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English-Canadian literature

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IV.1 The Development of the Independent English-Canadian Literary Imaginary

(Klára Kolinská)

The Anglophone Canadian literature has, since its relatively recent beginnings, formed itself primarily in relation to the culture of its mother country, Great Britain. During the early years of Canada's history, the British culture had already had a strong and well established literary tradition of a steady historical continuum, taking pride in a number of famous works that constitute an indispensable part of the Western canon. The Canadian national culture has thus from the start found itself in a peculiar aesthetic dilemma: on the one hand, it felt and accepted positively its belonging to the wider cultural unit of the British Empire – and experienced this belonging as a defense mechanism against the imminent cultural (as well as other) expansion from the United States – but on the other hand, as long as it strove to find its own and independent national integrity, it needed to delimitate itself against the mother country and its influence in a clear and unequivocal manner. For this reason Canadian authors have always contended to develop and accommodate the models, forms, and genres of British literature to their own particular environment in such a way that would express the authentic character of Canada and the life and aesthetic experience of its people.

At the same time, Canadian national culture has, from the beginning, with more or less success, delimited itself against the largest and economically most expansive national literature written in English: the literature of the United States. It was precisely for the fact that all the three literatures are united by one identical language of expression that the original and nationally defining characteristics of Canadian literature have always been complicated to identify, and the process of their formation still continues.

The following chapter attempts at characterizing this process upon the example of the development of prose fiction forms in Canadian literature; the novel, that is to say, as the most complex and expansive genre of prose fiction, is generally considered to represent the integrating literary testimony of a national culture about itself, and the publication of a “great novel” is thus accepted and welcome as the touchstone for the national cultural authenticity. In the case of Canada and its national literature, this prerequisite is broadly valid, even though to identify and categorize the first (or, for that matter, any one in row) “great Canadian novel” would, until the present, imply great difficulty. Furthermore, the contemporary situation is complicated by the fact that the borderlines of the previously

easily defined national cultures have become more and more obscure, and the success of individual authors is decided far less by their national belonging than by their granting by one or the other of the prestigious international literary prizes.

In the following parts the chapter will focus upon some related crucial factors of the process. First of all, it is the problem of the relation between the English and the French Canadians – from the English-Canadian perspective in this context. Hugh MacLennan’s solution exemplifies one of the ways in which the Canadian Anglophone literature strove to find a path towards the integration of the Francophone difference into the national all-Canadian identity. Concurrently, his novel *Two Solitudes* (1945), reveals the identity stereotypes that form obstacles to the understanding of the Other, as well as of oneself. MacLennan’s perspective is, understandably, conditioned by the time of the composition of the novel, since the Anglophone Canadian literature has, during the past fifty years, developed other approaches towards the understanding of the Other, as can be evidenced by the growth of the Anglophone literary production by authors of Canada’s First Nations. The contribution by these writers, richer and more versatile in comparison with the situation in Francophone Canada, will be discussed in the following section. The final section of the chapter then analyses the Anglophone Canadian literature from the perspective of regional identity. Using the example of the genre of the essay, studied in the historical continuum, it documents the invariables, as well as the developments of the relation towards the land, region, and nature as a whole. As in the case of the genres of sketch and story cycle, in which the English Canadian literature defined itself as distinct from both the British and the American literatures, this use of the genre of essay can be considered as a specifically Canadian contribution to the development of environmentalist fiction.

IV.2 Stories of the New Land: Transformations of Prose Fiction Forms in English Canada

(Klára Kolinská)

IV.2.1. The Story of Canadian Literature

The story of the English literature in Canada may seem short if compared to the literary histories of European countries; nonetheless, it does provide fascinating episodes, surprising turns of events, and impressive narrative nuances. Even though its roots reach far into the time before the European settlement, in the written form it starts humbly in the years of the culmination of Renaissance in Europe. And the novel, its grandest and most representative genre, serving traditionally as proof of a national culture’s maturation and independence, is only born another one hundred years later, in the environment that can, for now, hardly be described as Canadian, and in which the ideas about the common national identity are yet to be formulated.

The first efforts to write a “great Canadian novel,” and texts in other genres of prose fiction are, not surprisingly, imitations of the genre forms already established in the

literary traditions of the mother country, that are gradually filled with new content, predominantly with literary accounts of the authentic experience of the new settlers in the colony, and of their impressions of the new environment, so radically different from any of their previous experience. For these authors Canada was not yet a home, but mainly a space for exploration, in the factual, as well as intellectual sense. Such experience often creates conditions for sufficient critical distance from the artistically approached material, and for the desired sharpness of vision. In contrast to the parallel development in the neighboring United States, the sense of the persistent appurtenance with the mother country is generally fostered, at the expense, however, of creating a sufficiently strong sense of conclusive national identity. Paradoxically, this moment becomes one of the national characteristics by which Canada differs from the United States, if not necessarily in the direction towards completely independent development. The first historical document that formulated the view of the political desirability of the union of the British colonies in North America, Lord Durham's *Report on the Affairs of British North America* (1839), did not consider the maintaining of unconditional loyalty towards the British Empire as either an antilogy, or an obstacle to their future progress:

I am, in truth, so far from believing that the increased power and weight that would be given to these Colonies by union would endanger their connection with the Empire, hat I look to it as the only means of fostering such a national feeling throughout them as would effectually counterbalance whatever tendencies may now exist towards separation.¹

The Canadian nationality is here perceived as a firm part of the global structure of the British Empire; Durham's *Report* betrays the first seeds of the somewhat inconsistent idea of the "colonial nation," that survived in Canada until World War 2.

Whether the social structure called "colonial nation" produces or is able to produce an independent national literature had been a subject of the Canadian public, as well as professional, debate until the twentieth century. Their background was explained in 1924 by Archibald MacMechan:

Whether or not Canada has produced a literature in th[e national] sense is a question which has been debated long and hotly. Some say 'No!' with emphasis, and demand a Canadian Dickens, a Canadian Tennyson. Others say 'Yes,' and point to the hundreds of books which have been printed in the country since Canada was a name on the map of the world. That the question has been raised at all is a sign that the young nation has a soul, which is striving to be articulate. It is a most important question and it must receive a definitive answer.²

Twenty years after the publication of MacMechan's study this question was unequivocally answered by E.K. Brown, in an article titled symptomatically "The Problem of Canadian Literature." Brown's judgment is categorical: "Canadian books may occasionally have had

1) Lucas, Sir C.P. (ed.). *Lord Durham's Report on the Affairs of British North America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912, p. 307.

2) MacMechan. *Headwaters of Canadian Literature*. p. 14.

a mild impact outside Canada; Canadian literature has had none.”³ After World War 2 the situation and position of Canadian literature underwent a substantial change, but the sense, as expressed in these early theoretical works, of one’s own existence as a “colonial nation,” whose authors write exclusively “colonial literature,” survived for a long time to come.

IV.2.2. From the Sketch Towards the Novel Cycle

The genre of the novel is one of the effective platforms of expression upon which the process of the gradual consolidation of the conscious sense of the Canadian national identity takes place, with all of its internal paradoxes and temporal delays. One of these paradoxes is symbolized in the story of the first Canadian writer of fiction that enjoyed success not only on the domestic Canadian scene, but gained fame and recognition in Europe as well – Thomas Chandler Haliburton (1796-1865), lawyer, politician, and keen observer of the social life in Nova Scotia, the province that was his home for most of his life.

The historical precedence of Nova Scotia in the Canadian cultural and literary production is given concurrently by the historical context of the development of the province, and its geographical location in relation to the rest of Canada. Halifax, the capital of the province and a strategically important Atlantic harbour, was founded in the middle of the eighteenth century with the conscious intent to create a counterpoise to Louisbourg, a French fortress on Cape Breton island, during the culminating war for power in the New World between Britain and France, and from its beginnings played the role of the natural centre of education and cultural life in the area; the importance of Halifax reached far beyond the borders of the relatively small province over most of the Atlantic region of today’s Canada. The local importance of Halifax was further promoted by the fact that Nova Scotia became a logical refuge for the American Loyalists, objectors against the ideals of the War of Independence fought in the colonies in the south of Nova Scotia who were, for the most part, members of the cultural elite. Halifax thus became, whether quite deservedly or not, a city associated with cultural refinement, artistic erudition, and exquisite literary taste:

When the rest of the present Dominion was wilderness or virgin forest, Halifax had its books and its book sellers, its bookbinders and even its book auctions, its own newspapers and its own magazines. Thus Nova Scotia holds the position of primacy in the intellectual development of Canada.⁴

The Atlantic coast of Canada thus gradually becomes a site with favorable conditions for the creation of the domestic cultural tradition: amiable milieu for the acceptance and absorption of cultural influences from the mother country, proximity of the current social and political movements, including the at times threatening closeness of the United

3) Brown, E.K. “The Problem of a Canadian Literature,” p. 42.

4) MacMechan. *Headwaters of Canadian Literature*. p. 19.

States, the conscious need to overcome one's own provincialism, and the emergent infrastructure of cultural institutions. One of the products of this milieu is the artistic career of Thomas Chandler Haliburton.

Haliburton was the first Canadian writer of noticeable renown to actually be born in Canada; however, it is unlikely that he should explicitly consider himself a Canadian: he belonged among the generation for whom the word *Canadien* still denoted the French-speaking denizens of the country (see II.1. s. XXX/3). In the immediate context he viewed himself as a native from Nova Scotia, and in the wider, and more consequential sense, as a subject of the British Empire.

Haliburton was a judge, and also a Tory politician by profession, which implies that during all of his life he was actively involved in the public life, initially in Canada, and during his last years in England, where he was a member of the House of Commons for a six years' term. He held rather ambivalent feelings towards his native Nova Scotia: on the one hand he was aware of the great potential of its future progress, but on the other hand, primarily due to his growing political conservatism and loyal adherence to Britain, he found it difficult to suppress his displeasure at the existing political representation of the province and at what he perceived as a genial apathy and indolence of its inhabitants.

Haliburton expressed his relationship towards Nova Scotia, and herewith towards the newly emergent Canada, in his central work, originally published between the years 1835-36 as a series of sketches under the title "Recollections of Nova Scotia" in *The Novascotian* journal. His satirical sketches met with such success that the author decided to publish them in print. This was the start of the famed literary life of *The Clockmaker; or The Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick, of Slickville*, first published in 1836. The book comprises a more or less loose sequence of episodes, each of which is introduced by a concrete and illustrative situation that eventually serves for the compelling final – primarily business – lesson. The basic form of the narrative is a dialogue lead by a wealthy traveling gentleman, who represents the author's alter ego, and his companion, an artful traveling salesman Sam Slick. Sam Slick is not only an experienced businessman, but, more importantly, an expert in "human nature" – and these two kinds of expertise logically complement each other in his life philosophy. What is important – if at the same time ironic – is the fact that Mr. Slick is a Yankee – a proper American with everything that it takes, and portrayed in accordance with the stereotypical ideas of the time about the members of this young nation, so actively struggling to win its place in the sun of the world scene. The narrative means by which the Atlantic Canada is introduced to the reader by the experienced foreigner, familiar with Canada, as well as with the ways of the world, creates an effective discursive tension and, concurrently, the necessary objectification. The author's intention was to provide satirizing criticism of the social conditions in the province and of the dilatoriness of the local people – which is always far more effective if coming from the outside, than from the insider. The narrator can thus ask Mr. Slick innocent questions as to what he, as such a worldly traveler, thinks of Halifax and of Nova Scotia, and get a somewhat abrasive, but apparently well justified answer:

This province is much behind the intelligence of the age. But if it is behind us in that respect, it is a long chalk ahead on us in others. I never seed or heard tell of a country

that had so many natural privileges as this... They have all they can ax, and more than they deserve... A government that lays as light on 'em as a down counterp'in, and no taxes. Then look at their dykes. The Lord seems to have made 'em on purpose for such lazy folks... You have heerd tell of a man who couldn't see London for the houses? I tell you, if we had this country, you couldn't see the harbours for the shipping. There'd be a rush of folks to it, as there is in one of our inns, to the dinner table, when they sometimes get jammed together in the doorway, and a man has to take a running leap over their heads, afore he can get in. A little nigger boy in New York found a diamond worth two thousand dollars; well, he sold it to a watchmaker for fifty cents; the little critter didn't know no better. Your people are just like the nigger boy – they don't know the value of their diamond.⁵

Mr. Slick provides his own theory identifying the difference between the smart Americans and the Nova Scotia “Bluenoses:”

Do you know the reason monkeys are no good? Because they chatter all day long; so do the niggers, and so do the Bluenoses of Nova Scotia; it's all talk and no work. Now with us it's all work and no talk; in our shipyards, our factories, our mills, and even in our vessels, there's no talk; a man can't work and talk too.⁶

However, Mr. Slick does not only regale the poor Canadian victims of his own business practices with words of disdain, neither does he admire his American countrymen unconditionally: he is disturbed by certain features of demagoguery in the American thinking and politics, and he is able to appreciate the honesty and resilience, qualities necessary for the future progress of their province, in the Nova Scotia “Bluenoses” – upon whom he, after all, depends for his living. He himself is apparently far from being exempt from the true American vices: the image of the young Canada, or, at least, of its small, but historically important part, and likewise the image of its strategic and traditionally sensitive border with the United States, which forms a substantial line of its self-definition, thus in Haliburton's work becomes ambivalent, complex, and, to a large extent, objective.

Haliburton's sociological and political message was, however, largely ignored by the readers of his time: this was overshadowed by the figure of the narrator's companion himself, whose level-headed musings and earthy Yankee dialect soon became a sought-after source of charming amusement. Especially after the London publication of the book in 1837, Mr. Slick turned into one of the most popular comical literary figures of the nineteenth century, and his fame, reportedly, temporarily exceeded that of Sam Weller, Dickens' comical servant from *The Pickwick Papers*. Haliburton's *Clockmaker* became the first Canadian international bestseller.

In creating Sam Slick, Haliburton uncovered the rich mine of American humor. The Clockmaker is the same kind of cute Yankee as the real estate agent in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Lots in Eden, shoepeg oats, clocks in Nova Scotia, all existed like the famous razors, to sell. *Caveat*

5) Haliburton, Thomas Chandler. *The Clockmaker, or, the Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick of Slickville*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990, p. 13.

6) Haliburton, Thomas Chandler. *The Clockmaker, or, the Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick of Slickville*. p. 75.

emptor! Smartness, bragging, exaggeration, dialect are features of Sam Slick. His sayings have wide currency. Many are embalmed in Bartlett as ‘Americanisms,’ and they were collected in a British province by a lawyer of Scottish descent.⁷

The similarity between Haliburton’s Sam Slick and Dickens’ Sam Weller does not constitute the only parallel between these two authors. *The Clockmaker* and *The Pickwick Papers* share, likewise, an analogical narrative structure. Dickens’ arguably most famous work started as a serialized novel in London in the same year when Haliburton’s *Clockmaker* was issued here as well, and originally the young author did not conceive of it as a book publication, let alone a novel, either. The individual parts of its composition can most aptly be defined as “sketches,” which is a literary form used in Britain already by the neoclassicists and the romantics, and which Dickens variegated by his distinct talent for the realistic depiction of peculiar characters and sharply observed situations. Like Haliburton, Dickens sends his Mr. Pickwick on his travels, so as to enable him to meet a great variety of human types and characters, to get to know a variety of social milieus, and to experience a variety of small events and situations, generally rendered in a completely plausible manner, and all that without him undergoing any substantial psychological or aesthetic development. The young author felt that the use of this loose narrative composition will eventually lead him towards a grand and complex structure of the novel, and, as history showed, his judgment proved correct. And, according to the example of his Canadian fellow writer, Dickens also “conquered England, as well as the whole world, mainly by his humor.”⁸

Unlike Dickens, Haliburton never worked his way through towards writing a great realistic Canadian novel, but his fictional works contributed largely to the creation of conditions for its successful development in the future. Like Dickens, Haliburton may have apprehended that a series of sketches, enabling a realistic exploration of the new geo-social, as well as narrative, space, would prove as the most feasible starting point for the creation of the national tradition of prose fiction. Haliburton’s career as a writer thus became a metaphorical portrait of the national literature in its early years, and a mirror image of Dickens,’ functioning as a symbol of the culture of the mother country, against which the Canadian literary community needed to delimitate itself, if it was to start writing a national literature of the new home. Since Haliburton’s time, Nova Scotia, and the other Atlantic provinces, have always been an important linking element between the Old and the New Worlds:

The literary impulse which was once so strong in Nova Scotia and produced the first literary movement in Canada is by no means spent; but those who feel it belong to a more modern period and were subject to other than local influences.⁹

7) MacMechan. *Headwaters of Canadian Literature*. p. 39.

8) Stříbrný, Zdeněk. *Dějiny anglické literatury (The History of English Literature)*. Praha: Academia, 1987, p. 448. “[Dickens] dobyl Anglie i světa především svým humorem.”

9) MacMechan. *Headwaters of Canadian Literature*. p. 50.

IV.2.3 Story Cycle - The New Genre of Canadian National Literature

Haliburton succeeded in adapting a literary form that proved extremely fitting for Canadian prose fiction: a collection of loosely arranged episodic stories, interconnected by the time of the narrative, more or less loosely delineated space, and by the main character, or a group of characters that freely overstep the borderlines between the particular parts of the whole. Canadian literary history defines the genre as a *story cycle*. In a sense the story cycle stands on the verge defining a *short story collection* on the one hand, and a novel, or a novella, on the other. With the short story collection (in book form) it shares absence of a chronologically long-term perspective, and thus development in the horizontal sense, as well as absence of the internal transformation of the main character, and thus development on the aesthetically vertical level. At the same time, the individual parts of the story cycle typically are not dependent on their strictly identified place in the narrative whole, but, rather, function on their own, without necessary knowledge of the surrounding textual field.

In contrast from the short story collection, however, the story cycle displays characteristic linking elements, if elastic and semi-permeable. These are the above mentioned basic categories of character or group of characters, time, and space. The main character can be a companion – such as Haliburton’s traveling salesman – or the narrator, or the story cycle is focused on a group of characters inhabiting a shared space. The particular stories take place in one historical time, generally loosely identified. Their commonly shared narrative space serves, on the other hand, as the crucial defining feature of their existence, and of their own life stories – the Nova Scotia Bluenoses are what they are, and their stories are the way they are quite because they come from Nova Scotia; the genre of the story cycle constitutes, therefore, an example of “literature of place,” and in the context of Canadian literature they form a primary prose genre about Canada itself.

Even though it cannot be claimed that the story cycle is exclusively genuine for Canadian literature only (which is documented also by the above mentioned example of Dickens’ early work), the fact remains that in Canada it took very strong roots, and created a successful tradition. The nature of the genre is a quality that, from the beginning, effectively resonated with the needs, as well as real possibilities, of the newly developing national literature: a structural, narrative, and development openness, coming near to a “natural” style of storytelling: “It is only human nature for writers (and readers) to want to perpetuate the single work and to resist its completion.”¹⁰ Canadian literature of the nineteenth century had not yet disposed of a great number of outstanding artistic individualities – it was still waiting for its “Canadian Dickens” or a “Canadian Tennyson” – and for this reason many of the authors welcomed a form that would facilitate representation of a multiple, if not necessarily internally complex cultural identity.

10) Mann, Susan Garland. *The Short Story Cycle. A Genre Companion and Reference Guide*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989, p. 1.

The composite (or cycle) lends itself to an exploration of the unique cultural identity shared by a group of people, whereas the novel is suited to an intensive study of an individual or a few individuals. The composite, in other words, offers a panoramic view of a setting and its people, whereas the novel's form demands limitation of focus to individuals.¹¹

The basis for the definition of the genre of the story cycle is the relation between the whole and its individual components. The stories are autonomous discursive units the structure of which is organized by its own internal rules, and at the same time they form integral parts of a higher whole – from which they can, however, more or less freely alight.

Central to the dynamics of the story cycle is the tension between the one and the many. When do the many cease being merely many and congeal into one? Conversely, when does a “one” become so discreet and differentiated that it dissolves into a “many”? Every story cycle displays a double tendency of asserting the individuality of its components on the one hand and of highlighting, on the other, the bounds of unity which make the many into a single whole.¹²

The relative independence of the individual stories that, nonetheless, construct an integral whole, often contributes to the ability of the genre of the story cycle to absorb seemingly mutually contradicting subject matters and aesthetic perspectives. The constituent episodes have hierarchically the same level of importance in relation to one another, as well as in relation to the whole, and the general framework creates space for the free movement of identically important (or identically unimportant) characters, events, and discourses. Story cycles can thus be read very differently, according to particular circumstances and readerly preferences, and can gain volume by further adding of parts, or, conversely, they can be represented by mere selected segments (as was the case of the selection from Canadian nineteenth-century fiction in Czech translation, in which Haliburton's *The Clockmaker* is represented by eleven short episodes).

Some critics even consider the story cycle as a sort of an anti-novel, as a form based on the fragmentation of a longer, coherent narrative and its composite units of time, space and action by means of an internally developing main character, the unifying element of which is the repetition and variation of recurrent motifs. The identification of these motifs is precisely what constitutes the reader's aesthetic experience of the genre, and concurrently its most distinct characteristic feature.

The production of prose fiction composed in loose cycles thus became a metonymic part of the larger whole of Canadian literary fiction of the early period. In the nineteenth century it not only gained factual and historical value, but, by being primarily a story of Canada and its cultural and geographic space, it created an indispensable component of the historical memory and cultural tradition of the national literature. Therefore, the Introduction to the first representative anthology of Canadian short stories of the nine-

11) Creighton, Joanne V. “Dubliners and Go Down, Moses: The Short Story Composite” in Mann, Susan Garland. *The Short Story Cycle. A Genre Companion and Reference Guide*. p. 154.

12) Ingram, Forrest. *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971, p. 19.

teenth century, published in 1976, reminded of the necessity to identify the continuity of themes, as well as of narrative forms, that the contemporary literature develops, if not always in a conscious manner: “Canadians are prone to the danger of forgetting the past and its influence on the present [...]. Modern Canadian writing is far more rooted in the past than we usually care to admit.”¹³ And even though strictly speaking the first example of the story cycle in the history of Canadian literature is Duncan Campbell Scott’s collection *In the Village of Viger and Other Stories*, published in 1896, Haliburton’s *The Clockmaker* stands on the beginning of the essential line in the development of Canadian fiction, or at least, it adumbrates its historical arrival.

It is not without interest that many representative anthologies, or those anthologies used for educational purposes, that provide a retrospective overview of the development of Canadian fiction, are methodologically organized in view of providing the reader with an idea of the cultural characteristics of a specific place, region, or a whole province – they respect, thereby, the tradition of story cycles, arranged according to the principle of representation of the collective and local, rather than linear and individual identity. In the early 1970s (not coincidentally shortly after the centenary celebrations of the founding of the Canadian Confederation) the prestigious Macmillan publishing house thus issued a series of anthologies focused on introducing the production of literary fiction of the leading Canadian regions: *Stories from Western Canada* (1972), *Stories from Atlantic Canada* (1973), *Stories from Ontario* (1974) and *Stories from Pacific and Arctic Canada* (1974). The anthologies brought out upon the national literary scene the individual Canadian provinces, and by representing their cultural specifics they facilitated their mutual comparison and creative interaction. The particular provinces were thus given literary space – at least upon the field of short fiction – to prove their cultural sovereignty, and at the same time they entered the larger whole of Canadian national literature.

IV.2.4 The Manawaka cycle of Margaret Laurence

One of the most influential Canadian literary inheritors of the genre of story cycle and contributors to the creation of the canon of contemporary Canadian literature is Margaret Laurence (1926-1987). Her extensive work in prose fiction is inspired by a number of different sources: among these it is particularly her own childhood spent in a small provincial town in the prairies of southern Manitoba, her lifelong interest in the history of her native province, as well as of Canada as a whole, and her interest in the history of her own origin, the history of her people, cultivated since childhood by her avid penchant for reading, nourished by early attempts at her own writing. Of no smaller importance is the author’s seven years’ experience of living in Africa in the 1950s, one of the results of which was the publication of her first literary works: essays, a short story, a collection of Somali poetry and fiction, as well as her first novel, *This Side Jordan* (1960).

13) New, W. H. (ed.). *Literary History of Canada. Canadian Literature in English. Volume Four*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990, p. 47.

It does seem that several years of absence from Canada during her formative years as a writer helped Laurence to acquire the necessary objectifying critical distance from her mother country and its culture, and also advanced her interest to eventually return to its environment in her central works. These gradually formed a cycle of four novels and one collection of stories, usually referred to as the Manawaka cycle, according to the central framing location of the action, which is the Manitoba small town of Manawaka, inspired by the author's native town of Neepawa. The first of the works of the Manawaka cycle was an extensive novel *The Stone Angel* (1964), followed later by the novels *A Jest of God* (1966), and *The Fire-dwellers* (1969), and a collection of stories *A Bird in the House*, published in 1970. The Manawaka cycle eventually became complete by the publication of the novel *The Diviners* in 1974.¹⁴

According to the author's own words these four novels and one collection of stories form one organically interconnected whole, aiming at a common catharsis. Its stories converge in centripetal circles towards a common centre, symbolized by the town of Manawaka, which constitutes its local, as well as historically specific, but not untransferable aesthetic experience. In spite of the firm and determining local setting Laurence does not strive for cultural exclusiveness: her words in which she herself characterized one of her stories, are valid for the whole Manawaka cycle:

It is actually a story about the generations, about the pain and bewilderment of one's knowledge of other people, about the reality of other people which is one way of realizing one's own reality, about the fluctuating and accidental quality of life (God really doesn't love Order), and perhaps more than anything, about the strangeness and mystery of the very concepts of *past*, *present* and *future*.¹⁵

On the formal level the only real story cycle in the whole of the Manawaka fiction cycle is the fourth book, the *Bird in the House* collection. Its linking elements are, on the one hand, the town of Manawaka as the centre of all action, and, on the other hand, the central figure of the narrator, and concurrently the main character of Vanessa MacLeod, who betrays perspicuous autobiographical features. The individual episodes are modeled as retrospectives into the formative years of the young protagonist, struggling to reach self-knowledge via discreet epiphanic moments according to the Joycean example. Even though at first sight the collection appears as a clear case of its genre, the interpretations of its structure are surprisingly differentiated:

The stories which make up *A Bird in the House* are linked by character, setting, theme. The primary link is formed by the narrative voice, that of the child-cum-woman Vanessa MacLeod. These links are so effective that the collection might be called a novel, and more than one critic has made this claim. Laurence grants that the net effect is similar to that of a novel, but describes the flow-lines as being vertical rather than horizontal, as they are in

14) By her origin, education, international experience, and, above all, by the subject matter and the cycle-format of her stories, Laurence resembles the Manitoba Francophone writer Gabrielle Roy (1909-1983) considered as the *magnam matrem* of modern Quebec fiction (see III.3 and III.6.).

15) Laurence, Margaret. "Time and Narrative Voice," in Metcalf, John (ed.). *The Narrative Voice*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972, p. 128-29.

a typical long fiction. The threads of Vanessa's life are presented separately, not simultaneously. But the narrative voice, with its control over fictive time, is handled in the same way in these stories as it is in Laurence's novels.¹⁶

George Woodcock similarly noted that: "[...] it is hard to know whether to define *A Bird in the House* as a collection of tales or as a loosely knit and unconventional novel."¹⁷ Laurence herself called them "imagined autobiographies," in which she applied aesthetic means to recapitulate her own emotional and cognitive development from a child conscious of a small, relatively enclosed world of the family, into a young woman entering wider, mutually interconnected circles of the outside world. The time of the stories is interwoven with the time of their narration: the adult Vanessa returns into the time of her childhood, framed by her age between ten and twenty years, and unwittingly identifies the defining moments of getting to know her own identity, interconnected with getting to know the ever wider social space of the larger world. Among these is, for example, the discovery of the Scottish Presbyterian heritage of her family and its history, which contributed to the creation of the history of Manitoba. In one of her interviews Laurence described what personal value she ascribed to the theme of the "ancestors" and its correct interpretation:

My family began in Scotland and I was brought up with a great knowledge of my Scots background, but it took me a long time – in fact I was really grown up – before I recognized that, in point of fact, these ancestors were very far away from me and that Scotland to me was just an ancestral memory, almost in a Jungian sense.¹⁸

Unwillingly at first, but with growing understanding the young Vanessa, like her author, tells her stories in order to discover her family's belonging to the old Scottish clans and their history as Canadian settlers, which forms an integral part of her mixed cultural, and individual identity. The initially "boring" books covered with dust about the Scottish clans gradually reveal their charm for her, as the initially unloved members of her family, symbolizing strict and imposing authority, come alive by their life stories; and both of these sources become indispensable components of Vanessa's personality.

Vanessa's life, however, is not a mere passive copy of the lives of the hoary Scottish highlanders or early Canadian settlers; the concentric social circles in Manawaka have their outside, peripheral part, less pleasant to look at, and this is represented by the descendants of the Indian mixed-bloods eking out a bare existence beyond the town borders. For the town they symbolize a shameful embarrassment, for Vanessa they are a disturbing mystery that causes her unpleasant, but provocative quandary. Their silent rancor (embodied most immediately by Vanessa's schoolmate Piquette) is a completely impenetrable reproach to the surrounding hostile world, and a disconcerting secret the historical causes of which are gradually unveiled before Vanessa's eyes. The Métis,

16) Morley, Patricia. "The Long Trek Home: Margaret Laurence's Stories," in Verduyn, Christl, (ed.). *Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1988, p. 41.

17) Woodcock, George. "Jungle and Prairie," *Canadian Literature*. N. 45, Summer 1970, p. 84.

18) Laurence, Margaret. "A Conversation About Literature: An Interview with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*. N. 1, Winter 1972, p. 66.

descendants of the Aboriginal Indian people and French settlers, epitomize all the antagonisms of the ethnic and cultural influences, and for Vanessa they pose the necessity to come to terms with this part of the identity of her own national belonging as well. The members of the Tonnerre family, the most conspicuously profiled Métis characters, whose destinies are intermeshed in the whole Manawaka cycle, are the progeny of Riel's and Dumont's comrades-in-arms from Batoche – and as such they are symbols of the not only valid, but also crucial part of Canadian history.

The individual stories that comprise the collection *A Bird in the House* have a distinctly metonymic function: they are independent literary units, each of which gives a more or less accurate idea of the whole collection, but at the same time they contribute to the creation of the internal cohesion of the collection of which they are a part. The critics identify “the sameness of their final effect”¹⁹; the collection as a whole then forms a part of a higher unit, which is the whole cycle of the Manawaka fiction, subject to identical structural principles.

There are, however, two very large bonuses derived from the collection of these stories into book form. First, *A Bird in the House* is an integral and necessary part of the pattern of the Manawaka works as they have evolved... Second, in collection they also make a unique contribution to our literature in a particular Canadian time and place, under the deadening blows of the Depression and drought of the thirties, and into the early years of the Second World War.²⁰

The whole Manawaka cycle is then one grand set of stories about Canada, which can be read either by its parts or as a whole, and contribute thus to the rich, internally diversified unity of modern Canadian literature:

The Manawaka cycle is unified not only by the centripetal pull of the home town itself, but by the development over the four novels of a vision of the human condition which is not fully rendered until the cycle is completed. This development imparts to the cycle a rhythm of reconciliation in which the fragmentariness of ordinary life, explored in the separate works, is seen against, and so continually absorbed into, a sense of design and purpose in the universe.²¹

If the Manawaka cycle has a cathartic climax, it is the final novel of the whole composition, *The Diviners*. In it Laurence develops a number of the central motifs already suggested in the previous parts, and endeavors a cyclical completion of its plots and themes. Morag Gunn, the main character of the novel, bears distinct features of her author, and similarly to her, she gradually aims her life towards the “divining,” as a search for the springs of her own identity in the individual, but also historical and cultural sense.

19) Thomas, Clara. *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976, p.105.

20) Thomas, Clara. *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*. p. 106.

21) Blewett, David. “The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle,” in Verduyn, Christl, (ed.). *Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation*. p. 176.

Morag is born in Manawaka as a social and human outcast, whose identity is initially only based on minuscule snatches of memory. The starting motivation for the telling of her story, unfolding retrospectively in “memorybank movies,” is a deep personal crisis that comes many years later: her eighteen-year old daughter has left their home, trying to escape her own present, in order to find and come to understand her own past. Her daughter’s search forces Morag to follow her example and try to retrospectively reconstruct her own destiny that has brought them both towards the present situation. Morag knows very well that even the tiniest splinter is a part of a mosaic creating a meaningful image, as every tiny episode forms a firm part of a larger fate. She comments about a handful of old photographs, that is her only memory of her parents and the first years of her life, as well as the first fixed point of her narration, as follows:

I’ve kept them, of course, because something in me doesn’t want to lose them, or perhaps doesn’t dare. Perhaps they’re my totems, or contain a portion of my spirit. Yeah, and perhaps they are exactly what they seem to be – a jumbled mess of old snapshots which I’ll still be lugging along with me when I’m an old lady, clutching them as I enter or am shoved into the Salvation Army Old People’s home or wherever it is that I’ll find my death.²²

An important component of the image that Morag creates about herself is stories: stories about her own family, whom she never knew, as well as stories about her ancestry in a more general sense. Quite because she is an orphan she listens with eager interest to the stories of Christie, her adoptive father, about the Scottish clan of the Gunns, whose surname she bears, and about their coming from the Old Country to the Canadian prairies. Christie’s stories lay the foundations of the family mythology, which Morag eventually accepts as her own. As an adult woman she even undertakes a journey to Scotland, so as to meet the supposed country of her ancestors firsthand – but she arrives at a somewhat surprising discovery:

It’s a deep land, here, allright... but it’s not mine, except a long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not.²³

And at that time she already knows the answer to the question what then is the land of her ancestors: “Christie’s real country. Where I was born.”²⁴

In times of crises and moments of internal insecurity Morag tries to master the proper “settler spirit,” and in the example of the dauntlessness of her ancestors she searches for the enjambment valid not only for herself, but for the modern times as a whole. It is not by coincidence that she as a writer turns to her literary precursor, Canadian nineteenth-century writer Catharine Parr-Traill, whom she – again, and not coincidentally, in plural – invokes, partially with hope, partially with self-doubting irony: “Catharine Parr Traill, where are you now that we need you? Speak, oh lady of blessed memory.”²⁵ In the text

22) Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989, p. 14.

23) Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners*. p. 415.

24) Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners*. p. 415.

25) Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners*. p. 109.

by “Saint Catharine,” a pioneer settler of early Canada, and a pioneer of Canadian literature, she finds the guidance that she needs, and that provides the necessary, and viable extension over the barriers of time and place: “In cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one’s hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror. It is better to be up and doing.”²⁶ By means of the interior dialogue – which, however, is spoken aloud – with Catharine Parr-Traill and other characters the text turns into a multi-layered and multi-vocal polemic of various historical periods, as well as of different philosophical, moral, and aesthetic perspectives. Morag accepts Catharine’s advice, but at the same time she does not cease to question its absolute authority, and relativizes it in the spirit of modern thought – and modern literature:

Morag: Thank you, Mrs. Traill.

Catharine Parr-Traill: That, my dear, was when we were at one time surrounded by forest fires which threatened to crops, fences, stock, stable, cabin, furniture and, of course, children. Your situation, if I may say so, can scarcely be termed comparable.

Morag: Well, uh no, I guess not. Hold on, though. You try having your only child disappear you know where, Mrs. Traill. Also, with no strong or even feeble shoulder upon which to lean, on occasion. Okay, don’t say it, lady. You’d go out and plant turnips, so at least you wouldn’t starve during the winter. You’d pick blueberries or something. Start a jam factory. Make pemmican out of the swayback which dropped dead of exhaustion on the Back Forty. Don’t tell me. I know.²⁷

There is yet another type of stories that comprise the whole of Morag’s destiny and identity: the stories and history of the Manitoba Métis, and the sad reverberations of their legendary past, lost with Riel at Batoche. Morag, like Vanessa MacLeod, meets with the members of the Tonnerre family, but being an orphan growing up in the home of the local garbage collector, she is an outcast of a sort as well, and as such she can enter into a closer, and more fatal relationship with one of them. Her relationship with Jules Tonnerre brings about a daughter, who embodies the painful and conflicting connection of the heritage of the Aboriginal people of Canada and the European settler history. Where her search for her own individual destiny will bring her remains unspoken – the novel of Pique, Morag’s daughter, is left unwritten, and thus the Manawaka cycle, in spite of the catharsis inherent in *The Diviners*, maintains its characteristic structural openness.

The structure of the Manawaka cycle as a whole thus resembles the genre of story cycle, and forms an important part of the general whole of modern Canadian literature – to which it consciously added a significant chapter, by its concentrated effort to introduce it into the wide context of contemporary literature of the world.

For Laurence, as for the others, a native, Canadian literary tradition in no sense negates or ignores the total and continuing stream of all literature in the past and in the present. Margaret Laurence’s work is markedly “literary” in the conventional sense – *The Diviners*, for instance, is permeated with references to and resonances of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Re-*

26) Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners*. p. 109.

27) Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners*. p. 109–10.

gained and *Samson Agonistes*. All of her work is also, of course, enriched by the spirit, the language and the rhythms of the Bible. But she is predominantly engaged in writing out of the experience of Canadians and in their accustomed speech patterns.²⁸

Laurence definitely did not care to only be a regional writer; she was well aware of the necessity to write literature that would be able to enter the dialogic relationship with the surrounding world, and bear comparison with literary traditions of other nations. Her fiction, as well as her thinking about literature, reveals acute understanding of the fact that Canadian literature in its unity – largely nonexistent in practice – is formed by a number of diversified external, as well as internal influences and their mutual interaction. In the year 1977 she could, therefore, talk about Canadian literature with self-confidence given by her own authorial experience, and by her knowledge of the situation of Canadian national culture:

The calibre and scope of our literature now is such that it can be read and taught simply because it is interesting, worth reading and worth teaching. But for us it has an added dimension as well. It is our own; it speaks to us, through its many and varied voices, of things which are close to our hearts; it links with our ancestors and with one another... [we do] have a great need to possess our own land, to know our own heritage, to value ourselves in relation to a world.²⁹

IV.2.5 The Unbelonging of Mordecai Richler

A significant counterpart of Margaret Laurence on the turf of contemporary Canadian fiction is Mordecai Richler (1931 – 2001), whose career and orientation betray many parallels with the work of his female colleague. Very much like in Laurence's case, Richler's career as a writer was distinctly shaped by the strictly delimited localization of his background: Richler was born in the Jewish ghetto in Montreal, in an ethnically clearly defined environment in the midst of the multicultural metropolis, the fictive, but sharply perceived borders of which were as difficult to cross as Laurence's attempts at escape from the isolated prairie small town. The ghettoizing climate of his native neighborhood was for Richler the first determining life experience, and the source for inspiration for his work as a writer, from which he never distanced himself for long. In one of his interviews he admitted openly:

Ultimately I think all writers are parochial, they're stuck with the material to hand. I'm a Canadian and a Jew and I write about being both. I worry about being away so long from – well, the roots of my discontent.³⁰

28) Thomas, Clara. "The Chariot of Ossian: Myth and Manitoba in The Diviners," in Verduyn, Christl. (ed.). *Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation*. p. 154.

29) Thomas, Clara. "The Chariot of Ossian: Myth and Manitoba in The Diviners," in Verduyn, Christl. (ed.). *Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation*. p. 141.

30) Richler, Mordecai. "Interview" in *Time Magazine*. N. 7, November 1971, p. 6.

This constitutive life experience is, at the same time, what in Richler's personal history created the necessary extension towards the larger historical and cultural context. Such context, in his case, is predominantly the archetypal, as well as modern Jewish history, and its tragedy resulting in the holocaust during World War 2. Richler grew up in an enclosed world marked by orthodox religion – his grandfather was a rabbi and chassidic scholar – and also by deep distrust in both Francophone and Anglophone fellow citizens of different denominations. He was engaged in the study of the Talmud, and was supposed to follow in his grandfather's footsteps as a rabbi, but soon he felt the desire to liberate himself from the monolithic and limiting influence of the Jewish ghetto (functioning also where, in Richler's words, it "has no walls") and to find for himself his own independent path. Like Laurence, Richler spent his early years as a writer abroad, in order to get sufficient critical distance from his home environment. He spent ten years in London, where several of his first novels were published in the 1950s. Even though he later exceeded the literary quality of his early works, "for a Canadian writer" he enjoyed relatively good success in London – much earlier than when his name was known in Canada at all. An influential British critic Walter Allen even contended that with his novel *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1958) "the Canadian novel emerges for the first time"³¹. The trajectory of Richler's literary career thus in a sense repeats the arc drawn more than a hundred years before him by Haliburton, the first internationally famous Canadian storyteller. Richler, for that matter, mercilessly parodied the, according to him desperate parochialism of the situation of Canadian culture, and the obsessive efforts to define the Canadian identity, for his whole life. In an article published three months after Richler's death, one of his friends and experts at his work made sure to remind the readers of that, in a style very similar to Richler's own:

Mordecai Richler died on July 3rd, and within minutes of the announcement there was a stampede from the grand panjandrums of "CanLit" to conscript him posthumously into the ranks of "Canadian novelists." Mordecai was a novelist who happened to be Canadian, which isn't quite the same thing, and he spent much of his life making gleeful digs about all the great writers who were, as he put it, "world famous in Canada." Richler, by contrast, was famous in, among other places, Italy, where his last novel, *Barney's Version*, is a best-seller in its seventh printing and hugely popular among a population not known as great novel-readers. The word "Richleriano" has become the accepted shorthand for "politically incorrect."³²

In Canada Richler is known predominantly as an unpitied satirist, whose critical observations aim in several directions: at the Canadian parochialism and superficial nationalism, at the Francophone separatism in Quebec, and, not lastly, at his own kind: the Jewish community in Montreal. Richler often said that he came from two ghettos, one Jewish, and one Canadian, or, in other words, from one effectively marketable, and one totally uninteresting. Both his identities interface each other and create a complex and rich, if somewhat explosive mixture, nourishing several decades of the author's storytelling

31) <http://www.ucalgary.ca/lib-old/SpecColl/richlerbioc.htm>

32) Steyn, Mark. "Notebook. Mordecai Richler, 1931-2001" in *The New Criterion*. September 2001, p. 123.

invention. By the irony of his destiny as an artist Richler was much more passionately hated by members of the Canadian Jewish community than by anybody else; during one of his lectures in Montreal a member of the audience is reported to have asked: "Why is it that everybody loves Shalom Aleichem, but everybody hates you?" According to Mark Steyn, the author of the above quoted article, the answer is ready at hand: Richler could never resist the temptation to use any occasion to mercilessly ridicule all the vices that the Jewry, in his eyes, suffers from, above all the obsessive tribalism, narrow-minded materialism and inferiority complex linked with the feeling of historical hurt. The necessity to come to terms with these ethnic, but in reality moral inhibitions, inspired Richler's writing for many years.

The first novels by Richler, which were published abroad, already clearly revealed their author's thematic orientation, and the characteristic features of his style: the compulsive search for real, or at least somewhat fixed values, the very existence of which is constantly challenged by contemporary liberalism, the interest in the historical context of the interracial, political, and moral conflicts, the perspicuously formulated authorial attitude towards his protagonists, who are often strongly ambivalent, if not outright negative characters, thrilling stories told with obvious gusto, and the mercilessly satirical tone.

Richler authored a number of novels and short stories of uneven quality and scope, a large portion of which is related by the common milieu of Jewish Montreal on one side, and by a common group of characters on the other; these characters pass through the pages of the stories only to reappear, if marginally, or even quite inconspicuously, in some of the other stories later. Thereby the horizontal line of Richler's literary career metaphorically resembles the genre of story cycle – the sense of a well-told story was, for the formally conservative Richler, the strongest and most reliable artistic tool. Richler further developed the formally viable tradition of story cycle in a collection of sketches titled *The Street* (1961). Besides the characters already known from some of the other works of fiction by Richler, the central notion holding the collection together is its localization – the streets of the poor Jewish ghetto in Montreal, which became Richler's distinctive authorial feature and trademark.

The basically traditional narrative structure typical of Richler's early novels was for the first time carefully loosened in his first great work, the novel *St. Urbain's Horseman* (1971), which brought him his second Governor General's Award, the most prestigious Canadian literary prize; he was awarded as one of the first "ethnic authors" among Canadian writers. The storyline of this novel is not limited to one strictly defined narrative scene, as in Richler's earlier novels, but leads the reader through the Jewish Montreal, and from there through a variety of other milieus that the author either knew from personal experience, or studied with utmost care: through the fashionable intellectual and Bohemian world of modern London, through the war-torn Europe, through his phantasmagorical visions of South America, or the kibbutzim of Israel. All these motifs are brought together in the character of the protagonist, Jake Hersh, a successful film screenwriter, and a loving and loved husband and father, who has a somewhat absurd, but nonetheless understandable problem, caused by a whole range of complex ethnic, historical, generational, intellectual, as well as individual and psychological causes: his moral conscience (or, rather, sub-conscience) systematically punishes him for the fact that as a Jew he did not turn into one of the victims of the European holocaust, but instead spent his life in

the safe and comfortable seclusion of North America. Paradoxically, Jake suffers from the feeling that he was born in the “wrong time, wrong place,” and that he belongs to the generation that, in the historical context, is destined to remain “ever observers, never participants.” Richler expressed here the retrogressive process of the genealogical trauma of “unbelonging,” which is, according to many theorists, a symptomatic feature of the history of immigrant literature in various cultural environments. One of the theorists, Arnold Itwaru, formulated the trauma as follows:

Enter the immigrant embodied in dreams and fears, torn between yesterday and tomorrow, walking the terrain of a new culture. For this person the need to understand what he or she has left behind and what is experienced here is crucial to survival. Uprooted from an indigenous culture and transplanted in another, this person's life will occur amidst many shifting images of the self, between a yesterday always alive within, but situated now in another country and culture to which the term „host society“ is usually applied.³³

Despite his seemingly safe and comfortable life Richler's Jake Hersh feels similarly insecure, rootless, and even ashamed for his undeserved happiness. His neurotic mind of a typical modern intellectual gradually produces a feverish, dreamy image of a mythical horseman, supposedly roaming the world in search for Doctor Mengele, whose killing will revenge the historical suffering of the Jews, and, likewise, undo Jake's inadvertent sin. However, towards the finale of his story Jake realizes that in order to solve his personal crisis – and, most likely, in order to simply survive as well – he must confront the dark and dangerous sides of the mythologized history, identify with them, and accept responsibility for his own destiny.

After the success of *St. Urbain's Horseman* Richler settled in Montreal again, this time for good, and became one of the most prompt and outspoken commentators of the social and cultural situation in Quebec, and in Canada as a whole. His perspective was objectified by the fact that in the Francophone Quebec he belonged to the Anglophone minority, and, concurrently, to the Jewish one as well – this position of a multiple outsider enabled him, especially in emotionally tense situations, such as during the repeatedly exacerbated struggle for the separation of the Francophone Quebec from the rest of Canada, to sound in a voice of common sense and reason. Richler's attitude towards the question of the independence of Quebec is summed up in his characteristically biting tone in his essayistic book *Oh Canada, Oh Quebec: Requiem for a Divided Country* (1992).

Richler's style achieved its most characteristic realization in his most ambitious narrative project, which is his grandest novel, *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989). In great detail, and with almost scientific precision, the author mapped in it a whole range of themes significant for the Canadian prose fiction of the 1980s, many of which he had already approached, in different variations, in his earlier works; these include the persistent effort to present a new, or interestingly different version of Canadian history and its relation to the historical context of the Western world; the question of immigration and the representation of Canada as a society built on the historical heritage of immigration

33) Itwaru, Arnold. *The Invention of Canada: Literary Texts and Immigrant Imagination*. Toronto: TSAR, 1990, p. 13.

processes; the question of the Aboriginal population of the continent and its position towards the mainstream society; keen interest in the specific geographic region and its aesthetic potential. *Solomon Gursky* thus can be read as a perfectly informed contribution to the knowledge of Canada's past and its cultural and political atmosphere, as a topography of its determining, or at least inspiring landmarks, and also simply as an extremely entertaining and thrilling story with many secrets, about the search for someone who may never have existed, whom nobody may ever have seen, who was, by every indication, a pretty rascal, but who, in the imagination of the characters, as well as the readers, inspires infinite curiosity that inevitably leads to (self)understanding.

In this complex novel in the form of a multigenerational family saga Richler definitively “[...] comes to terms with the Canadian tradition he has often mocked: he writes into Canadian history and national mythology a previously overlooked Jewish dimension.”³⁴ Many of the episodic characters are free variations or direct parodies of real historical personages (i.e. the conservative prime minister Bennett), historical events leave the exclusive domain of fact and become fascinating, imagined stories – such as for example the undercover Jewish participation in the doomed Franklin expedition in the 1840s, which “explains” certain mysterious customs and ornaments found in Inuit communities etc.

The story, experienced predominantly from the position of Moses Berger, once a promising scientist drowning his talent in alcohol, provides a detailed record of the search for the fate of Solomon Gursky, a charismatic son of poor Jewish immigrants, who as a chosen grandson accompanied his grandfather, his fatal precursor in the role of a “flying Jew,” and undertook a mysterious initiation journey to the far North, in order to return likewise mysteriously as a future founder of an influential dynasty of bootleggers, and later more or less elegant businessmen and originators of the Canadian economic power. Moses, a friend of Solomon's children, and another example of Richler's latently autobiographic characters, obsessed with Solomon as Jake Hersh is with his Horseman, gradually puts together the mosaic of Solomon's life story, using historical documents, newspaper items, court records, personal testimonies etc., and therewith, together with his author, he gives evidence of the unbound attraction of historical genres and historical research for our time, an attraction which is, according to Graeme Gibson, an expression of the postcolonial need to regain the lost understanding of our own past.

Like Morag Gunn, Moses Berger searches a colorful scale of sources for stories from the past, or at least for their fragments, in his desire to reconstruct out of them his own private past, and to come to the understanding of his own episodic story in the context of the Canadian, as well as generally human history. The individual fragments of “historical reality” freely and undetectably mingle with vivid fantasies, and create a fascinating and multi-vocal narrative composition the technique of which resembles that of magic realism. Richler himself jovially referred to *Solomon Gursky* as “the first South American North American novel;”³⁵ the statement, and the novel itself, opened for Canadian literature an important connection to another powerful source of myth, stories, and communication with the cultural scene of the contemporary world.

34) Toye, William (ed.). *The Concise Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, p. 401.

35) Steyn, Mark. “Notebook. Mordecai Richler, 1931-2001” in *The New Criterion*. September 2001, p. 126.

IV.2.6 Literary Genres and National Identity

It is, very likely, not a coincidence that during the time in which Laurence and Richler (as well as many other authors, of course) strove to formulate the Canadian national identity and to add important chapters to its history in their fiction, the focus of the discourse of Canadian literary theory and historiography significantly shifted as well. From the 1970s its argumentation started to concentrate explicitly on the questions of nation, national identity and national literature as a systematic whole structured by unifying models. Many leading critics tried to identify in Canadian literary history firm abstract consolidating patterns that would express the national character. Of essential importance in this development were the works by the most prominent Canadian literary theoretician Northrop Frye, co-founder of archetypal criticism, largely informed by Jungian psychoanalysis. Although Frye's central theoretical work, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), did not exercise immediate or open influence upon Canadian literature or literary theory, Frye's essays on Canadian literature inspired both significantly, namely in the 1970s and 80s. Among the best-known, and also the most controversial theoretical studies of Canadian literature of this orientation belong mainly Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972), or *Butterfly on Rock: a Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature* (1970) by Douglas Gordon Jones. These studies come out from an abstract assumption of one cohesive Canadian unity, which they then retrospectively co-create.

They view literary texts less as part of a larger, specifically literary system – e.g. *genre* – than as part of the production of an entire culture with an assumed unity. They see this literary system, in turn, implicitly as a subsystem of a more general system of cultural productions. Literary history in these terms turns into Canadian Studies; through an analysis of 'Canadian' symbols, images, and myths, literature is able to function potentially as a means of national identification and a force for national unity.³⁶

These theoretical works, and literary texts from which they drew their examples, made effort to fulfill the requirement of creating the domestic Canadian literary tradition, in the specific conditions of a culture still at the time defined by its settler and colonial mentality. They argued that it is:

[...] tradition (not language) [that] distinguishes a national literature; a 'colonial literature' achieves independence by discovering, constructing, or inventing a tradition, whether grounded in historical experience or not. But the effort to construct a literary tradition in Canada is more problematic than these statements suggest. Conventionally, 'nation' equates with the area where the national language is used. But when the nation is linguistically and geographically fragmented, and when the (plural) languages are at once 'our own' and those of other quite different and powerful cultures, then such terms as 'place,' 'speech,' and 'identity' carry ambivalent meanings.³⁷

36) New, W. H. (ed.). *Literary History of Canada. Canadian Literature in English*. Volume Four. pp. 111-112.

37) New, W. H. (ed.). *Literary History of Canada. Canadian Literature in English*. Volume Four. p. 111.

The development of literary theory in Canada underwent a significant change in the following years, thanks to the influence of poststructuralist, and mainly post-colonial criticism. It might seem that by their ethnic background and orientation, as well as by their effort to challenge the established hierarchies of social and aesthetic values and to introduce conscious multi-vocality into the structure of their fictions, enabling repeated varieties of their lectures, both Laurence and Richler would convincingly fit into the paradigm of post-colonial discourse – the assumption of which is justified by the fact that a number of critics have interpreted their works by its means. Other critics, however, have pointed out to the fact that the cultural effort to disrupt the imperial centre and to overcome one's self-perception of the former colonies as cultural peripheries does not represent a negation of the epistemological and power centre in the general sense, but a mere re-location of the centre towards other, i.e. one's own position – typically into the original periphery. In their opinion (voiced for example by Gary Boire), Canadian literary theory and criticism is tinged by nationalism even where it openly claims the contrary. Only by consistent destruction of the coherent historical discourse that maintains inequality of power by ignoring implied conflict, will Canadian literary theory reach the stage in which it will be able to fulfill its basic social function. To date, Canadian literary theory is still constrained by the contradiction between unity and difference, continuity and discontinuity, balance and conflict.

No matter how aware of the constructedness of identities, no matter how concerned with rupture, discontinuity, and transgression, postcolonial criticism of Canadian literature remains nationalist in inspiration. The poststructuralist rejection of nationalist constructs is always in favour of a renewed nation, the nation as it should be. To argue that Canadian criticism should question the nation and its historiography is still to presume that the field of inquiry is the nation. Even when the subject of inquiry is regionalism or ethnicity or gender, the field of inquiry remains the nation and determines what will be found. Postcolonial studies that consider Canadian attitudes to indigenous peoples presume the frame of the nation even as they denounce the imperialist framing of the New World. Studies that make irony the dominant mode of English-Canadian discourse presume that at some level beyond irony there is a Canada and that there is something that Canadians have in common that makes them different from other people.³⁸

In any case, it is without doubt that the English-Canadian literature displays certain characteristic distinctive features in terms of both subject matter and structure. Even though its history can be defined by means of various methodologies, it tells stories about itself, and by doing so it constructs its own independent identity. Its stories then enter larger narrative and cultural units, which create a firm, and more and more distinctly shaped component of the context of modern Western literary tradition.

38) ten Kortenaar, Neil. "The Trick of Divining a Postcolonial Canadian Identity. Margaret Laurence Between Race and Nation." *Canadian Literature*. Nr. 149, Summer 1996. p.12.

IV.3 Hugh MacLennan's Canadian Solitudes

(Klára Kolinská)

The first modern twentieth-century Canadian author of prose fiction who, according to the commonly shared consensus, succeeded in writing a “great Canadian novel,” representing in the form of a fictional story the experience of the young Canadian nation in its central constitutive conflicts, was Hugh MacLennan (1907-1990). MacLennan came from the Atlantic province of Nova Scotia, the symbolic cradle of the Canadian nationality and culture, and after graduating from Dalhousie University in Halifax he received further education in Oxford, Britain, and at Princeton University, where he took a doctoral degree in classical studies. In the United States he also met his first wife, Dorothy Duncan, whose influence reportedly inspired MacLennan to focus in his early writing on Canadian national topics and Canadian environments that he knew from personal experience. His first, and already very successful novel *Barometer Rising* (1941) is set directly in Halifax, and tells a real story that forms a part of the history of Nova Scotia and of the whole Canada – the tragedy of the devastating explosion in the city harbor in 1917. This early novel already betrays MacLennan's characteristic tendency towards a sociological perspective, and an effort to present and explain Canada to the surrounding world, and thus to contribute to its entry upon the international political and literary scene. This tendency is likewise notable in MacLennan's many essays, which the American critic Edmund Wilson praised for the way in which they formulated: “a point of view surprisingly and agreeably different from anything else I knew in English: A Canadian way of looking at things.”³⁹

The following novel became, in a sense, MacLennan's most famous, if not his best work; its title, *Two Solitudes* (1945), turned immediately into an emblematic expression of the schizophrenic essence of the duality of the Canadian nationhood and culture. It won its author the first of his, to date, record number of the Governor General's Awards, and an unprecedented renown in the academic and literary circles – in spite of the fact that some later, and more dispassionate reactions pointed out to the fact that what made MacLennan a very welcome figure on the Canadian literary scene was mainly his open, if well-meant, and state-constructive, nationalism: “MacLennan's deliberate choice of Canadian concerns for his subjects, and his early view of Canada as mediating between an inherited culture and North American obsessive materialism, earned him a too-facile reputation as a crusading nationalist.”⁴⁰ MacLennan was, admittedly, a true Canadian nationalist, and *Two Solitudes* is the most explicit and most complex, if not the most optimistic, formulation of his effort to grasp the homogenizing streams in the fragile structure of Canadian national identity.

The title of the novel, borrowed from Rilke's poem, relates to the two historical state-forming groups that constituted the modern Canadian nationality. The French group is embodied mainly in the character of Athanase Tallard, a noble, but desperately imprac-

39) Newman, Peter C. “A Passion for Canada.” Obituary, *MacLean's*, November 19, 1990, p. 63.

40) Toye, William (ed.). *The Concise Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. p. 303.

tical and naive representative of the French, primarily rural tradition that is not able to fight off the challenge of the aggressive development of modern industry and the new social values at the eve of World War I. Athanase's life is one overwhelming tragedy the catharsis of which, brought about by one impulsive act, seceding from the catholic church after a dispute with a rural priest, betrays the influence of the French naturalistic school by its fierceness and sheer inevitability. Athanase is the first "solitary" hero of the novel, driven into deadly isolation by his effort to free himself from the forced deformation of his independence by the conformity towards the generally assumed ideas about the character and duties of his "race." An apt remark by his British business partner McQueen comes late for Athanase, and meets with his inadvertent refusal: "The tragedy of French-Canada is that you can't make up your minds whether you want to be free-choosing individuals or French-Canadians choosing only what you think your entire race will approve."⁴¹

Athanase's likewise "solitary" opponent is the already mentioned British financier and industrialist Huntly McQueen, a hero of a much more realistic type and modern thinking, a tough businessman who in the critical moment does not hesitate to sacrifice his partner Athanase to his immediate business interests – not quite because Athanase is French, but simply because emotions and scruple have no place in business. McQueen is Tallard's direct obverse not by his nationality – he himself does not hold any particular grudge against the French-Canadians – but by his intellectual orientation and temperament. McQueen is an unemotional, rational practitioner, who, like Tallard, holds the interests and well-being of his country close to his heart – or, rather, to his mind; in difference from Tallard, however, he sees the guarantee of its future welfare in the construction of a solid capitalist social structure. He speculates about the future of Canada, and its comparison with the neighboring United States, in a remarkable manner (an in symbolic solitude):

In Canada, first of all, there were the two races: each could be employed to balance the other. Then there were the churches: they were filled every Sunday, and it was possible for the whole nation to excite itself over a theological dispute. But the real point was this: ten per cent of the college graduates, perhaps not the most brilliant men but certainly the most restless of the lot, found it so difficult to get what they wanted in Canada that you could always count on them drifting south to the States. That made enormously for stability above the border. Down there they could write their books and broadcast their ideas, and compared to the average American they were probably fairly stable citizens. Yes, McQueen thought with satisfaction, we have discovered a great social secret in Canada. We have contrived to solve problems which would ruin other countries merely by ignoring their existence.⁴²

By the irony of his literary fate, however, McQueen remains as solitary a hero as Tallard: he conducts his plans and general speculations in his luxurious, but empty home, he realizes painfully well that women detest even his touch, and that the members

41) McLennan, Hugh. *Two Solitudes*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1984. p. 219.

42) McLennan, Hugh. *Two Solitudes*. p. 273.

of his literary club, that means so much to him, respect only his capital and the power that it imparts to him. He, too, is labeled by his background, and isolated by his power into his own one-man mental camp, and his great dream of Canada united by modern industry remains, at least during his lifetime, unrealized.

Not even those characters that understand the absurd limitations of the tense nationalistic attitudes, be it the British, or the French ones, are exempt from MacLennan's Canadian "solitude"; the most conspicuous of them is the British captain Yardley, a good-humored, simple man with a kind heart and much hard-won life experience, who decides with exemplary impartiality to spend the last years of his life among the most conservative village folk in Quebec, where eventually he can only helplessly stand by and watch the destruction of good and honest people by obdurate nationalistic prejudices. In spite of his human understanding for his neighbors of both nationalities – or perhaps quite because of his understanding – Yardley eventually does not belong to either of the strictly delimited national camps, and ends his life in similarly sad solitude as his old friend Tallard.

It is the figure of Paul Tallard, son of the French nobleman Athanase and an Irish mother, who is liberated by his father's downfall from the restrictive family heritage and the expectations by people around him, who embodies MacLennan's aesthetic proposal for the reconciliation of the two solitudes that form the essence of Canadian nationality. Paul, who is considered as an ethnic French-Canadian, decides after hard-won life experience to marry Yardley's granddaughter Heather, an English-Canadian, and to write a great Canadian novel. In his character MacLennan expressed the core of his idea of a "new Canada" as a modern country liberated from prejudice and old ethnic animosities by consistent mutual interaction, and capable of critical self-reflection on all levels, including culture, literature and the arts. It is, however, still a somewhat abstract vision, and, after marrying Heather, Paul eventually has no other choice but to disappear from the pages of the novel into the uncertainties of World War II, in the name of his homeland as a united country. His solitude, like the solitude of the other characters, is thus in a sense an absolute aesthetic state. It was precisely for this quality that MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* "[...] became the fountainhead for defining the shared loneliness that is at the heart of the Canadian experience."⁴³

Even though it is thus a somewhat gloomy novel, and not quite an artistic success, MacLennan's symbolic *Two Solitudes* became one of the most illustrious titles of Canadian literature as such, not only on the domestic ground, but likewise in the showcase of Canadian literature presented to the rest of the world. Canadian critic George Woodcock explained that the causes of MacLennan's undeniable influence rested "[...] in the original way in which he has interpreted the Canadian scene to his fellow countrymen rather than in any originality of approach to the art of the novel itself."⁴⁴ Woodcock also mercilessly, but the more appositely, summed up the basic problems of the style of MacLennan's early novels:

43) Newman, Peter C. "A Passion for Canada." Obituary, *MacLean's*, November 19, 1990, p. 63.

44) Woodcock, George. "A Nation's Odyssey: the Novels of Hugh MacLennan." Smith, A.J.M. (ed.). *Masks of Fiction. Canadian Critics on Canadian Prose*. Toronto: MacClelland & Stewart, 1961. p. 129.

They are unashamedly didactic; they rely heavily on environmental atmosphere and local colour; their characterization is oversimplified and moralistic in tone; their language is descriptive rather than evocative; and their action tends to be shaped externally by a Hardy-esque use of circumstance and coincidence. What does distinguish them is MacLennan's combination of theme and symbol – his development of the problems of individuals in an emerging nation by means of action built on a simple but powerful foundation of universal myth.⁴⁵

The derivativeness and schematization of style, and the didactic approach to the characters and to the central conflict, place MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* into the Canadian literary history, rather than into the context of a living and contemporary literary culture. Nonetheless, the author cannot be denied a serious effort to create in this novel an integrating narrative form that would define by artistic means the essential core of the identity of Canadian national culture, and concurrently offer a solution – that the further historical development would prove as the right one – of its seemingly irreconcilable ethnic and historical controversies.

IV.4 "Sitting on a fence:" Canadian Literature Between First and Second Nations

(Klára Kolinská)

The history of Canadian national literature has, since its beginnings, evolved from the historic rift and constitutive cultural clash between the Aboriginal people of the continent – in Canada called First Nations – and the successively arriving immigrant groups that, by the irony of history, gradually established a mainstream society that has always accumulated the overwhelming majority of economic power and political influence, as well as cultural and aesthetic preferences.

Regardless of the question whether the Indian and Inuit people are the "Aboriginal inhabitants" of the North American continent in the true sense, in any case they are the true "First Nations" in relation to their countrymen of historically European origin. Their cultural and aesthetic self-expression, mainly in the category of verbal art, has always been, and still is today, demonstrably and explicitly influenced by the oral tradition, asserting itself in a rich variety of genres, styles, and aesthetic forms. Many of its crucial motifs and archetypes extend the topographic and linguistic barriers and thus provide space for comparison with cultures known from other environments and locations, without such comparison denying the inherent independence of the Indian and Inuit cultures. These motifs include, for example, metamorphic transformations, heroic encounters with supernatural forces, shamanistic rituals, the intermingling of the worlds of the animals, spirits, and human beings, belief in the meaning of dreams and spiritual visions, encounters with the spirits of the dead etc.

45) Woodcock, George. "A Nation's Odyssey: the Novels of Hugh MacLennan." p. 129.

Verbal art nourished so immediately by the oral tradition has for a long time met with ontological and methodological dissent with the tradition of European culture, which places the written word on the hierarchically absolute level, and gives preference to systemization, chronology, and narrative causality. The representative *History of Canadian Literature*, which analyses the Aboriginal literature from the Eurocentric position, states that: "The Euro-Canadian mind – with its different conceptions of time, the supernatural, material possessions, the phenomena of nature, and humour – finds it difficult to comprehend and appreciate Native mythology."⁴⁶ The explanation provided by the *Literary History* tellingly documents not so much the essence and specific characteristic of the verbal means of Aboriginal literature, as the causes of the historical misunderstanding of them by the mainstream aesthetic arbiters:

For the non-Native, transcriptions of oral myths lack dramatic emphasis and highlights, subtlety, characterization, and plot motivation. Anecdotal and episodic, they tend to be a pot-pourri of unrelated and incomplete fragments, often very brief and almost incoherent... To people schooled in the English literary tradition (including many Natives who understand little of the language of their ancestors), the rambling conversational manner and exaggerated action of Native myths can be tedious, their arcane subject matter and hermetic meanings frustrating.⁴⁷

In spite of the cultural and ontological determinateness of its exegetic position, however, the *History* reminds the reader of the fact that: "According to Natives themselves, much of the dramatic power and fun of their mythology and folklore emerge only when their stories are told in performance in the Native language."⁴⁸ And it is precisely this expressiveness and effective "eloquence" that became the distinctive qualities of Canadian Aboriginal verbal culture that were first met with inadvertent approval by the European discoverers. The seventeenth-century missionaries, such as Father Paul Le Jeune in the year 1636, already noticed that the Indian chiefs and leaders gained power and social prestige in direct relation to their rhetorical skills, which was given by the fact that in their cultural environment there existed no written law that would codify their position. (see III.5. First Nations in French-Canadian and Quebec Literature)

The formal, as well as the intellectual clash between the oral and written forms of language, and the conflict of language varieties as such have thus marked the whole development of Canadian Aboriginal culture and its relation towards the other components of the national culture as a whole – which in Canada has never been experienced as completely homogenous. The temporal delay with which the verbal production by Aboriginal authors entered the competitive field of Canadian national literature has motivated its frequent interpretations by mainstream readers and critics as an immature, underdeveloped literature without tradition that, therefore, reflects the uncomplicated and inferior character of the ethnic group of which it is an expression. Penny Petrone, author of one of the first comprehensive Histories dedicated to Canadian Aboriginal

46) Toye, William. *The Concise Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. p. 2.

47) Toye, William. *The Concise Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. p. 2.

48) Toye, William. *The Concise Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. p. 2.

literature, noted as late as in 1990 that: "[...] very few literary scholars are familiar with it,"⁴⁹ and identified five reasons for this conscious historical neglect:

European cultural arrogance, and attitudes of cultural imperialism and paternalism that initiated and fostered patronizing stereotypes of the Indian; European antipathy and prejudice towards the oral literature of so-called primitive peoples; the European belief that the Indian was a vanishing race; the purist attitude of Western literary critics towards literature that does not conform totally to their aesthetic criteria; and, finally, the difficult problems of translating native literature.⁵⁰

From this point of view it is hardly surprising that: "The first signs of literary activity among the Native peoples appeared as a result of organized missionary efforts to convert them."⁵¹ The more enlightened among the missionaries, as well as some of the European spiritual leaders of the time, often realized the great (if from their perspective still unrealized) potential of the Aboriginal people, and exercised consistent effort aiming at their inclusion into the integrating spiritual community of the Christian denomination. The foreign idea of the New World Native disturbed the European authorities from the Renaissance, which in the better cases lead towards the conferring of the status of general humanity to the Native Americans, and therewith towards their secure categorization. The well-known bull *Pastorale Officium*, issued by Pope Paul III. in 1537, openly repudiated the system of the modern, and thus racially motivated enslavement of the Aboriginal populations of the colonies, "since they are people, and as such capable of faith and reaching salvation."⁵² The "First" and "Second" Nations in Canada have thus from the beginning of their common history struggled for not only geographic, but also intellectual and spiritual space, and language and writing have served as the most obvious, as well as most effective, instruments for both sides engaged in that struggle. The Indian Christian converts were encouraged by the missionaries in their efforts to write the histories of their nations and their tribal traditions, customs, stories, and mythological ideas in texts and publications intended for readers in Europe, that were meant to inspire greater interest among the European public in the Indian inhabitants of the new colonies, and thereby to seek support for the missionary programs.

The first Canadian Indian who published such a text in English was George Copway (1818 – 1869); his book, titled *The life, history and travels of Kah-ge-gah-bowh (George Copway), a young Indian chief of the Ojibwa nation, a convert to the Christian faith, and a missionary to his people for twelve years...*, which was published in 1847, had immediate success not only in Canada, but in Europe as well, following its edition in London a year later. Copway was invited for a tour in several European countries, where he was received with unheard-of enthusiasm, resonating with the romanticizing tendencies and ideas of the first half of the nineteenth century, and became the first Native Indian international celebrity

49) Petrone, Penny. *Native Literature in Canada. From the Oral Tradition to the Present*. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1990. p. 1.

50) Petrone, Penny. *Native Literature in Canada. From the Oral Tradition to the Present*. p. 1.

51) Toye, William (ed.). *The Concise Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. p. 6.

52) <http://www.proglas.cz/vypis-programu-akci-clanku.html?date=2009-09-09&type=4&fromCalendar=1>. Translation mine.

writer. Rather than the cultural essence of the Native Indian ethnicity, Copway's book, like his later works, reflects the Aboriginal people's relation towards the mainstream society, and the fundamental historical changes that the missionary influence of the Christian religion imposed upon it.

An even more famous celebrity than Copway was the poet Emily Pauline Johnson (1861–1913), whose life story and artistic career, evolving on the verge of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, personified the whole ambivalence of the cohabitation of cultures that formed the Canadian national identity. Johnson was a daughter of an English mother and a father from the Mohawk nation, and she spent part of her childhood on the Mohawk reserve near Brantford. She was a sensitive reader of the tradition of the English romantic poetry, (among her favorite authors whose work she most admired were mainly Byron, Scott, Keats and Tennyson), but also absorbed the stories and legends coming from the culture of her father. From her youth she published poems in various journals, and soon she was welcomed with respect as the "authentic Indian voice" of Canadian poetry. Her renown grew considerably after she started public readings from her work, during which she recited her poetry in a stylized costume of an archetypal Indian princess; for reciting poems with "mainstream white" topics in the second half of the program she dressed up in a classical evening gown. Her artistic "changing of identities" thus illustratively symbolized the double nature of the Canadian culture, and the author's double-edged and precarious balancing between its internal borders. Johnson was a sort of a "double agent" inside the Canadian nation, struggling to belong to both of its organic segments at the same time, but this position could not enable her to become a steadily credible voice of the Indian minority. Her poems addressing Indian topics seem in retrospect to be unoriginal in both content and form, and a vast majority of their poetical images are conventional derivations of the imagery of romantic and Victorian poetry. The contents of these texts are in symptomatic contradiction to her poems in an uncritically nationalistic tone, displaying the author's unconditional loyalty towards the British government and its Canadian institutions. Johnson's poetical production thus basically asserted the conformist image of the Indian as a European construct that expressed and supported the mainstream assimilationist program.

The idea of the Indian as a projection of the European imagination is a surprisingly influential cultural phenomenon from which stems a number of still effectual stereotypes that have nothing in common with the real life of the Aboriginal people and their culture. And quite because of the epidemic power of these stereotypes it is necessary to clarify the commonly applied terminology, and to remind the mainstream society that "The Indian is the invention of the European."⁵³ Daniel Francis, author of one of the most significant studies of the symbol of the Indian in Canadian culture, points out that: "Indians, as we think we know them, do not exist. In fact, there may well be no such thing as an Indian."⁵⁴

Francis explains why this fictive idea deserves detailed analysis, even though it is not grounded in reality. It does not only imply harmless sentimentalism, known in different European contexts very well:

53) Francis, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian. The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992. p. 4.

54) Francis, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian. The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. p. 4.

Much public discourse about Native people still deals in stereotypes. Our views of what constitutes an Indian today are as much bound up with myth, prejudice and ideology as earlier versions were. If the Indian really is imaginary, it could hardly be otherwise.⁵⁵

The "imaginary Indian" was created as a subconscious paradoxical projection of the positive, as well as negative ideas that the Europeans held about the New World, of their hopes for finding there better conditions for life, and in the more general sense, for reconstructing in the New World an imitation of Divine paradise on Earth; concurrently, it expressed the Europeans' fears of the unknown, and the existential angst brought about by the seemingly spiritually empty space of the continent. The myth of the Indian provides, therefore, a metaphorical testimony not about the inhabitants of North America, but about the culture and thinking of the Old World:

Europeans also projected onto Native peoples all the misgivings they had about the shortcomings of their own civilization: the Imaginary Indian became a stick with which they beat their own society. The Indian became the standard of virtue and manliness against which Europeans measured themselves, and often found themselves wanting. In other words, non-Natives in North America have long defined themselves in relation to the Other in the form of the Indian.⁵⁶

The most influential, and the most impressive variation of the European "Imaginary Indian" was the concept of the Indians as a "vanishing race," doomed by historical development to sad, but inescapable extinction. The idea has enjoyed countless artistic treatments, and the certainty of the final "disappearance" of the Indians added to its attractiveness, which in some cases even caused desire for identification. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Emily Carr (1871–1945), the most renowned Canadian painter of the totem art of Western Canada, could thus proclaim: "Often I used to wish I had been born an Indian,"⁵⁷ in the hope that the Canadian public would readily understand her idealized conception of the Aboriginal people. Her works, in spite of their openly proclaimed effort to grasp "in a photographic style," i.e. as faithfully as possible, the life of the Aboriginal Canadians, and record it for future generations, were a part of the sweeping cultural reconstruction of the fictive European image, rather than of the Indian reality quickly becoming extinct, and it was precisely this social context that brought about their lasting success: "Having first of all destroyed many aspects of Native culture, White society now turned around and admired its own recreations of what it had destroyed."⁵⁸

As the social and cultural assimilation of the Canadian First Nations into the mainstream society progressed, and their experience with the mainstream language and its written form deepened, their cultural emancipation, and need for independent and self-confident artistic self-expression was becoming increasingly manifest. Spoken, as well as written English, is for the Aboriginal authors an effectual, but also a double-edged

55) Francis, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian. The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. p. 4.

56) Francis, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian. The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. p. 8.

57) Francis, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian. The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. p. 31.

58) Francis, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian. The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. p. 36.

instrument: it opens a path for their entry onto the wider cultural platform not only in their own country, but likewise in the international context, and enables them to win incomparably more readers than their native tribal languages, often of very low numbers of speakers, possibly could. At the same time, however, the English language constantly reminds them of the history of the forceful assimilation of their ethnic groups into the white mainstream society, and the irreversible loss of their own native language, experienced, due to the mythological roots of that language, as a particularly traumatic attack at the very core of their social and individual identity.

The Aboriginal literature in the written form found its first autonomous ways of expression in the early 1960s; this was one of the results of the changes in the overall political climate, including the new formulation of the general category of human rights, and the new national self-awareness of most of the ethnic minorities in North America. Aboriginal authors of this generation provide literary testimony of the historical and cultural position of their nations in Canada, and of the tragic social, as well as individual consequences of the persistent inequality. The first powerful text of the Aboriginal literature of this period and orientation is the strictly polemical book by Harold Cardinal, titled *The Unjust Society: the Tragedy of Canada's Indians*), published in 1971.

From the genre of exclusively "protest literature" it was a mere step towards literature reflecting not only political, but also personal and emotional experience. Literary texts of this orientation have gradually laid more and more stress not merely on the content itself, but also on the aesthetic form of its expression. The cardinal text of Canadian Aboriginal literature of this kind, against which the authors of younger generations have, according to the common consensus, measured their achievements up to this day, is, the autobiography *Halfbreed* by Maria Campbell (*1940), published in 1973. *Halfbreed* is a shocking personal confession of the author's tragic life story, including the eventually victorious battle with poverty beyond imagination, alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual abuse, and prostitution, that surprises, and at the same time leaves a deep impression by its openness and courage: By means of the written form Maria Campbell erases the boundaries between the private and the public, transforms her life journey into the general destiny of her nation, and offers it to her readers for larger literary and social discussion. Maria Campbell was one of the first Canadian Aboriginal authors who realized the effect of the written language in its therapeutic, as well as purely aesthetic function. She herself formulated her decision and its motivation in clear and convincing words: "I had a whole lot of stuff inside me that I had to write to find out who I was, to heal myself."⁵⁹

The form of confessional autobiography has proved as a particularly suitable genre for Aboriginal literature, corresponding to the natural way of language expression of this ethnic group, and facilitating concurrent fulfillment of several communication functions: autobiography provides the authors with sufficient space for sounding a private, even seemingly solitary voice, which, nonetheless, resonates on the narrative background of their ethnic history and belonging. One voice thus metonymically transforms into the voice of the many, and the resulting text is, typically, not only a fictive literary attestation, but also a social documentary. Many titles of Canadian autobiographies written by Aboriginal authors in the 1970s and 1980s are illustrative of the metonymic quality

59) Toye, William (ed.). *The Concise Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. p. 64.

of the texts that they refer to, in the manner introduced by Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed: Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief* (1972) by Dan Kennedy, *No Foreign Land: the Biography of a North American Indian* (1976) by Wilfred Pelletier, or that of the very first anthology of Aboriginal literature to be published in Canada, symptomatically titled *I am an Indian*, and compiled by the "white" editor Kent Gooderham in 1969.

The genre of autobiography had a direct influence upon the establishment of the genre of Aboriginal novel. The first novel by a Canadian Aboriginal author is a strongly autobiographical story *In Search of April Raintree* by Beatrice Culleton Mosisnier, which was issued for the first time in 1983 and consequently has seen several revised editions. *In Search of April Raintree* is closely inspired by the work of Maria Campbell; the two antithetic destinies of two sisters from a Métis family living at the bottom of the society document the extreme polarities of possible lives of the Canadian Métis that are disturbingly contemporary, and provide evidence of shocking human tragedies as well as, even more importantly, of the social conditions of many Canadians today, and of persistent prejudices and grievances felt within the Canadian society. For Beatrice Culleton, as well as for Maria Campbell, distinct personal engagement in the telling of one's own story becomes the only possible way of authorial expression in the written, published, and therefore publicly shared literary text. Both Campbell and Culleton represent authors of Métis background, and, therefore, they belong into both the "First" and "Second" Canadian nations, for whom the English language in the written form has turned into a means of effective social protest, and, at the same time, into a means of ontological rapprochement of their historical and expressive differences.

Besides the genre of autobiography, other literary forms that influenced significantly the development of Canadian Aboriginal literature were those that expanded the tradition of oral storytelling and imitated its narrative techniques. Many Aboriginal authors write short stories and more extensive story cycles, either in a more traditional style, like Basil Johnson (*1929) or Ruby Slipperjack (*1942), or successfully combine the elements of traditional storytelling and its mythological motifs with sophisticated techniques of mature postmodern fiction, as is the case, for example, of Thomas King (*1943), an extremely successful author of prose fiction, and also a university professor of literature.

In a way the most prominent genre of Aboriginal literature in Canada, however, is drama, which perceives the theatre space as a natural extension of the context of the oral rendition of tales, and of the ritual forms of their realization. According to many theorists every oral telling of tales has a potentially dramatic character, and, moreover, in the cultural sense, theatre helps the Aboriginal authors to overcome the temporal delay in the acquisition of the mainstream language in the written form.

Even though some sporadic attempts at Aboriginal drama in Canada emerged as early as in the 1970s, a real revolution in Canadian dramatic literature was caused by two plays by Tomson Highway (*1951), a talented writer and musician coming from the Cree nation in northern Manitoba. The first of his plays, *The Rez Sisters*, premiered in 1988, and was followed a year later by *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, which was historically the very first play by a Canadian Aboriginal author to be produced in one of the most mainstream and famous Canadian theatres, the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto. Highway, as the first Canadian Indian, thus overstepped the imaginary border

between the "minority," and therefore implicitly alternative art, and the canonical production, which in his case consequently conquered international theatre stages as well, and became part of the world theatre history. Highway opened a path for many other authors of younger generations, who have gradually gained growing respect not as ethnic authors or even mere "cultural informants" (as playwright Yvette Nolan expressed her assumed position, in order to refuse it, knowing her own real value), but as independent individual artists creating autonomous and original works.

As a consequence of this development, as well as of the overall changes in the social climate in Canada, Aboriginal artists have increasingly inclined towards the position formulated by actor Gary Farmer in 1989: "I think being Indian is a state of mind."⁶⁰ Gary Farmer is, in this context, well aware of the necessity to master the territory of the written language medium and to use it for the real benefit of voicing the so-far silenced historical events and interpretive perspectives: "The history that has been written is not a history from our point of view; there's that to do."⁶¹ Dennis Reid, curator of the National Gallery in Ontario, adds another insightful commentary to the question of historical sources: "We can rewrite history without altering the books – we can write new books."⁶² This tempting option has slowly begun to be realized, and treatises on the history of Aboriginal culture and critical evaluations of Aboriginal art are more and more typically written by authors coming from the Aboriginal groups themselves; their background gives their approach greater authenticity, also in consequence of the different level of the Aboriginal people's cultural self-confidence, and the different discursive and argumentation qualification of the Aboriginal minority as such. Such a radically changed social atmosphere would today hardly permit the kind of proclamation, which in 1970 sounded in a tone of irrefutable logic, to pass without heated and controversial public debate: when the Oscar nominations were being decided in that year, one of the names on the list was that of the Canadian Aboriginal actor Chief Dan George, for his role in the famous film *Little Big Man*; a certain Los Angeles critic nearly brushed his nomination off by arguing that: "It would be ridiculous to give an Academy Award to an Indian for playing an Indian."⁶³ This remark inadvertently, but aptly pointed out towards the basic problems of accepting the Aboriginal culture on the general scale, and of its informed critical appreciation.

The stereotypical, and therefore limiting and discriminating idea of the Indian in the European terms, and the loose exploitation of "Indian" motifs by mainstream authors, has given frequent cause for protest by Aboriginal artists and spokespersons, and created a new argumentation platform in literary discourse. In an article titled "Why Native Literature?" Armand Garnet Ruffo, Aboriginal poet and professor of Aboriginal literature at Carleton University in Ottawa, declares that:

60) Scott, Jay. "Being Indian is a state of mind: The star of Powwow Highway is fascinated by the power of both film and theatre." *The Globe and Mail*. April 22, 1989.

61) Scott, Jay. "Being Indian is a state of mind: The star of Powwow Highway is fascinated by the power of both film and theatre."

62) Hume, Christopher. "Is removing Indian statue tampering with history?" *The Toronto Star*. October 13, 1996 p. A18.

63) Appleford, Rob. "The Desire to Crunch Bone. Daniel David Moses and the "True Real Indian."" *Canadian Theatre Review*. Nr. 77, Winter 1993. p. 21.

The only alternative to the colonizing imposition is for Native people to claim their own voice and thereby give insight into their own values, traditions, concerns and needs. It is a reality that for the most part is still unheard and unheeded in country where its First inhabitants are but a mere afterthought, an anachronism to be dealt with, at best "material" for constructing a sense of Canadian national identity in a multicultural state.⁶⁴

Ruffo is convinced that: "Native literature, while grounded in a traditional spirituality based world-view, is no less a call for liberation, survival and beyond to affirmation."⁶⁵

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, another well-established Aboriginal writer, delimited her position against the mainstream culture and its appropriation of the traditional values of Aboriginal cultures in a similar tone, in a well-known article titled: "Stop Stealing Native Stories." In the sense of the time-honored understanding of the impact of stories in Aboriginal communities she emphasizes that: "Stories are power. They reflect the deepest, the most intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture, thinks. Such wonderful offerings are seldom reproduced by outsiders."⁶⁶

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias considers the appropriation of Aboriginal stories by mainstream authors as a "culture theft, the theft of voice,"⁶⁷ and therefore as basically a part of pointed cultural genocide. Her position, however, is not entirely confrontational, since she sends her mainstream colleagues a constructive message regarding the common solution of the current inter-cultural situation: "If you want to write our stories, be prepared to live with us."⁶⁸ "To live with us" apparently does not only mean living alongside each other in the same country, but implies deep and authentic knowledge of each other, and willingness to actively and equally share in writing the common cultural history. And it is only on this condition that the as yet still theoretical prophecy regarding the situation of Aboriginal literature in Canada, formulated by the mainstream "academic" companion to Canadian literature, will eventually be fulfilled:

Canada's Native writers are creating a body of new writing that has an amazing versatility, vitality, and commitment. They are questioning why they should be expected to conform to the constraints of Eurocentric critical theories; they are using the "language of the enemy" to break from a colonized past, bending and stretching mainstream rules of genre, reinventing new ones, and redefining traditional notions of orality and literacy to enrich and extend Canada's literature. Considering the power and sacredness that traditional Aboriginal cultures attribute to the word as a force of change, the Native word – whether oral or written – will never cease contributing new perspectives and insights to the literature of Canada.⁶⁹

64) Ruffo, Armand Garnet. "Why Native Literature?" *American Indian Quarterly*. Vol. 21, Nr. 4. Winter 1997. p. 63.

65) Ruffo, Armand Garnet. "Why Native Literature?" p. 664.

66) Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore. "Stop Stealing Native Stories" http://books.google.ca/books?id=BhAhb2lf49oC&pg=PA71&lpg=PA71&dq=%22stop+stealing+native+stories%22&source=bl&ots=g0__Nycl_J&sig=7Eb7qoCSMIHPUILOQ8Yne80bzt&hl=cs&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=3&ct=result#PPA71,M1

67) Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore. "Stop Stealing Native Stories"

68) Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore. "Stop Stealing Native Stories"

69) Toye, William (ed.). *The Concise Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. p. 11.

IV.5 Essaying the Literary Landscapes of Anglophone Canada

(Kateřina Prajznerová)

Examining the dynamic of identity politics in Anglophone Canadian literature through the lens of regionalism offers an illuminating double perspective. On one level, the region functions similarly to the nation, that is as a unifying force that privileges regional identification over other paradigms of identity formation and thus effaces signs of internal differentiation.⁷⁰ On another level, however, the region also functions as a site of resistance against the homogenizing tendencies of the nation and thus promotes diversification.⁷¹ As David Jordan explains, “since region is by definition a small part of a larger whole, a regional community is necessarily a marginal community” (Jordan, 1994 a, xvi). The resulting tension between the region as a centering and as a centrifugal social force has placed the concept of the region at the core of much recent scholarship dealing with the pluricultural and postnational character of Canada today. Nevertheless, as the following tetraptych of literary landscape studies shows, the region has played an ambiguous yet crucial role in the development of Anglophone Canadian literature from the beginning.⁷²

Covering a period from about the mid-nineteenth century to the present, this chapter compares examples of personal nonfiction that grew out of four Canadian geo-cultural regions. Chronologically, it analyzes the settling of Catharine Parr Traill’s southern Ontario lake country, the logging of Martin Allerdale Grainger’s British Columbia rainforest, the farming of Ernest Buckler’s Annapolis River Valley in northern Nova Scotia, and the ranching of Sharon Butala’s Old Man on His Back Plateau on the southwestern Saskatchewan prairie. Each author employs a different narrative strategy to represent his or her life experience, but there are three main parallels that can be traced in their literary representations of the varied Canadian landscapes: a) Traill,

70) An insightful interrogation of this common tendency of the region and the nation to work in concert to protect their borders and control/restrict full participation is provided in Roberto M. Dainotto’s *Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures, Communities* (2000). In a specifically Canadian context, this tendency is carefully examined in Frank Davey’s essay “Toward the Ends of Regionalism” in the collection *A Sense of Place: Re-Evaluating Regionalism in Canadian and American Writing* (1998). As examples, Davey brings up the frequent omission of Alberta foothills in Prairie regionalism and of Cape Breton Island in Maritime regionalism, because these areas are “too weak economically and institutionally to assert themselves” (Davey, 1998, 15). Interestingly, Davey suggests that “Southern Ontario regionalism has been successful largely by being invisible” and “by passing itself as the Canadian nationalism” or “as an internationalism” (Davey, 1998, 6).

71) The potential of regionalism as a means of social resistance has been emphasized especially in feminist studies of women’s literature, for instance in Krista Comer’s *Landscapes of the New West: Gender and Geography in Contemporary Women’s Writing* (1999) and in the essays collected in Sherrie A. Inness’s and Diana Royer’s *Breaking Boundaries: New Perspectives on Women’s Regional Writing* (1997). In relation to the particularities of the Canadian context, W. H. New elaborates on the subversive character of the region in his *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* (1997).

72) In “Writing, Regionalism and Globalism in a Post-Nationalist Canada,” Herb Wylie calls the position of regionalism in literary studies “during the institutionalization of Canadian literature from the late nineteenth century onwards” until the present time: “resoundingly ambivalent” (Wylie, 1996, 10).

Grainger, Buckler, and Butala all describe in detail how they have come to associate their personal identity with the natural and cultural history of the respective regions they have claimed as their home; b) They all place special emphasis on recording local ecological transformations occurring during their lifetimes, frequently connecting local changes to national and international developments; c) They all, even if in different ways and to varying degrees, express their ambivalence in regards to the colonial settlement project, examining openly its personal, cultural, as well as ecological consequences. Together, Traill's, Grainger's, Buckler's, and Butala's personal nonfiction texts comprise a mosaic of regional portraits that contribute to a polyphonic vision of Canadianness.⁷³

The reason for focusing on the genre of personal nonfiction pertains to both the thematic accentuation and the formal aspects of this kind of writing within the Anglophone Canadian tradition.⁷⁴ As the editors of *The Canadian Essay* put it, admittedly with some exaggeration, "If it is fair to say that poets write ultimately only of God and love, then Canada's essayists can be said to write only of nature and Canada" (Lynch and Rampton, 1991, 5). Daniel Francis also observes that the authors of the "classics of Canadian non-fiction" gathered in his collection "invariably end up writing about the kind of place they think Canada is, was, or ought to be" (Francis, 1994, 7). At the same time, Julie Rak (echoing Benedict Anderson) points out that while centered on telling the history of the self, personal nonfiction is closely linked to the discourse of national identity by the unavoidable filling in the gaps in the process of constructing the story of origins (Rak, 2005, 11-12). Moreover, the genre of personal nonfiction has been repeatedly characterized by its formal openness, fluidity, hybridity, mutability, and resilience, and by its use of elements of autobiography, memoir, travelogue, and nature journal, among others—qualities that stand out in the works by Traill, Grainger, Buckler and Butala.⁷⁵ Perhaps most importantly, I will be discussing the four authors in the general context of regional and environmental writing in which the "personal element—that is, the filtering of experience through an individual sensibility—is central" (Finch and Elder, 2002, 28).

The strongest connecting point among the four collections of personal essays that form the analytical core of this chapter—Traill's *Pearls and Pebbles*; or, *Notes of an Old Naturalist*

73) For a detailed description of the gradual formation of Canadian regions from the point of view of cultural geography, see for instance Brett McGillivray's *Canada: A Nation of Regions* (2006).

74) I use the term personal nonfiction because, a) my interest lies primarily in the characteristics of the voice of the author's narrative persona and in the transformation that this voice undergoes in the course of each collection of essays, b) while in all four cases these collections balance between fiction and nonfiction, the authors lean toward the personal essay rather than the short story. I base this assertion on the following observation made by Scott Russell Sanders to distinguish the genre of the personal essay from fiction: "I believe one writes, in essays, with a regard for the actual world, with a respect for the shared substance of history, the autonomy of other lives, the being of nature, the mystery and majesty of a creation we have not made" (Sanders, 2005, 391). In my opinion, Traill's, Grainger's, Buckler's, and Butala's essays grow out of this approach, this kind of regard and respect on the part of the authors.

75) For a variety of views on the formal flexibility of the genre of the personal essay, see, for instance, these particular pages in the introductory chapters in the following edited collections: Douglas Fetherling's *Best Canadian Essays 1989* (1989, n.p.), Phillip Lopate's *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present* (1995, xxxvii-xl), Lynne Van Luven's *Going Some Place: Creative Non-Fiction Across Canada* (2000, viii-ix), Gerald Lynch's and David Rampton's *The Canadian Essay* (1991, 2), and Robert L. Root, Jr.'s and Michael Steinberg's *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction* (2005, xxvi).

(1894), Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West* (1908), Buckler's *Ox Bells and Fireflies: A Memoir* (1968), and Butala's *Wild Stone Heart: An Apprentice in the Fields* (2000)—is the narrative persona's perspective of the regional historian with a poetic and environmentalist bent. Traill shifts back and forth between the voice of a literary ethnobotanist and a chronicler of the local community, Grainger between a travel guide and a labor reporter, Buckler between a farmer-philosopher and a neighborhood ethnographer, and Butala between a spiritual seeker and a documentarist of ranching. The narrators in all four works gradually become committed conservationists—of the environment as well as cultural heritage. The historicity of these personal essays is more spatial than chronological and consists of multiple layers of the past, interweaving strands of environmental and cultural history. As a result, what Krista Comer has termed a new “geo-cultural imaginary” emerges in the texts, adding an alternative, regionally positioned viewpoint to previously established ways of seeing the cartography of Canada (Comer, 1999, 10). All four authors pay tribute to the passage of time in a remote place, recording what is being lost and distilling what endures, inscribing their experience into that particular piece of Canada and simultaneously writing this piece of Canada into being on the literary map of the nation.

IV.5.1 Regionalism and Canadian Identities

Tracing the continuities and divergences in the work of Catharine Parr Traill, Martin Allerdale Grainger, Ernest Buckler, and Sharon Butala brings to the foreground the mediating role of the region in the cultural history of Anglophone Canada. Positioned as it is in the liminal space between the national and the local, the region offers a meeting ground for a multitude of distinct ways of being Canadian.⁷⁶ The inescapable influence of the region—and its dual function as a unifying as well as differentiating force—surfaces repeatedly in critical examinations of identity construction and development. In literary studies, the most pertinent analyses are those that explore the points of mutual resonance between the physical geographical properties of regions and the psychological aesthetic responses that underlie their imaginative representations. As Richard Maxwell Brown points out, there are many different ways to design a framework for regionalization: “regions overlap and interpenetrate each other,” and every place has multiple regional identities (Brown, 1983, 62). At the same time, though, each region “encompasses a unique regional reality” (Brown, 1983, 62). When viewed from this angle, the region emerges not only as a construct that changes over time, but also as a dynamic entity, as a

76) I am drawing here on a well developed branch of regionalist scholarship, mainly on David Jordan's discussion, in *New World Regionalism: Literature in the Americas*, of regional authors as necessarily writing across geographic, cultural, and epistemological borders (Jordan, 1994 b, 10). Additionally, in “Writing Out of the Gap: Regionalism, Resistance, and Relational Reading,” Marjorie Pryse observes that regional writing “represents in narrative a sense of place that reflects a *gap* between dominant ideological and aesthetic interests and the interests and stories of persons who reside in the locale” (Pryse, 1998, 24, emphasis mine). However, as Jeanette Lynes and Herb Wylie, among others, point out, the sense of place is not stable. Rather, it is “always shifting” between the center and the margins—occupying a liminal zone in between (Lynes and Wylie, 1996, 25). On a more theoretical level, in *The Geography of Identity* Patricia Yaeger makes a similar point in her discussion of the “interstitial” character of “narrated” space (Yaeger, 1996, 15, 18).

contested site of both locatedness and dislocation, as a fluid intersection of shared beliefs as well as conflicting characteristics. In his essay “The Lesson of Canadian Geography,” Robert Fulford asserts that “all that Canadians have in common . . . is the physical fact of Canada and the opportunities that fact offers” (Fulford, 1995, 53). Therefore, the cultural history of Canada can be seen as a continuing “attempt to come to terms imaginatively with the variety and vastness of the Canadian landscape” (Fulford, 1995, 51). This seemingly paradoxical interplay between Canadian history and geography—this pulling together as well as apart—is echoed also in Linda Hutcheon’s essay “As Canadian as ... Possible ... under the Circumstances!” Hutcheon’s list of binary oppositions that open space for “the creative tension between differences” in Canadian culture includes those based on history (“Native/colonial, federal/provincial, ... English/French”) as well as those determined by geography (“east/west, empty northern tundra/dense southern urbanization, ... balmy B.C. and frigid Newfoundland winters”) (Hutcheon, 1991, 339).⁷⁷ Approaching the theme of unity and diversity in Anglophone Canadian literature from a regionalist perspective highlights the role of the Canadian landscape as an active element in identity formation at all levels—individual, communal, as well as national.

Marjorie Pryse, drawing on Francesco Loriggio, has shown convincingly that regional literature has the potential “to keep alive alternative visions of national and global development” and to preserve “a sense of possibility for cultural transformation” (Pryse, 1998, 22-23). This is where the social impetus of regional literature intersects with the impetus of environmental writing—both aspire to bring into focus the interdependence of nature and culture. Bioregionalism,⁷⁸ a critical-theoretical stream that draws on the combined insights of regionalist and ecocritical approaches, provides an especially useful framework for examining the dynamic of literary reterritorialization⁷⁹ and reinhabitation⁸⁰ of Anglophone Canada. When considered from a bioregional perspective, it becomes clear that Traill, Grainger, Buckler, and Butala participate in the tradition of environmental

77) Marjorie Pryse points to another kind of “tension between region and nation” which shapes the national literary tradition, a tension that “manifests itself in the literary hierarchy of canonical and noncanonical authors and texts” and that has marginalized much regional writing into “the footnotes of literary history” (Pryse, 1998, 19).

78) As will become clear in the following analysis of the primary texts, my understanding of bioregionalism builds mainly on the work of Peter Berg, Wendell Berry, Kirkpatrick Sale, and Gary Snyder. For a concise introduction to this stream of thought, see Doug Aberley’s chapter “Interpreting Bioregionalism: A Story from Many Voices” in Michael Vincent McGinnis (ed.), *Bioregionalism* (1999).

79) I use the term reterritorialization to suggest that imagining Canada from a regionalist viewpoint leads to a destabilization in not only the literary and cultural but also the geographical and political blueprints that delineate the country’s internal divisions. As is the case in my understanding of the region as a site of potential social resistance, my view of the landscape as a dynamic force in socio-political terms is inspired especially by the work of feminist scholars, specifically Caren Kaplan’s *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (1996), Doreen Massey’s *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994), and Gillian Rose’s *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993).

80) I am referring here to Peter Berg’s and Raymond Dasmann’s view of reinhabitation as “learning to live-in-place” (Berg and Dasmann, 1978, 217). This implies “becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships that operate within and around” one’s place and “evolving ways to ensure long-term occupancy” of that place (Berg and Dasmann, 1978, 217). In other words, it is a process that “involves applying for membership in a biotic community and ceasing to be its exploiter” (Berg and Dasmann, 1978, 218). This view of reinhabitation is also a key idea in Wendell Berry’s *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (1977) and Gary Snyder’s *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds* (1995).

writing, a tradition that stretches, in the Anglo-Saxon world, from the pre-Darwinian period of natural history to the present days of ecology. Environmental writing, “while scientifically informed,” is “also marked by a personal voice and a concern for literary values” (Finch and Elder, 2002, 24). By treating literature and science as one discourse, environmental writing “fuses literature’s attention to style, form, and the inevitable ironies of expression with a scientific concern for palpable fact” (Finch and Elder, 2002, 27). According to Thomas J. Lyon, the three essential elements of what he terms “the literature of nature” include: “natural history information, personal responses to nature, and philosophical interpretation of nature” (Lyon, 1996, 276). The personal nonfiction of Traill, Grainger, Buckler, and Butala, which is, in this sense, representative of much of Anglophone Canadian writing in the genre, contains varying mixtures of all these elements.

Depending on the relative emphasis devoted to each element, the authors’ works occupy different positions in the spectrum between mostly science and mostly theory. Based on Lyon’s taxonomy, Traill’s *Pearls and Pebbles* is closest to “the ramble,” in which the narrative persona takes the reader along on “a short excursion near home” (Lyon, 1996, 277). On her rambles through the woods, Traill’s narrator often pauses and waits, looking and listening. Sometimes she even remains at home and sits on the porch, letting the birds come to her and the flowers reveal themselves, paying careful attention and leisurely musing about her surroundings. In a ramble, “the natural history and the author’s presence are more or less balanced” (Lyon, 1996, 277). Grainger’s *Woodsmen of the West* is largely an account of “travel and adventure,” in which the stress is on moving away from civilization and on the author’s experience rather than on natural history (Lyon, 1996, 279). Following Grainger’s narrator, the reader learns about the intricacies of navigating treacherous coastal waters and of working as a multipurpose assistant for an unpredictable moody boss in a logging camp. Buckler’s *Ox Bells and Fireflies* fits best into the category of “the farm essay,” in which working the land as stewards and “convey[ing] the deep, poetic pull of nature on the spirit” are at the heart of the text (Lyon, 1996, 280). Buckler’s narrator records the inner workings of a closely-knit rural community whose rhythms are attuned to the progression of the seasons. Butala’s *Wild Stone Heart* is the hardest of the four texts to pin down—it stands somewhere in between the ramble, the farm essay, and the “solitude and back-country living” essay which is centered round the ideal of “the more intense, more wakeful life in contact with nature” (Lyon, 1996, 278, 279). Butala’s narrator crosses and re-crosses a familiar field, tracing the changes in her mental, emotional, as well as physical health that occur in response to her growing perception of the complex webs of life imprinted within that piece of the prairie. Whichever type of essay they employ, all four authors interrogate, first and foremost, the interplay of language, land and identity. Traill’s, Grainger’s, Buckler’s, and Butala’s writings thus can be seen as integral parts of Canadian regional as well as environmental literatures—literatures which portray landscape as an agent in the cultural history of the nation.⁸¹

81) Most book-length studies of Anglophone Canadian regional literature focus on one particular region, as for example *History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* (2005) edited by Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh, Janice Kulyk Keefer’s *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction*

Like regions, landscapes are grounded both literally—that is, in the nonhuman world—and literarily, that is, in the world of discourse. In both of these worlds, landscapes change and develop in response to many diverse aspects of geography and politics and the combination of the two.⁸² As Frank Davey observes, regionalism works within the framework of the nation “as a transformation of geography into a sign” (Davey, 1998, 3). This transformation certainly has ideological implications, but it is also aesthetic—through it geography becomes “a site for investigating the metaphors and narrative strategies” (Yaeger, 1996, 5) that name where we are at home. Each of the following four sections focuses on a particular literary landscape within the cultural geography of Anglophone Canada. Traill’s *Pearls and Pebbles*, Grainger’s *Woodsmen of the West*, Buckler’s *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, and Butala’s *Wild Stone Heart* are presented as landscape narratives that interrogate the sources and the consequences of the human desire “to understand one particular spot as home” (Sale, 2000, x).

IV.5.2 Settling the Southern Ontario Lake Country: Catharine Parr Traill as a Literary Ethnobotanist and “a Walking Encyclopedia of Flowers”⁸³

Apart from bringing into focus the region as a place which impacts the senses as well as a discourse which shapes the mental processes, regional writing uncovers the emotional strings of attachment between humans and their homes. As David Jordan puts it, “regionalism does not originate *out there* . . . , but within the artist, in a deep personal affinity with a particular place, which he or she calls home” (Jordan, 1994 a, x, emphasis in the original). The personal nonfiction of Catharine Parr Traill traces the growth of the author’s affinity with her adopted home in what today is southern Ontario. Analyzing Traill’s writing from an ethnobotanical perspective indicates that it was her interest in the local flora that sustained her artistic tendencies and that helped her become integrated into her new environment.⁸⁴ In the three main volumes she wrote about plants in Canada—*Canadian Wild Flowers* (1868), *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (1885), and *Pearls and Pebbles; or, Notes of an Old Naturalist* (1894)—Traill’s literary,

(1987) or Ursula Kelly’s *Marketing Place: Cultural Politics, Regionalism, and Reading* (1993) which analyzes Newfoundland writing. Laurie Ricou’s study *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest* (2002) is rather unique in dealing with a cross-border region that includes parts of the US as well as the Canadian West Coast, and that is defined by the habitat of this particular tree endemic to the area. W. H. New’s *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* (1997) offers, to my knowledge, the only attempt to examine the whole of the Anglophone national tradition from a regionalist perspective. In *Treasures of the Place: Three Centuries of Nature Writing in Canada* (1992), the twenty-eight samples selected by Wayne Grady cover not only the span of the tradition in time but also aim to map the diversity of almost the entire territory of the country.

82) For a concise yet comprehensive and balanced overview of the main approaches to landscape studies, see for instance the introduction and the excellent bibliographic guide in Simon Schama’s *Landscape and Memory* (1995).

83) According to her biographer, Charlotte Gray, this is how Traill was known, with affection, among her neighbors in Lakefield toward the end of her life (Gray, 2000, 322).

84) According to the succinct definition in Paul E. Minnis’s *Ethnobotany: A Reader*, ethnobotany is “the study of the relationships between people and plants” (Minnis, 2000, 3).

botanical, and ethnographic concerns are closely interwoven, creating a unique record of the natural and cultural history of the southern Ontario lake country in the second half of the nineteenth century. Together with a detailed, poetically crafted description of the appearance of various plants, Traill was careful to note their medicinal, culinary, cultural, and other uses, which she had learned from the native inhabitants of the region. For instance, about the wood geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) Traill writes that “the blossom consists of five petals, obtuse, and slightly indented on their upper margins, and is lined and delicately veined with purple,” but also that the “Greek name of the plant means a Crane,” which refers to “the long grooved and stork-like beak composed of the styles” (*SPLC* 42).⁸⁵ In flowing prose her narrative moves on to the leaves that “are divided into about five principal segments” and “these again are lobed and cut into sharply pointed, irregularly sized teeth” (*SPLC* 42). It is the frequent “red and purplish blotches” of the leaves that have inspired the Latin name, *maculatum* (*SPLC* 42). In addition, Traill mentions that this plant “possesses virtues which are well known to the herbalist as powerful astringents, which quality has obtained for it the name of Alum-root among the country people, who use a decoction of the root as a styptic for wounds; and sweetened, as a gargle for sore-throat and ulcerated mouth” (*SPLC* 42). Moreover, as Marianne Gosztonyi Ainley points out, Traill paid attention to “plant succession as well as the interrelation of soil, light, climate, plants, and animals,” sometimes referring to other botanical sources she had consulted on the subject (Ainley, 1997, 88).

Traill did not leave England until she was thirty years old, and she never quite stopped comparing what she encountered in her new world with what she remembered from the old one. Nevertheless, her personal nonfiction testifies to a gradual shift in her loyalties. In a 1834 letter from *The Backwoods of Canada: Being Letters from the Wife of an Emigrant Officer* (1836), Traill says, with a twinge of homesickness: “as far as regards . . . affections that make ‘home’ in all countries, and among all nations in the world, a hallowed spot, I must ever give the preference to Britain” (*BW* 216).⁸⁶ But the essays gathered in *Pearls and Pebbles*, published more than half a century later, show that by this time Traill had come to consider herself Canadian. For instance, she closes her description of the white water lily in the following words: “The native water lilies of North America exceed in size and beauty those of England, and there are varieties found among *our* inland lakes in Ontario, tinged with the most delicate rose pink” (*PP* 114).⁸⁷ This transformation in Traill’s self-identification, in which her relationship with plants plays a crucial role, demonstrates that, in regional writing, concrete manifestations of place have the potential to become an “interactive force in human identity” (Kowalewski, 2003, 16). In his biographical sketch, “Catharine Parr Traill,” Carl Ballstadt confirms the link between Traill’s Canadian patriotism and her relationship with Canadian plants by observing that, according to Traill’s way of thinking, “the study of flowers is . . . a medium for the development of love of country” (Ballstadt, qtd. in Sparrow, 1990, 37).

For the most part, Traill scholars have centered their attention on the first book Traill wrote after her arrival in what was then Upper Canada, *The Backwoods of Canada*.

85) Traill, *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (*SPLC*).

86) Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada: Being Letters from the Wife of an Emigrant Officer* (*BW*).

87) Traill, *Pearls and Pebbles; or, Notes of an Old Naturalist* (*PP*), emphasis mine.

Traditionally, it is Traill's autobiographically-based representation of the experiences of nineteenth-century women settlers that has been considered her main contribution to Canadian literature. Traill came to the homestead on Lake Katchewanooka, north of Lakefield, in 1832. She had just married, after a brief courtship, and was still recovering from the break-up of her previous engagement—so, the opportunity to join her brother and sister in Canada and make a radically new beginning appealed to her immensely (Gray, 2000, 43-48). Moreover, Traill's position in her family had always been that of "the resilient optimist, who raised everybody's spirits," thus she was also psychologically well-suited to undertake the rigors of emigration (Gray, 2000, 62). In *The Pioneer Woman: A Canadian Character Type*, Elizabeth Thompson credits Traill with establishing the importance of the pioneer woman character which has continued to reappear in Canadian writing, in a variety of permutations, to the present day.⁸⁸ This pioneer woman prototype is "self-assured" and "confident," "capable and active in an emergency" and "one who adapts cheerfully to adverse circumstances" (Thompson, 1991, 4). Whether or not Traill actually fit this profile, in her life as a settler she certainly could often have used these predispositions and she projected this kind of persona in her writing. After seven years of unsuccessful attempts to profitably run their Katchewanooka farm, Traill and her husband were forced to move to a series of places in the Peterborough and Rice Lake areas, most of the time living "on the edge of poverty" (Peterman, 1990 a, 333). During this time, Traill tried to alleviate their financial situation by the earnings from her writings and, "relying heavily on the herbal remedies on which she was already an expert," by becoming a nurse and a midwife (Gray, 2000, 175). Eventually, as a widow aged fifty-seven, Traill built her own house in Lakefield (Peterman, 1990 a, 333). It was at this stage—finally settled in a place she could call home, and cared for by her oldest daughter—that Traill embarked in earnest on sending out natural history articles and preparing her major works of literary ethnobotany for publication (Gray, 2000, 281-301). In Marianne Gosztonyi Ainley's words, she gradually became "a pioneering naturalist and popularizer of science" (Ainley, 1997, 80), and her accessible volumes on Canadian wildflowers were the predecessors of the later field guides (Ainley, 1997, 93).⁸⁹

88) Building on the 1976 article by Virginia Watson Rouslin, "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Pioneering in Canada," Thompson places Traill at the beginning of a tradition that includes, among others, Ralph Connor's *The Man from Glengarry* (1901) and *Glengarry School Days* (1902), Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist* (1904), Marian Keith's *Duncan Polite* (1905), L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), Robert Stead's *The Homesteaders* (1916), Nellie McClung's *Purple Springs* (1921), Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel* (1954), Constance Beresford-Howe's *The Book of Eve* (1973), Joan Barfoot's *Abra* (1978), Aritha van Herk's *Judith* (1978), Katherine Govier's *Between Men* (1987), and especially Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974). Thus, the pioneer woman character reappears in various historical periods and in various parts of Canada. Apart from representing "the actuality of the pioneer experience," as in Traill's writing (Thompson, 1991, 3), the character functions as "a metaphor for social and religious conflict" as well as for an internal, "personal dilemma" (Thompson, 1991, 8).

89) As Ainley stresses, despite the difficulties of getting books in her remote location, Traill was familiar with the works of several prominent natural historians, in particular Izaak Walton, Gilbert White, Lady Dalhousie, Asa Gray, John Macoun, Titus Smith, William Hincks, George Lawson, James Fletcher, James Smith, and John Richardson (Ainley, 1997, 81-82, 84, 87, 90, 92).

IV.5.2.1 Traill's *Pearls and Pebbles*; or, *Notes of an Old Naturalist* as a collection of rambles

Traill's life-long dedication to looking for, collecting, preserving, studying, and writing about plants began well before her immigration to Canada. While growing up in the Waveney Valley in rural eastern Suffolk, she was home-schooled, like all her siblings, by her father and mother. In "Pleasant Days of My Childhood," the opening essay of *Pearls and Pebbles* which is set in May, Traill recalls gathering flowers first thing in the morning "while the dew was still upon them" (PP 6) and playing among the "sweet purple violets, primroses, and the little sun-bright celandine" (PP 7). Out of the eight children, it was Traill who most often accompanied her father on his fishing outings and his nature walks (Gray, 2000, 13). Drawing on these childhood field experiences, Traill published *Sketchbook of a Young Naturalist* in 1831, when she was still in England. Then, after coming to the lake country near Peterborough, Traill continued her custom of walking, energized by a fresh sense of excitement due to the unfamiliarity of the Canadian vegetation. One of the identifying features that characterized Traill's approach to such walks was her basket that she "always carried for rock, fern, and flower specimens" (Gray, 2000, 303). Within a short time after her arrival in the backwoods, "the window sills and shelves were as loaded with treasures as the window ledge of [her] Reydon Hall bedroom had been" (Gray, 2000, 104). While Traill's growing familiarity with the lake country permeates all her subsequent work, in *Pearls and Pebbles* she explicitly draws a continuous link between her childhood naturalist tendencies and her end-of-life interest in disseminating her accumulated knowledge through natural history books, between her early appreciation of wildflowers and her eventual commitment to conservation. Summarizing the significance of Traill's relationship to plants, Melody Hessing, Rebecca Raglon, and Catriona Sandilands assert that Traill "viewed the natural world as a source of intellectual solace: The flowers and ferns she loved were a backwoods library, society, and cultural event all in one" (Hessing, Raglon, and Sandilands, 2005 b, 1).

In the tradition of Anglophone Canadian environmental literature, Traill's *Pearls and Pebbles* stands close to the beginnings, predating better known works by authors such as Ernest Thompson Seton, Frederick Philip Grove, Grey Owl, Roderick Haig-Brown, and Farley Mowat.⁹⁰ *Pearls and Pebbles* came out when Traill was ninety-two years old, and Elizabeth Thompson aptly calls the collection "a miscellany" of pieces taken from the notebooks and journals which Traill had kept all her life (Thompson, 1991, xii). This collection is nevertheless almost seamlessly stitched together by the triple thread

90) For more authors belonging to this tradition, see Wayne Grady's anthology, *Treasures of the Place: Three Centuries of Nature Writing in Canada* (1992). Incidentally, as Grady explains in the introduction, the first part of the title is taken from Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada*, from a letter in which the narrator regrets that her mother/the reader cannot join her in her "rambles among the woods and clearings," feeling sure she "would be so delighted in searching out the floral treasures of the place" (qtd. in Grady, 1992, 7). Traill's chosen theme and narrative technique also prepared the ground for a strong women's tradition of nature essayists in Anglophone Canada which includes Theodora Stanwell-Fletcher's *Driftwood Valley: The Northern Frontier* (1946), Laura Beatrice Berton's *I Married the Klondike* (1954), Louise de Kiriline Lawrence's *The Lovely and the Wild* (1969), Gillean Douglas's *Silence Is My Homeland: Life on Teal River* (1978), and also Sharon Butala's *Wild Stone Heart* (2000), which will be discussed later in this chapter. Andrea Pinto Lebowitz's *Living in Harmony: Nature Writing by Women in Canada* (1996) provides a helpful introduction to this tradition.

of the setting (within the vicinity of Traill's various residences in the lake country), the naturalist focus (blending scientific observation and literary style), and the narrator's favorite activity (walking). Following the taxonomy suggested by Thomas J. Lyon, I examine the personal essays in this collection as rambles. According to Lyon, in the ramble the author's "experience in nature—the feel of being outdoors, the pleasure of looking closely, and the sense of revelation in small things closely attended to—takes an equal or almost equal place with the facts themselves" (Lyon, 1996, 277). Typically, in the ramble the narrator "records the walk as observer-participant" (Lyon, 1996, 277). For instance, this is how Traill responds to an encounter with a nurse log—rather than simply lifting her long dress, crossing over the obstacle, and continuing in her walk, she stops and tempts the reader: "Now let us look more closely at the surface of this fallen tree as it lies before us, a cumberer of the ground. It is covered with variegated mosses, soft as piled velvet, but far more lovely. Here on the mouldering old wood are miniature forests, *Hypnum*s, *Dicranum*s, *Bryum*s, with many lichens of the tenderest hues, grey, yellow or brown deepening to red, and, it may be, some brilliant fungus of gorgeous scarlet or cardinal red, fawn or gold, exquisite in form or in coloring, contrasting richly with the green of the mosses" (PP 146). Traill's excitement and genuine emotion are palpable.

Traill gave birth to her first child not long after coming to Canada and the condition of being a mother deeply influenced the way she related to the landscape in which she found herself, and not only by limiting the perimeter of distance that she could cover.⁹¹ Her intoxication by the beauty of the blooming flowers in spring often merged with her gratefulness for the physical and psychological sustenance she and her growing family drew from them. In *Pearls and Pebbles*, Traill captures one of these spirit-lifting moments in an image of fertility: "The earth is teeming with luxuriance, and one might almost fancy her conscious of all the wealth of vegetable treasures she bears on her capacious breast, and which she has brought forth and nourished" (PP 70). Significantly, blending her botanical and ethnographic interests, Traill was just as enthusiastic to learn the story of the land's features encapsulated in their native names, which could be depended on to provide "a graphic word-picture" (PP 104). For instance, the Otonabee River is "water running swiftly flashing brightly" and Lake Ontario is "sheet of placid water" (PP 104). As Andrea Pinto Lebowitz puts it, for Traill "observing the natural world and making it home are synonymous" (Lebowitz, 1996, 4). With each new discovery, Traill learns another piece of the map of her territory, getting another step closer to becoming a settler.

Emphasizing the importance of the affections in one's relationship to place, Wendell Berry observes that "[t]o be well used, creatures and places must be used sympathetically, just as they must be known sympathetically to be well known" (Berry, 1990, 116). Through her rambles, in her woods as well as in her writing, Traill proves to be not just an attentive student, but also a caring steward.⁹² In the course of her long-term residence

91) Charlotte Gray mentions that Traill often took her children along on her walks in the woods (Gray, 2000, 104).

92) I use the term "steward" here as it is employed in the bioregional writing of Gary Snyder (*A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds*, 1995, 43-44) and Wendell Berry (*The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, 1977, 30-31, 87, 130). Both Snyder and Berry stress assuming personal responsibility, developing intimate knowledge, and granting long-term commitment to a particular area as key factors in the relationship between humans and their home places.

in the lake country, Traill comes to know her place, in geographical as well as cultural terms, often drawing her strength and perseverance from identifying with the hardy plants she cannot eliminate from her yard, such as Carpetweed. As she confesses, this plant is “crushed by the foot and bruised, but springs again as if unharmed by our tread, and flourishes under all circumstances, however adverse. This little plant had lessons to teach me, and gave courage when trials pressed hard upon me” (*SPLC* ii). In the words of Michael A. Peterman, for Traill “the study of flowers was a nurturing process, engendering not only peace of mind through all the stages of life but also a firm sense of identity and place, of rooted continuity” (Peterman, 1990 b, 178).⁹³ Not only is Traill’s personal experience inscribed into her imaginative sketches of flowers—the flowers also act as links with the past and as touchstones of the present, “natural history was for her a kind of autobiography” (Peterman, 1990 b, 179). As the ethnobotanist Nancy J. Turner sees it, “being an active and direct player in the ecosystem, at once an observer and a participant, a learner and a teacher, a contributor and a user, can make us sensitive to Earth’s needs and dynamics, to the damage we are doing to the planet and its life” (Turner, 2005, 27). Traill clearly strove to fulfill her part in this endeavor and to inspire others also to become more observant.

IV.5.2.2. Traill becomes a settler

The openness and fortitude with which Traill’s autobiographical narrative persona faces her relocation stands out when Traill’s writing is compared with the work of other women authors of her generation who also wrote about their experience as settlers. In “Breaking the ‘Cake of Custom’: The Atlantic Crossing as a Rubicon for Female Emigrants to Canada?” D.M.R. Bentley discusses Traill’s *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) together with Frances Brooke’s *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), Anne Langton’s *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada* (edited by Hugh Hornby Langton, 1950), and Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), analyzing the significance of the Atlantic crossing in relation to its potential to transform what he calls “female identity” (Bentley, 1990, 94). Based on how Traill describes the defining moments of the departure, the voyage, and the arrival, Bentley shows that Traill’s dedication to promoting immigration is evident early on. From the start of her journey to Canada, Traill’s narrator focuses on her exhilaration at the adventure and her determination to make the most of her opportunity to explore. As she loses sight of Britain, she welcomes the liberating “prospect” of a “wide expanse of water and sky” opening in front of her (*BW* 16). During the voyage, she exults at watching the sea birds soar and feels inspired to boldly envision the future (*BW* 16). Upon entering the Saint Lawrence River, she is enchanted by a bouquet of wildflowers which contains species completely unfamiliar to her (*BW* 22), her excitement approaching the sensation of rebirth (Bentley, 1990, 108).

93) Peterman bases this assertion about the crucial role of Traill’s botanical pursuits in her personal as well as professional life on a comprehensive overview of all her writing but also on a particularly revealing passage with which Traill begins her *Studies in Plant Life in Canada*. In the introduction, Traill says: “But for the Canadian forest flowers and trees and shrubs, and the lovely ferns and mosses, I think I should not have been as contented as I have been away from dear old England” (qtd. in Peterman, 1990 b, 178-179).

Finally, when she sees the flora around her lakeshore homestead, Traill observes with confidence: “I consider this country opens a wide and fruitful field to the inquiries of the botanist” (*BW* 80-81). Within two years, she has learned to value her “present liberty in this country exceedingly” (*BW* 218). The narrative persona that Traill creates in *The Backwoods of Canada*, whose main characteristics are inexhaustible curiosity and stubborn courage, remains with Traill for the rest of her writing career. Traill was never able to visit England again, and even her mobility in Canada was severely circumscribed. She knew early on that she had made her choice and had to make the best of it.⁹⁴ In her essay that compares Traill and the nineteenth-century Australian author Louisa Anne Meredith, Judith Johnson places Traill’s *The Backwoods of Canada* into the broader context of colonial settlement narratives. In addition to perceptively highlighting Traill’s participation in the imperialist discourse of the time, Johnson emphasizes that, unlike temporary visitors who were just passing through, the settler “must stay, must interpret the new land and shape it” (Johnston, 1994, 35).⁹⁵ People in Traill’s situation have bought “a one-way ticket” and have in effect “become exiles” (Stanley, 1986, 52). According to Marni L. Stanley, Traill’s approach to immigration was “determinedly practical” (Stanley, 1986, 56)—and this approach sharpened Traill’s view of the natural world around her.

Studies of Anglophone Canadian regional literature often comment on the inescapable role of the natural environment in what may be seen as a specifically “Canadian” artistic response engendered by the entrancing but also frightening land.⁹⁶ A key essay typically cited in this respect is Northrop Frye’s conclusion to *Literary History of Canada*. Frye suggests that, at the beginning of the European settlement of Canada, “isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological ‘frontier’ separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources” and “confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting” were “bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality” (qtd. in Buss, 1990, 121). As Helen M. Buss points out, Northrop Frye’s “provisional” suggestion has become a rather entrenched expectation which often blinds scholars to alternative ways of literary representations of the land and thus prevents a whole body of writing from being considered as part of the canon. In particular, Buss examines the autobiographical works of pioneer women, including Traill’s *The Backwoods of Canada*. She shows that these authors “react to the strangeness of the Canadian landscape by *merging* their own identity, in some imaginative way, with the new land” (Buss, 1990, 126, emphasis mine). Wayne Grady makes a related observation when he asserts that in *Pearls and Pebbles* “[f]ar from building a garrison around

94) For instance, Traill’s first trip to Ottawa did not take place until 1884, at the invitation of Governor General Lansdowne (Gray, 2000, 326-329).

95) Clara Thomas observes a similar difference when she compares Traill’s writing with Anna Murphy Jameson’s *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838). That Jameson never intended to remain in Canada colors her portrait of the land and the people significantly—in some ways, Thomas asserts, Jameson was more open to exploring what she found unfamiliar, as is demonstrated in her interest in the native oral traditions. In other ways though, Jameson maintained a bigger distance, as is clear from her “notably scholarly” approach (Thomas, 1972, 14).

96) In her overview of these studies, Helen M. Buss includes D. G. Jones’s *Butterfly on Rock* (1970), John Moss’ *Patterns of Isolation* (1974), Margot Northey’s *The Haunted Wilderness* (1976), and Gaile McGregor’s *The Wacousta Syndrome* (1985).

herself, Traill embraced her new surroundings, strove to understand and describe them, and saw in the riot of nature an invitation to wonder rather than a dark tangle of Jungian turmoil” (Grady, 1992, 7). Grady then goes on to extend this argument in reference to the whole genre of Canadian nature writing, suggesting that, in comparison to the novels and poetry that Frye based his idea on, nature writing offers an alternative paradigm of relating to the land (Grady, 1992, 7-10).

In “Little Goody Two-Shoes: Reassessing the Work of Catharine Parr Traill,” Rebecca Raglon examines Traill’s work from an ecocritical perspective, making a strong case for Traill as an environmentalist, asserting that “she should be placed within an eighteenth-century tradition of nature writing” (Raglon, 2005, 5). In all of her writing, including *Pearls and Pebbles*, Traill supports her observations of natural phenomena with references to respected sources. As Rebecca Raglon, Elizabeth Thompson, Michael A. Peterman and others have shown, the most influential natural historian for Traill was Gilbert White (1720-1793), whose *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* (1789) she knew well since childhood (Peterman, 1990 b, 177-178). White’s collection is also loosely structured, consisting of letters to two friends, Thomas Pennant and Daines Barrington, who were fellow enthusiastic naturalists. Even more important is the similarity of White’s and Traill’s chosen narrative persona. Like Traill’s heterogeneous personal essays, White’s “reports, speculations, and inquiries add up to an engaging self-portrait of a man who delighted in the natural surroundings” of his village (Finch and Elder, 2002, 33). Finally, Traill’s style parallels White’s in that it expresses joy and “a playful spirit” while also “making original, substantial contributions to knowledge” (Finch and Elder, 2002, 33).⁹⁷

A comparison between Traill’s response to the forest in her first collection written in Canada and her penultimate publication, *Pearls and Pebbles*, foregrounds the identity transformation that Traill has experienced as well as the environmental transformation that the woods have been subjected to. While she on the whole enjoyed her roaming and rambling, in her early days Traill was sometimes unable to quite suppress her homesickness and complained about a “want of picturesque beauty” and English-style “venerable antiquity” of the forest (*BW* 96). Half a century later, she mourns the disappearance of the backwoods and, with an ecological and ethnobotanical foresight, she connects this change with the disappearance of the wildflowers and the native people. Traill begins her essay “Notes from My Old Diary” by comparing what she recorded in an entry from 1839 with what she sees around her now, in the early 1890s. This comparison indicates that “[t]here is a change in the country; many of the plants and birds and wild creatures, common once, have disappeared entirely before the march of civilization” (*PP* 49). In “The First Death in the Clearing,” Traill recalls, with sadness, the time when the Otonabee river still “dashed over its rocky bed, unchecked in its downward course by mill dams or sawlogs, its clear waters unpolluted by sawdust or bark, nor ploughed and stirred by steamboats and the rafts and cribs of the lumbermen” (*PP* 85).⁹⁸ *Pearls and Pebbles* can

97) Robert Finch and John Elder, the editors of *Nature Writing: The Tradition in English* (1990, 2002), place Gilbert White as a major figure at the very beginning of this tradition.

98) Traill expressed her concern about the environmental degradation that she saw happening all around her also in shorter newspaper and magazine pieces. In a letter to a magazine on farming, for instance, Traill protested the unbridled spread of farms into the forest in the following impassioned words: “I am a great admirer of the indigenous flowers of the forest, and it is with a feeling strongly allied to regret, that I see

then be seen as an “elegiac memorial to a landscape [Traill] had loved, even while she helped to destroy it” (Thompson, 1999, xviii). Even though, as Fiona Sparrow points out, Traill “was haunted by the fear of losing her children” in the forest, she embraced it as a source of her own and her children’s “entertainment and education” (Sparrow, 1990, 36). Therefore, Traill belongs into a particular “landscape tradition” consisting of Canadian writers who, rather than surrounding themselves with the protective walls of Frye’s garrison, strive to become at home in Canada by “crafting a complex intimacy with the wild nature around them” (Hessing, Raglon, and Sandilands, 2005 a, xi, x).

IV.5.3 Logging the British Columbia Rainforest: Martin Allerdale Grainger as a Labor Reporter and a “Republic of Cells in Danger of Revolt”⁹⁹

Like Catharine Parr Traill, Martin Allerdale Grainger was born in Britain and immigrated to Canada as a young adult, of his own volition. Like Traill, he was ready for adventure and scrupulously inquisitive about his new environment. Grainger spent most of his childhood in Australia where his father worked as the agent general for South Australia (Gerson, 1990, 124). However, he was sent to Britain to complete his education, and he set out for Canada armed with a freshly earned degree in mathematics from King’s College, Cambridge. Arriving in the late 1890s—that is, half a century later than Traill—Grainger was headed for the pioneer experience in the Far West, at first joining the gold rush on the Klondike. Eventually, after volunteering in the Boer War and then going back and forth between placer mining near Dease Lake in British Columbia and tutoring mathematics in London, Grainger decided to learn about the lumber business, which was then booming on the northern British Columbia Coast. He was, at the time, engaged to be married, and kept in touch with his fiancée by writing letters. *Woodsmen of the West* (1908), which was published within two weeks after his return to “civilization” in order to raise money before his wedding, is closely based on this correspondence.¹⁰⁰

Just as it did for Traill, Grainger’s decision to stay in Canada strongly impacted his view of the British imperial project and its environmental consequences. Simultaneously, there occurred a transformation in his view of himself—gradually, in the course of several decades, Grainger began to feel more as an insider, as someone who could act as a guide for people unfamiliar with his part of British Columbia. As in the case of Traill, his chosen strategy of integration became trying to protect the Canadian landscape that he came to regard as his home from careless exploitation. Shortly after the publication of *Woodsmen of*

them fading away from the face of the earth. Many families, containing blossoms of the greatest beauty and fragrance are fast disappearing before the destructive agency of the chopper’s axe, fire, and the plow. They flee from the face of men and are lost, like the aboriginals of the country, and the place that knew them once, now knows them no more” (qtd. in Raglon, 2005, 8).

99) This quote is adapted from Grainger’s essay “My Escape from Business,” which opens his collection *Riding the Skyline* and in which Grainger describes, with his characteristic humor, how he feels when he does not get enough physical exercise in the outdoors (Murray (ed.), 1994, 4).

100) This biographical summary is compiled from Caroline Adderson’s afterword to the 1996 New Canadian Library edition of *Woodsmen of the West*, Carole Gerson’s entry in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 92 (1990), and Peter Murray’s introduction to Grainger’s *Riding the Skyline* (1994).

the West in 1908, Grainger married and settled in Esquimalt on Vancouver Island. Drawing on his detailed knowledge of the corruption and ruthlessness of the logging practices in the province, he began working as a civil servant in 1909, writing much of the report of the Royal Commission of Enquiry on Timber and Forestry, which resulted in the passing of the Forestry Act of 1912 and the creation of the British Columbia Forest Service. He started as secretary and worked his way up to being appointed Chief Forester for several years (1917-1920), until he resigned to become the manager of several private lumber corporations. Throughout his career, Grainger was actively involved in various lumbering associations and, for a time, worked as director of the Timber Industries Council of British Columbia (Gerson, 1990, 124-126).

IV.5.3.1 Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West* as a collection of travel accounts

Grainger began his writing career during his participation in the Boer War, when he sent reports to the *London Daily News* (Gerson, 1990, 124). *Woodsmen of the West*, the only book he published during his life, has been categorized into many different genres—it has been called a novel (Murray, 1994, vi, Adderson, 1996, 220), an autobiography (Adderson, 1996, 220), and “a loosely structured, realistic narrative” (Gerson, 1990, 124). When considered from a bioregional perspective, it becomes clear that what holds this heterogeneous collection together is the setting, more precisely the narrator's circular journey up and down the British Columbia coast. It is a journey into an unknown world for Grainger, and as he travels, he describes his impressions and experiences. As Kristi Siegel observes, traveling usually “entails going to another culture, and travel writing is—in large measure—the record of what one *sees* on that journey” (Siegel, 2002, 2, emphasis in the original). Since it is Grainger's particular way of culturally inflected seeing that is most relevant for a discussion of the development of his relation to this part of Canada, I am going to examine the collection as a series of travel essays, even though I am aware that the narrative contains elements of other genres as well.¹⁰¹ Largely, I follow Lyon's definition of “travel and adventure accounts” within the tradition of the “literature of nature,” according to which the usual characteristics of such accounts are “the exhilaration of release from civilization, the sense of self-contained and self-reliant movement, and above all, the thrill of the new” (Lyon, 1996, 279, 276, 280).¹⁰² In *Woodsmen of the West*, all three of these characteristics are present. The reader is invited to join an exciting exploration of the remote northern reaches of the British Columbia Coast, of logging camps hidden in secluded inlets “sixty miles of storm-swept water away from anywhere,” accessible only by often unreliable small boats (*WW* 90).¹⁰³ This is definitely a new territory for the first-person narrator, both in a geographical and a

101) The closeness of the genres of autobiography and travelogue, especially as related to the role of the first person narrator, is analyzed in detail by Kristi Siegel in her introduction to *Issues in Travel Writing: Empire, Spectacle, and Displacement* (2002). As Siegel sees it, autobiography and travel literature are “closely aligned,” thus it is not surprising that travel theory “follows on the heels of critical interest in autobiography” (Siegel, 2002, 2).

102) According to Lyon, the travel writer “often seems like a rambler writer gone wild” (Lyon, 1996, 279).

103) Grainger, *Woodsmen of the West* (*WW*).

cultural sense (*WW* 21), which is often a source of self-deprecatory remarks but also moments of unexpected self-discoveries. The travelogue-like impulse of *Woodsmen of the West* is strengthened by the photographs that are sprinkled in the text. For instance, a detailed description of how a donkey engine works is accompanied by a photograph of a donkey engine (*WW* 84-86). The captions sometimes include the names of the people mentioned in the essays, further increasing the documentary nature of the text (*WW* 75). When seen as a piece of travel writing then, Grainger's collection is a series of episodes necessarily colored by the author's cultural and social background, limited by the amount of time he spent on the journey, and reshaped by the processes of memory and narrative. The collection offers a unique record of hand-loggers' life at the beginning of the twentieth century, a record that is "in motion,"¹⁰⁴ yet rooted in place.

In *Woodsmen of the West*, the personal experiences of the author are filtered through a narrative persona of the same name—most frequently he is referred to as Mart. Throughout his journey, Mart keeps writing whenever he gets a chance, even when he is moored in the middle of a stormy night in an unreliable boat at sea, cramped in a "dripping engine-room" lit poorly by a candle (*WW* 114). However, he does not reveal until almost the very end to whom he is writing. Therefore, until almost the very end Mart appears to be addressing directly the reader, as when he says: "You note, perhaps, the limitations of my character displayed so artlessly before your reading eyes. You smile at what you see. And what would you have done yourself?" (*WW* 159). Nevertheless, Grainger also undercuts the veracity of some of Mart's reports, dropping occasional clues to warn the reader that, after all, these are recollections based on memory and imagination which cannot be fully trusted. Thus, Mart's travel account often digresses into the past, into stories that he had heard from a source he may identify only as "[a] man I know" (*WW* 91). Moreover, Mart admits to his tendency to day-dream. For instance, he introduces his very precise and technical description of the mechanism of the donkey engine by saying: "*I make myself a picture*, too, of an earlier moment in Carter's life—on the first morning when his donkey began its work" (*WW* 84, emphasis mine). Perhaps the clearest indication of Mart's own awareness of his unreliability as a reporter comes when he tries to remember what Carter told him about his life before coming to the camp in Coola Inlet. Mart is simply forced to confess that he was sleepy that night and kept dozing off, lulled by "the gentle heaving of the bunk-house on the swell" of the ocean (*WW* 50). Grainger's record of his sojourn among the loggers is, therefore, consciously self-reflexive, which gives his portrait a special kind of credibility.

Grainger begins the account of his journey into his particular corner of Canada by Mart's getting ready to board a ship. In the opening essay of the collection, titled "In Vancouver," Mart is about to sail on the *Cassiar*, which departs twice a week at 8 p.m., regularly dropping off and taking on loads of woodsmen from and to the logging camps further up the coast (*WW* 13). As Mart sets out, he is conscious of the remoteness of this part of Canada and feels compelled to locate himself: "If you take a large scale map of

104) I am borrowing here from Kristi Siegel and Toni B. Wulff, who conclude their theoretical essay "Travel as Spectacle: The Illusion of Knowledge and Sight" by observing that travel writings, despite their fragmentary and subjective character, "achieve redemption by their ability to affect the present," and that, as "a kind of history, autobiography, and cultural narrative in motion," they "leave traces" (Siegel and Wulff, 2002, 120).

British Columbia you will notice how the three-hundred-mile stretch of Vancouver Island, like a great breakwater, shuts off from the ocean a fine strip of sea, and how that sea is all littered with islands. You will see the outline of the mainland coast, from Vancouver north, a jagged outline all dented with inlets and sounds and arms—fiords they call them elsewhere” (WW 20).¹⁰⁵ However, remote as it is, the area is not an untouched Western wilderness.

While depicting the enchanting beauty of the land and the sea, Grainger documents the encroachment of the logging industry. From the deck of the *Cassiar*, Mart admires the view he gets of the mountains and the forest that covers them. As the ship continues northward, the temperate rainforest seems “like a moss upon the higher slopes; and the bristling dead poles of burnt forest showing against the bare mottled rock: standing timber, fallen timber, floating logs and tree tops; and drift logs piled white upon the beach” (WW 20-21). But Mart also notices “long stretches of coast along which, every few yards, little lanes seemed to have been cut in the water-side forest. . . . these little lanes marked the work of hand-loggers, and were the paths down which big logs had crashed their way into the sea” (WW 21). The tension that results from these two types of photographic images placed together points toward the denaturalization of the forest, a direction that Grainger develops throughout the collection. The forest becomes constructed, it is revealed as an intersection of geographical, economic, historical, and cultural factors.¹⁰⁶

Grainger’s travel accounts reflect his growing ambivalence in regard to the effects of the loggers’ presence on the coast. On the one hand, he describes moments when Mart is caught up in the exhilaration that kind of work in that kind of environment can bring, especially when the weather is good and he is “timber-cruising up Coola Inlet” (WW 94). On the other hand, as he learns more about the logging practices and the actual abuse that is happening all around him, Mart openly vents his anger at the destruction. The juxtaposition of such moments creates a jarring effect. As he remembers, there were days when “a man’s eyes were pleased by the forest-green of the great mountains and the snowy whiteness of glaciers showing against the blue sky. The sea was sparkling in ripples against the gleaming line of Carter’s boom, that lay across a little bay” (WW 94). On days like this, it was a pleasure to watch “the water shoot up in lofty jets and sunlit spray” as another log “dived to join its fellows in the sea” (WW 95). Then the loggers are heroic figures “above the reach of average men,” who fight “against Nature in its wilderness”

105) Grainger is, of course, not the first or the only writer in English to have captured the topography of the British Columbia coast in a travel book. Apart from eighteenth and nineteenth-century explorers’ accounts, among the most important collections of travel writing about the coast are Emily Carr’s *Klee Wyck* (1941), M. Wylie Blanchet’s *The Curve of Time* (1968), Terry Glavin’s *This Rugged Place* (1996) and, most recently, Cathy Converse’s *Following The Curve of Time* (2008). Grainger’s work has so far not inspired much critical analysis, but it has become an indelible part of the canon of British Columbia literature and has provoked later writers to reimagine that place and time. For instance, Daphne Marlatt rewrites Grainger’s portrait of the West Coast in *Stevenson* (1974) and *Ana Historic* (1988).

106) For an interesting examination of contemporary travel writing from this particular geocultural area based on the perspective of “critical environmentalism,” see chapter four, “Landscapes of Loss and Mourning: Adventure Travel and the Reterritorialization of Nature and Culture,” in Bruce Braun’s *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada’s West Coast* (2002, 109-155). In this chapter, Braun illustrates that adventure travel (and I would add travel writing) is “both a source of pleasure” and “a specific constellation of cultural, discursive, and spatial practices” (Braun, 2002, 111, emphasis in the original).

and who “achieve noteworthy things by strain and stress of sweaty labour” (WW 72). However, there were days when Mart felt anger at the sight of the abandoned stretches of the coast after the loggers had moved on, where all that was left was a forest “whose sea-fronts [had been] shattered and left in tangled wreckage” (WW 77). Then loggers are nothing but butchers who “sack the woods, as mediaeval towns were sacked, by Vandal methods” (WW 77).¹⁰⁷ But he is still irresistibly drawn to what these workers stand for, still wishes he could be one of them.

Just as he cannot help admiring the majesty of the forest, wounded and treacherous as it may be, Grainger cannot resist celebrating the manliness of the woodsmen, foolish and ruthless as they may prove to be. Repeatedly, Mart compares the rugged Westerners who are “firm of flesh and weather-stained” with the citified Easterners who prefer “scheming to indulge in Comfort” (WW 36). He sounds not only desirous, but even jealous, of what he perceives as the loggers’ freedom from social convention, living “up among the feet of mountains” (WW 90), in the simple plank houses on rafts that are, often three or more at a time, “moored together at a convenient place within the protection of the boom, making a little hamlet on the sea” (WW 50). In such a logging camp, “[o]ne does not have to bother how one looks, nor whether one lives at a reputable address. As long as one does one’s work, nobody makes it his business to care a cent about the correctness of one’s demeanor or of one’s morals, or to dictate to one, impertinently, about one’s private affairs” (WW 42). Such freedom is, for Grainger, a distinctly Canadian trait. In this kind of society, “[t]here is a toleration that surpasseth all understanding of the old-country English” (WW 42). Grainger’s remark on this kind of difference between the British and Canadian cultures echoes Traill’s earlier observations on the freedom from convention that she experienced in the backwoods of Upper Canada.

IV.5.3.2. Grainger becomes a local trail guide

Analyzing Grainger’s *Woodsmen of the West* from a bioregional perspective which brings to the foreground place-based histories reveals certain erasures, most notably of women and the local indigenous population. Adderson aptly observes that “the feminine pronoun is used in *Woodsmen of the West* exclusively for steamboats, even when a steamboat is named *Burt*” (Adderson, 1996, 221). Nevertheless, these absences are not simply the result of Grainger’s blindness to them: they are not simply ignored—instead, they are subtly reflected in parts of the changing self-representation of the narrator. Adderson points out that the narrator does not fit into the world of hand-loggers—instead, he gradually takes on some of the marginalized roles when he acts as a confidant, a cook, and a nurse (Adderson, 1996, 222). When Mart is starting his journey up the coast, on the way to find his first logging job, he is painfully conscious that on the *Cassiar*, he is out of his element. As he succinctly puts it, placing himself in the group of outsiders: “Some of us

107) In “The Construction of Masculinity in Martin Allerdale Grainger’s *Woodsmen of the West*,” Misao Dean analyzes this tension in Grainger’s portrait of the loggers from a gender studies perspective, asserting that Mart “retains a distanced ambivalence toward masculinity as the book defines it, and the instability of his own position in relation to the men he admires undermines the ideal the text sets forth” (1996, 75).

were obviously not loggers” (WW 21). Later, trying to mingle with “the boys” in a bar on Hanson Island, Mart carefully imitates the other men’s “gait and dress and manners” as well as “the intonation of voice and the cadence of swear-words and swear-phrases,” but his British accent keeps giving him away. For instance, he answers spontaneously, “Yes, certainly!” rather than “sure thing!”—betraying not only his recent arrival from Britain but also his education (WW 35).

Another reason why Mart does not quite fit in is that he just does not have the physique, the training, and the sheer muscular strength required for the heavy work in the woods. As he admits, “I used to throw my coat over a saw-cut that was not straight enough for the professional eye” of the more experienced “logging gentlemen” (WW 30). He aspires to become a craftsman like “the best sort of Western working-men” (WW 79), but he knows deep down that he “shall never become a decent axe-man” (WW 30). With disarming honesty he confides, “my vanity gets on the grill whenever I realise that . . . I remain, in spite of bitter effort, a mere butcher of wood” (WW 30). Moreover, he has “a damaged foot,” which prevents him from venturing too far into the forest. In frustration, he reflects: “the woods, for walking in, are ‘something fierce’, as persons say—underbrush and fallen logs, rocks and crevices, to hinder one; and needles of the devil-clubs to fray one’s temper. There is no comfortable covering of soil to walk upon; moss and huge trees alike grow on the very rock, sustained by the heavy winter rainfall upon a scanty pretence of soil” (WW 29). Mart’s injured foot also means that he cannot walk the logs in the boom. When he tries, he always ends up desperately jumping from log to log as they roll under him, trying not to fall into the icy water, conscious of cutting “a figure of hopeless incompetence” (WW 38).

However, Mart, like Grainger, is a good listener (WW 23-24, 31, 49); he is good with numbers (WW 48) as well as the pen (WW 47); and he does not drink (WW 18). Further, he knows how to cook, and he is not afraid to experiment with different ingredients and different kinds of cakes and puddings to relieve the monotony of the camp fare (WW 40, 205). He also knows how to treat certain medical emergencies, administering bromide to help with hang-overs (WW 30, 101) and cleaning open wounds to stop infection when called upon (WW 105). These skills affirm his value in the eyes of the camp bosses—in short, he has no trouble finding and keeping employment as an indispensable assistant and adviser, a position he finds, for a while, quite suitable to his temperament and talents. Eventually, though, Mart grows fully disillusioned with the life of hand-loggers, realizing that it is not for him. As winter sets in and “the gloom of fog” settles all around him (WW 206), he complains of unhappiness and loneliness more and more often until he decides he has learned enough. Nevertheless, Grainger the author never really left the British Columbia rainforest and the logging business.

By poking fun at himself and his co-workers, as well as by documenting the ruthless practices of the loggers, Grainger exposes the cracks in the heroic myth of conquering the wilderness. In Grainger’s account, there is a strong undercurrent of ecologically based critique of what he saw happening around him at the time. His experience in the logging camps not only helped him find his home place on the British Columbia coast, it also inspired a life-long commitment to environmental issues in the area. In addition to working in various positions within the government and forestry industry, Grainger initiated a campaign to establish a provincial park in the British Columbia interior,

in the mountains between Hope and Princeton (Murray, 1994, vi). As Carole Gerson points out, Grainger was an “avid outdoorsman all his life” (Gerson, 1990, 126) and liked to get away from his office to the Princeton area, to the ranch of his friend, Bert Thomas, where he had his horses stabled and from where he often set out on horseback expeditions into the surrounding mountains (Murray, 1994, viii). Using his journalistic skills, he wrote letters to the local newspapers and called for the creation of a “Skyline Club” that would promote the development of “The Skyline Trail” and would help ensure provincial protection of the area. As he said in a letter to the *Vancouver Daily Province*, “You can take the train out of town any Friday evening, have two great days east of the mountains on trails, sleeping in camp, shack, ranch or hotel (whichever you prefer), and be back Sunday night. Bright sunlight and fine dry air up there are the right holiday change for anyone living on the Coast. . . . No business hustle up there” (qtd. in Murray, 1994, vii). Grainger’s dream became reality when Manning Park was created in 1941, only four months before he died. There is a creek and a trail named in his honor (Murray, 1994, viii)—his name, thus, literally inscribed into the place.

As Peter Murray summarizes it in his introduction to *Riding the Skyline*, apart from composing newspaper articles and petitions to the government Grainger recorded his experiences of horseback expeditions in the Princeton area in a series of letters to a former business partner and friend, C.F. Denny, who had retired to England. Written between 1928 and 1931, often on the train back to Vancouver at the end of the weekend getaway, the letters capture the excitement as well as the exhaustion with the immediacy of the travel journal. Denny and his niece encouraged Grainger to publish the letters in some form, and he must have considered it because he wrote an introductory chapter for the series, titled “My Escape from Business” (Murray, 1994, vi-x). However, the project did not come to fruition until Peter Murray found the manuscript in the Provincial Archives of British Columbia in Victoria and prepared it for publication in 1994. It is in these later sketches, written after he has lived in British Columbia for more than twenty years, that Grainger expresses his feeling of at-homeness in his particular region of Canada.

In *Riding the Skyline*, Grainger’s narrator is the knowledgeable guide who takes newcomers to the region on horseback trips along the old Hope trail. Along the way, he points out the unique natural features as he has experienced them and retells what he has learned about the human history imprinted in the land from his field research as well as from digging in the provincial archives (*RS* 5).¹⁰⁸ As he reports on the topography, “This Cascade country is full of deep gulches between hills. The horse and I would travel for a mile or two along a high flat bench, zig-zag down for half a mile to cross a creek, climb again, cross another flat, go down and up again, hour after hour” (*RS* 6-7). On a sunny spring day, he recalls, “All nature was smiling and gay, the high swelling hills a symphony in green major, with blazing masses of giant yellow marigolds, groups of horses and cattle under clumps of great russet-and-black pine trees, range after range of distant hills, and the Three Brothers still pure white towering on the far skyline” (*RS* 15). Significantly, the austere character of the land and the liberating simplicity of camp life during these expeditions bring about a specifically Cascadian aesthetic,

108) Grainger, *Riding the Skyline* (*RS*).

and perhaps even an ethical response on Grainger's part. As he confesses to his friend Norman Spalding, a British poet: "Could I match your felicity of expression I would write of the ascetic urge, the ceaseless effort to reduce food and covering to their bare essentials (so as to travel light), the perception of elegant simplicities, as in going to bed on hard ground underneath a tree by the mere act of taking off one's boots. I get fussed by all the paraphernalia of living, but people like you, in England, know how to make it beautiful" (*RS* 74). Clearly, Grainger's sense of who he is and where he belongs is now firmly associated with a Canadian place. As in Traill's later writing, in Grainger's *Riding the Skyline* a new place encountered in young adulthood becomes the author's personal and artistic proving ground.

IV.5.4 Farming the Annapolis River Valley of Northern Nova Scotia:

Ernest Buckler as a Landscape Ethnographer and "a Country Bumpkin"¹⁰⁹

As in the case of Traill and Grainger, Ernest Buckler's family roots were in Britain. However, Buckler's ancestors settled in the Annapolis Valley in northern Nova Scotia several generations before he was born there, in the small subsistence-farming community of West Dalhousie, near Annapolis Royal and Bridgetown.¹¹⁰ Therefore, while Traill and Grainger record the process of transferring one's identification from Britain to Canada, Buckler's writing dramatizes the tension arising from never quite feeling at home in the place where one grew up and yet never being able to leave. As Buckler says in "No Second Cup," an early story published during his years in Toronto, even when one returns after leaving home to go to school, one does not quite come back. Facing his mother, the autobiographical protagonist "could not tell [her] that he had not come home—that he could not remember the bare, shrunken pastures—that everything old was new and small" (qtd. in Bissell, 1989, 41). On the one hand, Buckler's writing is a testimony to the experience of self-exile within the home territory (Keefer, 1987, 205). In this sense, it is representative of a stream of regional writing that shows that "culture shock can be experienced at home as well as abroad," that disorientation and displacement often accompany human attachment to place (Kowalewski, 2003, 19).¹¹¹ On the other hand, Buckler's texts can be seen as variations on one theme, connected by "the recurring motif of homecoming" (Young, 1976, 11).

As Claude Bissell, Buckler's long-term friend and biographer, emphasizes, Buckler stood out as different in West Dalhousie from an early age (Bissell, 1989, vii). He was the only son in a family of four children, his health was extremely fragile and his nerves easily strained, and he was exceptionally academically talented, completing all pre-university requirements at the age of twelve and having to wait five years before being able to

109) This typical example of Buckler's humble self-characterization is quoted from his first letter to Claude Bissell, written after the publication of his first novel, *The Mountain and the Valley* (qtd. in Bissell, 1989, 5).

110) On his father's side, Buckler was descended from a United Empire Loyalist great-grandfather who came to the Annapolis Valley at the end of the eighteenth century (Bissell, 1989, 29-30).

111) A similar dynamic lies at the heart of Butala's portrait of her life in the southwestern corner of Saskatchewan.

continue on with his education. He focused mostly on mathematics during his studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax and won a scholarship to the University of Toronto, where he earned, within one year, a Master's degree in philosophy. It was at this point, aged twenty-two, that Buckler decided to leave the academic world and set out on a self-directed apprenticeship to become a writer (Bissell, 1989, 29-39). He stayed in Toronto for six more years, working as an actuary for an insurance company, educating himself in modern fiction, attending theatre performances, keeping a journal, and submitting a couple of pieces to *The Trinity University Review* (Bissell, 1989, 38-42). However, partly due to his failing health, Buckler eventually returned to live near his birth-place in the Annapolis Valley, settling on a farm in Centrelea where he was surrounded and cared for by his family. From that time on, he did not travel, other than for occasional trips to Halifax and a month-long stay in Toronto in the fall of 1964 (Bissell, 1989, 13, 24, 41). He dedicated himself to becoming, at first, a farmer who writes, and then, gradually, a "writer who chose to live on a farm" (Bissell, 1989, 55), always negotiating "the shifting loyalties of the country boy between the city and home" (Bissell, 1989, 40). As Robert D. Chambers phrases it, throughout Buckler's life, it was "the intense response of a sensitive youth to a rural Canadian experience" that remained "the creative impetus" of his work (Chambers, 1975, 2).¹¹²

One of the projects that Buckler was contemplating after his first novel, *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952),¹¹³ came out was "a non-fiction about the myriad, fast-disappearing, unduplicated-anywhere facts of life in a Nova Scotia village as I knew it in my younger days" (qtd. in Bissell, 1989, 101). As his thinking on the topic progressed, he wrote to one of his correspondents that he wanted to attempt "a straight reportorial account of the 'mores' of village life as I've known it here" (qtd. in Bissell, 1989, 116). In the eventual result of these plans, the collection *Ox Bells and Fireflies: A Memoir* (1968), Buckler succeeded in doing what, according to Michael Kowalewski, is one of the major contributions of regional writing—that is capturing "the local metabolism" of particular places (Kowalewski, 2003, 7). As Kowalewski elaborates, "regional writing tends to be less about a place than *of* it, with a writer's central nervous system immersed in the local ecology, subcultures, hidden history, and spoken idioms of a given location" (Kowalewski, 2003, 7, emphasis in the original). In Buckler's case, the place his writing is steeped in is his native farming community in the fertile basin of the Annapolis River.¹¹⁴

112) Chambers sees this grounding of Buckler's work in the rural experience as one of the similarities between Buckler and Sinclair Ross, an author of the Saskatchewan prairie, even though each author's response to his respective landscape is different. While Buckler "strives to establish a symbolic union between man and nature," Ross "tends to see the forces of nature as actively hostile to man" (Chambers, 1975, 2).

113) To date most critical studies on Buckler have focused on this first novel, *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952), and he has been compared with other Maritime novelists such as Thomas Raddall, Hugh McLennan, Charles Bruce, Alden Nowlan, Alistair MacLeod, and David Adams Richards (Creelman, 2003, 5). However, as Marta Dvorak makes clear in *Ernest Buckler: Rediscovery and Reassessment* (2001), Buckler's other writings, and particularly his various nonfiction pieces, also merit rigorous scholarly examination.

114) Brent MacLaine compares Buckler's *Ox Bells and Fireflies* to Sir Andrew Macphail's semi-autobiographical portrait of homesteading on Prince Edward Island in *The Master's Wife* (1939), suggesting that these two texts offer "the best introductions to the region's Anglo-Celtic rural sociology in the late 19th and early 20th century" (MacLaine, 2002, 164).

In *Ox Bells and Fireflies* and in its accompanying volume, *Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea* (1973), Buckler recreates his memory of an era that has now passed but that continues to underlie, in many ways, the changing patterns of the current society. As in Butala's *Old Man On His Back* (co-authored with photographer Courtney Milne), Buckler's text in *Nova Scotia* does not comment directly on Hans Weber's photographs, but the two kinds of documentary, which are also lyrical depictions of the area, are interwoven by the evocative atmosphere that they create together. According to Claude Bissell, *Nova Scotia* is, "in a sense, a completion" of *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, "an expansion of the imaginary village of Norstead into the whole of Nova Scotia" (Bissell, 1989, 128). Paralleling the history of the abandoned community about four miles west of West Dalhousie that inspired and haunted Buckler all his life, where now only a few depressions outline the former house sites but the orchards continue to bear fruit, the history of Buckler's Nova Scotia lives on in the present.¹¹⁵

Like Traill and Grainger, Buckler reached out from his remote farm and kept in touch with the wider world through extensive correspondence. Bissell remembers that Buckler's letters were always "a composition, never a miscellany of facts and polite inquiries" (Bissell, 1989, 11). Among Buckler's correspondents was Margaret Laurence, who, as was mentioned earlier, was also much influenced by Catharine Parr Traill. In one of her letters, recognizing Buckler's ground-breaking approach to a specific Canadian region as well to Canada as a nation, Laurence thanked Buckler in these words: "We, and I mean writers like me and all the young ones as well, owe you so damn much. You made it all possible. You showed us how to be ourselves. You told us where we really lived" (qtd. in Bissell, 1989, 139). Buckler's way of unashamedly and unflinchingly reaching back into his childhood in the Nova Scotia countryside spoke to many artists of similar inclinations and backgrounds. In addition to the depth of his insight and his boldly experimental style, the sensual immediacy and lyricism of his images are powerful. For example, in *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, as the narrator's thoughts flow "in one translocation after another" (*OBF* 38-39), the reader is taken along with him into the past where he hears "the ox bells cool as ax glint in the swamp" and where he smells "the green smell of the white willows . . . and the yellow smell of yeast in the crock . . . and the pointed smell of spun fleece . . . and the round smell of purple plums . . . and the stately smell of birch bark . . . and the laughing smell of apples in a barrel . . ." (*OBF* 41).¹¹⁶ Viewed within the context of regional and environmental literatures, Buckler's personal nonfiction collected in *Ox Bells and Fireflies* offers an inspiring vision of "human life integrated into a beloved landscape" (Finch and Elder, 2002, 22).¹¹⁷

115) In *Ernest Buckler Remembered*, Bissell recalls his visits to West Dalhousie where the Buckler family home was in the 1950s—he had assumed that it was this community that was the inspiration for Norstead in *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, but discovered that there was an abandoned village site about four miles west of there. This was where the first European settlers built their houses, but that community disintegrated after the First World War when lumber companies bought out the land and the people dispersed. Only the Anglican Church and the cemetery around it, where Buckler's ancestors were buried and where he also wanted to be buried, had been maintained (Bissell, 1989, 19-21).

116) Buckler, *Ox Bells and Fireflies: A Memoir (OBF)*.

117) I have borrowed this phrase from Finch and Elder, who in turn are referring to Donald Worster's *Nature's Economy: The Roots of Ecology* (1977). In this study Worster suggests that the essays of writers such as John Burroughs, John Muir, W. H. Hudson and Richard Jefferies continue in the tradition of the Selborne Cult inspired by the writing of Gilbert White (Finch and Elder, 2002, 22).

IV.5.4.1 Buckler's *Ox Bells and Fireflies*: A Memoir as a collection of farm essays

Similarly to Traill's *Pearls and Pebbles* and Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West*, Buckler's *Ox Bells and Fireflies* is a text composed of fragments and is not easily defined in terms of its genre. It has been described as "a pastoral" (Young, 1974, xii), "a self-destructing regional idyll" (Keefer, 1987, 207),¹¹⁸ "an unsentimental idyll" (Bissell, 1989, 129), "a series of portraits and occasional narratives" (Bissell, 1989, 121), "a series of loosely connected memories imaginatively recreated along fictional lines" (Chambers, 1975, 93),¹¹⁹ "a series of reminiscences about a time that is no more" (Deorksen, 1987, 238), and the especially apt "spacious bin . . . of wonderful odds and ends" (Chambers, 1975, 94). Like Traill's and Grainger's collections, Buckler's *Ox Bells and Fireflies* is held together by the setting—the pre-WWI world of the imagined farming community of Norstead, Nova Scotia. The opening and concluding essays of *Ox Bells and Fireflies* are narrated by a young boy named Mark; but, as in Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West*, in the anecdotes that form the centre of the collection the autobiographical narrator's voice often disappears and lets other voices take over and tell their stories. As in Grainger's work, the point of view shifts between the narrative I, we, he/she, and the familiar you.¹²⁰

While in the final title of the collection, *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, the rural theme is only implied, the importance of farming was explicitly expressed in Buckler's first choice for a title, "Singing as the Farm Was Home" (Bissell, 1989, 106). Once again using Lyon's taxonomy, I analyze Buckler's text as a collection of farm essays. In farm essays, "the farmer's proper role" is that of a steward who works the land by "fitting into natural patterns, rather than imposing some sort of abstract order" (Lyon, 1996, 280). While Grainger celebrates the virtues of the outdoor physical labor of the hand-loggers, Buckler devotes many of his essays to celebrating the rewards of the physical exertion of the farmers. In Mark's childhood, "[w]ork, woven with weather, was the very grain of existence" (*OBF* 89). With a warm feeling Mark recalls that "as long as there was work for the hands, there was wealth for the senses" (*OBF* 88). However, he admits that "some days it was *all* wealth, all anodyne. Others, it emblooded you and bled you almost equally" (*OBF* 90, emphasis in the original). Most of the details pertain to men's work, but "Wicks and Cups" is particularly about women, whose tools were "needle and frying pan, flour barrel (on its swinging clamps beneath the pantry shelves) and scrub brush,

118) In this context Keefer links Buckler's *Ox Bells and Fireflies* with the work of three other Maritime regionalists, particularly Charles G.D. Roberts (*The Heart of the Ancient Wood*, 1900), Lucy Maud Montgomery (*Anne of Green Gables*, 1908), and Donna Smyth (*Quilt*, 1982) (Keefer, 1987, 207).

119) Chambers points out that the use of this narrative strategy connects Buckler's *Ox Bells and Fireflies* with Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow: A History, a Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier* (1955) (Chambers, 1975, 93). Interestingly, Stegner's *Wolf Willow* is set in Sharon Butala's territory, near the town of Eastend and the Cypress Hills where Stegner grew up, and it is the only other literary treatment of this area of southwestern Saskatchewan available to date. Another regional author from the prairies to whom Buckler has been compared to is W.O. Mitchell, particularly his *Who Has Seen the Wind*, 1947 (Young, 1974, xi).

120) On a more thematic level, Keefer distinguishes three main voices in *Ox Bells and Fireflies*: "the 'down-home' which repeats and imitates the actual sayings of the villagers of Norstead; the 'impersonal literary' which translates the sights and sounds of the village into imperishable moments of significant beauty, and a third voice which Buckler often cages within parentheses—the disembodied voice of loss, regret, loneliness" (Keefer, 1987, 204-205).

washboard and creamers, bean crocks and jelly jars, mat hooks and baskets” (*OBF* 118). Occasionally, at what Mark remembers as special moments, men and women share their work, but their roles are still separate: “When they were on their knees together picking up drop apples and the heavy basket had to be emptied, he lifted it, and she held open the mouth of the bag. She raked the light scattering of hay into a pile, but it was he who took the weight of the pile on his fork and carried it to the nearest windrow” (*OBF* 120).¹²¹ The work began at dawn and ended at dusk, with “a sun’s length of labor . . . in between” (*OBF* 90).

According to Janice Kulyk Keefer, in *Ox Bells and Fireflies* labor “becomes emblematic of harmonious integration” with the natural environment (Keefer, 1987, 200). For instance, trying to imagine the early days of European settlement in the Annapolis Valley, Mark attempts to excavate from the land around him what he cannot remember, imagining his ancestors at work on what is becoming a farm. He listens and hears “the stroke of the first settler’s ax on the first astonished trees, which would give him both his home and his heat,” he can “see the lynx eyes smoldering at night at the edge of the tiny clearing he had made in this midnight of strangeness,” and he can “taste the faint trace of smoke in the burntland potatoes that gave him his strength” (*OBF* 23). In this context, *Ox Bells and Fireflies* can be seen as georgic literature, which, as Timothy Sweet defines it, is “a particular mode of environmental writing” that “treats those aspects of pastoral, broadly construed, that concern not the retreat to nature or the separation of the country from the city, but our cultural engagement with the whole environment” (Sweet, 2002, 2, 5). Therefore, in the georgic tradition as well as in Buckler’s world, working the land is considered a necessary part of human interaction with the environment.

Even more strongly than Traill’s and Grainger’s personal nonfiction, from a bioregional perspective Ernest Buckler’s *Ox Bells and Fireflies* is an evocation of the atmosphere of a place as it reveals itself through an individual’s memory. In Buckler’s essays, the “filtering process of memory” (MacLain, 2002, 164) involves both Mark’s heart and his mind, reaching deep into his inner life while at the same time encompassing the life of a whole community and place.¹²² In the essay called “Memory,” there is a passage that sets up, as it were, the parameters of Mark’s approach to this mysterious process. Two ways of recalling the past, through the heart and through the mind, are compared. The way of the heart, “a memory of feeling” (Althof, 1996, 113), is presented as the one that is more immediate, more piercing, more lasting. As Mark says, “The heart, far less misty-eyed than the mind, despite its sentimental name, is a far sounder witness. Once in a while it leaps of its own accord—through the skin, through the flesh, through the bone—straight back to the pulse of another time, and takes all of you with it. You are not seeing this place again through the blurred telescope of the mind: you are standing right there. Not long enough to take it all down, but long enough to give memory a second chance”

121) For a perceptive analysis of the problematically patriarchal attitudes in Buckler’s pastoral vision, see Leona M. Deorksen’s “Ernest Buckler’s Holy Family” (1987).

122) As Bissell points out, the workings of memory were Buckler’s focus from the beginning of his writing career—memory was one of the main themes in his first stories as well as his first novel. Bissell calls these early pieces “meditations on the inner life” (Bissell, 1989, 58).

(*OBF* 21).¹²³ Thus as memory moves back and forth between the past and the present, it acquires the power “to fuse different moments in time” (Young, 1974, xv), the power to make the reader today and anywhere experience what it was like for Buckler’s narrator then and there.

IV.5.4.2 Buckler becomes a neighbor

In “‘Regionalist’ Fiction and the Problem of Cultural Knowledge,” David Martin shows that regionalism and ethnography have much in common, in purpose as well as method. According to Martin, the central connecting point between these discourses is that they present ways of “[w]riting across cultural divides” and thus address “pressing issues of cultural identity, difference, and heterogeneity” (Martin, 1998, 35). More specifically, Martin identifies five similarities between regionalism and ethnography: they are interested in folklore and oral storytelling; they often investigate the diversity of local languages and dialects; they tend to emphasize the role of “ritual events” and “entertainment customs;” they attempt to portray “the inner logic” of the place and community under investigation; they face the same conceptual, political, and ethical questions related to acquiring and representing cultural knowledge (Martin, 1998, 37-38).¹²⁴ This ethnographic leaning can be detected, to a varying extent, in the work of all the four key authors discussed in this chapter. On the one hand, Traill, Grainger, Buckler, and Butala all examine their respective regions as entities that are in some ways unique and at the same time undergoing change under the influence of internal as well as external pressures. On the other hand, they all offer an introspective analysis of the changes that they, as observers, interpreters, and participants, undergo under the influence of the region. In Buckler’s writing this ethnographic element is expressed most strongly. In *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, the Annapolis Valley farmland becomes “an ethnographic landscape”—a landscape portrayed through a particular cultural lens, a landscape that embodies “the systems of meanings, ideologies, beliefs, values, and world-views shared by a group of people” (Hardesty, 2000, 169).¹²⁵

Like Grainger, Buckler interweaves descriptive and narrative passages with short dialogues, recording the distinctive speech patterns characteristic to his region. For instance, Grainger, showing with apparent delight the delicious expressiveness in these phrases, reports on the wisdom of loggers who find themselves in between jobs in Vancouver: “by keeping good-and-drunk you keep joyous. ‘Look bad but feel good’ is sound sentiment” (*WW* 16). Later, on Hanson Island, he notices a man outside the

123) A similar trust in and respect for emotionally-based recollections that can bring the past and the present into one moment of insight permeates the writing of Sharon Butala.

124) Some of the questions that both regionalist critics and ethnographers ask include: “What, exactly, does it mean to ‘understand’ a culture?,” “Is this understanding reserved only for members, or can a cultural ‘outsider’ achieve it?,” “How does one attain both a proper ‘objective’ understanding of a culture and a deeply intersubjective one?,” “What are the ramifications of making a regional culture the object of knowledge?” (Martin, 1998, 38).

125) Another interesting point that Hardesty emphasizes is that from this perspective “the same landscape may be simultaneously significant to people carrying quite different cultural traditions” (Hardesty, 2000, 171). Therefore, “conflicting cultural interpretations” often co-exist (Hardesty, 2000, 178).

bar “coughing his toenails up’ in pangs of whisky sickness” (WW 34). For his part, Buckler devotes a whole separate essay, “Goose Grease, Death, and Parables,” to the local language. In this essay, the narrator asks, “What medical term is as dead-on as ‘that ‘gone’ feeling’? What better picture of a woman plagued with neuralgia than ‘she looks like a hen with an egg broke in her’? How better describe a man after a bout of quinsy than ‘He looks as if he’d been pulled through a knothole and beat with a sutt bag’?” (OBF 129). As Mark summarizes his impression of the farmers’ talk, it “could be a dull rosary of empty shells they ticked off like parrotry or like a flash of eyelight that showed the whole blood-mesh of feeling behind it” (OBF 20). In addition to the function of cultural preservation, these remarks allow both authors to point to tensions, not just between the country and city, the past and the present, but also within the country. As Keefer observes, when Buckler’s narrator comments on the ways of the local farmers, he is “defining himself against” them (Keefer, 1987, 203). And yet, his loving depiction of the rhythms of their daily lives and their special farmer ways betrays his yearning to be one of them. He knows he does not quite belong among them, and yet, his identity is inseparably intertwined with theirs. Buckler’s *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, and most of his other works as well, are bioregional in that they blend together “geology, meteorology, history, myth, etymology, family genealogy, agricultural practice, storytelling, and regional folkways” to provide “a multidimensional vision of identity and landscape” (Kowalewski, 2003, 17). Together with Traill’s and Grainger’s essays, Buckler’s personal nonfiction is, thus, underscored by a strong environmentalist impulse.

This same impulse is also one of the reasons why the aging Buckler became intrigued by the work of the young photographer, Hans Weber, and agreed to get involved in the work of their joint project, *Nova Scotia: A Window on the Sea* (Bissell, 1989, 126, 145-146). Preparing for this volume, Buckler and Weber traveled together extensively throughout the province and the “poetic intensity” of Buckler’s prose is, to a large degree, the result of a deeply felt sense of personal identification with the region (Bissell, 1989, 129). The opening essay, “Amethysts and Dragonflies,” begins in words suggesting a strong emotional tie: “Nova Scotia is nearly an island . . . Yet what saves it from insularity is a peninsularity like that of the heart. The arteries go out to the Main, but the beat is all of itself. Sometimes it seems self-contradictory. It is grounded in the sea, but rooted in the land. Its features are as varied as those of the body” (NS 12). This link runs throughout the collection and is explicitly evoked again toward the end, in “Faces and Universes,” connecting everything into an interdependent web of life: “A land as exhaustively detailed as this is like a person. . . . here is no scattering of blind particulars, but a living organism” (NS 112). Nova Scotia “forms an isosceles triangle with the man who loves it; welding him, where their equal sides converge, to the universals. . . . of nowhere can it be said with more truth that here is where the heart meets its match in every sense of the word” (NS 112). Clearly, Nova Scotia is where Buckler feels his heart is at home.

IV.5.5 Ranching the Southwestern Saskatchewan Plains: Sharon Butala as a Spiritual Seeker and “a Western Canadian Hybrid”¹²⁶

In “Contemporary Regionalism,” Michael Kowalewski points out that even though today regional writing often encompasses both the city and the country, there is still a strong trend that continues in the tradition of depicting mainly rural settings in an attempt to search for “more intense and more authentic forms of physical and spiritual experience” than urban environments seem to allow (Kowalewski, 2003, 13). Butala’s personal nonfiction can be seen as part of this stream. In essence, the essays in the trilogy of which *Wild Stone Heart: An Apprentice in the Fields* (2000) is the final part¹²⁷ trace the transition that Butala went through when she moved, at the age of thirty-six, from her hectic life as an academic and an activist in the city of Saskatoon into the seclusion and quiet of the Butala ranch near Eastend, in the southwestern corner of Saskatchewan. It was on this ranch where Butala began “a life lived *on the ground*” (*WSH* 139, emphasis in the original)¹²⁸ and where she became a writer (Butala, 1987, 37-38). In this trilogy, even as she often yearns for the life she had left behind, Butala embraces her rural existence and celebrates the new forms of stimulation and satisfaction offered to her by the ranching life.

Like Traill, Butala grew up in the country. Until she started school, she lived in the bush of northern Saskatchewan, near Nipawin, where her father operated a saw mill (*WSH* 18). In a recent personal interview, she recalled how the memory of these early years in a log house with no running water “at the edge of the boreal forest” returned to her when she found herself again in the countryside (Butala, 2008).¹²⁹ Like Traill, Butala experienced this relocation as a newlywed still recovering from the breakup of an earlier relationship, ready for a fresh start. At the time she was already a mother, but her teenage son remained with his father in Saskatoon (*WSH* 22-23). As Andrea Pinto Lebowitz phrases it, “the arrival in a new place and the attempt to understand it mark a passage into a new way of being” (Lebowitz, 1996, 3). Connecting Butala’s work to earlier settlement narratives, Lebowitz points out that “the process of making a home occurs over and over with each new era” and that “the initiation and transformation [Butala]

126) This is how Butala describes herself in relation to the natural and cultural diversity of her home territory, to what she calls “our ‘two solitudes,’” referring to the European and First Nations traditions on the prairies (*WSH* 183). She identifies herself as “a hybrid” because, as she says, “I’m third-generation Canadian and westerner on one side, and, on the other, Canadian since 1650 and westerner since 1911, and because I’ve lived in the countryside for the last twenty-four years (and also for my first six years), I’ve absorbed this North American Great Plains landscape into my blood and bones” (*WSH* 183).

127) The first two parts of this trilogy of personal essays include *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature* (1994) and *Coyote’s Morning Cry: Meditations and Dreams from a Life in Nature* (1995). Butala has published extensively in a variety of genres (she is currently working on her seventeenth book) and in addition to writing creative nonfiction she is also an accomplished novelist. Among her best known are three interrelated novels that map the history of ranching and farming in southwestern Saskatchewan, *The Gates of the Sun* (1986), *Luna* (1988), and *The Fourth Archangel* (1992).

128) Butala, *Wild Stone Heart: An Apprentice in the Fields* (*WSH*).

129) The memory from that time was of “the tremendous power and beauty of nature” as well as of a hard-scrabble life, of her parents “fighting tooth and nail to stay alive” (Butala, 2008).

undergoes have much that is reminiscent of nineteenth-century settlement journals. Her story of and in the land is one of rebirth and origins” (Lebowitz, 1996, 3). Echoing Traill’s exhilaration upon her arrival in Canada, Butala’s autobiographical narrator is thrilled by the discoveries she is making on her own during her first walks on the prairie. Finally, there is space for her to roam freely. As she remembers, “No one was telling me what to look at, or explaining it to me, or telling me to wait and look longer, or not to bother looking at this or that” (*WSH* 22). With each new finding, with each new surprise, the ranch feels more like her place.

One of the questions that Sherrie A. Inness and Diana Royer, the editors of *Breaking Boundaries: New Perspectives on Women’s Regional Writing*, see as central to much of regional literature is: “how essentially are we changed by movement among regions?” (Inness and Royer, 1997, 6). In *Wild Stone Heart*, Butala addresses this question directly, examining the danger of disorientation as well as the potential to reinvent oneself in relation to the change in one’s locatedness. She admits that the transition is not easy for her, but stresses that it has its rewards: “In the midst of the severe difficulties of adjustment I was trying to deal with, . . . the simple fact of finding once again what I liked myself, something which I’d long since lost track of in my first disastrous marriage, was a quiet joy” (*WSH* 22). From the beginning, Butala’s journey of self-discovery is interconnected with her self-directed study of the geology, paleontology, zoology, botany, as well as human history of the prairie landscape. In the course of more than twenty years on the ranch, Butala gradually realizes how unique this particular piece of land is. Partly this uniqueness is the result of her husband’s careful management of the ranch that has protected it from falling into the usual trap of overgrazing and of plowing up too much of the drought-prone area (*WSH* 16); but mainly, it is the consequence of Butala’s growing awareness of the “*layers of presence*” imprinted into the land (*WSH* 37, emphasis in the original).¹³⁰ In this respect Butala’s life and work has followed in the footsteps of her literary predecessors discussed earlier in this chapter. Just as toward the end of her life Traill dedicated herself to writing on behalf of the wildflowers in the Lakefield area in southern Ontario, similarly to Grainger who promoted more sustainable logging practices on the British Columbia coast and helped create a provincial park to protect the Hope-Princeton area, and in parallel to Buckler’s celebration of the heritage of Nova Scotia—before retiring from ranching Butala and her husband took action in order to contribute to the preservation of the fast disappearing mixed-grass ecosystems in their home territory. In 1996, they donated about 1,000 acres of the Butala family ranch to the Nature Conservancy of Canada and began to negotiate a complex arrangement with several other organizations that led to the establishment of the Old Man On His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation

130) According to Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh, imagining the prairie landscape as layered in this way places Butala among a group of other contemporary creative nonfiction writers who “engage in a project of deep mapping, a genre that combines history and geography with culture to produce a portrait of a single area over time” (Calder and Wardhaugh, 2005, 9). This group of prairie nonfiction writers includes, for example, Trevor Herriot (*River in a Dry Land: A Prairie Passage*, 2000) and Warren Cariou (*Lake of the Prairies: A Story of Belonging*, 2002) (Calder and Wardhaugh, 2005, 9). In a personal interview, Butala acknowledged being strongly influenced by the fiction as well as nonfiction of Alice Munro and also by the work of three American authors, Truman Capote, Joan Didion and Annie Dillard (Butala, 2008).

Area.¹³¹ Several years later, in cooperation with the photographer Courtney Milne, Butala also published *Old Man On His Back: Portrait of a Prairie Landscape*, a mosaic of short prose pieces and images that tell the story of the protected area. In the essay “Walking,” Butala expresses her personal as well as artistic indebtedness to “Old Man” in the following words: “I think now, although I’d never have admitted it then, nor for years afterward, that I married this stunning landscape as much as I married Peter” (*OMB* 4).¹³²

IV.5.5.1 Butala’s *Wild Stone Heart: An Apprentice in the Fields* as a collection of solitude essays

While the essays in Butala’s *Wild Stone Heart* range widely in terms of theme and time, they are held together tightly by the consistent use of the first person narration and, especially, by their geographical demarcation—they all center, in one way or another, on one field, on one piece of unbroken prairie on the Butala ranch. Butala is drawn to this field from the start, by its “roughness” and “austere beauty,” by the way the terrain changes from “the steep cliff-side” to “the low grass-covered flat areas” to “the places where nothing grew because there was only hardpan,” and by the distinct fragrance of sage mixed with creeping juniper, wild roses, and the various kinds of grasses (*WSH* 16). The field is about one hundred fenced off acres, and it has a special meaning for Butala’s husband, too, because it is part of the first piece of land he was given by his father when he turned eighteen (*WSH* 15-16). The field has never been plowed as it is “too hilly and rock-covered,” but it had been used for grazing cattle in the past (*WSH* 15). Soon after her arrival on the ranch, Butala makes a “vow” to herself “to try to discover the story of the field by walking it with the greatest attention and openness to whatever [she] might find,” and she quickly becomes “totally caught up” in the story (*WSH* 80).

In comparison with the narrative persona in Traill’s *Pearls and Pebbles*, Grainger’s *Woodsmen of the West*, and Buckler’s *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, Butala’s narrator in *Wild Stone Heart* stands out as the loneliest figure. On her rambles, Traill was often accompanied by her own and her neighbors’ children; on his boat trips and in the logging camps, Grainger was almost always with at least a few other men; and Buckler’s farmers worked together as a community and a family much of the year. The narrative “I” that walks the prairie in Butala’s text, though, is alone, cherishing the “solitary hours” of “wandering” (*WSH* 17). This is how the narrator describes herself and the nature of her field walking: “Imagine me as a small, aging, not very strong woman . . . Imagine me alone, year after

131) In *Wild Stone Heart*, Butala mentions the resistance that this project generated among some of the local farmers, and she describes the dedication ceremony to which she and her husband invited the people from the nearby Nekaneet reserve. It was on this occasion that she finally learned where the name Old Man On His Back came from. She had heard that if looked at from the right angle, “the outline of the hill formed the silhouette of an old man lying on his back,” but she could never find that angle (*WSH* 101). When she asked an elder from the reserve, he responded that “it was so named by ‘the people’ when, a long time ago, ‘we found an old man up there, in bad shape’” (*WSH* 115).

132) The restoration of the mixed-grass prairie is also the main theme in Butala’s novel *The Garden of Eden* (1998).

year, mutely longing for all I'd left behind, suppressing the longing, never speaking of it, contemplating leaving year after year, and year after year staying" (*WSH* 29). Therefore, once again inspired by Lyon's classification, I examine *Wild Stone Heart* as a collection of solitude essays. Lyon stresses that in this kind of environmental literature "the author's first-hand contact with nature is the frame for the writing" and the experience of coming alive with a renewed intensity through this contact is the main theme (Lyon, 1996, 279). As Butala's narrator comes to see in retrospect: "I needed to re-create myself, and I did not know what that was or how to do it or even that that was what I was trying to do" (*WSH* 29). She experiences moments of revelation about the land as well as about herself, but one of the things she learns is that there is much she will "never know" (*WSH* 157, emphasis in the original), that "the 'root' of Nature, the true source of its wonders" (*WSH* 85) that she is after rests "on the bedrock of mystery" (*WSH* 29). Consequently, out of all the collections of personal essays examined in this chapter, Butala's work is the most deeply spiritual and the most self-revelatory.¹³³ As she testifies to the process of becoming a southwest Saskatchewan rancher and writer, she merges the story of her personal geography with the story she learns to read as the geographical personality of her prairie region.¹³⁴

IV.5.5.2 Butala becomes a dweller

Like Traill, Grainger, and Buckler, Butala writes to tell the story of a place in time through the memory of her personal encounter with it. As Lawrence Buell points out, "imagining a place with any fulness requires at least a glimpse of its whole history" (Buell, 2005, 74). The essays in *Wild Stone Heart* offer such a glimpse, and in this respect the history of Butala's field could stand for the history of any home territory—the narrator as well as the reader become aware that no matter where one walks in a place one cares about, one is walking "on the past" (*WSH* 131). In his cross-cultural study, *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama observes that "although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock" (Schama, 1995, 6-7). In *Wild Stone*

133) As Butala said in a personal interview: "my writing is my way of understanding my own life, my own motivations, my own psyche, and how the world works" (Butala, 2008).

134) For a helpful review of prairie literature and criticism, see for example Alison Calder's and Robert Wardhaugh's introduction in *History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* (2005). Some of Butala's predecessors include W.O. Mitchell, Sinclair Ross, Martha Ostenso, and Wallace Stegner. Among her contemporaries much of whose work also grows out of the Canadian prairie landscape and history belong, for example, Dennis Cooley, Lorna Crozier, Kristjana Gunnars, Louise Halfe, Aritha van Herk, Robert Kroetsch, Andy Suknaski, Guy Vanderhaeghe, and Rudy Wiebe. The most important critical studies, in chronological order, are Henry Kreisel's "The Prairie: A State of Mind" (1968), Laurie Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1973), Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1977), Robert Thacker's *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* (1989), Diane Dufva Quantic's *The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction* (1995), and Deborah Keahey's *Making It Home: Place in Canadian Prairie Literature* (1998) (Calder and Wardhaugh, 2005, 3-10).

Heart, memory is a central concern, but it works the other way around—the senses of the human body and the voice of the natural world are primary. The mind does not uncover the hidden layers of memory in the land; rather, in special moments of wakefulness and communion, the layers reveal themselves to the open yet still surprised mind. Even though Butala’s narrator asks questions about things like the stones scattered all over the field, reads books about glaciers, and ventures some attempts at explaining the way the stones lie and look today, she also admits that, on the whole, she does not “worry much about it” (*WSH* 134). As she says, over the years of living on the prairie, “I had developed a kind of faith that what was required of me was that I walk and look and think, changing nothing, moving nothing, and some day I would know whatever it was I needed to know” (*WSH* 134). In Butala’s world, the land is the teacher, the lone walker an attentive apprentice.

One of the best examples of this approach to learning from the land is the narrator’s personal discovery of Indian breadroot, sometimes called prairie turnip. She has heard others talk about it, knows it is a common plant in her area, and plans to look it up before she tries to identify it in the field. However, she admits: “I never seemed to remember to look it up ahead of time or to bring a plant book with me to the field, and as I walked the prairie or sat on the grass contemplating the fields and hills, I sometimes wondered idly what it looked like and which of the many plants around me it might be” (*WSH* 39). She consults various sources on the Peigan, the Cree, the Arapaho, and the Siksika ways of harvesting and using root vegetables, but she still does not recognize this particular plant when she comes across it on the prairie. Then one day, unexpectedly, the plant reveals itself. As the narrator records the experience: “I stopped dead in my tracks because directly in front of my toes, emerging out of the hard-packed earth where nothing else was growing, was a plant five or six inches tall and so pristine that it looked as if it had just broken through the ground into the light and air. . . . I knew at once without the slightest doubt, despite still not having looked it up, that this was Indian breadroot” (*WSH* 58). This privileging of the intuitive perception, allowing an active role of the landscape in the narrator’s insights, and accepting the inexplicable as a gift give Butala’s essays a mystical dimension.¹³⁵

During the years in which the narrator continues her walks, her relationship to the field develops. Gradually, as she moves from curiosity to apprehension, and on through humbleness to respect and joy, a strong and intimate bond emerges that allows her “to come home at last” (*WSH* 188). Therefore, it is possible to place Butala’s *Wild Stone Heart* within the branch of environmental writing called literature of dwelling. As Greg Garrard points out, dwelling is “not a transient state; rather, it implies the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work” (Garrard, 2004, 108). The longer the narrator walks the field and the more she understands about its many other inhabitants, former and present, the deeper her

135) As Butala says, she writes about much more than just nature. She is “interested in trying to write about an unused and forgotten realm of human possibilities” (Butala, 2008). In this context, Alison Calder links Butala’s *Wild Stone Heart* with Kathleen Norris’s *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (1993), showing that both authors, after their relocation from a city unto the prairie, learn “to acknowledge the ultimate inseparability of past and present, rural and urban, nature and culture, personal and political, and natural and supernatural” (Calder, 2002, 172).

marriage to the place becomes. At first, the field is “an aesthetically pleasing, interesting, and refreshing place,” but soon it begins to assume the role of the friends, teachers, counselors, and family members who are either far away or completely missing in the narrator’s life (*WSH* 35). Eventually, there comes a point when she feels “*devotion*” toward the field and is grateful for the “peace” and “quiet happiness” that she receives in return (*WSH* 58, emphasis in the original). She goes to the field when in need of consolation, the way, she imagines, other people go to church (*WSH* 74). In the process, she learns to see the prairie as well as herself in a new way.¹³⁶ As she comes to realize about the land that may often appear barren and boring at first sight: “To fully appreciate it . . . , you have to study it with your nose only a couple of inches from it. Then a whole new universe of beauty opens to the jaded or the skeptical eye” (*WSH* 50)—and the beauty out there resonates with the beauty and depth within. Like the work of Traill, Grainger, Buckler, and other environmental essayists, Butala’s *Wild Stone Heart* demonstrates that “in paying attention to the vivid, dynamic outer world” we can sharpen “our own sense of identity and purpose” (Finch and Elder, 2002, 19).

IV.5.6 Refining the Map of Anglophone Canadian Literary Landscapes

In *Rediscovering the New World: Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context*, Earl E. Fitz asserts that regionalism has characterized “New World writing” from its early stages (Fitz, 1991, 170). As Fitz puts it, “the regionalist affinities between particular texts (and nations) outweigh the political disjunctions that separate them” (Fitz, 1991, 170). While this assertion may be too much of a generalization, it suggests two relevant points in reference to the preceding discussion. Firstly, regional considerations have always been, and will likely remain, an integral element in the formation of Anglophone Canadian literature and identity. Secondly, within the context of the Americas, the Canadian situation is not as unique as it may seem in comparison with European literatures. When the role of the region (and therefore the interplay of geography and history) in the development of a national literary tradition is taken into consideration, “multiple geographic knowledges,” together with “multiple histories” emerge within the national territory (Comer, 1999, 10). Viewed from a bioregional perspective that integrates the insights of literature, ecology, and history, the map of Anglophone Canadian literary landscape becomes a multilayered, deeply textured palimpsest.

As W. H. New points out, the concept of the region can be a tool of asserting power in two different directions, from the center as well as from the margins. The region can “sometimes be used (by the place that believes itself to be the ‘center’) as a way of declaring its current power and defining its periphery, and of consigning others—the excluded—to the margins” (New, 1997, 118). However, “it can sometimes also function (within the areas consigned to the edge of conventional power) as a synonym for ‘leading edge’; it then becomes a watchword of unity and of alternative power, a sign of an active

136) In an article that compares Butala’s earlier collection of personal essays *The Perfection of the Morning* with Wallace Stegner’s *Wolf Willow*, Walter Isle goes as far as to say that Butala’s “daily walks out onto the prairie and her learning the details of ranch life lead to her transformation from alien to native” (1999, 92).

process of aesthetic and political resistance” (New, 1997, 118). In a similar vein, Caren Kaplan points out the double-edged effect of the related category of the local in these words: “The local appears as the primary site of resistance to globalization through the construction of temporalized narratives of identity (new histories, rediscovered genealogies, imagined geographies, etc.), yet that very site prepares the ground for appropriation, nativism, and exclusions” (Kaplan, 1996, 160). The interaction among the complex processes of regional affiliations and contestations creates a fertile middle ground for sprouting new varieties of Canadian regionality, and hence also Canadian identity.

In the epilogue to *Wild Stone Heart*, Butala decides to draw a map of the field for herself, as a way of being “a witness to the field” (*WSH* 192). In a sense, this is what regional writers do—they pay witness, creating imaginative maps of their chosen places and thus transforming the matrix of national literature. In their personal nonfiction, Traill, Grainger, Buckler and Butala invite the reader to participate in their lived and remembered experience of particular Canadian landscapes in particular historical periods. Their autobiographical narrators take on the role of the regional historian who betrays pronounced poetic and environmentalist leanings. The essays map the texture of each author’s respective landscape, transforming it into what Patricia Yaeger calls “storied” space (Yaeger, 1996, 18). Simultaneously, the essays dramatize the process of recreating, for the author/narrator as well as the reader, one’s composite identity true to one’s individual life history. Just as the genre of the personal essay is a hybrid that embraces autobiography, nature writing, travel writing, ethnography, philosophy, etc., the places depicted in Traill’s, Grainger’s, Buckler’s, and Butala’s nonfiction are collages that incorporate fragments of many different kinds. Ultimately, each author offers a somewhat unsettling portrait of local life in the context of larger regional, national and international developments, a portrait that raises many questions about the ways of belonging and practices of inhabiting Canadian territories.