

**Justice on the Rocks:
(Re)Writing People and Place in Banff National Park**
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Abstract

Banff National Park is most commonly and powerfully represented as a place intended for wealthy tourists to experience leisure and for “all Canadians” to encounter “the essence of Canada,” representations that emphasize transience, leisure, safety and abstract notions of nature and nation. These institutional narratives of place validate management decisions that alienate residents and motivate them to assert special claims to belonging that distinguish between the local who belongs and those who are out of place. My first argument, developed through a survey of creative non-fiction and fiction literature of the Rocky Mountain Parks, is that literature has been a key site for articulating such claims and setting such distinctions, as evident in recurrent emphasis on permanence, work, risk and place-based knowledge. Supported by the work of scholars and activists in environmental justice and the related fields of critical race, gender, queer, disability and Indigenous studies, my second argument is that the dominant narratives of Rocky Mountain literature, while resisting institutional narratives and promoting Banff National Park as a co-creation of more-than-human assemblage, inscribe a highly privileged framework for belonging. Such a framework naturalizes white, masculine, heterosexual and able bodies through their engagement with rugged wilderness landscapes and other-than-human animals while negating, excluding or marginalizing those who do not conform. This paper goes on to present a series of Banff National Park stories, derived from walking interviews and textual research, that historicize, politicize and otherwise confound naturalized normativity without abandoning efforts to narrate more-than-human co-creation of Banff National Park spaces. These stories are told in two sections – one which takes place in the wilderness setting of Saskatchewan River Crossing and the other within the urban Banff townsite – and attempt to disseminate experiences of making a home in the particular social and environmental landscapes of Banff National Park that are complicated by intersections of race, gender, sexuality, nationalism, capitalism, religion, Indigeneity and class. This paper argues that those resisting institutional processes of exclusion in Banff National Park must interrogate their own privilege if they hope to promote anything approaching environmental justice in the Canadian Rockies, while simultaneously attempting to model new narratives by engaging with and privileging a variety of claims to place that destabilize my own, including stories of Indigenous displacement, imprisoned labour, genderqueer performance and racialized migrant labour.

Foreword

This Major Research Paper (MRP) strongly and thoroughly aligns with the Area of Concentration that has guided my research throughout the MES program: to build interdisciplinary understanding of the ways wilderness environments – especially Canadian national parks – are created (politically, symbolically and materially, by human and other-than-human forces) and how they currently and may in the future intersect with the concerns of environmental justice. To that end, my Area of Concentration includes the following Components that are also the central elements of this MRP: 1) Philosophical and Political Perspectives on Wilderness; 2) Environmental Justice; and 3) Recent Developments in Ecocriticism.

This MRP uses environmental justice ecocriticism and, to a lesser extent, material ecocriticism as an entry point into evaluating and advancing environmental justice in the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks. In particular, I investigate the ways Banff National Park's self-narration as a wilderness area resists narratives that validate touristic exploitation and exclusion of the park's contemporary residents (including me), but replicates privileges of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability and nationality (which benefit me). I seek to advance alternative narratives that better reflect the diverse positionality of people who, amidst narrative and institutional violence, see Banff as home. I attempt to do so without relegating other-than-human forces to the backdrop of human sociality or the clay of human construction.

This MRP is a culminating project that integrates the lessons I have learned in a diverse range of courses and learning opportunities at York University under the direction of a profoundly interdisciplinary faculty. In particular, this project owes a debt to: Catriona Sandilands' "Culture and the Environment" for exploring the ways narrative can model cause and effect in inter-species relations; Jinthana Haritaworn's "New Social Movements, Activism and Social Change" for detailing (and implicating me within) intersections of power, privilege and violent structures of oppression; Ravindra de Costa's "Native/Canadian Relations" for better contextualizing my work in settler-colonialism; Liora Salter's "Applied Research" and Paul Wilkinson's "Protected Area Management" for improving my understanding of how national parks function institutionally; Peter Timmerman's "Readings in Philosophy, Religion and Environment" for the opportunity to explore Canadian environmental justice literature in-depth; independent reading courses with Catriona Sandilands and Stefan Kipfer for allowing me to wander at length – with a pack full of critical theory – through the makeshift canon of Rocky Mountain literature; and conversations with my MES peers, particularly Genevieve Fullan and Jacob McLean, for helping to clarify and condense the purpose of my project and to see it in concert with very different projects in very different places.

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Introduction: Banff National Park as Home

It is not easy to feel securely at home in Banff National Park, but stories can help. In an influential Rocky Mountain treatise, Robert Sandford (2008) outlines the ways amenity migration and tourism undermine conservation, local culture and long-term residents' capacity to stay amidst rising living costs.¹ He argues that, in order to resist this trend, those who see the Canadian Rockies as home must fortify a collective identity bound to our unique history and environment. Following the work of Wes Jackson (1991), Sandford proposes identifying and celebrating "local characters" who demonstrate ideals of who we aim to be, and "becoming native," or knowing one's self through the prism of land such that human and ecosystem wellbeing are synonymous. In other words, Sandford urges residents of the Canadian Rockies to make ourselves apiece with the natural landscape by telling stories that describe who can become native and how.

Such stories are my focus in this paper, guided by a central question: Who is made natural – and, inversely, who is made *unnatural* – in the stories we tell about Banff National Park? If the stories of Banff are to be read (or even written) as a framework for fortifying residents' claims to belong against the rationales of outside power, then my aspiration is to turn that project inside out: How do stories that fortify residents' claims to belong assert their own power against those they *perceive to be* outsiders, those they present as incapable of being natural in (or native to) Banff National Park?

For me, these questions have significant personal implications. Growing up in the Canadian Rockies, I had simple answers to them. I belonged because I was here while others came and went. Being rooted in the Rocky Mountains – and almost everyone else

¹ Amenity migration is commonly defined as the movement of urban or suburban populations to rural or "natural" areas for reasons of "lifestyle" rather than economy or other necessity (Abrams et al., 2012).

not being rooted in them – became central to my identity. Upon finishing high school I found work with Parks Canada, first as an interpreter in the Banff townsite and then as an entry gate and campground attendant at Saskatchewan River Crossing, an experience I detail in chapter two. Although living in the Rockies had long been central to my identity, and I enjoyed hiking, skiing and climbing, it was during my seven seasons with Parks Canada that the physical geography of the Canadian Rockies became integral to my sense of self and I came to see myself as something like Sandford's new native.

At the same time, I began to realize the limitations of emplaced identity as a resistance strategy against powerful forces of exclusion, as well as the shortcomings of using stability in place as a useful measure of attachment. When Parks Canada initiated a planning exercise for the Icefields Parkway to re-envision its touristic offerings, the few of us who lived and worked in the area were never consulted. Instead, tour operators and recreation groups based in Calgary and Edmonton sat on the committee, and students newly-arrived from Ontario and Quebec handed out surveys to visitors to glean their opinions of a place they were often encountering for the first time. Our recommendations for maintenance and improvements were ignored, we felt, while one visit from a Senator would lead to new signs and revised dates for facility openings. My employee's park pass was only valid for my work area and did not cover neighbouring Jasper or the Banff townsite. My pass expired at the end of my contract each year, which meant having to buy an expensive visitor's pass until the next contract began. New questions became urgent: What if I am unable to find decent work here or my wage cannot cover the cost of living? What becomes of my sense of self if I am elsewhere but the tourists remain? Even if I *can* stay, how do I influence a home that is, as legislated in the *Canada National*

Parks Act (2000), “dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment,” a place that is a “legendary mountain playground” for the global leisure class (Morrison, 2014, para. 1)? A place that is not *for* me.

Nonetheless, I was fortified by Rocky Mountain literature.² Reading books about living in the Rocky Mountain Parks, I encountered people like me, people who feel bound to the mountain wilderness within the parks but frustrated by the challenges of staying and exerting influence.³ Andy Russell, Sid Marty, Mike Schintz, Karsten Heuer, Graeme Pole, Kevin Van Tighem and Jerry Auld have all written about places I know well, populated by people with whom I identify. Their protagonists are not the representations of Canadians that Parks Canada is always trying to attract (or create), and neither are they the wealthy tourists or businesspeople whose interests seem prioritized in decision-making. Instead, these writers claim a place for themselves, for me and for other-than-human animals and forces in the Rocky Mountain Parks. They describe people who have already become native, by Sandford’s definition, and encourage me to do the same.

² I use *Rocky Mountain literature* or *literature of the Rocky Mountain Parks* in reference to published fiction and creative non-fiction writing intended for a broad and general readership, and in which the Rocky Mountain Parks are central to the narrative and/or the identity of the main characters. Rocky Mountain literature thus excludes academic and scientific texts that are intended for specially trained readers, as well as promotional and educational materials from institutional commercial and political sources. Rocky Mountain literature is not synonymous with mountaineering literature that takes place in the Rockies. Mountaineering literature is defined not by specific place, but by the act of climbing. Rocky Mountain literature often depicts mountaineering as an essential means for engaging place, so some Rocky Mountain literature could be classified as mountaineering literature, but the categories remain distinct.

³ In this paper, *Rocky Mountain Parks* signifies the protected areas of the central Canadian Rockies, reflecting the usage in the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks UNESCO World Heritage Site. The heritage site covers the national parks of Banff, Jasper, Kootenay and Yoho and BC provincial parks of Mount Assiniboine and Humber, while I include contiguous Alberta protected areas in Kananaskis Country and the David Thompson Corridor. I narrow my frame for alternative narratives to Banff National Park because it is the park with which I am most familiar, and to demonstrate that one need not look far, not even beyond the borders of a single national park, to find diverse positions and perspectives on making a home of the Rocky Mountain Parks. The shifts between Banff National Park and the broader Rocky Mountain Parks are messy because literary depictions of the region, like advertisers, rarely differentiate between parks, but governmental oversight and legislation vary considerably. My focus is on the national parks, but in doing so I also draw from narratives that include provincial ones without making a meaningful distinction between them. In addition, like other regional literatures, Rocky Mountain literature employs a diction particular to its cultural and physical geography. I include footnote definitions for such terms when they arise.

The affirmation I felt in reading Rocky Mountain literature was, however, troubled by the knowledge that my constant identification with the books' protagonists meant that many of the people I knew would not see themselves in those stories. Like me, the authors listed above are all straight white men, professional writers, wardens, climbers or naturalists, sometimes all at once. They are also, almost without exception, writing about the Rocky Mountain Parks as a conflicted but sublime *wilderness*. Living and working remotely, wilderness came to dominate my perspective of the parks as well, but other characteristics had been much more central to me as I grew up. Banff National Park is home to more than 10,000 people, almost all within the boundaries of the Town of Banff or the village of Lake Louise. Banff is a place for solitary wandering – that much is clear in the regional literature – but it is also the place my public school teachers cautioned was “the STI capital of North America,” where the largest employers are Fairmont Hotels, Sunshine Village Ski Area and The Banff Centre for the Arts.⁴ Where do these complexities show up in Rocky Mountain literature? Where are the migrant workers from the Philippines and Jamaica? Where is the gay man initiating Banff Pride and drag queen shows at the cowboy bar? What about the *Īyāhē Nakoda* (Stoney Nakoda) people arguing at the park entry gate that they should not have to pay the federal government to access traditional territory?⁵ The question of who we are as locals in the Rocky Mountain Parks must include careful consideration of who is not included, and to what effect.

In this paper I argue that Rocky Mountain literature *opposes* institutional represen-

⁴ Banff's reputation as the STI capital of North America persists, though the rates in the Rocky Mountain Parks are not – and probably never have been – radically divergent from Alberta as a whole. Alberta, however, does possess among the highest STI rates on the continent (Alberta Health, 2013).

⁵ The *Īyāhē Nakoda* are officially recognized by the Canadian government as the Stoney Nakoda First Nation and are commonly identified by several names including, most frequently, “Stoney.” In this paper, I use “Nakoda” to acknowledge *Īyāhē Nakoda* self-identification in their own language while connecting with acknowledgements in Banff – like interpretive signs, festivals or news stories – of “Stoney Nakoda” history. When quoting external sources, “Stoney” and “Nakoda” are interchangeable in this paper.

tations of Banff National Park in a manner that *naturalizes* particular and highly privileged perspectives, with *openness* to the reaching out of other-than-human elements, while *naturalizing exclusion* of less privileged bodies. In other words, Rocky Mountain literature defends Banff-as-home for a highly privileged group of people to the further exclusion of those marginalized along lines of Indigeneity, race, gender, sexuality, ability and class. I demonstrate that such narratives are unjust and inaccurate, overlooking the many ways marginalized people struggle against institutional and narrative obstacles to encounter, gain intimacy with and make a home in Banff National Park. By telling new Banff stories that contradict the narratives of Rocky Mountain literature, this research calls for and models a Rocky Mountain literature rooted in solidarity and environmental justice rather than privileged self-interest.

My initial purpose in this research was simply to tell some stories I knew to be present in the Banff landscape, but which I never encountered in dominant stories of the Rocky Mountain parks. To do so, I soon realized, I would have to disrupt the stories of Banff that are widely known and, apparently, foreclose the possibility of diverse entry points into communion with this landscape. Telling undisseminated stories also means disrupting privileged narratives that, considered differently, perform an important function in resisting my own exclusion. This local project expands through Banff's status as a metonym for ideas much larger than itself, particularly those of Canadian nation and nature. As I will describe, perceptions and portrayals of Banff as "the essence of Canada," as emblematic of nature and as a definitively white hetero-masculine able-bodied and middle-class landscape, coalesce in narrative space. Canada appears natural, nature appears white, white appears Canadian and so on. De-linking these associations in Banff

therefore contributes to larger political projects that challenge structures of oppression, particularly those that hide behind the seemingly irrefutable authority of nature. As environmental justice actors have extensively demonstrated, we cannot isolate nature from the hegemonic structures that so heavily inform our understanding of it any more than we can isolate nature from culture. Even so, by demonstrating the historicity of the links described above, we begin to disassociate actual other-than-human beings and forces from political projects that deploy them to the purposes of powerful interests. Banff National Park is a product of and a tool for human systems of oppression, but it is not *only* that.

I begin this paper by outlining narratives of Banff National Park embedded in representations by government and commercial actors, which I refer to as *institutional* representations.⁶ I use advertising from regional tourism actors and educational materials from Parks Canada to illustrate how institutional representations employ *transience*, *leisure*, *safety* and *abstract notions of nature and the nation* to articulate Banff as a natural site for wealthy visitors from around the world and for “all Canadians.” Such narratives, I argue, validate an outward-oriented politics that continues to cause frustration and anxiety among Banff National Park residents. I then outline, in broad strokes, a chronology of Rocky Mountain literature from the mountaineer-explorers of the Victorian period through early 20th century performance of frontier masculinities in popular writing. In my reading of early 20th century literature, I identify a shift toward local knowledge and self-representation, which establishes a pattern of differentiation between knowledgeable locals and out of place visitors. With examples from authors Sid Marty, Mike Schintz, Kev-

⁶ I use *institutional* in recognition of the hegemonic power these actors possess – through policy formulation, infrastructure development, law enforcement and information dissemination – to carry unparalleled influence over the way a subject is modified, encountered and perceived by those who do not possess such power (Gramsci, 1972).

in Van Tighem, Graeme Pole, Jerry Auld, Andy Russell and Karsten Heuer, I outline how Rocky Mountain literature establishes narratives of *permanence, work, risk* and *place-based knowledge* in contrast to those advanced in institutional representations. Drawing from critical gender, race, queer, Indigenous, disability and environmental justice scholarship, I highlight how these literary tropes naturalize structures of oppression.

In chapters two and three, I write Banff National Park stories derived from my own experience, textual research and walking interviews with people who consider Banff home. The first story, built around a walking interview with my mother, complicates my attachments to a wilderness landscape with the discovery that my grandfather also lived and worked there as an imprisoned labourer. My familial narrative is troubled when intersected with historical and ongoing land claims of Nakoda and Cree people, as detailed in Chief John Snow's (1977/2005) *These Mountains are our Sacred Places* and Gary Boting's (2005) *Chief Smallboy*. A story that could validate my belonging as a rugged white man encountering pristine wilderness instead becomes a tale of complicity in colonialism with messy intersections of gender and class. The second story, derived from walking interviews with LGBTQ activist Joe Bembridge and Filipina migrant worker Tula Matapang, explores the urban and cosmopolitan Town of Banff, where global capital, state, sexuality and race intersect to confound normative ideas of heterosexual white wilderness.⁷ I include these stories to honour a multiplicity of positions and perspectives from which people encounter and develop intimacy with Banff, as well as to highlight the narrative and institutional obstacles – including those prevalent in Rocky Mountain literature – that violently challenge their belonging.

⁷ Tula Matapang is a pseudonym, as requested by the participant.

Chapter 1: Belonging in Books

In this chapter, I describe how those who feel themselves at home in Banff are marginalized by institutional voices of capital and state that establish Banff National Park as a site of commercial exclusivity and political inclusivity through appeals to transience, leisure, safety and abstract notions of nature and nation. I then describe how recent literary depictions of the Rocky Mountain Parks resist these institutional narratives by emphasizing permanence, work, risk and place-based knowledge. My first key argument is that these emphases in Rocky Mountain literature set up an alternative framework for what Banff National Park is and who has rights to occupy it, a framework that resists powerful narratives of capital and state. Under each heading I explore an example from Sid Marty – a former park warden and likely the most widely read author of Rocky Mountain literature – and an example from at least one other author in order to illustrate how these themes are stacked within the work of an individual writer as well as spread through the Rocky Mountain canon. I go on to detail who and what are made (un)natural in Rocky Mountain literature, leading to my second argument: that the resistance framework in Rocky Mountain literature is a highly privileged one rooted in uninterrogated assumptions of race, gender, sexuality, nationality and ability. Finally, I briefly explore accounts of grizzly bear encounters, arguing that Rocky Mountain literature, while muddling badly through social privilege, offers worthwhile insights into narrating inter-species relations as part of a co-creative assemblage in the Rocky Mountain Parks.

Banff as Institution: State and Capital

As a substantial body of historical literature has demonstrated, the Canadian government

established Banff National Park and, later, the other Rocky Mountain Parks, to meet the intersecting interests of state (for control over land) and capital (for revenue from that land). The park's purpose was primarily to make a largely pre-industrial stretch of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) profitable by developing it as a destination for wealthy tourists. As E.J. Hart (1999) describes it, the Canadian government and CPR "quickly found themselves pursuing mutual goals consistent with the 'doctrine of usefulness' at a critical moment in park development" (p. 114). The government provided infrastructure necessary to support tourism and to assert sovereignty over territory, while CPR provided transportation and luxuries to draw in visitors.

Intersections of politics and commerce have always made Banff a difficult place to call home. The federal government has administered Banff since the transfer of Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company to the Crown in 1870, an arrangement that went increasingly against the grain as control over natural resources and Crown lands in Western Canada were transferred to the provinces over the course of the 20th century. Even the national park's founding is a tale of state expropriation of the lands around the Cave and Basin Hot Springs – first officially claimed by two prospecting railway workers – on the basis that they could not be claimed, except by the Crown, because they were neither agricultural nor mineral (Hart, 1999).⁸ As Hart (2003) details, the federal government took an increasingly interventionist approach to park administration and policy as the 20th century progressed. Resentment among residents and local park administrators grew alongside, as federal decisions – like listing 400 of Banff's 431 residential buildings as unauthorized slums while permitting bungalow cabin developments beyond the townsite –

⁸ Land with mining potential was designated as "mineral." The irony here is that the Cave and Basin was, and is, advertised according to the curative benefits of the *mineral* hot springs (Liefers, 2011).

failed to consider or reflect local opinion. Residents of the national parks were required to pay provincial taxes, but because they did not live in provincial municipalities they did not benefit from provincial infrastructure grants, and they often believed that the federal treasury earned more through rental payments and utility fees than it reinvested in infrastructure or services (Laux, 1991). Residents' desire for self-government, the Parks Service's frustration with urban issues beyond its expertise, and decades of surveys, studies and negotiations beginning in 1960 led to the first *Town of Banff Incorporation Agreement (TBIA)*, incorporating Banff as a provincial municipality on January 1, 1990.⁹

For day-to-day governance, incorporation was a landmark moment for Banff residents, but the *TBIA* (1998) remains clear that the town, no longer administered by Parks Canada but still under its regulatory oversight, exists "to serve, as its primary function, as a centre for visitors to the Park and to provide such visitors with accommodation and other goods and services" (p. 6). The last of the town's mandated purposes is "to provide a comfortable living community for those persons who *need to reside* in the townsite *in order to achieve its primary function*" (p. 6, emphasis added). The "need to reside" clause is formalized in the *National Parks of Canada Lease and License of Occupation Regulations* (1991) to legislate, with certain exceptions, that anyone living in Banff must work there to support, in some manner, its status as a tourist resort. Residents argue that these mandates privilege business interests at the expense of residents and Parks Canada's conservation mandate and that they validate undemocratic decision-making (Rettie, 2006).

Although the language of commercial appeals and Parks Canada rationales has changed over time, particularly with the emergence of mass tourism and scientifically

⁹ Banff was the only incorporated municipality in a Canadian national park until 2001, when Jasper followed suit. Other residential centres, including Field and Lake Louise, remain federal jurisdiction.

rooted discourses of “ecological integrity” (MacEachern, 2013; Sandilands, 2009), the tourism industry and government have remained the most dominant voices in narrating Banff to the world and even to itself. In the spring of 2014, I attended a Jane’s Walk in the Banff townsite guided by a municipal planner (McKay, 2014). The planner led his small group, including the mayor and the head of a major tourism industry organization, on a tour of Banff’s main drag and the two streets on either side of it. On several occasions, the planner pointed out buildings approved before the town’s incorporation, buildings in governmental modernist style with clapboard siding stained evergreen or brown and Bavarian architecture evoking Swiss chalets. These buildings are among my favourites in Banff, being among the few places that have remained largely the same my entire life. Consequently, I was jarred when our guide described them as examples of locally inappropriate architecture, the kind of buildings only far-off utilitarian bureaucrats would think of as matching Banff’s landscape and culture. The planner instead identified more recent and abundant post-and-beam-with-rundle-rock buildings as “the Banff tradition,” an architectural style that, in his view, emerged from local landscape and culture.

One member of our party asked how “the Banff tradition” might actually emerge from a contemporary view of Banff as a white and wealthy touristic space. Indeed, the Banff tradition our guide identified is part of a recognized and programmatic “mountain architecture vernacular” that is replicated in resort communities throughout North America (Hendricks, 2009, para. 1). The attendee’s question pointed to my sense of dislocation in the guide’s assertion that “my Banff” was inappropriate, but it also pushed my discomfort further. Insisting that contemporary commercial buildings are derived from Banff’s cultural and environmental history negates attachments, like my own, rooted in a town

with the utilitarian mandate of supporting visitors to the broader park, but much more thoroughly erases the histories and ongoing presence of Indigenous people, Chinese railroad workers and miners, fur-traders, Swiss mountain guides, Japanese business owners, migrant workers or the many other traditions that might be affixed to Banff. As we continued, the planner spoke of the need, in his work, to remember that Banff is the “birth-right of all Canadians.” Planning decisions, from parking at the post office to constructing a pedestrian bridge, are made not only for residents and visitors, but also for the Canadian imaginary. In language befitting the best federal civil service rhetoric, Banff town managers are “stewards” for “every Canadian,” suggesting that daily life within this specific locale is also lived in a symbolic nationalist terrain.

The issue of the *Rocky Mountain Outlook* newspaper that was available during the Jane’s Walk detailed two of Banff’s biggest and related struggles. An article on housing documented vacancy rates holding at zero, estimated housing shortfall of 170 units increasing to between 455 and 750 by 2022, rental costs close to the highest in Alberta and significant year-over-year increases in the average purchasing cost of a house (10.5%) or condominium (11.3%, Ellis, 2014b). Another article covered the announcement by then-federal Employment Minister Jason Kenney that the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program would be suspended for the food service sector, potentially forcing nearly 500 migrant workers in Banff to leave Canada (Ellis, 2014a). The article explained that Banff’s tourism industry has struggled to find employees for low-paying jobs in a high-cost (and zero vacancy) community, and the TFW program has become central to their business model. Halfway through the Jane’s Walk we crossed in front of Banff’s Central Park, where construction was about to begin on a two-storey environmentally friendly

public washroom for visitors, with a bill to council of nearly \$500,000 (Foubert, 2014b).

The stories most often told about Banff, even to those who live here, include the commercial story that Banff belongs to wealthy visitors, and the nationalist story that Banff belongs to all Canadians as their birthright. Neither narrative makes room for claims that Banff belongs to those whose connections to it are rooted in everyday acts of residency, work and social life.

A Safe Wilderness Playground Escape: Institutional Narratives of Banff

Commercial and state representations of the Rocky Mountain Parks – most evident in tourism advertising and Parks Canada information packets – define them as a wilderness playground, a place for leisurely escape that reveals the true nature of the nation. As J. Keri Cronin (2011) argues with respect to visual depictions of Jasper National Park, the Rocky Mountain Parks are shown as an interface between wild nature and civilized culture, where human and nonhuman “can peacefully co-exist” for the purposes of human pleasure (p. 115). Such an instrumentalist perspective of nature, which William Cronon (1996) famously identified as “the trouble with wilderness” and which is known in cultural studies as “the wilderness plot” (Chisholm, 2011; Comer, 1997), is common to nature tourism around the world (Jamal, Everett & Dann, 2003). But national parks also inscribe broader identities and politics into specific landscapes, extrapolating a particular view of the nation from iconic nature (Baldwin, 2009; Mason, 2008; Reichwein, 2005; Sandilands, 2000, 2009). Below, I identify and briefly describe four recurrent themes in institutional narratives of Banff – transience, leisure, safety and abstract nature – and how they convey the message that Banff is not the domain of those who live here.

Transience. Tourism's dominance in the regional economy ensures that institutional representations focus on movement in and through the mountains from elsewhere. The historic seasonality of Indigenous occupancy and the early European search for fur trading routes rather than settlement opportunities are even employed as evidence that the Rockies are naturally suited to travel. In the enormous Whistler's Campground immediately south of the Jasper townsite, there is an interpretive trail that winds through the campsites. Here and there a visitor finds climbing walls, log obstacles to balance on or manoeuvre around and signs explaining the stand of aspens edging the campsites. One interpretive spot features a tiny log cabin beside a *wikiup*, a lean-to shelter historically used by Indigenous people in the Upper Athabasca Valley. A Parks Canada sign, under the heading, "Camping: A Long Tradition," explains that "even before it became a national park, there were very few permanent settlements in this area. Most aboriginal people, explorers and fur traders stayed a short time and moved on." The sign and the display – "a place to play," the sign encourages – suggest untroubled continuity between Indigenous inhabitation, early European settlement and contemporary camping. In a different vein, researchers exploring public response to park planning initiatives have labelled residents "permanent tourists" (Ritchie, 1998). Such a category assumes that life in a national park is an everyday holiday, a misrepresentation that residents argue validates their marginalized position in decision-making relative to outside interests (Rettie, 2006). This is not a place to stay, these stories say. It is a place to visit.

Leisure. Leisure is at the fore in institutional portrayals of the Rocky Mountain Parks. Most often, representations rely on photographs of smiling (white) people in grand

vistas.¹⁰ They are in motion but do not sweat, and carry and wear lightweight performance gear. When words are necessary, they tend towards the invigoratingly adjectival:

Travel on foot amongst impressive glaciers, famous lakes, ancient mountains, lush forests and the headwaters of great rivers. [...] Feel small amidst glaciers on the Plain of Six Glaciers trail. Enjoy refreshments at a mountain teahouse. [...] From short, interpretive walks within the village, to moderate hikes leading to spectacular vistas and a myriad of unique overnight backcountry experiences, Lake Louise is the place to hike. (Parks Canada, 2014a, p. 11)

Leisure, inspiration and refreshment are the takeaway characteristics here, with all the strain and discomfort of mountain travel buried in “unique” and “moderate.”

Commercial representations place even greater emphasis on ease. A Banff Lake Louise Tourism (2008) advertisement published in Toronto-based magazines like *City Life* and *Toronto Life* features a photo of Lake Louise foregrounded by the Fairmont hotel. Beneath the photo is the tagline, “Our cottage is bigger than yours,” and under that the promise of “peaceful hikes on mountain trails, deep muscle massages at alpine spas and vintage wines that pair perfectly with mountain majesty.” The advertisement evokes ultimate relaxation while replacing the common middle class cottage with a palace.

The service industry even frequently equates work with leisure in an effort to attract employees from elsewhere and to count lifestyle benefits as remuneration in low-paying positions. Job classifieds in an average issue of the *Rocky Mountain Outlook* feature the headings “live, work & play in the Rockies” (Canmore Community Daycare, 2015) and “work where others play” (Nakiska, 2015), while descriptions of benefits promise that “you’ll get to experience the mountains” (Discover Banff, 2015) and “work and live in

¹⁰ I bracket “white” because, while most faces in promotions *are* white, Parks Canada (2015) has recently been directing appeals to “urban and new Canadians,” particularly regarding the Learn to Camp program (p. 14). Learn to Camp promotions consistently feature women and children of colour. In the absence of such faces elsewhere in park materials, these ads identify women and children of colour as those who do not *already* know how to camp, thereby reinforcing notions of white wilderness.

one of the most beautiful places in Canada” (Lake Louise Inn, 2015).¹¹ Just as residents are identified as *permanent* tourists, employees could be called *working* tourists.

Safety. Although risk is often assumed to be part of the draw to mountain and wilderness settings, tourism researcher Carl Cater (2006) separates risk marketing into desirable and undesirable components. Cater finds that the most successful adventure travel businesses minimize (and downplay) *danger* while enhancing (and promoting) feelings of *thrill*. An example of Cater’s distinction can be found in the “Mountain Safety” section of the 2014-15 *Mountain Guide*, which informs visitors:

Unpredictable mountain weather can change road and trail conditions from one minute to the next, and from place to place. Wildlife can be anywhere, any time. You are in *true wilderness*, and some simple precautions will *ensure a safe and enjoyable visit* to the mountain national parks. (Parks Canada, 2014a, p. 38, emphasis added)

In Parks Canada’s articulation, a few “simple precautions” – carry water, plan your trip and avoid overly steep terrain or whitewater – can fully eliminate the danger of “true wilderness.” To borrow from Cronin (2011), these portrayals “promise a vacation that is at once tame and wild” (p. 109), a balance achieved by employing representations of wilderness – the famous peaks and wildlife – while downplaying dangers actually present in mountain landscapes. In line with Cater’s assessment, institutional portrayals of the Rocky Mountain Parks reassure potential visitors that risks are moderate and manageable, and will only add desirable thrill to their leisure experience.

Abstract nature and the nation. Certainly, the Rocky Mountain Parks are associated with particular mountains, glaciers, lakes and wildlife. Yet, institutional portrayals

¹¹ The trend of advertising work-as-play is fictionalized in Jerry Auld’s (2009) novel *Hooker & Brown*, in which a young Quebecois park interpreter explains that she was drawn to the Rocky Mountain Parks by advertisements: “That was the advertisement: you could live here, in the pristine mountains. But that is wrong – you cannot live somewhere that is pristine. No one seems to count themselves” (p. 99).

contextualize such phenomena less in the particularities of Rocky Mountain ecosystems or cultures than in abstract notions of nature that convey “the very essence of Canada,” as stated in the Parks Canada Agency vision statement. Banff National Park in particular, as Canada’s first and most recognizable national park, has been cast by hegemonic interests less as a place than as an icon, where one goes “to witness the essence of the Dominion in all of its glory, crafted from a combination of colonial civility and imposing wilderness” (Sandilands, 2000, pp. 138-139). The Cave and Basin, a network of subterranean thermal springs and surface pools on Sulphur Mountain, provides a multifaceted illustration of this dynamic. It was the commodity potential these springs promised – as a curative for the moral and physical maladies of modern life – that inspired the Canadian government to set aside a national reserve in 1885 (Liefers, 2011). Today, Parks Canada (2014a) describes the Cave and Basin as an opportunity to submerge oneself in the Canadian nation, more so than a specific, and quite remarkable, hydrogeological feature:

You’ve got to see this! The impressive rundlestone architecture, the bubbling mineral waters, and the small cave that gave rise to a huge idea, the birthplace of Canada’s national parks. All new interactive programs, exhibits and a giant four-screen high definition visual experience lead you on a journey across the country, including to your favourite national park, historic site or marine conservation area. [...] Hot water, cool stories! Leave your mark in Canadian history when you visit the Cave and Basin National Historic Site. (p. 4)

In another section of the *Mountain Guide*, the Cave and Basin and the rest of Canada are symbolically linked through the powerful image of the railroad that united Canada through economic links. In this example, Parks Canada temporally displaces Indigenous people to the past while casting the settler state as their descendent in the present:

In 1883, like Aboriginal peoples long before them, three railway workers stumbled across a series of hot springs on the lower shoulder of present-day Sulphur Mountain. No doubt they laid down their shovels and pick ax-

es, stripped out of dusty clothes and gratefully slid into the waters to soothe their aching muscles. Two years later, even as Canada was completing its transcontinental railway, Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first Prime Minister, realized a new national dream: the creation of Canada's first national park, which set aside the Cave and Basin hot springs as a small protected reserve. (p. 6)

Visiting the Cave and Basin in August 2014, I was surprised to see a Parks Canada interpreter in character as a British soldier from the War of 1812, a conflict that happened 3,000 km away and over 70 years prior to the site's incorporation into the Canadian state. In each of these examples, the specific geological features of the Cave and Basin are subsumed beneath the location's metonymic capacity to link both visitors and nature to the Canadian nation as a whole: "an opportunity for people to come learn about the essence of Canada," as Banff Superintendent Dave McDonough describes (Doll & Elliot, 2013, para. 6). That the new building in which visitors purchase tickets is also a gift shop and ticket agency for tours provided by Brewster Travel Canada emphasizes the way the state and capital are blurred in institutional narratives of the Rocky Mountain Parks.

Response from Locals

By emphasizing tourism, leisure, safety and abstract nature, institutional portrayals of the Rocky Mountain Parks appeal most directly to wealthy, professional and urban demographics, offering opportunities for rejuvenation. Words like "escape," "getaway," "playground," and "wonderland" are common in institutional depictions, leaning on established demarcation between spaces of leisure travel and those of residency and labour, with the latter pair conceptually located beyond park boundaries and outside nature. By implication, the Rocky Mountain Parks are cast as symbolic terrain outside the realm of real human life. If the mountains are an escape *from* reality, then the mountains are

somehow unreal, and those who occupy them are necessarily out of place, embodying those oxymoronic “permanent tourists.” Narratives that make the local in Banff metonymic of the nation rationalize political processes and outcomes that are more responsive to outside interests – either political or commercial – than to residents, or that, at the very least, feel that way to residents themselves (Jamal & Eyre, 2003; Rettie, 2006). As someone who sees the Rocky Mountain Parks as home rather than an escape, my attachment to place feels invalidated and my political agency outsourced.

Affirmation in Rocky Mountain Literature

Historically, literature of the Rocky Mountain Parks demonstrates a conflicted relationship with institutional narratives of the region. Many of the best-known and most readily available books of the region derive from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, following completion of the CPR in 1885 and as the different parks were designated.¹² Stories from the “golden age” of mountaineering in the Canadian Rockies detail the authors’ adventures in the oft-integrated pursuits of exploration, mountaineering, scientific discovery and nation building. The accomplishments of Canadian climbers and clubs were understood as accomplishments of and for a nation still new to much of the territory it claimed (Reichwein, 2014; Robinson, 2007). Authors of the period arrived after disease, conflict and politics had drastically reduced and displaced Indigenous populations (Binnema & Niemi, 2006) and were steeped in the romantic sublime tradition, so it is unsurprising that

¹² Examples include Walter Wilcox’s (1896) *Camping in the Canadian Rockies*, Hugh Stutfield and Norman Collie’s (1903/2008) *Climbs & Exploration in the Canadian Rockies*, William Hornaday’s (1907) *Camp-fires in the Canadian Rockies*, A.P. Coleman’s (1911) *The Canadian Rockies, New and Old Trails*, James Outram’s (1923) *In the Heart of the Canadian Rockies*, and Mary Schäffer’s (1911/2010) *Old Indian Trails of the Canadian Rockies*. In the notes to a 1982 poem, Banff poet Jon Whyte (1982/2000) calls Schäffer “Banff’s first resident writer,” but I include her among the travelling set here because she most famously wrote of the Rockies as a place of travel and discovery while she was a seasonal visitor residing in Philadelphia. Many of these books have been reprinted in recent years by Rocky Mountain Books.

they mostly overlooked Indigenous, racialized and working class white populations to describe a vast, unpeopled and unknown landscape awaiting discovery and civilization. Many writers employed heroic mountaineering narratives to transfer traits of strength and perseverance onto the young Canadian nation as a whole (Kelly, 2000). They were also well-to-do white scholars and professionals from cosmopolitan centres of Eastern Canada, the United States or Europe, arriving by train and hiring working class or Indigenous guides to lead their tours of “discovery.” These works are largely consistent with the tropes of Canadian wilderness writing of the period: overrepresentation of white elites; frequent omission of women, children and labouring people; and the negation or stereotyping of Indigenous people assumed to be inevitably giving way to progressive civilization (Thorpe, 2012). Colleen Skidmore’s (2006) collection of women’s writing on the Canadian Rockies to the 1950s makes clear that “women’s presence, pictures, and stories have never disappeared from local history and lore” (p. xix), and women have been writing about the Rocky Mountain Parks at least since Agnes MacDonald visited Banff with her husband, the Prime Minister, in 1897. As Skidmore’s book also makes clear, women writers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were largely consistent with their male counterparts, writing fun, adventurous tales from positions of high privilege that helped construct the Rocky Mountain Parks as a tourist destination (Kelly, 2000).

The stories I am most interested in are more recent, written by and about people whose encounters with the Rocky Mountain Parks are of the everyday variety, those who Kathleen Rettie (2006) might count as park “insiders” rather than “outsiders.” Historians have recently shed light on two early authors exemplifying the insider type: Nello Vernon-Wood (Gow & Rak, 2008) and Hubert Green (MacEachern, 2013). Like the

more famous Archie Belaney, Vernon-Wood and Green were relatively well off and educated Englishmen – the sort who had previously counted as authoritative authors of the Rockies – who assumed and performed identities as working-class frontiersmen, with Vernon-Wood using the pseudonym “Tex Wood” and Hubert Green identifying as “Tony Lascalles.” While Belaney found authority in the performed Indigeneity of Grey Owl (Erickson, 2013), Vernon-Wood and Green found authority in performing the earthy working class, authority that was denied actual Indigenous and working class people. Ironically, Green would later find himself victim of a similar dichotomy: his folksy know-how was viewed with increasing scepticism as technical discourses of scientific management gained prominence in parks policy and decision-making (MacEachern, 2013).

These men are characteristic of a period in Canadian history heavily marked by an anti-modernist “return to nature” that has been critiqued as a reaction against modern progressivism, including changing gender dynamics, racial integration, homosexuality, consumerism and alienation from the means of production (Thorpe, 2009; Wall, 2009; Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010; Dean, 2013). Apiece with these broader trends, I read in Vernon-Wood and Green a shift in Rocky Mountain literature towards the local as a source of narrative authority in contrast to the visitor, privileging rooted knowledge at a time of growing influence for universalizing knowledge systems like science.

So we arrive at my entry point: literature that asserts claims to the Rocky Mountain Parks in contrast to institutional narratives of capitalist exclusivity and nationalist incorporation. I outline four often overlapping themes common in Rocky Mountain literature that directly contradict elements of institutional portrayals but contain their own violently problematic privilege. Specifically, literature emphasizes *permanence* rather than transi-

ence, *work* rather than leisure, *risk* rather than safety and *place-based knowledge* rather than abstract ideas of nature and nation.

Drinking with dead wardens: Asexual permanence in place. Transience is not simply a myth in Banff National Park. Very few people are born in Banff – the town hospital even ceased obstetric services in 2013 – and few of those who were born here have managed, or wanted, to stay. According to census data from the Town of Banff (2011), 40% of Banff’s residents have lived in the community for ten years or more. At the same time, 56.1% of the population is between 20 and 49 years old, with the largest share (22.6%) being between 20 and 29 years. These numbers indicate very few multi-generational families and a high propensity towards short-term residency. Of course, the town’s 8,241 permanent residents (Town of Banff, 2014) are dwarfed by the park’s more than three million unique visits per year (Parks Canada, 2014b). Mobility is a very real and overwhelming characteristic of life in the Rocky Mountain Parks.

As a result, length of individual tenure carries substantial social currency in the Canadian Rockies (Sandford, 2008), but Rocky Mountain literature more often establishes permanence by asserting a sort of spiritual lineage. Instead of establishing the land as the home of one’s parents’ parents – as, for example, Chief John Snow (1977/2005) does in beginning his Nakoda history: “Long ago my ancestors used to go to the mountaintops to pray” (p. 1) – characters in literature of the Rocky Mountain Parks frequently claim lineage in place by following the lead of well-known historical characters, most strikingly in the form of ghosts.¹³ As Michael Bell (1997) asserts, ghosts “help constitute the specifi-

¹³ Sometimes the following is literal, as in recent books detailing cultural history of wilderness trails. Emerson Sandford and Janice Sandford Beck’s (2008-2011) guidebook series *Life of the Trail*, soon to be an eight-volume set, and Nicki Brink and Stephen R. Bown’s (2007) *Forgotten Highways* weave the authors’ hiking adventures with those of the explorers, fur traders, industrialists, and mountaineers who came be-

ty of historical sites, of the places where we feel we belong and do not belong, of the boundaries of possession by which we assign ownership and nativeness” (p. 813). In other words, we are native to the place that hosts our ghosts. Particularly illustrative examples come from Sid Marty’s creative non-fiction collections *Men for the Mountains* (1978) and *Switchbacks* (1999) and from Jerry Auld’s 2009 novel *Hooker & Brown*.

Men for the Mountains and *Switchbacks* feature stories of Marty’s experiences integrated with those of his peers and predecessors in the warden service, trading on tales of horse packing, climbing accidents, bear encounters, alpine rescues and the erosion of Parks Canada’s conservation mandate as personified through bureaucratic chastening of the traditionally masculine warden on solitary backcountry patrol. *Men for the Mountains* is a stubbornly patriarchal expression of the white, heterosexual warden figure and the iconic wilderness it represents in Canadian national identity, which Catriona Sandilands (2005) contextualizes as a reaction to the professionalization, centralization and diversification (read: feminization and modernization) of the warden service. *Switchbacks* shares theme and format with *Men for the Mountains*, though the binary Marty tries to maintain between masculine wilds and feminine domesticity is blurred somewhat by the intervening years of aging, family life, financial strain and changes to the practice of wardendom.

Switchbacks and *Men for the Mountains* feature strikingly similar stories of ghostly backcountry encounters between Marty and long-passed wardens. In *Switchbacks* Marty writes of climbing in the dark of night to Abbot Pass, where he finds the door to Abbot Hut wide open and is greeted inside by two historical figures: guide Edward Feuz, Jr. and

fore, and whose histories are largely invisible in the landscape today. As William Turkel (2007) and Bruce Erickson (2013) argue, these types of historical re-enactment inscribe a particular history into the present landscape. In a very direct way, the histories they commemorate become contemporary stories that validate contemporary authority. Cultural history accounts invite us to revisit assumptions about pristine wilderness, but the stories they tell still function at the expense of those that remain largely undisseminated.

trail builder Lawrence Grassi. In *Men for the Mountains*, Marty describes a nearly identical scene in a warden cabin with the spirits of Bill Peyto, Bill Neish and George Busby. In both cases, the long-dead men converse with Marty in such a way that he is able to prove that he knows what they know and can do what they did. The ghosts give their blessing to Marty and his writing before disappearing. In each case, the boisterous hut gives way to Marty, the lone living representative of a legendary grouping.

Auld's *Hooker & Brown* is the story of a young man, nicknamed Rumi, who is frustrated by the abstracted intellectual practice of a university life he has recently left and attempts to encounter the Rocky Mountain wilderness with a sense of immersive discovery.¹⁴ Rumi works with a small crew in Kananaskis Country, where he maintains trails and pursues ambitious mountaineering objectives throughout the Rocky Mountain Parks. Finding inspiration in the journals of late 18th and early 19th century mapmaker David Thompson and turn-of-the-20th-century mountaineer-explorers Norman Collie, A.P. Coleman and James Outram, Rumi is particularly drawn to the key discovery those men sought but never made: the mythic summits of Mounts Hooker and Brown. The novel subsequently follows Rumi, pursuing the literary and literal footsteps of Thompson, Collie, Coleman and Outram, in his personal quest to answer why so many believed their locally incomparable heights were possible, if not to discover the peaks themselves.

Often, Rumi's mountain forays are guided or informed by ghostly apparitions. On Mount Assiniboine, a "grey figure, quiet as memory," likely Outram, gives climbing di-

¹⁴ The nickname "Rumi" is given when the otherwise nameless character stares wide-eyed and unmoving, like a ruminant (a deer), at an approaching helicopter. The name also evokes the 13th century Persian poet of the same name, whose focus on *tawhid*, or the unity that defines God against binaries or hyphenates (Altintas, 2010), finds echo in the desire of Auld's character for oneness with the natural world he encounters. Through his name, Rumi is connected to wild nature as well as the pursuit of divine revelation found within, but much greater than, the physically beautiful.

rections before disappearing (pp. 164-165). Towards Athabasca Pass, Rumi glimpses Thompson's hired hunter, Baptiste, hears Collie speaking with a packer and encounters "a woman, distraught, in a gown of white" (p. 200). When the Ranger, unaware of Rumi's sighting, later tells the story of Margaret Harriot, a trapper's wife who wandered in madness into a blizzard and off a ravine nearby in the 1820s, Rumi remarks: "We all shiver, but I'm doubly alarmed: seeing visions of stories I don't even know" (p. 200). These ghosts are not Rumi's imagination; they are actively reaching out to him.¹⁵

Reaching backward, ghosts establish proprietary rights through historical tenure. Simultaneously reaching forward, who constitutes the ghosts we identify in a place naturalizes a spiritual baseline for belonging, as the past is employed to validate particular visions of the present and future. Who gets to be a ghost establishes whose history matters in a place, as well as who may claim that place in the future. The ghosts of wardens and mountaineer-explorers establish eternal occupancy for very particular historical personages – white, hearty and almost entirely masculine adventurers – who are antecedents to very particular people in the present. If wardens and mountaineers are eternally employed in the Canadian Rockies, then the descendents of those wardens and mountaineers, like Marty and Rumi, will similarly extend into the future.

Establishing these particular ghosts naturalizes Marty and Rumi in a unique way. As feminist critics point out, the vision of an individualist white man as the only appro-

¹⁵ As a mountaineer himself, Auld is certainly aware of "the third man" phenomenon, in which people in dire emergencies feel unambiguously that there is an additional member in their party aiding their survival. Auld even describes such an experience occurring at Jasper's Columbia Icefields in the short story "Enchainment" (2013a). As John Geiger (2009) has documented, the third man phenomenon is particularly strong in the mountaineering community, with well-known examples including Frank Smythe near the summit of Mount Everest in 1933 and Reinhold Messner descending Nanga Parbat in 1970. But climbers who experience the third man generally describe certainty of company without evidence, a companion without identity. The ghostly personages Rumi encounters are historically identifiable, those already established as Rumi's predecessors or those who accompanied them. A third man presence could be anyone, but in *Hooker & Brown* the spirits are specific.

priate body for the wilderness is confounded by the women and domesticity necessary for biologically reproducing future mountain men and the broader (white heterosexual) nation (Roorda, 2005; Sandilands, 2005). Because they do not need biological procreation, ghosts sidestep otherwise essential figures of femininity and domesticity that threaten the masculine wilds, thereby permitting homosocial reproduction while maintaining an asexual (and therefore not *homosexual*) stance (Sedgwick, 1985). These ghosts claim place for a particular vision (almost entirely) of hetero-masculine white men, to the neglect – the exclusion – of people of colour, Indigenous people and women both historical and contemporary. Where are the ghosts from a century of Chinese railroad workers and miners, or from millennia of Indigenous hunting, trading and warring? Where are the women and children? Wardens may travel “old Indian travel routes” (Marty, 1999, p. 78) or “the vestiges of Indian trails” (Heuer, 2002, p. 53) but only white men’s spirits, or those assisting white men’s undertakings, haunt the trails.

Learning the land through labour: Gender and work. The most persistent assertion in institutional portrayals of the Rocky Mountain Parks is that they are playgrounds, or spaces intended for leisure. It is impossible to ignore the numerical discrepancy between visitors and residents, and the ratio would be similarly skewed between tourists and employees (remembering that residents and employees are closely linked categories through the need to reside clause and without forgetting the way they are further blurred by the practice of remunerating work with touristic opportunities).

In contrast, work is at the heart of Rocky Mountain literature. Half the characters in *Hooker & Brown* (Auld, 2009) are known by their job titles: the Interpreter, the Ranger and the Lookout are each identified in the most literal way by their work. In particular,

the warden (or ranger) is nearly ubiquitous in Rocky Mountain literature, and the detail with which warden's work is described is exemplified by two collections of non-fiction warden service anecdotes: Mike Schintz's (2005) *Close Calls on High Walls* and Marty's (1978) *Men for the Mountains*.¹⁶ I also argue that the literature makes room for (certain bodies performing certain types of) mountaineering *as* work in contrast to touristic leisure. Graeme Pole's 1998 novel *Healy Park* illustrates my argument in this respect.

Close Calls on High Walls follows the anecdotal memoir modelled by Marty's two books described above. It recounts Schintz's early days with the warden service in 1952, and years of rewardingly working backcountry trails, before resignedly occupying highway and office postings and nervously adjusting to new requirements in technical mountaineering and rescue skills. Sandilands' (2005) criticisms of Marty also apply to Schintz, who firmly contrasts his feeling "instantly at home" while isolated in the wilderness (p. 34) with his wife's "anxiety" at being left alone in *her* home, the warden cabin (p. 44). Ultimately, the need to school their children hauls Schintz out of the backcountry to the highway. "I did not enjoy it," he summarizes (p. 77).

In drawing him out of the wilderness, Schintz's family also draws him away from a type of work he privileges: solitary, physical and dangerous land-based labour. Early in the book, Schintz explains the process of maintaining forestry telephone lines that, at the time, connected backcountry warden stations to administrative centres in town. The job required "climbing spurs, a climber's belt and a splicing tool [...] to crimp the two ends of a hollow tube or sleeve, around the two ends of the wire," as well as "specially designed telephone pliers, [...] a pulley device, [and] some spare insulators, staples and tie

¹⁶ What are called "wardens" in Canada's national parks have equivalence in the "rangers" of Canadian provincial parks and US national and state parks. Although those with intimate links to the warden service would likely take exception, the two labels are used interchangeably in common parlance.

wire,” all of which “constituted a considerable weight” (p. 18). Schintz spends five pages describing telephone wire maintenance before narrating his first backcountry travel experience. Along the way, he tells this story:

Working the lines could be very hard work, particularly when alone or when unexpected damage was encountered on a day’s patrol. Picture, please, a hot summer day, about two in the afternoon. I have been hard at work since 4:30 that morning when I set out before breakfast to find my horses. Now I am moving along with my pack string in heavy spruce forest when I come upon a typical blow-down, a place where a violent storm has cut a swath through the timber. Half a dozen spruce trees, some nearly two feet in diameter, lie across the trail and telephone line, blocking access. Several insulators are down; the line has snapped and recoiled for a quarter of a mile. The next cabin is still six miles away. Slowly I dismount, tie up my horses, unpack my tools and begin the wearying work. (p. 20)

Marty (1978) similarly describes travelling an alpine trail in Yoho National Park, under a pack filled with hand tools, before describing the process of his trail maintenance work:

I stepped up the new tread and slammed the blade home. It whanged off an unseen boulder and jarred my arms with high voltages of pain. The mountain spoke to me and it told me not to be fooled by the transitory green of plants and trees. [...] *Rock is what I’m of and about.* [...] Lunchtime came and went. The afternoon air was livid with mosquitoes and I was their meat. [...] I chopped and levelled my way to the edge of the slide, and sat down to sharpen the chainsaw with a file. One knuckle dripped red on the wet snow, and a whiskey-jack came up to peck at it, interested. (p. 43, emphasis in original)

Recall Parks Canada’s description of hiking in Lake Louise quoted earlier in this chapter, with its emphasis on inspiration followed by refreshments, and compare it to Schintz setting himself to “wearying work” with six miles still to travel before the end of a long and tiring day, or Marty labouring through lunch while sweating and bleeding on the trail.

Work in Rocky Mountain literature extends, I argue, beyond the frame of literal employment. While we might usually include mountaineers in the category of recreation-
alists, Rocky Mountain literature often describes climbing in a manner similar to how

Schintz and Marty describe their labour. Mountaineering is undoubtedly physically demanding, but what I refer to here is the tendency to ascribe labour-like characteristics to mountaineers that differentiate their activities from those of touristic hikers and climbers, as illustrated most clearly in Pole's *Healy Park*.

Healy Park is a novel that escalates real life Banff National Park controversies and contradictions to their extremes while imagining them all coming to a head at once.¹⁷ Commercialization takes shape as a conspiracy by park administrators to lease backcountry warden cabins for use by a private European tour company; the increasing public relations role demanded of wardens leads to escorting potential corporate sponsors on wilderness tours; Indigenous access and land-use conflicts with Parks Canada's development plans climax in a barricade on the Trans-Canada Highway; and so on.

Healy Park's most central character, Gregory Phillips, is an author who spends most of his time in the novel mountaineering alone in the Rocky Mountain Parks. Key to distinguishing him from everyday recreationalists, Gregory's mountaineering exploits are described as technical, responsive and purposeful. Like wardens, mountaineers have tools requiring expertise, focused effort and adaptive knowledge of the environmental factors to which the labourer must respond. The following is one in a string of 22 paragraphs describing Gregory's solo rappel from isolated Wolverine Lake. :

¹⁷ In *Healy Park* some of the place names in the novel match official names, including Banff, Castle Mountain and Saskatchewan River Crossing. Most of the others are variations of official names: Razorback Range instead of Sawback Range, Beavertail Valley instead of Ottertail Valley, Waterfall River instead of Cascade River, and so on. Healy Park itself is a stand-in for Flint's Park, a portion of Banff National Park located on the other side of the Sawback Range from the former location of Silver City, which was founded by the actual Joseph Healy and his brother, John, and abandoned by 1886 (Tolton, 2014). Institutional names are also changed in *Healy Park* but are likely to be recognizable to most readers: Pacific Overland Railway instead of Canadian Pacific or Springview Hotel instead of Banff Springs. Reading *Healy Park* can feel like taking an exam on local geography and history, but one less defined by official records and histories than by local folklore. Not only does the book describe standards for who and what belongs in the park, it also measures the reader against those standards as someone who can or cannot decipher local code.

Gregory inspected a large limestone boulder just north of the lake's outlet stream. It appeared immovable, weighing several tonnes. On its eastern side, a crack system created a projecting flake. The mountaineer tested this flake for strength, pulling on it and kicking it to see if it would part from the boulder. It was solid. He untied a nylon web sling and threaded a metal rappel ring onto it.¹⁸ Then he looped the sling around the flake to use as the anchor for his first rappel. He was carrying six pitons of different sizes, but would need them for anchors lower down on the cliff where natural anchors would probably be scarce.¹⁹ (p. 169)

Like Marty and Schintz, Pole describes Gregory's equipment, never-ending tasks and the pains of weather and work, particularly "the clumsiness that comes with cold" (p. 171) and a falling rock that breaks one of Gregory's ribs.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011) describes tools as material-cultural objects that, rather than mediating between users and the environment, inform our experience and perception of the world, including our own bodies. Ingold differentiates between tools and technology in a manner that resonates in Rocky Mountain literature. Artisanal use of tools involves "practical, perceptual activity, reaching out into its surroundings along multiple pathways of sensory participation," while technology attempts to "reconfigure [artisanal] practice as the application of rational principles whose specification has no regard for human experience and sensibility" (p. 61). Tool use involves skill, concentration and adaptive knowledge of environmental factors influencing one's work. Technology deskills and displaces; it does not require the users to know where they are, or the particulars of the matter with which they work. In Rocky Mountain literature, tools and their employment are artisanal, demonstrating place-based skill rather than general leisure. Because only insiders are likely to know the names for these tools, or the names for land-

¹⁸ A sling is a loop of webbing used for a number of security purposes while climbing. A rappel ring is a metal loop that connects a rappel rope to an anchor, and to allow the rope to pass through without friction.

¹⁹ Pole provides his own definition for this one: "Pitons are forged metal pins that are driven into crevices with a hammer. A piton has a hole in its head, through which a sling is attached. The climbing rope is then draped through the rappel ring on the sling" (p. 169).

scape features in which they do their work, specificity regarding tools serves as a marker for he-who-belongs in contrast to the ignorant outsider.

Just as “the mountain spoke” to Marty as he worked it with his hand tools, mountaineering work gives Gregory unique insight into what the Rocky Mountains truly are. On his expedition to Wolverine Lake, Gregory spots a grizzly bear while approaching Pika Pass. His experience has taught him how to navigate such an encounter and that experience has come to be part of who he is: “In fifteen years of hiking, Gregory had surprised a dozen bears on the trail [and] the encounters had all been momentary, ending in a catastrophic collapse of adrenaline, with another image of wild nature etched forever into memory” (p. 194). Gregory is able to read the bear and the landscape accurately and he safely retreats to attempt a different route. Shortly afterward, two German hikers, “knowing little of the do’s and don’ts of behaviour around bears,” approach from the opposite side of the pass (p. 197). The grizzly attacks them, killing one.

Gregory only learns of the attack the next day when he emerges from the wilderness and runs into Robin Ashcroft, a park interpreter and Gregory’s romantic interest. He weeps at the news, for the people and the bear. Robin tells him:

You know, Gregory, you and the bear share the same courage. [...] The bear is running out of places nearby where it can experience wilderness. You still have a connection with the wild earth, a reverence and respect for it. You speak for the bear often in your writing. And that’s good. But in doing so you are also speaking for what needs to remain wild in each of us, and that is perhaps even better. [...] Too many people have forsaken their wild nature, their wild heritage. They have bought into a scheme of destruction. (pp. 225-226)

Gregory’s mountaineering has allowed him to retain a link to wild nature that exists, if dormant, in everyone. Without being a warden he has even come to possess “the warden intuition that comes from being so close to the land” (p. 201). He is able to see the moun-

tains for what they really are, which gives him permission to represent them: Robin encourages him, “speak for the bear, Gregory” (p. 226).

In each of these examples, labour constitutes a way to truly know the land. Marty (1978) states this most directly at the end of his hard day of trail maintenance:

after I’d sawed an alley through this giant “pick-up-sticks” of entangled trees, after I’d dodged the sixth widow-maker that flew at my head when I cut the counterbalance of snow off its crown, this, with other things, made me feel like I owned the place. Like a farmer or a rancher, like anyone who works with grass and flesh, I invested more than time and sweat in the territory that was mine to oversee. In the days ahead, I staked my claim in my own blood and in my love for the earth it watered. (p. 44)

Not only does work give these men ownership of the landscape, it makes them *part* of the landscape as their sweat and blood waters the soil.

These examples all describe men in the wilds doing physical work. The most obvious question is what about women? There are warden’s wives in Marty and Schintz’s books, but their work is primarily in the home that (even if it is a backcountry warden cabin) lies conceptually outside the wilderness that both authors insist is the parks’ true nature. Other women appear briefly as diversions reaching out from the *other* domestic spaces in the Rocky Mountains: service and administration centres. For example, Schintz describes his first day learning alpine rescue from warden Fred Schleiss: “Fred, although a fine mountaineer, was also an impatient man. By four o’clock he was obviously anxious to be done with the day’s work and get gussied-up for his second favourite sport – courting the pretty waitress at the Icefields Chalet” (p. 57). Schintz is eventually lured in and finds himself working a desk job in Jasper, where he is seemingly inundated with feminine sexuality. Among similar comments, Schintz notes that one benefit of his new job is “a gorgeous girl in accounts, whose legs must have been made on a Saturday, because

even God would have wanted a day off next to admire such handiwork” (p. 151). Regardless the pleasure they seem to derive from crossing over the nature/society binary (thereby demonstrating their heterosexuality), the men claim wilderness through men’s work while identifying women as representatives of corrosive civilization.

Three of *Healy Park*’s wardens are women, though all are peripheral characters and each is introduced with reference to her looks and romantic standing with male wardens. Clara Johnson, identified as “the frontcountry warden,” receives an effusive introduction that includes: “she turned heads when patrolling Banff Avenue and had broken more than a few hearts in the Banff Warden Office” (p. 28).²⁰ Called in to fight a forest fire, Anna Fleming shows up “looking great [...] in cut-off shorts revealing voluptuous, tanned legs” (p. 264). She seduces Brian who is “at the end of a sixteen hour day” of frontline fire duty, and smells like it, but remains virile enough not to let the opportunity pass (p. 264). The remaining woman warden, Martha Bailey, is “average in looks” but because of her “quiet energy [...] many a male co-worker in the Banff Warden Office had expressed romantic interest” (p. 27). At Pika Pass shortly after the bear mauling, Brian confronts the grizzly who is standing over the tourist’s partially eaten body, wounds it with a shotgun blast to the shoulder, then advises the hunt when the bear flees. Martha, in contrast, asks Brian if he is okay. When he begins to weep, “Martha embrace[s] him for minutes until the sobbing stop[s]” (p. 208). Clara and Anna exist to affirm the wilderness bachelor’s heterosexual credentials while Martha is a chaste, maternal nurturer. The woman wardens are no less rote and symbolic than the wives and waitresses.

The type of work Rocky Mountain literature ascribes to the feminine and unnatural

²⁰ “Frontcountry” is an antonym of “backcountry,” with the former referencing locations accessible by car and the latter suggesting undeveloped wilderness.

is typically done by women, but it is also the type of work historically given to people of colour and, increasingly, migrant labour. In her history of the Alpine Club of Canada in the Rocky Mountain Parks, PearlAnn Reichwein (2014) describes how early, upper-class mountaineering camps employed Chinese former-railway workers as kitchen staff because white men were considered no good at it, and working class women were deemed too feminine for the cowboy masculinity expected of camp labourers and too low-class for the attendees. Exemplifying what David L. Eng (2001) labels “racial castration,” camp directors sufficiently emasculated Chinese men that they could perform domestic duties for white mountaineers of both genders without compromising the wilderness with feminine domesticity. One might read a similar dynamic today in the substantial class of migrant workers who are filling considerable gaps in the service industry labour market, as I detail in chapter three. While Parks Canada struggles to promote national parks to people of colour as a destination – and thereby struggles to keep national parks relevant as a prominent source of national identity in a country of rapidly changing demographics – the service industry within the Rocky Mountain Parks is increasingly racialized.

Service work is highly feminized in Rocky Mountain literature, associated with modern incursions into masculine wilderness. While race is almost entirely unmarked in the literature (everyone is presumed white), intersections of race and gender mean the literature ascribes the same unnaturalness to people of colour that it does to women. The warden and the mountaineer, those who belong in the Rocky Mountains, remain white, heterosexual and predominantly masculine figures, while the work done by other folks is considered party to destructive forces against which heroic white men must struggle.

Dangerous for real: Risk, disability and race. Contrary to the welcoming mes-

sage of institutional portrayals, the Rocky Mountain Parks of literature are a tossed salad of dangerous situations, near misses and lost companions. There is risk at every turn, it is not easily mitigated and it is never eliminated. In the apex chapter of *Hooker & Brown* the Ranger plummets through a cornice; in a particularly memorable story from *Switchbacks*, Marty's friend miraculously bounces over a bergschrund high above Lake O'Hara; the penultimate disaster in *Healy Park* and the subject of Marty's (2008) *The Black Grizzly of Whisky Creek* are fatal grizzly bear attacks; Schintz describes a slip into a stream at 30 below; and Karsten Heuer (2002) encounters grizzlies, wolves, waterfalls, rivers, cornices and unstable snowpacks on his 3,400 km journey along the spine of the Rockies.²¹ Survival in mountains such as these demands much more than the simple precautions of tourist brochures; it calls for perseverance, ingenuity, iron will and practical expertise.

In analyzing literary representations of Rocky Mountain risk, I do not wish to suggest that such risk is modern fantasy. Before the reserve system enforced stationary living, the particular dangers of mountains informed Indigenous patterns of residency and use. Indigenous people on both sides of the great divide camped in, travelled through and hunted in the Rockies during summer while wintering in safer neighbouring valleys or foothills (Dempsey, 1998). Chief John Snow (1977/2005) describes the mountains as an integral part of the Nakoda homeland, with its particular sacredness accessed through the vision quest, a ceremonial journey that takes advantage of the high mountains specifically as sites of physical isolation and deprivation to summon response from the Great Spirit.

Prior to romantic Victorian explorations in the latter part of the 19th century, writing by

²¹ A cornice is a slab of ice and/or snow that accumulates beyond the solid ground of rock. From above a cornice appears apiece with the mountain; from below it looks like an overhanging roof. It is dangerous from both perspectives. A bergschrund is a crevasse (or deep crack) that forms where the moving ice of a glacier departs stationary ice or snow above it.

fur-traders and mapmakers describes the Rocky Mountains principally in terms of hazards and privations, a place to overcome or escape (Jenish, 2004; Payne, 2007). Travel on terrain as uneven and volatile as the Rockies, far from populated corridors and service centres and in landscapes populated by apex predators, presents unique and real dangers.

My argument, then, is that Rocky Mountain literature emphasises danger as the true nature of these mountains (and, indeed, the true nature of nature), setting up those who interact with, understand and navigate mortal risks against those who maintain distance, are unaware of or fall victim to mountain dangers, the latter group being those who buy into Parks Canada's erroneously ensured "safe and enjoyable visit." The examples of peril in Rocky Mountain literature are innumerable, but particularly illustrative examples come from Marty's *Men for the Mountains* and Kevin Van Tighem's (2000) polemic *Home Range*. After exploring how these writers employ risk as a mechanism of belonging, I briefly visit Patricia Van Tighem's (2000/2012) grizzly attack memoir *The Bear's Embrace* and the work of critical race scholars to illustrate how celebrating potential physical harm reflects a privileged perspective that obscures experienced effects of multiple risks in the Rocky Mountain Parks.

Marty commits one of the anecdotes in *Men for the Mountains* to an attempted rescue of a man fallen into Yoho's Kicking Horse Canyon. Alongside the Takakkaw Falls road, the canyon features a steep and narrow gorge that is a popular photo spot. Parks Canada (2014a) encourages visitors to "drive or bike this steep scenic road" in order to "admire the power of nature" (p. 25). The man in Marty's chapter had been trying to do just that by descending the canyon "without a top rope and wearing smooth-soled street shoes" (p. 73). Marty offers a violent perspective on "the power of nature" on display:

Midway down the Big Hill the river pours into a deep whirlpool, gathering its force for the final run down to the gravel flats two miles below. It pours in under a spray-flecked cliff, rushes down a rocky chute and hurtles deep into the bottom of the pool. It carries driftwood, heavy logs, fish, and the odd dead mouse, and bats them playfully end-for-end on its spinning fulcrum. Anyone who fell into that pool would be battered to death in the chaotic swirl of rocks and debris. The icy temperature alone would kill a man in thirty minutes. (p. 72)

This is the pool into which warden Malcolm McNab descends. McNab, instead of being “middle-aged,” as Marty describes the victim, is “grey-haired and rock hard from fifty-seven years of living with the sun and wind on his face” (p. 74): a Rocky Mountain personified. Because “water was the only highway he knew” (p. 75), McNab is prepared, capable and calm in this place of immense danger.

Later, once they have recovered and loaded the body into a hearse, Marty looks again at the scene as though from above:

The cars drove out onto the busy highway with the sun streaming down on a scene that now bore no evidence of human tragedy, just a few men in green uniforms standing beside a river. “What do you suppose they’re doing down there?” somebody might ask. And somebody else would say, “I dunno, probably just fishing.”

A man had died. (p. 77)

The visitors go about their happy vacations in ignorance of the dangerous terrain they see as a pleasure ground. The deceased man’s slick shoes, his vacationing family, his camera and his “tasteful clothes, carefully coordinated” (p. 76) mark him as an urbanite transgressing the realm of the tourist for that of mountain men. The Rockies as Marty describes them belong to men like McNab, but will destroy the overstepping tourists to whom institutional portrayals appeal. Marty remarks on the blue sky, traffic and ongoing vacationing, suggesting that the mountains are indifferent to human suffering and death. And yet that clear sky, and the way the gathered wardens appear to be fishing rather than

recovering a body, helps confuse the reality of these mountains – death and danger – with the institutional image of them as a safe, pristine playground. The mark of belonging is the ability to recognize and navigate the difference.

While Marty juxtaposes his wardens with visitors who overlook risks immediately before them, other writers contrast themselves against those who never encounter the risks of mountain wilderness at all. Written by Kevin Van Tighem (2000) – a magazine columnist, conservation biologist and Superintendant of Banff Field Unit between 2008 and 2011 – *Home Range* is a collection of journalistic and anecdotal essays on specific environmental problems, social values, charismatic regional conservation leaders and place-based solutions. Like Robert Sandford, Van Tighem urges Western Canadians to “become native,” or identify with place to such a degree that one’s own wellbeing and the wellbeing of one’s geography are the same.

What does the new native look like and how does one get there? Like many conservationists before him – he owes particular debt to Aldo Leopold – Van Tighem basically proposes more of what he has had, that we might all become more of what he has become. As Richard Louv (2005) has urged with particular contemporary influence, Van Tighem proposes firsthand experiences in nature, informed by science-based education, as the means for revealing humanity’s “real” place in the world. In *Home Range*, physical risk serves as a measure of truth explicitly contrasted with the falsehood of an urban and domestic life that includes video games, concrete, real estate and green consumerism.

Real equals natural equals dangerous; false equals cultural equals safe.²²

²² Jerry Auld’s short stories frequently assert something similar. In “The Descent” (2013b), for example, a former rock climber and current urban office worker identifies the difference between his grand former life and his inane present one as, respectively, “a simpler time, more dangerous, where you had to get whatever you were doing done right and done well” (p. 102) versus “the sense that there was nothing truly at risk” (p.

In the chapter “Real Grizzlies; Real People,” Van Tighem employs grizzly bears as a totem for what is wild and dangerous in order to establish that those who belong are those who recognize and accept the danger they represent. Van Tighem writes that a grizzly sow had attacked his sister and her husband in Waterton Lakes National Park several years prior to his writing. “Their injuries profoundly disturbed the attending physician,” Van Tighem explains, to the extent that the doctor “continues to argue that Canada’s national parks should be cleared of grizzlies to make them safe for people” (pp. 57-58). In contrast, Van Tighem’s sister and brother-in-law understood the risks of grizzly country: “Unlike the doctor who tended to them, they saw the grizzly for what it was” and did not seek or desire retribution (p. 58). He goes on: “They, I believe, are closer to *truly belonging* to this place than that doctor – because they accept the Rockies as a place that comes with grizzlies and the uncertain risk of meeting them” (p. 58, emphasis added). Real equals natural equals dangerous, and it is by accepting one’s place in that reality that one truly becomes native.

The same year that Kevin Van Tighem published *Home Range*, the sister who suffered the mauling, Patricia Van Tighem (2000/2012), published the first edition of her account of the grizzly attack and her struggle for recovery, a story that does not read at all like a claim to belong. The attack occurred in September 1983. Van Tighem and her husband, Trevor Janz, were hurrying through snowfall when they got between a mother grizzly and a carcass she had stowed. Van Tighem describes following the instructions for

96). One of the protagonist’s companions classifies the allure of climbing adventure in measures of *micromorts*, or the omnipresent but relatively small chance of dying. Echoing Van Tighem’s suggestion that safety and comfort are, paradoxically, the root of a much larger, collective risk, the climbing buddy classifies urban professionalism as “*macromort* [...] with] 100 percent chance of death” (p. 106, emphasis in original). Ultimately, the office worker reclaims his true self by smashing a window in his office tower, with a rock he kept as a memento from a dangerous climb, and scales the building.

surviving a bear attack that she memorized from the Parks Canada safety brochures she handed out while working for Banff National Park, but the bear continued her assault until satisfied the hikers posed no threat. Both survived with severe trauma and Van Tighem's head and face injuries would never properly heal. Twenty-two years later, suffering from post-traumatic stress and recurrent debilitating cranial infections, Van Tighem ended her life, as her sister, Margaret Van Tighem, writes in the heart wrenching post-script to the book's 2012 reprinting.

Where Kevin Van Tighem sees belonging, Patricia Van Tighem describes the opposite. Years after the attack, with those close to her expecting a recovery more thorough than she experiences, Van Tighem describes how her first attempt to return to hiking in the Rockies ended in 15 minutes. "I had to turn around, I felt so sick," Van Tighem explains: "That night I had horrible nightmares, sensations of falling, accompanied by a crushing sense of doom." (p. 137). Later she reflects:

I can wish it never happened, but it did. I will cry about it and feel sorry for myself. I will cry for Trevor and the distortion his face now wears. I will cry over the changes in our relationship. And I will be angry that I can never feel the same way about hiking in the Rockies, grieve the loss of that shared love. (p. 141).

Instead of making her feel at home, Patricia Van Tighem describes the ways that "grizzlies and the uncertain risk of meeting them," as Kevin Van Tighem puts it, physically and emotionally disabled her from materially encountering the Rocky Mountain landscape while forcing her to experience it emotionally and very intimately as a nightmarish geography. She is the farthest thing from Marty's arrogant tourist or her brother's ignorant urbanite, but risk only serves to keep her out. In Rocky Mountain literature, risk is almost always objective and physical. Avalanches, grizzlies and forest fires do not know

your social position; it is up to you to understand, accept and navigate them to earn your place. But Patricia Van Tighem reminds us that risk is never truly objective, it is always experienced and perceived subjectively. The very real potential for “objective” dangers to disable brings home the privilege of celebrating risk as a tenet of belonging.

While Rocky Mountain literature focuses on risk as an objective good that all should encounter, the spatial and conceptual construction of wilderness has been experienced very differently by those differently positioned, including along lines of race. In interviews and surveys with environmentalists across the United States, Carolyn Finney (2014) finds that African Americans, by and large, understand wilderness areas as white spaces where black bodies are unwelcome and endangered. Finney’s research suggests that there are many contributing factors to the idea of a “white wilderness,” including: histories of violent exclusion from outdoor recreation spaces; linkages between wilderness and nationalism where African Americans were denied rights of citizenship and personhood; the backwoods as sites of lynching and other violent assault; traditions of equating people of colour with less-than-human animals; and media imagery that equates black with urban and fails to show African Americans in the outdoors. All of these histories and contemporary experiences, in combination with their oppositional counterparts in the white experience, produce what Anthony Kwame Harrison (2013) calls “racial spatiality,” or segregation based on constructed racial norms within certain spaces. Racial spatiality marks place as the appropriate terrain for particular bodies based on race, while deviation from these expectations “creates social disruption, moral unbalance, and/or demands explanation” (p. 317). As both Finney and Harrison insist, outdoor spaces are not *essentially* racial, and black bodies in the wilderness or on the ski hill constantly contra-

vene racial spatiality. Yet expectations and elevated risks remain, influencing participation in outdoor recreation and environmentalist activities. When authors of Rocky Mountain literature assert, on the one hand, that real equals natural equals dangerous and, on the other, that false equals cultural equals safe, they make wilderness spaces appear *naturally* dangerous and cultural and urban spaces appear *socially* safe. Heterosexual white men can celebrate the risk of grizzly attack at least in part because they need not fear the heterosexual white men patrolling grizzly country. Likewise, heterosexual white men can assume the safety of the townsites because they need not fear the heterosexual white men emerging from the bar on Banff Avenue or overseeing powerful structures of social control like prison or immigration policy. As later chapters will demonstrate, these risks are very real for less privileged people in wilderness and town alike.

Wilderness has frequently been defined through normative ideas of “natural” as defined from the privileged position of white, male, heterosexual, upper-class and able-bodied individuals. Deviation from these normative locations, including Indigenous people and people of colour (Francis, 2011), women (Roorda, 2005), LGBTQ (Sandilands & Erickson, 2010), the poor (Rudin, 2010) and people with disabilities (Clare, 2014), are often considered unnatural, which means the particular *social* hazards less privileged people encounter in wilderness settings are easily overlooked. From the position of most Rocky Mountain writers, wilderness appears as neutral space imbued with physical and spiritual benefits, while from other positions it may be saturated in fruitless danger. From the latter position, townsites or teahouses (depending on their own human constituents) may be more desirable than alpine passes patrolled by solitary white men, many of whom possess the authority of a state whose relationship to marginalized people is tense at best.

Ignoring the subjectivity of risk while celebrating environmental hazards means further entrenching wilderness as highly privileged space while erroneously implying that town and tourist centres – already established as antonyms for the true and good nature of Banff National Park – are risk-free and (closer to) appropriate for non-normative bodies.

Anti-education agenda: Place-based knowledge and colonialism. Depicting the Rocky Mountain Parks as a getaway, or as a totem for the Canadian nation, neglects the ways the Rockies are a real environment populated by people whose lives are sharply defined by being in mountains. In literature, authors respond to the symbolic nature of institutional representations by insisting that life in the mountains is not only real, but is *more real* than life elsewhere. As we have seen from Kevin Van Tighem's realness and risk, authors of Rocky Mountain literature contrast the material specificity of mountain life with the perceived immateriality and placelessness of an urban world represented by mobility, business, bureaucracy and, as this section will detail, formal education.

Having identified the standard alienating characteristics of modernity as the root of ecological crisis, writers like Van Tighem (2000) and Sandford (2008), as mentioned, propose "becoming native" as the remedy, which Sandford defines as choosing to "dig in and aim for some kind of enduring relationship with the ecological realities of the surrounding landscape" (p. 111). For both Van Tighem and Sandford, becoming native means sacrificing the economic and social benefits of (freely chosen) mobility to develop intimate knowledge of one place, believing that place-based knowledge produces effective solutions to ecological problems while increasing incentive to act wisely: if you know it you will love it; if you love it you will save it. Becoming native involves choosing personal permanence to produce eternal belonging: once a person has become native,

questioning his belonging is as senseless as doubting that of the alpine heather.

Place-based knowledge in Rocky Mountain literature is accrued through long-term physical immersion in the landscape. The outcome of all the striving depicted in the literature – the reason one tracks ghosts through difficult terrain, burdens himself with inhuman weight to work the land and risks his life in grizzly country – is that one might know the place well. But other people – transients, tourists, bureaucrats and safety-craving city-folk – claim authoritative knowledge of the place without having suffered these ordeals. If belonging in the Rocky Mountain Parks is rooted in permanence, manual work and physical risk, then formal education is too abstract, intellectual and safe to bring the student closer to the mountains. In *Hooker & Brown*, Rumi complains, “I’ve lost my wonder, forgotten somewhere in the avalanche of books and terminology and math” (Auld, 2009, p. 17). The antagonistic relationship Rumi lays out between full engagement with the Rocky Mountains and formal education echoes throughout Rocky Mountain literature. It is a formulation in which education is rarely what one knows and far more often what one has been made unable to know by time and energy spent out of place. Below, Marty illustrates the position that formal education hinders belonging while Graeme Pole (1998) exemplifies how place-based knowledge in Rocky Mountain literature naturalizes and enacts colonialism. Finally, Chief John Snow’s (1977/2005) articulation of traditional Nakoda knowledge and colonial education systems demonstrates how depictions of formal education and place-based knowledge in Rocky Mountain literature reflect and reinforce the privilege of its authors.

In the warden service’s early days, labourers rarely had more than basic formal education, if any. The land provided what teachers could not, or so the story has it. For ex-

ample, the guide/author/photographer/hunter Andy Russell (1967) explains: “our education, my brothers and mine, might even be considered sketchy, but a good portion of what was missed in it was taught by our parents and the country we lived in” (p. 137). Meanwhile, Schintz (2005) opens with his first grizzly encounter as a newcomer to the Rockies. When the bear nearly kills him, he declares: “my education was almost over before it began” (p. 16). For these men, education is derived from land, not books.

By resisting and ridiculing formal education, Marty positions himself as a descendant of this land-based lineage. When Marty (1999) is still a seasonal employee at Lake O’Hara in Yoho, he experiences his first encounter with Edward Feuz. The elder guide watches Marty lead a climb unknowingly but dangerously beneath a cornice at midday and later launches into an angry lecture:

“See that dark band of rock in the ice near the top [of Mount Lefroy]?”

I looked up at it. “Yes.”

“That’s where Mr. Abbot fell in 1896. He was from Yale University. He died there. That’s when the CPR brought my father over from Schvitzerland [sic]. To keep more fools from dying. Are you from university?”

“No. Not yet.”

“Guhdt [sic]. Maybe you vill [sic] live longer than he did.” (p. 43)

In Feuz’s eyes, Marty is inexperienced and stupid, but not yet as inexperienced and stupid as attending Yale University would make him.

Marty claims that in the 1960s, when he began with the warden service:

Chief wardens were not looking for the computer literate so much as the merely literate high-school graduates, the ones with horse sense, the ones with bush smarts rather than “communication skills.” Slinging the bullshit – the homelier term – was as popular then as it is now. In the sixties it was seen as a vice, not an attribute you tarded up with euphemisms for your resumé. But then the only resumé we knew about in the older days was as in

“resume working.” (p. 76)

Marty describes academia as necessarily displacing the grounded knowledge of place earned through physical work. In such reasoning, one cannot have “communication skills” *and* “horse sense.” One cannot have a thorough résumé *and* be hard working. Going to Yale can get you killed and only hardnosed and earthy men can make sure it does not happen to the next person. In these and other anecdotes, Marty establishes formal education as a stand-in for being out of place in the mountains and proposes the landscape as an improvement on books and classrooms.

Of course, Marty himself, like many of his peers in the warden service and in Rocky Mountain writing, *is* well educated – he is a graduate of McGill University – and his diatribe against education is possible *because of* the skills he learned in city classrooms. In order to distance himself from his educated background and maintain his place as an alumnus of the backwoods, Marty contrasts the way he reached the warden service via hardscrabble trail maintenance with the (already dated) formal qualifications increasingly required for employment: “Today’s new recruit typically starts off with a pencil and a notebook – if not a lap-top computer. In the 1960s, we started out with work gloves and hardhats, degree or no degree” (p. 76).

Healy Park, which consistently pits (always good) wilderness men against (mostly bad) professional bureaucrats and businesspeople, also illustrates the uninterrogated colonial nature of wilderness access. In the novel’s final pages, Gregory is on another solo adventure “to reaffirm his connection” to the land (Pole, 1998, p. 280). A suitably wild spot inspires him to articulate his love of wilderness as ethical imperative:

as long as there were some sizable wild places remaining in the mountain national parks [...] the dream of a world where dominance by humankind

was not the guiding ethic remained possible. It was clear to Gregory that the expression of dominance did not stop with the land. If people could not live at peace with their home, their planet, they would never be able to live at peace with each other. (p. 280)

Gregory's salvationist vision of wilderness is accompanied by his rationale for exclusion:

The only saving grace that had so far kept it wild was *the barrier of fatigue* that prevented most people from reaching it: three days of sweat and toil to hike in, and three more to hike out. Because other forms of access were not permitted to the casual viewing public, this effectively eliminated access to virtually all. No, it was not democratic. *Banff was not a park that could be experienced in its entirety by everyone.* (p. 280, emphasis added)

Mountaineering has made Gregory the authoritative intermediary between Earth itself and the mass of humanity who physically cannot do what he does, and who therefore cannot know what he knows, except as he chooses to communicate it.

As I have mentioned, and will explore further in chapter two, the capacity of men like Gregory to know the land the way he knows it – through solitary travel in an unpeopled landscape – is made possible through colonial violence: land appropriation, forced expulsion and ongoing erasure. In the above passage, Gregory assigns himself saviour-like status as the-one-who-knows while standing above “a ring of white stones” (p. 281). This “simple relic,” he soon realizes, is a “dream bed [...] where, for centuries, aboriginal warriors held their vision quests” (p. 281). The site was designated and visited by “the ancient ones” and the ring has since been fractured by “[c]enturies of frost action” (p. 281). The land Gregory so thoroughly *knows* is Indigenous territory to which Indigenous people are denied access but, to Gregory, the fact that the dream bed is out of sorts indicates its ancientness rather than its ongoing colonization, relegating Indigenous people to the distant past in a way that dehistoricizes his own presence and allows him to “seamlessly take their place” (Lawrence & Dua, 2005, p. 123). As soon as Gregory steps into

the ring a raven appears and performs a summersault near enough to see “the glint of sunlight in its eye” (p. 281). Gregory experiences the raven’s flight “like a blessing” that is confirmed when the bird leaves a feather (p. 281). He interprets the gift as a contract signed by his “animal spirit guide ” (p. 281). In this individualized and rapid-fire vision quest, Gregory inherits the authority of “ancient” Indigenous knowledge of the land – and the land approves in the form of the raven – while masking the colonial violence that has made this land vacant for him.²³ He employs land-based knowledge practiced historically and presently by Indigenous people to legitimize his own claims of belonging, even as Indigenous place-based knowledge is often categorized by settlers as myth and legend.

Furthermore, authors of Rocky Mountain literature dismiss formal education from a position in which they already benefit from it, a position contrasted by the experiences of Indigenous people in the Rockies. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2015) has most recently and extensively documented, formal education has been a tool intentionally and explicitly employed by the settler state to disconnect Indigenous people from their cultural landscapes, including those emplaced in the Rocky Mountains. Traditionally, Nakoda education was a system of social reproduction embedded in culture and land simultaneously, as Chief Snow (1977/2005) describes:

There was no formal education as such, but education was interwoven into the life of the tribal society. [...] Parents, grandparents, and elders told and retold stories and legends to the children by the campfires, in the teepees,

²³ Chief Snow (1977/2005) describes Nakoda vision quests at some length. While involving a solitary “religious journey into the rugged mountains,” they are also “guided and aided by many members of the tribe who spen[d] much time fasting and praying in the sweat lodge” (p. 16). A “sacred lodge [is] erected by a chosen few who [are] appointed by the elders” (p. 16), wherein a “sacred fire” sends incense to the Great Spirit and a pipe ceremony is “prayerfully observed” that “the seeker of truth and insight into religious thought would be prepared to set off on the vision quest” (p. 17). Only then does the solitary journey begin:

There in the mountain wilderness he would be alone; he would live close to nature and perchance he would receive a special revelation. It might come through a dream or a vision, through the voice of nature, or by an unusual sign. It might be that the wild animals or birds would convey the message of his calling to him. (p. 17)

on the hillsides, in the forest, and at special gatherings during the day and at night. It was an ongoing educational process about religion, life, hunting, and so on. [...] With such an education based on religion, the child was established in Stoney tribal society. (p. 9)

Traditional Nakoda education was deeply land-based: “There are lessons hidden in creation that we must learn in order to live a good life and walk the straight path” (p. 18), Snow writes. The Canadian government fractured that educational tradition and the place-based knowledge it nurtured in large part through its imposition of formal education following the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877. After financing a missionary school until 1925 with the aim of “going out after the wild and ignorant and bringing them into a Christian home” (J. McDougall, as cited in TRC, 2015, p.126), until 1969 the Canadian government funded the Morley Residential School operated by the United Church of Canada. Snow (1977/2005) recalls from personal experience that residential school education “consisted of nothing that had any relationship to our homes and culture. Indeed, Stoney culture was condemned explicitly and implicitly” (p. 150). In addition, “many stories have been revealed about various severities of abuse inflicted upon generations of students who attended the Morley Residential School” (Wesley & Hogeland, 2014, para. 5). The TRC (2015) calls the residential school system “cultural genocide” for its “destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group” (p. 1), including integrated land-based education practices. While “books and terminology and math” cost Rumi his “wonder” (Auld, 2009, p. 17), formal education has been central to disassociating Indigenous people from the Rocky Mountain landscape, enabling Rumi’s access to it as a settler and (educated) wilderness adventurer.

While Nakoda children were forced to attend residential school, their education was of low quality and students were discouraged from pursuing higher learning unless it con-

tributed to their assimilation. While staffing the residential school with unqualified and proselytizing teachers, in the 1960s the Canadian government enticed Nakoda students into off-reserve schools (by providing a clothing allowance, for example) while diverting funds for Aboriginal education from on-reserve schools to those in nearby settler communities. With the Department of Indian Affairs transferring daily governance of many reserves (including Morley) to Bands in the 1960s, one of the Nakoda Council's first priorities was improving on-reserve formal education in order to combat assimilation through the settler education system and improve learning for Nakoda students. In 1968, when the government-assigned white principal of the Morley Residential School refused to live on the reserve, "Stoney Tribal Council was prepared to test the strength of self-government" (Snow, 1977/2005, p. 164). Council led a school boycott with 300 students that lasted eight days until the federal government permitted the Band to appoint its own principal. Chief Snow explains the significance of the struggle over formal education:

Appointing our own principal – and one who was prepared to live on the reserve – marked the beginning of our involvement in the education of our own children and at least the start of development of a school that would adequately meet requirements of the Stoney students. [...] But our victory went much further than the field of education. We began to get a feeling of what self-government was all about. (p. 166)

A certain degree of formal education was used to displace Nakoda people from their cultural landscapes, but Nakoda students were denied a level of education that might help them combat their exclusion within colonial legal, administrative, educational and narrative structures. Marty (1999) can dismiss his own interest in a Master's degree in creative writing as "silliness" (p. 97), but Chief Snow's diploma from Cook Christian Training School enabled him to become an ordained minister, and from that liminal space (in which he was recognized by both Indigenous and settler institutions as a legitimate

authority) he successfully advocated for his community's rights. Therefore, while formal education is a colonial weapon, Indigenous people have also repurposed it as a tool of decolonization, a means through which Nakoda relationship with the Rocky Mountain cultural landscape might be *restored* rather than obstructed.

Authors of Rocky Mountain literature are able to dismiss formal education as an obstacle to belonging in the Rocky Mountain Parks because they already possess two privileges that enable such a stance: they have access to the Rocky Mountain landscape to perform their particular rituals of land-based communion; and they do not face structural obstacles to accessing formal education and therefore already possess its benefits. Chief Snow's account of Nakoda education in the same landscape vividly contrasts such privileged experiences. Formal education, provided by the settler institutions of government and church, has been a tool of colonialism and cultural genocide, including dislocation from the land. It has also been a means through which to combat colonialism through individual empowerment and collective assertions of sovereignty. Authority ascribed to practical knowledge of the land is therefore reserved for middle class white men, identifying them as those-who-know and even, for the good of all, as those-who-*must*-know. Indigenous people (among others) are denied that same authority. Rocky Mountain literature instead employs Indianness to legitimize settler claims of belonging while disappearing Indigenous people as "spectres," to borrow Jodi Byrd's (2011) evocative term. This denial involves a particularly ironic violence: Indigenous peoples have survived, asserted their rights and defined themselves according to land-based knowledges *against* hegemonic western knowledge systems disseminated through formal education.

Grizzly Bear Assemblage and Rocky Mountain Co-Construction

Corollary to devaluing education in Rocky Mountain literature is celebrating knowledge of place born of immersion in wilderness and openness to other-than-human influence. While I have critiqued how such immersion is described, I want to also talk about what these authors do well, or at least what kinds of conversations they begin to open up: describing other-than-human beings, forces and material as co-determinant factors in producing place. As demonstrated by the way they have already shown their jowly faces several times in this paper, grizzly bears are the most consistent means through which Rocky Mountain literature depicts the other-than-human reaching out with authority. As I will show, Rocky Mountain literature describes grizzlies as *producers* of counter-narrative to the anthropocentric utilitarianism of institutional portrayals. In the process, (certain) people become like or are approved by grizzlies. It is muddy here, where recognition of other-than-human influence melds with social naturalization, but it is worth dwelling in the puddle to gesture at the role of other-than-human forces in producing Rocky Mountain space and literature, as evident in Marty's *Switchbacks* (1999) and *The Black Grizzly of Whisky Creek* (2008), and Karsten Heuer's (2002) *Walking the Big Wild*.

Many Rocky Mountain authors write with the explicit intent of complicating simplistic narratives of bears that portray them as ruthless killers or cuddly ambassadors of nature's beneficence. Marty writes large portions of his hybrid non/fiction book *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek* from the perspective of a grizzly bear who mauled three people in 1984. For weeks, the bear evaded capture by a team of wardens that included Marty, despite dwelling in woodlands immediately bordering the Banff townsite. Instead of a bloodthirsty ghoul, Marty's black grizzly, who he names Sticky-Mouth, is a compli-

cated if selfish creature accustomed to dominance who reacts to bad circumstances according to instinct. Faced with a shortage of essential fats and sugars to survive the winter – the result of a complex of politics, weather and commerce converging on Banff that summer – Sticky-Mouth kills out of anger and confusion, not bloodlust. Even this most notorious of real life Rocky Mountain bears finds sympathy from Marty.

But more than sympathy, Marty and other writers of Rocky Mountain literature find in the grizzly the region's dominant social actor. In these treatments, the bear is so central to wilderness that the space would not exist in its absence. In *Switchbacks*, Marty (1999) describes an encounter with a grizzly while on backcountry patrol. The bear lets Marty and his horse pass unhindered, which Marty explains as evidence that the bear and his horse are "old acquaintances from sharing the meadows along the creek" (p. 217). Marty further claims that "this bear, which had been close to me several times without my ever seeing it, knew the sound of my voice, knew the shape of the human form that went with that sound" (p. 217). Later that summer, an outfitter kills the bear beyond the park boundary and Marty embodies its departure from the landscape: "The bear's absence from the valley changed the whole set of my nervous system. Even my posture slumped. The valley had become altogether too safe; *its wilderness character was an expression of the bear*, which was the physical manifestation of what the word meant" (p. 217, emphasis added). Marty's words echo Russell's (1967): "All this is grizzly country. It is as big as all the mountains; it is the wild outdoors [...]. As surely as the sun rises tomorrow morning, *grizzly country is wilderness country*" (p. 16, emphasis added).

The grizzly as embodiment of wilderness is not merely atmospheric, however. It is also spatial, inscribed into the physical and political geography of the Canadian Rockies.

A series of ecological and social reports in the 1990s, especially the *Banff-Bow Valley Study* (1996) and the two-part *Report on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks* (Parks Canada, 2000), described a national park system without the mandate or capacity to properly protect ecosystems under its charge. The reports identified many sources of ecological stress both internal and external to the parks, including habitat fragmentation, housing and commercial development and over-use by recreationalists. In response, environmentalists and parks administrators in the Canadian Rockies began to take seriously the idea of large-scale conservation networks that would link protected areas together, expand the total area under protection and reduce user densities.

The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y), based in Canmore and Bozeman, Montana, was incorporated in 1997, aiming to establish “[a]n interconnected system of wild lands and waters stretching from Yellowstone to Yukon, harmonizing the needs of people with those of nature” (Y2Y, 2014). In support of Y2Y and over 18 months in 1998 and 1999, park warden Karsten Heuer hiked and skied the 3,400 km length of these “wild lands,” an experience he describes in *Walking the Big Wild* (2002). For Heuer, who later served as Y2Y president, the relative wildness of the land through which he travelled is measured by the presence of grizzlies. Abundant evidence or sightings of grizzlies mean an acceptable level of wilderness, while their absence signifies a compromised site affecting the whole bioregion. It is not mere marketing that the book is subtitled *From Yellowstone to Yukon on the Grizzly Bear's Trail*. Where the grizzly is present delineates wilderness that demands protection, informing spatial designation and legislation. The space defined by the grizzly becomes a space delineated politically, outlined by signs and fences and patrolled by enforcement personnel.

Donna Haraway (2003) describes dogs as “companion species” who have biologically and culturally co-evolved with humans. Both parties produce change in one another through interwoven relationship. Haraway writes that “generally speaking, one does not eat one’s companion animals (nor get eaten by them)” (p. 14), but Rocky Mountain literature suggests that the possibility of getting eaten is a central aspect of the human-grizzly relationship, requiring us to revisit any assumptions we may have that people are in control. Marty, Russell and Heuer present a view of grizzly bears as the determining influence in our experience of the Rocky Mountain Parks, of reaching out to mould us into people worthy of grizzly country. These authors argue that grizzlies and people mutually reach out and respond, producing themselves and the place they occupy.

Like other standards of belonging I have outlined here, grizzliness can be a measure that is met by the burly men of Rocky Mountain literature while excluding those in other positions. Literary grizzlies are potentially dangerous, primarily solitary creatures who mate when stars align and roam the hills endangered by the encroachments of urban artifice. That same description also applies to most of the central (male) characters in Rocky Mountain literature. But there is promise here as well, if we see literary grizzlies as emblematic of the other-than-human constituents of the Rocky Mountain Parks. The Rocky Mountain Parks are undoubtedly a social creation reflecting social privilege and power, but they are also a place uniquely determined by grizzly bears and, if we extend this view, avalanches, pine trees, glaciers, snails, chinooks and limestone. For all their limitations, treatments of grizzlies in Rocky Mountain literature *do* narrate a co-history that really is quite particular to the Rocky Mountain Parks.

Chapter 2: Buried in the Wilderness at Saskatchewan River Crossing

In this chapter, I tell three stories about living at Saskatchewan River Crossing, a frontcountry wilderness location in Banff National Park. My hope is that each successive story alters and troubles the previous one to produce a layered and complex narrative of Banff National Park wilderness that replaces ideas of the pristine with muddy implications of class, gender, capitalism, religion, race and colonialism. The first story is an autobiographical account of my tenure as a Parks Canada employee. The second, quite literally dug up during a walking interview with my mother, is a recounting of my grandfather's arrival in, and experience of, Saskatchewan River Crossing as the site of enforced alternative service during World War II. Finally, I outline a story of Nakoda and Cree claims on the lands that include Saskatchewan River Crossing, claims that have been asserted through occupation and petition over more than a century. I pull this story mainly from two Indigenous political history texts, Chief John Snow's (1977/2005) *These Mountains are our Sacred Places* and Gary Botting's (2005) *Chief Smallboy*.

Becoming a Mountain Man in the Wide Open Wilderness

When I was 19, I was fortunate to get a job with Parks Canada attending entry gates and campgrounds. The parts of the job that I like to tell people about involved helping visitors understand and interact with where they were, as well as the physical work of digging fire pits and postholes, chopping firewood and scheming creative ways to keep people from setting up their tents outside their designated space. I moved a lot of rocks around in an effort to make the boundary between human and wild spaces appear natural but transgressable, an act acutely emblematic of National Parks as a whole.

Most importantly in my estimation, I did not work in Banff or Lake Louise or any of the park's other concentrations of residents and visitors. I was based instead at Saskatchewan River Crossing Warden Station. The Crossing, as we called it, marks the convergence of the Howse, Mistaya, and North Saskatchewan rivers and the point from which they collectively flow eastward into the prairies and, eventually, Hudson's Bay.²⁴ Located 80 km northwest of the village of Lake Louise, 45 km southeast of the southern boundary of Jasper National Park, and 160 km from the town of Jasper, the warden station is a cluster of a half dozen small and discrete buildings in the low valley between the vertical faces and hanging icefields of Mounts Murchison, Wilson and Sarbach. For those of us on the visitor service end of the employment spectrum the main accommodation was an old mobile home half-covered in warped pine siding. Inside, the red shag carpet and false wood panels marked its age and deer mice and packrats reminded me that my domestic space only marginally belonged to us human interlocutors. There is a small hotel and gas station two kilometres up the road, but there are no stoplights, gondolas, or strip malls, and no pretence that anyone visits other than to look at mountains, ice, and rivers.

One Parks Canada (n.d.-b) brochure echoes the spiel I was instructed to give to visitors: "the Icefields Parkway was built to showcase Jasper and Banff national parks' powerful natural landscape. It's a scenic drive, not a transportation corridor." Another pamphlet identifies the Parkway as "a view from the edge" (Parks Canada, n.d.-a). In Parks Canada staff orientations, "the edge" was explained to us employees as the unique

²⁴ Throughout this chapter I refer to Saskatchewan River Crossing as "the Crossing." There are, of course, many places identified as a "crossing," usually in reference to a spot at which a river is best crossed. There are a great many in the Rocky Mountain Parks, and those for whom any given one is the most relevant crossing probably know it with the definitive article. I strain to speak of Saskatchewan River Crossing as anything except *the* Crossing.

experiential opportunity of the Icefields Parkway: it is where most visitors go to most directly encounter wilderness, where the untainted and untamed most immediately abut rented camper vans. The Crossing epitomizes that vision with its minimal infrastructure, unobtrusive roadside signage, and pull-off viewpoints that emphasize the smallness of visitors in relation to the vast wild space surrounding them. All this to say that the Crossing presents and is persistently presented as pristine wilderness.

During peak season in July and August there were seven of us living at the warden station, with six more at a campground 20 km to the south. With so few people around, I spent much of my seven seasons at the Crossing alone in a wilderness well populated by grizzlies, marmots, wolf willow, and lodgepole pine. I hiked in the mountains and called it “walking in the hills” to emphasize its everydayness (I still do). I fished, climbed and canoed. I also worked outside in the dirt and my knowledge of place was granted authoritative standing in interactions with visitors. I survived close calls with grizzly and black bears, slept out in the rain, bathed in glacial water, and learned about edible plants. I chafed at the suggestion that this was recreation or adventure. Those were tourist words; I was simply living my life, at home.

In my downtime I read the literature of my place, that collection of works written mostly from the perspectives of park wardens and mountaineers explored in chapter one. I felt affirmed, like I uniquely belonged in Banff National Park, because the men described in those books were a lot like me: sweating through my ash-stained Parks Canada uniform beside a baited bear trap explaining to a German tourist about buffaloberries. Like Sid Marty (1978), “I staked my claim in my own blood and in my love for the earth it watered” (p. 44).

Wilderness Incorporated: Three Generations at the Crossing

My mother, Evanne, and I plan a visit to the Crossing on a cool day in early spring to wander through the forest. In a park recognized mainly for its alpine ecosystems of high peaks and open meadows, we intend to drive past all that to bushwhack through the pine forest of one of the lowest elevation valleys in the Canadian Rockies. As we drive northwest from Canmore the temperature drops and the snowpack grows. Shortly after exiting the Trans-Canada Highway for the Icefields Parkway the road goes from bare to ice-covered, and by the time we reach Bow Lake we have returned to the heart of winter.

Then, suddenly, it is over. Cresting Bow Summit with the distant view revealing the length of the Mistaya River, the trend of increasing winter reverses itself as over the next 40km we move away from the Wapta Icefield that dominates the microclimate in the Bow Lake region and lose more than 600 m of elevation. The snowpack declines back to nothing and before we reach the Crossing it is clear that our skis will stay in the car.

Shortly after I started working at the Crossing my mom was visiting her parents in Saskatoon, on the Saskatchewan Prairie where her family had made its roots. By way of a family update she brought up my new workplace, perhaps showing photos of the giant peaks rising 2000 m out of the valleys, and she remembers her father saying, “I think I used to live there!”

My grandfather was never one to talk about himself and he passed away, at 95, five months before my walkabout with my mother. Consequently the story of his time at the Crossing remains partial and, at times, uncertain. We know that Vernon, like many Mennonites, was a conscientious objector (CO) during the Second World War, an exceptional

status given to those belonging to a recognized religious tradition with an institutional tenet of pacifism. Instead of fighting, conscientious objectors were given alternative service duties intended to support the nation in another way. Many Mennonites joined the military in a medical capacity. Vernon planned to do the same, but expected that he would be rejected for poor health.

While we drive past Castle Mountain, my mother discusses Vernon's place in his family growing up. As a child Vernon had been sickly and was not expected to survive to adulthood. His family believed his illness, and the time spent being nurtured at home by his mother instead of farming with his father, made him weak and frail. Vernon's inabilities distanced him from his family and his community, with two exceptions: his brother, Daniel, who was much younger than Vernon but the same size, and his mother, whose own frequent struggles with illness made her particularly sympathetic. Even as a child, Daniel embodied the family's ambitions in his strong, healthy body and the youngest boy became their collective hope for a prosperous agricultural future. It shocked everyone when, still a child, Daniel died suddenly of a ruptured appendix. Vernon, who had lost his nearest peer, was hit hard. Shortly after Daniel's death, Vernon, still a boy himself, overheard his father in prayer, asking God why He had taken Daniel and left behind sickly Vernon. "[Vernon] asked that question, too, but not in a negative way," my mother tells me. Instead of getting depressed or bitter about his father's clear preference, "he figured God must have left him alive for a reason."

Vernon claimed CO status in the early 1940s and was assigned to labour camps in the Rocky Mountain Parks. CO camps shared many parallels with concurrent POW camps for German soldiers and internment camps in which the Canadian government

held Japanese-Canadian men on nothing more than racist suspicion. Similar camps had previously been filled with Eastern European immigrants, or “enemy aliens,” during the First World War, and later by Canada’s unemployed and transient single men during the Great Depression. Between 1915 and 1946 some 10,000 men were made – from varying positions and with varying levels of imprisonment – to live and work in Riding Mountain, Prince Albert, Banff, Jasper, Yoho and Glacier National Parks. In his excellent history of prison camps in Canada’s National Parks, Bill Waiser (1995) argues that the commonality between these men was that “they were seen as a genuine threat to public order and a potential source of civil unrest” (p. 2) just at the moment when Canada’s National Parks Branch required cheap labour: large infrastructural projects had been envisioned to prepare the parks for prospective automobile tourism before WWI absconded with both the parks budget and the labour force.

Because imprisoned labour was cheaper than machinery, men in the camps were tasked with the physical labour of modifying mountain landscapes manually. Objectives included clearing scenic highways for tourist traffic, and building park facilities like entry gates, bathing pools at hot springs, and buildings for park administration, museums, and clubhouses (Waiser, 1995). To look at it differently, imprisoned labour in the national parks was given the job of civilizing the wilderness and imprinting commerce in the landscape, the same processes that constitute the great unnatural antagonists of modernity in Rocky Mountain literature.

During Vernon’s time at the Castle Mountain camp, the job was to cut down beetle-infested trees, protecting the uninfected as a marker of a pristine and healthy environment for visitors on the Bow Valley Parkway. Two men felled each tree, with one man on ei-

ther end of a long crosscut saw, pushing and pulling with full body motions. It was brutal, physical work for which Vernon was not well suited. “Nobody would have wanted to be on the other end of a saw with him,” my mother explains, so he was reassigned as a cook’s assistant, perhaps the least “manly” job in the camp.

I knew my grandfather as a man of deep faith always a step or two removed from the world around him. “He thought everyone would be [a CO] for the same reasons as he was. He thought there would be bible studies and hymnals,” my mother tells me. Vernon had hoped, too, to find the masculine camaraderie that had eluded him in his younger years. Instead, while there were indeed bible studies, they were too small to provide a meaningful avenue into camp community. Further, the men were nearly all farmers, a status Vernon wanted desperately but would never achieve. His faith and his body both served to isolate him from his fellow COs.

When Vernon first left Saskatchewan, his mother, his advocate in tough circumstances, told him that she expected never to see him again. She died a couple months after Vernon left, which devastated him. The National War Services Department granted Vernon leave to attend his mother’s funeral, and his sister remembers his open desire to stay with his family. According to my mother, Vernon’s father could have requested leave for his son that would exempt him from alternative service on the basis that he was essential to farm operations. But the stern old man, still not seeing Vernon as useful, dismissed the opportunity and returned his son to the distant labour camps.

While being a cook’s assistant took him off the saw, it gave Vernon a different opportunity to prove his worth. The camps received food rations irregularly and of unpredictable quality, and when a large shipment of mostly rotting apples appeared, the head

cook declared it garbage. Vernon, however, saw the opportunity. “Let’s make pies,” he suggested. The cook told him if he wanted to pick through a crate of bad apples, he could do whatever he wanted with them. My mother suspects that Vernon had never made a pie before – that was women’s work, after all – but, having been in the house for so much of his childhood, he had watched his mother and sisters baking nearly every day. From memory, Vernon concocted apple pies for his campmates and the rare treat earned him entry into their brotherhood. With the pies, Vernon built a reputation, and when a camp assigned to clear forest for a power line further north needed a head cook, Vernon was sent to fill in. He arrived at Saskatchewan River Crossing with little cooking experience but responsible for preparing meals for everyone in camp. He worked as a domestic servant in a wilderness deemed inappropriate for (white) women, and found the belonging he did in fulfilling those duties well. Together the men were bringing electricity to tourist facilities, further cementing the hold of commerce in the National Park landscape.

My mother and I arrive at the Crossing in early afternoon. The sky is grey, overcast, and there is a skiff of last night’s snow on the ground in the shadow of the forest. My parents stayed at the Crossing Resort on their honeymoon in 1976 and visited many times during my tenure, but my mother has never sought out her father’s presence here. At first we follow the Howse Pass trail to where it crosses the Mistaya River. A photo from my grandfather shows tents along the banks here, and I want my mother to stand in the flats where I believe they were set up. We pass a recently erected trailhead sign identifying the Howse Pass National Historic Site (NHS), which is actually more than 30 difficult and unmaintained horse trail kilometres to the southwest. The NHS commemorates David Thompson’s “discovery” of Howse Pass in 1807 and the first European fur-trading

route through the Rockies. The pass was used for this purpose for only three years before groups of *Piikani* (Blackfoot) defended their market strength with the *Ktunaxa* (Kootenay) to the west by threateningly convincing the traders to look elsewhere (Payne, 2007). For hundreds of years Indigenous people used the pass as an international highway between the mountains and the prairies, while celebrated European traders were pushed aside as proxies in an economic power struggle that had little to do with them. There are always more stories to be found here, with a little digging.²⁵

My mother and I talk easily while bushwhacking through the forest on the northern bank of the North Saskatchewan River, which we do for over an hour before we find what I was hoping for. With no trail and no signage, an old tire in the woods marks the spot. Beneath the tire, filled in with soil and roots and overlain with moss, we dig up milk, condiment and detergent bottles, an enamel pot lid, motor oil cans, and a Texaco gas sign. The glass bottles have formed tiny greenhouses and plants under their roofs are months ahead of those outside. A wooden cask filled with pine needles has become a planter of seedlings pushing through the snow. After digging around for a while, my mother pulls a bent and rusty artefact out of the earth and shouts, “one of my dad’s pie plates!” I express reasonable doubt – there are, as she has reminded me, many layers of history in this landscape – but my mother laughs. “That’s significant! Because that’s what got him out here.” It is the first time she seems to feel her father in this place.

We keep walking and find other debris piles: a section of corral fencing and a few

²⁵ In telling this story openly, with its contradictions bare, other stories emerge as well. My mother tells me about our family friend working highway construction in the 1970s; a conference participant tells me that he lived in the same trailer just before I did and traced his Métis ancestry to one of the first Europeans to cross Howse Pass; I pick up a novel I have had for years and it turns out to be about a deaf boy sent to live with his aunt and uncle at a Kootenay Plains forestry station just before the Bighorn Dam floods the valley (Hunter, 2009). A lone man in the wilderness begins scratching the surface and a plurality emerges.

collapsed wooden buildings, their stovepipes still in decent shape. One heap under a particularly large spruce has nearly disappeared under cone debris, the off-cuts of hungry squirrels in the branches above: a human midden buried by a squirrel midden.²⁶

Vernon's favourite story of the Crossing was of the one occasion the camp received a shipment of (relatively) fresh coastal salmon, an almost miraculous departure from poor grade root vegetables and grey meat. Vernon stored the cargo in a crate submerged in the glacial North Saskatchewan River. While salmon is a staple for grizzlies on the Pacific coast where a bear can stand in a river with its mouth open while spawning fish jump blindly about, Rocky Mountain grizzlies survive mainly on hardscrabble roots, berries and rodents. Salmon would be as great and rare a treat for a bear as it was for the men. It was inevitable, though unpredictable to Vernon, that a grizzly was soon moving intently toward the captured fish. Knowing the fine meat's immense value to the men in camp, Vernon sprinted from his tent hoping to beat the great bear to his bounty. Nearing the storage place, Vernon saw the grizzly wade into the current, pick apart his crate, and sit down in the middle of the river to enjoy this neatly preserved and kindly served delicacy. When Vernon told this story to my mother he would struggle through laughter and emphysema to ask, "If I had won the race with the bear, what would I have done then?"

When Vernon and his wife visited my family in the Rockies while I was growing up they never travelled to the CO campsites and never did the sightseeing that millions of visitors experience every year. Through his affection for the farm, his memory for yields and soil conditions, and his life in Saskatchewan, Vernon was always a prairie farmer, even when he was not. The mountains, to him, were a brief and strange moment, if a happily remembered one. The Rockies of Banff National Park were not a source of truth

²⁶ A "midden" is a refuse pile. In archaeology, middens usefully indicate established sites of human use.

or profound mystery for my grandfather the way they are claimed to be in literature. At best they were an opportunity to feel appreciated among men; at worst they were a prison. Likely, he was there under a year.

Standing atop the sandy cliff banks overlooking the spot in the river where Vernon likely stored his salmon, as well as my old panabode cabin on the opposite shore, I ask my mother if knowing her father lived here means anything to her own sense of place. “No,” she quickly answers. Part of that is the particularity of her relationship with her parents, but mostly it is her own 30-plus years in the Rockies during which the Crossing was never a place of attachment. “But I’m glad that the two of you have this connection here,” she tells me. “Because without it, you probably wouldn’t have one at all.”

My mother and I take with us a few of the items we found in the forest: a milk bottle, a detergent jar, and the pie tin. It feels strange putting the rest of the garbage back where we found it instead of packing it out to the bear proof bins along the highway, as both of us are in the habit of doing. But we decide that the story of my grandfather, and the broader story of encamped labour in the creation of the mountain wilderness as we know it, is already invisible enough. We both like the idea that someone else might stumble upon this story, layered up in a pristine landscape, just beneath the surface.

Colonialism and Complicity

Just as the rugged individualists of Rocky Mountain literature assert their place in the present by establishing links to the past, I can use (and probably have used) the fact of my grandfather’s presence to validate me as derived from this place. Few can claim multiple generations at Saskatchewan River Crossing, and doing so emplaces me in a manner that

tourist and state representations do not address. At the same time, my grandfather's story makes it clear that the Crossing is not the pristine wilderness it first appears to be, and if the Crossing itself is less natural than it looks, then my place in it must be as well.

My grandfather did not simply arrive at the Crossing of his own will. His presence there was born of a complex intersection of nationalism, religion, and state-initiated capitalism. To the extent that my own presence there as a Parks Canada employee, and my claim to belong there as a labourer and resident, are derived from my grandfather's work, my own place in the Banff National Park wilderness is built on that same complex intersection. I am not natural in the same ways that the Crossing – as an encountered location and as an idea of wilderness – is not natural. We are both historically derived.

In the most obvious sense, both my grandfather and I were brought to the Crossing because of the National Park that administers it. The Crossing first fell within the park boundaries following a massive and arbitrarily drawn boundary expansion in 1902. It was removed from protected status in 1911 when park lands were reduced significantly to accommodate development and extractive industries. The Crossing returned to Banff National Park in 1930 when the Parks Branch gained the lands from around Bow Lake to Jasper National Park's southern boundary at Sunwapta Pass in exchange for lands further south. The trade, which substantially reduced the protected area, was made to accommodate hydroelectric and other resource demands on the front ranges nearer the growing city of Calgary (Armstrong, Evenden & Nelles, 2009).

In order to incorporate the new lands into the touristic and nationalistic visions of the national parks, Commissioner J.B. Harkin immediately revitalized his dormant plan to build a highway connecting Banff and Jasper. Harkin had first proposed the plan after the

Great War, but it was not seen as financially viable until unemployment rates skyrocketed at the start of the Great Depression. Beginning in 1930, hundreds of single, unemployed men, many of whom were Great War veterans, were given the option of losing their relief benefits or working on infrastructure projects in national park labour camps, including a highway that would connect Lake Louise to Jasper (Waiser, 1995, p. 71). Although the Parks Branch initially envisioned a two-year project, the Banff-Jasper Highway (later renamed the Icefields Parkway) would not be driven from end-to-end until 1939 because of an incredibly difficult terrain and climate for construction, the limitations of manual work, and ongoing labour unrest motivated by low pay and inhumane conditions: a long step from the emplacing work described in Rocky Mountain literature. Over eight years, the highway was built entirely by unemployed and homeless men who basically had no other option, with the combined purpose of reducing the relief burden on cities and, in Harkin's words, to bring "the national playgrounds within reach of thousands" (as cited in Waiser, 1995, p. 49). Successive highway improvements were made during WWII by men like my grandfather, and by Japanese-Canadian men separated from their families and interned apart from white society.

Of course, the Crossing was not *terra incognita* before national park boundaries started jumping from valley to valley, and commerce and social control were not the state's only motivations for developing parklands. Ktunaxa, Piikani, Cree and Nakoda peoples claimed the nearby Kootenay Plains as a residence, hunting ground, sacred site and trading camp, with evidence of tool-making, campsites, and trails dating back between ten and 12 thousand years (Kostash & Burton, 2005, p. 37). Bighorn elder John Abraham and Morley Twoyoungmen describe the Kootenay Plains as a good place to die,

a place of refuge and hunting “even in hard winter” predating the arrival of horses in the mid-1700s (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996, p. 106). When European fur traders arrived in the corridor between Rocky Mountain House and Howse Pass in the 1790s, the Kootenay Plains were firmly under Nakoda control, and when settlers began demonstrating more permanent intentions in the 1880s Nakoda people “roamed, hunting in the foothills and on the plains from the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan to the United States border” (Snow, 1977/2005, p. 24). In 1894, after the treaty set aside the Morley reserve further south, Nakoda people returned to live in the Kootenay Plains under leadership of Peter Wesley because, as Chief Snow describes, “the quality of life on the reserve was so poor and, furthermore, because they believed the Commissioner had promised that band land on the Kootenay Plains during the Treaty Seven gathering” (p. 95).

Both Nakoda and Cree people assert ongoing rights to the Kootenay Plains, insisting that the land encompassing the Crossing was acquired in bad faith, and both have asserted their claims by settling these lands. As both Botting (2005) and Chief Snow (1977/2005) make clear, the land that now forms the southern portion of Jasper National Park, the northern end of Banff National Park (including the Crossing), and the Kootenay Plains was never ceded by the nations who occupied it during the treaty process. Negotiations for Treaty Six (which included the Cree in 1876) and Treaty Seven (which included the Nakoda in 1877), excluded the mountains and foothills surrounding the Kootenay Plains. Instead, that land was written into Treaty Eight in 1899.

Smallboy clearly believed there had not been a meeting of minds between the Indians and the Queen’s representatives who signed the treaties: the negotiators had deliberately and specifically excluded the Rocky Mountains from the treaty because they were recognized as being Indian land. And as for Treaty Eight, the northern tribes who were signatory to that treaty – the Slave, Chipewyan, Beaver, and Swampy Cree – had never oc-

cupied the Kootenay Plains, had never expressed an interest in it, and therefore had no right to bargain it away. (Botting, 2005, p. 150)

According to Chief Smallboy, the omission could not have been an accident on the part of Crown representatives because they used detailed David Thompson maps in the negotiations; they must have known precisely where they were drawing boundaries. The Nakoda followers of Chief Peter Wesley “were the only First Nations people inhabiting the Kootenay Plains at the time Treaty Eight was signed, yet nobody in the families or connected with them was ever consulted” (Botting, 2005, p. 157).

Under the knowledge that the land had not been ceded, Nakoda people remained living off reserve and self-sufficiently at the Kootenay Plains until formal establishment of the Bighorn Reserve immediately to the east in 1948, an event that the federal government came to view as necessary when plans for the David Thompson Highway were finalized (Snow, 1977/2005, pp. 127-128), and which came only seven years after my grandfather arrived at the Crossing.

In 1938, with construction on the Icefields Parkway underway and plans for the David Thompson Highway moving along, the Wesley Band hired a lawyer to persuade the government to set aside reserve lands in the area. “At this time, my people were concerned about the new Lake Louise-Jasper Highway and a road from Nordegg joining it; it would cut through our hunting territory and interfere with our land claim,” Chief Snow writes (p. 122). My grandfather worked lands actively used by Indigenous peoples for sustenance, and over which Nakoda people enacted their sovereignty by “sustaining themselves on these traditional hunting grounds, where the game was plentiful, where the grassy slopes were open in winter, and where there were only itinerant white people” (Snow, 1977/2005, p. 95). Vernon was part of the front lines, one of thousands of men

marginalized by class, religion, nationality, or race who were used to claim territory for a Canadian state that was, in a different way, the source of their own oppression. The work demanded of him and his peers functioned as an assertion of state sovereignty over land that up to that time was only uncertainly Canadian.

Of course, Indigenous people did not disappear from the landscape after it was developed. Twenty-five years after my grandfather helped bring “modernity and civilization” to the Crossing, Chief Smallboy, in 1968, led a group of 140 Cree from the Hobbe-ma Reserve to the Kootenay Plains to escape the “Christian education and mass media” transforming Cree life (Botting, 2005, p. 122). Smallboy established a community in the Kootenay Plains along what was then a rutted and seasonal dirt road. The Cree group, like the Wesley band of Nakoda before them, lived at the Kootenay Plains illegally while petitioning the government to set aside an additional reserve. Botting (2005) explains:

This new land could be drawn from the Indian land that the Crown in right of Alberta had claimed illegally – the land that had not fallen under Treaty Six or Treaty Seven – in short, the national parks and the Kootenay Plains. (p. 143)

While living at the Kootenay Plains, Smallboy’s band gathered and hunted in the surrounding lands, reacquainting themselves and the younger generation with Cree traditions. They also supplemented sustenance activities with treaty money from the federal government – the province of Alberta labelled the community a “camp” to avoid supporting them as treaty Indians living off reserve – and, beginning in 1969, by clearing forest upstream from the pending Bighorn Dam. The latter task encouraged the provincial government to continue its “hands-off” approach to the settlement because “it was cheaper to use labour already in place than to ship in work crews from points east who, in all likelihood, would not be happy with the attendant isolation” (Botting, 2005, p. 145).

Cree work in support of the Bighorn Dam caused a rift with the Nakoda, however, who refused to participate in the project. As Botting describes it, the Nakoda “had to live forevermore with the devastating change in the landscape, and their hunting grounds had become seriously altered, if not eradicated, by the dam construction and flooding of the river basin” (p. 145). Consequently, the Nakoda band demanded that Smallboy’s group of Cree move off Nakoda lands. The Smallboy community complied in 1974 by moving 100 km north along the Brazeau River, into Treaty Six territory, where the band remains living off-reserve today. The government of Alberta was pleased to let them go as the dam and the David Thompson Highway were completed shortly thereafter, but it is worth noting that the Cree were not forced away by the Canadian government; they left in acknowledgement of preeminent Nakoda sovereignty. Chief Snow describes the consequences of the dam in stark terms:

a substantial area of the natural habitat has been destroyed as a result of the Bighorn Dam built on the Kootenay Plains by the province and Calgary Power. Much of our traditional hunting grounds lies under a twenty-seven-mile man-made lake.²⁷ Our livelihood from guiding hunters and trapping wildlife has been wiped out by the hydro-electric development, with no consideration for our hunting rights or for compensation or retraining for employment in the new environment. About 95 percent of my people on the Bighorn Reserve have been on welfare since the completion of the dam. (p. 140)

Although I did not know it, such was the context of my life at the Crossing: making Indigenous people invisible in the present through assignation to the past is, after all, central to colonial validation (Byrd, 2011; Lawrence & Dua, 2005, Thobani, 2007). Working the entrance gate along the David Thompson Highway, a fair portion of my job involved dealing with Nakoda people entering the park. Because the Icefields Parkway was

²⁷ The anthropogenic lake is called Abraham Lake, ironically named for Nakoda leader Silas Abraham and one of very few landmarks named after Indigenous people. Poet Bruce Hunter (2000/2010) suggests it was not intended to honour Silas: “[t]he map men kept that one/ thinking it Biblical” (“Two O’Clock,” 15-16).

built by Parks Canada (with imprisoned labour) as a tourist destination rather than a transportation route, anyone who travels the road is required to buy an entry pass. Because the quickest route between the Nakoda Reserves at Bighorn and Morley travels along the Icefields Parkway, it was my frequent duty to explain the regulation and coerce payment from Indigenous people for access to those lands. Exceptions were to be made only when status First Nations had applied for permission to perform religious ceremony within the park boundaries and Parks Canada administrators had approved the application. In that case, I could provide them with a park pass for the duration of the activity, free of charge.²⁸ My job involved controlling and policing access to unceded land dividing the Bighorn and Morley reserves, while that same job enabled me to enjoy the benefits of an unpeopled wilderness for my own adventuring, personal growth and livelihood. I was as much on the frontlines of colonialism as my grandfather.

In Closing

My work and life at the Crossing can be read and told in alignment with the new natives described in Rocky Mountain literature. My grandfather's story troubles the naturalness, justness and hearty masculinity of the pristine park wilderness that lie at the foundation of that literature. And stories of the Bighorn Nakoda and Smallboy Cree contextualize both our stories within a colonialism that is both historical and ongoing. The domestic and domesticating work my grandfather was forced to do claimed the Crossing for the state against Indigenous occupancy and use, and I accessed the wilderness as a prototypical

²⁸ Since 2012, status members of the Stoney Nakoda Nation are eligible to receive a lifetime entry pass, which means they do not require official permission to access parklands. The pass, however, only applies to the Banff Field Unit, which extends as far north as Castle Mountain. The Crossing falls under the Lake Louise, Yoho and Kootenay Field Unit, in which the pass is invalid.

mountain man because of Indigenous expulsion and my role as a state representative in maintaining that exclusion. These stories trouble my own wilderness narratives that validate me in place, making clear the need to identify my access to Banff's wilderness landscapes, as a white male settler, as a privilege born of violence.

When we limit our stories of the park wilderness to the physical labour and adventuring of rugged white men, we obscure the ways those bodies and their experiences are emplaced through the omission or exclusion of others. We are free to celebrate Banff National Park as an ecological preserve and wilderness playground, or to criticize it for the ways it falls short on both counts, without slogging through messy questions of oppression and privilege. To simply affirm my own claim to belong in Banff National Park further naturalizes ongoing processes of colonialism, burying those processes and the people who do not fit the narrative beneath the forest floor.

Chapter 3: Colouring Outside the Lines in Cosmopolitan Banff

In this chapter, I explore physical and cultural landscapes of the Banff townsite through two stories. As in the previous chapter, I present these stories to remedy the narrow particularity of Rocky Mountain literature, and to complicate uninterrogated heteronormativity and whiteness, the divide between a real dangerous wilderness and a false safe urbanity, and notions of permanence in place that neglect positionality relative to structural obstacles that make it harder, if not impossible, for certain people to stay. I also tell these stories in the hopes that they will inform and complicate one another – and also my previous stories – with entanglements of genderqueer sexuality, race, class and nationalism. The first story, drawn from a walking interview to the Bow River Pedestrian Bridge, surveys the highly visible projects of Banff LGBTQ activist Joe Bembridge. The second story explores the experiences of officially designated Temporary Foreign Workers in Banff, built around an interview at Banff Full Gospel Church with Filipina migrant worker Tula Matapang. Together, these stories reveal privileged normativity in dominant portrayals of Banff National Park and the violence such privilege enacts on those who do not conform, as well as the creative ways Banff's normativity is challenged and disrupted, internally, in everyday life.

“We Don’t Have to be Natural”: Queering Banff with Joe Bembridge

It is a warm and sunny afternoon in early May, and I am waiting to meet Joe at a single-lot park on Banff Avenue. I have arrived early because I took the city bus that now runs every hour between Banff and Canmore, where I live and where Joe and I grew up around each other, about 20 km southeast of here. Each bus is decaled entirely with an

image of grizzlies in a meadow, elk in a pasture, wolves in a snowy forest, mountain goats on a cliff side or, as with the bus I rode in on, bighorn sheep resting on rocks. The decal that depicts a wildlife scene to the onlooker outside is also a window shade that obscures the view of the mountains and any actual wildlife the bus riders might see. The certainty of the representation is privileged over the chance of the real thing.

There used to be a gas bar where I am sitting, but more than a decade ago Parks Canada reclaimed the commercial lease it had granted to the service station. At the time, the agency expressed plans to re-acquire much of the block to build an environmental education centre along Banff's main drag. Those plans seem to be hibernating. Parks Canada has decided against revoking other leaseholds, although the agency states plans to "continue the assembly of lands" along this block for "development of facilities that enhance the connection of visitors in downtown Banff to the rest of the national park, and that foster knowledge and understanding of the ecology and human history of Banff National Park" (Parks Canada, 2010, p. 74). In other words, Parks Canada hopes to evoke the park's wilderness ecology in Banff's urban core to remind the town's millions of visitors of the surrounding undeveloped landscape they might be forgiven for not noticing while passing from shopping mall to movie theatre to Irish pub. Parks Canada would like visitors to re-attach the suffix "national park" to their holiday in Banff.

As I read captions on a small kiosk co-sponsored by Parks Canada, Banff Lake Louise Tourism and Banff Heritage Tourism – stories about visitors' expectations of adventure and splendour met and exceeded – a five-man French Canadian busker band, complete with saxophone and didgeridoo, provides the background score to my reading. They play barefoot to a quite substantial group of teenage girls recording on their phones.

In Banff, this scene is as certain a sign that summer is coming as the first crocus. Joe arrives smiling, as usual.

Joe's father, Bruce, was (and is) a well-known teacher, naturalist and guide in the Central Rockies who taught his kids to find rodent bones in owl pellets for fun and instructed them in the kind of camping that does not allow for toilet paper. Today, Bruce is a hiking and cross-country ski guide, part of the Mountain Heritage Program at the Chalet Lake Louise, which pays homage to the Swiss guides employed by earlier editions of the Chalet between 1899 and 1954. Often enough, Bruce suits that lineage. As one "wellness travel" blogger writes, "guide Bruce Bembridge looks the part: he carries a large pack loaded with rescue gear and a wide-brimmed Pony Stetson style hat, adopted by the area's mountain guides at the turn of the century" (Matyas, n.d.).

Joe is not his father, but is no less embedded in Banff. Joe started Banff Pride in 2013, which turned out to be the second most profitable night ever at a local cowboy bar despite a manager refusing to advertise for it. He teaches English at the library, mainly to the children of migrant workers. He works in the Canada House Gallery. He teaches drama at Banff Community High School. He leads dance classes for kids and adults. He is a human resources and floor manager at a new camping-themed restaurant on Banff Avenue. He plans events under the banner Banff Drag Academy and performs as Miss Ellen Q, supported by her all-woman troupe of backup dancers, the Pumas.²⁹

²⁹ The puma/cougar connotations are rich. *Cougar* often refers to an "older" woman "on the prowl" for sexual encounters with (mostly) young men, while *puma* is a less common variation referring to a younger "cougar in training." However, women increasingly claim these terms as an assertion and validation of older women's sexuality in social contexts that more often mock or deny the existence of such desire (Montemurro & Siefken, 2014). In terms of Banff wildlife, puma is a synonym for cougar, or mountain lion, a large predatory wildcat whose native range includes Banff National Park. Cougars are seldom seen in Banff because they are nocturnal/crepuscular (active at night as well as dawn and dusk, like their human parallels). Nonetheless, there are an estimated six to eight cougars living in the vicinity of Banff townsite and predatory behaviour towards humans is more common than one might expect (Derworiz, 2013). In Banff,

As Joe and I begin our walk, I am reminded of poet Charles Noble's (2001) obscure "counter-novel" *hearth wild / post cardiac banff*, which depicts Banff as a strange party town with too much alcohol, regular threat of macho violence, and little reason for restraint. The characters are mostly writers and musicians who, like the novel itself, lack narrative arc. Things simply happen, often out of sequence, and are reflected on by the characters through philosophical reference to the likes of Hegel, Plato, Schopenhauer, Gramsci and Tim Lilburn, with no conclusions and only intermittent action. Like many of the books discussed earlier, *hearth wild* is populated by Banff residents new and old but, rather uniquely, the novel's action is almost entirely concentrated – absent regret or apology – within the townsite. The characters belong to Banff through friendships and acquaintances with other people – including "educated and independent women" (p. 150) – rather than lonely peaks and threatening wildlife. Their bonds have built up through bodybuilding, poetry and musical performances rather than first ascents or rescue efforts, and through visiting and working at pubs, hotels and the Banff Centre for the Arts rather than Parks Canada. The few experiences of the wilderness landscape for Tain, one of the central characters, include being "bejesusly crucified" by a straightforward backpacking trip to Helmet Falls in Kootenay National Park (p. 157) and the "only one year really, that Tain downhill skied" (p. 224). Yet, in the Town of Banff, Tain is a "regular" who at one point plays guide to a fictionalized Sid Marty, "tak[ing] him around to the watering holes Sid, as a married man, wasn't familiar with" (p. 155). As the townie plays insider guide to the out-of-place mountain man, Noble disrupts the monolithic picture of Banff localness by exploring the decidedly urban and sexually undefined lives that Banff enables.

identifying dancers, who are definitively *not* performing in the service of the male gaze, as "pumas" naturalizes empowered female sexuality within the *nature* of Banff National Park, the cougar's home territory.

Joe is even less like Tain than I am like Sid Marty, but the relative privilege given to our bodies, experiences and knowledge in the park landscape means Marty and I are rarely positioned as the guided. There are connotations of *tourist* against which I rebel, but I *am* a tourist here. Joe's Banff is not my own and that fact is abundantly clear as soon as we begin walking together. I have yet to finish summarizing the purpose of my research when a town official starts a conversation. A half block onward we are stopped by a young woman walking her dog. We are greeted by several older couples as we chat. Joe, it seems, knows everyone, and everyone knows Joe. And these folks are not generally passing with a casual wave. Each of them has something to ask him about: performing drag at roller derby, hiring for the restaurant, choreographing doctors dancing to "Uptown Funk" for an SPCA fundraiser. No one mentions hiking or mountaineering.

As we approach the Bow River Pedestrian Bridge, the place he has chosen as our destination, Joe describes the concerns he had in returning to the Bow Valley in 2009. Aside from the childhood memories of roughing it with his family, Joe does not speak fondly of Canmore. He recalls friendships broken by harsh rumours of his sexuality, and a principal nixing his character from a stage production with the insistence that "we don't talk about sexuality in the school." As a teenager, Joe experienced Canmore as a violent place indicative of conservative small town Alberta. After leaving high school "in a dark place," Joe "split up with Canmore" and moved to Montreal where he studied theatre and established himself as a working actor. Despite his success in Montreal and his earlier experiences in Canmore, Joe felt a draw to the Bow Valley that he did not understand. Coming back was more difficult than he makes it appear today:

When I left Montreal it was kind of like a turning point where I was like, okay I've got this acting career, I'm doing really good. I'm not making a

lot of money but that's the reality of the art. But I was just like, I don't want to be here anymore. I wasn't feeling it. It didn't feel like home. I never felt at home in Montreal even though I was living there for seven years. [...] When I first got back [to the Bow Valley] it was actually more of a crisis where I was like, did I just lead everything in my life up to that moment in Montreal, and doing university and being a part of the theatre scene and all those things, and then just walked away from it? [...] I remember being on my mom's balcony and I was like, is this it? Did I just totally fucking walk away from everything that I was leading towards?

The day before our walkabout, Joe gave a presentation to students at the Banff High School. He describes an open question and answer session in which his intention was to demystify homosexuality, to make visible a queer presence in the lives of young students who might otherwise feel isolated as he had felt. When asked what a Pride is, each group of students answered with a variation of "a celebration of the LGBTQ community":

I loved that they said the word *celebration*. [...] I told them, I've never been someone who was like, "Gay rights! Gay power!" [...] But in the Bow Valley I've fallen into this role. I didn't ask for it. It's become my thing. And I just have to work within it.

In his reluctant activism, Joe identifies the impetus of his return:

Talking to the students, I'm like, it used to be all about me: oh, I'm going to audition for this, and oh, this is my show, and oh, this is what I'm working towards. And I find, every couple months that I've been here longer and kind of figure out my place, that it's less about me and it's more about others. And I'm not somebody that's like, "Oh, charity," or "Oh, change the world" or whatever, so when I was doing these talks and I was talking about how – now my involvement within the drama program at Banff High School and Banff Pride and things like that – it's about allowing *others* to appreciate, allowing *others* to express themselves, allowing *others* to feel comfortable.

The wooden Bow River Pedestrian Bridge is only four metres wide but 113 metres long. When Joe and I arrive it is busy with joggers, dog walkers and tourists. A man in hip waders is fly-fishing immediately upstream. To the north, the pathway and residential streets provide a clearing through the forest and a postcard view of snowy Cascade

Mountain. After flowing 100 km from its headwaters, entirely within Banff National Park, the water flowing under the bridge is clear and (relatively) clean, moving slowly in the moments before plunging over Bow Falls beneath the Banff Springs Hotel. Joe tells me that, because he no longer hikes and camps (or competes in biathlon, as he did as a child), this is where he encounters nature, where the other-than-human aspects of Banff are inescapable, and where he sheds the occasional frustration of constant social negotiations. This busy pedestrian bridge over the glacial river is Joe's healing immersion in nature, a version of wilderness where he can be *comfortable* and *safe*. Rocky Mountain literature insists that those two notions are antagonistic to the true nature of Banff National Park, but the (hetero-masculine) wilderness presents additional and more pressing discomforts and risks to the queer body. Joe's sense of wellbeing in nature at the bridge rather than the backwoods campground can thus be read as a distinctly queer natureculture.

The Bow River Pedestrian Bridge is also a source of controversy. Opened on July 2, 2013, the bridge was designed to serve three primary functions as a scenic pedestrian crossing, a secondary emergency vehicle route when the only other bridge is congested with traffic (read: much of the time), and a disguised support for elevated sewage lines needed to replace the corroding ones under the river. Some residents on the relatively quiet south bank of the Bow argued at the time of the bridge's approval in 2012 that they had been inadequately consulted on the \$6 million project, and challenged that it would increase traffic, noise, and litter. After the bridge's installation, south bank resident Iris Christou filed a \$2 million lawsuit against the Town of Banff, still outstanding, arguing that the smell of sewage, loss of privacy, and increased number of transient people over-nighting beneath or near the bridge have diminished her property values and compro-

mised enjoyment of her residence. More recently, nearby residents have urged the municipality to close the bridge at night, or at least dim its LED lights, to mitigate party noise (Ellis, 2015). Designers boast that the bridge increased foot traffic over the Bow River by 60% in its first year (Mah, 2014) and a municipal report shortly after the bridge's opening cited an average of 131 pedestrians per hour on summer weekdays and 150 per hour on weekends, with a single-hour high of 763 (Husdal, 2014).

There is perhaps no infrastructure more obviously suggesting metaphor than a bridge, and perhaps no more appropriate metonym for the Town of Banff than a new bridge that is both tremendously popular and vehemently protested. Where development so often happens against the wishes of long-term residents (Christou has lived in Banff for more than 50 years), any change is likely to be viewed as a threat, but Joe's affection for the bridge reflects his insistence that Banff is necessarily a dynamic community with fluid identity, a place where new physical and social bridges are always being built. Joe knows the violence the old-time mountain town enacts on queer bodies – he grew up with it and was, like unknown others, forced to flee from it – and it is Banff's tendency to change, and Joe's ability to facilitate new connections, that enable his intimate relationship with this place.

Joe and I leave the bridge and walk northwest through another municipal park, Central Park, where Joe stops to mock the new public washrooms, sharing a version of Christou's frustration with municipal decisions that prioritize visitors over residents. "My apartment is, like, one twelfth the size of that thing," he says, making reference to the zero vacancy rate in the town's property rental market and the crisis of affordable housing. We continue along the Bow River following a public pathway, which Joe calls his second

favourite spot in Banff. The town was centrally planned in the early 1900s around the artery of Banff Avenue, which was cut to provide the perfect view of Cascade Mountain that the new bridge effectively duplicates. On the north side of the Bow River, planners laid out the perfect grid pattern around Banff Avenue, following rationalist urban design popular at the time and leaving much of the Bow River awkwardly obscured by hotels and houses. The riverside trail remains curiously underutilized, making for an easy escape from Banff's crowded downtown streets.

In 1997, Lorie Millan and Shauna Dempsey performed *Lesbian National Parks and Services* in Banff. Developed at the Banff Centre, the art piece required the two women to pass as park wardens while depicting lesbian people and wildlife in the distinct media of parks interpretation and brochures. The performance reassigned the warden's heteromale authority onto (white) female and queer bodies, and naturalized homosexuality in the authoritative languages of wildlife biology and natural history. Joe, instead of appropriating the authority of the warden, disregards it. In blonde wig, tight dress, bright red high heels, thick eyelashes and dark lipstick, strutting down Banff Avenue with glamorous backup dancers while lip-syncing to "Call Me Maybe" – as Miss Ellen Q does in a YouTube video (Bembridge, 2014) – Joe offers up an opposite to the stoic and stolid mountain man persona repurposed by Millan and Dempsey. By embodying nonconventional gender expression, Joe sheds light on the heteronormative and masculinist particularity of identity in Banff National Park. Joe tells me that the mayor of Canmore once introduced Miss Ellen Q, seated at the time beside Banff Mayor Karen Sorensen, as "the second most powerful woman in Banff," a title received only half-jokingly. The wardens may claim the backwoods, Joe implies, but the Town of Banff belongs to Miss Ellen Q.

In presenting gender and sexual non-conformity as powerful and empowering in the Banff community, Joe helps open possibilities for others as well:

One woman, after one of my [dance] classes at the Banff Centre, she said, “I’m a hiker, I’m a mom, I’ve lived in the Bow Valley for six years, I fish, I do all this.” She’s like, “this is the first time that I’ve felt sexy *in years*.” And I looked at her [...] and I was like, “Yes!” Because living within this realm, to be fabulous [...] is kind of like, “Oh, that’s weird,” like you should be wearing your MEC pants and fucking hiking boots and don’t put hair products in and don’t wear makeup and don’t use moisturizer and, you know, be *natural*. And it’s like, “No, we don’t *have* to be natural.”

The “Banff uniform” that Joe describes is a version of masculine utilitarianism that is so pervasive as to foreclose other, more classically feminine or urbane expressions of gender, sexuality and desire. The ways that this normative presentation is associated with notions of natural – largely through wilderness pursuits – has negative ramifications for bodies and behaviours often considered unnatural. As Eli Clare (1999/2009, 2014) illustrates, “unnatural” works with “abnormal” to connote brokenness in need of repair or punishment. When applied to queer, disabled or racialized bodies the notion validates a range of invasive, dehumanizing and violent social and physical interventions. Yet, as Joe is convinced – and as the woman in his dance class exemplifies – Banff is far less normative than the uniform suggests. Joe insists that Banff is “the most cosmopolitan small town in the world,” a consequence of its high numbers of transient labourers and tourists made up of urbanites from around the world, as well as high cultural institutions like the Banff Centre and the town’s many museums and art galleries. At one point in our wanderings Joe recalls the “one Filipino family” and the “two Black families” in Canmore when we were growing up, whereas “Banff is, like, *half* Filipino now.” Nonetheless, an old image of Banff persists, and the town’s residents feel the pressure to live up to it.

I think it comes down to identity. What is the identity of a Banffite? What

is the look? What is the style guide? What are the variations? Because I think our look speaks to who we are, and because we're uniformed so much, because we all work in this town, and no matter what industry you work in within Banff, all of our industries are about pleasing people that are coming to see us. So we either dress a part, or play a part, or wear a uniform that speaks to our place in tourism.

In 1990 John Urry adapted Laura Mulvey's articulation of the male gaze to tourism and recreation studies, arguing that tourism manufactures "authentic" experiences when visitors encounter their own expectations of their host community, often rooted in simple and even negative stereotypes. Urry argues that host communities often respond by meeting the visitors' expectations in order to provide the authenticating experiences that draw them in (like the bus window shade *depicting* wildlife while obscuring the possibility of seeing *actual* wildlife). What Banff looks like, then, indicates how outsiders desire to encounter it, not necessarily what Banffites desire for themselves. Tourists understand Banff to be a place of heterosexual rugged men and (sometimes) their female partners, in part because cultural representations continue to depict it that way, and Banff finds ways to present itself accordingly through corporate uniforms and social pressure.

One of the ironies here is that the exclusive pressures of park tourism increase incentive for residents to present themselves as "authentic" to place. After all, Bruce Bembridge's capacity to "look the part" in his Stetson is elemental to his appeal as a trail guide and naturalist, and without that job he would be legally unable to reside in Banff National Park. The Stetson recalls past mountain guides and contemporary wardens, whereas an actual warden performing an actual alpine rescue – as Sid Marty (1999) describes – is called "a French queer" if he wears a beret instead (p. 155). The insult makes the queer foreign and the foreign queer, distancing both in a racialized example of what the late Eve Sedgwick (1985) identified as "queer panic." Sedgwick argued that homo-

phobic comments distance *homosociality* – the desire for all-male social groups like those deemed appropriate to wilderness – from *homosexuality*. And yet, as Miss Ellen Q, in dance sessions, in school presentations and drama classes, Joe is arguing that queer is as much Banff as it is French. Knowing that Banff can be queer alters our reading of those homosocial spheres with queer possibilities of “a continuum of desires” (Hammarén & Johansson, 2014, p. 4).

Even so, the tensions of self-representation remain. In his newest job, Joe has been helping design and staff a new restaurant called Park Distillery, a concept Joe explains has been built around “the history of the park” and the campfire as “what has always brought people together.” Joe describes pork and beans cooked on an open flame in an open kitchen, with picnic tables, enamel dishes and boxed wine or canned beer, intended to invoke outfitting trips and mountaineering camps.³⁰ Among other tasks, Joe has had to design uniforms for the wait staff that reflect contemporary impressions of historical Banff National Park (the masculine utilitarianism Joe was critiquing moments ago) while being attractive to wealthy customers *and* meeting Joe’s personal vision of empowering non-conformity.

Much later, I look into the newly opened Park Distillery and see trimly cut plaid shirts tucked into cuffed jeans and vintage-looking hiking boots. It is difficult not to think that “lumbersexuals,” socalled for carefully (and expensively) manicuring a ruggedly masculine appearance, designed the new Banff uniform before Joe could get a crack at it. Even so, for all its problematic appropriations of (white) working class utilitarianism towards (white) middle-class consumption-oriented identity, the lumbersexual aesthetic

³⁰ For me, Joe’s description brings to mind the enamel cookware and rusty food tins my mother and I dug up in the forest at the overgrown site of my grandfather’s labour camp. A very different dining experience, to be sure, but no less essentially Banff than guided camps.

openly sexualizes the woodsman whose asexual pose in homosocial spaces has been central to keeping accusations of homosexual desire at bay. Peter Boag (2011) uncovers how hard lines between hetero- and homosexuality in the frontier west (and their performance through strictly gendered clothing) emerged at a specific historical moment, but have been naturalized through subsequent depictions of insistently heterosexual frontiersmen. Boag documents a long and fluid history of cross-dressing in the American frontier, which inverts common understandings of queer emergence from the polluted city with the insistence that heteronormativity in iconic characters like “the mountain man” is the more recent and manufactured phenomenon. Aspiring to embody both historical Banff and transgressive glamour, Joe’s work with Banff might be understood as similar to his work with individual residents: it is less about making Banff fabulous than helping Banff uncover and express the fabulousness (and queerness) it has been pretending not to have.

In an earlier conversation, Joe told me that Miss Ellen Q might stroll down Banff Avenue on any given day. “Except weekends,” he said. “I would never do it on a weekend.” My thoughts went immediately to greater vulnerability during the times when residents of nearby communities are most likely to visit en masse. Instead Joe explained: “Living in Banff, you just don’t go downtown on weekends. There are just too many people. It’s not worth it.” I had to scold myself for reading the comment through a queer lens that neglected Joe’s status as a Banffite. Of course he avoids Banff Avenue on weekends; all Banffites do! Joe’s identity as a gay man and drag queen and his identity as a Banffite are the same identity, a melding that upends monolithic and naturalized notions of normative belonging and makes queer visible in Banff National Park.

“Temporary” “Foreign” “Worker”: Seeking Home with Tula Matapang

In interrogating uses of the warden/ranger as an iconic character in Banff National Park, Margot Francis (2011) revisits Millan and Dempsey’s *Lesbian National Parks and Services*. Francis suggests that the performative appropriation of authority ascribed to the heterosexual masculine park warden onto queer female bodies relies on the naturalized authority attached to the performers’ whiteness: “racialized artists would not have been able to draw on a ‘benign’ visual repertoire of Park Rangers in anything like the same manner” (p. 125). The disjunction between (assumed) white Canadian nature and a person of colour representing national park wilderness would be too disruptive for the queer body to pass as an authority, a truth that exposes the fallacy of “post-racial” Canadian multiculturalism (cf. Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2007, Mackey, 2002).

Miss Ellen Q likewise operates in this racially privileged space. I ask Joe if he thinks the mostly positive response to his work in Banff is linked to the privilege ascribed to “those who are from here.” Like an old-fashioned Banffite, he plays down the significance of Canmore within Banff’s peculiar social milieu, instead stressing his involvement in the community as the path to acceptance. Nonetheless, as Joe works against homophobic narratives of place to subvert norms of gender and sexuality in Banff, he benefits from his intersecting privileges of race and citizenship, including in the many avenues of engagement available to him. Even if Joe “had no roots in Banff” as a child, as he emphasizes, he inhabits a white body and possesses a Canadian (Rockies) birth certificate that make him (more) acceptable as a visible representative of the Banff community, just as those same characteristics do for me. This is not to say that Joe embraces whiteness; in Banff Drag Academy, he draws a diverse group of queens to Banff and through his work

as an ESL teacher he helps bridge racialized migrant and majority white resident communities. However, it is important to acknowledge that Joe inhabits a body that is, to an obviously constrained degree, both narratively and legally at home in Banff.

When Joe tells me that Miss Ellen Q is “the second most powerful woman in Banff,” I admire the openness to new narratives of place and belonging that such a reputation reflects and might mobilize in the future. I also wonder about the women who are not considered for that title, who are invisible in such conversations. In particular, I think of the migrant workers whose children Joe teaches, and who are often defined by their temporariness, foreignness, and “outside” labour status in ways that enforce and legitimize their out-of-placeness and help maintain Banff – and Canada – as a white terrain.

Arranging to meet with Tula has been difficult.³¹ In Banff, a hotel worker’s spring is like a bear’s autumn: hurriedly preparing for a season they just hope to survive. Tula has been left responsible for her entire department, including drafting weekly staff schedules, while her boss is on vacation. She has been working full days, everyday, trying to ensure the employees beneath her receive fair compensation that she, no doubt, will not. I assumed that many of the employees were Filipina, but mostly they are Japanese, along with Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, Canadian and Swedish. Usually, Tula explains, “they work for a few months, and then they will travel again or go back to their own country,” a quite different experience of mobility and work than hers, as she goes on to describe.

With little time off, Tula invites me to a church barbeque and suggests that we

³¹ Tula chose to be identified by a pseudonym out of concern for her relationship with employers and the provincial and federal governments, any of who could derail her efforts to stay in Banff, or even in Canada. The likelihood of that happening for Tula is extremely low, but the impact could be enormous. Furthermore, her fear regarding the immigration process is validated by her experience thus far, as this story will detail. In the context, it is in Tula’s interest to be less visible. Joe is in the opposite position. With the legal backing of the state in the form of human rights legislation and Canadian citizenship, visibility may decrease the likelihood that Joe will face overt homophobic threat or discrimination.

speaking afterwards. It is a slight departure from the walking interview I had planned, but the point of the walking interview was to interact with the social and physical landscape of the participant's community and identify places to which the participant feels connected. For Tula, those objectives are met at Banff Full Gospel Church.

For much of my life Banff Full Gospel Church met the same criteria for me. In fact, I was very nearly born there. My mother was in the front pew when her water broke and we were rushed to the hospital. We were back in that pew together as soon as possible, as the Banff Full Gospel community was a central part of my upbringing. I remember a lot of changes for a small church. For a time there was a large and excitable youth group and for a while I was the congregation's only teenager. Our assemblies were very international, drawn from vacationers, seasonal workers and those coming from afar to make Banff home. Since at least the early 1990s the building has been shared with the Japanese Grace Church, which holds services early on Sunday mornings. My parents, who remain leaders in the church, increasingly stand out in a church body that is predominantly Filipino and Jamaican.

There are 50 or so people at the barbeque, gathered on lawn chairs in the church's small back yard. Just behind the makeshift pulpit – a music stand in the grass – is a chain link fence, and beyond that the Whiskey Creek wetlands, famously home to the maunder grizzly bear that Sid Marty named Sticky-Mouth. The musicians and speakers escalate their volume periodically to overcome CPR cargo trains roaring and rattling past 50 metres away. The kids playing in the grass are Jamaican, the song leader is Filipino, the pastor's wife is Cree, the visitors are from Saskatchewan and the magpie hopping around the yard is blue and white and black. We eat slow-roasted pulled pork sandwiches and boiled

hot dogs on the cheapest possible paper plates. I have short conversations with people I have never met and people I have known since I was born. I know this is Tula's down-time, so I wait until she approaches me and says, "perhaps now we can talk." Because it is loud and crowded, we go into the empty church to speak on an old pew.

Tula is from a town just south of Manila, where she lived with her husband and three children while working in customer service with a major telecommunications company. The job was stable with good benefits, but not very high paying. She did not seek out a migrant opportunity but, when a co-worker told Tula about an agency that was recruiting people to work in Canada, she applied. After initial approval she spent a month in a classroom, training for life and work in a foreign country, and developed a profile for prospective employers in Canada. Tula could have been sent anywhere in Canada but was hired by a hotel in Banff. "It wasn't my choice, but they chose me to be one of their housekeepers," she tells me.

While I was in the immigration in the Vancouver airport, of course they asked me, "What are you going to do here?" "I'm going to work." "Where?" "In Banff," and so they said, "Oh, that's a very beautiful place!" So I was like, "Really?" Because I don't have any idea.

Another applicant in Tula's recruitment program once showed her photos of the Rockies, which was all she knew of Banff before she arrived in 2008. When she first saw the mountains, she thought, "Oh, I'm blessed to be here, in a place like this one." The landscape is at least part of the reason she wants to bring her family to Canada, "to see the beauty of Banff." Later she tells me, "but it's not only the beauty of Banff that made me stay. It's actually the church family. I found in this Full Gospel Church forever-family, so I really, really thank God that I was able to find this church."

By the time she was hired, Tula's employer would have already applied to the

Canadian government for the right to hire staff through the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program. In order to hire a TFW who is not excepted through a multinational trade agreement like NAFTA, employers must demonstrate that they have first tried to hire Canadian citizens or permanent residents at the “prevailing rate” of remuneration. Prospective employers must show that the domestic market cannot meet their labour demand so Canadian workers would not be negatively impacted by imported labour. The process, now known as a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA), is undertaken by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), and distinguishes the TFW program from other migrant labour permits. Generally, an LMIA is applicable only to the position and employer cited in the application, which means the employee is effectively bound to her employer but the obligation does not flow in the opposite direction. This context is often compared to indentured servitude, leaving TFWs highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Hill, 2014). As stated by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC, 2015), the TFW program “is designed to help employers fill short-term gaps in Canada’s labour market” rather than serve as an avenue for long-term immigration, although CIC insists that “[m]ost TFWs have the opportunity to apply for permanent residence if that is their desire, and limiting the amount of time they may work in Canada with a temporary status [currently four years on one-year permits] encourages them to do so” (para. 10). The TFW program inspires extreme ambivalence in government, business, labour and migrant communities. Consequently, the federal government is constantly changing program rules and regulations to suit the political needs of the moment, making it easier, then more difficult, then easier, then more difficult to hire or keep TFWs.

It is migrant workers themselves who suffer the highest cost of such uncertainty.

High profile cases in which Canadian citizens have lost jobs – as when the Royal Bank of Canada replaced resident professionals with TFWs from India – or when employers seemingly design job descriptions to discourage Canadians from applying – as when HD Mining International advertised the need for 200 Mandarin-fluent workers – have periodically stirred opposition to the program from both the Left and the Right. For instance, when 2012 legislation permitted wages for TFWs to be 15% lower than those of their Canadian counterparts, the Alberta Federation of Labour (ALF, 2013) argued that paying TFWs at or below minimum wage necessarily means employers are not increasing wages to attract domestic applicants, as the market would otherwise require. Jason Kenney, then-Minister of Employment and Social Development, agreed with ALF, famously posting a series of tweets angrily dismissive of his own TFW program and accusing it of increasing unemployment (Tencer, 2014). Strange bedfellows, indeed, but also the predictable outcome of a system that legally differentiates, even *within* the nation-state, between Canadians and Others: “The result is the subordination of all those who can be rendered ‘foreign’ and an intensification of competition between workers, both globally and within nationalized spaces” (Sharma, 2006, p. 5). The official two-tiered wage system was revoked in 2014 and the process for acquiring an LMIA was decelerated. With the incentive to hire and keep TFWs reduced, many were sent home or saw applications rejected by ESDC, applications businesses had recruited them to submit. Tula speaks of a co-worker in the Philippines who left a secure job to take a TFW position in Canada, hoping he could bring his family. He was sent back when the government revoked his employer’s LMIA. His previous job in the Philippines was no longer available.

Tula arrived in Canada at a difficult time. The 2008 economic crisis had just begun,

and Banff's visitation numbers would not recover until 2012. Contrary to the program's official mandate, growing unemployment rates in the general population coincided with growing numbers of TFW applications from employers finding approval with ESDC. Between 2006 and 2009, the number of TFWs in Banff grew from 805 to 1,760. The last available statistics, from 2011, put the number at 1,375 (Foubert, 2014a):

After two years here, there was an economic crisis, and so something went wrong with the processing of my papers and then I had to look for another job. And then I was hired at the time in Calgary, so I stayed in Calgary for one year. As compared to Banff, of course, Calgary has all the, you know, malls, groceries, Wal-Marts, Superstores, everything. I really enjoyed Calgary because of the malls, because I'm really... back in the Philippines we have big malls, so I really enjoyed the malls. *But*, you know, I went back to Banff because this is where my friends are, this is where my church is and, while I enjoyed Calgary, I cannot compare it to Banff, because this is really my home away from home.

Tula came back to Banff when she was offered another job on another TFW permit. She notes, however, that part of her motivation for returning to Banff related to the particularities of the LMIA: her position in Calgary was classified as retail, which meant her employer, unlike those in the housekeeping and hospitality category, could not nominate her for permanent residency.

In April 2014, the federal government enacted a moratorium on TFW permits for food services across Canada "as a result of serious allegations of abuse of the [program]" (ESDC, 2014a, para. 1). The moratorium meant an industry-wide freeze on hiring or renewing permits for TFWs, jeopardizing thousands of migrant workers in Canada whose permits were set to expire. Because the moratorium applied to food services and came into effect in the early spring, tourism businesses in Banff argued that they would be unable to fill their summer positions and would have to shorten business hours at debilitating cost. Media, politicians and business groups in Banff stressed that the moratorium "has

caught the local tourism industry off guard” (Ellis, 2014a, para. 1) and “unfairly treats compliant businesses the same way as those who violate program policy” (Ellis, 2014c, para. 2), while only occasionally noting that, “[i]n many cases, temporary foreign workers don’t talk because they fear repercussions” (para. 9). In late June, ESDC ended the moratorium, with new amendments: no LMIA approvals in areas with high unemployment and a cap on TFWs at 10% of an employer’s workforce. “The cap sends an important message – temporary foreign workers cannot be used as a business model and employers must do more to recruit, hire and train Canadians,” ESDC (2014b) explains. “This measure will help drive down the overall number of low-wage temporary foreign workers in Canada and end the distortion in the labour market caused by their prevalence in some sectors and regions” (p. 10). The problem, according to the ESDC, is two-fold: exceptional, unscrupulous businesses that abuse the *program* (not much is said about abuse of *workers*) and apparently overwhelming swarms of TFWs. As Nandita Sharma (2006) argues federally and Jason Foster and Bob Barnetson (2015) argue regarding Alberta, casting migrants as the source of the problem allows business and government to avoid questions regarding validity of the program, its business-oriented objectives, and white conceptions of Canadian space. Making racialized migrant workers narratively and legally foreign – definitively *not* at home – helps validate Canada’s self-interested and economically utilitarian treatment of them. Yixuan Wang and Li Zong (2014) identify “temporary,” “foreign,” and “menial labourer” as “stigmatized identities” that accumulate to deem migrants disposable, appropriate for work that is “dirty, dangerous and demanding,” as well as beneath the aspirations of socially mobile (white) Canadians (p. 8).

Most of the potentially evicted migrant workers in Banff managed to stay, but not

all. To the business and political communities in Banff – those comfortably “at home” in Canada – the problem was resolved and dropped from the news cycle. New migrants filled vacant positions but those deported lost forever the life they had been building.

I really feel bad about my friends who have been here, who have invested, you know, years of their lives here, hoping that one day they can, um, their family can also come here. But because of the economic situation and the government rules and regulations, I really feel sad. [...] I have, you know, two, three friends, who are really close to me. Two of them have already gone home and one is going home. One of them has been with me for the last seven years of my life in Banff, and she’s leaving. You know, I really feel bad that that has happened. [...] I’m just praying and hoping that the government will, you know, see things – I cannot say, “from the proper perspective,” of course – will see things *differently* some day.

After six years on TFW permits, Tula applied for permanent residency through the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program (AINP), a joint program of the provincial government and CIC. AINP, however, requires applicants to maintain both a valid work permit and a positive LMIA during application and assessment. In January 2015 Tula’s work permit renewal was denied. She reapplied using her nomination certificate but, unable to work and uncertain of the state of her permanent residency application, Tula again faced the very real possibility that she would be forced to leave the country:

For a while I thought, is this really God’s plan for me to stay, or to go home? But then the government granted *still* my work permit so it is really God’s plan for me to stay. But I still feel so bad and sad about some of my friends going home. They had to go home to the Philippines because of, you know, how strict the government is right now.

When Tula’s AINP nomination is finalized – she is approved and in the second phase of processing – she will gain permanent residency for herself, her husband and her youngest daughter, the only one of her three children considered a dependent at the time of her ap-

plication.³² She is not worried about her oldest daughter, who is married and lives in Colorado, but hurts for her son who will stay in the Philippines. “I feel bad,” she says,

because I sacrificed a lot for six, seven years, to be away from them, hoping that one day we can all be together, but then I can not take him. So I am hoping there will be other programs that we can apply for him to, like, be a tourist here. I don’t know if I can still sponsor him, I don’t know for sure about the government programs.

More than once in our conversation, Tula calls Banff “my home away from home.”

It is a phrase one sometimes hears in Rocky Mountain resort communities, most often spoken by second home owners or people who regularly vacation here. In Tula’s case, she is articulating a *sense* of home that is multiple, that holds a tense relationship to mobility (she has come a long way but is tightly constrained as a TFW), and that reflects the limitations of belonging within a context that defines her as “temporary” and therefore disposable. There are many reasons why Banff is Tula’s home *away* from home, including the distance from her family and her position in a society that enforces temporariness then uses it as a weapon against her. The largest lettering on the cover of ESDC’s (2014b) update on the TFW program boasts: “**PUTTING CANADIANS FIRST.**” This hard distinction between TFWs and Canadians is replicated locally, and TFWs are dehumanized, when newspaper coverage decries the loss of TFW *positions* for “local” businesses but neglects the experiences of TFW *people* who remain “foreign.”³³

Gaining permanent residency, in addition to reuniting (three-fifths of) her family, will certainly improve Tula’s position relative to the Canadian state and capital, but pow-

³² At the time Tula submitted her AINP application the age of dependency was up to 21 years old, the age of her youngest daughter. Since then, her daughter turned 22 and the age of dependency was reduced to 19, but Tula has been assured that her application will be judged according to her daughter’s age and the regulations as they stood at the time of her submission.

³³ Foster and Barnettson (2015) argue a similar point regarding Alberta politicians: “international migrant workers are dehumanized by discussing them in solely economic terms and by characterizing them as undesirable workers who pose a threat to Canadian communities [...]. These framings justify their partial citizenship and poor treatment” (p. 126).

erful frameworks of belonging in Banff National Park still work against her. As discussed in this paper's first chapter, Rocky Mountain literature claims belonging for certain bodies through long-term spiritual lineages and masculine work in remote wilderness. While Rumi, in *Hooker & Brown*, earns his place in an established lineage that runs through similarly situated historical bodies from David Thomson to A.P. Coleman, Tula is a recent and racialized immigrant from a distant country whose recognized lineage – spiritual and otherwise – is elsewhere. While Sid Marty's sweat seeps into the soil to nourish the wildflowers, Tula's is captured by layers of carpet, concrete and wood framing. Tula's status as a "permanent resident" rather than a "temporary worker" do little to make her less "foreign" in a context that sees her work as only appropriate someplace else. While Kevin Van Tighem insists that knowing and accepting the dangerous potential of the mountain landscape is central to "becoming native," and Graeme Pole asserts that the only obstacles to wilderness access are fitness and will, Tula is excluded by work requirements from the parts of the mountain landscape deemed dangerous in Rocky Mountain literature. At the same time, she is exposed to the much more pervasive and political risk of deportation. State-sanctioned bodies never need to think about that type of risk, and by negating it in their writing they mask and enable this violence. Tula's story exposes how naturalized standards of belonging in Rocky Mountain literature rely on and reinforce sexist, racist and xenophobic place-based identities in a way that makes other stories appear impossible. Yet, Tula's story is no less particular to Banff, or integral to the community's capacity to reproduce itself, than those written by and about wardens and mountaineers. The livelihoods of those manly men, after all, rely on the underclass of exploited service labour of which Tula is a member. We can see, then, that Banff is narrated ac-

cordova to normativity much more than it achieves it.

At the same time, Banff is still Tula's *home* away from home, where she discovered and built up her "forever-family" and finds comfort in the now familiar beauty of the Rocky Mountains and their unique inhabitants. As we chat in the church pew, several of Tula's friends come inside to wait for her. Others come and go, moving chairs and tables back inside following the barbeque. When we finish, Tula joins them to walk home together, a strong, supportive and established community that has sacrificed to be in Banff far more than will ever be asked of me, with far more precariousness to navigate.

In Closing

Naming Miss Ellen Q's backup dancers the Pumas, leading me to places in town where the specific nonhumanness particular to the Canadian Rockies can reach out most directly, seeking compromise between provocative and invocative in choosing uniforms for the camping-themed restaurant and defending his "beautiful mountain town" against the pollution of fast food litter *and* unflattering pants, Joe expresses an intertwined naturecultural sense of home. At least since 1885, Banff has always been urban and cosmopolitan, but it has likewise always been more-than-human. That combination has enabled Joe to make Banff home, and to at least begin to make queer visible in Banff National Park.

Banff's place in the global economy is also evident, to contradictory effect, in its material reliance on migrant labourers whose position in the Banff community is constrained by the legal, economic and narrative mechanisms of the TFW program, as well as racialized notions of Banff and the Canadian nation. Tula does not demonstrate Joe's more-than-human emplacement in Banff – we speak indoors about all the places and

creatures she has not seen – but Tula’s opportunities to experience such markers of Banffness, and to be seen as belonging in the community and the landscape, are constrained by intersections of class and race enforced by formal legislation that renders her exceptionally vulnerable. Tula’s experience of risk in the Canadian Rockies is profound, and on a register unknown to, and masked by, authors of Rocky Mountain literature.

Joe is actively subverting tropes of Banff identity that are evident in Rocky Mountain literature, and in part he is able to do so because of the ways he remains aligned with *other* expectations of the wilderness and the nation. With no such privileges, Tula performs her work – which is essential to Banff’s tourist economy – and her social life – which is essential to Tula’s own sense of home – in the faded background of Banff’s self-narration. If, as I have argued, Rocky Mountain literature frames belonging around particular and relatively privileged notions of work, permanence, risk and place-based knowledge, Joe and Tula provide very different accounts of how those standards are experienced in Banff from very different and marginalized positions. Evidently, Banff National Park is *not* exclusively home to the hearty, heterosexual white men in Rocky Mountain literature, and acting as though it is only makes it harder for people, who already face a wide range of oppressions and obstacles, to feel secure here.

Conclusion: At Home in Banff National Park

I argue in this paper that Rocky Mountain literature establishes a framework for asserting belonging that resists forces of exclusion within narratives of state and capital, but that such resistance frameworks rely on and further naturalize structural privileges of race, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality and class in the Rocky Mountain Parks. Identifying and unpacking some of the means through which Rocky Mountain literature advances belonging for certain (predominantly white, heterosexual, able-bodied, male and middle-class) bodies, including my own, exposes uninterrogated normativity in the Rocky Mountain Parks and the violent ramifications such standards have for nonconforming people, including those who are Indigenous, racialized, queer, disabled, female or in vulnerable labour categories. Within this context, writing emplaced stories from positions that complicate or contradict institutional and literary narratives of Banff National Park holds potential to: honour those who are challenging or have experienced the violence of emplaced normativity in Banff; model ways of writing Banff National Park that expose rather than bury the socio-political complexity and latent violence of wilderness and urban locations in the park, without abandoning efforts to recognize the intricacy of more-than-human co-creation; and provide a baseline for writers of the Rocky Mountain Parks, a call to pursue a literature of environmental justice that actually *does justice* with people and place in Banff National Park.

Robert Sandford (2008), in seeking means to fortify against processes of gentrification that threaten people like me, urges residents of the Canadian Rockies to tell place-based stories that identify role model characters as guides to becoming native. Evidently, that project is well underway, but it espouses a resistance narrative that replicates vio-

lence against bodies less privileged than my own. This paper therefore involves reassessing my own claims on a landscape I love, tearing down the scaffolding that supports my efforts to stay. There is a lot of work to be done, but striving towards environmental justice in Banff National Park requires that different stories circulate, and that we seek out and listen to stories that trouble our own sense of belonging, complicate our own personal and collective histories and illuminate the ways we are complicit in projects of violence. Instead of telling narrow and jealously self-serving stories, let those of us who most benefit from structures of privilege *listen* to stories that expand the possibilities of what Banff is and can be. If we better understand the violent nature of naturalized privilege in Banff National Park, and how people are already and have always been challenging it, then we as a community will be able to move towards something like justice.

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