

Perceptions of the Environment  
in Maritime Literature

by

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# **Perceptions of the Environment in Maritime Literature**

**Peter Thompson**

**August 20, 2004**

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the way in which perceptions of the natural world have evolved in Maritime literature from the early Nineteenth Century to the present. While it has been commonplace in the critical tradition for landscape to be evaluated as an aesthetic component of literature, it is largely within the last two decades that the idea of nature as a political entity in written expression has taken root. Loosely adhering to the principles of ecocriticism, this thesis argues that as Maritime society gains an awareness of the degree to which industrial development threatens human life in the region, the texts that it produces embody a clear struggle for recognition of the importance of our relationship with the natural world.

## Chapter 1: Maritime Literature and the Natural World

Perhaps more than any other aspect of literary discourse, the critical tradition has consistently seen in Maritime texts an obsession with the dilemma of “place”; this problem has ranged in the literature of this region from the leisurely search for beauty in the Nova Scotian landscape in the writing of Joseph Howe to the intense struggle of Christy Ann Conlin’s Serrie Sullivan to negotiate her relationship with her past. While the psychological or emotional end of this preoccupation has been given extensive treatment in the scholarly literature, a consideration of the manner in which perceptions of the natural world and its practical role in human society have appeared in this writing has largely been absent. This thesis will evaluate the manner in which the relationship between human society and the natural world has changed from the early nineteenth century to today, as it is evidenced in mainstream English Maritime literature. This relationship has changed dramatically from the point of contact, where the physical world is perceived as an enemy in a battle for survival, to the present age, one in which technology and industry have rendered the physical world nearly ruined. The environmental disaster that our society presently faces has prompted a struggle for conservation to be present in contemporary texts. This thesis is an attempt to understand the manner in which the natural world has been a shaping force in the literature of this region; however, this discussion will also centre on the way in which these cultural perceptions influence the treatment of the natural

world by society. In undertaking this objective, we will consider a selection of texts from various time periods in order to demonstrate the manner in which this relationship has transformed, beginning with Joseph Howe's Travel Sketches of Nova Scotia and concluding with the first novel written by Christy Ann Conlin, Heave.

The relative lack of comprehensive scholarship concerning the literature of the Maritime Provinces and the varied nature of both the forms of writing and the authors who compose this work has led to a degree of confusion within the field of literary criticism as it relates to this region. While, as we will see, Maritime writing has traditionally been marginalised as an afterthought within the realm of Canadian literature as a whole, an increase in scholarship relating directly to this region has resulted in a reconsideration of many of the labels of Maritime conservatism, and has challenged the process by which these texts have been ignored. Recent exhaustive studies, such as Janice Keefer's Under Eastern Eyes and David Creelman's Setting in the East have also attempted to address this imbalance, and have solidified the notion of Maritime literature as unique in terms of an area of study. This conception of the literature of the Maritimes as a distinctive body of work, however, poses theoretical problems that must be addressed. This chapter will attempt to reconcile several of these difficulties, and will begin with perhaps the most basic issue surrounding literary criticism, the definition of "text". Contemporary critical thought has challenged the idea that a text's unity is demarcated in relation to an author and has demonstrated the

manner in which the process of literary expression has become fragmented. These developments, as we will see, have outlined the need for a broad definition of text. This thesis will employ an analysis of transformation in perceptions of the natural world; as such, it is necessary that we evaluate the degree to which literary texts can be used as a lens through which cultural attitudes can be examined. Our survey of literary theory will address this question by evaluating the evolution of textual criticism, which will demonstrate the manner in which literature is constructed as a product of society as a whole. This chapter will also consider developments in the subfield of ecocriticism, discussing the degree to which the theoretical framework proposed by this school of thought is applicable to the texts included in this thesis.

### **A Revolution in Textual Studies**

M.H. Abrams notes that critics have traditionally adhered to the notion that a text is defined in relation to an author, and have “conceived the object of their critical concern to be a literary ‘work’, whose form is achieved by its author’s design and its meanings by the author’s intentional uses of the verbal medium” (16). Therefore, texts are deemed to be worthy of study as a result of their having been published, or, as we will see, simply as having been composed by a person who has achieved the status of “author”.

Michel Foucault has, however, challenged conventional definitions of “text”, offering an argument that calls for a greater degree of inclusion, which

contributes to the tradition of fragmentation that has arisen as a result of post-structuralist thought. In “What is an Author?”, Foucault draws on the positions of writers such as Roland Barthes and Samuel Beckett, who argue that Western society has erred in its insistence on a concrete delineation of an author in relation to a piece of literary work. Such writers have maintained that a piece of writing need not be defined in relation to a specific author, as the meaning of a text can be found without one knowing the name of the author; in other words, “what matter who is speaking?” (Foucault 174). The process of attributing to an individual a work, or worse, a tradition of thought, has, in effect, denied the social aspect of writing. Foucault states:

The coming into being of the notion of ‘author’ constitutes the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences. Even today, when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed scansions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the individualized work. (174)

This process of “individualization” and “valorization” has led to the imposition of a hierarchy within literary criticism. Foucault demonstrates this point by noting that the celebration of the genius of the author has caused critics to accept anything composed by this privileged individual as a work of significance.

Foucault argues:



If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers, or what has been collected of his remarks, could be called a 'work'? . . . Even when an individual has been accepted as an author, we must still ask whether everything he wrote, said, or left behind is part of his work. The problem is both theoretical and technical. When undertaking the publication of Nietzsche's works, for example, where should one stop? Surely everything must be published, but what is 'everything'? . . . What if, within a workbook filled with aphorisms, one finds a reference, the notation of a meeting or of an address, or a laundry list: is it a work or not? (176)

Foucault goes on to identify further problems, such as whether that which was composed by an "author" before he or she managed to have work published and, therefore, prior to having a legitimate claim on being an author, should be considered text. Foucault identifies several problems that have arisen as a result of this conception; for the purposes of this chapter, we will examine how the process of individualising the "author" has also led to a stratification of the notion of "text". It has been traditionally accepted that publication inherently lends legitimacy to a selected work; however, this definition excludes from the arena of literary production groups other than those who hold the social privilege of their expression being deemed worthy of publication. This approach has caused such forms of cultural expression as letters, popular music, and diaries to be trivialised within the study of literature. The arguments put forth by Foucault and others have

cast doubt on the way in which literary critics attribute legitimacy to certain texts. The “individualization” of texts has also, as we will see, contributed to the process by which traditional literary criticism has marginalised social groups in upholding the idea of “masterpiece”.

It is clear in light of Foucault’s statements that in order to gain a full understanding of the nature of literature, and, as is the specific goal of this chapter, the literature of the Maritime region, we must argue for a definition of text that is sufficiently broad to include such alternate forms of expression as those mentioned above. The fragmentation of the notion of text as outlined by Foucault has greatly impacted criticism in the Maritime region, and has resulted in, as will be discussed in detail below, the publication of editions such as No Place Like Home: Diaries and Letters of Nova Scotia Women 1771 - 1938. It is interesting to note that these arguments have cast doubt on the process through which writers have been deemed to have achieved individual genius; as we will see, the work of such theorists as Foucault has caused textual critics to reconsider the social component of literature, and has prompted scholars to reexamine the manner in which cultural value can be derived from such works.

### **Textual Criticism: Bowers and the Classical Method**

A consideration of the evolution of theories surrounding textual criticism will provide useful perspectives in this discussion of Maritime literature. As Jerome McGann notes, modern textual critics were influenced by the Lachmann

Method of producing classical texts. The overlying aim of this school of thought was to arrive at what can be described as “final authorial intentions”, or, in other words a pure text, one that contains as few editorial errors as possible (A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism 15). The Lachmann Method details that an editor’s painstaking study of the history of a given manuscript can eliminate textual errors by revealing the process by which these imperfections appeared. This theory holds that as the contents of a given text are transmitted through time, corruptions will take place, by way of errors in printing, misreading by editors, or damage to documents. Classical editors sought to eradicate texts of these impurities, creating a document that was the closest possible replica of the final manuscript intended for publication by the author. The classical school of textual criticism was adopted by modern editors in England; when writers of national importance, most notably Shakespeare, began to appear, this method was applied in a pursuit of standardised versions of these texts.

The Lachmann Method has continued to influence this arm of literary theory well into the twentieth century, and was upheld by the premier contemporary thinkers concerned with textual criticism, Paul Tanselle, and most prominently, Fredson Bowers. Bowers, in his seminal treatise, Textual and Literary Criticism outlines what he sees as the issue of supreme importance of contemporary critics, the standard of “final authorial intentions”. Bowers uses a considerable section of this work to demonstrate the manner in which this principle cannot be compromised. Bowers begins his argument by noting that the

debate regarding a change that is seemingly minute, such as the one surrounding Hamlet's use of the word "sallied" or the word "solid" in describing flesh, demonstrates a broader concern. Bowers notes that it could be permissible for critics to ignore this point and accept without question that which appears on the page before them; however, such "laziness" could lead to entire texts becoming contaminated with mistakes and departures from the original vision of the author through the process of editing (2). He continues by arguing that the task of upholding the vision of the authors whose work they evaluate is gravely important for editors, especially for ancient texts that have survived. It is undeniable that as texts travel through time and the filters of interpretation, they constantly move further from the original document as envisioned by the author. Bowers notes:

Ordinarily it is true that the nearer one comes to modern times, the more difficulty one has in penetrating the veil of print and recovering the characteristics of the lost manuscript. The uniformity of compositorial usage, added to the strong-minded styling given a typescript by the publisher's reader before setting, at the present day has a marked tendency to impose standard characteristics of syntax, punctuation, spelling, and sometimes of phrasing, on an author's individuality of expression. (19)

It is evident that the valorisation of the author of which Foucault speaks is greatly influential in the school of textual criticism that is offered in this argument.

Bowers, like such other textual critics as W.W. Greg and Paul Tanselle, sought to uphold the classical standard of editorial deference to the final vision of the

original author, and, in his attempt to look through the “veil of print”, maintained the principle of final authorial intention. This philosophy of textual criticism has clearly contributed to the process by which the notions of author and text have become narrowly defined. However, two developments have taken place in textual studies, casting doubt on the principle of final authorial intention. In the twentieth century, the standardisation of printing methods led to multiple useable drafts having become available to scholars (A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism 104). Also, as will be the focus of this chapter, theories regarding the role of interpretation in producing works have sought to reaffirm writing as a social, as opposed to an individual, process.

### **Hermeneutic Criticism**

Post-structuralist literary criticism has had the effect of placing under scrutiny the assumption of the authority of those who produce texts and the solemnisation of the idea of ‘final authorial intentions’. As mentioned above, Michel Foucault has directed much of his scholarly attention to questioning many of these assumptions, and theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Wolfgang Iser, and Roland Barthes have demonstrated the manner in which the idea of textual authority is no longer applicable within the realm of literary studies. Barthes argues: “Though the sway of the Author remains powerful, . . . it goes without saying that certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it . . . it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality, . . .

to reach that point where only language acts, ‘performs’, and not ‘me’” (147). For Barthes, a strict adherence to the notion of the author as the unquestioned purveyor of literary truth places limits on the function of a given text. Barthes states that to give such a definition to a literary work is to suggest that it is possible “to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (149); he argues that “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (150).

The Hermeneutic tradition of literary criticism has extended Barthes’s thesis, arguing that meaning in a given text can be found not in the work itself, but in an interplay that takes place between that which is found on the page and the reader. Iser notes:

the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic, and the aesthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact, lies between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader — though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be

identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader. (189)

Post-structuralist literary theory has emphasised that the act of creation does not end when the writer “finishes” a particular text. For theorists such as Foucault, Barthes, and Iser, the act of literary production is, in essence, a communal event, one that entails contributions from the author as well as the audience for which a work is intended.

### **McGann: Text as a Product of Culture**

It is important that we examine the way in which this shift in theoretical consideration has influenced the arena of textual criticism, and the insights that can be gained from this process on the manner in which literature functions as a cultural agent. Writing in response to the tradition of textual editors inspired by the Lachmann Method and upheld in the twentieth century by Bowers and Tanselle, Jerome McGann formulated an innovative mode of thought regarding editorial criticism that takes into account the issues addressed above.

McGann’s theories regarding textual criticism clearly bear out the manner in which post-structuralist thought has influenced his position. In light of the manner in which theorists such as Iser and Foucault have demonstrated that texts are acts of creation that are achieved communally, as opposed to through the work of an individual, it is clear that the magnification of the role of the author in this process is misguided. Modern critics, argues McGann, have shown that

the production of books, in the later modern periods especially, sometimes involves a close working relationship between the author and various editorial and publishing professionals associated with the institutions which serve to transmit literary works to the public. To regard the work done by such institutions as a contamination of authorized material is to equate the editorial work done by an author's original publishing institutions and the (historically belated) editorial work done by scribes of ancient texts. (34-5)

In other words, the production of literature is achieved not only through the individual genius of the author, but through the collaboration of a number of contributors.

In addition to the manner in which the editorial process functions in the production of literary works, McGann extends his theory to explain the role of the audience in this practice. McGann attempts to apply the hermeneutic theory of creation through interpretation mentioned above; however, he differs from Iser in that he conceives of the audience as an aggregate of potential readers as opposed to a hypothetical individual who experiences a piece of literature. McGann notes that literature anticipates an audience, and is therefore produced and realised as an event that encompasses the various forums for which it is intended. A critical edition, according to McGann, should be produced with an eye toward the specific purpose of that literature and the audience to whom it was and will be presented. The guide to textual criticism that McGann proposes, then, takes autonomy from the author to whom the work is ascribed and places it in the hands of the audience.



Thus, editors must be mindful not of the history of “imperfections” in a given text, but of the reasons for which these alterations occurred. McGann states:

The rule emerges when we theorize on the practice of the nonspecialist or modernizing editor, whose choices of reading text are guided by what he judges to be most useful and important for a certain audience of readers. His task is to preserve the continuity of a more or less significant cultural resource. Such an editor is aware from the start of the multiplicity of legitimate texts because he is conscious of the multiplicity of audiences, among whom the original author and work are dispersed. From the point of view of the nonspecialist editor, there is no such thing as final intentions, authorial or otherwise. (104)

Responding to the manner in which editors have upheld the idea of final authorial intentions, McGann has argued for what he calls the “socialisation of texts” (The Textual Condition 69). McGann draws clear influence from the Hermeneutic Theory in detailing the manner in which texts cannot be seen as the work of an individual, but as realised only through the multitude of interpretive lenses to which literature is subjected:

Literary texts differ from informational texts by being polyvocal. Whereas “noise” is always a form of corruption for a channel of information, it can be exploited in literary texts for positive results. The thicker the description, so far as an artist is concerned, the better. . . A thickened text is a scene where metaphor and metonymy thrive (75)

While McGann notes that it is the most finely crafted texts that embody what Geertz calls “thick” description, he recognises that the richness of a given text is “also built from the textual presence and activities of many non—authorial agents” (76). The best literature conveys these agents, which are interpreted differently by each reader of the text; therefore, for McGann, when one experiences a work, readers will “hear many voices in the texts they study” (76). It is clear that McGann subscribes to a belief that literature is produced not simply through an individual who happens to be celebrated as an “author”, but through the communal process of editing, expectation of reception, and finally consumption. In examining the evolution of textual criticism, it becomes evident that texts are capable of conveying broad cultural perceptions, as modern editorial theory has recognised the importance of the role of the anticipated audience in the creation of literary expression.

### **The Impact of Post-structuralist Critical Theory on Maritime Literature**

The work of Gwendolyn Davies, especially in Myth and Milieu, provides a precedent in Maritime literary scholarship for the framework that this thesis proposes: interpreting text as a means by which the cultural perceptions of a given time period can be discerned. In her collection of essays detailing the social conditions that produced Atlantic literature in the years between the World Wars, she states of Atlantic Canada that it is “important to know its past, its myths, and its milieu” (iv). In other words, situating literature in the context of the culture that

produced it is essential not only for its insight into history, but also for a better understanding of the shape that such scholarship will take in the future.

The effects that the notion of the unfolding text and an awareness of the communal manner in which literature is produced has had on literary criticism in the Maritime region have been varied. In Under Eastern Eyes, Keefer rejects a post-structuralist analysis in her treatment of Maritime texts, preferring instead to adhere closely to the New Critical principles of “transparent” reading. In her Polemical Introduction, Keefer also makes note of the widely held view that Maritime authors and their texts “resist postmodernism” (6); she asserts that the prevalence of realism and representative narratives in the region suggests that even contemporary authors are more concerned in their fiction with tangible social questions as opposed to what they see as the superficial or vapid proceedings of post-structuralist literature.

Creelman, however, offers an alternative conception of the literature of this region; he argues that the central tension in Maritime texts, that of traditional ideals coming into contact, both in materialist and psychological terms, with the transforming power of modernism, places this canon firmly in the post-structuralist mode. Creelman is sensitive to the issues that have been raised in this chapter, noting that Maritime authors have indeed been affected by them: “no individual or group of people has reliable or unmediated contact with the real, concrete world that surrounds them. Individuals may live in one of the Maritime provinces, but their connection to their immediate environment is conditioned by

the assumptions of the larger society” (14). Creelman’s observation has extensive implications for his methodology, and also provides insight into the way in which contemporary Maritime literature functions. While it may be true, as Keefer notes, that authors such as David Adams Richards explicitly resist post-structuralism, their work has nonetheless been pervasively influenced by it. Creelman’s study makes note of the manner in which contemporary criticism in the region must be aware of the degree to which these texts have been affected by post-structuralist thought, and frames his analysis accordingly.

Wolfgang Hochbruck also makes note of the degree to which Maritime literary criticism has been influenced by post-modernism. It is his contention that by simply debating such an issue as regionalism, Maritime critics have placed themselves firmly in the post-structuralist tradition; he notes that this debate is influenced by the fact that the idea of the Canadian “centre [is] not holding under the conditions of political postmodernity” (14). While Maritime authors and critics have offered, as Keefer notes, a resistance to contemporary modes of criticism, such major critics as Davies and Creelman reveal in their work a substantial debt to post-structuralist thought.

The post-structuralist literary climate has also led to scholars having begun to consider the process by which certain groups have been denied the opportunity of having their work published and the legitimacy that this lends to writing. This is particularly apparent within feminist literary criticism; the publication of an edition such as Conrad, Laidlaw, and Smyth’s No Place Like Home: Diaries and

Letters of Nova Scotia Women 1771 - 1938, is evidence of fragmentation in this field. The editors note in the Introduction that the stories of these women were difficult to secure; in the cases where such records were saved by households, they were often filed under the name of the male head of the household, and therefore presented a challenge in attributing them to the appropriate author. The editors also note:

Even in cases where the families had privately treasured and carefully preserved the writings of their womenfolk, they were frequently surprised that we were interested in this material rather than that of paternal ancestors. This response is a telling comment on the traditional focus of history and what our society considers important to remember about the past. (1)

While traditional scholarship has, as is noted by the editors of this collection, ignored and dismissed as “trivial” (1) such contributions, it is important to recognise that a broadening of the notion of text as outlined by Foucault, Iser, and McGann has resulted in academics having moved to examine such work.

In addition to the manner in which previously ignored literary forms have come to be accepted, recent developments in editorial theory have prompted scholars to utilise written text as a lens through which cultural perceptions can be examined. These letters and diaries have been recognised by scholars as invaluable, as they are “revealing about a certain time, place, class or culture” (Conrad, Smyth, and Laidlaw 3). Modern textual criticism has demonstrated the

manner in which writing, even that which is composed with no intention of publication, can be used to appraise cultural perceptions; the editors of this edition clearly rely on their selections to convey the experience of women from the 18th to the early 20th Century<sup>1</sup>.

### **How do we Define “Maritime Writing”?**

Keeping in mind the debate surrounding the definition of the nature and function of text in the realm of literary criticism, it is important that we next attempt to delineate a definition of works which can be defined as “Maritime writing”. This issue is fairly problematic; many authors who have been associated with the region, particularly those such as Thomas Chandler Haliburton and Joseph Howe, whose writing appeared before the twentieth century, were born outside of the Maritimes, but nonetheless spent much of their life in the region. Others, especially the “travel writers” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, spent only a short period of time in the Maritimes; however, the region is the main subject of their writing. Others, such as Hugh MacLennan and David Adams Richards, were born in the region, but spent much of their adult lives and writing careers elsewhere.

Frank Davey notes that the idea of regionalism has confounded critics of Canadian literature for decades; the recognition of regional literature within the country as a whole has further frustrated scholars. He notes:

both region and regionalism are social creations, the first constituting a territorial definition of geographic space based on a selection of possible differentiating criteria — a territorial definition that can change as national political policies change, and the second constituting an interpretation of social interests that gives geographic location priority over such other possible interests as gender, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, and race. (2)

In Under Eastern Eyes, Keefer attempts to define the process through which one can be described as a “Maritime writer”, and offers this delineation:

we consider as ‘Maritime writers’ those artists whose work reveals a strong imaginative involvement with and commitment to the region. The minds of such writers are either saturated (as in the case of Buckler, Raddall, Richards) or ironically gripped (as with MacLennan and MacLeod) by the Maritimes — their work reveals the kind of eyes the region gives to a writer; the kind of things those eyes are compelled to notice and to represent. (5)

Keefer goes on to state: “Maritime fiction is overwhelmingly representational in that it engages in what Joseph Conrad called making us ‘see’ — selecting, out of the welter of phenomena, impressions, actions, and events, those things that have a particular resonance for the writer and the reader” (7). It is important to note that the dominant mode of literary production within the Maritime provinces is, and has been at least since World War I, realist fiction. The tradition of literature in

this area has been dominated by realist writers who use the varied landscapes and differing cultural backgrounds of the region as backdrop for their stories, which document the real struggles faced by its people. As we will see, this tradition of realism within Maritime literature has contributed to the process by which the writing of this region has been marginalised as “regional”.

Ronald Sutherland has also offered an interesting perspective on the debate surrounding a definition of literature of region. While Sutherland’s theory concerns “Canadian” writing, it can be easily applied to that of the Maritime region. It is interesting to note that Sutherland states that it is because of the increase in scholarly activity relating to Canada in the 1960s that attempts such as his to resolve theoretical issues arose; it can be argued, considering the work of people like Ernest Forbes and Keefer, among others, that an increase in scholarship pertaining to the Maritimes has been taking place over the last three decades; therefore, a consideration of Sutherland’s arguments is especially apt.

In attempting to understand the process by which authors come to be associated with a specific region, Sutherland argues that it is not his or her physical address that is of fundamental concern, but what he calls the writer’s “sphere of consciousness” (32). He goes on to state that while people are ultimately affected by several cultural influences, their perspective is governed primarily by one dominant force; Sutherland refers to this process as “cultural conditioning” (32). Sutherland argues that expression can take place only within the bounds of this awareness and contends that in judging the region from which a



particular author writes, the "determining factor is not where he was born, where he was brought up, or where he has chosen to live, but rather the sphere of consciousness in which he created his works, the result of his total cultural conditioning and especially of the dominant influence" (32). In the 1982 Winthrop Pickard Bell Lectures at Mount Allison University, Hugh MacLennan also spoke to the manner in which writers become inspired by their cultural surroundings: "I am a Maritime writer in the sense that this area bred me, that it formed my sensibilities and most of such values as I have" (12). Sutherland's view of the sphere of consciousness is particularly applicable when one considers the textual arguments put forth by Jerome McGann. As McGann has shown, literature is created through a communal process and the author's physical and cultural surroundings play a large role in the process of expression. It is useful to apply Sutherland's argument that authors are inevitably conditioned and inspired by a dominant cultural influence to Maritime literature; as noted above, a delineation of "Maritime writing" is particularly challenging when one considers the differing experiences of the region that authors associated with this area have had.

It is for this reason that a consideration of the arguments of Sutherland and Keefer is useful in defining literature that can be associated with the Maritime region. For example, while Alistair MacLeod is a writer who has spent a relatively small portion of his life in the region, it is clear that his experience of the Maritimes has been the shaping force of his work. MacLeod was born in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, and spent part of his childhood and university years in

the Maritimes. His professional career was spent at the Banff Centre for Creative Writing and at the University of Windsor. MacLeod continues to travel to Cape Breton every summer, where he writes at his home in Inverness County (Guilford, 124). Although MacLeod has spent most of his adult life away from this region, it is clear that his fiction embodies a distinct connection to the Maritimes. As Keefer notes, MacLeod's fiction expresses a conflicted relationship with the region, and as Mary Frances Finnigan's thesis, To Live Somewhere Else: Migration and Cultural Identity in Alistair MacLeod's Fiction details, a celebration of the notion of "coming back" to this region. For example, in "The Return", Angus is overcome with joy at the prospect of respite from Montreal in his native Cape Breton:

'There it is,' shouts my father triumphantly. 'Look, Alex, there's Cape Breton!' He takes his left hand down from the baggage rack and points across us to the blueness that is the Strait of Canso, with the gulls hanging almost stationary above the tiny fishing boats and the dark green of the spruce and fir mountains rising out of the water and trailing white wisps of mist about them like discarded ribbons hanging about a newly opened package. The train lurches and he almost loses his balance and quickly has to replace his hand on the baggage rack. He is squeezing my hand so hard he is hurting me and I can feel my fingers going numb within his grip. I would like to mention it but I do not know how to do so politely and I know he does not mean to cause me pain. (80)

The sphere of consciousness of which Sutherland speaks can be easily discerned in the work of such writers as MacLeod, regardless of the amount of time they have spent in the region; just as the South inspired Faulkner and the streets of Dublin Joyce, the experience of the Maritime Provinces is the shaping force behind this writing.

### **Landscape and Literature**

While it has been commonplace in the critical tradition for landscape to be evaluated as an aesthetic component of literature, it is largely within the last two decades that the idea of nature as a political entity in written expression has taken root. In an age in which we become increasingly aware every day of the way in which the environment is threatened by the many abuses to which human society subjects it, there is a need for a better understanding of the relationship between human society and nature. Literary criticism that has addressed such questions generally has fallen under the umbrella of ecocriticism, a subfield of English Literature that largely gained its theoretical mandate from a meeting of the Western Literature Association in 1978 (Barry 249). Since that time, two major critical editions, Glotfelty and Fromm's The Ecocriticism Reader (1996) and Coupe and Bates' The Green Studies Reader (2000) have been published, giving shape and purpose to this blossoming method of reading.

Ecocriticism is a theoretical approach that investigates our relationship with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction. Proponents of this

subfield have maintained that environmental crises have arisen in the contemporary age as a result of human society's disconnection from the natural world; the goal of ecological criticism, then, has been not only to document the way in which nature influences culture, but to actively address this disjunction. In Writing the Environment, Kerridge makes note of the ease with which an awareness of environmental concerns can evade human society:

Environmental questions are large-scale and long-term. They are usually rumours, things scientists disagree over; things happening elsewhere, or very locally; disasters we hear about once they have happened. For those who are not activists, it is hard to make 'the environment' real or tangible in daily life. Environmentalism seems to be about contemplating the vast and infinite. (2)

In other words, while "nature" is something that plays an essential role in every person's life, it is an entity whose presence can be taken easily for granted, and one whose role in daily life can be difficult to define. Because our society is constantly devising strategies to secure independence from nature, an emotional response to an incomprehensibly extensive problem such as global warming is incredibly difficult to achieve. In addition to the process by which environmental problems are masked by modern conveniences, as Wilson notes, we experience nature through the filter of various aspects of human interaction:

Our experience of the natural world — whether touring the Canadian Rockies, watching an animal show on TV, or working in our own gardens

— is always mediated. It is always shaped by theoretical constructs like photography, industry, advertising, and aesthetics, as well as institutions such as religion, tourism, and education. (12)

Ecological critical theory is interesting in that its goal is not simply to document the manner in which the environment appears in literature, but also, as we will see, to restructure the canon and raise awareness of the degree to which the natural world is threatened by human society.

While the methodology of ecocriticism has been formalised in the editions mentioned above, Glen Love's seminal treatise, "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism", has provided for scholars what he sees as a strategy for transforming the critical discourse. In this essay, Love outlines what he sees as the main thrust behind ecocriticism: he calls for recognition of the degree to which human society is threatened by an ecological crisis of our own making. Love is eloquent in speaking of the manner in which environmental disaster has become ingrained in the human consciousness:

The catalogue of actual and potential horrors is by now familiar to us all: the threats of nuclear holocaust, or of slower radiation poisoning, of chemical or germ warfare, the alarming growth of the world's population (standing room only in a few centuries at the present rate of growth), mounting evidence of global warming, destruction of the planet's protective ozone layer, the increasingly harmful effects of acid rain, overcutting of the world's last remaining great forests, the critical loss of topsoil and

groundwater, overfishing and toxic poisoning of the oceans, inundation in our own garbage, an increasing rate of extinction of plant and animal species. The doomsday potentialities are so real and so profoundly important that a ritual chanting of them ought to replace the various nationalistic and spiritual incantations with which we succor ourselves.

(201-2)

In other words, it is impossible for human society to continue our refusal to comprehend the destruction we have exacted on the natural world as well as the degree to which there is a need to take decisive action to stem it. Love's aim is to develop a strategy through which this understanding can be achieved. He notes that it is the responsibility of critics to begin to notice the non-human in works of literature; it is in this way that the rights of the natural world can be addressed. Love critiques the "narrowly anthropocentric view of what is consequential in life (205), calling for the critical community to engage instead in a discussion informed by an "eco— consciousness". The chief way in which Love proposes that this can be accomplished is by replacing Western society's human— centred canons with works of literature that explicitly deal with nature and the wilderness. However, while Love's thesis provides an important theoretical starting point for ecological criticism, we must thoughtfully examine the implications of his influential statements, particularly as they relate to the literature of the Maritime region.

### **Defining Nature's Place in Literature: The Critical Debate**

While Love's influence over ecological criticism has been beneficial in achieving a degree of cogency within its critical tradition, the consequences of the distinction between "anthro" and "eco" have been detrimental. Armbruster and Wallace have argued that since the publication of Love's treatise, the field has been dominated by analyses of works which can be defined as "nature writing" or the literature of wilderness. Moreover, Rosendale notes, Love's principle of replacing the "anthro" with "eco" within literary studies has governed the subfield since its inception; critics have sought to expand the traditional canon to include texts which they deem to be nature-oriented (xvi).

Armbrumster and Wallace note that insistence on this principle has propagated what they see as a narrow definition of both the idea of nature as well as its place within literature and society as a whole; they argue:

Environment need not only refer to "natural" or "wilderness" areas . . . environment also includes cultivated and built landscapes, the natural elements and aspects of those landscapes, and cultural interactions with those natural elements. One way in which ecocriticism can and should widen its range of topics is to pay more consistent attention to texts that revolve around these less obviously "natural" landscapes and human attempts to record, order, and ultimately understand their own relationships to those environments. (4)

They continue by noting that ecocriticism has traditionally neglected “the landscapes in which most people live”: urban and suburban areas as well as rural places; it is for this reason that they seek an ecocriticism that considers works featuring these settings. This reformulation of the manner in which ecocriticism operates serves to provide a framework through which the relationship between culture and nature can be better understood. By placing an emphasis on “nature writing”, critics effectively uphold a theoretical structure that casts nature as rigidly separate from human society; Armbruster and Wallace seek an ecocriticism that “understand[s] nature and culture as interwoven rather than as separate sides of a dualistic construct” (4). It can be argued that expanding the ecocritical canon can achieve a degree of comprehensiveness within this subfield. In other words, in order for ecocriticism to achieve theoretical legitimacy, evaluations of texts that do not explicitly document “nature” must be included; it is in this way that critics can begin to understand the degree to which social perceptions influence treatment of nature and the manner in which environment shapes culture.

This reformulation of the mandate of ecological criticism has implications for the definition of key terms such as “environment”, “nature”, and “wilderness” that this thesis will employ. William Cronon, in his landmark essay “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” notes that the emphasis placed on the ideal of purity as found in “wilderness” by the contemporary environmental movement is both misguided and limiting. He states:

The time has come to rethink wilderness.



This will seem a heretical claim to many environmentalists, since the idea of wilderness has for decades been a fundamental tenet — indeed, a passion — of the environmental movement, especially in the United States. For many Americans wilderness stands as the last remaining place where civilisation, that all too human disease, has not fully infected the earth. It is an island in the polluted sea of urban-industrial modernity, the one place we can turn for escape from our own too-muchness. Seen in this way, wilderness presents itself as the best antidote to our human selves, a refuge we must somehow recover if we hope to save the planet. (69)

Cronon asserts, as do Armbruster and Wallace, that an insistence on a clear separation between the human realm and the natural world promotes a dangerous dualistic construct that serves only to cast our interests as opposite of those of the environment. The presence of human society's influence in nature has been pervasive to the extent that it is no longer viable for environmentalists to demand a definition of "nature" that includes only the pristine. Cronon's essay is particularly useful in its observation that the ecological movement can no longer seek our removal from the natural world; instead, we must strive toward "an environmental ethic that will tell us as much about *using* nature as about *not* using it" (85). As we will see, Cronon's considerations are appropriate for this project; Charles Bruce, for example, speaks out in his literature against the manner in which the encroachment of industrialisation threatens his rural characters; however, the ideal to which he aspires consists of the preservation of modestly-sized farms, as

opposed to the promotion of wilderness that is “untainted” by man. This is true also of contemporary literature, which strives to attain a degree of harmony between human society and the natural world and warns against the dangers of abusing the environment. In other words, for the purposes of this thesis, terms such as “nature”, “the natural world”, and “environment” refer not only, as they traditionally have in ecocriticism, to wilderness, but also to the various aspects of the physical world such as farms, gardens, and urban, rural, and suburban areas that have been transformed, to differing degrees, by the hand of civilisation.

While landscape and setting feature prominently in the novels and poems included in this discussion, the authors that will be examined do not constitute the traditional definition of “nature writers”<sup>2</sup>. However, as we will see, their fiction meticulously documents changes in the relationship between human society and the natural world. The texts included in this discussion display the struggle between our need for a connection with the nature and the manner in which technological advance has undermined this relationship.

### **Mi’kmaq Literature and the Oral Tradition**

While most of the literature that has been produced in the Maritimes has clearly drawn its influence from Western culture, the literary expression of the Mi’kmaq community has largely resisted this template and, as a result, requires a separate analytical frame through which its ecological sensibilities can be discerned. The presence of the oral tradition and the struggle to retain this

immensely critical aspect of Mi'kmaq culture has greatly impacted the form and content of the literature of this community, and has shaped the manner in which the natural world appears in these texts.

In the centuries since European contact, the Mi'kmaq of the Maritime region have persevered through a systematic and thorough cultural assault. The settlers who arrived in North America brought with them a perception that theirs was a way of life superior to that of the “uncivilised” people who inhabited the shorelines of the New World. One aspect of Mi'kmaq culture that was attacked by the Europeans was the oral tradition, a practice that was used both to bring together and entertain communities as well as to educate younger generations. Although the process by which this tradition was undermined and discredited was immensely aggressive, resulting in the oral tradition having been abandoned in the school system for the Western model, this chapter will demonstrate that Mi'kmaq cultural identity continues to be defined through this intensely important custom. By investigating Mi'kmaq texts, particularly the work of Rita Joe, this discussion will show that despite contemporary literature existing within a written tradition, current authors have assumed the place of traditional storytellers. These authors serve to create a bond between members of their community and stress the importance of the close relationship with the natural world that remains paramount to Mi'kmaq culture.

## **Pre-contact Mi'kmaq Literary Expression**

Ecocritics have asserted that modern Western society has enacted a devastating campaign of destruction on the environment in part because the natural world remains an unheard victim within the context of modern discourse. Christopher Manes has written extensively on a discrepancy that exists in the treatment of the natural world of societies which he labels as “animistic” and those which are not:

for animistic cultures, those that see the natural world as inspirited, not just people, but also animals, plants, and even “inert” entities such as stones and rivers are perceived as being articulate and at times intelligible subjects, able to communicate and interact with humans for good or ill. In addition to human language, there is also the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves, and waterfalls — a world of autonomous speakers whose intents (especially for hunter-gatherer peoples) one ignores at one's peril. (15)

Historians and other scholars have shown that pre-contact Mi'kmaq society maintained such a relationship with the natural world. Ruth Holmes Whitehead, for example, has written: “Since most of the things they made and all the food they ate came from these living beings whom they knew so well, the Micmac developed a respect for life. They thought of these animals and plants — and even some minerals — as persons with whom they could communicate” (7). This relationship continues to be reflected in the Mi'kmaq language; as Susan Berneshawi states:

First Nations languages are verb oriented and accurately describe the natural environment, its boundaries and resources. The Mi'kmaq people consider their language to be sacred, for it describes every aspect of nature, the location of resources and the traditional use of these resources within *Mi'kmaq'ik* (136)

It is interesting to note that Manes establishes a connection between animistic cultures and those that have no written language. Manes contends that the Western tradition of written text has initiated a hierarchical system of communication in which only privileged speakers are recognised; it is for this reason that communication with nature is not possible within Western society. The process of communicating through written text makes human experience rational and abstract; the alphabet works as a filter that mediates between speaker and audience. Manes has demonstrated that “animistic societies have almost without exception avoided the kind of environmental destruction that makes environmental ethics an explicit social theme with us” (18). This section is an attempt to understand the effects of the process by which Mi'kmaq culture has been confronted and undermined by abstract European thought, specifically examining changes in the relationship between Mi'kmaq culture and the natural world.

The intimate relationship between Native societies and the natural world of which Manes and Whitehead speak can be discerned in Mi'kmaq legends that have survived. This thesis will take into consideration various legends which have endured, mainly through the labour of Rev. Silas T. Rand (Nowlan 9). While there

is a certain degree of irony in both critiquing the process by which the Mi'kmaq oral tradition was undermined in the Maritimes while proceeding to evaluate legends in their textualised form, there are advantages to recording these stories that must be acknowledged. Vansina, for example, notes: "The marvel of the oral tradition, some will say its curse, is this: messages from the past exist, are real, and are yet not continuously accessible to the senses. Oral traditions make an appearance only when they are told. For fleeting moments they can be heard, but most of the time they dwell only in the minds of people" (xi). The pre-contact legends are considered, then, for the purposes of this thesis, in their written form; if Rev. Rand had not committed these stories to paper, they would be inaccessible for such a project.

In "The Man Who Hated Winter", Winter appears as a main character. In this story, Winter exists not as an arbitrary delineation that describes a time of the year, but as an entity who speaks and is spoken to. He is chastised by a Man who hates his presence:

In the days of the people who are gone, there lived a great warrior who hated winter. During the summer, this warrior was the happiest man who lived in the village, but when winter came he was never seen to smile.

Sometimes his anger was so great that he stood at the door of his wigwam and shook his fist in the face of the north wind, and often as he walked through the village he kicked at the snow as if it were the body of a treacherous enemy. (21)

In this description, we see aspects of nature characterised as entities that have the ability to feel pain as well as communicate with humans. It is telling that the legend describes the “face” of the north wind and designates the snow as the “body” of winter. This legend considers Winter to be a member of a community whose members are in contact with each other constantly. The man’s actions do not go unnoticed by the god:

Now, at first the god of winter was amused by the warrior’s antics. Once or twice he pinched the man’s noses or ears with his icy fingers to make him even more furious. “Poor little man,” he laughed, “he is like a rabbit who becomes enraged with a bear.” But as time went on, the god began to lose his patience. When he came home to his wigwam after a hard day’s work of scattering snow over the world, his wife would ask him what he had done that day to chasten the mortal who defied him. And when he would not answer her, she smiled to herself — one of those mocking feminine smiles that make even the gods uneasy. (21)

The degree to which the winter is brought to life in this legend is fascinating. In this story, not only does the warrior rail against what he perceives as injustices inflicted upon him by the changing natural world, but his displeasure is also acknowledged by the actions of an entity that within the Western tradition is viewed as an superficially designated period of time. It is interesting to note that in this story, the feelings of the warrior are compared to those of a rabbit, which further amplifies the notion of the animated natural world that is recognised within

the Mi'kmaq tradition. The fact that the Winter and the Warrior then negotiate an outcome that favors both parties in order to end their battle acknowledges the balance that exists between human society and the natural world.

The importance of maintaining this intimate relationship with the natural world is also present in the story “Brother to the Bears”. In this legend, an orphan wanders into the woods by himself and becomes lost. Fortunately, he happens upon a family of bears, and he is adopted by the mother. In this legend, the bears are immediately described as possessing the ability to communicate:

Imagine his astonishment when he saw not a man but bears — an old she bear and her two cubs — eating and talking together!

He would have run away, but the old bear beckoned for him to enter and the cubs pointed at his face and laughed so hard he could not believe he had any cause to fear them. Moreover, the old bear gestured for him to take a seat near the fire, and handed him dried meat and a birchen vessel full of berries. (48)

It is most compelling to consider that the bears are not only able to communicate (both amongst themselves and also with the boy), but are described as having other characteristics that can be clearly identified as being human. The cubs react with childlike giggling at the sight of the boy, and the boy recognises this behaviour and is comforted by it. There is a level of respect that is implicit in such writing; bears and humans are treated as intellectual equals in this legend, and the



story speaks of the process by which humans can be educated by members of the natural world:

And he found, to his amazement and delight, that the old bear treated him exactly as she treated her sons, and the cubs treated him like a brother.

Soon, by listening carefully, he learned the language of the bears so that he could converse with them. The cubs taught him the games that are played by the young of the bear people. And they went fishing for smelts, the four of them, the three youngsters wading in the water and driving the fish toward the mother, who scooped them up with her paws and threw them on the riverbank, in the manner of bears. (50)

The legend does not conceive the world in an order that places one creature above another; the bears are able to impart wisdom and skill to the boy, and it is because of the innovation of his adoptive animal family that the boy manages to survive. This knowledge serves the boy very well, as he grows up to be “a great warrior and hunter, of whom songs were sung and stories told by campfires” (52).

The Western hierarchy of which Manes speaks that places humanity on a perch higher than the natural world is not present in these legends; it is clear that the lessons contained within such stories advocate a close bond with the natural world, which is seen as an equal. Ruth Holmes Whitehead has noted that the oral tradition was essential in upholding this relationship. The stories that were passed from generation to generation were the means by which Mi'kmaq children were educated about the world around them. She states: “Through these dramatic and

humorous stories the children learned about life, and about the history, customs, and manners of their people” (23). As we will see, although European settlers who arrived on the shores of North America deliberately endeavoured to undermine and eliminate the oral tradition, contemporary writers have assumed the place of storyteller in the Mi’kmaq community, and through these stories, maintain this bond with the land that is essential to the cultural identity of their people.

### **Assaults on the Oral Tradition**

Although little is known about the Mi’kmaq people prior to contact, it is clear that the arrival of European settlers in the Maritimes resulted in many changes in their way of life. The Europeans brought with them written text, Western religion, a capitalist economic system, and an air of superiority that resulted in their destruction of Mi’kmaq culture in order to impose what they saw as “civilisation” on Native communities in North America. The respective processes by which the subsistence economy, Mi’kmaq spirituality, and the oral tradition were effectively wiped out by the Europeans are interwoven.

While the Mi’kmaq of the Maritimes had relied on a subsistence economy that maintained familial and community bonds and fostered a harmonious relationship with the natural world prior to contact, the advent of European settlement effectively ended this way of life. The fur trade and the insatiable European export market provided incentive for skilled Mi’kmaq hunters to exploit

the beaver and other sources of hides, leading to a great loss in the number of animals in the region (Davis 38). Thus, as the subsistence way of life gave way to the European capitalist model, the relationship between the Mi'kmaq and the land was also disrupted. Because of the arrival of European capitalism, and, as we will see, the destruction of Native culture by the Europeans, the Mi'kmaq soon lost their close relationship to the land, as they began to modify their economic life in order to meet the demands of the fur trade. Battiste notes that by the middle of the seventeenth century, direct trade between the Europeans and the Mi'kmaq of this region had increased dramatically, and that by the late eighteenth century, "the traditional Mi'kmaq lifestyle had become impossible" (138).

We must also examine the relationship between capitalism and written text. Jean Baudrillard has shown how the whole of Western society is built on the idea of representation. He states: "All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could *exchange* for meaning and that something could guarantee this change" (404). The capitalist system places arbitrary value on commodity; instead of a product's worth being measured by the usefulness of that object to the person who constructed or obtained it, intangible ideas such as supply and demand dictate the merit of an item. Baudrillard argues that this system is based on the Western idea of representation that exists in communication. Post-structuralist thought has shown that meaning is diluted when filtered through mediums of communication, as the speaker is separated from that which is spoken. Oral culture, then, is much

better suited to societies which employ barter systems, as opposed to a market economy (Felluga November 30). The process by which capitalism was introduced to North America greatly assisted the destruction of the oral tradition, as the capitalist system provided a frame of reference for understanding written text, and vice versa.

Just as capitalism fostered a distance between the Mi'kmaq and the land, the acculturation of the Native communities to Western thought also aggravated this disconnection. While Martin states that the effect of the fur trade and the capitalist market introduced by the Europeans provided incentive for the Northern Algonkian people to over-hunt the beaver, the systematic breakdown of native culture played a critically important role in this shift as well. The process by which these aboriginal people were acculturated took place with the introduction of several components of European life, including disease, Christianity, and technology.

Martin argues that the spiritual rules that governed the process by which the Mi'kmaq hunted maintained a degree of balance between human society and the natural world. The Mi'kmaq were not, as traditional scholarship has offered, unable to kill large quantities of animals because of a lack of technology (Martin, 11), but were prohibited from doing so by a strict set of guidelines that regulated the hunt: "Hunting . . . was a 'holy occupation'; it was conducted and controlled by spiritual rules" (11). For the Mi'kmaq, then, hunting was viewed not simply as a vehicle for profit, it was a component of an intimate relationship between

humans and the land that was checked by spiritual rules passed down through generations.

It is this spiritual relationship that was undermined by the French settlers. As Martin notes, the French missionaries, assisted by the process by which native communities were ravaged by disease, labeled the Mi'kmaq shamans as frauds and actively dismantled the spiritual dimension of the relationship between the Mi'kmaq and the land. The Mi'kmaq viewed all aspects of the natural world as members of an animate society that included animals and plants as well as humans. As such, when prey was hunted, a prescribed level of respect was shown to the animal, while it was living as well as after it was killed. The Mi'kmaq subsistence lifestyle was both regulated and upheld by these practices; prior to European contact, the relationship between the aboriginal populations of this region and the land remained sustainable. However, as Martin states: "The injection of European civilization into this balanced system initiated a series of chain reactions which, within a little over a century, resulted in the replacement of the aboriginal ecosystem by another" (16).

The French priests were responsible for the destruction of Mi'kmaq rituals and ceremonies, and as Martin states: "attacked the Micmac culture with a marvelous fever and some success" (21). The process by which the Mi'kmaq culture was replaced by the tenets of Christianity led to a despiritualisation of the natural world:

In accepting the European material culture, the natives were impelled to accept the European abstract culture, especially religion, and so, in effect, their own spiritual beliefs were subverted as they abandoned their implements for those of the white man. Native religion lost not only its practical effectiveness, in part owing to the replacement of the traditional magical and animistic view of nature by the exploitative European view, but it was no longer necessary as a source of definition and theoretical support for the new Europe-derived material culture. Western technology made more “sense” if it was accompanied by Western religion. (23)

The shift from the traditional Mi'kmaq lifestyle, which consisted of a subsistence economy and modest technology to the European model of capitalism and sophisticated material advance was facilitated greatly by the spiritual change that accompanied this transition. Acceptance of the tangible elements of European life necessitated approbation of the abstract components of European life, including Western religion, cultural attitudes, and educational strategies. The introduction of European disease into North America greatly facilitated the process by which Mi'kmaq notions of spirituality were subverted and Native material culture was replaced by Western technology. Martin asserts that the inability of Mi'kmaq shamans to provide relief to the decimation of their communities by disease allowed the French missionaries to ridicule Native spiritual beliefs and established Christianity as well as European technology as superior to that which was possessed by the Mi'kmaq.

In addition to the process by which Mi'kmaq spirituality was attacked by European settlers, the manner in which the children of Native communities were educated was also undermined and effectively destroyed. Prior to European contact, Mi'kmaq children were educated through the oral tradition. Legends and stories were imparted by elders and parents in the community and the lessons contained in these myths taught the children about the world.

It is clear that the Europeans who arrived on the shores of North America in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries viewed their culture as superior to that of the aboriginal people whom they encountered. This is reflected in the manner in which the education of the Mi'kmaq has been conducted in the centuries following contact in the Maritimes. Ralston notes that the conclusion one reaches upon examining the historical documents is that both state and church policy had as their collective goal complete assimilation of the Mi'kmaq into a superior culture (470). The educational systems that were established by the early settlers reflect this; policies were based on the assumption that the European way of life was more advanced than that of the Mi'kmaq. The French missionaries set out to "civilise" the Mi'kmaq, a notion that was greatly influenced by a dominant social philosophy that described societies as passing through stages, from savagery, through barbarism, before finally arriving at civilisation (472). The links between education and religion were close, as conversion to Christianity was associated with the process of "civilisation".

This policy was explicit; in the mid-seventeenth century, Capuchin priests established their first school in Nova Scotia at La Heve. The French set out to initiate the Mi'kmaq into their culture by sending Native children to board at such schools, where they would formally learn the French curriculum courtesy of their teachers and would also informally be exposed to European culture through interaction with the French children. The children would then be returned to their communities and would bring with them the cultural practices of the French for their parents and relatives to imitate (474).

The destruction of Native culture in Nova Scotia did not come about without resistance from the Mi'kmaq. The 1842 'Act to Provide for the Instruction and Permanent Settlement of the Indians', which embodied the assimilationist recommendations of Joseph Howe, was formally rejected by Mi'kmaq leaders who saw this policy as a means of alienating the Mi'kmaq from their culture (485). The Mi'kmaq custom of education through the Oral Tradition was sacred, and as such, was to be protected. As Ralston notes, the Mi'kmaq interpreted reality as independent from the European idea of progress: "They found their collective identity in the solidarity of their tribe and the transmission of tribal culture" (485). Within the Western system, whether in the control of the French or the British, the Mi'kmaq had no control over the education of their children.

The loss of the oral tradition as a primary means of education has had devastating effects on Mi'kmaq culture. With the arrival of European missionaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the responsibility for the education of



Mi'kmaq youth was taken from the elders of Native communities and given to priests, who imposed on these children the ideology of Western thought.

Brockman states:

Not only have schools failed to provide First Nations students with an education which includes Traditional Knowledge, they have served to undermine its elders as an important source of knowledge, and the value of subsistence activities on the land. They have clearly had a negative impact on aboriginal language retention and use. The Western education system continues to fail to teach the values, beliefs and principles which underlie Traditional Knowledge. (4)

In addition to the process by which the European settlers undermined the spiritual powers of shamans, traditional knowledge was discredited and treated as inferior. As we will see, the process by which the oral tradition was undermined and the loss of status within communities for elders and established leaders has had dramatically negative effects on the cultural identity of the Mi'kmaq people.

The process by which European technology and the written alphabet came to dominate Mi'kmaq culture has led to a devastating crisis of identity for Native communities. Marshall McLuhan has asserted that the imposition of foreign media within tribal communities has destructive effects on the social structure of Native cultures. In Understanding Media, McLuhan identifies different types of media. He states that cool media is a form in which active participation is required in processing information, while hot media allows content to be absorbed with little

or no effort. It is clear that the Mi'kmaq oral tradition is a form of cool media, while the Western tradition of written text constitutes hot media. McLuhan contends that grave complications arise when hot media is rapidly imposed on cool cultures: "it makes all the difference whether a hot medium is used in a hot or cool culture. The hot radio medium used in cool or nonliterate cultures has a violent effect . . . A cool or low literacy culture cannot accept hot media" (43). McLuhan goes on to document the effect that the sudden influx of technology can have on native populations. He asserts that the impact is dramatic, as social structures disintegrate and traditional values are quickly lost.

McLuhan's theory holds true for the Mi'kmaq of the Maritime region; just as the European capitalist system undermined the subsistence economy of the Mi'kmaq, the missionaries that accompanied the settlers actively discredited the knowledge of elders in North American communities and forced Native children to be educated in Western schools. In addition to being the key component of Mi'kmaq education, the oral tradition facilitated community growth, as it physically brought people together. In order to hear the stories of elders, members of the community were forced to gather together; however, the advent of written text in North America disintegrated the bond that was fostered by this process. The oral tradition has lost its place within Mi'kmaq communities as a means of education. As Brockman asserts:

time spent in residential schools, or day schools has limited the opportunity for Traditional Knowledge to be passed on to younger generations. Over

time elders and other community members relinquished their rights and responsibility to educate younger generations. They gave up their responsibility to teach their language and traditions. In the changing world where Euro-Canadian power and control seemed insurmountable, many elders questioned the value of their knowledge to younger generations in the modern world. (4)

The impact of the loss of the oral tradition as a key to the education of Mi'kmaq youth has been devastating. European settlers were able to subvert the value of this system upon arriving in North America because of the process by which the leaders of Mi'kmaq communities lost their power in the wake of spreading disease and the prevalence of European technology. Discrediting of Traditional Knowledge can be easily achieved because communal knowledge is rarely committed to paper; the knowledge of elders then lacks the degree of authority that written text is perceived to embody (Brockman 6).

### **The Writer as Storyteller**

It is important to note that there is a strong opposition to the process by which the oral tradition has been subverted in the Mi'kmaq community. Although the oral tradition continues to be marginalised, it remains an essential element of Mi'kmaq culture. As Berneshawi states:

Mi'kmaq culture *is* oral tradition. Ancestral knowledge encompasses not only environmental information, but includes the culture, religion, heritage

and history of the Nation. It is a means of identity, education and ties to Mi'kmaq ancestry. It is passed down through the generations by Elders and parents orally and is vital for a sense of honour and place. Stories, legends, songs, chants and dances are the traditional forms of education. The importance of oral tradition is its guidance; its effectiveness lies in the careful and gentle manner that elders tell the stories and sing the songs of their ancestors. (119)

Although this custom is no longer recognised as a crucial component of the education of youths in Native communities, there are initiatives led by people such as Aggie Brockman and Stephen Augustine to implement Traditional Knowledge and the oral tradition in the mainstream education system.

In a study entitled "Aboriginal Cultural Identity", John Berry has established the importance of the oral tradition and the role of elders in contemporary Native communities. In extensive interviews with aboriginal people from across Canada, Berry found many participants who expressed a belief in the importance of a return to their traditional values in order to maintain aboriginal cultural identity. These values include language, spirituality, arts, community, and the education of elders. Berry's study makes clear the need for Mi'kmaq literature to be considered independently from the mainstream writing that composes the remainder of this thesis. The sphere of consciousness of a writer greatly informs his or her work; Mi'kmaq authors express in their writing a need to return to the traditional values of the oral tradition. This struggle has, as we will see, a profound

influence on their texts. Participants in Berry's study stated that that which was taught to them by elders in their communities was central to their understanding of themselves as well as their cultural heritage. It is important to note that in addition to the emphasis placed on traditional values, Berry found that many who took part in this study also defined their cultural identity through a relationship with the land. Berry states that many "lamented that being forced to live away from their home environment caused many of them to lose touch with themselves and with their culture" (23). Although many of those with whom Berry spoke had been denied the right to live on their traditional lands and their having grown up in the Western educational system caused them to lose the skills required for living off the land, the participants reported that hunting, trapping, fishing, and berry-picking continued to be important activities through which their cultural identity was expressed. The remaining portion of this chapter will be dedicated to an attempt to recognise the struggle for a return to the principles of the oral tradition and the intimate relationship between the Mi'kmaq people and the natural world present in literature, especially the work of Rita Joe.

While the medium of storytelling has changed dramatically from the point of contact, Mi'kmaq authors continue to impart wisdom and forge new legends that serve to maintain cultural identity within their community. Hartmut Lutz states:

authors like Rita Joe retain the ancient role of storytellers and elders who consciously teach and follow guidance they themselves receive(d) from

their respective culture-specific traditions. In Rita Joe's writing, and in her increasing participation in First Nations traditional ceremonies and cultural events there seems to be a growing insistence on Micmac traditions, which centuries of Catholic missionary activity and eight years of residential school brain-washing have not been able to eliminate. (284)

Although European settlers explicitly attempted to erase the cultural heritage of the Mi'kmaq people, their rich sense of custom has survived and has adapted to the modern world. While the traditional relationship between the Native community and the land is essentially impossible in today's society, there is a clear undertaking in contemporary Mi'kmaq literature to maintain a spiritual attachment to the natural world.

This spiritual attachment is present in "The Sacred Seven Prayers". In this prayer, Noel Knockwood speaks of the relationship between all things that exist, with the overarching connection being mediated through the natural world. Each Great Spirit of which he speaks is closely associated with a process of nature; the prayer states:

O Great Spirit of the North, who gives wings to the waters of the air and rolls the thick snowstorm before Thee, Who covers the Earth with a sparkling crystal carpet above whose deep tranquility every sound is beautiful. Temper us with strength to withstand the biting blizzards, yet make us thankful for the beauty which follows that lies deep over the warm Earth in its wake. (2)

The harmonious relationship between human society and the natural world of which this prayer sings demonstrates the importance of the connection between nature and Mi'kmaq society, and the way in which this has persisted through centuries of Western domination of North American thought.

This intense need for a connection to nature can also be detected in the literature of Rita Joe, the poet laureate of the Mi'kmaq nation. For example, in the ninth installment of Poems of Rita Joe, the speaker laments the domination of traditional Mi'kmaq treatment of the land by Western attitudes: "They say I must live / a white man's way (1-2). The speaker explicitly notes that this way of life has destroyed the natural world:

I must accept what this century  
Has destroyed and left behind —  
The innocence of my ancestry  
I must forget father sky  
And mother earth,  
And hurt this land we love  
With towering concrete (13-19)

The speaker of this poem is intimately aware that in addition to appropriating the physical land of North America, European settlers also attempted to erase the attitudes of the ancestors of today's Mi'kmaq community. Western ideology has forced aboriginal people to forget their relationship with nature and has imposed

an economic system that values individual wealth over the prosperity of the environment.

The idea of the poet as link between the generations is present also in “On Being Original”. The opening lines of the poem read: “I like living close to nature / My ancestors did” (1-2). Again, in this piece, the speaker uses the land as a link between her and those who preceded her. Landscape is an important element of cultural memory, as there is permanence that exists in the natural world that cannot be found in human constructs. The idea of the landscape as a means of communicating between generations is a common theme in Joe’s work. The tenth of the Poems of Rita Joe:

Aye! no monuments,  
 No literature,  
 No scrolls or canvas drawn pictures  
 Relate the wonders of our yesterday.  
 How frustrated the searchings of the educators.  
 Let them find  
 Land names,  
 Titles of seas,  
 Rivers;  
 Wipe them not from our memory,  
 These are our monuments  
 Breath-taking views



Waterfalls on a mountain,  
Fast flowing rivers  
These are our sketches  
Committed to our memory.  
Scholars, you will find our art  
In names and scenery,  
Betrothed to the Indian  
since time began.

The speaker of the poem is acutely aware of the inability of written text to be a monument to the cultural history of the Mi'kmaq. She notes that literature is simply a construct of human society, and as such, is ephemeral when compared to the permanence of the natural world. The speaker finds that scrolls, monuments, and literature are unable to fully translate the cultural heritage of her people; however, she sees in nature the capacity for communication with her ancestors as well as future generations. For her, the fact that the Mi'kmaq language provides place names for the whole of the region provides comfort, as the landscape has been present for the history of her people, and will survive long after documents have been lost.

Although the oral tradition, along with other important aspects of Mi'kmaq culture, has been systematically marginalised in the centuries since Europeans began to settle North America, there is a strong movement for a return to the principles of this form of communication. The loss of this practice to the Western

tradition of written text had grave consequences for Mi'kmaq culture; however, contemporary authors have attempted to offset this by embodying the role of storyteller within their communities. In addition to the process by which the oral tradition educated Mi'kmaq youth, a deep connection to the natural world was also fostered by this form of communication. This relationship remains an to be an important component of Mi'kmaq cultural identity, and is expressed through contemporary literature. While the oral tradition remains essential within Mi'kmaq communities, the move to accept this custom as a legitimate form of education can have far-reaching consequences for society as a whole. The work of, among others, John Taylor Gatto has shown deficiencies in “conventional” Western education, and as we work to gain a better understanding of the way in which a society becomes educated, the importance of the Mi'kmaq model must be recognised.

### **The Relationship Between Nature and Culture**

An effective way in which the relationship between nature and culture can be understood is through a social analysis of the role of nature in human society. This thesis will investigate the manner in which our relationship with the natural world has evolved since the early Nineteenth Century, paying particular attention to perceptions of the degree to which nature can be of assistance to human society. This thesis divides the texts chosen into three time periods; the second chapter includes the literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth Century; the third

chapter features texts composed during and shortly after World War II; the final chapter of this analysis includes contemporary writing.

In the early literature by writers such as Howe and Haliburton, we are given an analysis of the economic and aesthetic utility of the landscape as well as a call for the immediate development of unused portions of the natural world. These writers' treatment of the landscape amounts to a search for leisure; authors of the nineteenth and early twentieth Century heavily mediate their experience of nature and actively diminish its role in individual and societal health.

This attitude changes as industrialisation makes its presence felt in the region; MacLennan, Buckler, Bruce, and Raddall each express in their fiction an uneasy recognition of the role of nostalgia in literature and an attempt at reconciling their preference for the traditional with their realisation of the inevitability of technological transformation. Their fiction reveals a thoughtful protest against the dangers of industrialisation and focusses on the manner in which the rural lifestyle of the Maritimes is threatened by this development.

The contemporary literature of MacLeod, Richards, McKay, and Conlin presents a formalized analysis of the manner in which the environmental crisis faced by our society places in peril not only the lifestyle of the people of this region but also their very existence. These writers argue in their fiction that the underdevelopment of the Maritimes has resulted in an unfulfilled industrial revolution that has left behind shells of company towns and landscapes that have been depleted, if not ruined by pollution.

In an age in which we become increasingly aware everyday of the degree to which human society is threatened by the environmental disaster we presently face, it is imperative that we critically examine the relationship between civilisation and nature. The critical framework proposed by this thesis provides the basis for an investigation of the way in which this relationship has changed since the early Nineteenth Century as well as the reasons behind this shift.

## Chapter 2: Conquest Through Literary Expression

Because writing that appeared in the nineteenth century, which drew influence from the British Romantic tradition, centred largely on the utility of nature as a source of inspiration, it is reasonable to assume, from this standpoint, that the connection between these writers and the natural world was both intense and completely realised. However, as we will see, such an account fails to provide an accurate picture of this relationship. While Maritime literature that appears in and shortly after the Romantic Period celebrates the aesthetic virtues of the natural world, this writing fails to embody a view of the natural world as a vital component of the existence of human society. As this chapter will demonstrate, nineteenth century Canadian society was influenced by an ideology of colonial conquest that allowed ecological concerns to be marginalised for the sake of further settlement and the realisation of heavenly order on earth. This chapter will analyse two nineteenth century Maritime prose works, Howe's Western and Eastern Rambles: Travel Sketches of Nova Scotia and Haliburton's The Clockmaker as well as the poetry of Bliss Carman and Charles G.D. Roberts, discussing the manner in which the natural world is treated in each. The literature of this period speaks primarily to the economic potential of subjugation of the natural world and the recreational value of nature, which ultimately diminishes the importance of the environment and its role in the health of human society. The latter section of this chapter will be dedicated to an evaluation of the manner in

which this sensibility influenced Maritime literature appearing in the early twentieth century, arguing that the idea of control over the natural world in the Romantic period results in the imaginative creation of idyllic landscapes in the fiction of L.M. Montgomery, Andrew MacPhail, and Charles G.D. Roberts.

Glickman notes that Nineteenth Century Canadian writing was deeply influenced by the Romantic aesthetic of searching for the picturesque in nature. She argues that this process was governed by the search for the perfect experience of the natural world; this is achieved through filtering perception through the use of emotion and imagination. This quest for picturesque landscapes in Nineteenth Century literature contributed to an attitude surrounding nature that was “detached and proprietary” (12). As Glickman has shown, poets chose images of nature that suited their purposes and simply rearranged those that did not adhere to their taste, a strategy that served to “suppress genuine appreciation” (12) of the natural world. Literature that appears in the Nineteenth Century endeavoured to achieve a sense of nature that fulfilled societal ideals. This attitude can be found in the texts included in this chapter and, as we will see, greatly influenced Maritime literature that appears at the turn of the century.

In order to understand the responses to the natural world of nineteenth century authors, we must first consider the ecological circumstances faced by these writers, as well as the way in which their society perceived the environment. This chapter will provide an analysis of the ideology of colonial conquest in the Maritimes, demonstrating the manner in which this attitude persisted well into the

nineteenth century, as is evidenced by its influence on the early conservation movement in Canada. The chapter will also examine the societal attitudes that informed the early conservation movement and the establishment of the first National Parks in Canada, arguing that these programs were designed by a population that continued to view nature with an eye towards its consumption. The environmental movement did not intend to preserve nature in its early stages, but rather was founded in order to promote tourism in Western Canada, giving the richest members of society a location in which they could casually use nature as a source of pleasure. The discussion will evaluate the degree to which such attitudes are reflected in the literature of this period.

### **Origins of the Cultivation Imperative in Eastern North America**

European settlers' arrival on the shores of North America inspired in them both terror in the face of this vast unknown terrain and delight at the sight of the untapped wealth of natural resources which were "discovered" in this "new" land. The reconciliation of these conflicting attitudes can be found in the campaign of control over the land that was waged by Europeans who settled this region. The early settlers were compelled to control the wilderness by a belief that they were given by the Creator the responsibility of carving the order of heaven in the land they discovered. This mandate was informed by an adherence to the biblical

notion of improvement that is found in Genesis 1:28, which states: "God blessed them, saying, 'Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have domination over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth.'" Ramsay Cook has asserted that the realisation of this biblical imperative in North America took place in the form of gardens and agricultural tracts carved out by the settlers. The celebration of this process is expressed clearly in the writing of missionaries and settlers who arrived in the seventeenth century. Cook states that the most explicit example of this attitude comes from the French writer Marc Lescarbot, who argued throughout his writing that humanity has been divinely blessed in its possession of nature and is therefore compelled to dominate over it. Lescarbot describes Acadia as "having two kinds of soils that God has given unto man as his possession, who can doubt that when it shall be cultivated it will be a land of promise?" (As cited by Cook 62). Such a statement is indicative of the degree to which the settlers claimed direct ownership of the land and provides insight into the pervasive manner in which the cultivation imperative was promoted to those who arrived to North America.

This notion of a divine purpose that governed the gifts of nature persisted throughout the Victorian age in Canada. Inhabitants of the Maritimes in the Nineteenth century viewed the natural world in religious as well as economic terms, and once again, the basis for the negotiation of this conflict was a belief in the idea that God's gifts are bestowed upon mankind along with a responsibility to use them correctly. Carl Berger asserts: "Natural history, moreover, reinforced



attention upon interrelationships in concrete terms and upon the fact that nothing in the natural world was useless or without purpose” (33). Just as clear as the notion that God can be found in the study of nature was the belief that this purpose is intended expressly determined by human society: “White wrote of earthworms that aerated the soil for man’s benefit and of cattle cooling themselves in ponds, providing by their droppings for insects and, indirectly, for fish” (33). Nineteenth century Canadian society perceived the natural world simply in terms of its economic utility, and as we will see, this influences the literature produced in this period greatly.

In addition to the manner in which settlers were compelled to establish a degree of superiority over the land which they found in North America, the form taken by this domination and its effects on nineteenth century society in the Maritimes can provide context for the literature of this period. The notion of perfection in the garden contrasted with the malevolence of the natural world in its state of uncontrolled wilderness finds its North American origins in the attitudes of writers such as Lescarbot and Biard. European settlers brought with them the concept of paradise as seen in the subjugation of nature, and spoke out against the evil that is found in wilderness; Cook argues: “Wilderness the vast expanses of Acadia might be, but a garden it could become, if cultivated. For Father Biard and his contemporaries, ‘subjugating Satanic monsters’ and establishing ‘the order and discipline of heaven upon earth’ combined spiritual and worldly dimensions” (69). The first Europeans who arrived at North America saw elements of Satan in the

uncontrolled wilderness that confronted them. This attitude has greatly influenced perceptions of the landscape in the centuries following European contact in this region. Cook states:

While Lescarbot might be dismissed as suffering from an overdose of renaissance humanism, it seems more sensible to take him seriously. His florid rhetoric should be seen for what it really was: the ideology of what Alfred W. Crosby has called “ecological imperialism” — the biological expansion of Europe. What Lescarbot, and less literary Europeans, brought to bear on the Acadian landscape was the heavy freight of the European agricultural tradition with its long established distinction between garden and wilderness. In that tradition God’s “garden of delight” contrasted with the “desolate wilderness” of Satan. Though the concept of “garden” varies widely, as Hugh Johnson notes in his *Principle of Gardening*, “control of nature by man” is the single common denominator. (70)

The process of framing of the natural world in such simplistically oppositional terms as “good” and “evil” both prompted a fear of the unknown wilderness and inspired the movement to quell the North American landscape into gardens and large agricultural tracts, suitable for use by the freshly transplanted European society in this region. As Cook states, the result of the prominence of this directive was “a promised land, a paradise, a garden of delights. Lescarbot’s observations seemed so axiomatic then, and for nearly five centuries afterward, that almost no one questioned his vision of a promised land - at least no European” (63). William

Cronon has shown that the idea of cultivation was also linked closely to the idea of conquest in North America. Cronon asserts that the European idea of land ownership was defined through use; one could claim deed over a piece of land only if it was being used to its full potential. This notion informed the strategy with which the Europeans appropriated the land of the Native populations in North America:

English colonists could use Indian hunting and gathering as a justification for expropriating Indian land. To European eyes, Indians appeared to squander the resources that were available to them. . . . This was, of course, little more than an ideology of conquest conveniently available to justify the occupation of another people's lands. (Changes 56-7)

The ideology of conquest has influenced perceptions of the natural world in the centuries following European contact. This emphasis on the idea of transforming the North American landscape from wilderness into gardens persists in the centuries following European settlement in North America and influences the beginnings of the environmental movement in Canada. As we will see, the paradigm of cultivated land continued to influence treatment of nature well into the nineteenth century and can be clearly discerned in the language used to govern the formation of the first National Parks.

Janet Foster argues that the Canadian government did not adhere to the idea of conservation in the late Nineteenth Century for several reasons, chief among them a belief in the "superabundance" of resources in Canada as well as

the presence of a wilderness frontier in the West (4). Canadians mistakenly maintained at this time that the unknown West was teeming with natural resources and would be abundant forever. Canadians presumed that large regions of the country needed only to be cultivated in order for economic gain to be realised. Ecological concerns at this time were neither understood, nor pressing; because an attitude remained that Canada was a frontier with limitless natural resources, a fear that the environment could conceivably be depleted beyond repair was unknown. This feeling of comfort greatly influenced the ideology that informed the early conservation movement.

Foster notes that while modern society views National Parks as sanctuaries constructed for the preservation of wildlife and wilderness, such a lofty goal was not the original intention of this program; she states:

A clause in the Rocky Mountains Park Act called for the 'preservation and protection of fish and game, [and] wild birds generally,' but the creation of a wildlife reserve in the Rocky Mountains was not the intention of John A. Macdonald's government. Parks were to be commercial assets, sources of revenue to a government foundering in economic depression and burdened by debt from building the Canadian Pacific Railway. From the outset, the parks' chief function was to popularize and help promote the CPR; the railway, in return, was to bring in a steady stream of passengers with their tourist dollars. (16)

The early conservation movement was pursued as the result of an ideology that was simply an extension of the imperative of colonial conquest in North America. It is interesting to note that the Macdonald government perceived the environment in almost identical terms as those of Lescarbot and Biard; the Prime Minister himself asserted: "the government thought it was of the greatest importance that all this section of the country should be brought into usefulness" (As cited by Foster 23). Just as the early settlers in North America believed that the unharnessed natural world offered no benefit to human society, John A. Macdonald also maintained that the wilderness of the Rocky Mountains required the human hand to make it productive and useful. The first National Parks were designed not as places in which the inherent beauty and elements of nature were to be preserved, but simply as gardens on a larger scale than that which Lescarbot envisioned.

Perceptions of the environment that were fostered by the colonialist attitude of such writers as Lescarbot and Biard and upheld by nineteenth century Canadian society can be seen in the literature of the Maritime region that appeared in the Romantic and Victorian Ages. Writers such as Howe, Haliburton, Roberts, and Carman continued to view the wilderness as a force that must be tamed by human society in order to be both morally and economically productive. The work of these authors embodies a sense of leisure concerning the natural world. Just as the early conservation movement was founded on the principle that the wilderness could be mediated in order for it to be enjoyed by tourists, these writers, especially

Howe, attempt explicitly throughout their writing to experience the “worthwhile” aspects of nature and chastise those elements which fail to meet their approval.

### **Nature’s Subjugation as Literary Motif**

Howe expresses throughout Western and Eastern Rambles: Travel Sketches of Nova Scotia an intense belief in the economic potential of the land. Just as the settlers who arrived in the Maritimes believed intensely in the virtues of cultivating the land that they discovered, Howe asserts that the underdevelopment that he sees in Nova Scotia is inexcusable and his collection amounts largely to a call for this to be remedied. The benefits that Howe sees in harnessing the wildness of nature and utilising it for the betterment of society is a constant theme in this collection. He emphatically states:

How much deeper would have been the tones of his Harp, had he stood where we now stand — had he been surrounded by the graves of those who found his country a wilderness, and left it a garden — who pitched their tents amid the solitude of nature, and left to their children her fairest charms heightened by the softening touch of art . . . . We have no Abbeys or Cathedrals where our warriors and statesmen are preserved — we have no monumental piles, fraught with the deeds of other days, to claim a tribute from the passer-by; the lapse of ages, political vicissitudes, violent struggles, and accumulated wealth are necessary to the possession of these; but in every village of our infant country we have the quiet graves of those

who subdued the wilderness — and beautified the land by their toils — and left not only the fruits of their labors, but the thoughts and feelings which cheered them in their solitude, to cheer and stimulate us amidst the inferior trials and multiplied enjoyments of a more advanced society. (134)

Howe sees no value in land on which the full economic possibilities of agriculture are not being realised. For him, Nova Scotians have been blessed with a portion of the world that teems with wealth, and its inhabitants have not only an opportunity, but a divine responsibility to put the land to efficient use.

While Howe casts Nova Scotians as lazy and ignorant of the opportunity that this land has afforded them, the issue with which he takes most offence is the presence of privately owned land that remained uncultivated. In the last decades of the eighteenth century, the Nova Scotia government enacted a program that saw “grants” of land parceled out to various individuals, mainly speculators. The holders of these grants were often absentee, leaving the land unsettled and undeveloped for years. To Howe, while public land that is used improperly is an opportunity lost, it is land that is both owned and neglected that is morally unconscionable. His thoughts on this matter are made explicit upon his sight of Governor Wentworth’s grant on his journey to New Glasgow:

From the mines we retrace our steps to New Glasgow, from whence the French River runs nearly due East. There are a few fine farms along its course, and among the most extensive and cultivated is one on the left, owned by Mr. MacKay, overlooking the little village; but a large break is

made in the line of cultivation by one of those immense grants, which retard the settlement of the country wherever they are found. For many miles, through a fine body of land, there is not a single clearing, and settlers have been forced to go in upon rear lots, often of an inferior quality, shut out from the main road by this unwieldy and burthensome grant. (170)

Howe can reconcile the idea of land that is not held by anyone remaining undeveloped; however, it is unthinkable to him that tracts given out by the government are being allowed to lie idle. It is a common theme throughout his journal that the land's potential for profit must be utilised; otherwise nature, for him, is of no use.

The theme of human society having been given a responsibility to maximise the potential of the natural resources bestowed upon it by God is present also in Haliburton's The Clockmaker. The attitude that aspects of the natural world not being used in the interests of industry constitutes an economic loss is present also throughout this work. Sam Slick manages to indict the "lazy" Nova Scotians in terms harsher than those used by Howe:

If their fences are good, them hungry cattle couldn't break through; and if they ain't, they ought to stake 'em up, and withe them well; *but it's no use to make fences unless the land is cultivated*. If I see a farm all gone to wrack, I say, Here's bad husbandry and bad management; and if I see a Province like this, of great capacity, and great natural recourses, poverty-stricken, I say, There's bad legislation. (73)



Slick consistently asserts that the epidemic of the wasted potential of the natural resources of Nova Scotia is a large problem that must be addressed both by the government of the province and its inhabitants. As can be seen from the above passage, Slick believes that the solution to this problem can be found only in an increase of fences that concretely delineate parcels of land, and place order and control over nature more effectively. He describes human society's relationship with nature in identical terms as those espoused by Howe in Rambles. Slick praises that which has been given to the inhabitants of Nova Scotia and decries their inability to benefit from that which is before them:

I neer seed or heard tell of a country that had so many natural privileges as this. Why, there are twice as many harbours and water-powers here, as we have all the way from Eastport to New *Orleens*. They have all they can ax, and more than they deserve. They have iron, coal, slate, grindstone, lime, fire-stone, gypsum, free-stone, and a list as long as an auctioneer's catalogue. . . . Their shores are crowded with fish, and their lands covered with wood. . . . Then look at their dykes. The Lord seems to have made 'em on purpose for such lazy folks. (13)

Slick, like Howe, sees benefit only in nature that has been controlled in order to facilitate industry. The literature of this period expresses no appreciation for the inherent value of nature as a vital cog in the existence of human society; authors such as Haliburton and Howe convey a recognition of nature only in terms of the material wealth that can be extracted from it.

### **Transforming Wilderness and the Need to Find Order in Nature**

The need for the land to be subdued into manageable and profitable gardens presented by these authors affects not only their opinion of the utilitarian value of the natural world, but also their aesthetic evaluation of the land about which they write. Howe casts the idea of the cultivation of the land in biblical terms throughout the text; he remarks on the extent to which the people of this province are “blessed” by the vast resources of Nova Scotia, and also the responsibility to realise this potential that accompanies such a divine gift:

now you catch a glimpse of the Basin and Blomidon and the Cornwallis River, to your right; and then in a moment more, some huge hill shuts out all these; and to your left, a stretch of Marsh, and a sweet little cottage, with some patches of corn, and oats, and wheat, to say nothing of the garden and orchard, open upon your view, and make you sigh for the little possession of Paradise, and almost forswear mingling in the City again. (76)

It is land that is separated and shaped into gardens and agricultural tracts that constitutes Howe’s notion of “Paradise”. Howe clearly subscribes to a notion that the will of God is realised by the actions of humanity; in this case, human society is compelled by Genesis to shape the earth in the image of divine perfection.

Howe praises cultivated land and its owners for their industry; this attitude is pervasive to the extent that he sees divine beauty only in that which has been sculpted by human society. While traveling to Truro, Howe remarks:

One of the most agreeable excursions is a ride to the North Mountain. The road turns off from the highway leading to Onslow, and you pass through some finely tilled intervale land that stretches away from the back lots of the village, and which is very rich and fertile. As you recede from the village, the North River appears on the left, flowing through low and cultivated soil, the distant border of which rests on the unfelled wilderness.

(129-130)

Although Howe is on a quest to find the most beautiful scenes that Nova Scotia can offer, he is comfortable only in viewing those aspects of nature that are under the firm control of human society. He does not find sublimity in “the unfelled wilderness”; that mysterious place, to him, offers no economic advantage to humanity, until the point at which it is finally harnessed and its resources harvested.

The notion that nature must be contained in order for it to be admired persists throughout Rambles. Howe consistently laments when confronted with pieces of land that are allowed to remain “wild”; however, it is his evaluation of unblemished natural scenery that is particularly interesting. In addition to the manner in which Howe wishes to promote the process of human control over the land, he also reserves praise for the aspects of nature which he judges to have qualities similar to those imposed on the natural world by human society. After complaining throughout his journey that Nova Scotia’s modest scenery cannot compare to the beauty found in other parts of the country, particularly the falls at

Niagara, Howe finally has occasion to witness one of the few breathtaking sights offered by the province, the descent of the river from the mountains at Gaspereaux. Howe is overcome by the refinement of this area:

It cannot be called a fall, as the descent is rather continuous than abrupt, but by many it is considered more curious and romantic; to approach the water from the summit of the natural walls which enclose it, is a work of some hazard and no little labor; as you have to cling to shrub and bough, to preserve yourself from performing a somerset, after no fashion that no rope dancer of the present day would feel to imitate. Having reached the foot of the descent, you endeavour to collect your wind, and gaze wround and above you, with feelings 'Which you can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.' (75)

The description of this view offered by Howe stands out for several reasons. While he is greatly intrigued and generally satisfied with this scene, Howe is, as mentioned above, very selective in the components of nature for which he reserves praise. Howe expresses that the natural world must offer to him a tangible benefit, such as an opportunity for profit or aesthetic pleasure. Although Howe clearly enjoys his experience of the river at Gaspereaux, he displays no emotional connection to the land about which he writes. It is also important to note that Howe again associates "labor" with attractiveness in nature. For him, human effort is required in order for the beauty of nature to be realised, even if the labor includes only the actual process of traveling to experience the natural world.

However, the most interesting development that occurs in this leg of Howe's journey is detailed immediately following his description of the river flowing through the mountain. While it is clear that Howe appreciates the highly mediated experience of nature as seen through the process of choosing the most satisfactory scene to be found in the province and taking a journey to the most appropriate vantage point, he rejects aspects of the natural world that are not heavily mediated, and, therefore, are truly natural. This discrepancy is made explicit when he notices that the river which he deems so picturesque extends into the foreboding forest:

Above you the huge ramparts, which the hand of nature has reared, are towering away to the Heavens, and the forest trees are waving their leafy banners, as if proud of the giant battlements they adorn - the stream dashes past your feet as if anxious to hurry from a place so dark and wild, to steal along through the meadow flowers, and clothe them in a richer bloom. (75)

Howe admires only that in nature which is calm and controlled, or, in other words, simulates the conditions of cultivated land and gardens. Howe's affinity for the process by which nature is subdued is sufficiently intense to influence his perception of parts of the natural world left untouched by the hand of human society. The author expresses not only distaste for, but also a strong fear of, the "wild" in nature. In this instance, the word "wild" refers to that which is not refined by the touch of man, or, as is expressed by Howe, does not have the appearance of this control. Howe notes that the forest is unknown; however, it is

crucial that we notice the death imagery that he associates with this example of true wilderness. While the uncharted trees that loom on the horizon are “dark and wild”, the meadow flowers that he has come to enjoy are a sign of vitality. It is interesting also that, in Howe’s eyes, the stream becomes productive in upholding life only when it emerges from the forest and finds land that can be described as cultivated. This notion runs parallel to the author’s lament that the potential of humans can be realised only on land that has been converted into agricultural tracts.

Howe makes extensive use of death imagery in speaking of other aspects of the natural world that he deems to be unknown and, therefore, wild. For example, when confronted with the tall and unkempt trees of the forest at Windsor, Howe is struck by the manner in which this place is inhospitable to life:

On both sides the tall trees are towering over our heads, and, covered by rich and luxuriant foliage, nearly exclude the sun from the ferns and moss that creep around their roots. To plunge ten yards into this forest would effectively shut us out from the world as if there was not one cultivated acre on this side of the Atlantic. (72)

For Howe, those aspects of nature that are not improved by the industry of human society are detrimental not only to the economic quality of life, but also to life in general. Howe makes note of the extent to which experiencing the true wilderness isolates a person from the rest of the world, and also states that the darkness of the forest leaves the “ferns and moss” in the shadows of life-giving light.

In addition to the manner in which a tolerance of the wilderness can obstruct economic and social development for Nova Scotia, Howe also expresses in Rambles a belief that when left unimpeded by the calming influence of humanity, nature can also be an entity that actively destroys human life. When he is given a tour of the Albion Mines, Howe is struck by the sound of the streams that are used in extracting coal from its seams; he states:

There is also a strange noise, as of gurgling and rushing of waters, which for a moment would make a visitor think that he had got into the Tunnel under the Thames, and that the King of European Rivers was bursting through his bed to punish him for his intrusion; but there is no risk, for the streams we hear are used to preserve not destroy life. (167)

Throughout this treatise, Howe notes that nature can be trusted only when it is harnessed in order to assist industry and improve the prosperity of the communities that he visits. In this instance, we are given a description of the unchecked natural world that is vindictive and evil by Howe; he is completely terrified of aspects of nature that are not under complete control by human society. For Howe, the uncontrolled wilderness is, by design, destructive, and must be controlled in the form of gardens and dammed streams in order to serve a productive purpose for humans.

In The Clockmaker, Slick also uses metaphors that reveal a belief in the malevolence of nature when it is not carefully controlled by human society. For

example, when speaking of the problems faced by the province of Nova Scotia, Slick compares them to the sea in an incredibly negative light:

“If the sea was always calm,” said he, “it would p’ison the univarse; no soul could breath the air, it would be so uncommon bad. Stagnant water is always onpleasant, but salt water when it gets tainted beats all natur’; motion keeps it sweet and wholesome, and that our minister used to say is one of the “wonders of the great deep.” This province is stagnant; it ain’t deep like still water neither, for it’s shaller enough, gracious knows, but it is motionless, noiseless, lifeless” (49)

To Slick, water that is not in motion, or, not in use, is putrid, just as the people of the province are rotting from a refusal to utilise the natural world to its full potential. Slick constantly uses imagery that asserts the negative in “natur’”, especially that which is not being used by human society.

### **Nature as Leisure**

The idea of use of the natural world as a place of leisure is also present throughout the literature of the nineteenth century, particularly in Howe’s Western and Eastern Rambles. The premise of this collection, a series of sketches that is written to give a picture of the landscape of Nova Scotia, immediately reveals the way in which Howe’s relationship with the natural world operates. Howe does not invest emotional or economic connection with any of the places he visits; he is simply a tourist whose objective is to experience aspects of nature that he deems



worthy of his consideration. We are immediately shown the way in which Howe links his experience of the landscape with a notion of leisure:

If we had a load of hay at our heels, gentle traveler, we would prefer the Kempt Road, as the even and regular; but as we have not, and the old road is the most picturesque, we who travel at our leisure must choose it of course. There is no moment of a man's life when he feels a more thorough contempt for Towns and Cities, than when he is going out of one to enjoy the free air of the country. (52-53)

In the first stages of this collection, Howe makes reference to what will become a dominant theme of the treatise, that of the freedom to traverse that his class status affords him. Howe distinguishes between those who are forced to work the field and cannot choose enjoyable routes on which to travel, and those like himself who are able to ignore practical concerns and proceed at their leisure. The idea of the natural world as a place of recreation is present throughout Western and Eastern Rambles, and this notion is one that serves to separate working class perceptions of the land as a source of subsistence and the upper class mentality of nature as leisure.

The idea of the natural world as a source of leisure is also present throughout the writing of Thomas Haliburton. While traveling across Nova Scotia, Slick continually looks for land that satisfies his desire for beautiful scenery, and derogates that which does not:

The road from Amherst to Parrsboro' is tedious and uninteresting. In places it is made so straight that you can see several miles of it before you, which produces an appearance of interminable length, while the stunted growth of the spruce and birch trees bespeaks a cold, thin soil, and invests the scene with a melancholy and sterile aspect. Here and there occurs a little valley, with its meandering stream, and verdant and fertile interval, which though possessing nothing peculiar to distinguish it from many others of the same kind, strikes the traveler as superior to them all, from the contrast the the surrounding country. (118)

The work of Howe and Haliburton celebrate the recreational qualities of nature, as these texts embody a tourist's attitude in relation to nature. It is clear that the writers of nineteenth century Maritime literature viewed the natural world as positive only when it offered to them some tangible benefit, one of which was the satisfaction of a mediated sighting of selected scenery.

### **Imaginative Control Over the Landscape**

In the writing of Howe and Haliburton, we see the active mediation of the manner in which these authors experience nature. This is particularly true of Howe, who goes to great length in Rambles to ensure that his encounters with the natural world occur in a way that is exciting yet highly controlled. While Howe's writing takes place within the British Romantic tradition of excursions that attempt to bring the writer closer to spiritual fulfillment through nature, as we will see, the

search of the author for control over nature is extended from the physical selection of appropriate scenes to the deliberate construction of the ideal in the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries in the Maritimes. The idea of the “creation” of nature is a common one in ecological critical theory; Wilson, for example, argues:

Our experience of the natural world — whether touring the Canadian Rockies, watching an animal show on TV, or working in our own gardens — is always mediated. It is always shaped by theoretical constructs like photography, industry, advertising, and aesthetics, as well as institutions such as religion, tourism, and education. (12)

In addition to the manner in which the extensions of human society inadvertently serve to mediate our experiences of nature, the process of domination over the natural world to which this thesis alluded can be actively achieved through literary expression. Ernest Callenbach has shown the manner in which our fear of the wilderness is mirrored in our fear of the unknown in ourselves:

Wilderness is thus within us as well as outside us. In fact, even our languages are wild. They change constantly, despite the rules of grammarians.) Our own wild side is echoed by wilderness — areas in which human influence is virtually nonexistent — and this is perhaps one reason why people are capable of being deeply moved by a pristine forest or desert or coastal barrier island. We probably sense that natural processes

within us are somehow kin to the ecological processes that prevail in these undisturbed and unmanaged places. (135)

This quest for control over our bodies extends to the way in which we seek domination over the processes of nature; the way in which human society strives to rid itself of aspects of the “wild” through bodily control is reflected in the process by which the natural world is “cultivated”, and, as we will see, ultimately influences literary expression. While Howe physically controlled his experience of nature by choosing that which pleased and inspired him, this is extended by Maritime writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to linguistic control over a landscape that is both idyllic and artificially created.

In the work of Charles G.D. Roberts and Bliss Carman, we are treated to experiences of nature that are actively and deliberately mediated, thus separating the speaker of these poems rigidly from the natural world. For example, in “Tantramar Revisited”, the speaker is terrified of the possibility that the terrain of his youth has been transformed, and endeavours to circumvent this inevitable process:

Here from my vantage-ground, I can see the scattering houses  
 Stained with time, set in warm orchards, meadows and wheat,  
 Dotting the broad bright slopes outspread to southward and eastward,  
 Wind-swept all day long, blown by the south-east wind (10-13)

The speaker notes that when nature is allowed to dominate the landscape without impediment, the result is disastrous. In this poem, the speaker openly rails against

the natural processes of time and progression as dictated by the natural world. He uses negative language in his evaluation of this process, one that, in this passage, stains the constructs of human society, and ultimately destroys the image of this place that exists in his mind. The poem concludes with the following lines:

Yet I will stay my steps and not go down to the marshland, —

Muse and recall far off, rather remember than see -

Lest on too close sight I miss the darling illusion,

Spy at their task even here at the hands of chance and change. (60-63)

The speaker of “Tantramar” chooses to selectively appreciate aspects of the landscape that suit his “darling illusion” (62) of permanence and effectively refuses to acknowledge the workings of nature in the marshlands where he grew up. The processes of the natural world are, for him, untrustworthy, and have the ability only to destroy that which he has loved since his childhood. The speaker is content to realise the experience of visiting the site of his youth from his memory alone, as his mind, unlike nature, can be controlled, leaving his recollection intact. The process of time is described as being governed by the “hands of chance” (63) in this poem. This poem, unlike, as we will see, contemporary Maritime literature, does not embody an acceptance of the patterns of nature and the role that they play in fostering and maintaining life. Just as Howe and Haliburton wish for human society to exert closer control over the natural world, the speaker of this poem also believes that when unhindered, nature acts in a manner detrimental to the interests of humanity.

Bliss Carman's "Low Tide on Grand Pre" offers the reader a similar mediation of an experience of nature that is found in the work of Charles G.D. Roberts. The speaker of this poem also wishes to freeze time in order to replay an experience of his youth. In this case, the speaker confronts nature not only through his memory, but also through the experience of another person. Although the scene with which the speaker is met is beautiful, he is forced to recall the passion that he and his lover shared in this place in order to fully enjoy it:

Then all your face grew light, and seemed  
 To hold the shadow of the sun;  
 The evening faltered, and I deemed  
 That time was ripe, and years had done  
 Their wheeling underneath the sun.

So all desire and all regret,  
 And fear and memory, were naught;  
 One to remember or forget  
 The keen delight our hands had caught;  
 Morrow and yesterday were naught. (36-46)

In addition to the manner in which the speaker attempts to control his experience of nature, he believes that the beauty of the natural world is brought out only by that of his lover. In this poem, time is at a standstill, as the people involved in the encounter are able to catch the summer and hold it there between their hands (14-

17). Just as the poetry of Roberts actively ignores and undercuts the processes of time and nature, Carman's "Low Tide on Grand Pre" also denies natural progression in order to control an experience of the natural world.

### **Influence of the Romantic Period on Maritime Literature of the Early Twentieth Century**

The influence of the Romantic sensibility that treated landscape as a largely aesthetic and ultimately malleable aspect of literary expression can be seen in Maritime writing that appears well into the twentieth century. Maritime novels at the turn of the century present a falsely ideal relationship between human society and the natural world that results in the creation of settings that reveal similarities to the English pastoral. The fiction of L.M. Montgomery, Charles G.D. Roberts, and Andrew MacPhail constructs an imagined landscape with which their characters blissfully interact, and as we will see, this production and the claim to ownership of nature that results from this process is reflected in the way in which their characters hold dominion over the natural world within these texts.

This trend is perhaps most evident in the prose fiction of Lucy Maud Montgomery. The foundation of Montgomery's fiction is the setting of Avonlea, which is based, in large part, on her interpretation of the community of Cavendish, where her formative years were spent. As Keefer notes, the imaginative process for Montgomery results in the finely tuned and questionably accurate construction of the imagined landscape of Avonlea, which "in *Anne of Green Gables* is a

conflation of bucolic and quasi-Arthurian bliss" (68). As Janice Fiamengo states, there is a close parallel that can be drawn between the process of Montgomery's creation of the setting of Avonlea and Anne's discovery and subsequent attachment to this landscape. Just as Montgomery set out in the novels of Avonlea to construct and commemorate a "remembered past" (227), Anne describes the natural world that she encounters in terms that reveal the way in which her sense of belonging is defined completely through ownership. Fiamengo argues that this theme of the novel is in no way accidental; Anne's treatment of the natural world is closely related to Montgomery's use of landscape within the novels. In the Avonlea books, Montgomery's objective is to arrive at perfection in her imagined setting of Avonlea, and this is representative of a larger trend in literary expression that appears throughout the early twentieth century.

Immediately following Anne's arrival at Avonlea, she begins asserting linguistic control over aspects of the setting with which she is met. Just as Anne finds agency in a rigid maintenance of the way in which her name is spelled (26-7), she also imposes such an order on the natural world in a similar struggle for control; she states:

"Oh, I like things to have handles even if they are only geraniums. It makes them seem more like people. How do you know but that it hurts a geranium's feelings just to be called a geranium and nothing else? You wouldn't like to be called nothing but a woman all the time. Yes, I shall call it Bonny. I named the cherry-tree outside my bedroom door window this



morning. I called it Snow Queen because it was so white. Of course, it won't always be in blossom, but one can imagine that it is, can't one?"(38)

Throughout the novel, Anne uses language to exert ownership over the natural world. Montgomery's attempt to create perfection in her portrait of the landscape of Avonlea is mirrored in Anne's establishing her claim to the trees and lakes that she finds on Prince Edward Island.

Just as Marilla has no concept of unconditional love in speaking of Anne's place in the Cuthbert household, Anne endeavours to place order and control over nature, which, for her, are realised largely in her spiritual understanding of existence; she praises God for the aspects of the environment of which she approves: "Gracious heavenly Father, I thank Thee for the White Way of Delight and the Lake of Shining Waters and Bonny and the Snow Queen. I'm really extremely grateful for them. And that's all the blessings I can think of just now to thank Thee for" (55). Throughout the novel, Montgomery's eye toward creation of the falsely blissful setting of Avonlea is reflected in Anne's assertion of ownership over the landscape she encounters at Avonlea.

In The Heart of the Ancient Wood, Roberts sets out to gain an understanding of the philosophical implications of the relationship between human society and the natural world. In his construction of the landscape, which appears in this text as richly textured and deeply complex forest scenery, Roberts sees the possibility for "a place for freedom, of unlimited access, of mystery" (Whalen 145); however, it is ultimately realised in the text through the domination of

human society over the natural world. Roberts expresses this sensibility in the novel through a celebration of the manner in which his characters impact nature even in the seemingly isolated setting which he creates. The wood, for example, is both branded forever and made accessible by a trail carved by Old Dave's predecessors:

The trail through the forest was rough and long unused. In spots the mosses and ground vines had so overgrown it that the only broad scars on the tree trunks, where the lumberman's axe had blazed them for a sign, served to distinguish it from a score of radiating vistas. But just here, where it climbed a long, gradual slope, the run of the water down its slight hollow had sufficed to keep its worn stones partly bare. Moreover, though the furrowing steps of man had left it these many seasons untrodden, it was never wholly neglected. A path once fairly differentiated by the successive passings of feet will keep, almost forever, a spell for the persuasion of all that go afoot. (3)

In this passage, Roberts not only promotes the idea that the destruction of nature is necessary for balance in the relationship between human society and the natural world, but also sees permanence in the way in which the woodsmen who precede Old Dave shape the forest landscape. As is the case in "Tantramar Revisited", human control over the natural world is presented as positive, and the processes of nature are both treated with suspicion and ultimately resisted. The idea of

domination over nature is also celebrated throughout the text; Kirstie's cultivation of the forest, for example, is described in glowing terms:

Kirstie was well fitted to the task she had so bravely set herself. She could swing an axe; and the fencing grew steadily through the fall. She could guide a plough; and before the snow came some ten acres of the long fallow sod had been turned up in brown furrows, to be ripened and mellowed by the frosts for next spring's planting. (38)

Throughout the text, the relationship between the "exiles" who inhabit the wood and the land is defined through the process of cultivation. As Keefer notes, The Heart of the Ancient Wood and Anne of Green Gables are similar in their treatment of the natural world; where Anne exerts linguistic and imaginative control over the setting of Avonlea, Kirstie and her daughter Miranda "master and transform" the wood and harness its benefits through physical domination (189).

Such a production of romanticism and the construction of a fanciful landscape are present also in Thomas MacPhail's The Master's Wife. Just as Montgomery transforms Cavendish into a place in which the fantastic beauty of the natural world inspires the heart of a small girl, MacPhail's novel too sees the Island as "filled with the material of romance with which a boy could fabricate a richer world of his own" (MacPhail 108). While the sensibility of the small community of which MacPhail writes is clearly defined in the novel through its relationship with the land, this bond is defined, as is that in Anne of Green Gables, through the unquestioned notion that the natural world exists in order to be owned,

and is useful only to the degree to which it is of assistance to the human world.

The theme of happiness, as realised through living on one's own property (13) and in benefiting from the spoils of nature, which are produced in "abundance in the spring when fresh food was needed most" (31), is supported by a sense of entitlement to the fruits of nature in this novel: "These animals for years had been loving friends, and now they made a cheerful sacrifice for human need. It sometimes happened that an animal was spared from year to year by reason of the affection it inspired or admiration of its immense size" (15). The natural world is cast by MacPhail as subordinate to the will of man, and this ideology is clearly celebrated throughout the text.

As mentioned above, The Master's Wife creates a world in which romance is constructed in the landscape and in the relationship between human society and "the world of nature" (108). As Keefer argues, MacPhail's production of such a world is reflected in the way in which his characters interact with the natural world:

The 'inner discipline' and 'oblique laws' to which MacPhail makes reference can be related, however obliquely, to that notion of 'woodcraft' . . . — that ability to 'read' the wilderness, registering the signs it flashes and interpreting its silence: that skill which permits man not only to survive in the wilderness but more importantly, to master nature and assert his title of lordship over the earth. (69)

Just as MacPhail creates the world of his novel through imaginative expression, his characters, like Anne Shirley, endeavour not only to assert control over nature through what they perceive as ownership, but also play a large part in transforming nature to suit their taste:

there was also a living world of growth. The Master's wife had a love for every growing thing, especially for flowers. In the winter, she kept potted plants, and her final task at night was to remove them, as many as three dozen, to the cellar, where they would remain safe until the house was warm on the following day. From every journey, she would bring home a slip, a flower, or a shrub. She planted them in any obscure place known only to herself, and a child had to move with care lest he did damage. (109)

Within the bounds of this novel, the "living world of growth" refers not to the wilderness which is governed by the processes of nature, but only to that which the characters create and foster. As Keefer notes in her evaluation of the text, the theme of the creation and ownership of the landscape reflect MacPhail's deliberate construction of the idyllic setting of his novel.

The influence of the ideology of colonial conquest can be clearly seen in Maritime texts that appear in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. As we have seen, the treatment of the natural world in these texts amounts to an analysis of the manner in which its economic potential can be maximised and a call for its unchecked aspects to be placed under firm human control. This attitude greatly

influenced aesthetic conceptions of the landscape in the Romantic time period, and its effects can be discerned in the novels of Charles G.D. Roberts, L.M.

Montgomery, and Andrew MacPhail. As this chapter has demonstrated, the manner in which nineteenth century society treated the natural world as a luxury is manifested in these texts; this literature places no value on the capacity of the natural world in sustaining human society, a view that will be refuted by the authors who will be featured in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

### Chapter 3: Reconsidering Nostalgia

As various critics have noted, a common preoccupation in Maritime literature has been the tension between what is commonly called a “golden” past and the transforming presence of modernism. In no time period is this conflict more apparent than in the literature appearing in the middle of the twentieth century. This chapter will examine four Maritime novels written during and shortly following World War II, Hugh MacLennan’s Barometer Rising, Ernest Buckler’s The Mountain and the Valley, Charles Bruce’s The Channel Shore, and Thomas Raddall’s The Nymph and the Lamp, discussing the way in which the relationship that these authors display with the natural world impacts this theme. Ian McKay has stated that Raddall, Bruce, MacLennan, and Buckler composed their fiction with the intention of explicitly promoting their anti-modernist agenda within Nova Scotian society; he notes that these writers “made glaring and obvious use of the idea of the Folk and expressed a strong concern for “the simple life” (216). McKay bases his analysis of the cultural production in these works on the notion that these authors completely reject technological progress, calling for an anti-modernist lifestyle in harmony with the natural world (223). His argument is extended by Erik Kristiansen, who also argues that these authors portray through their historical fiction an edenic rural life that has been destroyed by industrialisation.

While McKay's thesis holds a certain amount of truth, this chapter will demonstrate that his view of the treatment of nature in this literature does not account for the pragmatic perception of the role of nature that has been constructed within Maritime society. This chapter will utilise Leo Marx's view of pastoralism as an analytical framework through which the environmental sensibilities of MacLennan, Raddall, Bruce, and Buckler can be discerned<sup>3</sup>. Much like modern American writers, these authors temper the nostalgic condemnation of industrialisation in their fiction with an explicit realisation that such a lifestyle has been rendered impossible in the contemporary world. As a result, these works embody a reluctant acceptance of industrial development in the Maritimes.

### **Maritime Literature and Frye's Extremist View of Nature in "Canadian" Discourse**

Writing in response to Northrop Frye's argument in The Literary History of Canada that presents nature as either a menacing or delightful presence in Canadian literature, Keefer has offered an argument regarding the function of nature in Maritime writing that differs from the nationalist perspective and provides a degree of regional nuance. Keefer's contention is that Frye's vision of a cruel and indifferent climate succeeds for the areas of Canada west of the Maritimes, in part because of the manner in which that terrain remained largely unknown and unsettled well into the nineteenth century; however, this is ineffectual for the East Coast, a region that has been known to European



civilisation for a period considerably longer than the remainder of the country.

Keefer states:

Frye's notion of terror before Canadian nature seems to be inextricably bound up with his notion of frontier — that which marks the boundary between the seized, settled, and civilised, and the barbarous wastes beyond. And it is here, as we have previously seen, that the Maritimes is found wanting. For while Americans could choose either to embrace the wilderness beyond the Appalachians, or else ignore it by digging in the length of the Atlantic seaboard, Canadians, thanks to the scattered layout of the Maritime provinces, possessed no shield against the terrible unknown, but had resistlessly to sail into the jaws of the St. Lawrence. (64)

Keefer argues that ideas of terror and delight in the face of nature are not as forthright in relation to the literature of the Maritime region as they perhaps are with regard to other areas of Canada. It is her claim that the relationship between the inhabitants of the Maritimes and the natural world is one that is defined through pragmatism as opposed to ideology; the complex economic ties to the land maintained by this region's inhabitants have resulted in an ambivalent presentation of nature in its literature.

Keefer goes on to argue that nature has not been, as Frye would argue, a belligerent force, but has effectively been of assistance to Maritime society: "In Maritime literature, the natural world with its earthbound pattern of seasonal change and renewal, its ambivalent elemental forces of wind and water, its small-

scale and accessible landscapes, appears to exist in complementary relation to the human world” (70). Because the Maritimes is a region in which people continue to rely on the natural world as opposed to heavy industry for a living, this area has produced writing that has, in large part, embodied a recognition of the importance of its inhabitants’ relationship to their environment. Keefer rejects Frye’s “conceptual framework” and calls for evaluation of the natural world in literary texts to be based on a fluid understanding of social factors. She states:

In Maritime literature, for example, the complex emotional and economic ties of people to the land they farm or dig coal from, and the seas they fish, is a dominant feature . . . economic pressures and realities, not terror or delight in wilderness determine their relation to the natural world under their feet. (65)

The fact that Euro-Canadian culture has a relatively longer history in the Maritimes than in other portions of Canada provides support for Keefer’s claim that the idea of wilderness is less applicable to the literature of this region; because of the manner in which European settlement has become imbedded in the Maritimes, Keefer notes that “it is more sensible to speak of the region’s topography than its geography” (66). The cultural notion of nature in the Maritimes, then, is one that perceives the natural world not as a monolithic entity that must be feared, but as a necessary component of human society’s existence .

## Leo Marx: A Pastoral for the Twentieth Century

In order to understand the manner in which MacLennan, Raddall, Bruce, and Buckler perceive the environment in their writing, it is important that we consider the idea of the “pastoral” in relation to these works. The classical definition of pastoralism centred on the idea of urban poets who sought refuge from city life in a perfectly ordered countryside; pastoral writing has long celebrated the notion of the “ideal” as realised through nature and promoted the myth of the “golden age” that is associated with simplistic rural lifestyles (Abrams 202-3).

Leo Marx, however, has sought to extend this notion, arguing that the pastoral archetype is pervasive throughout American literature, and is symptomatic of a larger human consciousness. Marx argues that it is in pastoralism that authors have attempted to reconcile the conflict between civilisation and nature; however, modern literature does not simply pine nostalgic for an unattainable golden history, it also functions as a legitimate reaction to social problems that have been incurred for the sake of technological “progress”. Marx attempts to delineate a richer view of the pastoral; as Bryant notes, Marx demarcates two ways in which it functions; sentimental pastoralism encapsulates the blind want of “better days”, while literary or complex pastoralism simultaneously reveals a tentative celebration of the sentimental and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of its realisation (64). In The Quest of the Folk, McKay reads these texts as examples of sentimental pastoralism; however,

this section will argue that this characterisation does not succeed for these works, which thoughtfully seek to understand the conflict between progress and the traditional sensibility. As we will see, it is the latter definition of pastoralism that is most appropriate for the texts that will be discussed in this chapter.

Marx notes that the classical pastoral was grounded in the idea of redemption through nature and largely presented through the idea of the quest; characters would typically abandon the city in a search for purity, which was found in edenic representations of nature. Marx, however, goes on to state that pastoralism appears in a different form in contemporary American literature; he argues that the motif of quest has been replaced by that of disruption.

Contemporary pastoral literature embodies a presentation of idyllic nature being shattered by industrialisation, which appears in various mechanical forms; Marx uses the example of the writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne:

there is something arresting about this episode: the writer sitting in his green retreat dutifully attaching words to natural facts, trying to tap the subterranean flow of thought and feeling and then, suddenly, the startling shriek of the train whistle bearing in upon him, forcing him to acknowledge the existence of a reality alien to the pastoral dream. What begins as a conventional tribute to the pleasures of withdrawal from the world — a simple pleasure fantasy — is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind. (344)

As mentioned above, Marx treats the intrusion of the machine into the garden not simply as an aesthetic device, but also as indicative of a larger social comment being made by these writers. The pastoral in American literature has been shaped by the tradition of writers who spoke out against the ills of industrialisation in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in contemporary literature can be read as “a protest on behalf of the organic view of nature” (Whitehead, as cited by Marx 347).

The theory propagated by Marx is especially important when one considers the time period in which it was written; The Machine in the Garden was published in 1964, which shortly follows the composition of the works included in this chapter. A discussion of this analytical model is especially appropriate since, as David Mazel notes, it was composed in the time of “a rapidly industrialising America on the verge of developing an environmental sensibility” (342). It can be argued that the same holds true for Canadian society; as Kristiansen notes, the fiction of the authors under discussion is informed by what they see as the detrimental effects of industrialisation in the Maritimes: “They have witnessed modernity’s intrusions and lamented its effects. They reject urban modernity and much of what it stands for. Modernity has thrown the world into a state of chaos, driving us forward at an ever-accelerating speed of cultural, technological and social change” (225). As we will see, these novels are intimately aware of the manner in which industrialisation has affected the rural lifestyle of the Maritime region.

It is important to note that the analysis of the relationship between human society and nature in these novels does not end simply with a valorisation of the natural world and a condemnation of the industrialisation that threatens it. Marx notes that it is common in American literature for authors to celebrate the virtues of unsullied nature; however, modern writers will ultimately find that it is no longer possible in a world where the process of industrialisation has begun to infiltrate even rural regions. Marx notes that it is the thoughtful writers who will attempt to temper a celebration of the pastoral with a realisation that seeking such an ideal is essentially futile. These authors will arrive at a “middle landscape” (226); modern pastoral literature promotes an agenda that shuns industrial advance, but at the same time embodies an acceptance of the certainty of this development. As we will see, this framework provides the opportunity for a rich understanding of the way in which these writers promote their perceptions of the environment in an age in which the forces of industrialisation are too powerful to be stemmed<sup>4</sup>.

### **Nostalgia and the Condemnation of Technology's Presence in Nova Scotia**

While the word “nostalgia” carries the connotation of a simplistic yearning for better days, such a definition fails to consider the capacity for this inclination to be used in critically analysing the way in which society progresses. James Overton notes that the experience of nostalgia does not necessarily entail a denial of the future, but can actually be used as a “powerful creative force” (85), one that,

in the case of Atlantic Canada, often expresses a sophisticated analysis of modern cultural alienation (88). This observation is useful for the purposes of this chapter; as we will see, although McKay reads in these texts the unmediated promotion of a simple past, this writing reveals an attentive sense of historical progression and a sharp social commentary.

Each of these novels lends itself well to a discussion of the relationship between human society and the natural world. In addition to these works having been produced in a period in which the industrial strength of World War II was making its presence known in the rural regions of the Maritimes, the authors of these texts reveal within them their keen sense of history. The fiction of these writers is explicitly and pervasively concerned with the progression of time, and it is for this reason that a consideration of the idea of the pastoral is especially germane in this discussion.

The idea of historical progress is immediately addressed in the first pages of Barometer Rising. Upon his arrival in Halifax, Macrae acknowledges the work of the “The Great Glacier”, which “had once packed scraped and riven this whole land; it had gouged out the harbour and left as a legacy three drumlins . . . the hill on which he stood and two islands in the harbour itself” (4). He goes on to make reference to the fact that this glacial process has made life in this area possible: “the harbour is the reason for the town’s existence; it is all that matters in Halifax, for the place periodically sleeps between great wars. There had been a good many years since Napoleon, but now it was awake again” (5). A recognition of the

manner in which history and the processes of nature impact human society is present throughout the novel; the narrator frequently makes note of the importance of seasonal change and the role of the natural world in fostering the sustenance of civilisation.

In addition to the manner in which nature is celebrated in the novel, this text embodies a sharp condemnation of the way in which industrialisation has marred the rustic lifestyle of Nova Scotia. MacLennan realises this intrusion largely in aesthetic terms; however, as we will see, technology has also affected social relations within the world of this novel. For example, the narrator notes of Murray:

He preferred to remember Halifax as he had found it when he had first come here to college seven years ago and this had been the largest city he had ever seen. He liked to recall its English gardens in summer: the lazy and affable existence of its inhabitants who seemed to assume nothing they could do in peacetime could possibly matter to anyone; the way Halifax had of seeming not so much a town as a part of the general landscape; its chameleon-like power of identifying itself with the weather. (62)

The war and its resulting industrial influence in Halifax has transformed the city's relationship with its natural surroundings. That this novel is aligned with Marx's vision of the pastoral becomes clear when this memory of Halifax's beauty, invoked by the calm of Murray's surroundings, is suddenly interrupted by the introduction of disruptive modernity in the harbour:



The shipyard was flooded with sunshine and the air reverberated with the savage striking of the riveting machines, punctuated occasionally by a ringing clang of heavy metals knocking together. The outlines of the ship they were building were gaunt and uncouth in this merciless light, and the workmen moving about her looked so small it was hard to realize they were doing anything that mattered. (65)

It is interesting to note that the presence of heavy industry in the harbour affects the allure of the natural surroundings; for example, the sunshine is considered by the narrator to be “merciless” when mediated by the steel of shipbuilding. The narrator also provides insight into the manner in which this text derides the principles of industrialisation when he notes that it seemed that the men working on the boat were not accomplishing “anything that mattered”. There is an explicit attitude in these texts that condemns the fleeting aspects of technology and lauds the permanence of nature. The narrator extends the idea of the takeover of Halifax by the war complex when he contrasts Murray’s earlier memory of a Halifax at relative harmony with its natural surroundings with the present situation: “ [the] war had brought so many of these mongrel vessels to Halifax, they had become a part of the landscape” (22). This text provides a pervasive analysis of the way in which technology and industrialisation have become completely embedded in the once austere scenery of Halifax.

The Mountain and the Valley presents a complex conception of the natural world and its role in the community of Entremont; Buckler, more than the other

authors discussed in this chapter, is concerned with ideas of fate and time as opposed to the progression of history and the evolution of pastoral life in the Maritimes. The fact that this text exists primarily as a character study presents difficulties when attempting to deal with the idea of setting. However, it is through the relationship between the main character, David Canaan, and the natural world, that we can glean this text's perceptions of the environment. Throughout, David is presented as a series of contradictions; he is unable to excel in any aspect of his life; he essentially fails to utilise his considerable intellect and passionate desire to be an artist. David is the bridge between the traditional and the modern in this novel, and it is in his actions that we see the conflicted way in which Buckler presents his conception of the role of the natural world in human existence.

Throughout the early stages of the novel, David's happiness is, in large part, negotiated through his relationship with the natural world. His planned journey to the top of the mountain with Chris and his father is anticipated as an event he believes will effect his having achieved a sense of place within his family. The excursion is described as such:

Then something jumped in his heart the way water flashed right through your bare-free body when you took the first plunge into the Baptising Pool.

This was the very day!

This was the day his father had promised to take Chris and him fishing . . . today they'd walk on it, farther and farther into the deep, safe, unfathomable, magically-sleeping woods. (19)

As mentioned above, for David, this trip will be a great accomplishment; the importance of their visit to the mountain is accentuated by the narrator's description of it as a baptism. As we will see, David's identity is mediated throughout the novel largely by the way in which he interacts with nature. Throughout the novel, David finds solace in the natural world:

As far back as childhood, whenever anger had disheveled him, or confusion, or the tick, tick, tick of emptiness like he felt today, he had sought the log road that went to the top of the mountain. As he moved along this road, somewhere the twist of anger would loosen; a shaft of clarity would strike through the scud of confusion . . . He would take happiness there, to be alone with it. (13)

Alan Young sees Buckler's vision of the pastoral in this novel as completely realised. He notes that the text constructs "natural barriers, which are constantly referred to in the novel" and which "offer David a choice between the Valley and the world beyond" (220). David is provided with gifts that should enable him to escape the narrow world of Entremont, and it is in his conflicted negotiation of the rural and the urban that the tension of the novel is found.

This text's vision of the rural ideal is largely extended through the character of Joseph; his connection to the natural world is unyielding throughout the novel: "My land fits me loose and easy like my old clothes. That rick there is one my father rolled out, and my son's sons will look at these rocks I am rolling out today. Someone of my own name will always live in my house" (157). The novel

demonstrates throughout the way in which industrialisation and technology have intruded into this rural world; the narrator, for example, notes:

His neighbours had changed, as the village had changed. The road was paved now. There were cars and radios. A bus line passed the door. There was a railway line along the river. With this grafting from the outside world, the place itself seemed older; as the people who are not remembered are old.

And the people lost their wholeness, the valid stamp of the indigenous. . . and finally in themselves they became dilute. They were not transmuted from the imperfect thing into the real, but veined with the shaly amalgam of replica. (223)

Clearly, Buckler presents this story as a lament for a simpler past in which the community of Entremont is clearly defined and independent from the chaotic urban world. The novel details the way in which implements like cars and radios have in effect damaged the way of life of this community; as Young notes, Buckler's pastoral is conceived most fully as one that embodies a moral struggle. The Mountain and the Valley sees the encroachment of industrialisation as an ethical struggle; Buckler contrasts throughout the novel the idea of vapid urbanisation and its negative effects on a community such as Entremont.

The Channel Shore presents the pastoral sensibility of this time period in a more explicit manner than that which is found in the other three texts featured in this chapter. In this novel, Bruce constructs a detailed history of a small

community; his account sees the area through many changes in its inhabitants, their lifestyles, and the relationship between the Shore and the natural world. A celebration of the pastoral is present throughout this novel; nature is presented as a means by which the people of the Shore find not only their livelihood, but also their identity:

By then the Shore itself would be alive. Inland from the Head and the low ridge of beach the sunlight blew on hayfields patched with oats and the narrow strips of root crops, dull green on brown. Potatoes in drilled rows along the brows of hills were coming into blossom. On the branches of ancient apple trees where a seething foam of petals had bloomed and faded and vanished on the June wind, the tiny knobs of small hard fruit were forming, lost in a sea of leaves.

In this time now between planting and haying, from almost anywhere at Currie Head a man could see here and there a horse-drawn cultivator moving along side-hill turnip rows, smell the land and the smoky rumour of distant brush fires, hear the echo of an axe, a shout from house to barn, and the small far-off snarl and whine, down the road at Katen's Rocks, of Rod Sinclair's mill. (23)

Evident in this passage, which is taken from the first historical period of the text (1919), is the way in which the pace of life of the inhabitants of the Shore in the early twentieth century is defined through the processes of nature. Bruce presents a vision in which happiness of the individual and that of the community is realised

through a simple rural economy. The above vignette presents in the Shore's bygone days a view of nature as a provider of necessities; as we will see, the text contrasts this balance with the disruption of the rural economy that accompanies industrial development in the Shore.

Appropriate for the lilting way in which Bruce presents this gradual history, the intrusion of the machine into the Shore takes place slowly over time; there are few instances in which the signs of modern progress abruptly destroy idyllic scenes. Instead of the sudden appearance of the machine in the garden, we are provided with the detailed history of the process by which technology becomes embedded in this community. For example, Grant proposes throughout the novel ways in which he can transform the agrarian practices of the Shore into modern enterprises; his methods, however, are treated with uncertainty by the town's inhabitants:

Throughout the afternoon Grant tried to convince himself that it was all right. They talked naturally of common things as they chopped and trimmed in their stretch of timber between the Channel and the far-off railway. But not about Grant's mill and not about Halifax or the future. Something about it was unnatural. Something about it was artificial and strained. (218)

In this novel, the advent of industrialisation in the rural community of which Bruce writes is fashioned as a force that destroys not only the traditional way of life, but also the rich idea of kinship as realised through a shared responsibility for

the land, a relationship to which the narrator refers as “the companionship of work” (201). The virtue of hard work in the fields is praised throughout the novel:

In the last three weeks they had finished making the oats, picked apples, put down a new hewn-pole floor in the cow stable, ploughed a stretch of ground in the shadow of the woods behind the house. The thing Grant had noticed from the first was that if the plough-point caught in a boulder, Stewart would go at that rock with his hands. If a sleeper needed shifting he would strain at the heavy timber without waiting for help. He had never learned to work the easy way . . . Grant walked behind the cart and watched Stewart’s bent back and marveled again at the older man’s serenity. The flesh might be shaken, but within a circle of work and space and time that was drawn round the present, the mind was clear and calm. It was only in idleness, while he sat unoccupied in shop or kitchen, that the puzzlement appeared . . . (140)

As the history of the Shore progresses, it becomes clear that the new methods of agricultural development, the “diesel outfit” in the farms, and the large-scale mill, quickly make the work ethic of people like Stewart obsolete. Bruce also makes explicit throughout the novel the fact that the social aspect of work becomes lost as industrialisation makes its way into the Shore; for example, the evils of “idleness” of which Grant makes note above are realised:

Grant came through the open shop door and stood for a moment in the yard, brushing his hands. He had just dismantled the raker; haying was finished

for another year. . . . He and Alan or he and the Grahams had always made Josie's hay. Now Anse was supposed to be looking after the place but he hadn't started haymaking or even mentioned it. A small thing, perhaps; there was plenty of time, but Grant felt the need of getting it settled. If he were going to have to work in the hayfield with Anse he wanted to get it done with. Small things, like unmade hay, were what people noticed and talked about. (358)

The Channel Shore embodies throughout a conflict between tradition and progress. Bruce demonstrates the manner in which even meagre amounts of technological advance disrupt not only the landscape in towns such as the Shore, but also the way in which this process affects social relationships. Where haymaking was once a communal event in which each member of the town assisted the other in the manufacture of this resource, the advent of the mechanical raker has manifested a disconnect between the community and their shared landscape. Bruce very specifically makes note of the way in which the traditional practice of farming has been altered; by relying solely on Anse to harvest Josie's hay, the Shore has departed from the conventional way in which the farming community operated.

Raddall's The Nymph and the Lamp displays what is perhaps the most complicated relationship between human society and the natural world of the four novels included in this discussion. The text makes use primarily of three settings; the city of Halifax, the desolate island of Marina, and the fertile orchard that is the



Annapolis Valley. These settings are contrasted to varying degrees by Raddall, and it is in his treatment of each that this text's ideological perception of nature can best be discerned.

Raddall guides the reader's eye to the evils of Marina from the opening pages of the text. Throughout the novel, Marina is presented as a place inhospitable to natural life; it is, essentially, an island of lost souls that has been forgotten by the rest of the world. We are immediately told that Marina is a "barren landscape" (24) and that "God may make the trees, but the Devil made Marina — and he writes the rules out there" (30-31). Marina is presented as a desolate wasteland that destroys the human spirit, one where inhabitants are completely vulnerable to the will of nature. The dangers that the wilderness poses are amplified on Marina; the onslaught of winter acts as a jail for its people, and they are surrounded by a sea that not only makes them completely insignificant in its shadow, but also reminds them that:

The people of the North Atlantic coasts and islands, where the wind is strong and the waters cold, have no illusions about the sea. It is their enemy. Their lives are fixed in its grasp, they must battle for an existence, each day's survival is a little victory; but like all wars their struggle is in great part a monotony, an eternal waiting for tides to rise, for storms to subside. (153)

Clearly, the full force of the natural world is felt by the inhabitants of Marina; those people who dwell on the island do so at the mercy of the elements, and their lives are governed by this force.

Raddall explicitly contrasts the setting of Marina with that of the lush valley; the view of nature that is revealed in Isabel's encounters with Kingsbridge is much closer to the ideal setting promoted by Bruce in his history of the Shore. Kingsbridge is presented as being "on the road to Paradise" (254), and a community that, like Marina, lives in accordance with the processes of nature, but in a gentle, as opposed to violent, manner:

In winter Kingsbridge went into hibernation like the bears on the mountainside. The townsfolk stayed close to their comfortable homes, stoking fires and stoves and furnaces with chunks of hardwood cut on the wooded sides of the valley. Those who owned motorcars stored them away in a shed when the fall rains turned the valley roads to red mud, and there they stayed, jacked up on blocks to save strain on the tyres, until the following April, when the frost had come out of the roads and the spring mud had begun to dry. (242)

Raddall fuses this novel with an explicit celebration of the rural lifestyle; as we will see, this is complemented by a distrust of the process of technological advance. Isabel subsequently chooses life on Marina over the pastoral setting of Kingsbridge for reasons that will be discussed in detail below.

Raddall, like the other authors discussed in this chapter, also makes note of the degree to which the imposition of technology in such communities disrupts the lifestyles of his characters. Isabel's first sojourn in Marina is plagued by the presence of the wireless machine on the island, which preempts any attempt at calm rest:

She did not reply. How could anyone sleep, even exist, with this erratic uproar shattering the silence of the station and of all the dunes within half a mile? And when she thought of days, weeks, months of it, she wondered how any of them kept from going mad. She was glad when Matthew led her outside and they passed along the plank wall to his own apartment at the east side. (108)

This passage is particularly interesting when one considers that Isabel has come from the city to Marina; her background suggests that she would be accustomed to the sounds that accompany life in modern society. This accentuates the manner in which the pastoral operates in the text; the calm of the isolated scenery of Marina is destroyed by the sudden intrusion of a machine such as the wireless transmitter. The Nymph and the Lamp also embodies an ominous realisation that Marina's place in the oceanic community is about to be lost. While the predecessors of Carney and Skane were heroes of the North Atlantic who assisted in countless rescue missions, it is clear that the advent of technology and the end of the age of sail will make these men the last generation of watch keepers on the island.

Matthew notes:

“Of course we don’t get many wrecks nowadays. A fishing schooner from time to time, and once in three or four years a steamer off its course in thick weather. Fact is, the day of sail is past. Those ships you see on the map were windjammers mostly, caught on a lee shore and unable to claw off. Steamers can get out of trouble when they see the breakers; and anyhow nowadays when a skipper’s in doubt he can get his bearings by radio from the new DF stations on the main. What with that, and the improved depth-sounding gear, and of course the island lighthouses and wireless station, Marina’s lost its old meaning all together.” (110)

Throughout the novel, the conflict between the traditional lifestyle of Marina and the procession of technology is as palpable as is the fact that Marina is destined to lose this confrontation. Raddall uses the motif of the intrusion to demonstrate the manner in which the encroachment of modern society has spelled the end of Marina’s significance, and ultimately its existence as a community.

### **Conflict Between Nostalgia and Reality: The Middle Landscape**

It is important to recognise that the pastoral literature of which Marx speaks does not advocate a full acceptance of the notion of the ideal as realised through an encounter with the purity of nature. As mentioned above, Marx instead argues that it is possible for writers to achieve what he calls a “middle landscape” (226), which exists somewhere between the raw natural world and the ordered influence of civilisation:

In this sentimental guise the pastoral ideal remained of service long after the machine's appearance in the landscape. It enabled the nation to continue defining its purpose as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth, and power. It remained for our serious writers to discover the meaning inherent in the contradiction. (226)

Marx recognises the fact that there are positive developments that have occurred as a result of technological advance, and he states that it is writers who are concerned with the complex pastoral who will grapple with the irony of reconciling the ideal with the inevitable. As we will see, the writers that are discussed in this chapter embody Marx's attitude of pragmatism; in these texts we see both reverence for the traditional as well a promotion of the benefits of progress. The authors who have been the focus of this chapter exhibit in their work an indictment of the manner in which industrialisation has destroyed not only the physical landscape of the settings of which they write, but, in many cases, also the social and economic relationships of the characters in the novels. However, contrary to the position of Erik Kristiansen and other critics, these authors eventually accept the march of technology as an inevitable function of history, and pragmatically accept the benefits of this process.

In Barometer Rising, despite his distaste for the manner in which the war has wrought the Halifax landscape, Murray does find virtue in some aspects of industrial advance. For example, the presence of the *Olympic* in Halifax harbour is a welcome sight which is not only, unlike other ships, aesthetically pleasing, but

also a symbol that unites the whole community. This ship is beautiful in the eyes of the community:

A dark green dory, heavy with many years' accumulation of oil and brine and dirt, glided out from a nearby wharf. A longshoreman was sitting on its gunwale sculling over the stern with a long, flat oar, while another sat astride the central thwart as if it were a saddle. They were staring up at the *Olympic*. . . . "When I hear about the Germans getting some of them tubs been coming in here lately it don't make much of a difference, I says. But I'd feel pretty bad if I heard they got this one. She's sort of part of the place, you might say. I'd miss seeing her around. She ought to be convoyed through. One of these days they're going to get her." (64-5)

The novel's most explicit revelation of its acceptance of the advent of technology, however, is in its advocacy of the railway that has spanned the country. Following Macrae's extended description of the landscapes one can see on a transnational journey, he notes: "The railway line, that tenuous thread which bound Canada to both great oceans and made her a nation, lay with one end in the darkness of Nova Scotia and the other in the flush of a British Columbia noon" (101). In this passage, MacLennan blends a harmonious conception of the passage of time with a combination of the seemingly contrary elements of technology and nature. It is interesting to note that Marx also uses the idea of the railway in demonstrating the way in which pastoralism operates; he argues the railway is a means by which technology and the pastoral goal of "finding nature" can be merged. Instead of

speaking of the way in which the railway is destructive to the beauty of the natural world, Macrae makes note of the fact that such progress allows people to experience landscapes which were once considered unattainable and connects the opposite sides of the continent to one another.

The most rigorous debate surrounding The Mountain and the Valley concerns the idea of “success” as it relates to the life of David Canaan. While critics have traditionally seen the life of David as ending in a spiritual fulfillment and a realisation of his gifts as an artist, this view has subsequently been challenged as simplistic; contemporary critics read the text as an “ironic narrative depicting a fallen world” (Creelman Setting 86). This analysis centres on the failures of David throughout the novel, and, as we will see, his inability to find identity, as an artist or as a person. Although Creelman notes that the most important aspect of the novel is its fusion of nostalgia and conservatism, which results in a celebration of a traditional lifestyle as well as conventional notions of social roles, he claims that the novel also embodies “a remarkably sensitive internalized exploration of the modernist condition through the character of David” (Setting 97). This thesis argues that the text explicitly condemns David for his inability to exist within a rapidly changing world. David fails to find a balance, and the text clearly judges him harshly, as Keefer claims, for “repudiating his artists’ vocation, precisely because he has chosen to stay in his parents’ world and to live as they had done’ (225). Steve’s disjointed description of David makes note of the conflict that the main character of the text feels in this environment: “Smart

bugger. Smart as hell. God, that thing could spell in school . . . And figures . . . And books . . . Funny it never got him anywheres. Nothin stuck up about him, though” (284). Creelman notes that it is in the ironic fact that David’s intelligence, which served him no purpose in terms of escaping the narrowly defined sensibilities of Entremont also presented to him great difficulty in attempting to be a member of that community:

The central tension between the conservative desire to return to the past and the modernist recognition that such a return to a time of meaningfulness is necessarily doomed locates *The Mountain and the Valley* in the very vortex of the cultural transformations sweeping the Maritimes in the 1940s and 1950s. As Buckler watches his beloved traditional lifestyle disappear around him, he writes in protest against the forces of destruction and launches his strained quest to return to a bygone age. But at the same time Buckler recognises that destruction is irreversible, and in the end he must explore how new voices will exist in the wasteland. (Setting 103)

This novel consistently demonstrates the manner in which Buckler accepts as inevitable society’s progression from an intense need for a connection to unmediated nature to a world in which the extensions of humanity temper this relationship; David states:

When the wood boxes were full and the water in and you knew no one would have to go outdoors anymore, the storm mourned, more lost than ever, at the pane . . . . The wind was still cold and lost outside, but the



lamplight and the wood warmth, and the slow-cosy talk melted them all together. And with this the latest he's ever stayed up in his whole life (the tree was still awake and shining), there had never been anything like it. (75)

Buckler complements his nostalgia for the simple lifestyle enjoyed in the past with an explicit acceptance of the process by which this has become outmoded.

Joseph's anti-modern ruggedness is contrasted with portraits of the way in which modern living has shielded human society from the harsh in nature; the comfortable scene described above is made possible by a dependence on the implements of civilisation.

Although critics have traditionally based their analysis of The Channel Shore on the idea that Bruce expressly and deeply derides all forms of capitalism in the novel, it can be argued that this is not entirely the case. While Kristiansen's analysis of this novel centres on the idea that Bruce decries the advent of industrial development in the novel, even he admits that Bruce presents "the budding capitalist, Grant Marshall, in so favorable a light that any critique of urban capitalism is countered by a voice favouring some rural capitalist development" (234). Throughout the text, it is characters who are able to successfully fuse the traditional with the technological who are celebrated; although Grant Marshall's mill is at first met with skepticism, it is subsequently presented as a successful entrepreneurial venture that takes advantage of the advance of industry at the Shore.

In addition to the way in which the text promotes the positive economic developments that take place as a result of technological advance in the Shore, the novel also presents a favorable view of symbols of modernity as its history progresses. The appearance of the automobile in the Shore, a sight that becomes more common as the novel progresses, is spoken of in appreciative terms:

They were growing up, these, in a generation in which swift travel was the usual thing. Travel by truck and car, up and down the road, to Copeland or The Harbour — journeys that thirty years ago, before the Model-T had altered living, would have been unusual — such travel was no longer novel now. (380)

While the automobile has “altered living” at the Shore, it has done so in a way that is advantageous. Although one would assume that the noise and dirt of the swift-travelling car would be denigrated by Bruce for its destruction of the rural landscape and lifestyle, the novel effectively celebrates its appearance in this setting. Indeed, despite his inclination for nostalgia, Bruce presents the advent of industrialisation on the Shore as natural and simply a new chapter in its history:

And yet, people remembered. And people still lived on the Channel Shore, people with other skills, newer crafts, that somehow were related to and grew from the old. The story of the Shore was the story of a strange fertility. A fertility of flesh and blood that sent its seed blowing across continents of space on the winds of time, and yet was rooted here in home soil, renewed and re-renewed. (353)

It is in this statement that we see the manner in which the progression of technology and its appearance within the rural setting to which Bruce is dedicated is accepted, if not wholeheartedly celebrated as a natural development in this community. The pervasive historical analysis of this text makes this analysis of the pastoral explicit.

The Nymph and the Lamp provides the reader with a similar, yet more explicit, acceptance of industrialisation. While Isabel is given a choice between two settings; the edenic village of Kingsbridge that stands in stark contrast to the cold and unforgiving terrain of Marina, she wholeheartedly opts, at the close of the novel, for the desolate island. As mentioned above, this is indicative of the degree to which there is economic and emotional freedom for her on Marina; however, it is important that we critically examine this decision. While one might logically assume that Isabel's choice of Marina reveals her intense need for wilderness that parallels that of the ponies of the island who are "tamed" and killed by the mainland (158), this chapter argues that the opposite is true. While Marina is a place in which the natural world is found in its purest state, the island's community ironically exists only because of the presence of technology. Raddall contrasts the "golden harvest" (228) of Kingsbridge with the environment of Marina, which is described consistently as having no capacity to sustain its inhabitants:

The white skin of the dunes gave Marina the illusion of an Arctic landscape, a range of snowhills sunk to their shoulders in the sea, and by

contrast made the lagoon a pool of ink; between the black sheet of the lagoon and the heaving grey mass of the ocean itself the south bar made a thin white stroke like a path of virtue through besetting sins. None of this lasted further than the first hard blow, for then the familiar sand-devils rose and danced above the dune peaks and swept in clouds along the island, burying all that purity within an hour. (144)

It is in this paradox that we find the most accurate revelation of this novel's treatment of the natural world. Isabel chooses to flee a place where people live in a harmonious balance with their surroundings, to spend the remainder of her life in a destructively "unnatural" setting. Marina can exist only through a reliance on industrial technology; this comes in the form of the wireless station, regular visits from the *Lord Elgin*, and strongly fortified dwellings appropriate for survival of Marina's harsh winter climate.

Although, as Keefer notes, Marina "seems to fit the hostile wilderness paradigm" (75), we must recognise that this place, in fact, exists in the novel as an anti-nature, in which a life in harmony with one's natural surroundings is impossible. This novel is acutely aware of the way in which technological change will prevail in the region; *The Nymph and the Lamp* presents an acceptance of the inevitability of changes in lifestyle that accompany this transformation. Keefer is incorrect in stating that Isabel "embrace[s] . . . the spirit of pure wilderness" (78) in choosing a life on Marina. Isabel effectively finds freedom in the machine; her life on the liberating island of Marina is made possible completely by modern

technology. This fact is made clear by the manner in which she finds solace from her isolation on Marina in learning the craft of wireless transmission. Creelman also sees in Isabel's actions Raddall's explicit comment that his nostalgic vision is essentially futile:

This overdetermined attack on virtually every aspect of twentieth-century life is symptomatic of the narrator's anxious realization that the traditional vision constructed around Isabel and Matthew may not survive in the face of the many changes sweeping the Maritimes. (Setting 62)

This idea is accentuated by Isabel's proclamation that she will be a "lamp for Carney" (310), which amplifies the notion of their reliance on and need for survival through modern technology. It is interesting also to point out that despite the way in which the novel provides melancholy allusions to the end of life in Marina, we can see in this element of the plot another benefit of the rise of technology. While it is unfortunate that advances in navigation equipment are making the lives of the people of Marina obsolete, this process is actually tangible evidence of the positive way in which industrialisation has affected the Maritimes; the fact that Marina will no longer be the "graveyard of the Atlantic" is an excellent development for human society.

Although it is not often the case, Ian McKay's thesis in Quest of the Folk can be read as a pragmatic analysis of the advent of technological change in Nova Scotia. While the end of the first World War constituted the beginning of an era of

prosperity for much of North America, the Maritimes, because of a systematic process of deindustrialisation, did not share in the spoils of the roaring 1920s<sup>5</sup>. The trend of nostalgia of which McKay speaks is indicative of the degree to which the population of this region became disillusioned with modernism, and it is therefore of little surprise that such cultural production found fertile ground in Nova Scotia. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, literature written following World War II promotes a nuanced as opposed to rigidly ideological conception of industrial advance in the region; the novels discussed in this chapter at the same time denounce and accept as inevitable technological incursion in the rural areas of which they speak. As the force of industrialism becomes a stronger presence in an area like Nova Scotia, it is important that we better understand the ways in which a need for a connection to nature and the force of civilisation's progress can be reconciled. The acute sense of history displayed by these writers provides an effective manner in which this can be at least partially achieved; the novels included in this discussion seek to maintain a clear comprehension of the way in which the past impacts the present. Also, as mentioned above, these texts appear in a long tradition of literature that fashions a social comment regarding a need for society to consider critically that which constitutes true progress in society. These writers speak explicitly of the way in which the lifestyle and the landscape of the Maritimes is threatened by the advent of technological advance in this region, and attempt to negotiate the inclination for preservation of the traditional with the arrival of modernism.

## Chapter 4: Contemporary Maritime Literature Defending the Landscape

As has been discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, Maritime writers adopted a highly ambivalent attitude concerning industrial development in the Maritimes in the middle of the twentieth century, expressing through their fiction a fear of the potential for technological advance to disrupt the lifestyle of this region. As we will see, these fears were well-founded; this chapter will demonstrate that industrial development has negatively impacted the Maritimes and that the environmental effects of technological advance are reflected in contemporary literary discourse. Maritime writers who appear in the mid-twentieth century offer an analysis of the progression of technology and the subsequent destruction of the landscape that accompanies this process that aligns such development with the loss of a balanced rural lifestyle. We see in contemporary works, however, an acute awareness of the manner in which the very existence of human society is threatened by its inability to stem the tide of environmental degradation. It is a common theme in Maritime literary criticism that the writers of this region provide a voice for a population that is largely inarticulate; this chapter will demonstrate the manner in which these texts are written, in much the same way, on behalf of a silent landscape. This chapter will evaluate four contemporary Maritime texts, The Lost Salt Gift of Blood by Alistair MacLeod, Road to the Stilt House by David Adams Richards, Like This by Leo McKay, and Heave by Christy Ann Conlin, demonstrating the way in which each embodies a struggle for

the realisation of a closer relationship between human society and the natural world.

### **Nature as Innocent Bystander**

As mentioned in the first chapter, Western society has largely ignored the interests of the environment; it has framed its discourse to include only privileged speakers, a group that, in our anthro-centric attitude, excludes the natural world. As Manes notes: “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” (15). Manes goes on to assert that modern criticism is charged with the responsibility of remedying this flaw:

As a consequence, we require a viable environmental ethics to confront the silence of nature in our contemporary regime of thought, for it is within this vast, eerie silence that surrounds our garrulous human subjectivity that an ethics of exploitation regarding nature has taken shape and flourished, producing the ecological crisis that now requires the search for an environmental counterethics. (16)

Manes’ conclusions are germane to examine within the context of contemporary Maritime literature. As has been extensively noted by the critics, as well as alluded to above, Maritime literary expression has, at least in the last century of its existence, served as a means by which the interests of a politically inarticulate population have been represented. As this chapter will demonstrate, the landscape



appears, in the contemporary writing of this region, as a silent character whose redemptive power is beautifully illustrated and rights rigorously defended. Keefer notes that MacLeod functions “as much as translator as teller” (183) of the stories of the people of this region. She goes on to argue that the “biblical” prose of which The Lost Salt Gift of Blood is comprised lends permanence to his account; it is interesting to note that she chooses his description of the fisherman’s body being discovered, one that affirms the cyclical presence of the natural world in this fiction, to demonstrate the “timeless” qualities of this text.

The communities of the texts included in this discussion are dependent on the landscape in a manner that is unknown to residents of metropolitan centres. Kerridge is correct in stating that “environmental concerns come and go in the public consciousness, at least in affluent countries” (2). Although the Maritimes can be found in a country which Kerridge labels as affluent, as this chapter will demonstrate, the inhabitants of these texts do not belong to the economically privileged class of Canada that is able to conceptualise the environment as an intangible entity. The pollution and devastation that has been the byproduct of the industrialisation and subsequent underdevelopment of the Maritimes affects the people of the region in a very concrete manner, one that can be clearly discerned in the final texts of our discussion.

## **The End of Heavy Industry in the Maritimes**

At the middle of the twentieth century, industrial development promised, for many areas in North America, an era of prosperity and advance. While writers such as Bruce and Buckler had cause to be suspicious of many of the ways in which industrialisation was transforming the lives of the people in this region, they had no basis for understanding the disastrous effects that this development and its abrupt end would exact on the landscape and the way of life of the people of which they wrote. While traditional scholarship surrounding the Maritime region has attributed the economic disparity of this area to a decline in importance of the staples industry in Canada as well as a perceived “conservatism” among the people of this peripheral region, it has been demonstrated in recent revisionist texts that the Maritime provinces experienced a period of deindustrialisation that has effected the loss of virtually all heavy industry and manufacturing in the area (Clow 25). Forbes has shown that the Maritime Provinces, in spite of popular historical belief, indeed experienced an Industrial Revolution; a period of underdevelopment in the region in the early twentieth Century, however, spelled the end of prosperity for this area of the country. Clow argues that this took place for a host of reasons; the turmoil in World markets that accompanied World War I precipitated a sharp decline in the region’s resource-based industries, and the strength of central Canadian businesses over federal economic policies as well as the political wealth of that region led to a deindustrialisation of the Maritimes (24).

Murphy has shown that as farming in the region has progressed from subsistence operations to agribusiness, the ramifications for both the natural environment and the people of the Maritimes have been dire. In addition to a system that has demanded, for example, that potato farmers assume all risks and enjoy little or no profit in entering contracts with large concerns such as the McCain Produce Corporation, the shift to intensive production methods has been very detrimental to the terrain of this region (25-26). As farmers have begun to specialise their crop output, they have been compelled to use greater amounts of fertilisers and sprays that have polluted the air and soil as well as mechanical planting and harvesting implements that have destroyed the soil and transformed the rough landscape into flat terrain that is easily accessible (28).

Forbes has maintained that the influence of Central Canada in the trade policies of this country led to an increase in the freight rates for the Maritime region from 140% to 216% in the early decades of the twentieth century. Although a rail system with a fair rate structure was a key promise in effecting the Maritime Provinces' agreement in participating in Confederation, consolidation of the railways and a rise in the political influence of the West caused the federal government to seek "competitive balance" in their transportation policy, with an eye to maximising the profitability of the rail system (114). The restructuring of freight charges effectively dismantled the Maritime economy. The consequences of this shift in transportation policy had ramifications for this region that were two-fold: in addition to its having brought about the virtual disappearance of

established manufacturing operations and heavy industry, Forbes also notes that the freight-rate changes “permanently discouraged the location within the region of new industry dependent on markets elsewhere in the country” (125). It is evident that this policy led to the decline of heavy industry in the region, and has fostered a history of underdevelopment in the region.

Michael Earle notes that while the wealth of coal deposits in Nova Scotia caused that industry to play a major role in the region’s economy in the Nineteenth Century, the perceived promise of continued growth in this sector has not been experienced for several reasons. Earle argues that the monopoly enjoyed by the General Mining Association (GMA) over this resource in the nineteenth century was highly detrimental; the GMA developed only certain areas and prevented other companies from investing in this important resource (59). As noted above, federal policies essentially spelled the end of the importance of the coal industry in Nova Scotia in the 20th Century, and coal mining slowly declined in the region in the decades following World War I. The deindustrialisation of the Maritimes has, in effect, brought about the complete loss of the coal industry’s employment power in Nova Scotia, and the effects of this can be clearly seen in economically broken and polluted coal mining communities throughout the Maritimes (Earle 75).

The great irony for the people of this region is that industrialisation stopped as quickly as it started in the Maritimes, leaving the area with no benefits of

development, but all of the environmental drawbacks. It is for this reason that modern Maritime literature embodies a struggle for conservation.

### **Stressing the Role of the Natural World in the Sustenance of Human Society**

As noted in the preceding chapter, the Maritime writers of the mid-twentieth century embodied in their fiction a distrust and eventual acceptance of the progression of technology in the region. While the thrust of the objection of these writers arose from their lament for a lifestyle that they regarded as being lost at the expense of industrial advance, contemporary authors have formalised this complaint in ecological terms, demonstrating the way in which the very existence of human society is placed at risk by such development. While writers like Bruce and Raddall speak of the evils of industrialisation with the objective of preserving a traditional way of life in Nova Scotia, the authors featured in this chapter reveal in their fiction an acute sense of the impact that technological advance has had on human life in the Maritime region. This writing deeply embodies a struggle for conservation that is prompted by the realisation that human society is faced with unprecedented environmental destruction.

Contemporary Maritime writing has been concerned, in a very literal way, with the ramifications of living in a region in which industrialisation has left nothing but its consequences; these appear in the form of toxic blemishes on a once beautiful landscape, communities ravaged by out-migration, and the health hazards that must be negotiated by the people who remain. Throughout this literature, symbols of the hardships of industrial life are constant reminders of the

legacy that technological advance has posited on this region. In “In the Fall”, the beautiful rural scenery of which MacLeod writes is tainted by the presence of pollution:

It is hard to realise that this is the same ocean that is the crystal blue of summer when only the thin oil-slicks left by the fishing boats or the startling whiteness of the riding seagulls mar its azure sameness. Now it is roiled and angry, and almost anguished; hurling up the brown dirty balls of scudding foam, the sticks of pulpwood from some lonely freighter, the caps of unknown men, buoys from mangled fishing nets and the inevitable bottles that contain no messages. And always also the shreds of blackened and stringy seaweed that it has been ripped and torn from its own lower regions, as if this is the season for self-mutilation — the pulling out of the secret, private, unseen hair. (99)

MacLeod is explicit in his description of the way in which the coast of Nova Scotia has been destroyed by side effects of technology. This novel demonstrates throughout the consequences of allowing industrialisation to remain unchecked.

As Creelman notes, a pervasive theme in this collection, and one that is present in each of the texts included in this chapter, is that of “scarred bodies show[ing] visible signs of the world’s power” (80) and the destructive force of industrial labour. In “The Vastness of the Dark”, the dangers of human society’s reliance on industrialisation is made clear. James is struck by the sight of his

grandfather, who is a “mine-mutilated old man” (30) and offers this description of the way in which a life in the mines has crippled his father:

But now my father does not do such things with his younger children even as he no longer works. And he is older and greyer and apart from the missing fingers on his right hand, there is a scar from the broken bit that runs from his hairline and runs like violent lightning down the right side of his face and at night I can hear him coughing and wheezing from the rock dust on his lungs. And perhaps that coughing means that because he has worked in bad mines with bad air these last few years he will not live so very much longer. And perhaps my brothers and sisters across the hall will never hear him, when they are eighteen, rattling the stove-lids as I do now.

(34)

Throughout the collection, MacLeod describes the manner in which industrialisation has wrought physical disaster on the members of the communities of which he writes. In addition to the direct human impact of such development, this novel also embodies a clear condemnation of the way in which the natural world has been marred by technological advance:

For today I will leave this grimy Cape Breton coal-mining town whose prisoner I have been all my life. And I have decided that almost any place must be better than this one with its worn-out mines and smoke-black houses; and the feeling has been building within me for the last few years.

(33)

However, despite James' negative description of the way in which the mine has affected both members of his family as well as the community in which he has grown up, the real tragedy of coal's saga in Cape Breton is not the pain it has inflicted, but the fact that the next generation will be unable to experience it. Despite the aversion to the mine that he felt on his first trip underground, James soon realises that his grandfather's description is true:

“Once you start, it takes hold of you, once you drink underground water, you will always come back to drink some more. The water gets in your blood. It is in all of our blood. We have been working in the mines here since 1873.” (35)

In spite of his decided distaste for the impact that the coal-mining industry has had on his community, James is compelled to move to other parts of the country in order to find work underground. As mentioned above, these authors show a keen awareness of the manner in which industrialisation has been a largely belligerent force in the Maritimes. Despite the fact that the negative byproducts of development have been inflicted on human society as well as the natural world, the region is unable to reap the benefits of progress and young people such as James are forced to relocate to places like Blind River.

Leo McKay's collection of short stories, Like This also focuses on the quality of life that is found in the post-industrial Maritimes. Like MacLeod, McKay chooses to draw attention to the physical malaise that has been wrought on his characters by work in factories and mines. When Cliffy makes the decision to



leave school, his father's argument comes in the form of a demonstration of the realities of a life spent in the Car Works:

"Look, you little son-of-a-whore," he says. "Look!"

When I look up again, he says something. He says, "You tell me if you want to end up like this."

He holds his hands out from his sides. I look at his bad hand. The one that's only a thumb. The one that got sheared off in a big set of metal shears at work ten years ago. With a hand like that, you hold it out, a person thinks that's what you're talking about. But he just looks at me. (25)

McKay also makes reference to the debilitating effects of black lung: "He took the thing and blew into it. He blew into it some more. It's a good thing he isn't a miner. Daddy couldn't have blown that thing up supposing he tried all day" (32).

For these authors, the effects that environmental destruction has had on the communities of which they write extend beyond the blemishes that have been imposed on the landscape; these works present the human consequences of industrial development in the Maritimes, demonstrating the manner in which the health of their characters has been compromised.

A similar theme persists also in Road to the Stilt House. As is the case with much of his fiction, in this novel, Richards depicts a rural community that is in the process of decay at the hands of external influences; the government and corporate community have, from their urban power centres, systematically abused the inhabitants and, most notably, for the purposes of this discussion, the landscape of

this community. The oppression of the people in small-town New Brunswick and that of the landscape is intimately linked in the novel. Arnold and his fellow citizens are convinced by the government that the construction of a prison in their backyard is taking place in order for employment to be injected in the depressed area; however, it quickly becomes clear that this is not the case. In fact, the prison finds its home in this community because “no-one else in the entire country wanted it — and made sure they didn’t get it” (33). The process of building the prison wreaks complete havoc on the beautiful landscape; it destroys the community’s hill, gouging the soil and removing its trees. As the novel progresses, the prison becomes a constant reminder of the violence that is associated with the manner in which the people and the landscape of this community have been oppressed: “The prison now and then reared its cold head above the trees far off” (76). The prison becomes the dominant part of the landscape of this community; the sight of its brutal structure replaces that of a picturesque rolling hill covered by forest.

Instances in which development are attempted in the community are also telling of the ideological stance taken by this novel with regard to protection of the environment. The construction of a commercial road in the backwoods is heralded by the government as a means by which industry will thrive in the region; however, this project once again serves only to destroy the landscape and fails to fulfill the promise made to the community:

Heat rises off the road. It rises near us in the morning, so you can fry an egg on it, and settles like a vapour in the evening with the birds. It's a road in the back end of our province, tattooed and broken. They said they were going to make it larger, and there'd be a lot of commercial enterprise on it, and that it would be opened up to all sorts of things. They have even ploughed back some gravel a little — but they haven't done anything else. So the road looks like a grey snakeskin that follows the shale and the ditches, and the trees scarred and fallen over. (9)

Coping with a lack of useable roads is a way of life in the rural Maritimes; in this case, the construction of this route serves only to destroy the landscape, as the government's lack of attention to this project makes it completely worthless. It is important that we note the death imagery used by Richards to discuss the process by which the natural world has been overtaken in the interests of "economic development". Describing the road as a "grey snakeskin" emphasises the notion that the previous beauty of this backwoods scene has been discarded for the futile purposes of potential economic gain. Instances such as this in the novel demonstrate a larger comment on the nature of commercial enterprise, particularly that which requires the destruction of nature. The image of the road as an empty molt suggests that the values of the commercially driven world are flawed; adherence to these principles is both futile and short-sighted, as they will inevitably prove unsuccessful.

In Heave, we are given a sophisticated and pervasively realised portrait of the manner in which human society's destruction of the environment has impacted the quality of life in the Maritime region. Throughout the text, characters, for good or bad, are defined through comparison with the natural world, both by the people around them and the narrator. When Elizabeth discovers that Reggie is dishonest and unfaithful, she and Serrie immediately align their evaluation of him with decay in the natural world:

“Serrie, I always knew you were, you know, not exactly thrilled about life, you know, not in the way Dearie is, not all sour. You get sad, like when flowers die, and I think that must be hard because, like, flowers die, you know.”

I squeeze her hand and she cries a little, telling me that Clare saw Reggie with some other woman down at Historic Properties at sunset. He had his arm around her, sitting on a bench, as the *Bluenose* was coming in to dock. I could imagine it: a herd of tourists with expensive cameras, the ferry going over to Dartmouth, the mental hospital on the other side, brackish smell of harbour heavy on the evening air, Reggie being an infidel.

(260)

As we will see in detail below, the way in which memories and sensations of the landscape are depicted in relation to the inhabitants of the novel provide rich insight into the manner in which the relationship between the text and its characters is negotiated. In this instance, Serrie's depression is defined through

death imagery and thoughts of Reggie's abusive relationship with Elizabeth evoke memories of the manner in which human society has initiated the decay of the Halifax Harbour.

This novel presents a nuanced and pervasive evaluation of the manner in which industrial development has impacted the natural world as well as the quality of life enjoyed by human society that is compromised as a result of environmental desecration. The community of Lupin Cove has experienced firsthand the consequences of the natural world having been abused; Serrie states: "You know, it takes money to do what you are talking about and people here don't have any. Times are hard, with the economy and all, the fishing industry collapsing," (274). Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this novel, however, is its explanation of this process, and, as we will see, the fact that it embraces solutions to the environmental disaster that we face.

As the text unfolds to reveal Lupin Cove as an economically depressed and socially insulated region of the Maritimes, the causes of this malaise are debated and eventually pinpointed by the characters. When Hans hears Serrie's evaluation of the economic and ecological state of Lupin Cove, his response comes in the form of a lecture critiquing the Canadian frontier sensibility:

"Yes, yes, ja, sure, I know this, Serrie. But that's from over-fishing. You Canadians just think it won't end, these natural resources, you know. We Germans, we know, we have learned. But you don't want to learn from us,

from Europeans, because we are *from away*. This is not a good reason, you know. (274)

Hans' evaluation of the community of Lupin Cove as lazy and unable to maintain itself is met with a harsh reaction from Serrie; what he does not realise is that the deterioration of this community stemmed not from its lack of innovation, but from the fact that industrialisation failed to provide sustainable development in the region. Serrie elaborates:

Jeez, Hans, I don't know, I don't think of them as shabby. Because they're busy fishing. I mean, they keep the boats working great. There's only so much you can do in a day, my Grammie says. Lupin Cove was a real place, you know, it had a post office, and stores, it had ships in and out all the time, it had a school. But trains came, you know, industrial innovation, it sucked the life out of here, and places in the Valley took off. It's still a real place, you know, with its own kind of reality." (275)

As mentioned above, a pervasive theme in this novel is the manner in which industrial development has not only destroyed the landscape of which these authors write, but also has abandoned the region, leaving broken, polluted communities in its wake. As we have seen in previous chapters, technological advance has disrupted many of the social relationships in these communities, and, as Serrie's statement makes clear, has been responsible for the subjugation of traditional ways of life as well as the physical landscape.

In addition to making clear the way in which the landscape and, as a result, the people of the region are threatened by the encroachment of industrialism, this text also embodies a celebration of possible solutions to this grim situation.

Throughout the novel, Cyril is chided for his lack of ambition and his fanciful ideas; however, he eventually wins a sizable grant from the provincial government to finance his vision of sustainable power in Lupin Cove. The news that Cyril has been awarded this project brings a great deal of happiness to the “dysfunctional” Foster household:

We begin the present opening, my father starting us off with his big news.

He’s got a grant to do solar power research. We just sit there and stare.

Who’d’ve thought, I think, and then feel ashamed - I’m turning into

Galronia. He explains he’s going to make some solar panels to heat hot

water with, that he’s got a government grant for the alternative energy. And

he shows us the letter and the check. I ask if the buoy thing in the workshed

is for this and he tells me that’s for a future project, tidal power in the Bay

of Fundy. I don’t know what the hell he’s talking about really, sun-heated

water, big panels nailed on the south side of the house. I can just see it now.

But he’s beaming. (193)

While the novel draws attention to the way in which the landscape has been decimated by pollution and the lives of the inhabitants of Lupin Cove have been adversely affected by industrialisation’s having eradicated its natural resources, it offers hope through Cyril’s actions. Cyril is presented as surprisingly brilliant and

imaginative; his innovation in the face of the economic depression experienced by his community provides a foundation for human society's path forward in an age of environmental disaster.

### **Decrepit Houses with Million Dollar Views**

Throughout contemporary Maritime literature, we are given a critical evaluation of the place of technology and industrial development; this theme greatly affects the treatment of all aspects of human development by these texts. This section will focus on the pervasive symbol of the filthy and embarrassing house which is present throughout each of the four texts included in this discussion, demonstrating that this literature treats human constructs as fleeting. Roxanne Rimstead has written extensively on the manner in which social realism functions in Canadian poetry, arguing that "disturbing images" of poverty are pervasive throughout Canadian literature. She states:

Poverty exists in relation to affluence. When a society and its national dream admire the rich because they acquire wealth and power that allows them to stand outside the community by virtue of elite schools, restaurants, and estates, the same community must denounce the other polarity, those who do not succeed in the national dream and are therefore denied access to education, nourishment, and housing by the same logic of meritocracy. . . . To disturb naturalized images of the poor as outsiders or inherently inferior,



I recommend that we begin interrogating those images from a politically engaged perspective. (5-6)

The image of the house is consistently presented in contemporary Maritime literature as an embarrassing structure that betrays the social standing of its inhabitants. This section will critically examine such depictions, arguing that these texts embody realisation of the fleeting nature of human constructs and the permanence of the landscape.

Frances Berces sees in MacLeod's fiction a demonstration of the manner in which the pursuit of endless human extensions has become corrupt: "poverty is also present, as are the destructive powers of the restless sea and wind booming against the rocks, visible moreover through their effects everywhere on the weatherbeaten shanties, rusting metal, rotting rope, and twisted frames" (124). In MacLeod's story, "The Vastness of the Dark", the house in which James and his family live is described as broken, dirty, and a source of shame. James and his seven brothers and sisters live a crowded life with their parents in a small house which has space for only three bedrooms. In addition to the lack of physical room, James describes the home as in complete disrepair:

On "our side" of the hall it is very different. There is only one door for the two rooms and my parents, as I have said, have always to walk through my room to get to theirs. It is not a very good arrangement and at one time my father intended to cut another door from the hallway into their room and to close off the inadequate connecting door between their room and mine. But

at one time he also probably planned to seal and cover the wooden beams and ribs that support the roof in all our rooms and he has not done that either. On the very coldest winter mornings you can look up and see the frost on the icy heads of the silver nails and see your breath in the coldly crystal air. (29)

James maintains that the house in which he lives is unable to shield him completely from the elements and decries the process by which it has fallen apart. Throughout MacLeod's collection, the permanence of the natural world is contrasted with the fragility of that which is constructed by human society. In addition to the manner in which James' house is described as in shambles in this text, the lack of size within this structure is identified by the main character as a point of shame and causes him great embarrassment:

And by that time it seems my parents felt there was no point in either moving him in with me or me across the hall with him, as if they had somehow gotten used to hearing me breathing in the room so close to theirs and knew that I knew a great deal about them and about their habits and had been kind of backed into trusting me as if I were, perhaps, a younger brother or perhaps more intimately a friend. It is a strange and lonely thing to lie awake at night and listen to your parents making love in the next room and to be able even to count the strokes. And to know that they really do not know how much you know, but to know that they do know you know; and not to know when the knowledge of your knowing came to them

any more than they know when it came to you. And during those last four or five years lying here while the waves of embarrassed horniness roll over me, I have developed, apart from the problems of my own tumescent flesh, a sort of sympathy for the problem that must be theirs and for the awful violation of privacy that we all represent. (30)

While it can be expected that the symbol of the home be one of comfort from the harsh world and intimacy within a family unit, throughout this text, the opposite is consistently true. This story embodies a clear condemnation of human development, and, as we will see, celebrates the role of the natural world as a source of permanence and redemption.

This theme is present and decidedly more pervasive in Road to the Stilt House. The title of this novel alludes immediately to the image of a house that is at once a symbol of the fleeting constructs of human society as well as a blemish on the landscape and the pride of the characters of the novel. Throughout the text, the “stilt house” is presented as a disgusting reminder of the abject poverty in which the characters of the novel live, a reality that is accentuated by the fact that this particular building is raised from the ground, making it plainly visible to passersby. As is the case with James’ family home, the vulnerability of Arnold’s house is amplified also by the state of disrepair in which it is found, most notably its lack of insulation:

Without hesitation, Harry and Sadie said they were going to sue the government. But nothing came of that either. For there was no insulation.

They had put insulation in other houses and other people were suffering. But there was no insulation in their house. Mabel hadn't signed the form and they hadn't put it in. It came as no surprise to Arnold. They tested for insulation and found that there wasn't any. The government inspectors asked her if she ever remember it being put in: "Oh, that's right - they didn't put it in our house - I never asked for it," Mabel said. And the idea of money evaporated. (84)

Richards' description of the house as lacking insulation emphasises the manner in which those who inhabit the dwelling are vulnerable to the elements; the picture is one of nakedness, and, as mentioned above, the design of this structure leaves it susceptible to the judgment of others. While, as we will see, the landscape of which Richards writes offers to his characters beauty and redemption, the constructs of human society are home only to discord; Arnold states, for example: "Juliet has watched me through our dirty window, our smell of human sadness, has watched me for a moment" (12). Arnold makes clear the extent to which this novel critically views that which has been created by human society when he states that his "house was filled with agitation" (26).

Heave embodies a similar attitude to that of Road to the Stilt House and The Lost Salt Gift of Blood, in that its rich descriptions of the various constructed settings of the novel draw attention to the process of decay and disrepair in these structures. As the text progresses, it becomes clear that comfort is not to be found inside the walls of a house for Conlin's characters; the Sullivan family home is

described, as are those found in Richards' and MacLeod's fiction, as unable to shield its inhabitants from the elements and quickly becoming decrepit. Instead of functioning as a source of warmth and shelter for those who live there, the house offers to its tenants only cold and discomfort (140); this novel clearly draws attention to the notion that human society's structures are fleeting when compared with the permanence of nature:

We had our share of pain but weren't cheap — we just didn't have a sweet cent. When Cyril lost his job and it was one-income living again, the lights in the Spinster Sullivan's house went out, so to speak. The house had to have a new roof and it needed new shingles. The verandah was propped up with bricks. The house needed new windows on the north side, where the wind was coming straight through and blowing the curtains out like they were on the clothesline, but they weren't, they were inside the frigging house. Almost the entire house had to be closed off except for the kitchen in the back, the family room and the bedrooms . . . I'd have these huge fights with Martha about having to wear so many layers inside that there was absolutely no point in ever taking your coat off when you came through the door. (135-6)

Conlin, like Richards, amplifies the manner in which she criticises the constructs of modern society by making reference to the degree to which her characters feel embarrassment as a result of the conditions in which they are forced to live:

[Dearie's] house was so clean, so much cleaner than mine, as she'd point out with a grin. No dust-balls, no piles, no crumbs on the floor, no drafts blowing in the windows. It smelled like plastic, new things — the smell of prosperity, I guess. Her father came into the family room and ignored me. Nothing personal though — he ignores everybody under twenty-five except Dearie and she says it's just because they are directly related that he talks to her; he's obliged to.

“Now don't let her smoke up the place. Make her blow it up the chimney.” (146)

Throughout these texts, there is a keen sense of the manner in which a person's house is a symbol of their social class and the severe humiliation that accompanies such a display. These authors use this shame to emphasise their critical examination of the role of technological advance in the existence of human society.

In addition to the way in which contemporary Maritime texts denigrate human constructs as places of filth and misery, these works also embody an attitude that, when compared to that which is found in the natural world, the extensions of human society are ephemeral. In McKay's short story, “A Thing Like Snow”, the comforts of modern existence are completely removed and shown to be untrustworthy. Ralph is lost when faced with unfettered nature:

The power was out. The streetlight out on Hudson Street, when it shone, shone directly through his bedroom window between the small opening he

left in the curtains and onto his alarm clock. He heard the metallic clinking of the clock on the nightstand beside him, but couldn't see it. (111)

When Ralph wakes up after the storm to find that his electricity and his furnace have been compromised, he is helpless to such a degree that he fears for his life. McKay contrasts Ralph's reliance on technology throughout this story with his "Hippie" neighbours' ability to function effectively at the whim of the natural world. When Ralph realises that he is unable to fix himself breakfast without the assistance of electric appliances, it is the young Jana who comes to his rescue:

The crisp air caught in Ralph's lungs as they walked out the back door. It was lighter out, but not yet light. His nostril hairs froze. The Hippie boy put on his snowshoes and lay the pair he had brought for Ralph flat on the snow.

"Been years since I wore a pair of these," said Ralph. "On my paper route. Don't know that I'll remember how."

The boy bent to adjust Ralph's bindings for him. "You just walk," he said. "Like this."

The boy walked ahead of him, steady and sure-footed. Ralph dragged his heavy feet. The snow beneath him squeaked. The scent of the Hippies' wood smoke sweetened the air. (113)

McKay draws a clear contrast between Ralph's reliance on the comforts of modern existence and his subsequent lack of survival skills when faced with the natural world with the ease with which the "Hippie" family is able to adapt when stripped

of amenities. It is a common theme throughout contemporary Maritime fiction that those characters who are endowed with the ability to survive readily in the natural world are celebrated as strong, while those who are not are revealed as feeble.

### **Landscape as Redemption**

Maritime literature has traditionally been attacked by critics as embodying a “depressing” view of the world. Beginning with writers such as Dawn Fraser and Alden Nowlan, a trend has emerged in the region in which realist texts that defend Maritimers and depict the hardships faced by them have been produced. As we will see, however, the fact that this writing is largely concerned with poverty and, as has been demonstrated by this chapter, the way in which the natural world has been destroyed within the region, does not preclude it from embodying a hopeful vision of the state of human society. The final section of this chapter will evaluate the manner in which the landscape serves as a redemptive presence in the prose works that have been discussed.

A common theme that can be found in these texts is the sharp contrast between the impermanence of the constructs of human society and the constancy of the natural world. As we have seen, images of decaying houses and untrustworthy technological instruments are pervasive in MacLeod’s short stories; it is in his presentation of the manner in which his characters interact with the natural world that we can discern an active promotion of the redemptive qualities of the environment.



As has been noted by various critics, and elaborated by Mary Frances Finnigan, the most poignant way in which this is achieved in MacLeod's fiction is in his use of the landscape as a form of cultural memory for his characters. MacLeod's stories reveal an obsession with the idea of "return", and attempt to reconcile the relationship between a sense of place and a sense of identity. These stories consistently employ images of the landscape in reaching this end. For example, in "The Boat", the narrator's memory is dominated by thoughts of the sea and his family's relationship to it:

I first became conscious of the boat in the same way and at almost the same time that I became aware of the people it supported. My earliest recollection of my father is a view from the floor of gigantic rubber boots and then of being suddenly elevated and having my face pressed against the stubble of his cheek, and how it tasted of salt and of how he smelled of salt from his red-soled rubber boots to the shaggy whiteness of his hair.

When I was very small, he took me for my first ride in the boat. I rode the half-mile from our house to the wharf on his shoulders and I remember the sound of his rubber boots galumphing along the gravel beach, the tune of the indecent little song he used to sing, and the odour of the salt. (2-3)

The landscape serves as an effective tool for the realisation and preservation of cultural memory because, unlike human society's implements, it provides a source of permanence. When Angus and his family return to Cape Breton after a ten year

absence, it is the sight of the island from the Canso Causeway that ignites his memory and transports him back to his youth:

“There it is ,” shouts my father triumphantly. “Look, Alex, there’s Cape Breton!” He takes his left hand down from the baggage rack and points across us to the blueness that is the Strait of Canso, with the gulls hanging almost stationary above the tiny fishing boats and the dark green of the spruce and fir mountains rising out of the water and trailing white wisps of mist about them like discarded ribbons hanging about a newly opened package. (80)

Throughout the stories, the identities of characters are often intimately linked to the landscape. The decision to leave the place one’s family calls home is presented as devastatingly painful for the characters of these stories; MacLeod presents instances in which independence from one’s roots is both celebrated and chastised. In any case, the relationship of those who stay as well as those who leave to their background is defined throughout by the presence of the landscape.

MacLeod’s fiction also reveals a keen awareness of the way in which human life is fostered and maintained by the nurturing presence of the natural world. These short stories present a fully realised ecological vision in which the prosperity of human society is dependent on that of the landscape which surrounds it; St. John’s Harbour, for example, is described as such:

The harbour itself is very small and softly curving, seeming like a tiny, peaceful womb nurturing the life that now lies within it which originated

from without; came from without and through the narrow, rock-tight channel that admits the entering and withdrawing sea. That sea is entering now, forcing itself gently but inevitably through the tightness of the opening and laving the rocky walls and rising and rolling into the harbour's inner cove. The dories rise at their moorings and the tide laps higher on the piles and advances upward toward the high-water marks upon the land; the running moon-drawn tides of spring.

Around the harbour brightly coloured houses dot the wet and glistening rocks. In some ways they seem almost like defiantly optimistic horseshoe nails: yellow and scarlet and green and pink; buoyantly yet firmly permanent in the grey unsundered rock. (119)

This vivid portrait makes the conception of the role of the environment in the sustenance of human society that this collection advocates abundantly clear. The image of the water entering and withdrawing from the channel provides a sexually charged description of the way in which nature has, in essence, created human life in this region. That MacLeod uses words such as “womb” and “nurturing” in fashioning this picture emphasises the idea that a healthy environment is essential for the well-being of human society.

In addition to the manner in which these stories provide an ecologically complete view of the role of the landscape in the maintenance of human life, MacLeod's fiction also reveals instances in which his characters unexpectedly find happiness in their relationship with the environment. Creelman notes that the

environment, in these stories, is “not demonized, but the natural world is unrelenting” (81). The characters are overcome by their bond with nature; as has been noted above, Macleod’s fiction embodies a sense of place achieved by its intense use of setting that is, at times, overwhelming. In “In the Fall”, for example, James’ mother, who, throughout the story, displays an unflinching callousness to the emotional attachment that her family holds for an old horse by insisting that it be sold as mink feed, is finally content when she experiences the calm offered by the landscape:

I stop and turn my face from the wind and look back the way I have come. My parents are there, blown together behind me. . . My father puts his arms around my mother’s waist and she does not remove them as I have always seen her do. Instead she reaches up and removes the combs of coral from the heaviness of her hair. I have never seen her hair in all its length before and it stretches out now almost parallel to the earth, its shining blackness whipped by the wind and glistening like the snow that settles and melts upon it. It surrounds and engulfs my father’s head and he buries his face within its heavy darkness, and draws my mother closer toward him. I think they will stand there for a long, long time, leaning into each other and into the wind whipped snow and with the ice freezing to their cheeks. It seems that perhaps they should be left alone, so I turn and take one step and then another and move forward a little at a time. I think I will try to find David, that perhaps he may understand. (117)

The idea that the landscape is an entity that has the capacity to redeem the people of whom MacLeod writes is emphasised in this passage by the fact that it is the wind that brings together James' parents. James notes that his mother's happiness is greatest in this instance, when she allows her hair to be "parallel with the earth" and the couple allows their movements to be governed by the force of the wind.

When the narrator is given escape from his debilitating pact with his father at the close of "The Boat", it is the natural world that provides freedom, both for him and for the man who gives his life for his son:

But neither is it easy to know that your father was found on November twenty-eighth, ten miles to the north and wedged between two boulders at the base of the rock strewn cliffs where he had been hurled and slammed so many many times. His hands were shredded ribbons, as were his feet which had lost their boots to the suction of the sea, and his shoulders came apart in our hands when we tried to move him from the rocks. And the fish had eaten his testicles and the gulls had pecked out his eyes and the white-green stubble of his whiskers had continued to grow in death, like the grass on graves, upon the purple, bloated mass that was his face. There was not much left of my father, physically, as he lay there with the brass chains on his wrists and the seaweed in his hair. (25)

The idea that his father becomes forever linked with the natural world through his death is accentuated in this passage by MacLeod's comparison of his whiskers with the grass that grows on graves. In his choice to kill himself rather than be

forced to witness his son's terrible fate as a fisherman, the narrator finds freedom, much in the same way as do James' parents, in the throes of the unabated natural world. Throughout these stories, nature is presented as a liberating force, one that provides sanctuary for the characters, allowing them to find independence, often from the constraints of society's expectations.

In Road to the Stilt House, the characters also find identity as well as happiness in their relationship with the natural world. It is interesting to note that this novel, as is the case with much of Richards' fiction, progresses from beginning to end without mention of the name of a place for its setting. The characters of this text define themselves through their affiliation to aspects of the natural world, using descriptions such as "backwoods" and "down river", instead of an arbitrarily designated space such as a town to identify their origins. Sheldon Currie refers to these characters as "the people on the roadway", which is a designation that is very appropriate. In Road to the Stilt House, the narrator states: "This road is his [Arnold's] home. He knows every family. He knows every tree" (40). As Davey notes, Richards' use of the land provides insight, as is the case in Heave, into the development of character: "attention to the land can give characters endurance and survival opportunities, and even intuitively appropriate morality" (5).

Throughout the novel, we see the manner in which characters are dependent on the natural world, to the point at which they rely on it for identification. Arnold, for example, asserts that the landscape is his home throughout the text, and

pronounces an even deeper connection to the environment that is experienced by him and his family: “Sometimes I sit on the cot all day, just for peace. I know my moods and the moods of my family. It is in the dry barren trees that have afforded us no money. It’s in the soil, rancid and spoiled with too many widgets of human equipment” (58).

This novel embodies a critique of the constructs of human society, and demonstrates the manner in which industrialisation has threatened the livelihood as well as the well-being of the people of the region. Throughout Road to the Stilt House, we are presented with a conception of the way in which people are redeemed by the landscape; the characters of this novel consistently look to the natural world for peace:

He, like everyone, waited for the snow, longed for it like a half-sick animal.

And he couldn’t tell you any different.

He couldn’t say:

“I hate the snow,” as the student did.

Because he longed for it. So it must be. He waited for it to cover the black branches like piled bones. He waited for it when the sun was at its brightest and showed his house for what it was, and crept over the ancient brickhouse with half the bricks blackened. (84)

For Arnold, the snow represents an opportunity for redemption that cannot be offered by the constructs of human society. He wishes for the natural beauty of the snow to cover the embarrassment that is his house and provide it with insulation.

This is very telling; Richards notes that peace is to be found in covering the mistakes of human society with the serene beauty of the natural world. This novel embodies an attitude that products of human society cannot rival the simple perfection of its richly drawn Miramichi landscape. Statements such as Jerry's observation that the "snow will cover our tracks" (168) illustrate the redemptive power that this novel equates with the pure beauty of nature. While the actions of humanity can be regrettable and destructive, there is forgiveness to be found in nature. Snow provides people with a second chance to recover from the pain in their lives, as everything starts over with a tremendous blank sheet upon its arrival. By calling attention to the redemptive power of winter, this novel makes a plea for society to recognise the capacity of nature's regenerative processes. As the seasons progress, humanity, like the whole of nature, is offered constant opportunity for renewal.

Throughout McKay's short stories, a sharp contrast is drawn between the foulness of human development and the beauty and ultimate purity of the natural world. The stories present, in much the same way as does Road to the Stilt House, a celebration of the processes of nature. These stories explicitly critique the way in which technology has led human society to take the natural world for granted, and chastises characters who are unable to exist without the direct assistance of modern implements. McKay's stories embody a struggle to recognise, in the face of industrial and technological development, the manner in which nature is an



essential component and requirement of human life. For example, characters in these stories are calmed by experiencing the way in which nature progresses:

I stayed on the front step until you'd disappeared from sight. A small square of the front yard lay in the shadow of the house, but soon the sun would be in the western half of the sky, beginning its descent from day into night, and even the narrow strip of shadow that now remained on the lawn would be gone.

The grass of the front lawn was dry and brown; the last tinge of green had left it. There was a trace of frost on the tips of the grass blades closest to the house. On the concrete blocks of the front walk, there were patches of shell ice in the places where the lowest corner of one block met the highest corner of the one beside it. Each thin, translucent sheet of ice was broken by a web of fissures, where your foot had gone through. (82)

In this instance, the nameless main character of "A New Start" finds solace from his frenetic thoughts by noticing the fall changing into winter as well as the day turning slowly into night. In "A Thing Like Snow", Ralph comes to realise, despite the comfortable way in which technology normally shields him from the elements that "[a] thing like snow can change everything . . . the whole landscape" (128). Throughout these stories, we see a struggle for society to recognise the colossal way in which the natural world is responsible for the well-being of humanity, and a rebuke of the false sense of independence that is offered to us by technological advance.

In much the same way as in Road to the Stilt House, the characters of Conlin's Heave find their identity in a shared landscape. Throughout the novel, people are intimately associated with the "Valley" or with the "Mountain"; when Reggie makes the unforgivable mistake of calling Serrie and Elizabeth "Valley girls", he is put harshly in his place by Gallie: "My mother giggles and Gallie stares at her with horror, and then turns to Reggie. 'Serrie's a mountain girl, Reginald. Isn't that right, Elizabeth?'" (209). The characters of this novel find great pride in the landscape with which they are surrounded; the text is teeming with statements such as "the Valley has the best weather in the province, and Halifax has the worst" (34). Just as Richards' characters identify themselves in relation to their landscape, the inhabitants of Lupin Cove are closely associated with their natural surroundings.

In addition to the manner in which the characters of this novel are closely linked with the landscape, the natural world functions in this text as a means by which people find not only their identity, but also a sense of peace. Critical response to this novel has centred on the richly drawn natural environment that it provides for the reader; Wigston, for example, notes that "the story takes place partly in kind of a dreamscape. Conlin effortlessly paints this pocket of Nova Scotia, with natural wonders like 40-foot Bay of Fundy tides, gentle mountains, windflower and berry-strewn valleys" (2). There are several instances in the novel in which Serrie gains respite from the hardships which she faces in her family life as well as her severe depression through interaction with the natural world. When

Elizabeth and Reggie accompany Serrie on a skiing trip, she experiences deeply the regenerative power of the natural world:

The best thing about skiing is the solitude. The hill is covered with people and so you are in it together in that way, but you are by yourself, making sure you get down the hill, you surrender to every turn, every pull of gravity, and your body and mind just merge and there are no more thoughts or worries, just soaring. There's not time to think about anything except what you are doing. Reggie didn't like to stop and he also didn't want to leave me alone. He was keeping his vow to my family to look after me, make sure nothing happened. It was a good thing it wasn't cross-country skiing, what with my case of smoker's lung. You think when you grow up you'll be healthy, wealthy and wise, but it's just a crock. (229)

This moment of levity, which is arguably the closest that Serrie comes throughout the novel to finding happiness, takes place when she completely gives herself over to the landscape, allowing it to control her movements and dictate the pace at which she travels. Conlin illustrates and amplifies the idea that nature exists as a means by which her characters find a sense of place and happiness by naming the body of water on which Serrie's summer camp was held "Lake Redemption" (73), and draws attention to nature's restorative capacities by calling Serrie's substance abuse rehabilitation centre "Weeping Willows Treatment Facility" (189).

As has been mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, ecological critical theory maintains that environmental problems must be perceived as immediately threatening in order for the general population to speak out against them. As has been demonstrated by this chapter, the economic climate of the Maritimes has contributed greatly to the manner in which an analysis has become a major theme in the literature of this region. The contemporary texts included in this discussion present a fully realised vision of the manner in which the health of the natural world is necessary in maintaining the well-being of human society. This literature functions as a means by which the politically inarticulate residents of the Maritimes are spoken for and defended; however, these texts can also be read as serving the same purpose for landscape, which remains silent as it is attacked by human society. This writing is both elaborate and eloquent in its struggle for conservation; as we continue to debate the strategy by which human society will remedy the decimation it has exacted on the natural world, it is important that we recognise this aspect of literary discourse.

### **Commentary: The Place of Maritime Literary Discourse in Canada**

As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, defining Maritime literature as a unique body of work has presented difficulties for the critical community. In emphasising the manner in which regions within the country of Canada can be distinguished in relation to one another, it is important that we critically examine the reasons for such distinctions. Our final discussion will centre on two questions that arise from this delineation; the degree to which perceptions of the environment are unique within the Maritime region and the effects that approaching texts in this way has had on the reception of this literature on a national scale.

#### **Landscape and Utility**

The study of landscape, whether in literary or visual arts, is governed by the notion of perspective. Korte, for example, states that “[l]andscape seems most suited to an investigation of perspective, as it only exists as a portion of the earth that is perceived and apperceived in a certain way” (10). In other words, landscape is fashioned by the mind, “depending on a person’s individual disposition as well as the pervasive notions of his/her social and cultural environment” (10). A discussion of landscape, then, lends itself very well to an exploration of not only, as this thesis has undertaken, differences in perceptions of the environment as they appear in various time periods, but also the discrepancy between the way in which

the natural world is presented in the literary discourse of the Maritimes and in that of Canada as a whole.

The analytical framework employed by this thesis has identified differences in the way in which Maritime literature embodies the relationship between the natural world and human society and the treatment of this subject that is revealed in Canadian texts at large. We have noted in the third chapter of this discussion that Frye's frontier thesis has greatly impacted literary criticism in this country; it has been generally assumed that Canadian literature displays terror and delight in the face of an inhospitable and unyielding terrain. The effects of Frye's observation have been far-reaching in the critical community; the scholarly literature has debated thoroughly the manner in which these emotions have manifested themselves in Canadian writing. Contemporary critics, most notably Gaile McGregor, have propagated Frye's thesis; in her immensely influential study, The Wacousta Syndrome, McGregor describes what she sees as "the beleaguered human psyche attempting to preserve its integrity in the face of an alien, encompassing nature" (6). McGregor goes on to argue that this terror has extended from the earliest stages of Canadian literature to influence the contemporary canon.

As we have seen, however, Maritime literature has largely resisted this paradigm; Keefer has seen in the texts of this region an awareness of the manner in which the natural world has been helpful as opposed to foreboding for the communities in this area of the country. It is for this reason that Maritime writing

has displayed, as this thesis has demonstrated, a pragmatic view of the relationship between human society and the environment.

An appropriate example of the practical way in which the natural world has been treated in Maritime writing can be found in David Adams Richards' essay, "Land". Found in David Suzuki's collection, When the Wild Comes Leaping Up. Personal Encounters with Nature, Richards' piece, like each of the texts included in this discussion, centres on resource use strategies as well as a social examination of the relationship between the natural world and human society. Richards notes that nature provides an arena in which strength is measured; the urban characters of this essay who seek an "authentic" experience of the backwoods are quickly exposed:

When Darren said he would fish for his food, it was Peter who brought them ten smoked salmon. This was not one-upmanship, The little town was just the land extended. Until I was twenty four, I could carry my rifle from my house into the woods for a deer hunt. It is not that Darren did not know the land — he did not know himself, and the land simply told him this. Sooner or later the land does. I know he wanted to live in harmony like the first people and wanted the First Nations people to be his champions of the forest and his protectors of the environment. But that said only one thing: he had never allowed them an option; in his life he had never looked upon them the way they should have been looked upon from the first: as men.

(39)

Richards demonstrates in this story, as he does in his novels, that the natural world exposes weakness; he also makes reference to the manner in which those who live in areas such as the Maritimes are dependent on an environment that is intact in a way that others are unable to understand. Much like Richards, the literature that has been featured in this thesis rejects the ideological conception of nature as a destructive force in favour of a nuanced analysis of the practical benefits of the environment.

The authors of the Maritimes have consistently expressed in their fiction an analysis of nature's utility; this has ranged from the call for the economic potential of the land to be maximised in early texts, to a thoughtful social comment regarding industrial development in the literature of the middle of the Twentieth Century, and finally as the struggle for conservation that is present in contemporary writing. While the ways in which such statements are presented has, as we have seen, changed drastically over time, it is important that we attempt to discern common themes in the texts that have been chosen. We can specifically isolate three similar aspects found in much of the writing included in this discussion; the first being the degree to which these authors present a social analysis of the place of the environment; also, the manner in which these texts promote control over or acceptance of the processes of nature; the final theme concerns the use of landscape as a means of delineating character traits.

Although the literature that appears during and shortly following World War II and that which has been written in the last thirty years can be read as



indicting the processes of industrialisation, there are significant differences in the way in which each accomplish this end. Charles Bruce, for example, displays in The Channel Shore a mistrust of technological advance because of the way in which it threatens the way of life of the community featured in that text. However, in contemporary writing, we see a formalised analysis of the ecological effects of industrialisation and the manner in which this threatens human and societal health. Richards, MacLeod, and MacKay present a post-industrial Maritimes in their fiction where pollution and a dangerous lack of resources place in peril the people about whom they write.

Writers who appear at the end of the Nineteenth Century express in their writing a desire for imaginative control over the landscape. This inclination manifests itself in this literature as a struggle for a denial of the processes of nature. Roberts and Carman, for example, express throughout their poetry distaste for the changing hands of time and what they see as the destructive forces of nature. This writing displays a struggle to suppress nature's progression through the heavy mediation of the subject's experience of the natural world. The literature of MacLennan, Buckler, Bruce, and Raddall offers an alternative conception of the manner in which time progresses; their fiction is intimately aware of the process of history, and accepts as inevitable not only changes within human society, but also developments in the landscape of which they write. Contemporary literature, especially that of McKay and MacLeod, expresses a call for human society to rediscover the regenerative processes of nature; these writers hold the opposite

view from Roberts and Carman in their valorisation of the progression of the seasons. While early writers see in the changing environment the capacity for devastation, contemporary authors find in the natural world the potential for redemption and new beginnings.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the way in which the environment is presented in Maritime texts is the degree to which it is used to define integrity with respect to characters. The happiness of David Canaan, for example, is negotiated throughout The Mountain and the Valley through his relationship with the natural world. When he is young, he finds solace in the woods that he explored with his father and brother; David's life story, however, comes to an ironic close when he is unable to find his place either in the sophisticated urban world or the landscape of Entremont. In Heave, Serrie Foster is treated in much the same way; her happiness is also defined through her bond with nature. Conlin's novel ends with a much more optimistic vision; landscape is presented throughout the text as embodying the capacity for redemption.

### **Canon Formation in Canada: The Nationalist Agenda**

Abrams defines a canon as a complex social agreement which takes into consideration works that are most frequently rewarded, studied, and published in determining literary value, and has detailed the conventional process by which certain writing comes to be regarded as canonical:

In recent decades the phrase literary canon has come to designate — in world literature, or in European literature, but most frequently in national literature — those authors who, by a cumulative consensus of critics, scholars, and teachers, have come to be widely recognised as “major”, and to have written works often hailed as literary *classics*. The literary works by canonical authors are the ones which, at a given time, are most kept in print, most frequently and fully discussed by literary critics and historians, and most likely to be included in anthologies and in the syllabi of college courses with titles such as “World Masterpieces,” Major English Authors,” or “Great American Writers” (29)

As we will see, contemporary scholars have demonstrated the manner in which certain social groups, including people living in regions outside of the accepted “mainstream”, have traditionally been excluded from canonical consideration. Given the colonial history of Canada as well as the dominating cultural influence of the United States, and recently, the extent to which the debate over Quebec separation has threatened to divide the country in the last three decades, it is of little surprise that the government of Canada, and the country as a whole, has embraced a campaign that has as its goal the elimination of regionalism within this country<sup>6</sup>.

The effects of the “nationalist” agenda on the reception of literary works that are produced within the Maritimes have been well documented; in examining the reception of Maritime writing by critics who write in the country’s national

newspapers, it is clear that there is a distaste for both the content and the forms of the literature that emerges from this region. By way of short example, Joel Yanofsky's review of Hope in the Desperate Hour in the Montreal Gazette was entitled: "If Not For Dysfunction, these Losers Wouldn't Function at All". Critics have reacted with revulsion to the portraits of the Maritimes offered by the region's writers, particularly those who offer realistic depictions of its lower class. As Keefer notes: "The texts which make up a Maritime canon . . . suffer from a double disadvantage within the context of contemporary criticism: many of the genres they favour are, paradoxically, both critically outmoded and commercially popular" (6). It is for this reason that Maritime literature has traditionally been ignored by those who have constructed the Canadian canon<sup>7</sup>. Hochbruck argues that it is only contemporary Maritime literature that has been marginalised within Canada. As MacMechan notes, Halifax was home to many of the literary "firsts" in this country; these included not only books, but also "book-sellers, its book-binders, and even book auctions, its own newspapers, and even its own magazines" (As cited by Hockbruck 11). It is in the middle of the Twentieth Century that regional literature begun to be dismissed by the Canadian critical community.

The initiative to define ourselves in light of an innate lack of confidence in the nature of Canadian culture and in relation to our neighbours and colonial ancestors has had grave effects on the tradition of literary criticism in this country. Surrette notes: "Canadian literary criticism has always been an enterprise in which

the central purpose was the discovery of the Canadian-ness of the literature written in this country" (17). The celebration of "nationalist" writing has been upheld by Canada's foremost literary critic, Northrop Frye, who has argued that the value of Canadian literature can be maximised in the formulation of a canon that celebrates literature that embodies the experience of Canada as a whole (21).

### **Canonical Revision: Toward a Recognition of Regional Writing**

Historically, the nature of spatial and cultural divisions within individual nations has garnered little attention in scholarly arenas; this is true even in a country as seemingly separated by geographical and cultural differences as Canada (Armstrong 1). However, as is evidenced by the revisionist histories of such scholars as Ernest Forbes, and the very existence of an academic program such as Atlantic Canada Studies, this is beginning to change. While the implementation of a nationalist agenda has had far-reaching implications for the whole of the country, as Forbes notes, we must recognise how these "misguided symmetries" have essentially effected the exclusion of Atlantic Canada from the political and economic advantages enjoyed by the affluent regions of the country. In addition to the manner in which historians such as Forbes have attempted to revise the traditional attitudes and stereotypes by which this region have been largely defined by Canada at large, contemporary literary critics have responded to perceived imbalances in the Canadian canon in much the same fashion. Comprehensive editions such as Under Eastern Eyes and Setting in the East have sought to address

this issue, both in offering refutations of the ideology that has informed traditional canon formation in Canada, and in the realm of literary theory in general.

The nationalist agenda as propagated by such critics as Frye has also subsequently been challenged, as literary critics in Canada have begun to recognise the way in which a rich sense of regionalism does not necessarily threaten the cultural fabric of this country. Ron Pecosky has eloquently and effectively rebutted the myth that nationalism is somehow “better” than regionalism:

Regionalism is at the core of the Canadian identity . . . . Regionalism does not necessarily lead to national disunity . . . . In The Bush Garden Northrop Frye says that regionalism and national unity are opposites, but it seems to me that, in a country that takes in 5.5 time zones, the most common national experience, the one that defines our national identity, is the regional nature of our country. (3)

The initiative to clearly define Canada’s literary scene in a strongly unique way that protects our culture from the influence of our Southern neighbours and colonial origins has come with the unfortunate consequence of marginalising the expressions of peripheral regions that perhaps do not uphold the mainstream conception of Canadian society. As mentioned above, challenges to the celebration of “nationalism” in Canadian literature have come from the Maritimes as a result of an increase in scholarship relating to the region; it is therefore interesting to examine the debate surrounding Canadian literature in the 1970s, a period in

which scholarship relating to “Canada” as a region was beginning to take root. Sutherland notes that before this increase in literary criticism in this country, Canadian writers were attacked on the grounds that their work embodied a regional perspective, as opposed to a universal one. Addressing the manner in which critics have shunned the regional nature of Canadian literature, Ronald Sutherland states: “Some critics and budding authors have attempted to avoid the issue by proclaiming that a writer’s universality is more important than his ‘Canadian-ness’” (31). It is important to note that a defense of the “Canadian-ness” in the literature of this country was achieved only when the amount of scholarship concerning this body of work rose significantly; as we will see, an identical progression is taking place within the Maritime Provinces.

Although it is true that Canadian literature has traditionally been dominated by a metropolitan influence that has “helped to consign Maritime literature to oblivion, whether by ignoring the corpus of literature the region has produced, or by ‘centralizing’ its most important writers” (Keefer 19), recent reconfigurations of the nature of canonicity have questioned conventional notions of literary value, and have led to a campaign of revision.

Following his definition of canonicity, Abrams goes on to make clear the fact that the conventional process of canon formation has been challenged and has essentially been discredited. Abrams notes that as criticism has unfolded to include previously ignored groups such as feminist and Marxist critics, it has been argued that canons are formed by groups with social power, who impose on them an

ideological shape that upholds this privilege. Abrams notes that these groups claim “that the canon consists mainly of works that convey and sustain racism, patriarchy, and imperialism, and serves to marginalize or exclude the interests and accomplishments of blacks, Hispanics, and other ethnic minorities, and also the achievement of women, the working class, popular culture, homosexuals, and non-European civilizations” (30). Robert Lecker provides a Canadian perspective on this issue; he claims that present scholarship surrounding this issue in Canadian literary theory has cast doubt on traditional canon formation and has forced critics to “question the structures that invest certain texts and authors with canonical authority” (3). Lecker goes on to note that traditional canonical theories have become outdated, and that “[c]anonical theories recognize that the very existence of art forms called ‘masterpieces’ must be put in grave doubt and perhaps that the value of literary forms must also be put in doubt” (4). This process of exclusion can be applied to the manner in which mainstream Canadian literary criticism has marginalised the achievement of writing that has taken place in regions such as the Maritimes, and as we will see, current debate over the nature of canon formation within Canada is beginning to reverse this practice.

Keefer, in what is perhaps the most authoritative modern evaluation of Maritime literature, Under Eastern Eyes, argues for the inclusion of Maritime texts in the national canon in pluralist terms, offering an analysis of this issue that aligns the treatment of the texts of this region with the political imbalance that exists in Canada. As is the case with Daniel Creelman’s Setting in the East, the argument



put forth by Keefer centres on an evaluation of the pervasive realist genre that exists in the Maritimes; a defence of Maritime realism is the basis for these revisionist arguments. Various critics, writing in the country's most respected newspapers, have traditionally dismissed Maritime texts precisely for their dedication to the realities that beset Maritime society. This has greatly contributed to the manner in which Maritime literature has been perceived in the urban centres of the country, where the Maritime experience is unknown; as Keefer notes: "our understanding of our common world and of those literary texts which attempt to explore and reveal it is often skewed by schematic misreading, by expecting every text to reproduce the perspectives and conventions belonging to our own social class and context" (160). Implicit in this statement is not only an indictment of metropolitan critics who cannot stomach the grim realities of politically underprivileged life in the Maritimes, but also insight into the way in which (particularly contemporary) Maritime literature has been produced. According to Keefer, the political and social realities of life in the Maritime provinces have naturally produced literature that not only embodies these issues but also attempts to function as a voice for the communities about which it is written.

The notion of speaking for the inarticulate is pervasive especially in the fiction of David Adams Richards. A main theme of his novels is a belief that those who are politically, socially, or physically impoverished are intimidated and exploited by those who hold power in society. This is especially explicit in Road to the Stilt House; Arnold thinks: "When he found her that evening (she was

sitting in a tavern with a group of young women) no words came from his mouth. He tried to look stern — but smiled. Only people from his province couldn't speak to defend themselves" (50). It is clear that the political realities of life in the Maritimes are explicit throughout this work; Richards not only speaks of the silence of specific characters in his novels, but also that of the region as a whole.

Keefer goes on to argue that the realism that exists in Maritime texts has been misinterpreted by critics at the national level as somehow exceptional, or as some have stated, an attempt at "shock value"; however, the subject material of writers such as David Adams Richards and Alden Nowlan is, in fact, essentially documentation of the mundane:

In the Maritimes, isolation and impoverishment have nearly always been the normal conditions of life for a hefty number of people. This is a fact we prefer to leave 'outside the canon' of what we recognise as real, and there would seem to be something profoundly shocking, even subversive in writers such as Maillet and MacLeod suggesting the lives of dirt-poor charwomen, fishermen, and coal-miners are as significant - as 'real' - as those of the educated and the urbane, for whom poverty is exclusively an existential, even metaphysical affair. (161)

It can be said, therefore, that the modern tradition of realist literature that exists in the Maritime Provinces serves a dual purpose in terms of canonicity; in engaging with the economic and social realities of the region, these texts can be read as being representative of a sector of Canadian society that is politically and

canonically inarticulate; also, as we will see, it can be argued that the cultural value of writing that appears in this tradition clearly makes a case for the inclusion of such literature in the Canadian canon. It is clear that the writers who compose the literature of the region are aware of the issues of inclusion in the national canon; such authors as David Adams Richards have been among the most vocal assailants of the bias against East Coast literature in the Canadian literary scene.

### **Beyond Exclusion**

It is useful once again to return to the arguments offered by Ronald Sutherland in evaluating the state of Canadian literary criticism in the 1970s. Sutherland notes that the term “great regionalist writer”, in spite of its connotation within Canadian scholarly circles, need not be regarded as a paradox. In fact, Sutherland notes that in many, if not most, cases, the greatest writers in the history of literature can be discerned to have a distinct regional flavour (33). When speaking of, for example, James Joyce, William Faulkner, Leo Tolstoy, or, winner of the 2003 Nobel Prize for Literature, J.M. Coetzee, one must recognise that these authors are essentially “regionalist”. In fact, in his lectures “On Being a Maritime Writer”, MacLennan argues that greatness in writing comes precisely from one’s realisation of his or her regional identity (22). This argument makes evident the fact that Maritime writers have been marginalised for political reasons; the sphere of consciousness that governs artistic expression does not make certain pieces of literature inferior, it is a vital component of all writing.

While there is value to be found in the pluralist arguments put forth by Keefer, it is important to realise that it is not essential for recognition of Maritime writing to come in this form. As noted above, the process of canonical revision has demonstrated that literary “greatness” has been measured largely by a dominant social class; in the case of contemporary Canada, this comes in the form of a central metropolitan mainstream. It is clear, then, that the impetus behind the exclusion of Maritime texts from the Canadian canon originates from the same ideology that has marginalised the voices of women and minorities throughout history, the agenda of the mainstream to construct literary criticism in a manner that serves its own political ends. The process through which fragmentation of the notion of text and reevaluation of the cultural value of literature occurred has shed light on the need for revision within the canon; however, Keefer’s pluralist argument is fundamentally incomplete. While revisions in canon theory have caused critics to reexamine pieces of literature that were previously ignored, this thesis argues that Keefer’s idea of pluralism must be supplemented in order for it to be effective. The presence of Maritime texts within the canon on pluralist terms is not sufficient; it is important that the value of these texts be recognised.

In light of what has been established about challenges to conventional notions of the nature and function of text as well as the process of contemporary canon formation, it is clear that the design of literary value must be reconfigured. In other words, critics, scholars, and teachers should cease to glorify texts on the basis of their being “masterpieces” in terms of verbal form, and should consider

factors such as the degree to which a work embodies the unique perspective of a certain group of people or a particular place or time. To return again to No Place Like Home, it is interesting to note that the editors chose to evaluate the letters and diaries of the women featured in that edition not simply on the basis of their being women, but because these pieces offered a distinct perspective on the time in which they were written. While the literature of men who wrote at this time featured evaluations of “major” events, the diaries and letters found in this collection reveal insight into the day to day life of people in various communities in Nova Scotia (3), and therefore contains unique cultural value.

Canonical reformation has essentially caused critics to rethink that which they value in literature, and the post-structuralist theoretical climate has sought to consider literature as a social act that encompasses broad cultural perceptions. Texts composed by marginalised groups are invaluable in that they offer to scholars an opportunity to study the unique cultural insights contained in them. Contemporary critics value the regional perspective offered by authors such as David Adams Richards, and this is, in part, why such work has come to be considered “great”.

The process by which the “regionalist” writing of the Maritimes has come to be recognised within the whole of Canada can be demonstrated by a consideration of the distribution of the major literary prizes in Canada, the Governor General’s Award and the Giller Prize. The Governor General’s Award for Fictional Novels in English has been conferred since 1936, and in the 68 years

of its existence, has been awarded to Maritime writers only four times (Cumulative List of Winners of the Governor General's Award), including to David Adams Richards for Nights Below Station Street in 1988. However, in the ten years since the establishment of the Giller Prize, East Coast writers have been nominated eight times, and it was awarded to Richards in 2000 for Mercy Among the Children (Giller Prize Winners). In addition to the degree of success that Richards has achieved, other Maritime writers such as Leo McKay, Ann-Marie MacDonald, and Alistair MacLeod have been recognised by various literary awards, and the New Canadian Library has begun to republish the works of previously ignored Maritime writers, including Hugh MacLennan and Thomas Raddall. This recognition of Maritime writing suggests a shift in the manner in which the Canadian canon has come to view the literature of this region<sup>8</sup>.

As the only Maritime author who has secured both the Giller Prize and the Governor General's Award, the case of David Adams Richards must be examined in demonstrating the manner in which Maritime writing has come to be recognised within the Canadian literary scene. For the sake of argument, we may point out the fact that Richards' overwhelming success in Eastern Europe perhaps makes a case for him being considered an internationally acclaimed writer as well (Bemrose 89). Nevertheless, Richards, in the early stages of his career, was vilified by critics who attacked the "regional" nature of his work. For example, reviews such as William French's of Nights Below Station Street, entitled "Searing Fidelity About Grim Losers" led to Richards establishing himself as, as Tony Tremblay states,

“arguably the most berated author in this country today” (119). While the attitude that Maritime regionalist writing is in some way inferior has continued to a certain degree, it is, as noted above, slowly being rescinded. In addition to the various awards that Richards has garnered, he has also drawn praise from John Moss, one of the country’s foremost literary critics. In A Reader’s Guide to the Canadian Novel, Moss states that Richards has “a style that is uncompromising, a vision of incomparable integrity, and an aesthetic sense that is as austere and moving as waves on a limitless ocean. . . . There is no one in Canada today who writes like David Richards, nor has there ever been” (293). Moss’ evaluation demonstrates the manner in which the nature of literary value has shifted by noting that Richards’ fiction is valuable in that it brings a voice to Canadian literature that is at the same time unflinchingly unique and broadly representative (297). In light of the arguments offered by Sutherland and the evolution of critical response to Richards’ work, it is clear that the marginalisation of Maritime writing on the grounds of its being “regional” is beginning to shift, as the canon of Canadian literature is beginning to recognise the value of such work.

The fact that Maritime writing has been, for decades, ignored by the metropolitan power centres of Canadian literature has had effects that have been far-reaching. Following the nearly four decades of exclusion of Maritimers from the list of Governor General’s Award winners, there was an attempt by Canada’s literary establishment to explain the success of Nights Below Station Street as

“token” recognition (Scherf 170). That such an attitude remains in this country suggests that there is much work to be done in defending and promoting the writing of this region; however, an increase in discourse surrounding Maritime literature is effecting progress.

The ramifications of delineating Maritime literature as a unique body of work have been twofold. Such a definition accentuates the regional nature of this writing, and, as mentioned above, attempts by authors at portraying the realities of the Maritime experience have resulted in intensified critical scorn. However, as scholarship relating to the region has increased, so too have editions in which this regional culture has been defended and the stereotypes and political imbalances that exacerbate this marginalisation have been addressed. Perhaps it is appropriate to turn once again to Huch MacLennan, who argues: “If we look back on the literatures of the western world, we can see emerging a very clear pattern in their development. All of them have come into being when a particular people . . . felt an urgent need to discover their own unique identity” (24). The strength of Maritime literature lies in its dedication to a discovery of the identity of this region; this pursuit has resulted in the development of one of the most vibrant literary communities in the country today.



### Endnotes

1. While it may be logically argued that such pieces of writing, especially diaries, are private, and therefore do not anticipate an audience, this thesis maintains that all writing, as is detailed by Barthes, is a social event, simply by virtue of its appearance within the bounds of a collectively agreed upon verbal system. Also, it can be pointed out that the very act of writing suggests that the author indeed intends for their work to be preserved for someone, even if that audience is him or herself.
2. The exception to this statement is, of course, Charles G.D. Roberts, whose work, especially The Heart of the Ancient Wood, appears firmly in the tradition of nature writing.
3. Each of these novels constitute, in various ways, historical fiction. It is for this reason that the novels present differing degrees of the way in which technology has threatened the natural world. This chapter will consider each as a cultural expression of the time period in which it was written, as opposed to one that reveals insights into the past. The Channel Shore, for example, will be read, then, as providing an observation of the cultural perceptions of the late 1940s and early 1950s, as opposed to a period stretching from 1919 to 1946. This thesis argues that the form of the “intrusions” is of little consequence; it is the way in which they are presented and the degree to which the numerous historical manifestations of industrialisation affect the communities of the novels that is most revealing. As we will see, despite, for example, the fact that MacLennan speaks of the railway as a

symbol of impending technological change and Bruce writes of the automobile, the results of each having become embedded in their fictional settings are largely the same, and similar themes surrounding such development can be seen in both texts.

4. Most critics point to the late 1960s and the publication of works such as Rachel Carson's Silent Spring as the period in which an ecological sensibility can begin to be seen in literature. In the Maritimes, for a short example, contemporary works such as David Adams Richards' Lives of Short Duration present a formalised environmental analysis of the way in which industrialisation threatens human society.

5. See, among others, Ernest Forbes' Challenging the Regional Stereotype and Michael Clow's The Maritimes: A History of Development and Underdevelopment in the Region.

6. See, for a short example, David Swick, who, speaking of Canadian response to the recent "Sponsorship Scandal", has stated:

there are serious reasons for our soft-glove treatment, too. Criticism has been muted because much of the missing money is believed to be funnelled into Quebec. Separation would be devastating to Canada, and many Canadians are prepared to look the other way if underhanded means are needed to prevent it. So long as the sponsorship program is portrayed as an expensive exercise aimed at keeping Quebec in Canada, many Canadians will downplay it. (19)

Robert Lecker's introduction to Canadian Canons also describes the manner in which Canadian society struggles to define and preserve itself to the detriment of peripheral regions.

7. Keefer has shown that Maritime literature has been submitted to what she calls a "longstanding neglect", which has been exacted on both "contemporary and pre-Confederation" (20) Maritime texts.

8. This acknowledgement has not been isolated to David Adams Richards and other novelists, but has been taking place throughout the literary scene in the Maritimes. Creelman, for example, notes: "In the last thirty years, short story writers from the Maritimes have been winning increasingly wide recognition for their work. Collections of short fiction by Elizabeth Brewster, Carol Bruneau, Sheldon Currie, Leo McKay, Alden Nowlan, David Adams Richards, and Budge Wilson — to name a few — have received enthusiastic reviews and in some cases national recognition" (79). See also Hochbruck, who argues: "others like Alistair MacLeod, David Adams Richards, and George Elliott Clarke are gradually being recognized as the literary masters they are" (10).

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