthropocentric self-trust in ingenuity” (Frazier 31) which, according to Anne Mellor manifests a “poet-savior” that:

[...] engage[s] in figurative battles of conquest and possession and at the same time [is] capable of incorporating into itself whatever attributes of the female it desired to possess. In effect, the sublime Romantic ego defined itself as god the father, the creator of that language “which rules with Daedal harmony a throng / Of thoughts, and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were.” (Mellor 7)

Thus, from a feminist perspective of Romantic nature, the poet who wills to power becomes a passive-aggressive colonizer, of sorts, and thus, is stripped of his 'authority' within feminist discourse. Ecofeminists further problematize the ways in which the Romantics codified the landscape as feminine and sought to "conquer" its "pure" and "pristine" essence (Ross 29-45). In addition, responses to such a lasting and popularized connection between the Romantic ego and a nature-human politic has instigated a reaction among late twentieth century American male ecological writers who, in an attempt to be more objective, and portray "little or no personal identity" (Frazier on Merwin 54) to make "quests without the burden of the ego" create narrators who become "disembodied". Ecocritics Frazier and Molesworth consider this characteristic of American ecological writing desirable, deeming it "a technique [that serves] as a method of gaining knowledge metaphysically, a knowledge not available to those in the body" (Frazier 54).

What is particularly interesting when studying gender differences in ecological writing is how the desire to "get out of the body" as a means of "reliev[ing] himself of his humanity in his desire for a more integrated being and understanding" directly contradicts basic ecofeminist laws: the investigation of one's physical presence on Earth is essential to reconceptualizing one's place within the appropriate bioregion through an on-going recentring and decentring of the mind-body-spirit unification. Thus, while women (eco)poets avidly engage in body politics and in exploring connections between the mind-body-spirit, male ecological writers, in general, distance themselves from their own bodies to create

an objective narrative; paradoxically, however, they create a narrator who, through his attempts to connect responsibility with the wilderness, may ultimately be one step removed from “deliberate” ecological connection, having to contend with a decentring and recentring of the *alienated* ‘natural’ self.

Writing the Earthbody

In an article entitled, “Body politics in American nature writing. ‘Who may contest for what the body of nature will be?’” Gretchen Legler stresses that ecofeminist writings, focusing on “raced, gendered and sexed bodies” (73), fundamentally change the ways in which critics view the human-nature dynamic through what Donna Haraway deems ‘the power to signify’ (73). In a reversal of Romantic notions that stress the necessity of transcendence in seeking a relationship with ‘the landscape’ (75), revisionist women nature writers, who foreground race, class, gender, and sexuality, find “the power to contest not only [...] what the body of nature will be, but also the power to contest [...] the place of their own marked bodies in nature” (73). In so doing, they are “making the *body* explicit” (73). Legler agrees with Peter Fritzell’s assertions in *Nature Writing and America* (1990) that “most American nature writers simply pretend not to have bodies at all” (72). Fritzell contends:

They appear solely as disinterested (and, in a technical sense, “innocent”) recorders of information, or as enthusiastic (and right-minded) appreciators—in short, as almost anything other than active, interested human organisms. (72)

Responding to Haraway's notion of the 'unmarked body' as that which "inscribes all marked bodies, names them, and has the power to see but not be seen, the power to represent, but to escape representation" (85) Legler argues:

In most American nature writing, the politically potent raced, classed and sexed body is erased along with the marked body of the author/writer. The nature that is constructed by this unmarked body becomes innocent and unpoliticized—it is raceless (white), genderless (male), sexless (heterosexual) and classless (middle class). (72)

Ultimately, Legler, following Haraway's example, attempts to theorize an ecofeminist break from "the myth of the goddess [...that] dangerously reinscribes notions of original innocence and unity [...through its] call[] for a return to that edenic state before language, before culture, before Man" (72). Though Legler's theories initially appear oppositional to grassroots ecofeminist tenets, her discussion ultimately embraces a more radical ecofeminist philosophy that posits feminist notions of 'equality in difference' within ecofeminist discourse through a reconciliation of woman, animal, other, and technology. In this way, Legler is in agreement with Haraway, who insists: "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (Haraway *Simians* 181). Entertaining ideas of cyborgism may be both theoretically thrilling and politically advantageous for women; however, hailing cyborgism as the ultimate (eco)feminist goal is not as simple a solution as one might think. Sturgeon points out that: "'cyborg ecofeminism' would have to manage the problems encountered by the figure of the cyborg, which, given its

strong articulation to masculinist uses in popular culture, science, and militarism, is a problematic feminist metaphor” (195).

Within ecological writings and ecocriticism much debated notions of dwelling, home, homeland, place, and placement explore how environmentalists come to terms with human ‘belonging’ when our presence contributes to unprecedented environmental destruction and contamination. Patrick D. Murphy—updating a Thoreauvian term that instructs his readers, in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, to “live deliberately”—calls for the recognition and development of a healthy *geopsyche* (Murphy WTE 42). This term assembles an intangible but important direction in ecological attitude, theory, and literature since it defines the hopeful consciousness of individuals that are in tune with their bioregion, and their involvement, individually or collectively, within it.

In poetry in which “home” is not necessarily defined simply as place (location) but space (a place of psychological and physical interaction), origin poetry, ecofeminist writings, “cyborg writing” (Legler 73), post-pastoral, ecological texts and ecopoetry all attempt revisionist mythmaking which challenge the erasure of particularly important aspects of the human-nature dynamic. In particular, women’s ecological writing continues the politics of writing-the-body through *écriture féminine* by voicing a silenced and unmarked representation of the human body within the greater biosphere (and particular bioregions) and the representation of biospheres within the human body. Recognizing that anthropocentrism and humanity are inextricably linked, critic Dominic Head points to Andrew Dobson’s construction of ‘ecologism’—“a

political ideology in its own right rather than ‘environmentalism’ as a provisional management strategy” (Head 27)—as a “human-authored political programme” which distinguished between two types of anthropocentrism: “a strong kind, such as the Marxist human-instrumental attitude to nature, and a weak kind which is merely human-centred” (29). Human self-realization, Head argues, requires an “identification with the non-human world [...] because human activity of any kind has no meaning without such an identification. The former, which implies a dialectic between nature and humanity, linked to a process of self-actualization necessitates ecological explorations into how the human body reconciles itself with a geopsyché. In this way, being human, knowing one’s “place” in the world includes ‘feeling at home’ in one’s own skin—physically, morally, and psychologically.

Writers chosen for this section (Chapters Four and Five in particular) attempt to connect spirituality with everyday rituals as a means of displacing false Western constructions of womanhood that alienate women from civilization (language, technology, religion, etc.) and from a positive perspective/dynamic of what is ‘natural’. My selections were made from a wide range of Canadian poets who thematically reflect a shift from nature-centred poems to a more ecological or ecofeminist perspective. I maintain Murphy’s use of the term protoecological as literature that foregrounds a consciously ecological poetic. When I bracket “proto” in protoecological, I am referring to literature that may be ecological but it is either not self-consciously so, or it wavers in its commitment to the tenets of ecological poetry. Not one of the writers chosen is a self-professed ecopoet and

of them, none writes exclusively ecological literature. I have limited my study to poems that suggest an emerging ecocritical thought and concern in Canadian literature.

Feminist revisionist mythmaking, the making of matrilineal art

Much of the literature discussed in this section may be considered under the categorical heading of “matriarchal art” that “examines the patriarchal power-oriented splintering and artistic hierarchy, which empties our lives of beauty, ignores our complex experiences, and denies our concrete, multifarious being of any force” (Gottner-Abendroth xi). As an aesthetic that “never refers to art alone but always to a societal form entirely different from those known today,” matrilineal art of revisionist mythmaking potential creates a space in which:

[...] artists are free to decide whether to continue to participate in artistic practice that bears the imprint of patriarchy and adheres to patriarchal divisions, differentiation, and hierarchical-sexist criteria of value. (xiii)

In differentiating matriarchal art from a feminist aesthetic, feminist art and literary critic Heide Gottner-Abendroth explains that the latter is impossible to know until we can accurately define “femininity” from a potential space wherein “society and art are not under the domination of men but are the creation of women” (30). The extremely radical position of this kind of artistic expression aims at “shatter[ing] the precisely defined boundaries of the patriarchal domain and institutions, which confine art to one sphere, science to another, and religion to still another” (30).

Feminist writing, through its abridgements and alienating female-centred utopias, Gottner-Abendroth points out (211), has further marginalized women's art—writing, visual, and performance—making it obscurely celebrated and oftentimes approached with hostility or denigration. And though it is “a tiny island so far” (211), ultimately, the zealous Gottner-Abendroth advocates, the emergence of matrilineal art will allow for a social charge so profound that:

[...] we will become as aliens in this present by creating our own present. We will make an inner emigration into an epoch of our own. We will create a space for ourselves within a hostile society and an egress to a land of our own. (212)

Likewise Patrick D. Murphy calls for “revisionist mythmaking” in nature-writing that is necessarily ecofeminist since it recognizes a potential in new women's writing to stop tracing masculinist notions of wilderness at the expense of a more innovative, less alienated relationship with nature (Murphy, *LNO* 119). This highly politically charged art, with the potential to inspire life-altering changes in individual belief-systems and communal practices, according to Gottner-Abendroth, “seems absurd only if the aesthetic equates with the fictitious [since] matriarchal art [...] is not a liberal play of possibilities but a liberating play of realities” (212). Though it is unfashionably essentialist to revisit women's unique association with nature (both culturally and biologically), any liberating artistic movement may ultimately prove to be politically essential. As I have argued in my Introduction, essentializing women's link with nature and ‘the natural’ remains theoretically unstable, contested by many feminist philosophers.

However, I remain committed to the notion that essentialism is fundamental to ecofeminist possibilities since it is “almost always strategic” (Sturgeon 169). Whether we name, or can ever fully label the feminist revisionist mythmaker ‘cyborg’ or ‘goddess’ within an ecofeminist milieu remains to be seen. I believe that, currently, the ecofeminist movement embraces essentialist and anti-essentialist notions of the woman-nature dynamic (sometimes simultaneously in the same individual!) in an attempt to support a feminist fundamental notion that multifarious factions and perspectives are paramount to the movement.

This section hopes to look at the notion of how the ecopoet serves as the ecoprophet who learns how to address nature in literature in ways that reflect an emerging respectful and environmental consciousness. As human beings, we have always written about nature and our relationship within and without that particular dynamic. At a time when it is necessary to “reinvent ourselves,” albeit in terms of gender, race, or species, Leonard Scigaj asserts that:

[...] we can no longer conceive of nature as a bucolic idyll, a type of Christian resurrection, a rational exemplar of God’s harmonious design, a romantic refuge from urban factories, an indifferent or hostile Darwinian menace, or an echoing hollow filled by poststructural language theory. What we need is a sustainable poetry, a poetry that does not allow the degradation of ecosystems through inattention to the referential base of all language. (5)

Reinventing cultural ideologies through revisionist mythmaking demands an extraordinary suspension of disbelief from its readers, particularly if they are not

already converts (for the purposes of this study) to the philosophies of feminism,
and environmentalism.

Chapter Four

Home-wreckers/ Homemakers:

Grounding Earth-centred spirituality in (eco)feminist poetry

God would eat horses. He would eat anything if he was hungry. He does.

Karen Connelly *Small words in my body* (47)

[Plato's angel] thinks the world/ into being/ with its huge mind,/ its pure intelligence.//
On the curve / of its crystal/ skull/ you see yourself,/ you see your shadow.// One of you/
will put on shoes,/ will walk into the world.

Lorna Crozier *Inventing the Hawk* (52)

By my side, nudity of rage, [god] advances, naked, powerful, somber, full total presence, near, is it possible to be more present, nearer, more naked, more somber; more accessible, more hideously inaccessible? Leaving our birth-place, moving away from the port, from the bay, this is not enough. Above all we must rid ourselves of the dead, gods, and men who play the mother.

Hélène Cixous "La" (*Reader* 66)

[The sacred] is not found outside the world somewhere—it's in the world: it *is* the world, and it is us. Our goal is not to get off the wheel of birth, nor to be saved from something. Our deepest experiences are experiences of connection with the Earth and with the world.

Starhawk "Power, Authority, and Mystery" (*RTW* 73)

Canadian women poets who explore tenets of Earth-centred spiritualities which challenge traditional religious notions of the soul's privilege of transcendence over the body's earthly experiences and responsibilities expose empowering possibilities for a mind-body-spirit unification. In so doing, they reveal a wealth of concerns for women, all linked to the health and well-being of the environment, and the natural world as a temple of women's self-discovery. Locating the sacred in nature is a centuries old idea; what makes spiritual ecopoetry unique, however, is the ways in which it refamiliarizes spiritual

empowerment for women by defamiliarizing an abused and neglected nature-human dynamic. Because ecopoetry, like ecofeminism calls for the liberation of oppressed voices and unadulterated experiences, this human-nature relationship is explored through vast differences in perspective, subject, concern, and focus.

I will not attempt to categorically define Canadian ecopoetry since, because it is in early stages of development, it has yet to show a concrete direction. My intention nonetheless is to explore the myriad of ways in which the ecopoetic vision is emerging in Canadian literature. Finding poets that suggest a kind of ecofeminist query in their work was not easy; after a decade-long search in obscure bookstores, new and used, taking leads from the odd poem written in little magazines, and by interviewing dozens of Canadian critics for their recommendations on women poets writing on nature, I believe I have chosen poets that best address ecofeminist concerns. I have no doubt that many legitimate poets for this project have been omitted, missed, or neglected: but since this study is to be a life-long endeavour, I look forward to discovering their existence, and their placement in Canadian ecological literary history.

My argument serves as an answer to Frye's probing into Canadian imagination and nature; to Atwood's musings over how the Canadian woman writer responds to an inherited masculine tradition which labels the 'landscape' "an icy femme fatale"; and to the curious inquiries from newcomer Laurie Ricou who challenges Canadian critics to become ecocritics and not "lag behind" "like some scattered little grey birds among a flock of cranes beating their way into motion" (Ricou 3). This chapter initially explores how a sampling of Canadian

women poets—Anne Szumigalski, Lorna Crozier, Karen Connelly, and Gail Fox—are all currently writing revisionist poetry that searches for feminine responses to *le nom de pere* as a hegemonic spiritual construction and feminine spiritual answers derived, instead, from a respectful connection with their natural earthbodies serving quality of life and survival on Earth. While it is not likely that any of these poets writes in response to ecofeminist theory *per se*, it is without difficulty that I suggest these women, living within the same cultural and political milieu, find inspiration from nature struggling to survive in the age of fast-paced technological advancements and a need to articulate fears of an unsustainable finite resource—the planet Earth. In the very least, as Ricou charges, “the current clamour to be ‘green’, as with most mass trends, mixes (and blurs the line between) ethical commitment and cynical exploitation. [...] your neighbors are concerned. We are all using our blue boxes” (3); surely these changes in national policy that affect the environment and are relegated into the lives of the everyday for Canadians are cause for reflection. What becomes particularly interesting, and complex is the ways in which theorists and poets alike disarm feminist fears of women’s essentialism by reconnecting women and nature as a point of positive departure for discovering aspects of womanhood and/or the biosphere. As a kind of micro/macrocosmic link, women’s bodies become a space of physical, intellectual, psychological understanding *because* of their natural cycles linked to creation, as planets unto themselves.

Continuing with (eco)poetry that attempts to define a feminine spirituality, this chapter concludes with the (eco) poetics of Eva Tihanyi, Anne Szumigalski,

Lorna Crozier, Daphne Marlatt, and Kristijana Gunnars that shift in focus from the first part of this chapter—its Godly injustices against gender, racial, and species minorities—to a celebration of creation that reflects the mind-body-spirit unification. In this way, these poets attempt to blend mind with body in the making of women’s writing and the revisionist mythmaking of the female-nature-body connection. By challenging constructed and conventional masculinist notions contained within the logic of dualistic thought, (eco)feminist poets show the need to create a harmony between the cultured woman and the woman-as-animal as a point of empowering departure. As Karen Connelly’s title suggests, these are *the small words in my body*, and like fetuses, the poetry (re)births words, thoughts, and ideas into fruition.

Both sections deal with “origin” poetry as it is named and defined by Jane Frazier, who refers to this thematic category as “poetry that focuses on the original world [...and] seeks a timeless existence in which humans are participants rather than rulers or [...] biocentric rather than the homocentric constitutes of the object of literary desire” (16). For Frazier, the literary pastoral ideal, particularly for her targeted eco-poet W. S. Merwin, becomes a place of beginning for ecological musings through an imaginative “contact with a lost, original world, free from the ontologically insular and physically threatening forces of industrialization and technology” (16). Frazier further categorizes “origin” poems that “lament or long for a lost, original world while emphasizing our present ideological distance from it” as “division” origin poems. Merwin’s approach to ecologically minded “origin” poems is a kind of First Nations’

synchronous visioning that enables the poet-visionary to simultaneously connect his/her “primal memory” (20), that unexplainable link to an instinctual past knowledge, with a disturbed present (33). Ultimately, though, this link to the past, reminiscent of Romantic philosophical strategy, is “primal and strange” but “it is nevertheless the return to lost familial relationships” (23). In this way, connecting the male-animal with a primitive self or an original state of existence is the first step on his journey home.

In contrast to the “origin” poetry of Merwin—a seemingly masculine-encoded quest for selfhood that adds the urgency of the disappearing weekend retreat to the Romantic escape—“origin” poetry in this chapter is strategically employed by (eco)feminist poets to undercut the romanticized Western pastoral ideal, mythologized in the Edenic roots of a primordial land of harmony and ecological abundance. Operating as a kind of post-pastoral exploration of ecologically harmonious beginnings, origin poems of this ilk can both inspire a human-nature connection through biospheric utopias of their own and problematize that connection by focusing too much on the pastoral ideal and not enough on revisionist mythmaking. Nonetheless, the origin poetry selected for this chapter aims at imaginative movements away from humanist, linguistic, intellectual, and ethical ideologies that claim historical beginnings and moral mastery. By exploring poetics that question a male transcendental God’s place among the ultra-technological chemically saturated, troubled and wickedly violent tendencies of a late twentieth-century human society, the women poets selected for this section attempt to make a spiritual-wilderness connection, to “find the true

nexus of relationality that sustains, rather than exploits and destroys life” (Ruether *E&S* 22). While Section One focuses on dismantling cultural myths based on religious hegemonies, Section Two examines how achieving a spiritual focus in the tenets of Earth-centred spiritualities illuminates an on-going feminine creation.

Origin Poetry

Ecological “origin poetry”, as Frazier defines it, is an “opportunity for recovery” in a poetics which divides a “lament or long for a lost, original world while emphasizing our present ideological distance from it” (42). Frazier finds it necessary for us to feel the “regret [for] the rift between ourselves and nature” so that we can “feel any compunction about altering or annihilating it” (46).

Frazier—naïve or inspired—adopts, within ecopoetry, the tenets of a post-pastoral movement, as those that hope to find “pure” philosophical and moral roots for a polluted aesthetic. Additionally, Frazier asks us to consider the division between myth and origin and the ways in which “myths circumscribe origin.” Through myth, she argues, “the narrator may experience a regeneration of language and of life” (38). Admittedly, however, there can be no clear delineation between myth and origin since in practical terms origin = myth. As Canadian literary critic D. M. R. Bentley asks us: “can there, should there, be a new mythical pattern for the poet of the ecological age? A returned Ulysses? An integrated Pan? A naturalized Hercules” (271)—to which we have yet to answer.

Effectively, by examining the origins of masculinist cultural roots through Christian tropes and icons, these women poets defamiliarize the spiritual in “God”

in order to refamiliarize the sacred in nature in their own bodies; by extension, revisiting their own “natural” earthbodies connects them to a greater [Mother] Earth-body. Because of their radical nature in contemporary Western civilization, gynocentric spiritualities are necessarily political: they speak of reformation for the powerless whether the alienation stems from racism, sexism, speciesism, classism or animalism. What eco-spiritualists share is a dedicated mission to end sexism and naturism in a way that liberates all those oppressed by the strictures of a dysfunctional social system. Carol Christ reading Kaufman asks us to:

[...] attempt to think of God in terms defined largely by the natural processes of cosmic and biological evolution. This would result in a God largely mute: one who, though active and moving with creativity and vitality, was essentially devoid of the kind of intentionality and care which was characterized by the heavenly father of tradition [... This] is not a God who could provide much guidance with respect to the great crises we today face, crises which are largely historical in character, not biological, crisis of human motivation, policy, action an institution. (*RTW* 11)

If we are, as Carol Adams claims, “parasites on the food chain of life, consuming more and more, and putting too little back to restore and maintain the life system that supports us” (*E&S* 21), then “a reintegration of human consciousness and nature must reshape the concept of God, instead of modeling God after alienated male consciousness, outside of and ruling over nature” (21).

By exposing masculinist language as a site of feminine denigration, poets such as Fox, Connelly, and Szumigalski seek a poetics of origin that challenges the constructed fundamentals of liberal humanism. As a basis for division between humanity/nature and likewise, man/woman, language is perceived as the building block of oppressive political power. Like “technoculture [which] is creating conditions that can isolate large populations from any sustained contact with plants, animals, or even the atmosphere” (Frazier 41), environmental poet-philosophers also see the postmodern decline of meaning in language and our relationship with it as another symptom in a greater cultural disease. In compliance with the philosophical notion that “prereflective experience [is] the base of all thinking” (Scigaj 11), and explored by ecopoets who ground their exploration in mundane rituals, necessarily “affirm[ing] the integrity of the lived body of quotidian” (11), ecocritics Scigaj and Frazier argue that the:

[...] absorption of the earthly into the self must [...] occur in any modern-day poetics of nature. Otherwise, the psyche is relegated to a removed contemplation of the world that might as well take place in a condition of virtual reality. (Frazier 26)

Thus, according to ecological philosophers, isolation from the natural world coincides with an alienation from spirituality. Frazier cites ecopoet W. S. Merwin, as a proponent of origin ecopoetry, who believes that “as time progresses cultures are also losing their historical ties between language and the planet” (76). Explained by Merwin as a “kind of pollution creeping into our lives,” he asserts that imprecision in language, and namely, the very *real* link between world and

word used by “nomads and hunters of the past, whose entire life was inside every word” (77) makes language—particularly as it is currently used by politicians and advertisers to manipulate— “cheap and shabby” (76-77). Poets in Chapter Six, namely James Strecker, maintain this philosophy as a springboard for their radical ecological poetry. Considering language is a fundamental tool for poets and academics alike, these theories of language-evolution must be taken, at least for the time being, as theoretical musings; ultimately, Merwin warns writers, “the damage to language, simultaneous without schism from nature, presents a tragic scenario for poets concerned with both” (77).

Gail Fox illustrates a feminine “schism from nature” simultaneous with an alienation from civilization in *Houses of God* (1983) through the poet-speaker’s lack of connection to her own culture in “Listening to Myself Sing” (13). As “a stranger to this/ world,” she tries to “learn the alphabets,/ the numbers of love” but eventually finds these trappings of civilizations (signifiers) incongruous with “love.” Initially, one questions what Fox means by “this/world.” Is it a civilized human culture or the natural world to which she retreats? Stanza two suggests that it is the world this poet-speaker designates as a patriarchal society filled with “books and sometimes/ people” that is only redeeming when there is “occasionally a note that does not/ mutilate the ear.” Her self-professed isolation bears witness to a literary eco-ennui—as a kind of existential angst associated with the loss of connection to one’s ‘natural’ origins as an animal-human—in which she finds herself alienated from the possibility of original primal structures of language, which once possibly served as a liaison between nature and human

civilization. Her alienation from human lifestyle “continues unfamiliar” as she endures a condition “incurable,” representational not only of an ‘unnatural’ techno-dis-ease of the twentieth century, but also of her marginalized position as a woman who, without political and cultural power, is unable to affect revolutionary changes in gender discrimination and ecological disrespect.

If connecting to cycles within nature serves as a healing or as a discovery process, Fox’s cancerous disease equals dis-ease with the placement of woman—neither animal nor human—within patriarchal social confinement. In an earlier collection, *In Search of Living Things* (1980), republished in *The End of Innocence: Selected* (1988) the poet-speaker in “Gentle Fluid Through the Living Plant” (122-3) asks her male partner to “teach me Centre” which she defines as necessary “insanity.” It is *his* language, which in carrying the ideological baggage of “the language we try to speak” (as a “door on its dark hinge wobbl[ing]/ like a child spelling”) “and drowning, cannot articulate,” that renders her defenselessly speechless, her “legs like Sappho’s/ woman caught fire, and [her] knees/ [...] crooked in [her] vision.” Her own failure to communicate to a male partner, and father of her children, suggests again, that she feels a discontinuity with language itself, her own *mother* tongue. Clearly, this poet-speaker’s self-diagnosed dis-ease occurs when she tries to inhabit a masculinist world. From an ecofeminist perspective, the tension between the Earth (nature) and the world (civilization) fails to cause her madness; instead, she finds that an social intolerance of her instincts to occupy both worlds at the same time is the maddening culprit.

Despite these feelings of alienation, and despite (as a literal reading of the poem implies) the knowledge of a cancer killing the narrator slowly—“dying to the intense timed/ sequence of the leaves”—she finds solace in the natural world. Turning away from a society to which she feels no deep connection, she retreats, not surprisingly, into the romanticized cleanliness of a “green” world, ideally void of cancer-causing chemicals (or at the very least, where the makers of such chemicals are absent). To justify such an untimely death, she essentially chooses a more primal self, an animal-self unencumbered by the trappings of civilization as she connects to the cycles of the natural world. Herein, her own death has meaning in rebirth, just as the sun fosters when it “sets and rises in a perfect shaft of *green* light” (emphasis added). By associating natural cycles of death with bodily rebirth, her consciousness is reborn in a healthy growth of green leaves, no longer rotting with physical or psycho-intellectual disease as she begins “listening to *myself* sing” (emphasis added). Ultimately what she knows is a siren (facetiously damned in the penultimate stanza) that calls her away from a poisonous cancer-causing society to a “natural” world where death is part of greater healing cycles uninterrupted by the notes that “mutilate the ear.”

As Fox’s poetry shows a feminist struggle to understand “the language we try to speak” so too does Szumigalski’s “Think of a word” suggest how language distances the poet from lived experience. In this first poem from Szumigalski’s *Rapture of the Deep*, the joys of experiencing the natural ocean/beach biosphere are halted when the poet-speaker tries to “think of a word.” Absolved from a shared experience with the natural world, the poet-speaker ironically shares this

alienation with the reader when she demands: “think of yourself thinking of a word” (1). By attempting to “capture” the moment in stalemated language, words like “*banal, [...] burial, denial*” surface. As one might expect, cosmic and eternal entities like stars and planet, considered “unchangeable” “rush[] away [...] simply because all these [words] are abhorrent to them. You, in fact, are the centre from which they are fleeing” (2). Ironically, by escaping the intellectual wor(l)d, Szumigalski’s poet-speaker has “the *presence of mind* to fling [her]self down on the beach and play dead” (my emphasis 3). Her gesture of playing dead to an investigating seaman who “holds high the lantern,” symbolizes a rejection of Enlightenment arrogance (pun intended) which, in its attempt to prereflectively illuminate ‘ordinary’ experiences, limits one’s connection with the unpredictable elements of the natural world. “Thinking of a word” likewise condemns the poet-speaker’s unadulterated moment with nature; herein, a biotic ‘land-scape’ is replaced by a civilized ‘mind-scape.’

In a more detailed exploration of the limitations of the myth of the logic of dichotomies wherein these dualistic constructions pit two halves of the same whole against each other—“apartness. Agglutination” (45)—the poet-speaker wills, commands language to be more organic like imagination and experience. Herein, Szumigalski compares signifiers (both numeric and alphabetic) to a chocolate egg, which is manmade (manufactured), irresistible (tasty) and is metaphorically a woman-centred creation potential (egg). When it eventually falls on its side, “never again will you be able to/ tell which half was right, and which was left.// or indeed whether the egg is divided N/S or E/W.” Like the

determination of the poet-speaker/reader who ceases to “play dead” in “Think of a Word”, this narrator remains hopeful finding that rebirth and “resurrection” are possible under a certain set of conditions:

Invent me a set of pure symbols. Write me a letter in unmistakable signs. But are these signs unmistakable from each other, or are they simply unmistakable signs? (45)

The poem’s title “ $i^2=-1$,” a non-existent and impossibly translated equation for imagination, becomes the origin of meaning, which, paradoxically, has no origin, nor meaning. In other words, because we cannot glean meaning from either side of the equation—as we might be directed to believe is illogical in a system of dualistic thought—we understand the focus not to be on the two halves of the egg, but on the centre, on what is inside the egg, the actual creation. In this way, the equal sign suggests that the harmony (two parallel lines) resides solely in what the imagination creates, outside of equations, logic, and even possibly, meaning.

Like Fox and Szumigalski, Connelly investigates particular feelings of disease living within contemporary Western society; by exploring fantastical options that exist, if only imaginatively, outside of it. After all, she emphatically agrees, “Yes. Yes.” in “Would You Trade Your Life To Live There” (28-9 *Brighter Prison*) to the idea of exchanging her life for the “pearl brain of a fish/ flying weightless through blue glass.” This poetic vision rails against monotheism as its speaker, wanting to escape a man-made land God (what “lurks behind this arras of roses and sun”—that “acid pleasure of this air”) to take, instead, “gleaming scales.” Air itself, like man-made language in Fox’s collection, does not nourish

or promote healthy growth but is like “burlap/ on my skin, sandpaper/ under my tongue” (22). Despite her romantic description of “the days at Sopolana”—an apparent gateway to the sea—she is willing to lose what she describes as the trappings of human imprisonment by “par[ing] away these blunt bones,” “shed[ding] the weight/ of human skin” when “this life” is discarded: she “could quit it, spit it down/ among the salt-eaten ear of shells.” Connelly’s use of poetic devices in this stanza noticeably makes and breaks rhythms within the poem: the alliterative “blunt bones” reflects the soothing repetitive sound of waves but it also resonates with the hopeless sounds of a head banging against concrete; thus life itself, the reader easily gleans, appears intrinsically flat, endlessly pointless and lacks any meaningful responses both internally and externally. As well, the onomatopoeic quality of “quit it/spit it down” coupled with the internal rhyme doubly suggests a fluid, quick vomiting of her life, as though casting it out like a poison, that sharp salty taste, “among the salt-eaten ears of shells.” Her life, “salt-eaten” leaves a bitter taste, drying like a corrosive toxin to flesh (blood-suckers recoil and die at its touch) and yet, ironically, preserves dead, lifeless flesh. She trades her mortal life on Earth for the eternal keeping of the ocean so as not to be washed up, metaphorically, as she predicts she would be, psychologically destroyed like the ears of shells, un-stripped, and salt-eaten. By choosing an ocean rebirth, this poet-speaker returns to life-origins—before God, before civilization, before mankind—before those who “lurk” and “lie.”

These sentiments of dis-belonging in a post-structuralist/modern literary world wherein experience is always mediated by language, are echoed in

Connelly's later book of poetry, *the small words in my body* particularly in "Languages I have failed to learn;" like Fox's poet-speaker, Connelly's voice considers that "there is a language between the trees and the sky" and laments, "to learn it now is impossible." Her lost desire (or primal instinct?) is to speak an ancestral language, clearly connected herein to feminine wisdom and through a presymbolic instinct to "screech at the moon" as a form of lunacy, "your mother might [...] join you [in]." Fox, Szumigalski, and Connelly all suggest the possibility of meaningful translations of experience reflected in literary art, but new language and new ways of expressing the feminine experience must be brought into fruition. What stops these women from expressing themselves in a vocabulary more in tune with their femininity (as Szumigalski suggests by the image of a chocolate egg in "i²=-1") is that "they think you are crazy/ when you dance/ when you dare to sing songs/ in your language." Of course, in practical terms, an already established linguistic system becomes simultaneously debilitating and inspiring. Despite her failed attempt to communicate in what is for her a more desirable realm of existence, the language of the natural world remains "a language you almost understood,/ remembered, almost,/ even through the panes/ of glass" (45). Even greater than mourning her inability to join the moon is her feeling of alienation in a culture that is supposed to be her own. The assumption she plays with is that everybody learns this logos without question, with ease; yet, she fails at them too, asking "Why can't you make the letters?/ Are your fingers broken?/ Or is it your mind?/ Something in you is flawed."

Furthermore, her inability to act as a scientist who maims animals in a quest for

scientific knowledge that solely benefits humanity causes her repulsion, and silence—“her crippled tongue.” As though caught between an identification with the marginalized animal world and a connection to an advancing civilization, this poet-speaker opts for a return to matrilineal ideologies, in a greater spiritual search for “[some]where to go” (44).

With a fragmented view of God as proponent of positive change, Fox’s “The Workshop” expresses human and Godly limitations when “birdhouses [are built] with/ holes too large for birds// too small for humans.” Through a figurative and literal home for humans and birds respectively, which neither birds nor humans have access to, this poem suggests how not to live in this world. Not only does human wisdom create a living stalemate, but humanity’s attempt to survive has made the world environmentally lethal as the useless holes are “energy/ leak, clap trap visions of the world” that like “dynamite” are “ready to explode.” This world described as “a monstrosity” circles back onto itself in a dystopia in how it was created by man in ‘God’s image.’ What then is this “claptrap vision” but God’s own making? Fox’s poet-speaker connects the Christian God with arrogant andocentric practices, which ironically attempt to reorder “natural” laws of creation when she accuses, “God, your/ dreams that made us are/ Frankenstein.” Yet, predictably in Fox’s work, she gives God an “out” claiming once again that humanity mistreats “God” by using him as a scapegoat without taking any individual responsibility for its own destructive actions. This poem concludes with a prayer not to “God” but to “Lord” (a renaming for a new conception of God?) who is available not for plea-bargaining

after we have “exploded” his creation but as one who helps us live with our choices, as He is asked to help (re)build the “houses of/ our insanity” (78-9).

For many of the poems in Fox’s collection, *Houses of God*, it is likewise “as though the world were on fire,” where the only solution for a Christian woman searching for answers is to “be courageous and believe (I have/ these doubts)” (Fox *Houses* 30). Her own fear of speaking against a God of mixed conception (Jesus is kind and healing, but God is vengeful) is sheltered by Fox’s bracketing of “I have/ these doubts” when the poet-speaker contemplates clichéd sentiments of Christian empowerment: “Be courageous and believe.” She dubiously chooses this advice for “the sparrows [who] hop, as/ though the world were on fire.” The poet-speaker attempts to justify her own anger and disappointment toward a God who has, despite free will, allowed for the metaphorical catching of the world on fire; herein, Fox’s implied metaphor suggests that this fire is to the sparrow’s feet what abuse is to the woman’s soul.

When the poet-speaker desires (“how I want You”) God to be “reduced to/ anything I can understand,” she does not negate God *per se*, but suggests seeking Him outside of Western constructions of a denigrating power-hierarchy. Fox’s poet-speaker feels strongly about a God who can answer her prayers, if *she* asks the right questions. What completes her own miracle is a Thoreauvian view of God in nature; herein, “geranium, goldenrod, the blue petal/ of hydrangea in the rain” become “a point of astonishment, like the/ meeting of earth and sky.” Her astonishment, sandwiched between an identification with hydrangea and the realization that “you are lord and I am/ blind” suggests a twist in the poem that

empties this speaker of any real connection with a God who does not see the world (his creation) on fire as she “blind[ly]” and ironically, does. She criticizes the Christian God who cares less for his own creation, himself blind to the here not-so symbolic “fires” of pollution, abuse and oppression, than she does. She “sees” yet, by her own admission, is as powerless to put out the fires as the sparrows whose perpetual stomping process is a pointless repetitive exercise.

This pattern of tension between a masculine-constructed God and a God of nature is consistent throughout Fox’s poetry. For example, in “The God-Rose” the God-in-nature appears as “spirits marvelous—the rose upon/ the thorn, the limited miracles” though God-himself is “whatever, lambent,” important only insofar as He is “still in my fingers” (Fox 34). Fox’s own “Houses of God” quotes Michelangelo as saying “God did not create us to abandon us”; yet, in describing her “house of God” she relates to “images as clear as/ sand. The upright tail of the/ little wren, a tree with birds/ busting into green that spring[s] up within you like a plant” (53). And though we build actual churches as houses of God, it is the mountains, rivers, bogs, and bodies that make up a practical realized God, who are interpreted as creation itself. Fox’s “God” is reformed, after all, when she finds him in “the shape/ of golden rod, that God, the fireball, against/ a backdrop of deep pines, is sinking into my/ head” where “this, the sparkling rocks and golden/ butterflies, is the living jesus” (35).

Other poems in Connelly’s collection, *The small words in my body*, are less generous than Fox’s revisitation of Christian hegemony; in contrast to Fox, she is clearly unsympathetic to a God who legitimizes the oppression of women and

animals. The result for this poet-speaker is an emotional, intellectual, and psychological departure from masculinist religious culture. In “The April Nightmares” the poet-speaker explains: “it is close/ to rape,/ some savagery/ without definition./ only the skin knows and cries” (51). Her poetic world (not restricted to Western societies but including India, Thailand, etc.) is as dystopic as her nightmare wherein “the streets of the city,/ lives [are] pressed/ brittle as flowers in old books/ [and] the streets, where people walk quickly/ because they are dying,/ touching nothing/ beyond their gray hands” (53), awaking to find “it does not stop.” She explains it is “not a nightmare/ but a mirage in my skull” which excuses her dissatisfaction but not without recourse: to this narrator, nightmare and mirage are “reality” for women who never reach the oasis, and who never find “Eden” until they are “unable to read the fine print or see past the edge of a/ clean porcelain bathtub” (48). What remains, outside the scarring nightmares and frightening collages that make up her world, is, not surprisingly, a connection to the muted forces of nature as she “listen[s] to the words of stones,/ whisper secrets to veins of gold/ and granite ears” (54). Ultimately, she finds their “real” messages as cryptic, as illusory, and as unreadable as the “small words in [her] body” crushed by expression itself.

Unlike Fox’s inaccessible system of letters and numbers, Connelly’s dystopia reveals an intense dispassion for God’s creation, wherein the underlying voice questions what kind of God kills sisters, makes love-making eschatological, and does not believe in or listen to the many “stars,” those “voices/ of starving women” (68-9). In “It’s easy for the Men I know” her desire for death is “a

hunger” greater than the “whine” one gets “when you fuck those men” (27).

Even the natural world does not come to her rescue: “clean waters” only allow her to “pretend to see heaven wash around me” where the stars (voices of starving women in the previously mentioned poem) become Orion, the male hunter of the feminine sexual spirit, and the trees have “hands that can crush you” (27).

Connelly establishes a tension between the human world of technology and the natural world, neither of which provides the comforting safety of home. Against her will, she becomes something she is not, wearing “a pink plastic mask for them/ [...] a doll’s stupid, beautiful face” (27). Yet, when Connelly questions this feeling of dislocation from her native land, she returns to Genesis in “What I didn’t get in Church” to find a “simple” explanation for women’s mass misery: they were “forgotten,” missing “a rib.” (29). Ultimately, this poet-speaker strongly protests against a Genesis interpretation of human origins that gives too much power to masculine-encoded cultural beliefs; more likely, characters Adam and Eve “dreamed each other/ at the same time and we dreamed a garden.” Her version grants each sex equal “dream” time and equal powers of creation. In comparison to other mythological tales of origin, Genesis is not only more fantastical it is also insulting. Finally, she refuses her Biblical beginnings, asserting:

I was not made from a thin, dry rib
white and bare as if chewed and sucked
by a small dog. These breasts did not come
from a man’s side, this round belly, this hollow at the centre. (34)

From Crozier's collection *The Garden going on without us*, the poem "myth" likewise explores possible mythological options for human creation as it "facilitates a recognition of the earth profoundly related to environmental cognizance and self-examination" (Frazier 24). This poet-speaker gives more credence to First Nations oral history than the Eden-myth as more authentic beginnings to a geographically linked understanding of self and community wherein harmonious biotic communal living might have existed. What makes the Aboriginal myths more credible to this feminine consciousness is the way in which they allow her entry to the Earth through a personal connection with the swan and the dolphin, instead of being defined "unnaturally" as a lesser man, taken from *his* body. Like an ancient echo from the collective consciousness, or connection to the presymbolic (m)other, she feels, "sometimes the wings of a bird beat against/ my skull. Feathers fill my mouth and eyes/ with a whiteness like winter" (Crozier 34). The dolphin's voice, likewise, resonates like womb-noises when she is alone "float[ing] through rooms, my sides sleek and slippery" (34).

(Re)-placing the blame: A shift

Szumigalski's poetics may not altogether agree that 'God is dead'; however, her quest in *Rapture of the Deep* takes us on a satirical journey in which the practicality of an absentee God is challenged as Szumigalski juxtaposes women-oriented mundane, everyday chores and experiences with mythological manifestations of a traditional Western spirituality. By defamiliarizing simultaneously the ordinary and the extraordinary, Szumigalski turns the mirror of satire back onto humanity whereby forcing the refamiliarization of the sacred

outside of the text and into the questioning consciousness of the reader; thus s/he is confronted with the urgent and necessary need to find alternatives to sexist attitudes and conditioning linked to ecological suicide.

Like Connelly's "Would You Trade Your Life to Live There?" (*Brighter Prison* 28-9), where returning to primordial waters metaphorically suggests an escape from what we have become, and from the trappings of humanity, Szumigalski's "The Fishes" turns to the water, wrought with classical symbolism of reflection, and rebirth as a place of new beginnings and a return to the ancient past. "The Fishes" tells the story of a woman with god-like powers who suspiciously communicates with the fish. Like the woman in Connelly's poem, Szumigalski's female character connects less with a human civilization and more with a natural world. She is, after all, "a foreign woman/ who has no business in this place" who "moved in here to *bother* our lake" (67 emphasis added). Her super-human (or sub-human) powers make her new human community more wary of her single-woman status since she is neither God nor more importantly, male. Interestingly, what concerns the villagers is how she does not "keep her place" in the so-called "natural" hierarchy wherein women do not expose talents without modesty, nor do they display any sort of leadership abilities.

Likewise, the gossiping villagers' complaint that she "bothers" the lake indicates their fear of a potential revolutionary uprising of the animal community; the fish are, after all, compared to "the children" who naively "trail after [men and women] in the dust." Because she has only the excuse that she was raised "on the coast/ amongst the Finny's and the Clams," like a fictional Tarzan, or

Jungle Book's Mowgli, the poet-speaker's own connection to nature appears odd, forbidden, unnatural and witch-like. As has been, and continues to be a common misconception, her society interprets "the material world [as] belong[ing] to the devil. What's under your feet is closer to hell, and the more sensual you are, the more open you are to being corrupted by the devil" (Griffin *RTW* 87). Other Christian eco-theologians bemoan the common Christian perception that "the results of the fall go so deep that nature, by definition, is fallen nature" (Halkes 78).

Curiously, this nature-woman who bridges the gap between humanity and fish is completely trusted by the fish who "tell her all their secrets and troubles;" yet, she eats the odd kamikaze fish who is "foolish enough to jump in to my frying pan." Although she is not a vegetarian, as one might expect from the stereotypical concept of 'green-thinkers', she is also not an "angler [...] upon/ whose drowned bodies they feed for months at a time." Her ability to be fair and compassionate (though Szumigalski notes it is rare to *Homo Sapiens*) is key to defining her as human and not "animal." By calling the fish from the water, as Jesus once did at Galilee, not to feed the masses but to feed the fish "on compassion," Szumigalski's poet-speaker challenges traditional notions of heroism and justice that are exclusively aimed at human reward. Rather than being a "fisher of men," she is a "fisher of fish" and strangely, symbolically, connected to their earthly salvation as a heavenly body, of sorts, to which fish souls might go. As in an inverted Jesus-myth, the *fish* die to save *her earthbody*. Through this amalgamation of Christian and matrilineal icons and ideologies,

Szumigalski succeeds in proving a need for new spiritual practices that are both spirit-affirming and life-sustaining. In this way, “miracles” happen “naturally,” without the absurd intervention of masculine-encoded interpretations, which distance the wonders of creating and creation on Earth, by removing them from the source.

Larger issues in this poem include the way in which Szumigalski, like Michael Cook in *Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*, and *Jacob’s Wake*, explores the complicated relationship between the sea and humankind where life and death exist on both sides and the sea has been unfairly denigrated by human arrogance, laziness and greed. While the nature-woman in this poem respects all life, she still chooses to eat fish for sustenance; thus Szumigalski challenges the common and over-simplified perception that to be “green” is to only eat plant matter. She suggests that responsible individual choices that sustain human life (like eating meat) can be maintained within a system of respect and moderation. Instead of damning the human survival instinct, she eats fish but she does not kill: she eats only those fish “foolish enough” to sacrifice themselves to her. Furthermore, the villagers’ resistance to accept a woman more in tune with nature than with society satirically suggests an unwillingness of Westerners—at a grassroots level—to embrace changes in attitudes towards the environment.

In much the same way that Szumigalski defamiliarizes the relationship between de-naturalized humans and the natural world, her poem “Purple” further explores human arrogance and the triviality of outmoded religious doctrines in the age of ecological awareness. In a poem that inverts religious convention to

address concerns of the natural world, we are reminded the God is God to all creation. Like many poems in this collection, “Purple” parodies human arrogance that is manifested in religions tenets. One sympathizes with purple loosestrife, and “the urgency of that scattering. More than a poet/ desires fame, or a traveller his bed, each one of these/ seeds desires its own resurrection.” With the plants’ hopes and prayers for change made anthropomorphic, Szumigalski points to the absurdity of the transcendental notions of resurrection, heaven, and life after death usually reserved solely for humans; herein, however any of God’s creations have access to God’s miracles, perhaps because there is no promise of a life after death. Since “God” is perceived to answer pleas for water (he “did heed the desperate prayer/ of his only Son”) his seemingly accidental drowning of the loosestrife is interpreted as a “sudden outpouring of/ love.” Obvious allusions to the Biblical flood abound as only “a few [...] float it out and are saved [...] manag[ing] to take root in/ another part of the garden.” Unfortunately, life after the flood is, “not all that/ good. The soil is soggy and cold, and fine white worms crawl up from the mud and feed on the/ delicate new leaves.” As the loosestrife, we are told, interpret this flood as God’s love, an outpouring of “His mercy” Szumigalski, criticizes not God, necessarily, but “God” as a human invention. He appears as an absent figure to which foolish performed ritualistic practices reveal misguided, blind faith.

Suggestive of the kind of faith humanity places in the natural sciences, “an angel with double/ qualifications” is sent: “she is both a botanist and an ecologist.” Like Fox’s definition of God as a cryogenic-dreamer, this

representative of God is no more qualified than He is to render appropriate and graceful solutions: neither scientific fact nor a distant and invisible God satisfies nature who persists according to its own internal plan. Her argument maintains the justification for God's continual plagues (as God's wisdom) since "we can't/ allow the whole garden, let alone the whole planet,/ to find itself twenty inches deep in purple loosestrife." As another attack on the human tendency to believe their own ideological constructions, without questioning them, and to likewise blame others for problems created through greed, Szumigalski alludes to the Western world's perception that the population explosion in third world countries is a major environmental threat further exacerbated by bans against birth control orchestrated by various organized religions, particularly Catholicism. Though an expanding population does create certain environmental hazards, it cannot compare with North America's greed, as Canadian scientist and environmentalist David Suzuki repeatedly points out, which is responsible for 80% of world consumerism.

Like a civil servant to an inaccessible power—"a mere angel after all [... who] like the rest of us, [...] has just enough knowledge to deal with the question in hand"—the angel's control over the loosestrife situation is limited to a short-term compromise as each plant (not the plants' offspring, seeds) is listed in the "seed catalogue" for the following spring, arisen and resurrected, as promised, on Earth. To a biotic community, completely abhorred by problematic miracles that are often ineffectual, Szumigalski sarcastically wishes—"Good luck."

Essentially, the miracle postpones the natural 'inevitable' cycle which, in the

short term, offers viable solutions that silence the loosestrife's complaints. In the long term, however, this 'miracle' that alters nature's course will devastate other plants and life-forms in its over-abundance. In this way, Szumigalski's satire turns the metaphor of meddling back onto us; where only angels and plants appear in the poem, it is ultimately human beings who have become ineffectual and unthinking 'gods' of the natural world.

While Szumigalski explores the usefulness of a religious patriarchal figurehead, in "I am one of the Privileged" Connelly, likewise, challenges the logic of monotheism in a postmodern world. God—connected to masculine human traits—is not the gentle and forgiving "father" but is more like men commonly experienced by all women; that is, he exhibits signs of abusive behaviour. Finding no answers for the cruelty of spontaneous death, the poet-speaker attributes them to God's "lab experiments" as though humans are to God, what kittens are to scientists; herein, "a lead weight [is dropped] on [kittens'] spines and later assess[ed for] damages [which] is tragic, too despite the/ cheapness of kittens, and even if you don't like cats." The idea that the biosphere and human intelligence are linked to "God's creation" loses its appeal when the greatest expression of existence is not connected, as we are accustomed to believe, with the "flowers and mountains and puppies and/ the deep blue sky" but simply with survival itself wherein "like a popular/ joke, the sun keeps rising" (48). After all, Connelly grimly attests: "it does not matter how much we love our lives./ Someone is always in the goddamn garden, turning up the soil and/ eventually you go down, sliced in the middle, or maybe just across/ the legs" (47).

What seems to be her biggest resentment towards a conceptually indifferent God is the hypocrite He has created in her: she is “privileged” to be poet who is both interpreter of tragedy and champion of beauty; she is “one of the lucky who stares appalled at the world, then eats/ cheesecake” (48). And though she is “privileged” with the gift of insight, she still is not privy to “the secret God knows, the one we touch all our lives but/ never recognize;” thus, God plays us like “surprised dogs [...] we whip our heads back and forth” always saying “what, what?” (47). In a poem that links God’s terminal indifference to humankind, reduced to (made equal to) animalkind, Connolly conducts a full-fledged attack on traditional Western spirituality depicting ‘God’ as a symbol of patriarchal domination who often acts as a consumer of the world, rather than its creator: she explains, “God would eat horses. If God were hungry, he would eat anything./ He does” (47). God, for Connelly, is less the God of who joyously celebrates life on Earth and more the God of revenge (including warring, killing, abusing, beating, and polluting.) In Connelly’s collection, God may be all-knowing and all-powerful but his actions are not for “good:” “the sky keeps no Yahweh,/ no old white man, white-bearded./ The Devil lives in heaven, screaming there” (64-5).

In poetry that foregrounds a postmodern questioning of the usefulness of one central and powerful (masculine) God, Szumigalski repeatedly defines angels as spiritual entities that link the Earth to the heavens and ground to sky (with angels as mediators); and man to women (with angels as androgynous). This attempt to locate a recognizable spiritual icon capable of diffusing phallocentrism proves problematic, however, when Szumigalski’s angels fall short of miracles

and satisfactory compromises. Clearly, that which is attributed to femininity holds no actual power in either realm. Considered conventionally as sources of inspiration, angels become, instead, manifestations of disappointment through such poems as “Purple,” “Light,” “Angels,” and “A Sanctuary.”

In “A Sanctuary,” for example, angels keep a safe-home for dead babies sent up to them in the mountains, “bundl[ed]/ in quilted bags,” so as not to bruise them “as the sisters haul them up the broken/ face of the rock” (38). In a poem that questions God’s role in baby-deaths, and by association, their births, Szumigalski omits a male-god’s connection with human creation by placing the dead babies with nuns instead of the stereotypical placement of ‘innocent’ children with ‘God in heaven.’ Yet it is a bitter-sweet sanctuary since life after the death of one’s child means living with a constant reminder of that death through the trill sound of “high voices in unison [...] a sort of shriek, hard for the/ teeth to bear.” The reader discovers that the nuns’ toothlessness, which on the surface seems harmless, is not; instead, their lack of teeth reveals an evolutionary strategy that appears tainted by those whose mouths have lost the need for teeth to eat the “ground/ bones of their dead [...] and sometimes/ powdered reindeer moss. It’s rumoured they suck/ these delicate meals through straws of ice.” In this interpretation of “heaven” as a kind of constructed purgatory, angels (usually associated with “the good”) act like “bizarro-world” where essentialized women—those who ‘naturally’ nurture—are called into question. Herein women are cold instead of warm, hostile instead of nurturing and distant (emotionally and

physically) instead of nearby. Ultimately, Szumigalski's "sanctuary" like God's "heaven" is dangerously fraudulent.

Though not as damning as "Sanctuary," "Angels" (263) likewise juxtaposes a woman's world with the existence of angels on Earth, inverting the angel-stereotype as a way of revisioning expectations society places on religion-oriented spirituality and the essentialized woman and/or mother. The poet-speaker's mother perceives the angels as a nuisance and, understandably, mistakes them for birds, even though "their wings fold the other way." As in "Purple," in which Szumigalski explores how indifference becomes the standard *modus operandi* with all levels of the spiritual hierarchy (God, angels, etc.), in "Angels" the mother, as god of her household, treats the angel/birds "not too gently." She fears their lack of control and civility as they "will let go their droppings" thus making more housework for her. Not only does the mother "shoo" them away like a nuisance (no pseudo-romantic eco-connection with nature here), she "brushes them from the branches with her broom" so that they will not ruin her own aesthetic pastoral—her garden—with their droppings. If, metaphorically, she is connected to the garden-as-self (as ecofeminists argue is often the case in pastoral narratives wherein the landscape is feminized), this woman is, effectively, 'keeping her own house'—taking care of her own well-being—by keeping her mind-body-spirit free of 'dirty' clutter.

Szumigalski's allusion to the use of household chemicals to keep nature's dirt and chaos out of our "homes" ironically, however, reflects a de-natured woman, blind (her "eyes are clouding") to any message or miracle. After all, the

excrement, like sheep manure, might actually benefit her garden. Nonetheless, her obsession with ordering earthly chaos prevents her from a more illuminated interpretation of angel-sightings and likewise, a more meaningful connection with nature. In fact, when “each lift[s] a cold and rosy hand/ from beneath the white feathers/ raising it in greeting/ blessing her and the air/ as they back away into the mist,” the ritual is entirely lost on her. Trapped within a generation of women whose stereotypical role as housewife and/or mother is the only acceptable standard, this woman is conditioned to use a certain figurative blindness as a coping device. Her “eyes are clouding” literally through the aging process, but they also blind her against a personal potential, having shown her nothing but housewifery for decades.

Reduced to excrement, the angels risk ruining domestic aesthetics and the civility of an ordered cleanliness, largely connected culturally—right or wrong—with women’s work and pride. By falling from heavenly grace to an earthly association with fecal matter, the angels transmogrify, ironically, through a connection to this lowest form of dirt. It is a fall from grace that is clearly illustrated through their first actions, which are “clumsy” when they “clamber down” from the tree. While Michael Cook’s symbolic act of urination into the sea (*Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance*) may be read as denigration, and Engel’s “shit with the bear” (*Bear*) as a wilderness-connection, the possibility of angels (transcendental heavenly creatures) defecating on planet Earth illustrates the complexity of interpreting what is “natural” and what is “supernatural” or miraculous. The angels’ blessing is one of unconditional love and understanding

but it may simply exist without meaning and consequence if the human (earthly) reaction to their action is one of indifference. From a feminist perspective, Szumigalski's poetics point more to a woman's earthly sphere wherein not only do miracles not happen, but women are too busy with mundane labours to afford the luxury to explore spiritual matters as men for centuries have demonstrated and thus, would not notice a miracle if it, quite literally, defecated on them.

In "Angels" women are reduced to an existence that consists of housework, procreation and fecal matter (literally and figuratively). Ironically, this mother-protagonist does not interpret natural bodily cleansing with the naturalness of reproducing and childbirth. Though she is "afraid they will let go their droppings," she orders them to do something just as messy: "go and lay eggs." Though it may be surprising to witness the narrow-mindedness of this woman, interestingly, the next generation—her daughter who narrates the poem—is the source of intellectual and spiritual illumination as the one who recognizes the angels (she is not blind to the feminine potential). By essentializing the angels as feminine, the mother-protagonist instigates a progressive movement towards feminist (the daughter who sees irony in urging angels to go lay eggs when angels, like humans are not so easily reduced to biological function) and ecofeminist enlightenment (the mother who unwittingly is connected to an earth-centred spirituality).

By making angels alternative people or birds, Szumigalski suggests the possibility of an un-romanticized utopia in which spiritual entities, animals, and humanity can co-exist, unencumbered by the pastoral ideal and unrealistic

interpretations of nature. Interpreting why the mother cannot tell the difference between a bird and an angel becomes the crux of this poem. Perhaps, 1) she is too busy cleaning up the messiness of the world to recognize a bird from a bat; 2) hierarchy and division among members of the biotic community is not practical or realistic; 3) icons of a dead or non-applicable masculinist religion are unrecognizable to women; 4) socially conditioned, she lacks the education needed to fully integrate her intellectual, spiritual, psychological, and emotional aspects of a more “natural” or essential womanhood; or 5) the angels do not actually exist (the mother is correct) and the poet-speaker mistakes an ecofeminist spiritual connection with birds as a religious sighting, lacking any other language to communicate the experience. The mother-protagonist’s only clear connection with the bird-angels is her identification with them as feminine (as angels are largely perceived in other works by Szumigalski) and as such, orders them to do something useful: “go and lay eggs.” She even condescends to them further by making “clucking noises/ to encourage them to nest.” The irony here is twofold: 1) the mother identifies more with birds than with angels despite her instinct to wield her power over them; and 2) she essentializes the angels by reducing them to potential birthing vessels, who are actually dirty, and useful—as she perceives it, limited through her role as a culturally enforced stereotypical housewife and stay-at-home mother—only, when reproducing. Read in an ecofeminist light, this poem asks us to explore the ramifications of such a connection between women and angels wherein angels are mistaken for birds in the natural/non-transcendental realm.

In being asked to redefine “angel” and earth-spirits, Szumigalski questions the basic human need to make spirituality anthropomorphic in the first place. Whether our interpretive reaction to these textual angels is 1) indifference or 2) a propensity to elevate them to a higher status (deserving or undeserving), Szumigalski’s poem suggests that human perspective is inconsistent and flawed. If the concept of “angel” or “bird” can be revamped, what then of “woman?” In poems that blame masculine-constructed religions for human corruption, souls sent to heaven on the wings of Canada geese are never transferred or purified but exist like parasites on spiritual Truth, “as lice on pelicans, as mites on cranes, we infest the holy pink skin of angels” (40).

Beyond revisionist Christian mythmaking: mending the mind-body-spirit

The first part of this chapter examines (eco)poetry that explores a tangential relationship to God in lieu of more a positive and practical link to Earth-centred spiritualities. For an even more radical departure from traditional religion in poetics, that celebrates earth-centred spirituality, poets Tihanyi, Crozier, Gunnars and Marlatt attempt explorations of bioregional “belonging”, serving as an answer, of sorts, to Fox’s, Szumigalski’s and Connelly’s earlier call for more appropriate (feminine) explorations of experience and expression. This section includes poems from Eva Tihanyi’s *Prophecies Near the Speed of Light*, Lorna Crozier’s *Inventing the Hawk*, Daphne Marlatt’s *This Tremor Love Is*, and Kristjana Gunnars’ *Exiles Among You*. Through a journey that involves ruptures in language, thought and practice, these writers quest for self-discovery in attempts to access—as the French Feminists suggest is apropos for *l’écriture*

féminine—a presymbolic state of existence. Through this process of locating “home,” made manifest in these particular poetics through environmental imagery, Tihanyi, Crozier, Marlatt, and Gunnars demonstrate matrilineal (eco)poetry that constitutes women’s *jouissance*. Thus, paradoxically, forgetting becomes, for this particular ecofeminist poetry of origin, the point of imaginative departure for revisionist mythmaking that remembers feminine selfhood through a space chosen for its *lack* of known mythologies. For example, Tihanyi mourns the loss of presymbolic possibilities in “Solar Fugue” as her poet-speaker considers that she once “wrestled with the sun,” and “took for [her] talisman/ a light that soared soprano,/ shattered windows with its song” but does not remember “singing like the light” (36). Remembering what she must have forgotten creates a desiring void through which the poet-speaker is inspired to find “behind [her ...] a love and a worship” “that has lapsed [in her]/ into a colourless silence,/ or sunk or slipped off.”

Ultimately, poets Tihanyi, Crozier, Marlatt, and Gunnars regard selfhood itself (particularly for women) as a place of beginning, thus reflecting quotidian miracles of creation as acts of conscious and imaginative connection to this self-made identity, and a nature-other, through writing. In contrast to the first part of this chapter, these poets oftentimes completely omit any mention of Christian iconoclasts and ideologies in favour of a strictly feminine celebration of Earth-centred spirituality; by not defining this alternative reality through a reaction to or defiance of organized masculinist religions, this ‘branch’ of ecofeminist poetry returns a primordial woman’s homeland as a space of empowerment for women

through poetics that sidestep deeply masculine-encoded cultural and social connections contained within language structures. This *écriture féminine* echoes the emancipated voices of women and women's natural body rhythms as the source of biological creation and thus, re-membered sites of women's undivided intellectual, emotional and spiritual imagination. This ecopoetic seeks sexual difference, rejecting "phallic monosexuality" (Cixous "Newly" 41) in order to explore the "cosmic libido" (44). This quest, feminist psychoanalytical theorists (i.e. Cixous and Irigaray etc.) agree, is for that "endless body, without 'end,' [...] not simple [...] but varied entirely, moving and boundless change" (44), and as such, it makes strategic a defiance of critical attention that attempts to lock, pin, define, or label it. In this way, examining this kind of poetry becomes nearly impossible—like translations—but ultimately, necessary since conceptually, it emerges as literature of celebration, empowerment and revolution. By incorporating the (m)other tongue, Tihanyi, Crozier, Marlatt, and Gunnars do not eclipse consciousness but illuminate the feminine human-animal.

By challenging a masculine-encoded orderly universe perpetually interpreted through the lens of scientific process and technological phallogentrism, these women poets request a return to life's mysteries from a mastery left too long unchallenged. Clearly, God is dead, "despite the lame hands/ palmed in prayer/ to stone gods in a stone heaven" (Tihanyi 67), but "hope/ that has swindled to destruction,/ the chrysalis of blood/ bursting in the wind" finds a replacement in "the pirouetting earth,/ its timeless dance/ within a womb of air" (67). As ecofeminist poetry, it strives to maintain the life and death

cycle from a more ‘natural’ understanding of it rather than through its traditional cultural positioning of it at opposite ends of a good/evil dichotomy. Ultimately, the majority of the poets chosen for this chapter reveal how contemporary obsessions with false man-made gods privilege technology, science, pharmaceuticals, consumerism, and the manufactured fear of filth manifested in a cultural obsession with chemicals, to reveal the hypocrisy of a culture that defines itself traditionally through death (by privileging soul-transcendence over body-actions), while simultaneously creating scientific advancements that serve to extend the life-expectancy of one’s earthbody.

As a way of challenging the superficiality of worship that stems from defining a culture through intellectual andocentric arrogance, Tihanyi creates a tension between science and nature which illuminates how science’s mastery of meaning attempts to dismantle the Earth’s miraculous mysteries. In “The Earth Doesn’t Know Itself,” words such as “revolution,” “circumference,” “forecast[ing] the weather,” and “diagnosis” seem absurd to a massive entity, a human homeland that manages to continue natural cycles of existence despite “its beautiful illness,/ its schizophrenic days and nights” created, in part, by humanity’s quest for scientific and technological knowledge. In fact, the Earth may very well know itself, but Tihanyi concludes that despite humanity’s attempts to acquire knowledge, it has only “remed[ies]” and “cure[s].” Furthermore, knowing the Earth requires that one has access to that which makes the Earth persist, despite human poking and prodding. Ironically, despite massive amounts of factual information collected concerning the planet, it is human indifference—here,

satirically mirrored by the Earth that is “happily oblivious/ to its distance from the stars” (“it doesn’t verify nor refute/ a single diagnosis”)—that has ultimately created forces capable of destroying a presumed innocent Earth’s “flower” and “tree” innocence.

Likewise, Crozier’s “Variations on the origins of flight” (17) juxtaposes women’s experiences of the feminine body with sterile elements of the scientific study of it. By creating a tension between a woman’s personal insight or creative “variations” on the essence of “flight” and a historically masculine-encoded “origin of flight” or aviation as it is specifically connected to mastery over earthly physical laws (i.e. gravity), Crozier questions the privileging of man-made technology over life’s mysteries, particularly juxtaposing women’s mapped and ordered anatomy with a silenced *jouissance*. Clearly, a woman’s figurative “flight” into orgasm is as significant and as empowering as a literal learning to move through the air. Because this juxtaposition lacks any obvious connection, it draws attention to the division between an ecofeminist interpretation of creation (through the female body) and a more constructed masculinist one (through the male intellect). This extreme divide between male and female poles suggests, as many feminists commonly concur, that monstrous (i.e. Dr. Frankenstein’s creation) or remarkable (airplanes and space travel) technological accomplishment or production masks certain womb-creation envy. Thus, Crozier calls to our attention the connection, culturally, between the female earthbody and a revisioned Mother Earth in a way that challenges masculinist scientific masturbation, ironically through a poem about female orgasm.

Like Crozier's libidinal "creature closest to the sea./ Snail-moist, all tuck and salty/ muscle, it opens and closes/ like a sea anemone" that connects mind-body-spirit with a scientifically indefinable miracle ("Mute/ but several tongued,/ minus legs and memory") Gunnars' own mystery of *jouissance* is explored through tropological "wings" of desire, sensation, and escape. "Wings" in both Crozier's and Gunnars' poems illustrate an intense complexity as they are simultaneously metaphor and metonymy, ambiguously shifting into and out of meaning. The wings, because of their clear link herein to feminine sexual desire, symbolically reflect the wing-shaped elements of female genitalia; thus labia become metonymic to that play of possibility between human flight and desire as an attempt to emancipate and access a fully realized femininity. Flight becomes a metaphor for the inscription of feminine creative and sexual definition a priori to masculine-encoded essentialism.

Necessarily, this manifestation of feminine desires mirrors, in its provisionality, an unsettling movement, liberation, inspiration, and creation within women's potential. As another forgetting/remembering, of the (m)other tongue, those "touched/ by the wings of a blue butterfly" are "lost/ in the hemisphere." Thus, what connects the mind-body-spirit is a nondescript "green calipash/ motion come to rest on your arm// as if pointing to you: come/ between the nest and the sky/ between the mist of the sea and heaven." Gunnars' synergy of senses culminating in this edible green gelatinous delicacy suggests a kind of organic knowing, ungraspable in its glob-like movement, and unencumbered (as Marlatt's poetics attest) to a masculine-constructed notion of femininity. In contrast to

Crozier who attempts scientific language (“reptilian,” “prelapsarian,” “evolutionary” 17), to expose the shortcomings of such a discourse to record mind-body-spirit epiphanies, Gunnars carefully places “the shadow of lost wings” within the mindful human (“careful/ the gentle transformations in your hand”) earthbody with “eye/ praying there” that exists outside any defining discourse. Without heavenly angels, Gunnars’ poet-speaker celebrates the passionate and poetic few “touched/ by the wings of a blue butterfly” who “move with the steps of folded/ wings.” And though Gunnars uses the synecdoche “wings” which seemingly separates the desire or instrument of flight from the creature of flight, certain wholeness culminates in the meeting of dichotomous opposites (“nest/sky,” “sea/heaven,” “leaves/roots”) thus creating a space for dissected mysteries in the wholly integrated mind-body-spirit.

While ecofeminist writings appear to privilege heterosexual connection, (i.e. revisioning culturally encoded ideals of ‘the natural’ woman, motherhood, etc.) it becomes obvious in reading lesbian writer Daphne Marlatt’s poetics that woman’s choice, sexual difference, and desires belong succinctly to the woman-animal, regardless of her sexual orientation or means to a *jouissance*-end. What becomes unnatural, thus, in Marlatt’s poetry is the feminine body preinscribed in masculinist definitions to operate in dysfunctional, unhealthy, and non-affirming ways. Marlatt constructs a poetic of erotic feminine energy, an *écriture féminine* that endlessly affirms the potential for articulating feminine difference and desire, without any expectations for women’s wants and responses. By subverting the traditional nature-woman metaphor as objectified ‘other’ in masculinist economy,

Marlatt finds a revisionist space the combines nature and woman in a way that reverses patriarchal interpretation.

In revealing an impossible but necessary quest for the (m)other tongue in an isomorphic amalgamation of the text and psyche that does not make women and nature mutually exclusive, Marlatt points, brilliantly and uniquely, to *écriture écoféminine*. Thus, her production of a (m)other language inscribes both nature and woman, making no divisions between an animal and woman-self. In “retriving madrone,” for example, the poet-speaker observes woman’s identification with a shape-shifting tree and chooses to “throw off words, leave out-‘grown images of myself” and “listen to slippery/ woman, word peeler, leaf weaver, hear the slur/ or a different being approach// leaf lingua love-/tongue” (29). Thus, she endorses women’s adaptability and places it playfully and strategically in a poetics that both essentializes “crazy-woman-tree” and celebrates the way she “does/ everything at the wrong time/ sheds last years’ leaves mid-/ summer, yellow, out of new green, sheds ochre bark at the/ end of summer when// you’d think she’d hang onto it.” In this way, Marlatt blends ‘tree’ with ‘woman’ and equates ‘natural’ with ‘choice’ in a poem that articulates a non-stereotyped, non-fixed, and endlessly woman-nature and nature-woman entity. Ultimately, as one might expect, the “leaf lingu love-/ tongue/ turn[s her] / inside out” revealing no Truths, no answers, but a discursive space for feminine exploration.

Not surprisingly, Crozier’s “Variations on the origins of flight,” Marlatt’s “retrieving madrone” and Gunnars’ “19” speak of mind-body-spirit integration

dwelling in profound silence—unexplainable, inexpressible, and thus, inexplicit. Subtly, there is something that cannot be articulated, at least in a masculine-encoded logocentric real, to ‘capture’ “the way/ light catches in the curled edges of her// skin, it’s only/ paper, thin enough to let light, as the words of this world/ impinge, turn me out of mine” (Marlatt 29). In this way, Gunnars’, Tihanyi’s Marlatt’s, and Crozier’s poetry embraces cosmic libidinal recognition (or what Frazier refers to as “primal memory”) through constructions that strategically explore excess, disruption in thought and syntax, ambiguities, and playfulness through a projection of timelessness and limitlessness. In Tihanyi’s “Bequest,” the poet-speaker commands us to “climb/ black heights to the starts/ where the moon’s lungs/ expand with silver/ and the sun’s hot mouth/ breathes gold” (80). However, unlike a replacement for “heaven” Tihanyi’s cosmos connects to the Earth, “when we come back down” to “worship the russet face/ of the sovereign earth/ as life roils about us/ like a boiling sea.”

While timelessness seems to be achieved in this poetry in the extremes between cosmic abstractions and metaphors that examine the importance of a microcosmic universe (i.e. Crozier’s female sexual organs are compared to a snail while Gunnars’ butterfly wing “take[s]/ the pallor from the lips of the water/ waken the cowrie shells from sleep”) another certain holistic connection of the earthbody to the cosmic body is achieved through a celebration of the earthbody as a mini-universe. In “Breaths Along the run,” Tihanyi “breathe[s] a green grace” by acknowledging two wisdoms: the spirit is maintained within selfhood since “God is but the speed of light,/ unattainable and 2) the earthbody

(particularly the female body) ought not to be expected to exist in a state of youthful perfection—“eventually, the body/ must admit its limitations” (60-1).

This poem takes the poet-speaker past favourite haunts to a holistic incorporation of vision:

Past the corner grocery,
the bookstore, the Laundromat,
past all the necessary places
toward beach, toward water;
and in the aging afternoon
the clouds part like a great white sea,
the sky opens into sunlight
to reveal blue islands
high above the empty streets (60)

Coming from a unique place of personal strength—for a woman both physically and emotionally (“centred in the moment”)—the poet-speaker feels integral to “the earth/ which holds everything in place” who, like her “pulls the pulse into itself,/ a search for perfection.” And though she physically grows older, (as she appreciates in “Nearly thirty” 64), like the Earth itself, she is renewed not only by the sea and her recognition of its mythological powers of rebirth, but by the ritualistic sacred act of gathering strength from “pebbles, shells, grass” as amulets of the “invincibility of earth.” Thus, “wholly filled” as though the ritual itself were a formula for eternal youth, she absorbs the Earth’s ability to renew itself, manifest by the discovery of the child within, “running green upon the streets/ like freshly sprouted grass/ in her a woman breathing a greener grace” (60-1).

By focusing on the earthbody as a microcosmic and unified entity, these poets are careful to maintain the image of the female body as intact and whole (i.e. body parts are rarely named as separate entities though exceptions include Tihanyi's "Breaths Along the Run" wherein "arms and legs push against the earth" and as such, become conjoiners between the human body and the body-Earth). In addition, the physical body does not exist outside a greater mind-spirit connectedness. By removing body-objectification and by extension, objectivity, these poetics reveal an intensely emotional post-postmodern revisionist attempt (called for by ecophilosophers Merwin, Murphy, Bate, Buell, Warren, and Gifford) to link human and natural worlds, earthly and cosmic universes, the human body with the body-Earth, without segregating the natural from the civilized, and the animal from the human. Thus, non-objectification of the female body through re-membering the spiritual earthbody, through the presymbolic, liberates this particular division of ecopoetry from the confines of historical, social, and cultural patriarchal strictures by creating a space in which these culturally constructed ideologies are non-existent. Furthermore, by joining mind-body-spirit, these poetics celebrate—practically—the power of body-reverence (particularly for women whose bodies and body-images serve as commodity) as a feminist solution to equality in difference and as an ecofeminist solution to the destructive cultural and intellectual human-nature divide.

Subtle solutions for improved personal health and global well-being, commonly offered in ecopoetry, are subtly reflected (without the kind of didactic rants found in poetry selected for Chapter Six) in mindful physical actions that

never appear indifferent to the body's spirit and the Earth's integrity. Thus miracles happen in everyday occurrences and revelations abound in quiet tranquil moments, without the need to escape to sacred wilderness spaces. By writing a reverence into banal existence, Tihanyi, Crozier, Marlatt, and Gunnars revisit the ordinary as extraordinary in poetics that value daily existence as the process, as the very makeup of our individual and collective existences. Ultimately, they ask the reader to consider how waiting for defining life moments and so-called 'miracles' desensitize him/her to everyday mysteries in our earthbodies and in the body-Earth. Unlike the poetry in the first part of this chapter that values "woman's work," and practical chores as links to Earth-centred spiritualities, poems selected for this section necessarily demand that mind-body-spirit integration, within the practice of Earth-centred spirituality, be manifest through the act of artistic creation, namely writing. Tihanyi explains, "we want it all:/ to grow out and take in,/ to mark that place/ where beyond the borders of ourselves/ the world continues/ fierce-headed as a lion" (43); in a plea for positive change, this poet-speaker calls for mindful observation ("we want the eyes/ to learn leaf by leaf/ the cider-coloured trees in autumn,/ breathe the yellow mist of spring") and "the art of saying: *this is*" (43).

In protest against what Tihanyi clearly views as a common cultural ailment—indifference—the poem "Branding" creates a tension between those who "believe/ planthood would be preferable [...] unconscious" and "herself," "I, as a plant,/ [who] would practice photosynthesis,/ transform light into leaves, water/ into clear blood." Through this metaphor, Tihanyi successfully

interrogates banal existence as a kind of unhealthy alternative to self-respect and planetary integrity by exploring the possibility of a mind-body-spirit unity, even within the context of a life-form that is traditionally viewed as mindless and passive. By contrast, the human potential to surpass ennui resides in having “roots [that] would be words// So the mind penetrates,/ remains itself” (47). By connecting postmodern feelings of alienation with a revised identification with [plant] roots (both literal and metaphoric) Tihanyi “affirms the integrity of the lived body of quotidian” (Scigaj 11), that ecocritical plea, through her attempt to integrate body, mind, spirit, and nature into selfhood. Poems such as “Easter Weekend Among Friends” (31), “City Midnight” (18), “In the Name of Art” (42) and “What the Neighbours Didn’t See” (59) all weigh the consequences of the dangers of ignoring our innate link to the natural world.

Likewise, Crozier’s “Inventing the Hawk” explores how the imagination, even in the extreme boredom commonly experienced during winter in bleak northern environments, connects the poet-speaker with “her reason for living” (44-5). Surviving emotionally, spiritually, psychologically and physically has its challenges when, “so long in this hard place/ of wind and sky, the stunted trees/ reciting their litany of loss/ outside her window” reflects a landscape where clearly ‘God [must be] dead’! Without nature’s healing cycle of spring coming soon enough, this poet-speaker finds solace in the imagination, which begins, remarkable, almost unbelievably, in “words/ [...] that blue/ bodiless sound entering her ear,” from which a hawk is born, “just beyond the light.” As a kind of intellectual and psychological renewal, the poet-speaker begins to create life in

a seemingly lifeless biosphere by birthing and building a fertile space in which her learned connection to nature reveals a mandatory inhabitation of the world she knows and the Earth she hopes to understand. This harmonious psychological and physical understanding of wilderness exists in opposition to commonly held beliefs in “bush madness” (real, imagined, or mythologized) that confirm the impossibility of living simultaneously in nature and in civilization; herein, nature serves as a place where mind-body-spirit-nature integration is necessary to *avoid* psychoses. Taking the voice from within—“already she had its voice,/ the scream that rose from her belly/ echoed in the dark inverted/ canyon of her skull”—she alone “built its wings, feather by feather,/ the russet smoothness of its head,/ the bead-bright eyes.”

Other creations also become possible for her psychological survival, and the continued existence of the imagined hawk; after all, on a practical scale, the hawk must eat: “drawing/ gophers and mice out of the air, [...] she’d have to lie here forever,/ dreaming hair after hair,/ summoning the paws (her own heat/ turning timid, her nostrils twitching).” Despite the fact that this biosphere is imagined into existence, what is compelling, from an ecofeminist standpoint, is the way in which Crozier links woman to nature through a process of creation, which makes identification with animals and landscape not only possible and probable, but absolutely necessary for maintaining mental stability.

Deep ecologically speaking, while Crozier manages to suggest how a necessary connection between humanity and nature can be bridged, Gunnars’ ecopoetry profoundly explores the necessity of bridging such a gap. In contrast to

Tihanyi's poetry that seeks inspiration through abstraction, Gunnars' attention to microcosmic detail (from an ecofeminist standpoint) and the more quiet voices of otherness is astounding. In *Exiles Among You*, a collection of sequential poems told from the first-person perspective, indifference to the natural world and to the poet-speaker's involvement in her biotic community is nonexistent. She initially not only points to cultural ennui as an alienation from nature, but condemns it as a state-of-mind chosen by those who have psychologically and spiritually vacated their own earthbody, as a form of suicide or escapism from earthly responsibilities. She asks: "why do they say it is not a fairy tale/ world? Have we not been kissed/ by the glacier, and awoken again/ by the daughters of the sunbeam" (7). By remembering the "purple violet on my desk," the poet-speaker re-members herself through a meaningful and respectful analysis of the plant as a "listen[ing]," "think[ing]," and potentially "know[ing]," though silent, living entity. Gunnars respectfully uses anthropomorphism (considered an inappropriate approach to the human-nature dynamic by ecological literary critics) as intellectual tool to undermine cultural speciesist attitudes towards "non-sentient" beings. After all, in this poem, the violet is limited only by its human-enforced cage/flowerpot; the poet-speaker is to the violet, a "body with fingers," as we might likewise interpret the violet as simply, a pot with leaves.

Even forgettable tasks like disposing of dead birds that have flown into her window, "small miracles" and the "bodies/ of flies on the floor and bees/ weightless by now on the sill/ after what must be hours/ of looking for escape" (56) that appear expectedly insignificant by the action of the poem, are

challenged. Though she casually “throw[s] the bird into the bushes/ below, the bees and flies/ over the ground” and simultaneously breaks “a web across the room [...] heading for a cup of coffee” this short poetic segment reveals a dissolving of the logic of dichotomies that privilege life over death, heaven over earth through what her actions which define an everyday ethic of care in a life-death harmony/ continuum. Furthermore, despite the poet-speaker’s blasé attitude made apparent through her narrative, her attention to what most consider insignificant life-forms (dead bugs) and life-events (cleaning unwanted dead houseguests) serves to ultimately undermine her casual indifference.

Tihanyi’s use of bold strokes of abstraction oftentimes fails to harmonize the cosmic with the specific, and as such, her work privileges a human creative potential that can be read as andocentric; Gunnars, on the other hand, gives attention to infinitesimal details—that “silence” Crozier illuminates in “The Language of Angels.” In this way, “each blade of grass, [becomes] an exegesis of the earth” (62). Thus, Gunnars employs a kind of metaphysical conceit wherein cosmic change is not only possible it is probable, stemming from minute and ‘insignificant’ natural entities. “67” is perhaps Gunnars’ most poignant illustration of the human-nature interaction that reveals the necessity of exploring nature-otherness in a quest for self-discovery and planetary harmony. Though ecofeminists and deep ecologists agree that finding nature is not limited to wilderness spaces (Gunnars’ interaction with the “violet on my desk” is a case in point), this segment moves the poet-speaker through the woods as place of self-discovery “because of the conversations/ between eagles.” From an ecofeminist

standpoint, Gunnars' recognition of "them above// in the tops of fir trees/ in melodious chimes they make" as a community distinct from her own reflects the way in which undulation between entering the mindset of wildlife and interpreting meaning from unknowable signifiers; and a mindful, yet distant observation of wilderness allows for an emergence of evolutionary environmental changes in consciousness. In awe of what "I never hear/ creatures like that, so unmoved/ so out-of-reach," Gunnars creates the necessary continuum for changes in the human-nature connection: when she observes "where forget-/ me-not flowers crowd/ and hemlocks stay green" she does not simply admire their beauty as Moodie does in Chapter One, but "wonder[s] how they knew."

Because the evolution of a life-sustaining, life-respecting consciousness is still emerging and is still largely undefined (obvious exceptions include practical environmentalism which I explore in Chapter Six through protest and propaganda poems) commenting on poetics which explore the mind-body-spirit approach to planetary well-being is somewhat problematic. However, ecological (theoretical) mindfulness in ecopoetry, as an emerging genre, continues to reveal possibilities for political and personal change by presenting alternative ways to read, to experience, and to write the human-nature connection. And while Gunnars includes predictable poems that join memory with recycling ("I put/ plastic bottles into paper bags/ for recycling, the paper bags/ themselves for recycling/ it all comes back to me// in another form, but back/ the way all materials come around/ in what they used to call/ a vicious cycle" (58)), all of the poets included in this chapter explore revisionist mythmaking through the practical application of

artistic creation as place of origin. Ultimately, one must “live deliberately” (Thoreau) and as Gunnars likewise contends, “speak// with the mouth of prayer, the heart/ beating an unconscious rhythm” (18) but “write and paint the sacred world” as Tihanyi suggests, (Tihanyi 80), “choos[ing] to write/ about tree-souls and dancing” (64).

Chapter Five

“Life doesn’t seem natural:” Ecofeminism and the Reclaiming of the Feminine Spirit in Cindy Cowan’s *A Woman from the Sea*

When the earth is sacred to us, our bodies can also be sacred to us.

bell hooks *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-recovery* (182)

In feminist spirituality the desire for the integration of body and spirit is great. Women have for so long been primarily consigned to their corporeality that they are now looking for an integration of spirit and body and for physical expressions of what lies deeply in their spirit.

Catharina Halkes *New Creation* (122)

I’m not just repeating here the old adage about your body being your temple. That adage reflects precisely the kind of world-view that I’m trying to debunk. It says that your body is an object that houses something *else* that is holy. I’m saying that your body is the sacred itself. Seek no further: you’ve found divinity in your toenails [...] We are each, as body, a biological ecosystem as complex, efficient, and as fragile as the Brooks Range, the Everglades, a native prairie.

Deborah Slicer “The Body as Bioregion” (113)

Cindy Cowan’s *A Woman from the Sea*, first produced in 1986 by the Mulgrave Road Co-op Theatre in rural Nova Scotia, sets the stage for pioneering fully actualized ecological literature in Canada. This play, like the works by authors Atwood, Cook and Engel explored in Section One, reflects what is essential for ecological Canadian literature—that conscious striving for reconciliation of the human-nature conflict, both practically and ideologically. By showing a collapsing of the kind of “violent duality” contained within the Canadian psyche, which sets humanity against members dwelling within a bioregion, Cowan’s main character—in contrast to Cook’s patriarchs—recognizes changing cultural and social attitudes toward nature as it is reflected in Cowan’s consciously ecofeminist framework.

As previously argued in Section One, Atwood and Engel, while attempting “post-pastoral” feminist shifts in literary representation of the feminine-nature paradigm, fail to meet the criteria required for ecological literature. However, Cowan’s drama, performed a decade after Engel’s *Bear*, establishes what Atwood and Engel could not: it boldly explores the intimate relationship between nature and humanity, instinct and intellect, the earthbody and the greater body-Earth, ultimately showing resolution in women’s natural cycles and women’s inherent ability to recognize and attempt necessary alterations to ecologically unsound theories and practices. Cowan emphasizes that a feminine connection does exist between woman and nature, even if it must be (re)created through revisionist mythmaking within a revised human-wilderness connection. Thus many of the components for ecological poetics—as outlined by Murphy, Buell, Gifford and Warren—culminate in Cowan’s *A Woman from the Sea*. Working well within Murphy’s parameters for revisionist mythmaking, Cowan achieves an unprecedented blend of spiritual icons and ideologies from Aboriginal and Pre-Christian goddess-worshipping cultures within a dramatic ecofeminist milieu. Though Cowan maintains the literary framework of the pseudo-wilderness continuum model discussed in Chapter Three, *A Woman from the Sea* expands beyond the andocentric limitations in feminist quest fictions that are more about self-empowerment than emancipation of the “other,” by focusing on essentialist aspects of ecofeminism.

By embracing ecofeminist ideologies that liberate restrictive definitions of ‘woman,’ ‘nature,’ ‘animal,’ and ‘wilderness,’ (within masculine-defined

traditions and feminist theories) Cowan revisions the typical pseudo-wilderness continuum modeled by the Canadian wilderness women-on-spiritual-quest novel. Thus, pseudo-wilderness becomes less tropological and more topographical in the defining of “home”—a space of belonging, of respect—through the recognition of an actual endangered wilderness continuum. Herein, Almira’s vision quest begins in the sea-as-wilderness and moves into an alternate (spiritual) reality, by-passing the reductive wilderness-as-greenworld altogether. As an ecofeminist literature, *A Woman from the Sea* necessarily maintains a non-dichotomous scenario in which the fantastic and the ordinary, the living and the near-dead, the animal and the human, the civil and the wilderness co-exist in a harmony that reflects non-linear space. Like the poets explored in Chapter Four, who create a relationship of respect rather than reverence with nature in an attempt to dismantle cultural hierarchies, this play challenges the masculine-encoded division between “woman” and “Earth,” “spirit,” and “body” by marrying Almira’s individual concerns for her body’s health and life-giving potential with a broader planetary plea to end life-endangering human practices.

Cowan’s play invites viewers to consider the liberating potential of the world of female spirituality as she brings these radical feminist ideas into popular theatre. Yet, Cowan’s reviewers seem to have missed the message of her spiritual ecofeminist revisioning of a matrilinear past. Instead they prefer to read the play as a “fantastic encounter” and a “fantasy drama” wherein “Almira’s despair is challenged by a wisdom of an almost forgotten age” (Deakin), but never elaborate on what is not only a forgotten age but a silenced and forbidden one. Elissa

Barnard, a reviewer for the Halifax *Chronicle Herald* calls it a play that “transcends [the] rational for [an] irrational world,” but we are never sure whether Barnard has considered the full ramifications of such a distinction. Clearly, she is not at all sympathetic with Almira’s character; she describes her as an “embittered,” “cold, irritable, and semi-hysterical woman who is pregnant, has given up on life, and has quit her job.” Though Barnard attempts to sound solicitous by calling *A Woman from the Sea* “a noble effort marred by a few flaws,” her review fails to embrace the profoundly feminist nature of Almira’s spiritual crisis in a review reeking of “cunt-hatred” (Betty Lambert in “One Step Forward”). Cowan, herself comments on the difficulties of writing feminist theatre, regionally, in places such as Guysborough, Nova Scotia where the numbers do not support a feminist agenda. She says, “negative criticism in the media and a lack of understanding of alternative theatre is a serious impediment to the growth of any theatre in this province” (Cowan “Messages” 106).

Harnessing the same energy that fuels the ecofeminists’ cries for a return to an Earth-centred relationship with nature, Cowan approaches wanton environmental destruction, rampant in Western civilization, as does Michael Cook; instead of approaching environmental crisis analytically as another political, economic, or scientific puzzle, both Cook and Cowan respond to environmental destruction as more of a spiritual and cultural crisis. While Cook creates a mythological dystopia in the future, however, filled with barren despair, Cowan reaches to an ancient matriarchal past for solace and hope for rebirth. Still, writing for an audience not yet predisposed to feminist and/or ecological

theories proves problematic for any critical review of the performance. This general eco-ennui among Canadians may account for why, to date, Canadian ecological literature is not more widely published (see Chapter Six). As artists working from within any revolutionary artistic framework will attest, interpretation is as much a part of the art as the art itself. After all, what is the point of art that confuses audiences, leaving them possibly alienated and angry? Ultimately, environmentally conscious literature attempts a political agenda to teach audiences “to become native to place, fitting ourselves to a particular place, not fitting a place to our predetermined tastes” (Plant 155). Cowan’s particular philosophy suggests what ecofeminists argue is a symbolic approach which employs controversial essentialist strategies within feminist discussions (see my Introduction). As a way of entering ecological politics, *A Woman from the Sea* examines how—through a reconnection with Earth-centred, matrilineal pre-Christian spirituality—women and nature can become empowered despite historical and cultural connections between them that falsely link both entities to denigrating hegemony. As Deborah Slicer (quoting environmental philosopher Wendell Berry) explains:

It is hardly surprising [...] that there should be some profound resemblances between our treatment of our bodies and our treatment of the earth [...] Contempt for the body is invariably manifested in contempt for other bodies—the bodies of slaves, laborers, women, animals, plants, the earth itself. (“Body” 113)

Slicer adds that “most Westernized men and women stand in a similar confused and unhealthy relationship to both their bodies and the Earth, and what we do to both, with frequency, is sacrilege” (113).

Cowan’s drama forces its audience to question this link between women and nature—particularly when, historically, its privileging of the grotesque feminine body has produced disharmonious identification for women with femininity and selfhood. Deborah Slicer attests:

We are encouraged to think of our breasts as enemies. The industry says that our uteruses and ovaries, too—everything contaminated by the womanly hormone, estrogen—conspire against us. Nature is the mother of a future full of horrors. (“Body” 110)

Cowan explores this issue of how the female body may be perceived—falsely or accurately—through the varying recognition and misrecognition of Sedna. Sedna is simultaneously a rotting seal-carcass, thrown repeatedly out to sea by Almira’s husband George, *and* a mythological Selkie-goddess. In contrast to George’s clear disgust for Sedna-the-smelly, Almira, through a process of revisiting repulsions and insecurities concerning her own pregnant body, remembers Sedna’s menopausal body not as useless but as a vessel for transporting wisdom, spiritual guidance, beauty, and self-respect to her. Revisiting the body as a place of health, and well-being—conceiver of life and maker of ideas—is the place ecofeminists wish to take notions of essentialism and the woman-nature link. Seeing the female body as temple instead of perdition, Cowan insists, is a matter of respectful (re)interpretation.

Western patriarchal religions teach us that our earthbody is the enemy. Body politics—a hot debate in feminism—is merely emerging in ecological debate through critics such as Deborah Slicer, Gretchen Legler, and Irene Diamond. Feminist resistance largely problematizes this debate by defining essentialism as an “unchanging identity of ‘woman’ and women’s bodies, which ignores the realities of historical change, social production, and ideological construction” (Wolff 133). Nonetheless, ecofeminists stress, the time has come within the feminist political arena to re-member the body, “to speak about a positive model or series of representations of femininity by which the female body may be positively marked” (133). The body, after all, cannot and should not be erased to annihilate the pervasive hold that “the male gaze” and the “projection of male desire” has over the “regimes of representations which produce them as objects” (128).

The problem, Legler notes, (reading Peter Fritzell) is that, “most American nature writers simply pretend not to have bodies at all: ‘They appear solely as disinterested [...] recorders of information, or as enthusiastic [...] appreciators [...] almost anything other than active, interested human organisms” (Legler 72). Thus, writing that depicts nature “constructed by this unmarked body becomes innocent and unpoliticized— it is raceless (white), genderless (male), sexless (heterosexual) and classless (middle class)” (72). Writers marked by gender and/or minority status, according to Legler, are more likely to make radical moves by exhibiting the, “power to contest not only for what the body of nature will be, but also the power to contest for the place of their own marked bodies in nature,

making race, class, gender, and sexuality explicit—making the *body* explicit” (73).

In breaking the silence particularly concerning women’s sexualized bodies, the body has become—as Deborah Slicer reminds us— “a contested area in both ordinary life and in recent feminist literature: the body as social “text,” the body “in the grip,” the performative body, the “outlaw” body” (“Standpoint” 57). Slicer explains that the Constructivist’s argument deems the “the ‘body’ [as] a socially and physiologically constructed ontological category through and through” (62); however, Slicer also argues that:

[...] bodies while, partly and significantly, socially constructed ontological categories and (unlike gravity, perhaps) partly materially constructed by culture (per Butler), these constructions are also grounded in and constrained by nonconstructed physical stuff. (62)

Ecofeminists argue that the body is not simply a social construction; by de-essentializ[ing] and de-naturaliz[ing] woman as body and the meaning of the “body” [...] in favor of a body that is always mediated by social constructs, the body becomes ‘a potential site of disruptive genealogical deconstruction and other destabilizing acts’” (Slicer “Standpoint” 57). By marrying the woman-nature connection to positive notions of femininity, Cowan revises unorthodox views of femininity and empowerment that explore “the female psyche or self, shaped by the body, by the development of language and by sex-role socialization” (Showalter “Wilderness” 23-4). This amalgamation of theories creates continuum

for the emergence of women's writing that is simultaneously ecological and feminist in nature.

By exploring biological, cultural, social, and linguistic models of gender differences within a body politic, Cowan questions how the woman's body and the earthbody reconcile themselves in the face of a conceptual masculinist framework of dichotomy-oriented repression and possession. Cowan's literary journey finds emancipation for Almira through revising womanhood and selfhood; however, in contrast to other Canadian spiritual quest novels, this quest does not divide male and female genders along warring sides. Achieving holism is revisionary; a masculine-encoded definition of 'woman' liberates both women and men. Almira alone enters Sedna's alternate reality in what may appear to be a "fantastical" pseudo-wilderness continuum; however, her emergence prepares her for heterosexual love and breeding through reestablishing personal integrity that allows her to find gender equality with her feminine/natural differences. Thus Almira's journey does not socially isolate her from mankind but illuminates a greater harmonious approach to achieving gender equality through respect for differences within the self and other. In this way, Cowan's play embraces Murphy's theory of "anotherness" (*WTE* 40-3) as that necessary ideological shift toward non-victim status for woman, nature and minorities.

Breaking away from the only cultural belief-system Almira has ever known proves complex, as she tellingly begins to identify more with the dying environment than her own male partner (ironically a professional environmentalist). Through a spiritual quest, which constitutes the bulk of the

play, aided and influenced by Sedna, Almira recovers her worth as a woman, as a creator, and as a potential mother. By resisting the standard feminist exploration of selfhood as seen in Canadian women-on-spiritual-quest novels, Cowan asserts a more ecofeminist philosophy of a harmonious biosphere in which finding mind-body-spirit unity within oneself becomes necessary for a 'natural' connection with a heterosexual partner. Committing to this kind of self-respect and self-knowledge is as important, Cowan stresses throughout the play, to personal well-being as it is to the survival of the species and, by extension, the biosphere.

In contrast to the ways in which women writers explore Earth-centred spiritualities and non-patriarchal spiritual empowerment in the ecopoetry of Chapter Four, Cowan specifically refers to origin myths connected to aboriginal cultural heritage as well as theoretical possibilities linked to a pre-Christian past as a kind of spiritual 'pastoral' psychological and physically integrated space. Attention to mythological detail and goddess-worshipping icons—in the absence of Christian symbols—places Cowan's drama on the literary frontier of ecological drama and literature. Nonetheless, what appears to be a radical feminist approach to literature and literary criticism is actually, to the contrary, quite conservative; ecofeminism, particularly as it is explored by Cowan, revises women's equality through an age-old biological and cultural connection with nature that is nearly destroyed (at least in Western industrialized nations) by denigrating masculine-encoded value-systems *and* by early feminists philosophers who sought equality for women through the impossibility of eradicating gender-difference. The woman on ecospiritual quest seeks equality in difference through a revisioning of

women's biological and socio-historical link to creation through natural cycles; this strategy places women, right or wrong, in the unique position to speak against environmentally destructive practices that threaten the survival and well-being of women's earthbodies, the continuance of the human species, and the quality and diversity of existence on Earth. Cowan's dramatic wilderness milieu is, therefore, not limited to a fabricated "green world," a pseudo-wilderness, but instead embraces a timeless escape from patriarchal hegemony to find solutions for entrenched ideologies that continue to oppress the "other" and advocate social change against sexism, racism, and naturism.

Many may question how 'natural' the choice to bear children really is for women living in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and, consequently, how 'wise' it is to further extend the sustainable limits of an already over-populated planet. Clearly Cowan focuses on women's connection to giving birth as an act of original creation unique to women that is profoundly reflective, both literally and figuratively, of the powerful link women have to natural universal cycles, and nature. In this way, Cowan revisits women's *intellect* as an exclusionary method of evaluating a woman's role in society (as feminism tends to instruct) and balances it with women's *instinct* for survival (as is the tendency for ecofeminism). Because of Cowan's obvious celebration of the essentialized 'natural' woman, her drama may raise questions concerning the value of homosexual relationships. One could make a case that Almira, "mother of us all," finds wisdom through an additional feminine pseudo-sexual connection with Sedna. Her own link to the presymbolic reeks of lesbian erotica which, on a

spiritual level, appears more profound than Almira's 'natural' connection to her husband, George. In fact, her social and sexual relationship with the opposite sex requires commitment and hard work while her association with Sedna seems 'natural'. It is no wonder then, given this interpretation of the play, that George mis-sees Sedna as a threat not only to the continuation of his well-being, but to the future of his relationship and his genes. Ultimately, for "the woman/women from the sea" there is no bypassing the process of creating human life, but accessing a mind-body-spirit harmony does not necessarily require heterosexual intercourse: from a feminist perspective, the choice is still her own.

In contrast to other theoretical and practical ecological groups, ecofeminism insists on connecting ideological changes in attitudes toward nature with feminist concerns for the physical earthbody. Nonetheless, focusing particularly on the woman's body as agency for social change is still largely open for interpretation even within ecofeminist theory. Cowan takes a great risk presenting such a play which in many regards speaks, ironically, against the popularly conceived feminist notion that women-as-vessel is a dis-empowering position, historically connected to masculinist oppression. While ecofeminist theorists necessarily touch on the issue of women's bodies as the foundation of this oppression, few ecofeminists to date have entered into the specific complexities of body politics widely explored by feminists, and psychoanalytical feminist theorists. Although Cowan does not explore outright Almira's choices for the termination of her pregnancy, the option to abort is contained within the hidden narrative and an obvious echo to Cowan's many allusions to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* when Almira

contemplates, with anxiety, her potential role 'to be, or not to be' a mother. Issues of technological "advancements" in abortion, conception, and birth control are rapidly becoming too-hot-to-touch debates in feminist/ecofeminist circles. While feminists strive for the right to choose control over one's body, ecofeminists concern themselves with the ways in which manipulation and exploitation of the female body have changed the dynamic concerning the issue of "choice" (see Diamond's *Fertile Ground*). Are women freely choosing "life" or abortion when potential community reactions strongly influence their decisions? Do women openly enter into the sexual revolution, making difficult decisions on methods of birth control when they would rather not? Given women's increasing role in scientific invention, are the possibilities of better forms of birth control in the care of women's discovery? The question of womanhood in light of women's dilemma over "natural," (goddess) choices for the sanctity of the body or the intriguing time-altering "advancements" facing what Donna Haraway calls the "cyborg woman" become increasingly more complex as we enter the twenty-first century.

Cowan's literary pilgrimage to a space outside of masculine-encoded culture and ideology achieves certain global perspective and self-reflection through the tropological use of mirroring within textual dialectics. Almira mimics her husband George repeatedly; their conversations circle each other in a web of meaninglessness. Although Almira and George seem to attempt to listen to each other, they are unable, initially, to get beyond what Almira calls, quoting Hamlet, "words words words" (351). Their inability to communicate effectively as

intellectual and biological partners becomes indicative of the impossibility and the improbability of environmentally life-sustaining changes. Like Lou in Engel's *Bear*, Almira seeks an understanding of herself through a mirror-other; however, while Lou projects an underdeveloped feminine empowerment onto the Bear, seeing in him what strengths she seeks in herself, Almira is not as fortunate. Her puppet-like responses to her husband suggest that Almira is initially more like Bear than Lou, more willing to be defined by the will of another than to find and assert one of her own. Ultimately, however, Bear leaves his "just say no" scar on Lou's back, and Almira returns to her husband renewed, and ready to end the psychological and emotional violence between them.

Cowan's mirroring of the female partner, Almira, to the male partner, George indicates a cultural tendency of women to defer authority to men and to identify with masculine-encoded definitions of womanhood; as such, Almira, in turn, reflects the majority of women who unquestioningly support the status quo (i.e. sexist language and actions), oftentimes to her own detriment. Cowan's division between the two sexes explores more than simple marital strife or communicative breakdown—it examines how identities, especially the feminine, are formed in patriarchal society. Almira's echoing of her husband and her reliance on quoting Hamlet—another man's words—to express her frustration with George's inconsequential chattering are evidence of her submissive role within her society and within her private relationship with George. Almira's ability and willingness to identify with a fantastical female entity outside of her own species suggest her need for a radical departure from a masculine-encoded

existence. Like the women-on-spiritual-quest in Chapter Three who seek a “green world” distancing from masculine influences, Almira finds similar answers without leaving the bioregion into a wilderness retreat. By discovering self-worth, Almira is fully able to function as a creature without limitations: she finds positive value in both her relationship with Sedna, the feminine-other and with her husband, a man she has chosen to be her life-partner, and mate.

The stagnant mirroring between Almira and her husband is necessarily undercut by Sedna, who is Almira’s other mirror-option. Without human female role models, Almira is intellectually isolated from a journey that encourages feminist revisionary evolution. Almira’s identification with a rare and dying sea creature appears much more colourful and complex than her human partnership; ultimately, however, her exploration of the presymbolic, through the archetypal “mother,” Sedna, becomes a mandatory journey for celebrating heterosexuality (since that is her choice to make) as a completing part of this interpretation of holistic womanhood. In fact, Almira’s identification with Sedna (and vice versa) is not altogether harmonious: Almira is described by the critics as “embittered” and “cold, irrational [...] semi-hysterical.” According to Denise Carmody, Almira’s attitude perfectly reflects what folklorists say is Sedna’s *modus operandi*. This critic explains:

Sedna has the consciousness of a woman wronged. Though she is not without guilt, she can think that she has been victimized. That is bound to make her provision of the sea animals uncertain. It is bound to complicate relations with her. She is the capricious, worrisome face of

ultimate reality—the divinity that is sensitive, touch, easily offended.

(123)

Sedna is Almira's Medusa-in-the-mirror (Gallop and Cixous), an enantiomorph who does not simply reflect and perpetuate habitual discourse but rather moves, thinks, and changes. Sedna challenges Almira's culturally constructed ways of understanding her feminine space within their bioregion by reconnecting her with an ancient reverence for a woman's relationship with her own body. By forcing Almira to look at herself through Sedna's exclusionary female restorative rituals, beyond a perpetually masculine-encoded image, Almira is able to overcome a certain eco-ennui caused by her seemingly ineffectualness in the face of environmental destruction. Thus Sedna convinces Almira that optimism for planetary healing is sustained through individual actions that reflect respect for the earthbody and the body-Earth.

Within her, Almira contains origins that are not ineffectual but celebratory, illuminating Almira's own creative and regenerative powers as "Al mira = all sea/mother of us all" (Cowan 359). In other words, Sedna bravely revisits masculine-defined "hysteria" and re-experiences it from a feminine perspective, exposing it not as a neurosis but an unhealthy tension between women's creative energy and having that power oppressed. After all, the so-called "hysterical" Sedna rationally protects herself repeatedly against the threat of extinction at the hands of the patriarchy—her husband, her father, and George—and is not sliced to pieces: she keeps re-appearing, using her tail, her headdress, her outer masks as a means of outsmarting a tracking hunter. When her father offers her as a

sacrifice to appease Sedna's angry and abusive ex-husband Fulmar, and axes her hands clinging to the gunnels when she does not consent to it , Sedna adapts, and through her powers of creation (in a moment of hysteria perhaps?) fills the sea with a protective community. Cowan explains:

The first blow tore off the first joints of my fingers. As they dropped into the sea from each was born a dolphin [...] On the next were born the seals and the walrus. On the third and final blow I dropped to the ocean floor. Then from all around me, from my flesh and blood, were born the whales. (377-8)

She is the ultimate and enduring myth of environmental survival. According to Inuit folklore, fishermen finding parasites (symbolic of human failures) in their fish correspondingly sought to recreate the kind of environmental/spiritual balance that would restore Sedna's happiness by "begging her forgiveness" (122). Without it, the sea, they believed would be doomed. Their own morally reprehensible actions were directly linked with the welfare of the sea in a system that "was a living network of physical and spiritual relationships. (121-2). Sedna demonstrates to Almira that in the face of destruction, creation is essential. Sadly, however, Cowan's play is a tale that shows Sedna in her finality; despite her perseverance for centuries against extinction as a result of humanity's hunting, technologies, and pollution, Sedna is finally dying. By transferring her survival instincts onto Almira, Sedna puts faith in humanity to make necessary changes within their practices, ideologies, and belief-systems to precipitate sustainability

As representative of the plight for all women, Almira's mind-body-spirit is virtually absent and as such, reflects how "the mother of us all," like Sedna and the planet Earth, is nearly extinct. When introduced at the beginning of the play, Almira is alienated from her spirit (depressed, she has no clear direction), her body (she is in denial over her pregnancy), and her mind (hysterical). In a supposed state of hysteria, Almira has quit her job, all but given up on her marriage, and has cut herself off from the world—Almira explains that "not caring feels very, very good" (Cowan 347). Well-inscribed in the technological age, and the myth of creative power in the patriarchy, Almira's embattled self-identity is not unlike the states of mind other female protagonists are in when they begin their spiritual quests into the pseudo-wilderness continuum (see Chapters One and Three). For that matter, Almira and Cook's various disengaged male characters have more than a polluted seascape in common. Like Cook's Skipper Pete and John, Almira (and her environmentalist husband) experience disappearing sea creatures, but in contrast, Almira and George are not at war with them. At opposite ends of the social spectrum (in terms of how humanity connects with the wilderness), George's livelihood depends on saving the wildlife while Cook's figures rely on hunting them. In *A Woman from the Sea*, written almost two decades after Cook's dramas, it is not surprising that George and Almira do not fish or hunt for their livelihood but are environmentalists.

From an ecofeminist perspective, Almira's hostile relationship with her own body automatically problematizes her position as a person with an environmentally altruistic agenda. From the play's outset, Almira is not in touch

with herself, her body, or her needs. If we consider Almira's body as a microcosmic biosphere, her disgust for the perpetuation of "a deformed and demented race" (378) suggests that like out-dated interpretations of nature-as-enemy, that enemy is not only her, it grows, as a fetus, within her. Thus, Almira, as the embodiment of "nature" and "civilization" becomes the battleground—spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically—of this age-old tension. She despises humanity not for its animalness but for its lack thereof, which manifests in Almira's seemingly perverse identification with female animals who continue, pointlessly, to carry on the cycle of life, despite the dangers inherent in environmental destruction.

Cowan explores how culturally defining nature as the enemy is internalized by women who continue to be defined by their close cultural and biological connection with the natural world. In this way, Cowan explores Atwood's question concerning the interpretation of wilderness from a woman's perspective, particularly when they are exposed, repeatedly to the Canadian North as "a sort of icy and savage *femme fatale* who will drive you crazy and claim you for her own" (*Survival* 89). Like Michael Cook's "hunters" who rage against the nature-enemy in a perpetual battle for human survival, Cowan's "nurturer" equally alienates herself from a blind wilderness that stupidly continues cycles of life, which provides more living fodder for the masculinist propensity for destruction. Almira is never "mad," but "frightened" since "there's something going on and it's far more insidious than the seals and the fishermen [...] nesting females have their eggs smashed because, fools that they are, they just keep laying more eggs"

(Cowan 351). Like the ecofeminist who sees women caught between the worlds of “nature” and of “civilization,” completely belonging in neither realm, Almira exists in a state of feminist ennui: nowhere; disgusted by environmentally destructive human practices (in which she includes herself) Almira alienates herself from humanity and her biological potential to perpetuate life-cycles. Almira thus attempts to eliminate herself (as a form of cyborgism) from what would traditionally be deemed a celebration—pregnancy and birth—since she intellectualizes this “natural” process as fruitless and dangerous and her role in it as the perpetuator of abusive cycles. In other words, by giving birth to a child who will become either the abuser or the victim, Almira’s life-giving capacity becomes, itself, a weapon of destruction. Neither choice for her child’s future is appealing, particularly when it involves creating life for a non-life-sustaining ecosystem. Ultimately, Almira chooses sanity, ironically, through disengaging from “reality,” and by fleeing from “humanity.”

By seeking answers in an alternate reality, Almira discovers the path of restructuring, rediscovering, and reconnecting with typical archetypes such as the self, the nurturing mother, the virgin (she is given a pearl to reflect rebirth and purity), and the lover (renewal of sexual desire for her heterosexual partner, George). Initially, Sedna attempts to transcend Almira’s rational and intellectual environmental ideals by showing Almira her emotional link to ecocrisis. Sedna initially attempts to reactivate Almira’s despondent emotionality through her dreams; however, by refusing to look at [Sedna’s] “thick, crimson blood” (347), Almira demonstrates how powerful the fear of making personal ideological

renovations can be at the home front of a culturally defined identity. In Almira's case, Cowan focuses on the kinds of changes potential feminists and ecofeminists might make to revolutionize gender-oriented oppressions. She dismisses Sedna's persistent and symbolic calling of her name and is continually revolted, as George is, by the smell of death and rotting animal flesh that emanates from the beach. Of course, the rotting seal is Sedna and the stench of death and blood and environmental nightmare she represents is not so easily removed from either the physical, or from the psychological.

In Cowan's play, Sedna's nightmare—the horrific vision of the environment she chooses to share with Almira—is a manifestation of the Dreamer's duty (reflected in Aboriginal philosophy) to translate messages from the natural/spiritual worlds. Because “anything and everything comes to them through dreams or vision-based concourse with the world of the spirit people, the divinities and deities, the Grandmothers, and the other exotic powers” (Allen 205), the dream, ritual, or ceremony is essentially the foundation of comm(unity). Paula Gunn Allen, a leading First Nations' critic, explains:

The Dreamer is the person responsible for the continued existence of the people as a psychic (that is, tribal) entity. It is through her dreams that the people have being; it is through her dreams that they find ways to function in whatever reality they find. [...] She is the mother of the people not because she gives physical birth but because she gives them life through her powers of dreaming—that is, she en-livens them. (204)

Thus Sedna's dream both links her to Almira in a spiritual awakening of her-self and connects her to the "vast, living sphere" (22), the universal systems of interdependence. Though Almira is relieved to discover that Sedna's flowing "crimson blood" (Cowan 347) and Sedna's death by drowning will not necessarily constitute her own fate, she also recognizes how delicately her destiny is linked to the natural world. Sedna's environmental nightmare passes to Almira, as does the immediacy and intimate nature of her concern for the dying planet. Sedna's wisdom echoes ecofeminist philosophy which insists on dissolving the ideological logic of binary oppositions that promote and privilege prescribed "good" over "bad;" "logic" over "emotion;" and "life" over "death." Culturally sustaining such socially entrenched dichotomies not only establishes a false belief system on which gender, racial, and nature inequalities persist, but it furthermore repudiates the wisdom of "natural cycles" that, by their very nature, resist judgment of life's events. Sedna, in tune with personal, historical, and global cycles, shows—through her own example—that living necessarily contains within it, death and rebirth. Thus, for her, life's greatest potential exists within a woman's unified mind-body-spirit, which has the potential for creating life, and experiencing death. In this way, Sedna's exotic beauty is simultaneously a rotting corpse; within the complex makeup of Sedna's own self-defining womanhood, her wisdom grows from life's struggles, and her appreciation of life includes life's nightmares. When Sedna tells Almira that, "women from the sea believe that this is a time for rejoicing, [and sorrow]," she further explains that both need to occur "for the great mystery that is ours" (Cowan 375).

Cowan's theatrical attempt to rediscover the sensual feminine raises the larger question: what happens and has happened to a society wherein the male/female harmony is absent? Cowan rejects the notion of a two-dimensional feminine image (the hysteric, the mother, the romantic interest etc.) all too common in traditional theatre, and instead seeks to include all six senses in her exploration of the complexity inherent in feminine creativity by shifting the theatrical landscape-as-setting, as backdrop to a privileged human action to the setting's involvement as character. This manifestation of the sensual feminine experience is reflected in the environment that is ever-present and ever-enduring through the production of water-lighting, music, and sounds. Almira's misunderstanding of herself is, in part, a failure to recognize and/or confront the sights, sounds, and smells that surround her externally in the body-Earth and internally, in her own earthbody. In stark contrast to Cook's sea-set as a transition zone between broken civilization and a lifeless sea (*Head 7*), Cowan's feminine depiction of an ocean frontier on the brink of environmental destruction still contains hope for the future through a feminist revisioning of masculinist ways. In essence, Cowan's sea becomes the macrocosm to Almira whose body, like the sea, is not only a physical vessel for future survival but a much-needed spawning ground for ideological adaptation.

In ecofeminist fashion, Cowan questions how humankind justifies the privilege it places on human life which sustains certain luxuries at any and all cost to animals and the environment, when it hypocritically devalues others within its own species, and within its own biotic community. Cowan seems to ask: are we

leading ourselves towards our own destruction? when George says to Almira “I certainly don’t want to die,” and Almira significantly responds “don’t you” (353)? Though George as an individual is an environmentalist by profession, Almira nonetheless associates him with that system of masculinist exploitation and control, which seems hell-bent on the destruction of itself, the planet, and everything else, including her. When George tries to make love with her, she simultaneously rejects her mutually inclusive “natural” will to survive and her instinct for heterosexual passion when she breaks from her initial mimicry by saying to George, “I want to keep dissolving” (356). In addition, she stifles George’s propensity for survival through conception by killing the sexual connection between them; Almira responds to George’s intimate sexual advances by saying: “leaden lovers living love lower me to my grave” (356).

When false or inappropriate myths and male role-models fail to provide a whole and complete self-image, they are like an irritant, or the revolting smell of a rotting carcass, both of which “stink of fear” (357). Eventually, Almira repudiates masculinist myths, particularly those that perpetuate female oppression and moves, instead, towards marginalized creating figures such as Eve (Cowan 355); nesting female sea turtles (351); and Sedna who is half seal/half human. Though aligning herself with Eve and mother turtles is obviously symbolic, Sedna’s role in Almira’s psyche is curious. Witnessing Sedna, the mythological selkie, stimulates Almira’s own knowledge of power and female privilege. Such knowledge of feminine power and radical self-discovery comes to Almira through Cowan’s use of ritual in scene nine. Sedna and Almira celebrate both the birth of

Almira's spiritual self, and her new-found acceptance of her pregnancy in a ceremony of both birth and rebirth that is part baby shower, part baptism, and part mystical communion. Sedna plays the role of priestess leading Almira through various rituals and presenting the sacred story of both her personal history and the history of the selkies, of which she is the last: Almira ("mother of us all") is the symbolic sacrifice. These stories function for Almira as parables of what Sedna describes as "the nightmare you humans have spewed on this earth" (Cowan 380), and as powerful reminders against the relinquishing of political power, both personally and publicly.

Sedna baptizes Almira "Pearl"; Cowan again uses this name to point to yet another primeval belief. Though Sedna can be linked to First Nations' figure "Hard Beings Woman" who "owns" all hard substances, and "lived in the beginning on an island which was the only land there was" (Allen 14), we might consider here how, instead, Sedna merely embraces Almira and brings her into a natural elemental domain. Barbara Walker, a leading researcher on matrilineal mythology and symbolism, tells us that pearls were "made of two female powers, the moon and water" (779); symbolically then, this pearl represents the union of Almira (moon associated with pregnancy) and Sedna (sea-goddess). From the cult of Aphrodite Marina, or the Sea-mother Man, we know her body as an "early gate [...] through which all men [*sic*] passed at birth (outward) and again at death (inward)" (779). In this way, pearls are associated with rebirth and regeneration. Furthermore, Walker explains, ancient traditions left naming to the mother; it was often connected with food-giving and thus, "the French still give a child a *nom de*

lait milk-name, obviously recalling the pre-Christian matriarchy where only, mothers could give names” (708). Sedna feeds Almira’s soul with a milk-name, Pearl. Almira resists at first but learns to accept the symbolic action involved. Sedna’s ‘real’ name is, interestingly, never told. Her excuse is that humans cannot pronounce it. As many primeval cultures believed, “the secret name embod[ied] the soul” (709), and could be used, if known, to destroy the bearer of that name: “no greater harm could be done to an Egyptian than to erase the caning or writing of his name. To destroy the very letters meant destruction of the soul” (710).

The ritual communion that follows Almira’s sacred naming ceremony is Cowan’s most powerful, clear, and provocative image of her strong belief in the interconnectedness of a woman’s struggle for self and liberation and the environmental struggle against extinction, destruction, and death. This particular part of their ceremony is a ritual borrowed in Western culture from the Roman Catholic belief in consubstantiation and significantly joins Sedna and Almira into one spiritual whole; it centres on an invocation that calls for a time when:

The Earth Spirit was everything

That walked swam, crawled

On her surface

The bond is broken

And once [...]

Fishermen and the creatures of the sea

Believed

That the Spirit of Man

And the Spirit of Animal was one (378-9)

Sedna reminds us that “we keep the same rituals still” (374-5) but still, “that bond is more than broken,/ It is forgotten/ Why?” (379). Clearly, Sedna respects both masculine-encoded and feminist-oriented rituals; her worry (ironically, like Cook’s patriarchy) is for the abandonment of any sacred ceremony replaced by the advanced “indifference” of a technological age in which things spiritual appear redundant, insignificant, or primitive. During her chant Sedna and Almira become one, both completing Almira’s return to her connection with the world, and suggesting the larger possibilities of rediscovering, through self-discovery and the reclaiming of the bond, not necessarily between man and animals, but between the women, and between women and nature. Sedna and Almira, together assuming the form and movements of a seal, is the central ecofeminist image of hope in the play.

As a two-fold baby-shower and baptism for birth and rebirth, Almira and Sedna bond over the blend of the frivolous fun of modern-day party-rituals (particularly those associated with ceremonious weddings and baby-delivery) and the spiritually sacred and serious ritual of baptism. Sedna explains that these are the old ways, “we keep the same rituals still” (Cowan 374-5). Despite alluding to a masculine-encoded Catholic ritual, their own mishmash ritual is also Beltane-like wherein fertility, growth, and rebirth become festively marked by exuberant sexuality. Resurrecting *jouissance* as a “natural” feminine instinct, falsely ghettoized, historically, in masculinist culture as morally reprehensible, Sedna and

Almira talk of asparagus, an obvious phallic symbol, and revision the sexual, physical, and spiritual bond between opposite genders as instinctual. Through her rebirth into self-love, (as Lou does with Bear in *Bear*, and Atwood's protagonist attempts in *Surfacing*) Almira revisions a personal connection with her husband through self-empowerment which allows her to express lust, ideas, desires, and dreams without depending on him. Significantly, Almira sheds an earlier despondency towards life when she eliminates the need to define herself by her husband's existence. She rejects her previous role as the mimicking, puppet-like wife who waits for her husband's words and her husband's actions to stimulate her; by journeying towards a state of ecofeminist empowerment, Almira necessarily remembers a woman's sacred link to nature through her potential to contain and create life. She asserts:

Lust! (Almira *champs the asparagus*) George's smell use to drive me crazy. I loved it. Heavy with oils. As if I were in a foreign market filled with unknown and forbidden scents. One whiff and my stomach would flip. What a wonderful sensation, desire. (376)

The bond between humanity and nature has been broken partly because women have failed to heed the message of George's admonishment when brandishing a harpoon and an axe and in the midst of cutting up Sedna he laughing says, "never leave nothing to the Devil" (379). Sedna's lesson for Almira and Cowan's message to woman is a strategic one: do not "ignore what little power you have been given. The power to create life" (381). Ultimately Cowan's ecofeminist insight calls for a caring relationship amongst all

members—human and nonhuman—of an eco-community. After all, as Sedna wisely points out, “union is a gift. We are always alone” (383). Within her presymbolic mirror-gaze, Almira faces her own fears of “darkness,” “ghosts, senility, “losing someone [...] making friends,” “dreaming,” and “tomorrow,” and her existential angst halts at the brink of her “losing [her] mind” (372).

Ultimately, she discovers that she does not want to live in seclusion, isolated from humanity, her sisterhood, nor from her chosen life-long male companion. When the fog clears from the seashore, her alternative mirror-other, Almira recognizes the value of community, which she comes embrace as biotic, and which she comes to know spiritually, physically, and intellectually.

Chapter Six

Be-me-eating ‘meat’: Canadian radical ecopoetry and the ecofeminist politics of animal trafficking

How hard it would be for me to engage in any kind of action now for justice and peace
with the remains of murdered flesh in my body.

Alice Walker *Living by the Word* (182-3)

We live today in a world of deceptively easy choices. The ‘ethical vegetarian’ who
persists in ignoring the consequences of large-scale agriculture, and the meat-eater who
would rather not think about how a steer becomes a Big Mac, are in this regard equally
self-deluded.

Mary Zeiss Strange *Woman the Hunter* (7)

We are thin, famished poachers waiting/ at the edge of the world. [...] We are smart
worms/ who eat our way/ into the carcasses of animals, then/ rise up in malefic parody,/
grotesque marionettes,/ ripped and skinned and dyed. /we gnaw within, fashion/ lethal
technologies from skeletons and/ slaughter others with their own bones, worked malign/
into deadly revision of tooth and claw.

Christopher Dewdney *Signal Fires* (21-22)

In ecopoetry, the act of writing about eating or not eating meat approaches
fictional/non-fictional boundaries that challenge cultural, social, and individual
choices in today’s society. From the symbolic act of eating meat—through which
the politics of “othering” expands to connect human violence against racial
minorities and women with the slaughtering of voiceless animals—to the actual
practices of carnivorousness, these poems of protest create a poetic that blurs the
lines between language and practice. This chapter divides defining examples of
Canadian radical ecopoetry (dealing with the moral and ethical implications of
eating meat) into three categories: 1) propaganda poetry; 2) identification with
the hunted/hunter; and 3) the ecofeminist commitment to reprimand the ways in
which a woman-nature link falsely justifies violence against women and animals.
Herein, the important question of how Canadian appetites reveal themselves in a

literature that foregrounds the future of dinnertime—with the hopes of radical cultural and social change—is explored.

While other environmental concerns such as pollution, (nuclear) war technologies, the over-use of harmful chemicals, waste disposal, and acid rain, to name only a few, may be interpreted as subjects more worthy of literary protest, eco-poets who choose to focus on issues of consumption—both in the eating of animals and in the consumer-marketing of animals as product—make a case, within the intimacy of such mandatory social/survival practices, for individual action against violence and the degradation of others. In problematizing the relationship between the personal and the political, between desire and necessity, between home and imprisonment, eco-poets—male and female—investigate a wide range of contemplative options which ultimately ask: ‘to eat [meat] or not to eat? That is the question.’

Though I will give examples of propaganda poetry (and explain its in/effectiveness) in recent Canadian poetics, I am more concerned with the emerging validity of eco-poetry as a sub-genre, which meets the criteria of eco-poetry as it is outlined by ecocritics Lawrence Buell, Terry Gifford, and Karen Warren. In such examples, the reader witnesses a response to poetry that is personal and political, emotional and intellectual in a fusion of ecological ideologies. My selection of Canadian eco-poetry, which deals with the topic of eating and humanity’s moral/ethical responsibility to others in their biotic community, was chosen from a particularly limited selection of eco-radical poetry. Though this chapter focuses on the consumption side of animal

trafficking, other more popular environmental topics such as fur-as-fashion, the use of animals in scientific experimentation, and unconscious violence against animals, wild and domestic, are also addressed by ecopoets. Canadian literary magazines print the occasional ecopoem and proto-ecopoem; however, on a larger scale—collections focusing on ecological issues, collections that contain the odd ecopoem, or anthologies that include ecopoetry—seem absent from the Canadian literary scene. I have spent innumerable hours gathering recommendations from ecocritical scholars, combing bookstores, reading through anthologies, surfing the internet, and scanning library shelves for what might be deemed ecological Canadian literature—particularly the more radical entries. In part, my study hopes to prescribe an ecocritical approach for the reinterpretation of nature literature in general and specifically, ways in which Canadian writers are moving in the direction of legitimizing a Canadian ecological literary genre. Poets not included in this chapter but who deserve study in this area include, in no particular order, Joe Rosenblatt, Don McKay, bill bissett, Jan Zwicky, Tim Lilburn, Lyn King, Christopher Dewdney, Lorna Crozier, and Miriam Waddington. The exploration of the human-animal/nature dynamic in each of these poets is deserving of its own chapter but, for restrictions on space, the selection for this chapter remains limited to some of the more obviously ecological voices in Canadian ecopoetry.

Although eating is essential to any discussion of survival (for obvious reasons) many academics and readers of poetry—including ecocritics—still view “eco-veggie poems” on the radical extreme of a horizontal scale which posits

propaganda rants at one end and Zen-like meditation on the other. These poets ask us to review our choices of meat-eating, and our cultural habits centred on hollow ritualistic practices such as consuming “fast food;” the renaming of animals in consumptive form; and the serving of *dead* animals in traditional meals for the celebration of *life*. All of these unchallenged quotidian acts are, according to ‘green thinkers,’ politically charged with denigration, repression, violence, and perpetuated cycles of human and non-human abuse. Not all eco-poets advocate radical veganism or vegetarianism as solutions to impending ecocrisis; however, all of them ask each individual to make educated choices based on the factual evidence of abuse and violence in scientific experimentation (including the cosmetic industry), farming, and in hunting practices. Furthermore, not all eco-poets have easy answers—such as veganism—to these questions. As Joe Rosenblatt astutely questions, while examining a dying salmon who remarkably resembles his dead Uncle Nathan, the fish-monger: “in relationship to the sum of all conscious being// who are you” (Rosenblatt 72-3)?

Among the many issues that academics have in analyzing propaganda poetry—inadequate critical vocabulary; confrontation of their own choices which affect the biosphere; or dismissal of its claims as illegitimate—one of the main reasons that radical propaganda poetry is not studied is because of its tendency towards what high modernist writers T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound deemed inferior (as is documented in Eliot’s essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”): self-absorbed poetry that privileges the egocentric/Romantic poet as the narrative centre of knowledge and wisdom. In other words, the kind of emotional outrage

reflected in propaganda ecopoetry reads like naïve, underdeveloped writing which, at its core, seems hypocritical (after all, it is printed on *dead trees*). Oftentimes, the lyrical is sacrificed for the political message, and readers begin to suspect that they are being insulted, and blamed for humanity's moral corruption, violence, and their own ignorance. To add insult, readers may also consider that, simultaneously, they are wasting their time reading what, rhythmically, structurally, and linguistically exists outside the realm of "good" poetry. One might also argue that poetry which speaks to radical ecological extremes preaches to the already converted. Nonetheless, because conscientious awareness of ecocrisis is not as readily apparent as, say, patriarchal hegemony within present-day Western intellectual society, ecopoetry of radical ecological concerns simply does not *yet* speak to a wide audience.

Although one may argue that such a poetics has no place in the realm of scholarly discourse, I believe these poets, as the front-liners of a revolution against environmental degradation and destruction, deserve recognition. Every revolution has its radicals and two of the best ecological propaganda poets I have found within Canadian poetry are James Strecker, and Sandy Shreve. Examples of propaganda poetry, selected for the first part of this chapter, are oftentimes more detrimental to the movement than helpful as they move in and out of lyrical gracefulness and didactic environmental 'green' condescension.

Proto-ecopoetry: propaganda, protest, or poetry?

Some of the most comprehensive examples of radical ecopoetry (from experiments to the trafficking of animals for food consumption or for sport) are

found in James Strecker's *Recipes for Flesh* (1989). Though seemingly simplistic in style and form, Strecker's images of violence, both in the trafficking of animals and in the observation of eating practices, make this poet's poetics outstanding as examples of an emerging sub-genre in Canadian literature. As stated previously, Strecker's poetry is not for everyone; he does not strive for popular appeal. However, the text emerges as a poignant example of a politic striving to be heard in its attempt to open the dialogue between "radical" vegans and "unconscious" meat-eaters. Within the Canadian ecological literary milieu, Strecker is an environmental revolutionary, whose motivation for such emotionally charged poetry can only be speculated. Nonetheless, in an emerging ecologically conscious literature, Strecker's work is worth the often painstaking read since his departure from a consensus reality (the majority of people are meat-eaters) challenges the 'primitive' practices of animal-trafficking as unbecoming of an evolved and civilized species. Poems that challenge our collective social practices of eating meat and animal products include "What did you eat?" "The Carnivore's Commercial," "Why I don't eat meat," and "Milkshake and Omelette." Strecker's vision of moral ecological rage in this collection is consistent throughout all of the fifty-three poems.

Strecker's earlier collection, *Bones to Bury* (1984) makes problematic the consideration of his poetry for any ecofeminist exploration since it moves ideologically between ecofeminism and sexist portrayals of women in an appropriation of the ecofeminist voice. The women in poems "Marina" (28), "The Reward for Not Eating Meat" (33), "Vanessa Harwood" (40), "Ofra

Harnoy” (47), “A Woman’s Masterpiece” (52), “The Singing of Fairuz” (56), “Susanne Farrell” (64), “Mary” (66), “Rue St. Denis” (73), and “For the Waitress” (79) initially appear “goddess-like”, connected to nature’s powerful mysteries: ultimately, however, as collector of women-as-trophies, the male poet-speaker effectively colonizes his female subjects when he blames *them* for *his* sexual failures. Poems such as “Quintet” (42), “The University Grad” (45), “Men are Like Pigs” (54), “A Housewife” (68), and “Women Like You” (82) are likewise objectifying but hold none of the woman-hating insults back. His solution: “I should put a match/ to the glossy whore/ dangling in my sleep// deliver my body some light” (82). Herein, women are the brunt of his rage—a rage later unleashed onto meat-eaters in *Recipes*.

Strecker’s women are also attacked in this early collection for their “unnatural” smells and beauty. For example, the poet-speaker in “The Smell of Roses” confesses to subtle seduction—“I// try to manipulate/ your senses”—but objectifies his unnamed female companion instead, in a morally reprehensible manner, by admitting his manipulation of her: “I maul your breast instead” (18). His “natural” sexual aggression and his condescending attitude are herein justified since she has, in his mind, constructed herself as an “unnatural” object, “singular/ among mannequins,// like no one in particular.” Her breasts may smell like roses but, “it’s stuff/ from a can,/ not roses.” Likewise in “Ineffable Beauty” Strecker’s poet-speaker condemns his female subject for wearing makeup, making women the scapegoats for animal cosmetic testing. He explains:

To create
the pigment of

roses
for your cheek
living rabbits
were
tortured
in a lab; their
eyes were burned away.
I have no word to compare
your skin
to petals. (14)

Centring on women as targets for his ecological frustrations, Strecker neglects to address how the manipulative powers of the fashion/cosmetic industries and social pressures to conform to the beauty myth complicate this particular issue. In comparison to Strecker's later poetry, it becomes clear in this earlier work that eating meat might not kill—yet; but not eating meat will get you the girls because, naturally, the vegetarian—at least the one in “the Reward for not Eating Meat” (33)—“smells” better than an animal-killer.

Repeatedly Strecker strongly asserts the idea that physical sustenance, at the expense of other nonhuman life forms is ethically reprehensible. The trafficking of animals (which includes slaughtering for food; using for experiments (particularly for cosmetics); the mechanizing of agricultural animals for their product consumption (i.e. milk and eggs); and the agricultural practices of raising/housing/feeding animals) exhibits an abhorrent abuse against animals.

From an environmentalist's standpoint, these practices create an unhealthy animal-product that, on a physical level, lead to debilitating human diseases (the hormones and antibiotics fed to cattle to improve size and production of milk are associated with health risks in humans). On a less tangible, less practical level, Strecker's poetry argues, slaughtering with indifference leads to spiritual and emotional debilitation. This poet-speaker (speaking in ecofeminist terms) points to the practice of meat-eating as a horrific act against humanity itself, ironically, when it is justified as a mandatory source of protein and thus, sustenance. Clearly, according to Strecker, eating "meat" kills more than just the animal.

By describing an agricultural world—the practices of which the majority of Westerners are denied access to—Strecker exposes the hypocrisy of an industry that promotes healthy pastoral images of barnyard animals (seemingly happy to sacrifice their lives to sustain the life of a human being) when, in actuality, animals oftentimes fight for "food substitutes" and live in the internment of standardized and over-crowded battery cages on factory farms. Ex-animal rights advocate, Karen Davis describes how this common practice makes hens our "metaphysical slaves" (205) by perpetuating the perception of the chicken as an "egg-laying machine of a dumb-ass chicken" (201). Told from a battery hen's perspective, Davis writes:

I live in a cage so small I cannot spread my wings. I am forced to stand night and day on a sloping wire mesh floor that painfully cuts into my feet. The cage walls tear my feathers, forming blood blisters that never heal. The air is so full of ammonia that my lungs hurt and my eyes

burn and I think I am going blind. As soon as I was born, a man grabbed me and sheared off part of my beak with a hot iron, and my little brothers were thrown into trash bags as useless. (200)

Davis makes a strong ecofeminist argument concerning masculinist ecological ethics that eliminate all moral consideration for “tame” animals, raised for human consumption, and automatically given to “wild” animals. In this way, Davis asserts that deep ecology:

[...] seems in large part to cloak the old macho mystique of unrestricted power, conquest, and disdain for the defenseless, idolized by our culture, in pseudoscientific, pseudopoetic distinctions between beings who are “nature, wild, and free” and things that are “unnatural, tame, and confined” (201).

Ultimately, Davis finds that environmental theorists tend to unjustly agree with Aldo Leopold who argues that domesticated farm animals “have been bred to docility, tractability, stupidity, and dependency” as “creations of man” and as such, to make concessions for them is “to speak of the natural behavior of tables and chairs” (194).

Davis seems to have a limited academic understanding of environmental ethics, citing only two articles (three environmental theorists, Karl Sagan, J. Baird Callicott and Aldo Leopold), though she makes a passionate argument. Sagan, she argues, raises the issue of the rights of animals whose fate is based on a constructed hierarchy of animals, so-made by how closely they resemble human traits (i.e. intelligence, aesthetics etc.). Callicott and Leopold (cited above)

dismiss domesticated animals altogether, “relegat[ing them] to the wasteland of foregone conclusions in which they are considered to be [...] ecologically out of tune” (198). Nonetheless, her ecofeminist argument which links the treatment of farm animals to the treatment of women in masculinist society compels us to consider how “nonhuman animals are oppressed by basic strategies and attitudes that are similar to those operating in the oppression of women” (195). Men, Davis argues, “have traditionally admired and even sought to emulate certain kinds of animals, even as they set out to subjugate and destroy them, whereas they have not traditionally admired or sought to emulate women” (196). In Davis’ opinion, human males “identify with the ‘wild’ and not the ‘tame’” (197). Thus, ultimately, both men and women (living in a masculinist culture) “exhibit a culturally conditioned indifference toward, and prejudice against, creatures whose lives appear too slavishly, too boringly, too stupidly female, too ‘cowlike’” (196). Clearly, Davis’ argument links Western society’s treatment of women and locally raised, domesticated animals to a hegemonic system of socially acceptable denigration for those who exist outside the masculinist centre of privilege. In light of this ecofeminist debate, the issue deep ecologists raise about coming, finding, or defining “home,” becomes increasingly problematic when those who “stay at home” receive little or no respect.

To this end, Strecker instructs and attempts to inform as much as he creates a poetic. In “Why I don’t eat meat” Strecker’s poet-speaker serves as a sensitive observer witnessing the kinds of poor stewardship which, in calling attention to it,

challenges meat-eaters to take responsibility for their unrecognized “murder” of animals-for-meat. He states:

fingers crushed;
knees a bloodied splinter,
two arms at the shoulder

severed from my breathing,
a saw through my genitals,
a number inked on my thigh,

my name and heartbeat divided,
my muscle in one belly,
my kidneys in another,

all flushed into sewage
as you eat and shit again [...] (33)

Though he states meat-eating is a hollow act: “while nothing of spirit in me// reaches you, a corpse eating/ corpse without eyes” (33), his tone implies that it is anything but meaningless since animal-killers are the ones who carry indifference and ignorance with their actions. His cry against individual and cultural indifference becomes as much of a crime as “unnecessary” animal-killing. These perpetuated hostile acts of denigration—“fingers crushed,/ knees a bloodied splinter,/ two arms at the shoulder”—against animals intermingles with what is an indistinguishably metaphoric desecration of his own body: animals slaughtered for human consumption are “severed from my breathing,/ a saw through my genitals,/ a number inked on my thigh,// my name and heartbeat divided” (33).

Herein Strecker alludes to the Jewish WWII holocaust, in a reductive argument that didactically oversimplifies the ecofeminist-oriented linkage between those who perform animal defilement (agriculturalists); those who perpetuate that violence (consumers); and the animals themselves who are, like holocaust victims, “innocent.”

Part of what appears to be Strecker’s strategic ecological argument to convert ecologically ignorant readers to a more mindful ‘green’ space is his shock value; though Strecker pushes images to their limits in his incredibly subjective epic cataloguing of gruesome details, his facts, unfortunately, are not altogether exaggerated, nor are they fictionalized. By questioning his seemingly uninformed readers (after all, who would choose to eat an animal product *knowing* how cruelly it was raised and slaughtered?) Strecker’s “What Did You Eat?” attempts to explain, illuminate, and eliminate the horrific practice of ‘producing’ veal. The poet-speaker renames the euphemized “veal” the “limb of a calf/ that never saw light// and stood in one place/ unable to turn// each morning the/ birthday of nothing// for ninety-five days/ till you cooked its/ / anemic flesh” (45). Animal by-production in “Milkshake and Omelette” becomes less emotionally obvious and more crammed with factual evidence designed to repulse readers, effectively making them denounce typical breakfast feasts/ treats. Calves are ripped from the mothers at birth and given two choices, according to gender: “if female,// it becomes another/ machine [for milking] if male, anemic/ meat” (34-6). Adult “mother” cows “give milk for// only ten months” and thus, “rebreeding/ takes place maybe fifty// days after the calf is born.” Such close

associations with human biological functions are designed to force readers—particularly women in this case—to identify with practices that appear unappealing and morally corrupt. Even ‘mature’ post-menopausal women are asked to identify with old cows whose “production wanes” as:

the cow is sent to a
slaughterhouse, not

graded high enough for
steak or chops but ground

to hamburger for fast-food
chains. The cows who remain,
many cows, are chained
by the neck, on concrete

floors, for months on end. (35)

Strecker’s play on the word “chain” makes concrete a symbolic and perpetual bondage of human ignorance and animal imprisonment. Strecker’s listing of “technological magic” creates a tension between the pastoral view of the idealized farm and the post-industrial mechanization of agricultural practices which aims at leaving readers as cold as the “machinery,/ living or stainless steel.” This treatment of female chickens is equally gruesome:

The hen is also a machine,

beaks and toes clipped
away because even hens will
kill their own, if locked

in cages piled high. [...]
The hens are confined to
automation when mature.
[...] After a year
and a half, the profits

each hen produces begin
to dwindle. Each hen,
like two hundred and fifty
million other living gears

in the system, have ground,
useless rust, to a halt.
They are made into soup

and other processed food [...] (35-6)

Strecker's radically post-pastoral perspective includes the equal discrimination of animals along sex-lines: "male// chicks don't lay eggs, so/ of course they are suffocated/ in heavy-duty plastic bags" (35).

Though speaking for the voiceless animals is, to some extent, a recognizable violation of the 'other's' voice, Strecker is intentionally careful (in observance of ecocritical theories) not to reduce animals to their euphemistic meat-names (i.e. cows as beef, chickens as poultry etc.). As Carol Adams explains:

We do not see our own personal 'meat'-eating as contact with animals because it has been renamed as contact with food [...] The crucial point

here is that we make *someone* who is a unique being and therefore not the appropriate referent of a mass term into something that is the appropriate referent of a mass term (202).

In addition, Strecker does not make anthropomorphic the voice of animals in any condescending or ‘knowing’ way. His ‘beef’ is with humanity, and not with the animal kingdom. And while this approach seems to speak of a respect for animals, it also serves, oftentimes, to distance the poet-speaker, and the poet from his (for lack of evidence otherwise) biotic community. In other words, Strecker’s poetics foreground a speaker who clearly makes ecologically sound choices; nonetheless, he seems trapped outside the possibility of an “ecotopian future” (Davis 198) in a world littered with guilt, accusations, and ‘civilized’ human political dogma.

In the same ‘vein’ as Strecker’s “Milkshake and Omelette,” Canadian poet Sandy Shreve, in a collection entitled *Bewildered Rituals*, considers the ramification of rituals and traditions which centre on the hypocritical—often absurdly so—acts of animal and wildlife slaughter. In “Tradition,” Shreve points to Christmas as a time more like Hallowe’en when “wild abstract designs/ and split-second pictures/ of skeleton trees” flash across the wall. Despite “feasting” on the death of, in this case, turkey, the poet-speaker sympathizes with the roasting bird as she gazes:

outside my winter window [as]
juncos come with sparrows
forage about the fir and cedar boughs
and sing, free range

an exotic concept for fowl
farmed for our feasting
caged and kept on chemical feed
for rapid growth and slaughter
like cultivated Christmas trees (33-4)

Westerners honour the actual and symbolic freedom of winged animals—namely the bald eagle—while roasting a “bird” that “permeate[s]/ the air I breathe with festive scents/ of sap and slowly roasting poultry” (33-4). Furthermore, tradition dictates that the bounty of a celebrated living natural world be ritualized by decorating a dead tree with fake birds. Herein, choosing “natural” over “plastic” is preferred, even by the poet-speaker herself, *and* absurd since both options seem equally environmentally unfriendly. She connects, ironically, the “exotic/ replicas of birds of paradise [used]/ to crown the top [of the tree]” with how birds, domesticated for human consumption, must also view these songbirds, privileged for their daintiness, their aesthetics, and their melodic abilities. While these birds may appear ‘safe’ from human consumption—no one eats a songbird—Shreve implies through the repetition of the word “exotic” that these birds are, in fact connected: songbirds may not be eaten but they are killed for the use of their feathers in the making of human adornments (such as hats, jewelry, etc.) and bird replicas for Christmas trees.

In pointing to the absurd and hypocritical mores of Western “holidays,” Shreve questions the holiness, the sacredness of such barbaric praxis. As such, Shreve also challenges our whole notion of a dichotomy between those who claim to be ‘civilized,’ and those who are perceived, simply, as non-sentient beings,

wildlife, or 'nature.' How, ethically, do we accommodate "holiday" and "celebration" when it involves the denigration and destruction of other living members of our biotic community? Shreve's poet-speaker is willing to take responsibility for her thoughts—those that challenge traditional holiday wonts, particularly those centring on the eating of dead animals—but she draws the line in the penultimate stanza when "I" shifts to "we" as though the practice itself, and the unwillingness to revisit traditional cultural observances is for the majority, (for the "we") taboo. For Shreve, this switch from the casual musings of the poet-speaker to a collective voice indicates a communal responsibility for not taking action against these outmoded traditions.

From the macrocosmic Western civilization to contemporary advertising which perpetuates false barnyard images ("the happy poster-hen/ will not ride on the transport truck/ stacked with her bedraggled cousins") to her microcosmic family gathering, Shreve incriminates all of humanity, including herself. Despite the fact that this poet dedicates large sections of this collection to the issue of eating practices, her poet-speaker is surprisingly paralyzed by what is seen as radically revolutionary—the changing of the menu for holidays. The poem itself is a quiet protest, one not likely to ostracize her from community. In fact, Shreve gains a certain persuasive power by: 1) including herself in the blame (as opposed to Strecker) and 2) by recognizing the political sensitivity of making changes with force or by radical confrontational means. Clearly, Shreve's poetry asserts a certain bravery that her poet-speaker lacks. Even the eating of seaweed, in "Dulse" becomes a challenge to 'normal' expectations when her husband is

“disgust[ed]/ *how can you eat that stuff?*/ my fishy kisses/ greeted with suspicion.” Her defense is not to alter her alternative eating practices, but to “exile myself/ to the opposite side of the room/defiantly feast/ on an insignificant cultural gap/vast as a continent/ between us” (61).

Hypocrisy in the teaching of these outmoded rites to the next generation plagues proto-ecopoetry. While the thrust of Shreve’s “Tradition” admits to the two-facedness of eating turkey “next to an evergreen/ raised on pesticides toxic to songbirds” (34), the final stanza makes a more subtle ‘dig’ at how the seemingly innocent custom of wishbone pulling becomes sinister: “children will curl their fingers/ around wishbones/ dried for dreams.” Seemingly barbaric meat-eating habits are made palatable for children who associate the remaining evidence of ‘animal-murder’ with an activity closely linked to birthday wishes and impossible desires. Furthermore, this ritual both draws children into the custom of killing animals *and* incriminates them—those who might otherwise have appeared innocent, eating without the knowledge of their actions—in the slaughtering of animals for human gain. Nonetheless, Shreve’s innuendos suggest yet another complexity: “wishbones/ dried for dreams” alludes to lost First Nations’ rituals of praising the animal spirit for its sacrifice. In this way, the practice of eating meat is not the issue (after all, many animals instinctively eat meat, humans may not be the exception—see my discussion of Strange’s *Woman the Hunter* later in this Chapter); instead, Shreve comments more on the hollowness of holiness and the lack of thankfulness Westerners generally have towards the taken-for-granted, sacrificial dinner-lamb.

Strecker also comments on these particular crimes of ecologically reprehensible behaviour: hypocrisy and the perpetuation of such ‘barbaric practices’ as the use of animals and animal-products for human ‘luxury.’ Like Shreve, Strecker labels prayer an equally senseless activity as animal-killing. In “What did you eat?” Strecker clumsily points to animal-eaters (in this case, ironically, ‘baby calf’) who “prayed over dinner to// a god who might save/ your children from// a cruel indifference/ such as yours” (45). Similarly, “A block of wood” describes a young child’s witnessing of what, effectively, reads as a simple narrative of the habitual killing of chickens by his grandfather. Throughout this collection children are the only human beings who receive any sympathy from Strecker; usually, they are portrayed as innocent by-standers. Herein, however, this young prophet “watched the killing, [and] remembers/ a greasy soup on his tongue” (27). And though there are no overt signs of early vegetarianism, this young boy somehow breaks the expected cycle of animal-violence through his early identification with the disturbing images connected with chicken-slaughter. He does not identify with the chickens, *per se*, as one might expect from an ecofeminist reading of this early childhood memory; instead, he rebels against the inherited rituals perpetuating masculinity by disassociating himself—right or wrong—from the kind of human being he perceives his grandfather to be. In childhood innocence, the boy will “never hide in the ditch/ again from demons described/ by a man who carries an axe” (27).

Steeped in propaganda-like patterns of outrage, Strecker’s “The Carnivore’s Commercial” exposes animal-trafficking industries as sanctimonious profiteers of

those brainwashed by brilliant advertising; this particular angle on environmentalism creates the best opportunity for Strecker to rant about profitable sanctimonious actions. One might expect a little sympathy for those who buy into the propaganda that pushes the consumption of animals and animal products; however, Strecker labels them gullible, self-absorbed and brainless for succumbing to repeated ecopornographic images created by advertisers who connect human health with animal savagery. Herein Strecker alludes to what many environmentalists casually refer to as the “ecopornography” of corporatism and capitalism (fully acceptable and unquestioned in Western society), often linked to ill-advised humour in magazine and television advertising. In Strecker’s work, eating and profiting from the death of animals is deftly marked by “the smiling fool/ of a cartoon tuna dragged/ from its home, the sea” (clearly Charlie of Sunkist Tuna fame), and “cartoon hot dogs/ seducing your young to a/guiltless fantasy on/ Saturday morning TV.” Strecker is appalled, and rightly so, by the unconscionable use of animal-imagery to sell its own denigration and destruction.

Though Strecker makes a case for ‘cartoon’ images in ecopornographic advertising, one might cite more recent anthropomorphism of actual animal images such as the cow in the A1 BBQ sauce commercial of the early 1990’s wherein the fenced cow sings a popular jazz tune—“you know the only one for me—yah—could ever be you!”—but mumbles “mooo moooo moo moo” when a cowboy passes by in order to “disguise” his intelligence. The shocking end of the commercial presents its viewers with a close up of a bottle of steak sauce, for use, of course, after the charming and clearly intelligent cow is slaughtered. Other

examples of recent ecoporn include an onslaught of car commercials that advertise the vehicle's ability travel in any terrain, effectively destroying many ecosystems. One commercial attempts to disguise the obvious destruction a jeep creates while roaming through uncharted woods, by showing a grizzly singing opera, a deer painting a pastoral scene, and, raccoons playing chess.

This attempt to 'civilize' the wilderness is made possible only through the wilderness-destroying technology of the all-terrain motorized vehicle. More ironic, however, is how this kind of unconscionable 'invasion' echoes earlier attempts by New World colonizers to erase, and exploit a First Nations/wilderness biotic harmony. In this way, the concept of 'civilization,' problematized by the ecoporn of animals made anthropomorphic through elitist cultural actions, is effectively inverted in such a way as to maintain the commercial's fantastical "green world" reality without the viewer (a supposed nature lover) identifying with the "invisible" car-driving destroyer of the forest. Furthermore, because the 'cultural' activities of the forest animals 'attract' human attention they are ultimately seen as seducers of the desired technology that allows wilderness adventure without wilderness fear. Thus, the animals' activities deconstruct into a source for blame concerning their own ecological demise. Wilderness and humanity are not brought to the same 'level' where human beings and animals engage in a mutual exchange of intellectual and creative endeavours; instead, this harmony is superseded by the barbaric actions of the car consumers.

In a similar 'vein,' the advertisers for "Shake and Bake" have portrayed irresistibly cute barnyard chickens who are either shocked or relieved (depending

on whether they are pigs/cows or chickens) when the idea of “chicken fingers” reaches them. Currently, their ads show two clearly intelligent young pigs “mooring” when barnyard gossip unveils this company’s plans for a coating for pork chops. Likewise, Maple Leaf’s “leaner chicken” advertisement demonstrates how chickens working out at the gym will be identified by consumers attempting to reduce their own fat. Unconscionably, these consumers, according to the commercial, must eat these conscientious chickens in order to be like them. Family restaurant chain Denny’s “uses” muppets Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy to sell a “grand slam breakfast” through its obvious ‘affordability.’ By eating her choice of bacon or pork sausage links, however, Miss Piggy sells *herself* (in a grand slam, thank you m’am) for a tasty \$1.99 US.

Strecker’s own rant on the subject lacks the sophistication of poetic tone and style to persuade his readers to make lifestyle changes since it attacks with more emotional rage than rational intellect. He ends the poem by making an obvious connection between those who “pay the killer/ to bloody his hands” and the very same person who would “chip in bucks for the/ SPCA, and, full in the/ belly with the dead you/ would not hear, you weep/ real tears for Bambi.” Though Strecker consistently criticizes individuals for what he sees as inane choices, he neglects to fully expose the media, advertising, multinational corporations, animal-traffickers etc. for their roles in perpetuating barbaric social mores.

Ecopoetry: Identifying with violence against agri(cultured) animals

Steeped in religious tradition, community ritual, and family values, the writings of poets such as Kathleen Forsythe, Marianne Bluger, Cathy Ford, Ellen Jaffe, John O’Neil and Erin Mouré show an evolution from the raw propaganda ecopoetry (as seen in Strecker and Shreve’s texts) to a more refined, multi-layered lyrical grace of ecological concern married to a sophisticated poetic consciousness. One may argue that Strecker’s poetry lacks the “awe and humility” required of ecopoetry (see “ecopoetry” in my Introduction); however, its bold and presumptuous, brave and obnoxious tendencies give it a necessary place in the emergence of Canadian ecopoetry, among the slogan-slinging environmentalists that make the revolution so multi-faceted.

Not unlike the motivation behind the narrative in Strecker’s “A block of wood,” Kathleen Forsythe’s “Why I Won’t Eat Ham” taken from a collection entitled *The Hair Cage* (1972), gives personal reasons for choosing one form of vegetarianism over another ethical or health-oriented choice. In this case, it is unclear whether the choice is simply ham, pork, bacon, back bacon or wild boar, or whether it is animals in general that this poet-speaker has chosen not to include in her diet. Nonetheless, Forsythe’s catalogue of negative assertions overstates the poet-speaker’s case when her relatively simple and non-judgmental reasons for her personal decision to abstain from pork do not match any of the reasons listed. This protest becomes the poem’s structure, resonating the repetition of common prayers. The poet-speaker asserts:

It is not because I am Jewish
although I have certain allied sympathies at heart
It is not because I heard the pig

squeal short sharp piercing
fearful squeals when I was a child [...]
It is not because a snake caught my eye [...]
and the old man stopped to tell me
it ate human flesh [...]
“Just like ham it was” (20)

Ostensibly, by foregrounding the many reasons to not eat pork, the poet-speaker joins the multifarious factions of conscientious objectors of pork-eating to the company of “polite” consumers invited to the dinner table, and likewise, to read this poem. Thus, not alone, she appears rational in discussing with “polite company” the details of animal slaughter, ironically not apropos for the dinner table. In contrast to Strecker, whose coarse poetics lack the subtle grace of persuasion—by categorically denying the many explanations she gives for not eating ham—Forsythe is heard. Ultimately, just as the socially acceptable explanation that it is the salt in ham, “the taste of a mouthful of sea-water/ which catches my throat” seems absurd, so too—the subtext implies—is everyone else’s reasons for eating ham.

Like Strecker’s childhood remembrance of a chicken-slaughtering, Forsythe adds, among her dismissed reasons for not eating pork, the auditory memory of “the pig/ squeal short sharp piercing/ fearful squeals when I was a child/ and they cut its throat and I crept from the house/ wide-eyed to see the gutted body/ drip blood/ a barrelful/ that I could not reach to touch/ so much/ blood” (20). Also, Forsythe’s chiasmic connection between a “human-eating snake” and a man who once ate human flesh, declaring it “just like ham” parodies carnivorous behaviour through the absurd complexity of animals eating animals. These seemingly banal

vignettes, which connect the poet-speaker to animal slaughter, serve as a satirical underpinning of more sinister consideration. If, for example, snakes eat humans, why should people not eat pigs? If human flesh tastes like ham, and human beings like the taste of ham, why not eat each other? While this particular incident connects the eating of ham to ham-as-commodity, by extension—the “tins of potted [human] shoulder, rump and thigh/ cheaper than ham/ but by far a better buy”—links the buying and selling of human beings and the human spirit to a capitalistic trafficking of animal flesh.

Stretching this association further, one might argue that Forsythe’s example also hints at the connection between the trafficking of animals and the marketing of women’s bodies for consumptive use. Though this interpretation may seem far-fetched, Forsythe reminds the reader of this ecofeminist connection when, in her second explanation, her childhood memory is linked to blood, a powerful symbol and physical cyclical reality for women. Her shortest explanation, the first one: “it is not because I am Jewish” alludes to a complex social milieu: not eating pork because of religious convictions is currently socially acceptable. However, the Jewish WWII holocaust reminds us of how this ethnic minority was possibly persecuted, in part, for refusing to eat pork (i.e. other reasons for ‘racial cleansing’ were equally absurd). In addition, like the holocaust, the mass killing of farm animals for human consumption connects racist agendas with speciesism through equated acts of injustice. By including Jewish custom, Forsythe challenges how community consensus—with regards to culinary customs—dictates daily activities that are not always prescribed by rational choices (i.e.

what is available in the garden, what is abundant at the grocery store, macrobiotic harmony, dietary restrictions for pain management) that best serve the biotic community but often by religious strictures which may have, at one time, served the human community (i.e. Catholics until Vatican II were forbidden to eat meat on Fridays and still honour the tradition on Holy Fridays). While pointing to the kinds of patriarchal logics designated for change by ecofeminist theorists, significantly, this poet-speaker does not overtly identify with the pig (unless one makes an argument for identification between menstrual blood and the pig's own "barrelful" at its witnessed slaughter), nor does she make an obvious connection between the violence against women and the violence against slaughtered animals for human consumption. In this way, Forsythe's poet-speaker suggests a middle ground for a woman caught between the wont of human civilization and the identification with gender-discriminatory violence and abuse.

The ecofeminist dilemma: seeing the animal within/out, hunter or hunted?

Many eco poets resist easy identification with consumption and, instead, find that the witnessing or the act of killing is the incident that challenges habitually unconscious supermarket buys. Through identification with the animal-as-victim—a trait in literature which Atwood (in *Survival*) insists is undeniably Canadian—eco poets oftentimes find either a pseudo-spiritual connection with nature and/or a repulsion against animal violence and wilderness degradation. First Nations philosophies that have made their way into popular theories include the idea of the hunter who hunts to sustain him/herself but who ultimately thanks the slaughtered animal for his/her life-giving sacrifice. In

Marianne Bluger's "The Salmon," the poet-speaker embarks on what seems to be a life-affirming quest by gutting and cleaning her own dinner-salmon. Her response is unexpected, "shock-numbed from the severing." Ultimately, however, the fish's surrender does not complete the poet-speaker's quest: "she flexed/ she continued—writhed/ and the side-long blank stare/ of her smoky ringed eye/ accused// it accused me" (18). Thus, ritual killing, for someone not accustomed to it, is no easy fix, though environmentalists might argue that it is one step closer to taking responsibility for one's own meat-eating.

Hunting poems and ethics are not popular amongst ecofeminist philosophers who prefer to view women as "gatherers" in a renewed "hunter-bad-male/ gatherer-good-female" anthropological and evolutionary dynamic. However, Mary Zeiss Strange makes a compelling argument in *Woman the Hunter* when she explains that this dynamic perpetuates the kind of illogical patriarchal dichotomies ecofeminism claims to want to disarm. While Strange harshly neglects to recognize that ecofeminism is open—as any feminism is—to multifarious factions, she claims that:

The exclusion of women from hunting turns out to be a necessary counterpart to their social and psychological subordination to men. It all comes down to the issue of power, both literal and symbolic, and to American culture's deep-rooted ambivalence about power in female hands. (57)

Strange, like Davis, identifies passivity in femininity with the proclivity for abuse in agricultural activity whereas in hunting, in her subjective view of it as a self-

proclaimed woman hunter, “animals are viewed as equal or superior to humans”

(49). She explains:

It is the farmer *not* the hunter, who approaches the world of nature as something over which he must seize control: marking off fields and pastures, churning up the soil and changing patterns of vegetation, damming and diverting streams, confining small animals and birds to yards and pens, bringing large animals under the yoke, and through selective breeding manipulating their physical and psychological characteristics. It is also in the context of farming that nature begins to be experienced as an unpredictable, capricious, and often inimical, force [...] The devaluation of women and of women’s work is an old story. But the pace of its telling clearly accelerated with the development of agriculture. And the capstone of the tale is the twentieth century myth of Man the Hunter. (47, 49)

Despite Strange’s convincing assertions that her argument in favour of revolutionizing the woman hunter is anti-ecofeminist, it is, in fact, radically ecofeminist since it ultimately makes the woman-nature connection in a way that suggests respect for “natural” human consumption through respectful human-animal practices. It becomes radically ecofeminist because it deviates from mainstream ecofeminism, which promotes women’s nurturing connection to wilderness, replacing it with a more ‘grounded’ interpretation of the human-animal sustaining life outside of the over-protection of supermarket shelves and packaging of animals.

Strange advocates that “an Artemesian sensibility with regard to women’s and environmental concerns [...] appears to be precisely what feminism needs, as a necessary corrective, at this point” (137). However, in my fifteen year search for Canadian ecopoets, I have found few female poets who embraced the celebration of the hunt and female empowerment as the result of killing animals; it may be that narratives of this sort are more popular in non-fictional stories of wilderness-dwelling etc. and/or that urban-centred publishing houses have rejected them: or, it may be that the majority of women do not, and would not hunt even if forced to by necessity, for any variety of reasons. Though ecofeminist theorists recognize the potential empowerment of “woman the hunter” (contrary to Strange’s limited interpretation of ecofeminism) many identify too strongly with the victimization of animals to feel empowered by causing them harm, regardless of the reasons. Feminist theorist Barbara Kafka explains:

The person who hunts to eat is certainly more of a piece than I who have no intention of becoming a vegetarian but cannot kill. A woman who can hunt as well as any man has a primitive quality I will always lack. I am no warrior and no hunter; I like my garden and my casserole: but some part of me mourns the lost Diana in my birthright.
(138)

Samples of poetry from Erin Mouré’s *Furious* reveal a woman-speaker who sympathetically identifies with the “irrational deafness of our heads” when individuals perpetuate abuse against animals and how these blasé attitudes

towards the killing and maiming of animals are similarly reflected in how women are treated in masculinist culture. Like Strecker and Forsythe, whose ecological epiphanies seem to originate in truculent encounters with slaughter, Mouré's poet-speaker recalls an incident when hunting 'for fun' with her brother: she remembers, "the squirrel my brother shot down with the .22 so the dog could play" (16). This moment teaches her a fundamental deep ecological lesson that advocates an understanding of 'wilderness' as an unpredictable, ever-changing process-orientated biosphere rather than a continued mis-recognition of it as a picture-perfect snapshot, often referred to by deep ecologists as the "National Park" syndrome (see Thomas Birch and/or Nelson and Callicott's *The Great New Wilderness Debate* in my Introduction). After all, the squirrel's death is senseless: no one wanted to eat it—"the dog just sniffed the dead fur/ & looked up the tree again, eye/ cocked for the squirrel." Rule deontological environmentalists—those who adhere inflexibly to ethical questions of 'right' and 'wrong'—may argue that, as Mouré suggests, any killing for the benefit of others (whether it is fun for the dog or a tasty treat for dinner) is unjustifiable and irresponsible. The poet-speaker's final thoughts assert, matter-of-factly, that "when we got together, what we talked of,/ the moose my uncle shot & cut up into frozen pieces,/ & sent it down, in 1964, on the Greyhound." Effectively, this "slaughter" becomes family mythology through its annual retelling of the story since it is still welcomed close to three decades after the moose-killing happened. Essentially, this particular example of Canadian culture, Mouré suggests, is symbolic of how violence is handed down from generation to generation. This

particular story, like so many hunting narratives, links heroism with conquest. It is a message ecofeminist mothers would choose not to teach their children. Nonetheless, as family stories they often remain uncensored like a harmless heirloom photograph.

Herein, Mouré's historiographic metafiction creates tension between what ought to have been a fairly uneventful killing for mere sustenance, and a family legend that is still bragged about more than two decades after the slaughter. Thus Mouré challenges our cultural acceptance of hunting as a legitimized and valorized form of violence by showing how the concentration of masculinist subjectivity in the hunting narrative is privileged over either the simple facts, or accuracy. Furthermore, the dead moose was sent down on "the Greyhound," a mechanical gas-guzzling, 'road hog,' which, when juxtaposed with the romantic "smell of spruce" problematizes aspects of the hunting narrative that make it heroic and primal. The word "greyhound" itself, as a name for a trans-Canadian bus-line, denotes a kind of efficiency associated with a sleek dog namesake. In this context, the association between the dog and the bus seems ecopornographic. Ironically, however, it may have ultimately been the most fuel-efficient method of transporting the dead moose.

In contrast to the more typical ecopoetry which views the senseless slaughtering of animals—domestic or feral—as problematic, Ellen Jaffe's "The Octopus" qualifies as an ecopoem that celebrates a woman's ritualistic connection to the preparation of food considered 'not quite dead.' Interestingly, Jaffe begins the poem with "two small boys" whose stereotypical response is to admire the

octopus for its exotic and somewhat grotesque qualities. However, by having the boys initially reject the appearance of it in a ‘civilized’ marketplace—“‘ow ‘orrible!’”—and by having the rest of the poem lyrically celebrate a kind of quiet meditation this female chef feels in preparing “its softness/ tentacles rippling/ black-brown ink bleeding over my fingers” (133), Jaffe incorporates a respectful, yet psychologically complicated response one might expect from a biotically reverent human being when choosing to eat another animal. Enticed by Jaffe’s rhythms and graceful phrasings, even the cleaning of the octopus, which might have been interpreted as violent (as it was in Bluger’s “The Salmon”), is more like a dance than a murder:

Now I reach in the hole of the head, of the body
feel the sac moving, alive in my hand.
Plucked out, it lies tense, a black heart
while the head, suddenly free of its knowledge
collapses falling
 into the pot to boil,
 tough
 pink, purple
petals of a tropical plant
spread-opening a star at its mouth
sucker-eyes gleaming on angry flesh.

Once fully dead, the body is “beaten/ hard/ with a mallet/ (*the Greeks do it against rocks*, says the book)/ flesh half-smashed/ body dismembered/ the octopus becomes civilized/ mellowed with red wine, herbs, spices.” And though this particular stanza reads as violent, in the penultimate stanza, the reader has already established the poet-speaker’s fair claim to recognizing “its secret black blood”

that lies within the eater of this praised flesh. In light of Strange's theories, Jaffe's poem may be read as an ecofeminist poem that celebrates the empowerment of women who recognize the spiritual sacrifice made by creatures who die for the dinner table. On the other hand, ecocritics might also question the validity of this ecologically sensitive dance, which ends in calling the now dead octopus "civilized" without ironic tone.

Readers interested in the ecological guilt facing those torn between hunting and being an environmentalist—from a male perspective—ought to review Canadian poet John O'Neill's *Love in Alaska* (1994) and *Animal Walk* (1988). Though my intention is not to concentrate on hunting narratives, I feel they warrant mention because they are intricately connected to culinary customs—at least in Canadian literature. Unlike James Strecker's seemingly one-man rage against the hypocrisy of those who choose to eat animal corpses, O'Neill's finely crafted poems explore the greater complexity of male guilt in a post-industrial, ecologically conscious era. In both collections, each poem explores a tension between the natural and primitive instinct to hunt, and the deep ecological respect for the wilderness that oftentimes prevent him from pulling the trigger. In problematizing this relationship between ecologist and hunter, O'Neill brilliantly explores a human ecological battle, largely fought in today's society, but illuminated here within one consciousness.

The ethics of humanity's eating practices are not referred to directly in O'Neill's later collection, *Love in Alaska*, even though the poet-speaker, himself, almost becomes food for a bear in "You are in Bear Country" (37). Herein the

poet-speaker creates a philosophical quandary when a man, who respects hunting and survival as instinctual and natural for wilderness animals, attempts to justify the bear's "mistake" in choosing him as food—"dinner right in his gluey dish-face, [with] his claws the cages for small birds. While the poet-speaker recognizes, in practical physical terms, that he "stumbled on [the bear's] food cache," he stubbornly insists on finding justification for not ultimately being eaten. Herein the poet-speaker's only defense is a series of logical arguments that might work in the legal system but fail to translate in "bear country." He justifies what he believes to be his non-eatable status by explaining his commitment to ecological theories and practices. He explains: "I imagine myself dressed as the bear, Tlingit shaman, robed in fur, bear-maked, trying to commune with the animal, become him [...] But I'm not the shaman. Not the bear. I'm dead." When the spiritual approach fails to work the poet-speaker recognizes the irony in the fact that he "donate[s] to Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, protest the sale of furs, don't eat meat" but "the grizzly doesn't realize [it . . .] can't see the irony [...] Irony would slow him down." Finally, even though he studied the pamphlet "YOU ARE IN BEAR COUNTRY (wrong, I'm IN the bear)" he reconciles himself to the fact that no ecological awareness can prepare a person for the unpredictability of stepping out of civilization—organization of fairly predictable human behaviour—and into a chaotic wilderness.

O'Neill's earlier works "Hunting Flesh," and "Brain Food" allude to hunting for food as "the duty of our leisure" (47). As Joseph Wood Krutch writes:

[...] most wicked deeds are done because the killer proposes some good to himself [... but] the killer for sport has no such comprehensive motive. He prefers death to life, darkness to light. He gets nothing except the satisfaction of saying, 'something which wanted to live is dead. There is that much less vitality, consciousness, and, perhaps, joy in the universe. I am the Spirit that Denies.' (Strange 95)

Clearly, O'Neill's perspective on hunting is not as reductive as Krutch's focus. What makes "Hunting Flesh" extraordinary, from an ecocritical perspective, is the way in which the poet-speaker celebrates the emotional and/or psychological complexities contained within a more primal ritual of the hunt, recognizing the spirit of the animal and its willing sacrifice. Ultimately, he decides not to shoot "that year of dinners [...] the loss is a delicacy" (49), most likely pointing to the spiritual-hunter's understanding that no animal allows itself to be hunted unless it is willing to sacrifice its life for another's survival (Strange 126). In this way, O'Neill's hooved-animal is akin to Szumigalski's fish in Chapter Four's "The Fishes" wherein the fish are not hunted but are "foolish enough to jump into [her] frying pan;" after all, when "[She] calls them [...] they come" 67-8). Though his gun is cocked, O'Neill's poet-speaker recognizes the legitimacy of this individual moose's spirit which "is already/ roll-calling his body/ across the meadow/ behind a boneyard of trees." Furthermore, the poet-speaker understands the collective spirit of the biosphere as a natural part of the death-birth cycle when he observes that "every animal/ you've yet to stalk/ is cradled in that deer's rack,/ full caribou herds/ migrate through/ the cirque of his spine."

As a hunter, Strange criticizes ecofeminist Carol Adams' assessment of "meat-eating and the abuse of women as 'fused forms of oppression'" (70) since it lumps hunting into the greater theoretical umbrella of animal trafficking and as such, makes hunting and rape "virtually interchangeable" (7). For Strange, hunting empowers women, whereas the majority of ecofeminist poets embrace a moral opposite. For ecofeminists, this difference of opinion is difficult, if not impossible to reconcile. Strange's justifications for hunting (empowerment of women, primitive instinct, natural animal-like behaviour, responsible member of a biotic community) largely centre on how non-hunters, distanced from the ritual and spiritual act of killing one's own food, are "alienate[d...] from the natural world" (122). The majority of ecofeminists are leery of committing to the woman-as-hunter profile of empowerment; they respond, as Marty Kheel succinctly states, "saying a prayer before you kill an animal is no more acceptable than saying a prayer before a rape" (Kheel 111).

Ecofeminist ecopoetry: recognizing the nature-woman connection

At the radically opposite end of the ecopoetic spectrum, poems from Cathy Ford's *Blood Uttering* (1976) reveal an ecofeminist complexity, which equates the trafficking of animals (including eating them) with patriarchal violence against women, racial minorities, and those individuals "othered" by masculinist hegemony. In contrast to above-mentioned poets who employ graphically gruesome descriptions of animal slaughter for shock value, Ford's poet-speaker (like Forsythe in "Tradition") begins her contemplation in "Axed Chickens" while preparing a thawed supermarket chicken. As such, her own horror is not the

axing of chickens, *per se* (though as the title suggests, it is what ultimately offends her) but the image of how one imagines a living creature frozen. Though her dinner is a dead chicken—poultry—this poet-speaker anthropomorphosizes, ironically a headless bird, by focusing on its “smile” (52). Twice mentioned, “the smile freezes tight/ showing teeth,” is followed by a description of the process of turning a vibrant “walking” life into the stone-cold stillness of the “deep freeze.” She explains: “the smile stiff first/ then the hands/ then toe turn blue/ soon a layer of ice/ over thighs/ it continues/ the deep freeze stops/ walking/ the centre frigid last.” In this way, time appears altered to reflect the absurdity of the process of preserving dead life for future human survival, particularly when the chicken’s own dying process is never witnessed by supermarket consumers. Dying, the poet implies through the peristaltic rhythm of this passage, is an organic process, made mechanical by an untimely killing and then freezing of a living entity for human preservation.

This “freezing” of time, life-sustaining/life-ending processes, and the actual living chicken connect nostalgia and pornography to supermarket meat consumption through allusions to other consumptive pornographic practices. Effectively, the inversion of “smile” and “stiff” freezes the chicken’s absurdly happy face while alliteration marks certain innocence for the chicken in a play-by-play narration of the process of “keeping” what was once alive. Keeping, for the poet-speaker is both the quality of the chicken without freezer burn and happiness. Ironically, however, it is not ultimately the smiling chicken who is happy but the consumer who is distanced from the realities of the chicken’s

former life and slaughter. The absurdity of such a description echoes other cultural practices of describing play-by-play animal-to-animal violence (i.e. TV wilderness videos and shows) and hunting narratives. Through a process of identification between woman (creator of life) and hen, the reader witnesses a nostalgic loss for the self-in-animal which may ultimately prevent her (through a permanent photograph-like memory of the chicken's horror frozen in her mind, or the reader's) from eating a living creature again.

Further anthropomorphism gives the chicken "hands" and "toes," the juxtaposition of which, with the chicken's "thighs," highlights a connection between the eating of this dark meat and the figurative "sexual" eating of women's own "dark" or mysterious sexual area of the inner thighs. By playing with the language that links edible chicken parts to those used to sexually label and objectify women—breast, legs, thighs—Ford clearly implies a mutual suffering in a masculinist society in which women 'paint' phony smiles on their faces while their "heart[s are] in a waxed bag." Herein, there is only one ironic conclusion: this poet-speaker matter-of-factly recites the standard directions for cooking chicken; through a series of three "simple" commands, these "instructions" read like a recipe for rape: "remove [...] drive meat thermometer/ through the breast/ tie legs together." Ultimately, as Ford concludes with her final two lines, the directions for preparing a chicken for eating require the consumer to "stuff with lies// swallow all victims." Emphasis on the word "stuff" (placed here at the beginning of the line) creates a nagging question of meaning: chickens are traditionally "stuffed" before roasting (like a woman's sexual cavity during

intercourse); the popular conception of “stuff” is non-descriptive, miscellaneous things that no one can be bothered to name or label (the anonymous objectification of women) which as a noun creates tension between the non-action and the action of “stuff” as a verb. As a verb, “to stuff” refers to a kind of non-descript violence since, by definition, it refers to the filling of a vessel that would otherwise exist as an “empty” space (which implies an insistence to put things where they may not belong in order to control what is uncomfortably left empty). Furthermore, Ford’s inversion of “stuff” and “swallow” forces the reader to question whether we “stuff” or “swallow” “lies” at the expense of “all victims.” In this way, the words “stuff” and “swallow” become interchangeable; not surprisingly, stuffing and swallowing are also associated with phallic (real and symbolic) acts of rape. In addition, the tension between the verb “lies” and the noun “lies” links the telling of false things with how a dead chicken does not simply rest peacefully on a cutting board but, even dead, presents itself in a sexual position.

Finally, Ford’s “Piper’s Lagoon,” makes overt the sexual connection between eating and sex, and in particular, how the violent act of rape (of women) links attitude and action to appetite. What makes Ford’s seemingly radical ecofeminist premise palatable is how the “oysters dying/ sadder/ smaller/ harvest/ than should be” becomes metaphor for “mother/ it’s your daughter/ tall, cold and damp/ slipping into other beds” (10). Because Ford actually names this “rip[ping] out the inside/ ignore the screams/ [...] throw the shell away” as “rape,” it becomes difficult to interpret whether her tone is ironic in section two when she

states: “liberated women open to love/ like oysters to knives/ and sherry// to touch just the right place open/ is important.” The tension created between the delights of “oysters [...] and sherry” and “the stench of oysters” is puzzling. This poem becomes a complexity of appetites and desires, particularly for women (since, obviously, the men with “knives/ and sherry” like any kind of oyster) who, as oysters plucked from “sand ocean beaches,” seem here to associate sexual appetite with an invasive “harvest.” Furthermore, the loss of daughters and/or innocence is anything but positive when oysters are eaten, die and what is left is an empty shell which is “throw[n ...] away.” Like the hollow remains of either a digested oyster or a ravished woman, (physically and psychologically, respectively) the losing of one’s virginity, for a girl, herein creates an emotionally empty “shell” (or, as in “Axed Chickens,” “walking/ the centre frigid last// heart in a waxed bag”) willing to lose more by “slipping into other beds.”

Eating is both the most taken-for-granted conscious action humans do and the most favoured aspect of many human traditions and celebrations; for Canadians, despite the false consensus reality that eating meat daily is fundamental to human survival, what is eaten is ultimately a personal choice (Forsythe’s point in “Why I don’t eat ham”). As such, the issue of food, and how this industry impacts our economy, our resources, our environment, and our ideologies continues to be the most complicated issue facing ecologists, ecofeminists, and new millennium populations. True to form, the brave voices of ecopoets suggest a necessary revisiting of these cultural attitudes towards culinary practices, which regardless of changes in lifestyle choices, will in the very least

help Canadians find their way back to a non-alienating appreciation of the food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink. Ultimately, these poetic voices may not merely be the voices of social radicals but the call for reason in face of the impending ecocrisis.

Canadians, like people of any other culture, have had a long-standing relationship with eating and survival. Fundamentally, it constitutes the central ritual of home-making and family preservation. Poems examined in this glance at Canadian ecopoetry through the subtext of culinary appetite and custom expose a growing unrest towards what Canadians want to call “home,” tradition, and sustenance if it means perpetuating practices that destroy, and abuse animals and in so-doing, continue a cycle of violence and sexual denigration. Though ecopoetry is not established as a sub-genre of nature writing in Canadian literature, it is likely because Canadian scholars have not had the critical vocabulary or philosophies through which such an emerging genre is to be legitimized. Despite the lack, to date, of easily definable Canadian ecopoetry I am confident that, with respect to the growing popularity of American and British ecological literature and ecocriticism, that Canadian publishers will soon also reflect this global focus. According to scholars such as Ricou, Relke, and Bentley it is simply a matter of time before Canadian academics and writers enter into the ecological dialogue—both in their criticism and in their writings. In fact, Relke argues that nature-writing poets of the past, P. K. Page in particular, have been misread, misinterpreted and mistreated critically *because* of the lack of an ecological critical Canadian perspective. Thus if Relke is right, then increased

awareness of the importance of ecopoetry may revive lost writers, and/or inspire new publishing criteria.

AFTERWARD

Coming home: The Canadian quest for 'where is here' in the bioregional literary geopsyché

The Wordsworth who saw nature as exquisitely fitted to the human mind would be lost in Canada, where what the poets see is a violent collision of two forces, both monstrous.

Northrop Frye *The Bush Garden* (164-5)

[...] this/ was supposed to be the feast of homes/ and homebodies, the time to bring a tree indoors/ and charm its boreal heart with bric-a-brac,/ to make ourselves so interesting its needles would forget/ the roots they left behind.

Don McKay *Another Gravity* (65)

And the fact is, the earth is not a perfect sphere./ And the fact is, it is half-liquid./ And the fact is there are gravitational anomalies. The continents/ congeal, and crack, and float like scum on cooling custard./ And the fact is,/ [...] there is a solid inner core./ Fifteen hundred miles across, iron alloy,/ the pressure on each square inch of its heart/ is nearly thirty thousand tons./ That's what I wanted:/ words made of that: language/ that could bend light.

Jan Zwicky *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth* (33)

Notions of how humans dwell, build, survive, and make homes in pursuit of the desire to “belong” is still a popular debate in discussions concerning the environment—whether they are explored in practices at the grassroots level, or examined within artistic, scientific, and/or intellectual expression. American environmental writer and ecocritic Gary Snyder maintains that “nature is not a place to visit, it is *home*—and within that home territory there are more familiar and less familiar places” (7). Unfortunately, as most ecological theorists, environmentalists, and ecopoets attest, the late twentieth century shows a clear alienation from “home” as it has historically been defined in terms of community, family, and biosphere through regional landscape. Part of living in a poststructuralist age means adapting to fast-paced changes in our environment but these rapid changes in technology, though time-saving, have served as

handmaiden to perpetuating a harmful distancing of ourselves from nature.

Ecocritic Jane Frazier explains: “nature by word and by deed has long been pushed away from much of human society in order that society may imagine itself as different from it” (18).

Those of us living in a kind of post-industrial, poststructuralist age of eco-ennui, John Elder suggests, witness a new millennium that reads, lives, and breathes like an “entropic drift of culture” (35). He adds:

To live in an urban world, cut off from tradition and nature alike, is to experience a life-threatening wasteland. But the inward withdrawal of a distanced tradition, without regard for current necessities of the tribe, becomes absurd; flight into the wilderness, accompanied by a denunciation of all human civilization, arrives finally at the utterance of self-cancellation. (33)

Elder examines Robert Bly’s conclusions concerning a post-Enlightenment culture of the West wherein Bly asserts that “Descartes’ ideas act so as to withdraw consciousness from the non-human area, isolating the human being in his house, until, seen from the window, rocks, sky, trees, crows seem empty of energy, but especially of divine energy” (Elder 35). The present ecological goal of theorists and writers is to “reacknowledge the energy of the nonhuman [to ...] show a doorway out of the empty house” (35).

It is this “empty house,” built by our culture, that makes way for “our journey [which] is only toward loss” (Frazier 50). Literary ecocritic Jane Frazier explains that by “living in climate-controlled buildings, transporting ourselves by

machines, and communicating by electronics, we have pushed away the need for any sense of mystery about the natural world and the need for knowledge of our essential place within it” (50); in other words, we have lost the understanding of our necessary place in our particular bioregion and in many ways, how to get back there. According to Frazier, who advocates the notion that ecopoets are ecoprophets, “humans are a part of a collective universe, and by shaping the world to accommodate our immediate desires we have gone far to eliminate the original conditions that we need for a complete, healthy environment” (41).

Canadian ecocritic and postcolonialist Susie O’Brien theorizes how postcolonial and ecological literatures define “home” in seemingly dichotomous terms. Postcolonial urbanity, O’Brien explains, “admits traces of nationalist feeling in the form of diasporic longing [which] refuse[] the kind of claims to “natural” belonging that are seen to smack dangerously of colonialist forms of essentialism” (142). Thus, the “postcolonial home” which “functions metonymically and symbolically as a microcosm of a new decolonized world” (142) promises the desired and sought after comforts constructed socially and culturally in “community and heterogeneity” (142). Though postcolonial literature tends to privilege an “urban outlook,” its “cosmopolitan restlessness” maintains a global focus that appears, on the surface, to be more expansive than ecological literature that centres, predominantly, on “non-urban [regional] settings” (142). Generally, the understandable wariness of postcolonial literature’s “ideological and material implications of globalizing impulses,”

creates a paradoxical merging of the global and the local. O'Brien suggests this occurs:

[...] not by way of simple synecdoche, or the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm, but in a way such that each interrupts and distorts the other, thereby refusing the possibility of concrete partial or abstract global belonging in favour of what Homi Bhabha terms the 'unhomely ... the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world.' (143).

Inherent in ecocritical thought, likewise, is an "explicitly global focus" (143) that allows for easy shifts from a bioregional understanding to an awareness of to a "planetary consciousness" (143). In this way, "home" both in the postcolonial and the ecocritical creative and political arenas defines itself as a space that exists simultaneously within the individual earthbody, the regional biosphere, and the global planetary consciousness.

Ecocriticism embraces a literary exploration of the human-nature dynamic which—momentarily sidestepping the possible death of our planet—stems from our humans-as-animal origins, that is not unlike postcolonial attempts to redefine "altered" races of colonized (largely First Nations) peoples through a decentring and recentring of cultural ideologies. In contrast to the ever-present and obvious limitations of the gloom and doom of ecocrisis, this 'branch' of ecological literature allows for infinite possibilities for revisioning a healthy future. Gary Snyder, in a life-long attempt to reinvent contemporary cultural attitudes towards the place of humanity in nature, points to the two definitions of culture as 1) "a

deliberately maintained aesthetic and intellectual life;” and 2) “the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns” (15). Yet culture, he explains, “is never far from a biological root meaning as in ‘yogurt culture’—a nourishing habitat.” Since “civilization is permeable,” Snyder maintains, it “could be as inhabited as the wild is” (15). In this way, attending to nature need not manifest itself in hostility toward Western civilization. Crossing the dichotomous human-civilization/ nature-mystery divide is a possible and necessary reevaluation of (biotic) community, for sustainable development within and around the home front.

Home-making and the Homemaker: Ecofeminist challenges

The concept of home to the homemaker becomes problematic when feeling at home in one’s own body—the original site of the individual’s safe haven—is socially encrypted with elements of fear, dread, and death. Most women, whether or not they acknowledge it, face the knowledge that their bodies—as agency to mental and physical deterrents—are, at one time or another, the enemy of feminist success, both individually and collectively. Ironically, they are simultaneously the spiritual and biological link to the continuance of *homo sapiens*. Ecofeminist Slicer argues that:

[...] before it’s safe for either women or men to go back into the home, even in the broader, environmentalists’ sense of home as one’s most proximate ecological bioregion, we must come to terms with the complex and destructive social meanings of the body, of that ecosystem

with which we are self-identical and about which most of us are
virtually ignorant. (“Body” 108)

Thus, for the ecofeminist, ecological changes for the survival of Planet Earth are
virtually impossible without practical and ideological attitude adjustments toward
the treatment of women, of non-sentient “others”, and toward the responsibility of
keeping the body-as-home in healthy order.

As a too-hot-to touch debate within ecofeminist studies, the exploration of
women’s “natural” and “technological” choices concerning body modification,
birth-control, and the termination of (unwanted) pregnancies is currently
emerging within the pages of leading environmental philosophy journals such as
Environmental Ethics and *ISLE*. The complexity of such issues is further made
problematic with the notion that there can be no definitive answers to the question
of moral and intellectual ethics concerning women’s choices, particularly since
each woman must decide, for herself, what is fundamentally necessary, what is
morally acceptable, and what is physically safe. As Donna Haraway prescribes,
the female consciousness must resist “perfect communication, [and] the one-code
that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism”
(Haraway 176); in so doing the liberated feminist, or “cyborg” frees herself from
tradition and non-traditional social and biological stereotypes by celebrating the
“other [as] multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial” (177). In other
words, “goddess-choices” enable a woman to celebrate natural cycles occurring
within her own body whereas cyborgism defines the psychologically emancipated
individual who makes choices necessary for her personal well-being (given

medicine, surgeries, scientific advancements etc.) without giving credence to social pressures from lover, mother, or other-community.

Thus, the cyborg woman “goes home” through finding comfort—intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, and physically—within her own skin; she is neither animal nor hu-man with one foot in both arenas, never fully dwelling in either the natural world nor the civilized world of masculinist culture but reconciles herself as both animal and wo-man celebrating modern medical and technological advancements as “natural” since they evolved from the human imagination and intellect. Symbolically, “going home” for the ecofeminist who may or may not choose to embrace Haraway’s cyborg philosophy is not necessarily in human conception, as one might expect. Thus far, in literature—Canadian literature in particular—giving birth (i.e. becoming a mother) is not as empowering as it is madness-making.

Generally, coming to terms with a sexualized earthbody in Canadian literature is made problematic, perhaps because the Canadian mother is portrayed as one who is forced to reconcile herself with notions of “home” in an environmental space, must be internalized. As Atwood describes it, women internalize the Canadian wilderness as “a sort of icy and savage *femme fatal* who will drive you crazy and claim you for her own” (*Survival* 89). In Robertson Davies’ *Fifth Business* Mrs. Dempster becomes a surrogate mother for Dunstan Ramsay, (his own mother is frigid and cold) born out of guilt connected to her madness; this image of motherhood is further complicated by her face appearing to Dunstan in battle as a figure of mercy, the way in which her own biological son

is effectively a “circus freak,” having grown up with no real mother, and by Dunstan’s desire and disgust when his “saint” is publicly humiliated after she is found having mercy sex with a homeless man. Likewise, Morag Gunn talks (in madness?) to the invisible ghost of a Canadian historical mother, Catharine Parr Traill who embodies the stereotypical nurturing mother/bush-survivor in Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners*; Lou madly seeks bestial impregnation from her lover-bear in Engel’s *Bear*; Bobby’s mother in Wayne Johnston’s *The Story of Bobby O’Malley* lives vicariously through Bobby as he seems to experience the culmination of his mother’s own silent insanity—that “kind of silence that early darkness can create, [a] winter Sunday silence” (19); and Atwood’s narrator in *Surfacing* experiences a temporary insanity when she is confronted by the aborted fetus/dead father image swimming into her physical and subconscious space.

Feminist Jane Gallop in *Thinking through the Body* examines psychoanalytical theories of the castrated, alienated, and murdered mothers in the history of literature (a topic too large for this study). She notes:

In the ideology of our culture women are objects described, not speaking subjects. Women as women, as incarnations of the myth of woman, do not produce culture. Woman was never considered to be actually nonspeaking. Talking constantly, women emitted chatter, gossip, and foolishness. (71)

Culturally conceptualized as meaningless chatters, makers of noise, these “mad mothers,” silenced in mind, body, and spirit, reflect a complexity of culturally-conceived motherhood. The most widely accepted theory is that mothers,

transferring their identity to the child (particularly if it is a boy), struggle to retain a sense of individuality that does not further isolate her from community and selfhood. Giving birth is, after all, proof of her sexuality (a taboo point of discussion in Catholic social circles) regardless of her sex-sanctioning marital status.

So, if Canadian women do not symbolically “go home” through the creation of human life, then what does bring the ecofeminist home? What makes “home” for the homemaker? Thus far, as readers have witnessed through the popular genre of women-on-spiritual-wilderness-quest novels, it seems that venturing into the unknown (pseudo)wilderness as a place distanced from patriarchal strictures and culturally defined roles for women is a necessary component in the search for a place to call home. Nonetheless, the wilderness emerges, simply, as a “green world”, in which the social dynamics of a confused woman traveller can be isolated and distanced from her while she sorts out what is in her best interests. Thus, for Canadian women writers “the homeland” appears to be found in a return to a more ‘civilized’ urban space inhabited after a foray into the wilderness. Herein, conception becomes mandatory but it is not necessarily in the conceiving of human life; ultimately “going home”, at least for women, requires the conception of inspired ideas, of selfhood, and of the voicing of experiences unique to women. By dispelling fairytales—both the ‘good’ and the bad’—that prescribe either unrealistic or undesirable roles for women, women who “go home” find a genuine self by learning how to live “deliberately” and not automatically. In this way, the essentialized woman can be both goddess and

cyborg by making choices that enable her to dwell, without qualms, within herself (through a celebration of her earthbody), and within her biotic community (with a healthy geopsyche). By revisioning creation and the origins of life not as biological but as spiritual, intellectual, and psychological, women become, in essence, homemakers by setting the s/pace for a healthy homeland.

Mother(ing) Earth: Nurturing earthbodies and the body-Earth

Ecofeminists stress that historically denigrating and culturally perpetuated attitudes towards the feminine body are extended to the Earth itself. Charlene Spretnak in an article entitled “Earthbody and Personal Body as Sacred” astutely asks how we can come to the realization that we live in a “participatory universe” when humanity sees its “natural role” as one which works in “opposition to nature” in our continued attempts to “master it” (265)? And it is that patriarchal conditioning that transforms our innate connection with the cosmos and our awe for its creative and regenerative powers into the “urge to control rather than toward humility and the urge to protect” (Spretnak 266), that ecofeminists challenge.

While ecofeminists stress that, symbolically, the notion of women’s wisdom is empowering, Roach argues that the metaphoric connection between Mother Earth and the Earth’s mothers is a dangerous false analogy. Considering the cultural view of women’s roles globally, perpetuated stereotypes of “mother” and “motherhood” in patriarchal culture will not, as Roach argues, “achieve the desired aim of making our behaviour more environmentally sound, but will instead help to maintain the mutually supportive, exploitative stances we take

toward our mothers and toward our environment” (53). Though, like human mothers, the environment is “life-giving and life-sustaining [...] the Earth is not our mother” (53). Not only is the notion of motherhood under appreciated in a culture that does not wholly value the economic, physical, intellectual, and emotional sacrifices made by mothers in a capitalist society, but the role of mother is one that “appears all-powerful and caring but also capricious and malevolent. The baby thus comes to love and desire but also to hate and fear the caretaker” (54). As the predominant “homemaker,” mothers foster relationships filled with mixed feelings where loving is oftentimes a “difficult task and [...] to some extent ambivalent” (54). Ultimately, “we expect our mothers to love us in a way we can never expect the environment to love us. There is no ‘Mother Nature’ wanting to nurture and care for us, no ‘Mother Earth’ who loves us” (55).

Transferring these inferences onto a false metaphor may be seriously contributing to ecocrisis, Roach stresses, if we continue to view nature as a “storehouse of riches which will never empty and which we may use at will for any purpose we desire, without incurring any debt or obligation of replacement” (55). Just as, culturally, we view motherhood—an institution of unconditional love—the mother(ing) earth becomes, Elizabeth Dodson Gray points out, an entity that, “always cleans up any ecological mess we make and, besides she would never really kill off her children no matter how badly we treat her” (Spretnak 266). Thus, this connection between the self-sacrificing mother and mother earth perpetuates a deadly and false association. By reinforcing negative aspects of patriarchal motherhood, the best possible intentions projected by the

“Love your Mother (Earth)” slogans of the 1960’s lead us into a perpetuation of dangerous and false signals concerning “mother as idealized, the perfectly round globe-breast; mother as mysterious, shrouded in cloud; mother as ambivalent love-object, abandoned up in space (Roach 56).

While ecotheorists fight for the planet’s right to be released from a gendered stereotype, an ecofeminist might challenge it by asking why the automatic privileging of planet over the obvious struggle for women. After all, should we not work at “home” first, by revisioning popular conceptions of women, femininity, and motherhood as lesser valued conceptions in patriarchal society in a coming to respectful and celebratory terms about the home-body of woman/motherhood before attempting to theorize about a macrocosmic body-Earth entity? The ecofeminist challenge is, after all, to address impending environmental disaster at its core—misplaced human ideologies and practices that devalue human life—since they are the same attitudes that are manifest in the ways we treat others (animals, nature, natural resources, third world countries and peoples etc.) as “others.”

CONCLUSION

In coming to terms with Canadian identity, Frye astutely observed that the question we ought to ask ourselves is not “who are we?” but rather, “where is here?” As I have attempted to show, defining ‘where is here’ and ‘home is where?’ is profoundly tied to the geopsyché of Canadians since, for Canadians, mindscape and landscape are internally linked. Because nature itself has largely been associated in Canada with a love-hate relationship, as that which “is not accessible and [where] no mediation or reconciliation is possible” (McGregor 27), I have argued that the emergence of current global trends in ecological criticism (primarily in the U.S.A. and the U.K) is virtually unrecognizable in Canadian writing. This critical perspective, nonetheless, will prove to be a particularly poignant addition to Canadian literary studies. The focus of this study was to explore the possibility of Canadian ecological writings, (largely according to Lawrence Buell’s prerequisites) from an ecocritical (including ecofeminist) perspective.

The complexity of identifying Canadian ecological writings and proposing theories concerning its unique culturally mythologized “violent dualistic” relationship with nature, is that the physical proximity of the U.S.A. to Canada and its cultural/capitalistic influence on the Canadian psyche paralyses the advancement of a literary subgenre that does not comply with its standards. Since Americans, Kolodny argues, developed a pastoral impulse based on a false delusion that moves the European pastoral ideal into daily reality, embracing what Michael Branch deems the “topographical imperative”, that matching of human

cultural interests with a magnanimous landscape, established a precedent for the privileging of an awesome and inspiring natural environment. Critics Frye, Atwood, McGregor, Howells, Frye, Jones, and New theorized that Canadians, in contrast to Americans, erased pastoral expectations, and replaced them with stories of disaster and survival which fostered a “violent duality” within the literary imagination. Summarized by Atwood: “Canadian writers as a whole do not trust Nature” (*Survival* 49), since “Canada is “the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It’s the kind of space in which we find ourselves lost” (18).

Ecocriticism then, for the Canadian scholar, poses many unique cultural and political complexities, and cannot be easily understood as just another critical approach transplanted from Europe or America and applied to Canadian literature. And though we boast of Traill’s catalogue of Canadian wildflowers, Roberts’ stories of bears, the fraudulent but intriguing Grey Owl, and the early deep ecological efforts of Ernest T. Seton, none of these Canadian writers can be said to answer Emerson’s call for a new American (ecologically minded) Adam as the work of Thoreau, Audubon, Gary Snyder, A. R. Ammons, Barry Lopez, W. S. Merwin, and Wendell Berry can be said to have done for the U.S.A. Likewise, ecologically-oriented philosophers like Annette Kolodny, Michael Branch, Karen Warren, Val Plumwood, Gloria Orenstein, Judith Plant, Greta Gaard, Patrick Murphy, are equally sparse in Canadian letters. I believe that an ecological consciousness can be found in the Canadian literary tradition, but that its continued love/hate relationship with nature stems from an inability to think

outside of, or even aspire beyond, inherited European conventions. Authors chosen for this study effectively revisit this currently unnecessary “violent duality,” given the strength of a growing urban-technologically oriented Canada *and* the fragility of Canada’s national natural heritage.

If we reexamine Annette Kolodny’s theory that Americans internalized and practiced the “pastoral impulse,” as a means of belying wilderness fears by placing them within the care of a nurturing feminine landscape, and Michael Branch’s further theorizing of the “topological imperative” as a “social need to have a culture develop in the greatness of the landscape” (Branch 284) from a Canadian perspective, given the cultural, geographical, historical, social evolution, and interpretive differences, it becomes clear that Canadians developed, in contrast, what I have argued is a “topological departure” reflected in a kind “pastoral impulse” that manifested itself in a retreat from the “unnatural” wilderness-terror (feminine or not) into the garrisoned confines of traditional Mother country, psychological and physical, fortresses. It is this profound tension, manifest in Canadian literature that makes problematic the emergence of Canadian ecological literature, while it also predicts a unique Canadian eco-literary perspective.

It has never been my intention to locate and categorize Canadian ecological writings but to vie for a position for Canadian literature within an emerging global literary tradition of ecological literature and ecocriticism. Because Canada’s unique perspective on nature and wilderness—particularly as a nation containing one of the world’s final wilderness frontiers where vast untamed and unclaimed

bush land remains—limiting the obvious diversity of the human-nature dynamic and possibilities in future literary endeavours would be, in my opinion, anathematic to the emergence of this sub-genre in Canada. Keeping political, imaginative, and environmentally feasible possibilities open is fundamental to the making and the maintaining of post-pastoral, ecological literary studies. By embracing the democratic voices, the multifarious factions in feminism, environmentalism, and ecofeminism emerging in current cultural, social, scientific and intellectual debate, academics and environmentalists, artists, musicians and writer, social workers and health caretakers have an opportunity to foster ethically healthier choices, products and practices. The environmentally conscious strive not for conformity but incorporation of equality in difference that resists intolerance, greed, ignorance, and laziness—all dis-eases of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Ecological literature, ironically, marks the meeting of highly touted pursuits of Western civilization—politics, science, philosophy, spirituality, ethics, and art—paradoxically necessary for making strategic choices for avoiding ‘manmade’ global destruction. Sabotaging existing (eco)feminist tenets, winning or terrorizing our philosophers serves no purpose when the planet’s survival, the continuation of our species is in question.

The time has come for us to move into a post-postmodern phase: we need to appreciate how postmodern politics have cleared the cultural arena for the voices and the experiences of those colonized—literally or figuratively—into an unmarked existence; but we also need to assume a new position—for the oppressed “othered” entities—to move into a position of greater equality in

vanquishing the duality of the centre-other dynamic altogether. As Patrick D. Murphy argues, the concept of “other” has been a “valuable tool in psychoanalytic and feminist literary theory and criticism but the ‘Absolute Other’, founded upon notions of permanent incompleteness and prematurity, communicative incommensurability and binary constructs, is, however, largely an illusion” (WTE 40). He argues that:

[...] its continued acceptance is a dangerous reification that protects much of the Western dominant hierarchical power relations that its use has been designed to dismantle. Ecology and ecocriticism indicate that it is time to move towards a relational model of ‘anotherness’ and the conceptualization of difference in terms of ‘I’ and ‘another’, ‘one’ and ‘another’, and ‘I-as-another’. (40)

Serving a continued political need to segregate the dominated from the dominated is rapidly becoming the perpetuation of an unnecessary objectification that prevents the amalgamation of groups culturally, racially, and ideologically. If we consider Murphy’s position that “nothing human is intrinsically ‘strange’, but rather needs to be recognized as ‘strange-to-me,’” then an “ethics of answerability” can be rightfully grounded in differences “of perspective or degree[s] of recognition and identification rather than [limited to] a condition of being” (41). Ultimately, Murphy calls for a collective healthy geopsyche in which a reorientation of the concepts of ‘other’ and ‘otherness’ opens the possibility for “the condition of ‘anotherness’, being another for others” (42). In this way:

[...] the ecological processes of interanimation—the ways in which humans and other entities develop, change and learn through mutually influencing each other day to day—can be emphasized in constructing models of viable human/rest-of-nature interaction. Inhabitation as a dominant feature of much nature writing might, then, be emphasized over traveling through, visiting or ‘going-out-to-experience-nature’ approaches. (42)

In light of Murphy’s theory of “anotherness”, “otherness,” I hesitate to argue, is still not entirely outdated or useless since it maintains an important political paradigm through which voicelessness, dealt with in such theoretical milieus as post-colonialism, feminism, and feminist psychoanalysis, can be emancipated and the experiences and perspectives of the oppressed, legitimized. For the purposes of ecofeminism and ecocriticism, however, Murphy’s plea for such a theoretical shift in the literary critical perspective of “othering” to “anothering” circumnavigates dualistic thinking—the most fundamental tenet in ecofeminist philosophy— in a pragmatic way. This theoretical model calls for ideological shifts that may allow for greater diversity environmental action, ecological strategies, and imaginative possibilities. Ultimately, Murphy legitimizes Thoreau’s call to “live deliberately”, giving—by defining and naming—what so many ecological philosophers have failed to describe in concrete terms.

“Living deliberately” or “coming home’ means many different things to Canadians. Commercials would have us believe that coming home means returning to missed Tim Horton’s coffee, finding and wearing an old hockey—

Toronto Maple Leafs or the Montreal Canadiens—jersey, having pockets filled with heavy change seemingly named by preschoolers as “the loonie” and “the two-nie”. But, as anyone who has ever left their hometown geosphere will attest, coming home is only superficially attached to consumerism, corporatism and materialism since it is profoundly connected to Canada’s natural heritage contained within the geopsyche of one’s childhood: coming home is snow-shoeing into the cabin, canoeing to the beaver dam, hiking in the nearest provincial park, returning to a favourite tree, clamouring along the ocean’s edge, or skinny dipping in the lake. It is this primal nostalgia linked to original understandings of bioregion as a place that exists within and without discrete corporal human entities, that is triggered by our response to nature’s visual, aural, olfactory sensations. With such a rich cultural heritage tied to vast areas of wilderness, geographical magnificence, and natural phenomenon, the subconscious connection to a topological—a former Canadian disease—that “cultural schizophrenia” is making way for a new disorder—amnesia for what has become an unnecessary hatred of nature and the wilderness. If we respond to Murphy’s call for a shift in the colonial “us versus them” paradigm and embrace instead, a theory of “anotherness” we may find not only a continued diversity of biospheric entities but a renewed interest in nature and multi-faceted geopsyches contained within a uniquely Canadian ecological literature.

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