

**FOOD AND FICTION:  
LITERATURE AND CREATIVE WRITING AS FOOD PEDAGOGY**

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## ABSTRACT

Writing about food has proliferated in the last few years and in many ways has been responsible for propelling the food movement, which can be broadly defined as the movement against alienating corporate industrial agriculture, into the mainstream. With the food memoir, or food alienation drama, becoming almost as ubiquitous as the nature memoir, this paper gives due attention to the works of fiction that perhaps less obviously deal with food issues, but nonetheless offer valuable insight. Food is always already storied and stories about food occupy a unique place in that every reader has their own material experience with food. Each reader has their own varied experiences with food and as such they bring with them a wide range of assumptions and understandings based on the role that food occupies in their lives. Both reading and writing offer a moment of intervention into those assumptions. Stories, particularly as they take shape in the novel, have the unique ability to transform our understanding by engaging readers beyond information transmission, making literature an important component of food pedagogy. Creative writing engages the mind and engages language in a way that is different from more formal academic writing, but in a way that is just as valuable. This paper consists of ecocritical readings of two novels—Timothy Taylor’s *Stanley Park* and Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*—using food as the primary lens, as well as creative responses to those novels, in order to explore how both reading and writing offer different modes of research and inquiry. Together, ecocritical reading and creative writing offer complementary methods of food pedagogy that enhance and enrich the more common hands on approaches of current food pedagogy practices.

## FOREWORD

This paper was undertaken in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies and is the culmination of the three learning components in my Plan of Study. My paper engages with all three components—alternative food systems, environmental and food education, and literature and writing about food—but is most focused on the two latter components, as it explores literature and writing as food pedagogy. Alternative food systems, for the purposes of this paper, provide the context in which these two other components play out. I have drawn from and expanded upon research in papers I have written for courses that I have taken throughout this degree.

Food pedagogy aims not just to teach people how to navigate the food landscapes in which they find themselves or to understand the issues that a globalized food system encompasses, but also to address dynamics of power and oppression in order to change the current system as well as harness food's intimate role in our lives, including its pedagogical potential. I had initially intended for my research to engage with the more hands-on methods that are common in food pedagogy practices, such as community gardens and school food programs. However, as I became more familiar with the food movement and the debates within that movement, I began searching out different reading material and found myself drawn to literature about food, and especially novels. As I explored more creative forms of writing in an introductory course to creative writing and in an environmental education course, I began to consider its potential place in the emerging field of food pedagogy. As a result, this paper is an exploration of ecocritical and creative approaches as pedagogy and represents an integration of the various elements of my plan of study as they have culminated in this final project.

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE FOOD ALIENATION DRAMA

Writing about food has proliferated in the last few years and in many ways has been responsible for propelling the food movement into the mainstream. The food movement can be broadly defined as the movement against corporate industrial agriculture and the resulting alienation from food that many people are experiencing. Though there are many offshoots that fall under the food movement umbrella, all with varying foci, the push against industrial agriculture and the desire to reconnect with food and its production is at the core of all of them. Writers such as Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore's Dilemma*), Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon (*The 100-Mile Diet*), and Barbara Kingsolver (*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*) are well known for bringing the more unsavory elements of the industrial food system into popular consciousness. Films, such as *Food Inc.*, *Farmageddon*, and *Just Eat It*, have likewise proliferated to add to this now well known story. Industrial agriculture is causing widespread environmental degradation by way of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, soil degradation, and greenhouse gas emissions. Corporate concentration is resulting in the decline of small farms (Wiebe) and these companies push an ever-growing array of what Anthony Winson calls pseudo-foods (nutrient-poor, overly processed edible products high in salt, sugar, and fat) because of their wide profit margins. This corporate concentration extends to farming, where a handful of corporations, namely Monsanto, Syngenta, Dow, Cargill, and Bayer, supply most of the chemicals, fertilizers, and seeds (Wiebe), many of which are designed to achieve maximum yield only when used together. "Food production today," as

Hendrickson, Kloppenburg, and Stevenson succinctly put it, “is organized largely with the objective of producing a profit rather than with the purpose of feeding people” (6). As a result, food production has been largely removed from the daily lives of many North Americans. Few people have direct access to growing food or even to farmers, resulting in a decline in food knowledge and alienation from the food cycle.

It’s not a happy story, which is why the above-mentioned authors present readers with alternatives alongside their condemnation of the industrial food system, contributing to a genre that I will call the food alienation drama. Pollan presents us with a harrowing portrait of the modern beef industry as he follows a cow (steer number 534) from the farm on which it was born to the feedlot where it spends the remainder of its days standing around in the muck of its own feces before being sent to slaughter. The tale is made deliberately unappetizing and Pollan links it deftly to industrial agriculture’s obsession with monocropped corn by demonstrating how the beef industry grew as a market for corn to be used as cattle feed, despite the fact that cows eat grass and their digestive systems are ill equipped to handle corn. Corn then becomes the symbol throughout the book for everything that is wrong with the modern food system. By the end of the book, however, he offers us a story of hunting wild boar and foraging for chanterelle mushrooms to create what he deems to be “the perfect meal,” one that reconnects him with his food, offering a remedy to the pandemic of alienation. Though he remains ambivalent towards hunting, he clearly considers this homegrown style of eating superior to the fast-food meal he shares with his family at the beginning of the book.

In a similar vein, Smith and MacKinnon offer readers an emotional passage about a train that jumps the tracks 55 miles north of Vancouver spilling 14,000 gallons of

sodium hydroxide into the Cheakamus River and consequently killing 90 percent of free-swimming fish downstream. The event is rendered personal by the couple's challenge to adhere to a 100-mile diet for that year, a choice that had them relying on the fish available in that river. The passage demonstrates that the challenge of local eating arises not only from the globalized nature of the food system, but also from the fact that in many places, local food sources have been contaminated or destroyed due to various other environmental disasters and degradations. By the end of the book, they, like Pollan, have asserted the superiority of the local diet for reasons of flavour, sustainability, and personal identity. "Our 100-mile diet hadn't ended, not really," they write at the end of the book. "It comes down to this: we just like the new way better" (259). They cite the pleasures of their continued new discoveries in old-fashioned red carrots, side-striped shrimp from the Pacific shore, and almonds from Victoria.

Kingsolver's family set out on an eating adventure much like Smith and MacKinnon when they move to a small farm in Virginia and vow to eat only what they can grow themselves or obtain locally, though without the firm boundaries of 100 miles. Like Smith and MacKinnon, Kingsolver and her family decide to continue with a more flexible version of their local diet by the book's end. Kingsolver ends with a tale of the heritage turkeys she is determined to raise and coax into breeding and brooding. "The whole birds-and-bees business has been bred out of turkeys completely," she writes, "so this complex piece of former animal behavior is now of no concern to anyone" (320). As such she has trouble finding information on how to get her turkeys interested first in breeding with each other, and then in caring for their eggs. It's a success story, in the end, one that highlights the absurdity of the industrial food system and reasserts the

superiority of smaller, local operations in one fell swoop. Each of the authors offers up local eating as an ethical choice, constantly juxtaposed with the evil industrial option that dominates the food landscape. Kingsolver tells the reader that in contrast to the single acre their family used to grow their year's worth of food, "current nutritional consumption in the U.S. requires an average of 1.2 cultivated acres for every citizen—4.8 acres for a family of four. (Among other things, it takes space to grow corn syrup for that hypothetical family's 219 gallons of soda.) These estimates become more meaningful when placed next to another prediction: in 2050, the amount of U.S. farmland available per citizen will be only 0.6 acres" (343). In the face of such statistics, and the facts of mistreated animals, pollution, and fossil fuel consumption that each author presents, how can an alternative diet be anything *but* an ethical choice?

I'm pointing to these moralizing similarities not to dismiss these books outright—I enjoyed all three and have recommended them to people because these authors are not wrong in their criticisms of industrial food—but I do want to demonstrate that they are telling a particular story. I'm using the word "story" in the sense that Thomas King uses it in *The Truth About Stories* (26), to encompass any instance in which we tell of an event, ongoing or complete, in the world. This includes history, the news of the day, recounting your day to a friend, or the attempt to explain what is happening in the world, like Pollan, Smith and MacKinnon, and Kingsolver do in their books for the world of food. Keeping this idea of "story" in mind is important to understand that food, in every instance, is always already storied, and the above authors do their job telling a story that is, at least in some ways, counter to the corporate one being told largely through advertising. Jaffe and Gertler explore this distancing and the consumer deskilling that has

resulted from such advertising, noting that, “The agro-food industry has spent billions on marketing campaigns to persuade and re-educate consumers for its own purposes” (143). Corporations have been telling the story of food for decades, and it’s time some other stories were heard.

That being said, it is important to keep in mind that these counter-stories are still stories, framing events and facts in particular ways that inevitably leave out some perspectives, have their own biases, and in some ways serve to reinforce the existing dominant story. Each of these writers is already in the unique position of being a writer with a schedule that is flexible enough to allow them the time to pursue such a different mode of eating. They are also all bestselling authors whose livelihoods depend on selling these food stories. Despite their attempts and encouragements to opt out of the capitalist mode of food production, they are in many ways still reliant on a capitalist system. Each of these stories also takes the form of the grail quest, and successful grail quests at that. The heroes set out on a quest to find greater connection to their food and all ultimately find their grail in the form of homegrown “perfect” meals.

I’ve spent a good chunk of this introduction providing a background of popular food alienation drama non-fiction because it has been so extraordinarily influential in the food movement and to the development of growing fields such as food pedagogy. However, this paper will focus on novels. Novels, in contrast to the hero-driven grail quests found in the bestselling food alienation dramas, respond to food alienation through more nuanced and complex engagement with food issues.<sup>1</sup> Novels more readily allow for a multiplicity of voices, and for this paper I’ve chosen novels that are specifically justice-oriented, bringing forward an important aspect of food that is largely absent from Pollan,

et al. Joni Adamson writes of Winona LaDuke's novel *Last Woman Standing* as a case study of Indigenous food sovereignty. Adamson writes, "literature allows environmental justice to be seen not only as a political movement concerned with public policy but also as a cultural movement interested in issues of ideology and representation" (214). Direct action is, of course, important, but so is understanding these issues of ideology and representation because they inform how we understand the world, how we move through it, and how we interact with it, for better or worse. Literature is just as important to food justice and its educational components as the hands-on work being done in the movement. In this paper I will perform ecocritical readings of two novels—Timothy Taylor's *Stanley Park* and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*—using food as the primary lens as well as respond to each novel with a creative writing piece to explore creative writing as a mode of research and inquiry. I'm borrowing the method from former MES student Amanda Di Battista (*Environment in Mind*), whose work also involved a juxtaposition of scholarly and creative writing, though with a more generally environmental focus. My own work is firmly embedded in the unique qualities of the stories of food.

Food stories are highly personal, whether they are politicized like food alienation dramas or fictionalized like the novels addressed in this paper. Each reader has their own varied experiences with food and as such they bring with them a wide range of assumptions and understandings based on the role that food occupies in their lives. Both reading and writing offer a moment of intervention into those assumptions. Reading novels does so by offering an alternative world to consider, one that interrogates dominant narratives and allows the reader to temporarily occupy a position different from

their own. The reader can then consider that new position in regards to their own position and reconsider their understanding of food and the myriad issues that surround food, including environment and social justice. *Stanley Park* does this by complicating the local food movement's conception of local food, disrupting the local-global binary, and by juxtaposing the middle class position of local consumption for reason of ethics with the homeless position of local consumption for reasons of necessity. The novel performs the ways in which class, place, and food intersect through the different characters.

*Monkey Beach* demonstrates food knowledge as embodied knowledge and shows the ways that Haisla culture is inextricable from Haisla food practices as well as how those food practices are further tied to the health of their traditional lands. The events of the novel enact a passing down of knowledge that is at once incomplete and recoverable. It offers an intervention into the threat posed to Haisla culture by industrial development and late capitalism as an extension of colonialism.

Creative writing brings a more personal form of intervention to bear on these issues. While both of my creative pieces are about fictional characters, they are also about very real places that have been important in my life. These places have influenced my approach to food and my relationship to the environment, but I have also been absent from both places for quite a few years now. In "How to Eat A Lobster" I was able to examine the particularities of eating lobster and how that particular food has, for me, become tied to the Maritimes. I was able to work through my own conceptions of the boundaries of place and the foods that belong to those places, to consider what the soil of those places has to offer, if you will. That story was also an opportunity to mimic Timothy Taylor's use of dialogue as a way of performing conversations and allowing for

a multiplicity of opinions without necessarily privileging one over the other or insisting upon “right” or “wrong” opinions. With “Musselman’s Lake” I was able to revisit a place that I largely took for granted in my childhood and to imagine what a lesson in making dinner rolls with my grandmother might have looked like. The very act of writing became a way of recovering some of that knowledge, just as *Monkey Beach* in many ways works to recover and sustain Haisla food knowledge. Despite the obvious cultural differences between Eden Robinson and myself, writing this piece was an opportunity to think about the intersection of people, place, and food, and the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission. In adopting the first person voice that Robinson employs in her novel, I was able to pay close attention to the detail of how people talk about food in instructive ways.

In Chapter 1, “Reading and Writing Food,” I lay out the theoretical frameworks that have influenced my approach to these novels, writing, and food studies more generally, including but not limited to ecocriticism. It begins with a discussion of food pedagogy and environmental justice, and then follows with my reasons for taking a specifically materialist ecocritical approach with these texts. I then move into a discussion of novels and the particular work they do in interrogating food stories and acting as a point of intervention in dominant discourse. Lastly I discuss creative writing as a research method and mode of inquiry, and demonstrate how creative writing and food-focused ecocriticism can be valuable additions to food pedagogy practices.

In Chapter 2, “Raccoons and Grey Squirrels,” I examine the ways that Timothy Taylor’s *Stanley Park* interrogates the assumptions and conceptions put forth by the local food movement. The shifting and conflicting notions of place in the novel and the way

local food is embodied by different characters demonstrate the imprecise and mutable nature of any definition of “local.” Chapter 3, “How to Eat a Lobster,” is the first creative piece in this paper and follows Sloane, a young food blogger returning to her home region of the Maritimes as she grapples with her conceptions of place and food. I drew on my own experiences travelling to the east coast for summer vacations and how those vacations influenced some of the foods that I love, especially lobster.

In Chapter 4, “Fishing for Oolichan,” I trace the transfer of Haisla food knowledge between generations in Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*. The novel aligns the decline of the oolichan runs due to environmental degradation with the decline of Haisla language and culture, demonstrating the trauma of this particular instance of slow violence. Yet the novel also offers a voice of hope for cultural restoration. Chapter 5 is my second creative piece and mimics Robinson’s use of the first person, allowing my character Abigail to tell her story of her grandparents’ cottage and the learning experience she had there. As in Chapter 3, the characters are fictional, but the place is real, this time based on my grandmother’s cottage outside Stouffville. Chapters 2 through 5 constitute a conversation between scholarly writing and creative writing, and between the authors and myself, and ultimately invite a wider conversation around food. Since this project argues for the importance of stories and highlights their particular ability to engage readers in an alternative reality, as J. Hillis Miller suggests (20), I’ve chosen to end with a story rather than pull the reader out of that engagement with a formal conclusion. The end of Chapter 5 indicates the end of this paper and I hope that as a whole this paper demonstrates the important roles of reading and writing stories.

## CHAPTER 1

### **READING AND WRITING FOOD: PEDAGOGY, MATERIALISM, AND THE PARTICULAR FUNCTION OF STORIES**

A critical reading of Pollan, Smith and MacKinnon, and Kingsolver highlights the ways in which alternative food stories easily find themselves working within the very neoliberal framework they are claiming to subvert. The emphasis on making the right choices as consumers—buying the *right* products, shopping at the *right* places—rather than providing an alternative to a capitalist food system, serves to reinforce values of commodification and profit. Many alternative food businesses, such as organic farms and local food distributors, are valued and deemed successful in monetary terms. Julie Guthman has been vocal in her criticism of Pollan and other alternative food advocates for the “vote with your dollar” mantra they so often put forth as a solution to industrial food. She insists that such a framing of alternatives in neoliberal terms limits what she calls “the politics of the possible” (“Commentary,” 261). By adhering to the monetary valuing of food alternatives, we have already excluded alternative modes of applying value, such as the social, cultural, or environmental value an alternative might offer, and thus reinforces the dominant hegemonic ordering of the world within neoliberal economics. This monetary valuation reinforces a capitalist worldview as the only “realistic” or “possible” option and effectively erases any true alternatives before they even have a chance to exist as a possibility.

Guthman is also critical of the alternative food movement’s back to the land mentality that ignores both the historical and present racialized nature of agrarian labour and for food projects that “reflect white desires and missionary practices” (“Bringing

good food,” 433). Christie McCullen offers a compelling example of this tendency to ignore race in her article “The white farm imaginary” (2011) in which she examines the way that one farmers’ market, with its largely white vendors, has effectively *refetishized* food by obscuring the means of production by farm workers who are largely migrant people of colour. She asserts that the absence of people of colour, both from the farmers’ market itself and from the discourse of local farming, effects a construction of an idealized agrarian America, one free of difficult, dirty labour and often exploitative relations of production. In these particular representations of alternative food, race is frequently ignored or glossed over as it intersects with class, and gender is often also given only passing consideration. So while Guthman is not dismissing outright the various projects that the food movement promotes, she is calling for a more nuanced consideration of what alternative food could and should look like if all voices are considered equally.

### **Food Pedagogy and Food Justice**

The food justice movement, as a subset of the larger alternative food movement, aims for a more truly democratic approach to food system change that sees people as food citizens. Food justice, and food sovereignty in particular, advocates that people be active participants in the food system, to be both producers and consumers, as well as decision-makers in the shaping of that system.<sup>2</sup> Charles Levkoe writes, “one of the central struggles of food justice movements is to identify eaters primarily as citizens as opposed to consumers” (90). Moving away from being a consumer in the context of food is a difficult one for the obvious reason that people literally consume food for sustenance, so

we will always be consumers of food, but this does not preclude the possibility of a more democratic system of production. Indigenous groups in North America have been particularly active in working towards food sovereignty. In her chapter in *Original Instructions*, Melissa K. Nelson writes: “Farmers and fishermen, ranchers and gatherers, these are the real stewards of our foods and yet through marketing, distribution, food policies, and other economic and political demands, even these food caretakers are struggling to maintain control of their food production systems” (208). In response to this loss of control, Nelson advocates for rethinking food as an extension of local ecoregions to “renew our sense of place with our sense of taste” (217). In *Recovering the Sacred*, Winona LaDuke has been vocal in fighting for protection of the traditional food sources of the Anishinaabeg people, particularly as an advocate against GMOs that threaten foods such as wild rice and one of the main goals of her White Land Recovery Project is the restoration of traditional food ways.

Food justice often has a pedagogical aspect, one that tends to grow naturally out the skills one develops working for a civic movement, but also arises more explicitly in the form of cooking and garden workshops. As a result, the field of food pedagogy is emerging as an important area of scholarship, one that holds food justice as a central tenet. Rick Flowers and Elaine Swan noticed this growing trend in their work as adult educators and subsequently conceived of a book entitled *Food Pedagogies* to anthologize the work in food pedagogy across the world. Their rationale for using the term “pedagogy” gives us insight into the nature of various food pedagogies, however different they may seem at first glance. They write:

We prefer “food pedagogies” because pedagogy is capacious enough to denote the range of sites, processes, curricula, practices, “learner” and

even types of human and non-human “teachers” but sufficiently narrow to refer to some kind of intended or emergent change in behaviour, habit, emotion, cognition, and/or knowledge at an individual, family, group or collective level. (24)

Flowers and Swan have noted that despite the range of food pedagogies, most of them are engaged in the kind of critical pedagogy methods initially theorized by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and seek not just to teach people about food systems, but to encourage an understanding that effects changes to those systems.

Jennifer Sumner has adopted what she calls *critical* food pedagogy. She calls food “an edible dynamic” (“Eating”) echoing Freire’s problem-posing educational approach, “which accepts neither a ‘well-behaved’ present nor a predetermined future [but instead] roots itself in the *dynamic* present and becomes revolutionary” (Freire, 84, emphasis mine). Additionally, his emphasis on praxis, “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (51), can be seen in Sumner’s approach to food literacy. Rather than accept the rather anemic, watered-down definition put forth the Conference Board of Canada, Sumner provides the following definition:<sup>3</sup>

Food literacy is the ability to “read the world” in terms of food, thereby recreating it and remaking ourselves. It involves a full-cycle understanding of food—where it is grown, how it is produced, who benefits and who loses when it is purchased, who can access it (and who can’t), and where it goes when we are finished with it. It includes an appreciation of the cultural significance of food, the capacity to prepare healthy meals and make healthy decisions, and the recognition of the environmental, social, economic, cultural, and political implications of those decisions. (“Food Literacy,” 86)

To gain full food literacy people must have an understanding of a multiplicity of food stories and food literatures.

Julie Sze asserts that literature can offer a different way into environmental justice issues, and by extension food justice issues. Already an interdisciplinary field, food

justice scholarship can benefit from literary studies, which offers a complementary way into these issues that is freed from the “prism of statistics” (Sze, 163). Literature offers “complex, multi layered analysis that can interweave a dizzying array of images and issues” (ibid., 170), drawing the reader into these issues more intimately than the reportage of straight facts. The layering of images and metaphors allows for multiple meanings and interpretations, facilitating not only connections that may be missed or glossed over in more clinical approaches to environmental justice issues, but also space to examine multiple perspectives. Literature can interweave history and the present, giving voice to marginalized perspectives and making explicit the connections among environmental degradation, colonialism, and neoliberal free trade as they shape the global food system.

### **Have Your Materialism and Read It Too**

Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii) and suggests that the answer to why literary analysis is important “lies in recognizing that current environmental problems are largely of our own making, are, in other words, a by-product of culture” (xxi). Literature, however, is not only reflective of culture, but also informs it. Writers tell stories and as such have the power to frame events and issues in particular ways. They are able to bring to light stories that might otherwise have been ignored and bring urgency to those stories. Rob Nixon, in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), presents the notion of slow violence as “a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range

of temporal scales” (2). He differentiates this slow violence, one that is often the result of colonial oppression, gradual environmental degradation, and various types of extraction, from the more immediate and obviously catastrophic types of violence seen in events such as wars and “natural” disasters. It is a kind of violence that is inherent at all levels of the industrial food system, whether in the form of increasing farmer debt, or of dangerous working conditions for exploited migrant workers, or of free trade deals that have disproportionately damaging effects on farmers in the Global South, or of the increasingly destructive effects of chemical inputs and greenhouse gas emissions on the environment. Food justice demonstrates the inextricable nature of social and environmental concerns. Growing food relies on a healthy environment, so environmental degradation has a direct impact on food production, and industrial agriculture functions on the intertwined exploitation of land and people.

Food is a topic of increasing interest in ecocriticism and I was pleasantly surprised to find a wide range of food-related presentations when I attended the 2015 Association for the Study of Literature and Environment conference. From fermentation and permaculture to urban foraging and community gardening, ecocritics are examining the interwoven nature of food and environment and how that nature plays out in various texts. Meredith Abarca is one scholar bringing food narratives into her pedagogical methods as a way of concretizing theory for her students in her critical theory classes, and a number of scholars such as Joni Adamson, Allison Carruth, and Cheryl Fish have considered food in their ecocritical analyses. As I mentioned earlier, Adamson has examined Indigenous novels—LaDuke’s *Last Standing Woman* and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Garden in the Dunes*—as case studies of Indigenous food sovereignty. She writes,

“They are drawing readers into a ‘middle place’ between nature and culture where the garden or farm might be seen as ‘a powerful symbol of political resistance’” (214). Fish demonstrates the way that Ruth Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats* highlights the connection between meat production and environmental and public health issues, particularly as they affect women, children, people of colour, and the poor (43). Carruth’s book *Global Appetites* traces conceptions of U.S. global power as they relate to industrial food through both fictional and non-fictional literatures of food. Her article “The Chocolate Eater” explores Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby* and reveals “food as the locus of both Morrison’s environmental imagination and the wider imagination of environmental justice” (597). I would suggest that the analysis of food literature is *necessarily* material ecocriticism. As Abarca has observed in her classes, “the analysis of food passages is not purely a cognitive process but most often it is one that begins through the sensory recollections they evoke in the reader” (208). Food, unlike other aspects of the environment in its most broad definition (to include not just “natural” environments, but constructed ones as well), is something with which everyone has experience. While it is possible for someone to read about the concentration of high-rise buildings in Toronto or about the vastness of the Rocky Mountains in Banff without ever having a tangible experience of either of them, everyone reading about food has had a material experience of food, and thus has a point of comparison and a pre-existing notion of what food is and means.

Material ecocriticism is the most recent turn in ecocritical studies and it builds on ecocriticism’s examination of the natural world to examine matter itself as text. In their introduction to a recent anthology, *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman write, “a *material* ecocriticism examines matter both *in* texts and *as* a

text, trying to shed light on the way bodily natures and discursive forces *express* their interaction whether in representations or in their concrete reality” (2). I find material ecocriticism a particularly useful framework for considering the representations of food in texts, the material existence of food in the world, and the way these two modes of examining food interact with and inform one another, reading “world and text as an agentic entanglement” (ibid., 10). This echoes what Leslie Marmon Silko wrote of the Pueblo people in her chapter in *The Ecocriticism Reader*: “Whatever the event or the subject, the ancient people perceived the world and themselves within that world as part of an ancient continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories” (268). Though she is speaking specifically to collective memory and the maintenance of the Pueblo knowledge system in this passage, the fact that the entanglement of material world and story is inherent to that system is important to keep in mind. Materialism has, in many ways, been embedded in a number of Indigenous cultures for centuries.

Dobrin and Weisser point out that “writing began as a means by which to record, count, calculate, codify, and taxonomize human relationships with nature” and thus the two have always been “deeply imbricated” (63). I would add that this imbrication has been particularly true of food, or of nature as it is tied to the provision of food. Food, as I’ve said, is always already storied and if we are to truly understand the culture of the current food system in order to change that system, we must examine representations of food. The way people conceptualize food and understand it, the various ways people imagine it and talk about it are in part a product of the stories told about it, even when these stories are competing and contradictory. Abarca has noted that, “due to food’s materiality and our daily consumption of it, thinking critically goes beyond the level of

discourse and enters into the realm of action” (205). Thus food narratives are uniquely poised to inspire action because of their materiality, because of the simple fact that everyone needs to eat and knowledge of the food system becomes concrete at every meal.

### **Of Carrier Bags, Departures, and Slow Violence**

I’ve made the case that the analysis of food stories is an important component of food pedagogy, as well as a valuable addition to more traditional ecocriticism, and that food studies is particularly well suited to the recent material turn in ecocriticism. However, “food stories” do not necessarily mean novels and ecocriticism is a field that encompasses far more than novels in its analyses. So why novels? In their examination of *biophilia* and *bibliophilia*, Heesoon Bai, Daniela Elza, Peter Kovacs, and Serenna Romancyia explore what they initially conceive of as an inherent connection between love of books and love of nature. I understand the impulse to believe in this inherent connection because it is my own. Romancyia says:

I grew to love nature because I am not unfamiliar with it. It does not feel like a stranger to me. It is woven into me through all the stories I have listened to, all the forests I have walked through, all the experiences I have had, both directly and vicariously. It has become so completely integrated into my experience that I cannot help but try to pass the experience on, to tell my own stories, to repeat what I know to others. (356)

Because these experiences have been both direct and vicarious, it’s easy to mix them up, to not be sure which experiences were the ones that solidified my love and sense of care for the environment. I think the obvious conclusion is that they fed into each other, reinforced one another, so that my vicarious experiences were reinforced by my direct experiences and vice versa, which in turn prompted me to seek out more of both.

Bai et al. acknowledge that powerful literature is not enough to inspire *biophilia* in others and recognize that much of the connection they have conceived between *biophilia* and *bibliophilia* is informed by personal experience. Likewise, powerful literature is not enough to drive people to change the food system. However, it can be a contributing factor. A number of scholars have examined the particular quality novels have in teaching empathy and ethical judgement, and by offering an intervention by way of presenting another world. Martha Nussbaum pays particular attention to the novel because it “is concrete to an extent generally unparalleled in other narrative genres” (7) and because of its “interest in the ordinary” (9). She insists that “an ethics of impartial respect for human dignity will fail to engage real human beings unless they are made capable of entering imaginatively into the lives of distant others and to have emotions related to that participation” (xvi). The unique quality of literature about food, as I have pointed out, is the material experience each of has with it, and thus they can more readily bring the food world of the novel back into the “real” world, as J. Hillis Miller suggests. He writes: “Literature uses such physical embodiment to create or reveal alternative realities. These then enter back into the ordinary ‘real’ world by way of readers whose beliefs and behavior are changed by reading” (20). Novels, by virtue of this alternative reality they are able to create, absorb readers in a way that other kinds of writing do not and access readers’ emotions and compassion that they may then transfer to the “real” world.

Stories, particularly as they take shape in the novel, have a particular ability to transform our understanding by engaging readers beyond information transmission: they “become engrained in our memories not because they are compilations of interesting

information that we make a conscious effort to remember, but because we simply cannot forget them. Stories effortlessly work their way into their listeners and transform them into storytellers themselves” (Bai, Elza, Kovacs, & Romanycia, 361). I’ll get back to the part about storytellers in a moment, but for now I want to focus on this idea of how stories work themselves into our memories to be unforgettable and why this is particularly important when considering novels. This unforgettable nature is, once again, not unique to the novel. The stories I relayed at the beginning of this introduction are not excerpts from novels, but from the writers’ lives. However, novels are particular in the way they present the reader with alternative realities, as Miller suggests. The characters in novels are not real people and, though they may have to navigate through places and times that are, for lack of a better word, “true,” the specifics of their lives are fictional. Due to this unique quality of the novel, there is a malleable quality to the way people read and understand novels. Shari Stone-Mediatore writes, “a story, when recognized as such, is not an end point, but a point of departure from which readers can explore the lived significance of strange affairs and can consider how their own lives might be situated within the web of actions and reactions that make up those affairs” (63). A novel, since it isn’t bound to provide answers or solutions, can tell stories that explore different themes and issues without ever having to claim their story as the “true” story. This open characteristic of the novel allows for further exploration and more voices telling more stories to add to a body of understanding.

Ursula K. LeGuin writes about the particularity of the novel as “a medicine bundle, holding things in a particular, powerful relation to one another and to us” (153). She develops the idea of the novel as carrier bag following the Carrier Bag Theory of

human evolution, which suggests that the first cultural artifact was probably a receptacle to carry things in rather than weapons for hunting. Instead of thinking that human culture is built on eating meat and the development of weapons, this theory sees it as built on the ability to carry home more gathered foods. The novel, she posits, mirrors this carrier bag. It stands in opposition to the hyper-masculine stories of violent triumph over other life in the form of a hunt and instead more closely resembles the gathering of wild oats. She continues: “Conflict, competition, stress, struggle, etc., within the narrative conceived as carrier bag/belly/box/house/medicine bundle, may be seen as necessary elements of a whole which itself cannot be characterized either as conflict or as harmony, since its purpose is neither resolution nor stasis but continuing process” (153). There is no climax where the hero triumphs, no tidy ending that ties up the loose ends and provides all the answers, but rather a process. If we are to agree with LeGuin that “the novel is a fundamentally unheroic kind of story” (152), then the novel becomes the ideal form for what Nixon is calling for throughout *Slow Violence*: for writers to “bring into imaginative focus apprehensions that elude sensory corroboration” so that they can “offer us a different kind of witnessing of sights unseen” (15). Novels depicting slow violence are also fundamentally unheroic, and though Nixon is wary of the potential for political moralizing and sentimentality that may arise in the absence of drama, he sees it as a risk worth taking.

### **Telling Stories**

I wanted to explore creative writing as a means of critical inquiry for several reasons, but part of it comes back to the idea put forth by Bai et al. that those who listen to stories

can't help but become storytellers themselves. Of course not everyone who reads novels will be inclined to write their own fictional stories (nor do those who write necessarily read), but I also don't think it's an uncommon impulse. Personally, I find writing of any kind is an excellent way to sort through my thoughts and ultimately make connections I may not have otherwise made. Di Battista argues that "creative writing, regardless of form or style, works to challenge the reader to reconsider environmental issues and attitudes in the same way the Nussbaum asserts realist fiction serves as a model for ethical behavior" (11). Indeed, it was in taking an environmental education class and creative writing class concurrently that prompted me to consider how my own experiences with food and the environment have shaped my conception of them. I ended up drawing a short piece for my creative writing class from journal entries for my environmental education class. Though the resulting piece was fictionalized, I drew on both lived experiences and my understanding of my place in the environment. That writing facilitated connections between my personal experience and my ideas about environment that I otherwise would not have drawn, and it challenged those ideas in a new way.

Writing is also a way of composing self and of understanding oneself in relation to the issues I have addressed thus far. For most of my life, writing has been one of my primary ways of making sense of the world. It is a way of trying to look at the world through someone else's perspective as well as working to understand how my own subject position influences my writing. Often the critical work that I accomplish through creative writing is not a conscious process, but it is something I've come to notice as I reflect on my writing practice. Creative writing engages the mind and engages language

in a way that is different from more formal academic writing, but in a way that is just as valuable. It can also be fun and more playful than academic writing and that's important when engaging with such heavy issues as environmental justice, industrial food, and climate change in order to not only keep despair at bay, but to maintain a sense of hope. Di Battista said that what she found lacking in her narrative scholarship was "the opportunity for whimsy" (14) and while my own creative pieces that follow would likely not be described as whimsical, they did allow a freer mode of inquiry and response to complement the academically rigorous ecocritical responses. "One mode of understanding and representation without the other," Di Battista insists, "would be flat" (15). I couldn't agree with her more, and with the food memoir, or food alienation drama, becoming almost as ubiquitous as the nature memoir, I felt that attention was due to the works of fiction that perhaps less obviously deal with food issues, but offer important insights and interventions. I have written of my own experiences with food in the style of Pollan and Kingsolver, but far less fiction. The creative pieces, then, are a complementary exercise to demonstrate how writing fiction can work as a pedagogical method.

In *Wild Garden*, dian marino writes, "Something that is critical and creative is built on a substantive understanding of what currently exists and why it came to exist in that current shape; we need both the creative and the critical to transform our understanding" (44). I would argue that the writing process itself is a way of deepening our understanding and sharpening our critical abilities. Furthermore, creative writing does not exist in a vacuum and bringing a critical perspective to creative writing forces writers to consider the context in which their work exists. What is that context? How does that

context influence not only the writing itself, but how that writing might be received and understood by readers? Writing facilitates that point of departure for discussion that Stone-Mediatore speaks to, as opposed to searching for finite answers. I also find that creative writing fits within a critical pedagogy as a form of praxis, defined by Freire as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (51). It disrupts the notion that we can’t contribute to the larger story of the world. Following Miller, who insists that literary works “re-enter the ‘real world’ in the effects, often decisive, they have on the belief and behavior of those who read them” (80), writing becomes a way to have a more direct action upon the world. It is also an exercise of practiced attentiveness to the world, attentiveness that can then be turned into the creation of an entirely new world, a “supplementary world, a metaworld, a hyper-reality” (Miller, 18). The creation of that new world becomes a point of intervention and writing about food in particular is an intervention into a food system that people, even people like me who think about it almost constantly, very often don’t have much cause to think about and so take for granted.

## CHAPTER 2

### **RACCOONS AND GREY SQUIRRELS: INTERROGATING LOCALISM IN TIMOTHY TAYLOR'S *STANLEY PARK***

“I spent a week trying to catch my first bird. A week. Do you know what I mean?”

“I have no idea what you mean,” Jeremy answered. “I buy my ducks direct from a guy named Bertrand who lives on a farm up the valley.”

“Although presumably someone catches them for Bertrand. Say though, I’ve been reading about you. Earlier this year. Anya Dickie’s review of *The Monkey’s Foot*. Brilliant job.” (Taylor, 13)

The above exchange takes place between main character Jeremy, who works as a chef at his own restaurant in Vancouver, and Jeremy’s father, the Professor, an anthropologist who is living in Stanley Park as part of his research studying the homeless people who live there. Jeremy goes on to correct his father that his restaurant is actually called *The Monkey’s Paw Bistro*, a correction his father ignores in favour of admiring Dickie’s phrase “local bounty” to describe the food that Jeremy’s restaurant offers. It seems a simple enough conversation, but in these few sentences Taylor is already laying out the one of the central questions of the novel: what does it mean to eat of a particular place and to know that place? Jeremy’s goal for his restaurant is “to remind people of something. Of what the soil under their feet has to offer. Of a time when they would have known only the food their own soil could offer” (23). The exchange Jeremy shares with his father, however, already complicates this desire. Jeremy buys his ducks, already dead, from a man who, as the Professor suggests, likely doesn’t even catch the birds himself. The Professor, on the other hand, along with the other homeless residents of Stanley Park, catches his meal with his own hands every day. So who is closer to what the soil can offer? To what extent can eating at a restaurant really remind people of what the soil

can offer? This juxtaposition of Jeremy's version of "local bounty" and the Professor's version already begins to unravel common notions of local food and accompanying notions of authenticity.

Jeremy is motivated by his desire to capture his experience working at the Relais de St. Seine L'Abbaye in France, where he spent time after his mother's death. It is in France that Jeremy begins to formulate ideas about the soil under people's feet and constructs a binary of two types of food people, placed in sharp opposition to one another. Some are Crips: "They fused, they strove for innovation, they were post-national," others are Bloods: "Blood cooks were respectful of tradition, nostalgic even. Canonical, interested in the veracity of things culinary, linked to 'local' by the inheritance or adoption of a culture, linked to a particular manner of place or being" (Taylor, 32).<sup>4</sup> Jeremy refers to this dichotomy throughout the novel and as his restaurant starts to sink financially he finds himself in a struggle to remain "Blood" while keeping The Monkey's Paw afloat. As the credit companies and banks start demanding payments he can't make, Jeremy takes a business offer from Dante, CEO of the Starbuck's-like Inferno Coffee, a Crip if there ever were one. Once Dante swoops in, everything changes: Jules, Jeremy's partner and sous chef at The Monkey's Paw, is fired, Jeremy is forced to declare bankruptcy, and Dante begins plans for a market-tested, post-national restaurant, Gerriamo's, to replace The Monkey's Paw. Meanwhile, Jeremy begins spending more and more time in Stanley Park with his father and some of the other men that live there, namely Caruzo and Chladek, until everything culminates with Gerriamo's opening night. Throughout this experience, Jeremy also spends significant time with his old friends Margaret and Olli (now married to each other) and their young son Trout, who is also

Jeremy's godson, and each of them contributes in their own way to Jeremy's evolving ideas about food and place.

It's simple enough to dismiss *Stanley Park* as setting up a local-global binary that praises the local and vilifies the global, but I'm inclined to agree with Travis Mason's assertion that this is not the case. Mason examines Taylor's use of *ekphrasis* (in this case the written descriptions of artworks, both real and imagined, that appear throughout the novel) as one way that Taylor complicates that binary. The short exchange between Jeremy and the Professor is just one of many other examples that demonstrates some of the tensions inherent in the rhetoric of local food. It's a tension that is further complicated by the realities of privilege and necessity that are at play: the patrons of Jeremy's restaurant are there because they can afford to pay the premium that local food garners in such a setting, while the residents of Stanley Park are eating local food provided by the park because they have no other choice. The concept of place is very different for these two groups of people and Taylor deftly layers these various concepts of place throughout the novel, making *Stanley Park* an extremely useful text for thinking about the local food movement's purposes, values, and desires. The novel offers a critique of the often fetishized construction of local food perpetuated by the mainstream local food movement, and *Stanley Park* points to its inherent contradictions and imperfections.

### **Locating the Local Food Movement**

*Stanley Park* was published in 2001, several years before the local food movement really gained traction. Although you can see the beginnings of the local food movement as early

as 1986 with the founding of the Slow Food Movement by Carlo Petrini, it wasn't until 2007 that local food entered mainstream consciousness.<sup>5</sup> That was the year that Barbara Kingsolver published *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* and Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon published *The 100-Mile Diet*, both of which inspired people to take on their own local food challenges, or at the very least visit their local farmer's market. (It probably helped that *The Omnivore's Dilemma* had been published just the year before.) That same year the Oxford American Dictionary declared *locavore* the word of the year. Eight years later, as Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann state in their book *Foodies*, "the virtues of locally-grown food are so prominent within contemporary foodie culture that the 'buy local' mantra has reached near common-sense status" (140). Taylor similarly points out in his recent publication *Foodville* that farm-to-table restaurants "can't even really be referred to as a phenomenon anymore, because in the past twelve years or so it's grown from a flaky niche into one of the foundational values of restaurant cuisine" (44). He goes on to cite the numerous lists of "Top 10 Farm-to-Table Restaurants" in Vancouver and a longer such list on Urbanspoon that consists of over sixty entries.

Since its popularization, the local food movement has garnered a fair amount of criticism, not just from proponents of global capitalism and liberalized trade, but from food justice scholars and activists. As mentioned in the introduction, Julie Guthman has been a particularly vocal critic. About the local food movement in particular she says, "I see shockingly little reflexivity among both local food activists and writers as to how 'going local' might affect places that retain post-colonial dependencies on export markets" ("Interview," 39). She goes on to cite people giving up coffee as part of their local food challenge without any consideration of how that might affect coffee farmers in

Sumatra, as an example. This lack of consideration for the people who produce food is one of the major shortcomings of the local food movement. Many farmer's markets, for example, have white vendors and white clientele, constructing McCullen's "white farm imaginary," wherein the farm workers, who are often people of colour, are left out of the picture to create a whitewashed vision of agrarian America. By obscuring the realities of local food production, farmer's markets can, whether intentionally or not, reinforce a fetishized version of local food that prioritizes the *where* of the food being sold while ignoring the *how* of production.

Carlita Greene and Josée Johnston have also both been critical of local food as a part of the wider alternative food movement, though they focus more on the efficacy of the movement to offer real alternatives to global industrial agriculture. They each offer a closer look at the consumers of local food and the ways that they often reinforce food as commodity, thus framing local food in neoliberal capitalist terms. Greene draws on the Slow Food Movement and identifies two shifting personae—the "Utopian Foodie" and the "Grand Gourmand"—in those who participate in this movement. The "Utopian Foodie" is the promoter of local and organic, of fair trade and equal access, and encourages the purchase of a certain kind of food (sustainable slow food as opposed to processed, unsustainable fast food) as the predominant method of resisting the mainstream, industrial food system. The "Grand Gourmand" desires food of superior taste with an air of authenticity gained from its deep cultural origins and prioritizes flavour above all else. The two personae are distinct, but overlap in a number of ways, for example under the insistence that locally grown organic food tastes better anyway and that local food will be naturally steeped in culture, so it *just makes sense* to purchase it.

Slow Food members can supposedly have the best of both worlds: ethical, sustainable foods that never have to sacrifice flavour. Of course one of the major issues with this line of thinking is the way it excludes a large portion of the population who cannot afford sustainably and ethically produced foods (many of Slow Food's members are white, educated, and in a high-income bracket). Another is that the "Grand Gourmand" demands variety, while the "Utopian Foodie" is hailing for local, and eating seasonally in a particular place necessarily limits choice. Greene suggests that the presence of these two conflicting ideologies allows Slow Food members to move between them as required, allowing ideologies that both resist and reinforce the dominant food system to exist simultaneously.

Johnston examines the prevalence of the citizen-consumer in the local organic food movement. The citizen is driven by concern for others and the building of the commons, while the consumer is driven by individualistic needs to be satisfied through further consumption. The citizen-consumer, then, is a blending of these two ideas: the consumer who is also citizen, driven not only by individual desires, but by concern for others. Johnston cautions against being too optimistic about the potential of the citizen-consumer to effect change in the food system, and she maintains that the concept may be inconsistent with growth-oriented corporate models of business ("The citizen-consumer"). There is an inherent contradiction in consuming in the name of sustainability. A more effective method of sustainability would be a reduction in consumption rather than consumption of the "right" products. The result of this citizen-consumer construction is a continued emphasis on individualism and "voting with your

dollar” rather than an emphasis on changing the system that makes these kinds of individual choices necessary in the first place.

Despite these shortcomings of the local food movement, there is something to be said for eating and purchasing local food. Beyond reducing the distance that food has to travel to get to the table (and thus the fossil fuels associated with that travel), eating locally supports local farmers and has the potential to raise awareness around the impact food production has on the environment. Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, and Stevenson propose the concept of the “foodshed” as a way of understanding and examining the food systems of particular places.<sup>6</sup> “Recognition of one’s residence within a foodshed,” they write, “can confer a sense of connection and responsibility to a particular locality. The foodshed can provide a place for us to ground ourselves in the biological and social realities of living on the land and from the land” (1). This understanding can also be applied more globally to promote an understanding of how things are connected across the planet. As a result, none of the critics mentioned above are advocating for a wholesale dismissal of the local food movement. What they are calling for is a more nuanced understanding of what local food entails and identification of its insufficiencies so that we can come to a more integrated approach that considers both local and global issues and understands that in a globalized world, local and global are constantly informing one another in the context of intersecting relations of power and privilege.

### **Stanley Park: Real and Imagined**

Before delving into *Stanley Park*, the novel, I want to first talk a bit about Stanley Park, the novel’s eponymous park. As it is one of the primary settings of the novel, it’s

important to have a brief history of Stanley Park in order to better understand how the physical reality of the park influences meaning, and especially the notion of local food, in the novel. Despite the fact that the predominant perception of Stanley Park is that of an untouched wilderness, the park is actually a highly constructed place that, as Sean Kheraj points out in his history *Inventing Stanley Park*, “has never been free from human use and modification” (5). Pre-contact the area that encompasses the park was settled by Indigenous peoples, namely the Squamish, the Musqueam, and the Tsleil Waututh, with the largest settlement being the village of *Xwayxway*, and after the arrival the Europeans the park was settled and used as a site for resource extraction until its designation as a public park in 1887 (Kheraj).<sup>7</sup> Even after this designation, conflict continued over how the park should be used. Deadman’s Island came under dispute when Ottawa leased it to a private owner for industrial development in 1899, and though Indigenous, European, and Asian settlements were evicted at various stages of the park’s development, it wasn’t until 1931 that the last families living at Brockton Point were forced to leave (Kheraj).<sup>8</sup> The Professor relays an abbreviated account of Stanley Park’s various inhabitants to Jeremy: “There had always been people here [...] There had been a First Nation, of course. Squatters later. Men who lived in trees. But this generation was the homeless, the new Stanley Park people” (Taylor, 14).<sup>9</sup> The novel shows awareness of the various ways human activities have shaped, and continue to shape the park, and that history is part of the dynamic in which local food occurs.

Of course it is now illegal to live in the park, so the homeless that do so are vulnerable to the possibility of being forcibly removed, and hunting, fishing, and foraging in the park are likewise banned: realities that the characters of *Stanley Park* note more

than once throughout the novel. Upon creation of the park as a public space it became subject to park board regulations, which “attempted to establish [a] division between park and city—a vision that was highly influence by middle-class notions of non-consumptive use” (Kheraj, 77). Once it was designated “public” park space, its function as a potential source of food ceased; yet the homeless in Stanley Park, whom we see repeatedly throughout the novel, continue to use it for just that purpose. Significantly, the middle-class notion of the park as a space of non-consumptive use is reflected to a certain extent in notions of “local” food as defined by the local food movement: local food was never intended to include raccoon and squirrel, however local both those potential meat sources might be, and public parks were never intended as a source of local food. Rather the park was intended to be a retreat from the city, a space of untouched wilderness, and this perception of the park has influenced how people react to human intervention in the park. The construction of bridges and roads was strongly resisted, though spraying to control pests and the construction of a sea wall to protect the peninsula from natural erosion both garnered widespread support (Kheraj). And although a number of non-native tree and animal species have been introduced over the years (including the squirrels that Jeremy deems “local” for the purposes of his climactic dinner), this does nothing to lessen public devastation when the “virgin forest” is damaged during storms.<sup>10</sup> As Kheraj writes, “in erasing evidence of past disturbance by human and non-human agents, Park Board policy clouded the public memory of the park” (12). As it stands, the park’s history and the fact of its deliberate construction through human intervention have been obfuscated by the myth of Stanley Park as untouched wilderness.

This history of Stanley Park, the various uses people have for the park, the people that still live there, and the sometimes illegal activities that still take place there, all constitute what SueEllen Campbell has called “layers of place.” In her article of that title, she writes, “all places are astonishingly complex. They are finely and intricately laminated, not only with the immediate and personal, but also with what we don’t see that is present, with what is past and future, even with what is somewhere else” (179). The perception of Stanley Park is highly constructed by conflicting desires and understandings of what constitutes public space and who can use it, as well as by notions of nature and wilderness. At the beginning of the novel, Taylor demonstrates the interplay of the city with the park, the imagined boundaries between the two, and the park’s constructed nature:

A map and a global positioning system would have revealed to Jeremy that he was not far from the things that he knew. Just a couple of hundred yards off the Park Drive, near Prospect Point, in fact. Here a densely forested slope fell from the road, down to the top of a cliff that towered a hundred feet above the seawall and the ocean below. The professor had found a clearing between the trees at the very edge of this cliff. There were tamped-down ferns and a tent built against the trunk of a cedar, a space big enough for one very still, very accomplished sleeper. And through the branches of this tree, and the others that umbrella-ed over the small clearing, one had a view of the harbor, freighters silent at their moorage, well lit. (20)

It is significant, then, that Stanley Park is used as a central setting in a novel so invested in the concept of place, the boundaries of place, and what it means to know a particular place, especially considering how place is tied up with food. Many such descriptions of Stanley Park appear throughout the novel as Jeremy spends more and more time cooking and eating there with his father and the homeless people who live there. The entire park

as a setting gestures towards and teases out the inherent complexities, serving to complicate and interrogate definitions of local food.

### **“What the soil under their feet has to offer”**

In order to adhere to a concept of local food, it's necessary to define local and that involves constructing boundaries. Smith and MacKinnon decide that their definition will constitute a one hundred-mile radius around Vancouver, thus popularizing this distance as the definition of local. “Poring over the map that day,” they write, “we considered, for the first time ever, the boundaries of the place in which we live” (9). It's an interesting exercise, trying to decide what constitutes local and where those boundaries lie; it's an exercise that highlights the very constructed nature of place. City limits, national borders, parks, any locale designated a distinct “place” is a construction of arbitrary boundaries. Arbitrary is perhaps a strong word. These borders often have a basis in the cultural and the political, as well as the ecological. Designation of Origin, for instance, ensures foods that carry the names of specific places in Europe are in fact produced there and are produced using the traditional cultural methods that make them unique.<sup>11</sup> Champagne, as an example, may only be called Champagne if produced and bottled in the Champagne region of France and it must be processed using the traditional Champagne method. The borders of that place, in this instance, have been decided based on both where the grapes are physically grown (*terroir*) and where these particular methods of production have traditionally been used.<sup>12</sup> Both elements (grapes and processing technique) affect the final product, giving Champagne a quality that is unique to that region.

Though Jeremy spends significant time in France, his ideas about place are never as concrete as those put forth by designations of origin or even by Smith and MacKinnon. He tells his father that he's trying to remind people of something, of the soil under their feet, and he repeats this idea throughout the novel, always very assuredly, but he is only ever able to explain his reasoning with this nebulous definition, an indefinable "something" that he can't quite grasp. In France he tries to gain a deeper understanding of the place, of the water and the soil that produce the food of that place, but it isn't until he's leaving that he realizes his impression of it is based on a misunderstanding. He believes a little grotto with an artificially routed brook is the source of the Seine, but he is shown instead a smaller unmarked place that is also the source of the Igon, a river that flows through Burgundy. He takes this new impression back to Vancouver with him and it influences his creation of The Monkey's Paw. However, he makes a similar mistake in Vancouver by using vague ideas about the local without taking the time to really know the place. Mason writes:

Jeremy's version of local knowledge—his version of place—is mediated by a knowledge made up of various cultural ideologies: French cuisine, Dutch painting, Western dualism. Once he returns to North America and puts his entrepreneurial skills to the test, these ideological implications unravel as tensions develop between his sense of self, his desire to cook local food, and the financial realities of the restaurant business. (4)

The way that Jeremy constructs his version of place is important because it is flawed and the novel acknowledges those flaws. Jeremy is trying to impose his version of place and a version of the French restaurant at which he worked, onto Vancouver and The Monkey's Paw. His failure to do so demonstrates that the way Jeremy conceptualizes local food doesn't work and has no basis in reality. While it may appear on the surface that Jeremy's character reinforces many of the aspects of the local food movement with which critics

have raised issue, the novel actually interrogates many of Jeremy's beliefs and motivations, thus interrogating many of the ideologies behind local food.

In contrast to Jeremy's version of local knowledge and place, the novel presents us with several characters with more nuanced approaches. The Professor and Margaret have a particularly interesting conversation in a flashback scene. Margaret is studying seismology in university at the time of this conversation, a field of study that leads to her current work upgrading earthquake infrastructure throughout Vancouver. The Professor is fascinated by her study of shifting tectonic plates and tells her, "I study how it is that people move across this surface, in groups or singly, or how it is they become stationary. You study how the surface beneath their feet might choose to move first!" (Taylor, 150). This attitude acknowledges the agency of the planet when thinking about place. Unlike Jeremy, who has a very controlled understanding of place that he is attempting to impose, the Professor and Margaret allow that many things about place are beyond their control and that places have as much a hand in shaping themselves as humans have in shaping them. Another character who offers a complex version of place is Siwash, one of the homeless men living in Stanley Park. Siwash collects maps of all kinds and when Jeremy visits his cabin he finds versions of maps that he's never seen before. He and Siwash have a discussion about the ability of maps to really capture a place, offering that all maps have limitations, but they become more limited the bigger scale they are. "With a map of just one square foot of this room, you'd *really* know where you were," Siwash says (Taylor, 333). While this could be read simply as a reinforcement of the idea that the more local you are the more you can know about a place, Siwash's earlier statement that "we rarely understand map projections that are not our own" (Taylor, 332) demonstrates

that the way people understand place is filtered through their particular constructions of them. Like maps of any size, something will always be left out or skewed.

On the other hand, Dante has no desire for local knowledge or any version of place. Dante's definition of local shifts as suits his needs. One instance of this is when Inferno Coffee gets a stand at the local food event, Seasons of Local Splendour, and Dante insists he thought up the idea for Inferno while he was in Vancouver, thus making it a local product. Margaret and Jeremy protest that this isn't what's meant by local. Olli then points out that even something as seemingly place-less as the internet still requires wires and fibres and poles that must be stuck in the ground to string them up, insisting that everything is of *some* place. Dante then claims, "I think I'm wireless. Culinarily, I mean" (Taylor, 270), ignoring the fact that a wireless internet connection still requires a base router that would be linked to the wires of which Olli speaks. Another instance of Dante's casual disregard for place and limitations is when he renovates The Monkey's Paw space for the re-branded Gerriamo's restaurant. Benny, Jeremy's girlfriend for a short time until she starts working as a decorator for Dante, notes that it's a good thing Dante owns the entire building that houses the restaurant space, telling Jeremy, "Permits would have been a bitch otherwise. Earthquake upgrades, the whole bit" (Taylor, 280). Dante chooses to ignore the ground beneath his feet to the point that he'll even dismiss the need for earthquake upgrades. These kinds of realities are inconvenient limitations with which Dante would rather not contend. Though Emily Johansen sees Dante's characterization as the wholesale rejection of the global, set up as a villain against the morally superior local, Dante's character is representative of a very specific type of globalism that is rooted in neoliberal capitalism. It is a globalism that desires continual

growth and refuses to acknowledge the reality of limitations. The Professor provides a succinct summary of Dante when he tells Jeremy, “Dante is a price. Dante is a sale. Dante abhors anything that is not a commodity” (Taylor, 30). It is not the global that Dante represents, but unfettered capitalism, to which neither the global nor the local is immune.

### **Bloods and Crips**

Jeremy’s world is a world of food. He is obsessed to the point that his understanding and experience of the world is constantly being mediated by his understanding and experience of food. His division of this world into Bloods and Crips offers a simplistic version of complex ideas. Even though Jeremy has particular notions of what makes a cook Blood and what makes a cook Crip, he makes it very clear that the most negative quality of Crip cooks is their tendency to commodify food. Of course his distaste for that commodification is complicated by the fact that he is also commodifying food by selling “the local” in his restaurant. This rejection of Crip cosmopolitanism against Blood tradition, Johansen insists, “sets up an untenable binary that suggests, at best, a highly romanticized yet anachronistic longing for an imagined past where the global did not intrude on daily lives or, at worst, a model for political action that invalidates necessary solidarity-building with others throughout the world” (132). She is suggesting that this binary is the novel rejecting anything global; there are, however, many instances in the novel where this is clearly untrue. Olli, as an example, wants to make books available on the internet for the free dissemination of information around the world. Olli is an interesting character because he’s set up not *against* Jeremy, as such, but as a person in

Jeremy's life who does not always share his opinions. Olli is never presented as being wrong where Jeremy is right, rather he's presented as having an equally valid but alternative way of looking at the world.

When Jeremy first conceives of The Monkey's Paw he conceptualizes it as "Blood cooking in a *relais*-style room with six nights of Sunday nights" (Taylor, 51). Already we can see that Jeremy's memory of the *relais* has less to do with what went on there on a day-to-day basis when they were serving wealthy patrons, and more to do with his romanticizing of the farmers and locals—the "rubber boot people"—that would dine there on Sunday nights. But even the *relais* could not sustain itself on the rubber boot people alone; it needed the wealthy patrons and the tourists that frequented during the week. The fact that Jeremy is unable to make six nights of Sunday nights successful is less a critique of the way the global inevitably takes over the local, as Johansen suggests, and more a critique of Jeremy's flawed construction of local food and his invented Blood versus Crip dichotomy. Furthermore, despite Jeremy's insistence that "you could be a Crip or a Blood, but you had to choose sides" (Taylor, 32), his friend and sous chef Jules is allowed to embody a kind of in-between cook persona, or at the very least a more nuanced Blood persona:

Jules Capelli was not a Crip, but she was different than Jeremy despite her sympathies to his cause. She believed, primarily, that restaurants themselves were organic. Crip, Blood, whatever it was you were consciously trying to do only had so much impact—you grew a reputation in the divinely haphazard way that trees grew roots and leaves. (Taylor, 53).

Jules is ultimately more of a realist than Jeremy and she is more willing to be pragmatic when required. She doesn't sacrifice her ideologies—in fact she manages to keep them

more intact than Jeremy after the demise of The Monkey's Paw—but nor does she ascribe to the essentialist dualism that Jeremy does.

Crip becomes synonymous throughout the text with capitalism, and the inability of local food to escape a capitalist framework is best demonstrated by the presence of Inferno Coffee at Seasons of Local Splendour. Dante's redefinition of local to include Inferno Coffee is the ultimate fetishism of localism—he is using localism to sell coffee with no adherence to local as an actual practice—and that scene serves to highlight that tendency to fetishize. At Local Splendour, “you were encouraged to have you own personal epiphany about the relationship between working farms and the food that you eat” (Taylor, 258). Jeremy notes that the experience is contrived, that the farm is a bit too tidy, “a show farm,” but he also notes that most people need the lesson. And he isn't wrong. People often don't think about where their food comes from. Even those who appear to be more conscious of how their food is produced tend to fall short, as when Smith and MacKinnon realize, “our vegetarian diet apparently depended on a long-distance food system heavy with environmental costs” (71). The fact remains that the industrial food system would prefer that people not look too closely at the food they're eating to discover the chain of production that got it to their tables, and events like Local Splendour, however contrived they may be, are one way of at least getting people to think about the fact that their food must come from somewhere other than the grocery store shelf.

### **A Blood overture to a Crip opera**

The climax of the novel plays out during the opening night of Gerriamo's. It is, to use Jeremy's labels, the ultimate in Crip cooking. Jeremy crafts a menu to appeal to the hip, wealthy "fooderati" that is their target market and all the while continues to visit his father, Caruzo, and Chladek in Stanley Park. In stark contrast to the fine kitchenware and premium ingredients Dante is paying for at Gerriamo's, meals in the park always consist of "a poverty-inspired mixture of items salvaged from dumpsters (from those who had just arrived) or items harvested from the forest around them (from those, like Caruzo and Chladek, whose skills had been honed by need)" (Taylor, 301). Jeremy admits to his father that despite the impressively stocked restaurant kitchen, he'd rather cook in Stanley Park. Freed from the need to sell what he is cooking and by the creativity required to cook things like squirrel, Jeremy is able to slowly redefine his version of local knowledge and craft for himself an understanding of what local means in this specific place rather than transpose a copy of the French *relais*. And it is Jeremy's experience cooking and eating with the residents of Stanley Park that inspire the changes he makes to the opening night menu.

As a way to assert his allegiance to Stanley Park and offer a kind of tribute to the people who have contributed to his evolved understanding of place and local knowledge, Jeremy ensures everything on the menu is made with local food. What he can't get from local farms and fisheries, he harvests from the park. The menu reads as though nothing of its presented substance has changed, but Jeremy replaces certain items, such as steak, with a substitute from the park. As a result, the menu ends up containing some items that most people would never consider eating, and were never intended to be included in the

local food movement definition of “local,” such as squirrel, starling, and raccoon. At this point in the novel, raccoon is the only item on the menu Jeremy hasn’t tried before. When discussing his idea with Chladek to gauge the feasibility of executing the menu with foraged foods, he calls the meal “*notre gastronomie*,” but admits, “even as a one-off thing on opening night, I’m guessing people might not partake voluntarily” (Taylor, 354). This admission exposes the class dynamic of local food that is often ignored. Local food never means raccoon or squirrel. It might mean foraged greens and mushrooms, but mostly as a hobby and not as a full-scale change in lifestyle. For the middle and upper classes, local food is that which is found at events like Local Splendour, while local food for the poor is foraged and scavenged from the park or salvaged from a garbage bin. By substituting the menu ingredients with foods that the homeless are eating on a regular basis—but that would horrify the patrons of the restaurant—Jeremy is challenging middle class constructions of local food, challenging not only Dante’s bourgeois performance of cosmopolitan consumption but also the bourgeois performance of local consumption. Using Stanley Park for his primary ingredient source is also significant. As mentioned earlier, the construction of the park as a public space for non-consumptive use was rooted in middle class desires (Kheraj), so Jeremy’s menu ultimately challenges that construction as well.

Beyond the challenging of middle class views, Jeremy is also subverting Dante’s “wirelessness.” Johansen points out that “we are already global citizens through the food we eat—whether we acknowledge this or not” (134). She argues that Jeremy, through his fetishizing of local food, refuses to acknowledge the reality of globalization; however, I believe Dante is guiltier of this ignorance than Jeremy. Dante doesn’t want to be global;

he wants to be of no-place. Jeremy, on the other hand, though he chooses to root himself in Stanley Park and the local food producers around Vancouver, also draws on different culinary traditions in his preparations. With this final meal Jeremy has evolved from his dogmatic (though he claims not to be dogmatic) adherence to an imagined *relais*-style locality and allowed himself to cook more organically, creating something entirely new as a result. This meal he creates, “a Blood overture to Dante’s Crip opera” (Taylor, 347) as the Professor puts it, subverts Dante’s ideology of wireless no-place. Jeremy’s revised menu becomes a small moment and a site of resistance within the capitalist food system, made all the more effective by Jeremy’s use of the capitalist structure to do so. He uses Dante’s restaurant and Dante’s menu to bring a particular version of Stanley Park to the patrons, a version that is decidedly not bourgeois.

Since the printed menu doesn’t reflect the changes Jeremy makes, the question of knowing what you’re eating is also central. Halfway through the meal, Olli phones home to talk to Trout, who asks what he’s eating. Olli jokingly tells him he’s eating walrus and elephant, to which Trout responds with a laugh: “No you’re not” (381). So Ollie describes the soup he just had, though not with sufficient detail to satisfy his son. At the end of their conversation Trout insists that Olli find out exactly what he was eating, declaring, “you really should know” (382). When food critic Kiwi Frederique begins to realize what Jeremy has done, she answers the question of what she had to eat with a delighted, “I have *no idea*” (392, emphasis in original). Of course many of the other diners are not quite as thrilled by this revelation and when the rumours of what happened that night (with theories as wild as a menu of Everglade alligator, platypus, and hyacinth macaw) become public, all hell breaks loose, causing Dante to fire Jeremy and begin

damage control. These reactions demonstrate that people aren't too concerned with where their food is coming from until it disrupts their understanding of what is acceptable. Although many people often don't know where their food comes from, or even what they're eating exactly, the possibility that they've eaten something that falls outside of their accepted parameters is cause for concern. Trout's assertion that Olli should know what he's eating applies not just to this particular meal but also to all meals, just as Kiwi's revelation that she *doesn't* know what she's eating might be applicable to a variety of foods that people eat everyday.

### **Alt.preneurship and the punk economy**

*Stanley Park* is at its most effective when it is performing different versions of local food through different characters. Jeremy performs his "Blood" version of local with the Monkey's Paw—and it is a local food that wants desperately to be authentic—but has trouble adhering to such a lofty definition. Jeremy's mentor, Chef Quartey from the *relais* in France, performs an unassuming European local, also romanticized, that arises from centuries of French tradition. Dante, insofar as he claims the local title for Inferno for the sake of Local Splendour, performs a highly fetishized local that even proponents of the mainstream local food movement would reject. And the homeless in Stanley Park perform a version of local that many either dismiss or don't think to consider in the first place. The dialogue between characters further strengthens the interrogative nature of the story, as various arguments and discussions are allowed to play out through their conversations. Jeremy talks at length with both his father and Siwash about the idea of place and place knowledge, while dinner conversations allow Margaret, Dante, Olli, and

Benny to offer their opinions about the local and the extent to which one can know anything.

After all the complexity that plays out in the novel, the ending of *Stanley Park*—that sees Jeremy with a new restaurant and in a relationship with Jules—can initially seem too tidy and as such is probably the weakest part of the novel. It is perhaps a potential weakness of the novel form itself that it can sometimes demand such an ending, although I don't think that novels are beholden to endings that are unambiguous.<sup>13</sup> However, the ending is not without its positive traits. With his new restaurant, Jeremy has found a way to work outside the structure of the system he was beholden to with the Monkey's Paw. His fellow chef friend Fabrek comes up with the idea, telling Jeremy about places that operate underground: "Alt.preneurship, the punk economy. No business or liquor licenses, no insurance, no regulation, no inspection. Risky but occasionally very good, mostly a lot of fun" (421). He goes on to explain that the reservation system works on the reference system, so anyone who wants to make a reservation must know someone who has already been to the restaurant and is willing to vouch for this person. Jeremy's new restaurant manages to subvert to some extent the capitalist imperatives that drove his first business into the ground. It is still too neat of an ending, the solution a bit too individualistic (it does nothing to change the system), but it is a moment of intervention, an alternative reality that exists for the sake of this novel's ending. Ultimately, *Stanley Park* still offers a nuanced portrait of local food that challenges the discourse around local food and questions the assumptions put forth by the local food movement, while also offering a critique of capitalism's desire for limitless, borderless growth.

### CHAPTER 3

#### HOW TO EAT A LOBSTER

The sun was just peeking up over the horizon, casting a golden glow over the water, when Sloane made her way out to the dock. She couldn't remember ever seeing the water so still, but all the same there was a gentle lapping as it sloshed against the wooden pillars. The fishermen were hauling traps and rubber banding the lobsters in the morning chill. There was a strange calmness despite the flurry of activity, the rhythm as familiar and sure as the ebb and flow of the tide.

Sloane found herself nervous as she stood on the pier, shuffling her feet over the wet wood, inhaling the salt air that should have felt more familiar than it did. She spotted her uncle almost the moment she'd stepped onto the pier. He was wearing the wool sweater she'd sent him for Christmas. He was focused enough on shifting the wooden lobster traps from one side of the boat deck to the other that she was able to watch him work for a few minutes. His face broke into a wide grin when he lifted his head and saw her, and he raised an arm in greeting. She raised her hand shyly in return, bemused by her own uncertainty. This was Angus after all, the man who'd taught her to fiddle, the man who'd more or less raised her. Four years was a long time though.

"C'mere girl," he said as she got closer. "Let me look at you."

He placed both hands on her shoulders and beamed at her before pulling her into his massive arms. He smelled of fish and briny wet wool. Sloane took a deep breath.

"How are you?" Sloane asked.

“Oh, you know,” Angus replied. “I get by. Playing fiddle shows in the off-season to make ends meet. It’s good most days.”

“You bought a fiddle?” Sloane asked, grinning.

Angus gave her an odd look.

“What?” Sloane asked.

“I kept your father’s,” he said, carefully.

Sloane swallowed against the clench in her stomach. “Oh,” was all she could come up with.

“I, uh,” Angus reached up a hand to the back of his neck. “I kept yours, too.”

“You were supposed to sell that,” Sloane said, the words coming out sharp. It was an instinctual reaction fueled by the memory of being 14 years old, standing in her living room after her father’s funeral and pushing her fiddle case at her uncle with the intention to make it disappear. They’d exchanged a look: Angus’ sad and imploring, asking if she was sure, Sloane’s a hard glare, probably more grief-stricken than she would have liked, telling him yes. She wasn’t sure how to feel about its sudden reappearance beyond this déjà vu anger that recalled her angry teenage existence in the aftermath of her father’s death.

Sloane sighed and ran a hand through her hair. It was damp with the moisture of the morning sea air. “Sorry,” she said. “I’m not even mad, really, I just—I wasn’t expecting it.”

“I thought you might want it one day,” Angus said, shrugging, hands now stuffed in his pockets. “Either yours or your father’s.”

Sloane looked at her uncle, at the lines that had deepened around his eyes, the grey in his beard that was starting to take over the black. She couldn't tell because of the hat he was wearing but she was pretty sure his hairline had receded. Her clearest early memory of Angus was of a hulking figure of a man with a full black beard and thick curls on his head to match. He had been wearing denim jeans and a green flannel shirt and Sloane had been nervous of him at first, six years old and moving into a strange house, clinging to her father's legs in lieu of her mother's skirt.

Angus' fiddle was the first she'd ever scratched out a note on. She could still remember lifting it from where it was resting on his armchair, dragging the bow shakily over the E string to produce a high pitched, grating shriek. Angus had chuckled from the doorway and Sloane turned startled eyes on him, glanced between him and the instrument she held clumsily in hands far too small for a full-size fiddle. He showed her how to bow anyway, letting her run rosined hairs across open strings until she could produce an even tone. A week later her father presented her with her own half-size fiddle. Still, that first note on Angus' fiddle clung to her, resonated through her skin down to her marrow; it refused to let go even through those years she'd stopped playing.

"You want to come by for lunch?" Angus asked. "You've got a place to stay while you're here, right?"

"Owen and I rented an apartment in Halifax since we're going to be here for a bit researching this cookbook I'm writing," Sloane said. "And we have some work to do today. We can stop by for dinner though if you're not playing tonight. I just wanted to say hi. And I was hoping to get some lobster."

“I see how it is,” Angus teased, his smile deepening the lines around his face but making him look younger nonetheless. “You’re just using me for cheap seafood!”

Sloane laughed. “You caught me.”

“Lobster wasn’t always a rich man’s food, you know. It was poor man’s fare. Bottom feeders fit only for prison food and fertilizer. Be sure to mention that in that cookbook of yours.”

“I will,” Sloane said, as though it weren’t something he’d been telling her all her life.

Angus placed two mid-sized lobsters in a paper bag and handed them to her.

“Can I pay you tonight?” she asked.

“Just take ‘em,” he said. “Too big of a haul this season anyway. It’s driving prices down. Don’t you go eating ‘em today, mind. We’re having canners for dinner.”

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“So how’s your uncle?” Owen asked after he set up most of his photography equipment.

“He’s good, I think,” Sloane replied. “Lonely maybe. I don’t know. He’s getting too old for lobster fishing, but I don’t know what else he’d do. He can’t survive on fiddling.”

“From what you’ve told me, he probably could,” Owen said. He turned his lights on and began adjusting the umbrellas until he was satisfied with the angles.

Sloane frowned as she set up her ingredients on the counter: basil, onion, carrot, celery, all from the farmer’s market she’d stopped at on her way back from the wharf. She’d picked up some asparagus too, not sure yet what she was going to do with it, but it had looked so fresh with its bright spring-green stalks that she couldn’t resist.

“I don’t know if he’d want to,” Sloane said.

Owen gave her a long look.

“What?” Sloane asked, looking up from the basil to meet Owen’s gaze. It was the same kind of look she’d gotten from Angus that morning, like she should be able to tell what he was thinking.

“Nothing,” Owen said. He thought she might be projecting with her insistence that her uncle wouldn’t want to fiddle full time.

She blinked at him, irritation visible in the set of her shoulders, and went back to prepping her *mise en place*. Owen watched as she rolled the basil into a neat little cigar and began slicing it into thin strips. “*Chiffonade*,” Owen thought to himself. It was a perfect word for the pretty technique Sloane was using. She’d tried to teach him how to do it once and he’d been so discouraged by his slow motions and uneven strips compared to her swift, even ones; he’d given up almost immediately. He had opted to leave it to the professionals. Besides, he enjoyed watching her work.

Owen found something satisfying in the ease of her motions, the dexterity of her fingers as they worked at something that had so clearly become second nature, muscle memory fused into the very fibres of her hands. The first time he’d watched her do this he was certain she’d slice a layer of skin off. The knife moved so quickly, so close to her fingers that it seemed impossible for her to come away unscathed. And yet she did, and continued to do so every time. He wondered if there was something in her fiddle playing that helped hone her coordination and swiftness. There was an art to it, for sure, but there was something about it all that seemed inherent to her very being. She’d been playing fiddle since she was old enough to hold one, so it was something she grew into as much

as it grew into her, as much a part of her as the freckles that scattered over her pale skin. Her muscles and bones had formed around practiced movements, around fingers moving up and down scales, motions built into her mannerisms. It was skill she'd worked for and perfected over years of repetition. It didn't seem so farfetched that she might be able to transfer that ease of motion over to a cutting board.

"Take a picture, it lasts longer," Sloane teased, not looking up from her knife work.

Owen just smiled at her, long past being embarrassed by his habit of staring at her, and then snapped a photo.

It had become a running joke. The first time they'd worked together, he'd spent more time watching her than actually photographing her. They'd met at a mutual friend's party, of all places, in a cramped bachelor apartment in Toronto's Parkdale neighbourhood at the height of summer. The window air conditioning unit was doing little to alleviate the pressing humidity of too many bodies in such a small space and they started talking when they both escaped to the balcony in the hopes of finding a breeze.

Oddly enough it was the fiddle that brought them together before the food. They'd been griping about their respective food industry jobs when an electrified, dubstep-style violin piece came drifting out to the balcony. Sloane stopped mid-sentence to focus on it.

"Lindsey Stirling," she said when the song finished.

"You like violin?" Owen asked.

Sloane had laughed at that. "You could say that."

"You play at all?"

“A bit,” she replied.

“I tried violin once when I was little,” Owen told her. “I wasn’t very good though. My mom sort of pushed me toward piano instead.” He laughed. “I guess it doesn’t sound as bad when you’re screwing up on a piano. And I think she thought I could be the next Ray Charles or something, just without the drug addiction and the blindness.”

“I like Ray Charles,” she said.

“Yeah, me too.”

When they finally managed to find a time that worked with both of their schedules, Sloane brought over a grocery bag of food along with her fiddle. Owen watched, first in amazement at the way her fingers flew over the neck of her fiddle, racing with the bow for a seemingly impossible rhythm, and then at her ability to easily throw together *croque-monsieur*, complete with *béchamel* sauce.

“So you just play a bit, eh?” Owen said, eyebrows raised, when she finished off a traditional Cape Breton reel.

Sloane ducked her head and blushed. “I played when I was younger. Only started again a couple years ago.”

Owen shook his head and then sat down at his piano, not to be outdone. “Well I’ve been playing since I was seven, no breaks in between.” And he broke into a fast ragtime number.

Sloane grinned at him. “I’d say the next Scott Joplin, not Ray Charles,” she teased.

“I’ve always had a soft spot for ragtime,” he said.

Sloane was whisking the béchamel when she first made a jibe that he should take a picture. Owen smiled and took her up on the challenge. He made it back to the kitchen with his camera just as Sloane was drizzling the béchamel over the sandwiches and proceeded to snap as many pictures as he could.

“These are good,” she said later, when Owen was cleaning up and she managed to snatch his camera from him to scroll through the pictures he’d taken. “The pictures on my blog are terrible compared to this.”

“I could take some pictures for your blog,” he shrugged.

“No, I couldn’t ask you to do that,” Sloane said. “I can’t pay you.”

“You didn’t ask,” Owen said. “I offered. Plus it helps build my portfolio. I don’t have a lot of food shots.”

“You planning on getting into food styling?” she teased.

“It shows versatility,” he insisted.

She sidled up beside him as he wiped his hands on a towel. “I like this one,” she said, quieter, all the teasing gone from her voice. It was a fairly simple shot, of her slicing a sandwich in half with the chef knife that she’d brought from home. It displayed clearly the white scar that ran down the webbing between her right thumb and forefinger.

He was about to ask her where she got the scar, but she looked up at him then and something made the words catch in his throat. A moment later he was sure he must have imagined it because Sloane turned away as though nothing had happened and asked:

“You around next Monday? That’s usually when I work on recipes.”

Sloane started in on the onion, stripping the papery skin off and then making the precise, strategic cuts that allowed her to flip the onion on its side so it would fall into a perfect, even dice with every slice of the knife. Owen moved in next to her to start snapping pictures and Sloane spared a glance in his direction while he was occupied with the camera. He looked good like that, with his Nikon pressed against his face, hand nestled under the lens for focus and balance, the smallest crease between his eyes as his face tensed in concentration.

“Why’d you stop?” Owen asked. He lowered the camera and Sloane snapped her head back down to her onions.

“Onion tears,” she said. She could feel him staring and focused intently on dicing the rest of the onion until he stopped.

“What are we making?” he finally asked.

“*I am making lobster Thermidor,*” Sloane replied.

“Sounds fancy.”

“Well I’m doing three different lobster recipes, four, I guess, if you include the basics of steaming and boiling, and I thought I’d include something a little more...”

“Elite?” Owen offered.

“No,” Sloane protested, bringing her knife down heavily to chop off the end of the celery. She chopped the leafy ends off as well and tossed them in a pot to be used for stock. Maybe lobster Thermidor was elite, but it was still lobster.

“Isn’t it French?”

“So?” she demanded. She set her knife down and glared at him.

“Hey,” Owen said, hands raised in surrender. “I’m just asking questions here. It’s a local cookbook. Lobster Thermidor does not sound like a local recipe.”

“There are French people in Nova Scotia,” Sloane insisted. “Besides, I’m sick of this purist version of local. Everything in this country is a mash of a bunch of cultures anyway. The lobster is local. Who cares where the recipe came from?” She was thinking of fiddling now as she ran her knife through the stalks of celery. East Coast fiddlers certainly had their own sound, but it was a mix of Irish, Scottish, and French traditions, jigs, reels, and strathpeys riffing off one another to create the particular Cape Breton and Acadian sounds.

“Shit,” Sloane hissed as blood seeped over the cutting board. She pushed the salvageable celery onto the counter and dumped the rest in the sink along with the board. It wasn’t a deep cut, just a nick, but like most finger cuts it was bleeding fast and freely. On instinct, Sloane sucked the finger into her mouth only to watch the blood reappear immediately on pulling back to look at it.

“You okay?” Owen asked. He was beside her and pulling her hand up to his face to get a better look before she had a chance to reply.

“Yeah,” Sloane said, and pulled her hand back, sucking the blood off again. “I just need a bandaid.” She watched the blood surface again. “Maybe a small piece of gauze actually, this isn’t going to stop bleeding anytime soon.”

“Sure,” Owen replied, and left the kitchen to find the first aid kit.

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Sloane started working in kitchens around the time she stopped playing the fiddle, partly because she needed money, but more because she needed an outlet for idle, itching

fingers. Cooking was enough like music to satisfy her for the time being; it was open to spontaneity and improvisation.

To be fair, her first job working the fruit counter at Farmboy grocery store in Ottawa didn't leave that much room for improvisation, but it did keep her hands busy. She chopped fruit for customers' pre-packaged convenience and put together fruit trays and salads with too much melon. She started watching cooking shows and practiced her *chiffonade* technique until it was good enough that she started slipping mint *chiffonade* into the fruit salads. Her boss, a youngish woman in her late twenties or early thirties, only sighed in exasperation because the customers enjoyed the mint, but only Sloane could slice it into thin enough ribbons. No one else working the counter cared enough to improve.

When she was 18, Sloane started the first of a string of chain restaurant jobs at Jack Astor's in Toronto. It had been four years since they left Cape Breton Island and Angus wanted to move back to Nova Scotia. He couldn't quite bring himself to head back to Sydney, so he settled in Dartmouth just across the harbour from Halifax. Sloane had no interest in returning to Nova Scotia, but didn't want to stay in Ottawa, so she headed to Toronto instead. The city was big enough and loud enough, filled with enough people that she could lose herself in it for a while. And it had a hell of a lot of restaurants.

She worked her way up from prep to line cook before moving into a demi-chef position at a small independent French restaurant in midtown. Smaller capacity meant fewer chefs. She was in charge of two appetizers and a main: the escargots sautéed in garlic Pernod butter, the octopus terrine layered with oranges and pickled cucumber, and the duo of seared jumbo shrimp and scallops served over a puff pastry tart of creamed

mushrooms and shallots. It was the first time she'd ever tried scallops and enjoyed them, and she could almost feel Angus' indignation, that after years of searing, poaching, and baking scallops that her father harvested by hand on dives, she didn't enjoy them until working at a French restaurant so far from the Atlantic.

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Sloane shifted the bottle of wine she was holding to nestle in the crook of her left arm as she knocked on Angus' door. The night was cool and heavy with impending rain. Sloane had forgotten the kind of damp that infiltrated living so close to the water, the sea traveling on the air and seeping through cracks under doorways and between the stitches of clothes. It felt a bit like it was trying to draw her in, capture her and keep her here. She wondered if Owen felt it too.

“What's all this?” Angus asked when he opened the door, eyeing the items they were carrying.

“Wine,” Sloane said. “And some asparagus I picked up at the farmer's market this morning. And, uh, I made dessert. Mom's sticky toffee pudding. It just needs to go in the oven for a bit before we eat it.”

“You didn't have to do that,” Angus said, taking the asparagus from Owen. “I'm Angus, by the way.” He reached out his hand to him.

“Owen,” Owen said with a smile, shaking Angus' hand.

“Good to meet you,” Angus said.

“You too,” Owen replied. “Sloane's told me a lot about you.”

“Nothing good, I'm sure.” He led them down the hall to the kitchen where he had a massive pot set up on the stove. A large cooler was set up next to it on the counter and

soft thumping and clicking noises were coming out of it from the lobsters moving against one another.

“All good,” Owen said. “She tells me you’re a hell of a fiddle player.”

“I do all right,” Angus said. “Sloane could out fiddle me by the time she was 12 though. Which reminds me...”

Angus disappeared from the room and they heard his footsteps thump upstairs. Sloane leaned over the cooler to look at the lobsters. They were small compared to commercial lobsters, commonly referred to as cannery lobsters because they were once used exclusively for canned lobster. Owen sidled up beside her and stuck his hand in the cooler to run a tentative finger over one of the lobster’s shells.

“They look even more like bugs when they’re this small,” he said.

Sloane snorted. He wasn’t wrong, and their shiny dark brown shells didn’t help matters.

“Did you say your mother’s sticky toffee pudding?” Angus asked as he strode back into the kitchen. “I haven’t had that since before she died.”

Sloane nodded and glanced over at her uncle. He set a black fiddle case down on the kitchen table.

“Is that mine or dad’s?” she asked, jutting her chin towards it and crossing her arms over her chest. She was fairly sure she knew.

“Yours,” he said.

Sloane walked over and lifted the lid of the case. The wood was still dusty with rosin even though no one had played it in over ten years. It was darker than the fiddle she had back in Toronto. Her new fiddle had a lighter, more orangey hue, while this one was

darker, closer to a deep mahogany, more red than orange. She traced her finger along the curved body and up to the scroll at the top. It was probably terribly out of tune.

“Have you listened to her play?” Angus asked, looking over at Owen.

“Oh yeah,” Owen said with a grin. “She’s incredible. I play piano, so sometimes we kick around with duets and stuff.”

“Now that I’d like to hear,” Angus said.

“You don’t have a piano,” Sloane reminded him.

“Well, not tonight then, but someday.”

“Should we roast the asparagus, do you think?” Sloane asked, shutting the lid on her fiddle and heading back to the counter. She started snapping the woody ends off the asparagus. “I’m thinking with lemon and garlic might be nice.”

“You’re the expert when it comes to food,” Angus said.

Angus laid the lobsters out in the middle of the table on a large platter and dished out melted butter for each of them. Sloane poured the wine for her and Owen, while Owen divided the asparagus evenly between the three of them. It took Sloane a moment to notice the way Owen was craning his neck towards her in an effort to mimic her handling of the lobster.

“Sorry,” Sloane said. “Here.” She angled her body toward Owen so he could watch her. “Twist the claws off,” she said, pulling them from the lobster’s body. “Then crack them here with the nutcracker.” She showed him the position of the nutcracker around the claw before crushing down. “Remove the tail,” she instructed, flipping her lobster and bending the tail back until it separated with a snap. She pulled the small

flipper bits from the tail and then moved back to the claws with her small fish fork to demonstrate how to pull the meat from the shell. “You can eat this part, too, if you want,” Sloane said, pulling the body shell away to reveal the greenish tomalley. “But a lot of people think it’s gross, so I understand if you don’t want to.” She licked some of the green from her fingers and then detached one of the legs, explaining that the meat in those can just be sucked out.

“That’s a lot of work for dinner,” Owen said, adjusting the nutcracker around one of his lobster’s claws. After the first bite he took it back as worthwhile. “This might be the best thing I’ve ever tasted.” He paused and pushed at some of the green tomalley with his fork, “I’m still not sure about this green gunk though.”

Angus laughed. “I like it well enough, but I don’t love it the way Sloane’s dad did.”

“I used to give him all mine when I was little,” Sloane said fondly. It was good to be talking about him and easier than she’d expected.

“How’s that cookbook of yours coming?” Angus asked.

“It’s coming,” Sloane said. “I’m still trying to figure out what it’s going to be.”

“She’s battling with the publishers,” Owen supplied.

“We’re not battling,” Sloane protested. “I’m just trying to preserve the spirit of the book.” As much as Sloane would love to do whatever she pleased, she understood that were certain points she had to compromise. Without the publisher there wouldn’t be a book. “Owen thinks I’m selling out,” she added.

“I did not say that,” Owen protested. “I just think that they sought you out because of your blog so you have more power than you think you do. You want to do local Maritime cooking, so do that. You don’t need to fancy it up just to sell books.”

“This from the man who thinks I should have a cooking show.”

“Okay, but that’s just because I think people are missing out not seeing you in action,” Owen explained, and added that he’d also suggested the YouTube channel, which would really just be a video extension of the blog. He shifted focus to Angus. “She’s very good at what she does.”

“I have no doubt,” Angus said. “Are any of your mother’s recipes making it into the book?”

“A few of them,” Sloane said, laying into her third canner. Owen was still working through his first, but Angus was one ahead of her. “It’s one of the reasons I made the sticky toffee pudding. I think I’ve finally perfected it, but I want your opinion. I never tried it when she made it, so…”

“Sure you did,” Angus said. “You were probably just too young to remember.”

Sloane had very few memories of her mother, having been only six when she died of cancer that everyone attributed to the Sydney Tar Ponds. Angus’ wife died just two years before Sloane’s mother from a similar cancer. She tried to picture her mother serving sticky toffee pudding, maybe at Christmas or on someone’s birthday, but all she could come up with was a memory of them picking blueberries, her mother’s long pale fingers dipping into Sloane’s overflowing bucket to snatch up some berries.

“Either way,” Owen said, snapping Sloane’s attention back to the conversation, “it’s delicious. Seriously. I thought I was going to be sick of it she tested that recipe so

many damn times, but I could eat it every day for the rest of my life probably. Hard to photograph though.” The colour and texture, he explained, were not the most photogenic or appetizing. Not like chocolate chip cookies, which, because of their greater familiarity with a wider audience, looked appetizing almost no matter what. People have sense memories of them that they don’t necessarily have with sticky toffee pudding. “Hell,” he said, “half the time you say ‘pudding’ and people expect custard, not cake. It’s *very* British.”

“Well people will still want to try something different,” Angus said. “Isn’t that part of the idea of a cookbook? To get people to try new things?”

“Oh for sure,” Owen agreed. “But you’re always playing a little on what they already know.”

“Nostalgia,” Sloane added. She knew a thing or two about nostalgia. You don’t spend half your life running from it without having a sense of its power. “A lot of local food’s allure is nostalgia. People want to feel like they’re coming back to something that’s been lost.”

“Personally, I don’t think they can have it,” Owen said. “World’s too different. It’s changed too much.”

“Well, I think people be looking for something they’ve imagined,” Angus added. He had his own intimate understanding of nostalgia. “Memory and nostalgia, they’re funny things. Not nearly as reliable as we’d like them to be.”

“Unless you’re talking muscle memory,” Sloane said. “There are some things you don’t forget. It becomes a part of you. Like riding a bike.”

“Or fiddling?” Angus suggested. He winked at Sloane and scooped up some tomalley with a piece of claw meat.

“Maybe,” Sloane said. Food must come into the muscle memory somehow. Nostalgia for certain meals must manifest in a certain way, the way that particular scents can recall memories you didn’t even realize you still had. She had learned to cook the way she’d learned to fiddle, she figured. With rules and techniques, but also with a certain amount of instinct based on the ingrained knowledge of food she’d grown into throughout her life. Someone must have once shown her how to eat a lobster, but she couldn’t recall the experience. She felt more like she was born with that ability already in the sinews of her limbs.

“I think we might have a kind of evolutionary memory of food,” Sloane said. “Something that goes way back, you know? To when we were living in caves.”

“You might be right about that,” Angus said. “Is that what this cookbook is? A kind of way back food tradition?”

“I don’t even know anymore,” Sloane said. “I guess I just want people to think about their food, to be honest. To wonder where it comes from, why they’re preparing it in certain ways, why they like what they like. And I want people to let their food traditions evolve. I think Owen has a point about the world having changed too much. We can’t go back, but maybe we can take a bit of that old knowledge and blend it with what we know now.”

“Well, there’s history there, right?” Owen said. He poured more wine for the two of them.

“Past, present, and future?” Angus suggested.

Sloane snorted. “It sounds silly and romantic when you put it that way.”

The conversation drifted to other things and they maintained the leisurely pace of the meal, moving some time later to the sticky toffee pudding. Angus insisted it was just like he remembered. It wasn't until after coffee that Angus looked at her and suggested a duet, for old time's sake. Sloane rolled her eyes, but knew Angus would be able to talk her into it. Once she'd tuned her old fiddle and had it resting on her shoulder she could admit that she'd never needed him to talk her into it.

“Devil in the Kitchen?” Angus asked.

Sloane nodded.

## CHAPTER 4

### **FISHING FOR OOLICHANS: PUSHING BACK AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL DEGRADATION IN EDEN ROBINSON'S *MONKEY BEACH***

Like salmon, oolichans spawn in rivers and their fry migrate to the ocean, where they live for about three years. They return to their home rivers along the British Columbian coast in early spring, usually between mid-February and early April. The Kitimat River used to be the best one, but it has been polluted by all the industry in town, so you'd have to be pretty dense or desperate to eat anything from that river. Mom said the runs used to be so thick, you could walk across the river and not touch water. You didn't even need a net; you could just scoop them up with your hat. (Robinson, 92)

At the beginning of Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*, the narrator, Lisamarie, guides the reader in locating Haisla territory. "Find a map of British Columbia," she instructs. "Point to the middle of the coast. Beneath Alaska, find the Queen Charlotte Islands. Drag your finger across the map, across the Hecate Strait to the coast and you should be able to see a large island hugging the coast" (Robinson, *Monkey Beach*, 4). Robinson uses this second person imperative voice frequently throughout the novel, often when Lisa is offering an explanation of Haisla culture and history with which the Western non-Haisla reader, like myself, might not be familiar. Lisa adopts a similar voice when she participates in Haisla food traditions through instructive passages that read almost like a field guide. This second person direct address invites the reader into the story and makes their participation in it explicit, a tactic that Nussbaum observes when examining Dickens (31). But by providing only limited cultural glosses and constantly pointing to the gaps in Lisamarie's knowledge, Robinson also reminds the reader of their own limited ability to truly be part of this Haisla world. This direct address also serves to show the reader that as much as they might be observing the narrator throughout the story, the narrator is also

observing them, reversing the Western gaze that so often serves to “other” Indigenous peoples and ultimately implicating the Western reader in the violence—both fast and slow—that plays out in the novel.

While much attention has been paid to Robinson’s use of the Gothic in *Monkey Beach*, less has been said about the explanatory passages of Haisla food ways. Ella Soper-Jones has pointed out that such passages of “potted histories” read like salvage ethnography—a record of a culture that is presumed to be going extinct thus acting as the final preservation of that culture (16), but what Robinson presents in *Monkey Beach* is far more complex than that. Though these passages are offered up as guides for the non-Haisla reader, and certainly read as factual descriptions, as Lydia Efthymia Roupakia points out, “Lisa repeatedly confounds—and Robinson boldly challenges—the reader’s expectation that Lisa be positioned as an ‘insider’ to ethnographic ‘otherness’” (283). Lisa’s knowledge of both her family’s history and wider Haisla history and culture has gaps in it, and secrets ripple under the surface of the novel, providing an ambiguity that undermines Lisa’s ability to offer complete knowledge and ultimately interrogates the notion that complete knowledge might ever be something that *can* be offered.

Any attempt at accessing so-called “authentic” Haisla culture is further complicated by the constant interweaving of Haisla with settler-colonial traditions. Sherry Kulperger writes: “Rather than seeing aboriginal culture as completely overwhelmed by settler-colonial culture, Robinson at once underscores and *performs* their intertwining, thereby refusing the simplistic split between the modern Western and the pre-modern tribal” (88). The use of the novel—a European form—to tell a Haisla story steeped in Haisla traditions is a display of the endurance of Haisla culture, not of its

eclipse by settler-colonial traditions. Robinson's refusal to portray certain ceremonies and record certain stories in the novel demonstrates the tension that exists between these two traditions, but also serves to demonstrate that the two can co-exist.

In respect to food specifically, Robinson both describes how traditional food ways are passed down through generations and offers the reader instructive passages about those food ways, while always carefully embedding hints that such passages are limited in their ability to transfer full knowledge. The prominence of food in the novel demonstrates the importance of food traditions in maintaining Haisla culture, while also highlighting the difficulties, both economic and environmental, in keeping with those traditions. The above epigraph points to the effects of environmental degradation on one of the Haisla's staple foods, a smelt-like fish called oolichan. However, more than just the oolichan have been affected by industry and pollution. The Haisla Nation is one of eight First Nations currently challenging construction of the Northern Gateway Pipeline in British Columbia precisely because of its potential impact not just on fishing, but also on hunting and gathering practices, and ultimately on the traditions that define the Haisla nation.

The narrative links the history of colonial trauma with its continuation through late capitalism and environmental degradation, while Lisa's gift for communicating with the spirit world (an inherited gift) demonstrates the difficulty of adhering to Haisla traditions within a white settler-colonial society. Throughout the novel Robinson uses food to underscore the important cultural knowledge that exists in Haisla food traditions and insists that this knowledge remains present, recoverable, and strong. The ending, in which Lisa is able to talk to her deceased relatives, I argue, ultimately offers hope for the

regaining and strengthening of Haisla traditions, while also refusing to back down from the reality that those traditions are at risk. As Robinson writes in her lecture *The Sasquatch at Home*, “of course the [oolichan] are a concern, but it’s the traditions that go with the fish that are in real trouble” (22).

*Monkey Beach* follows Lisa as she sets out to find the fate of her brother, Jimmy, who has gone missing at sea, and moves between the present and the past as she reflects on her childhood and the events that have brought her to the point where the novel begins. Lisa’s favourite uncle, Mick, and her grandmother, Ma-ma-oo, serve as her primary teachers of Haisla traditions. Uncle Mick encourages Lisa’s more rebellious tendencies, affectionately referring to her as his “favourite monster” (67). His death is the first to make Lisa aware of the truly ominous nature of the visits she receives from the little red-haired man who occasionally appears in her bedroom—she realizes that his appearance is a death sending. Lisa is later wracked by guilt after Ma-ma-oo’s death, believing that if she’d tried harder to understand her gift, she may have been able to prevent it. The loss of these two important mentors in her life, exacerbated by the trauma of being raped by her former friend Cheese, prompts her to move to Vancouver where she spirals into a vortex of drugs and alcohol as a way to keep both her grief and her gift at bay. At the end of the novel, Lisa calls upon her gift to discover Jimmy’s fate and learns that he has died. She enters the spirit world where she encounters Uncle Mick, Ma-ma-oo, and Jimmy, all of them urging her to go back even as she feels the tug of desire to stay in the spirit world with them. The reader is given no conclusive ending and is left to wonder if Lisa lives or dies, further adding to the ambiguities already present throughout the novel.

## **Grease Trails and Oil Pipelines**

In order to fully understand the significance of food in the novel, it is important to understand the importance of food, and especially oolichan, in Haisla culture. As the first fish to appear at the end of winter, oolichan are one of the most important foods for the Haisla and they are central in the traditional story of the founding of Kitamaat Village. Robinson recounts part of this story in both *Monkey Beach* and *The Sasquatch at Home* and it also appears in a collection of Haisla stories, *Tales of Kitamaat*, recorded by Robinson's uncle, Gordon Robinson. The crux of the story is that people once believed a large white monster lived at the mouth of Kitimat River, until the monster was discovered to be a flock of seagulls feeding on the plentiful oolichan. This discovery led to the settling of Kitamaat Village. Oolichan are eaten in a variety of ways not just by the Haisla, but by a number of neighbouring aboriginal groups. They are eaten fried, smoked, and boiled, but are most commonly eaten and preserved as grease. Because of their high oil content grease is the most effective way of preserving them and it can be spread on toast, used in cooking, or eaten by the spoonful as medicine. Oolichan grease is made all along the coast, with each nation having its own particular method of making grease and since oolichans are only available in a few rivers it became an important commodity for trade with inland nations. These trade routes became known as "grease trails," many of which converged at a fishery on the Nass River, and people would travel for weeks to trade for oolichan grease. Kitimat River was the primary source of oolichan for Kitamaat Village until it became so polluted by the nearby Alcan aluminum plant as to be unfishable. Haisla Dan Paul Sr. tells Allene Drake and Lyle Wilson in their book *Eulachon* that although all of Kitamaat Village used to fish that river, no one does

anymore, and they instead travel to Kildala or Kemano (35).<sup>13</sup> Oolichan runs have also lately been delayed and are not nearly as abundant as they once were, making oolichan grease increasingly rare and expensive, yet as Drake and Wilson write, “it remains very solidly entrenched as an important and distinct part of contemporary native people’s cuisine” (27). Robinson recounts an instance when her parents’ house was broken into and despite the presence of several expensive electronic items the only thing missing was their oolichan grease (*Sasquatch*).

In *Sasquatch* Robinson writes: “If the oolichan don’t return to our rivers, we lose more than a species. We lose a connection with our history, a thread of tradition that ties us to this particular piece of the Earth, that ties our ancestors to our children” (23). This concern is echoed by a number of Haisla people with regards not only to oolichan fishing and grease making, but all of the food traditions that rely on access to traditional *healthy* Haisla territory. The construction of the Northern Gateway Pipeline threatens this territory and despite Enbridge’s efforts to assure residents that the risk of a spill is minimal, many of them believe that even minimal risk is unacceptable. Several affidavits of Haisla people collected in the case against Enbridge outline the food and medicine harvests that would be affected by Northern Gateway. Nina Shaw and Thomas Gregory Robinson provide extensive lists of these harvested items, which include salmon, crab, clams, cockles, moose, deer, elderberries, blueberries, and soapberries. Thomas Gregory Robinson writes: “I depend heavily upon the natural food resources of Haisla Territory to sustain myself and my family. The loss of this resource would be an economic disaster for myself, and for my family” (7). Nina Shaw writes: “If my ability to hunt, fish, gather and engage in traditional practices were lost or compromised, I would not have food for

personal consumption or food for sharing with my family. Traditional uses of food would be lost” (4). And of course it’s about more than food. Adding to these voices, Gerald Amos has told the CBC, “if these little ones can’t witness us doing what we’ve done for generations now, if we sever that tie to the land and the ocean, we’re no longer Haisla” (Thomson Reuters). All of these people demonstrate the importance of Haisla territory both as a food source and as a source of Haisla culture. The survival of the Haisla is bound up in the survival of their food traditions and the survival and health of their traditional territory. This slow degradation of the environment and the degradation of culture, enforced through the residential schools, that accompanies it is exactly the kind of “bloodless, slow-motion violence” (16) that Nixon addresses in *Slow Violence*.

### **Untold Stories, Secrets, and Trauma**

Before turning to food in the novel I want to address the ambiguity and deliberate gaps in information that run throughout. From the very beginning of *Monkey Beach* Robinson sets up the possibility of multiple meanings and multiple stories, upsetting the possibility for an indisputable truth. On the first page, Lisa awakens to the sound of crows calling the Haisla word *la’es* outside her window. “Go down to the bottom of the ocean,” Lisa translates for the reader and immediately follows it up with, “the word means something else, but I can’t remember what” (1). The reader knows from the first page that she is an unreliable narrator. These gaps in meaning and understanding appear frequently throughout the novel and this is in some ways a formal choice that the novel form is particularly adept at, offering, as I pointed to in the first chapter, what Stone-Mediatore refers to as a “point of departure” for exploring various issues and circumstances without

being beholden to providing answers or solutions. Miller insists that it is “an essential feature of literature to hide secrets that may not ever be revealed” (40). The withholding of secrets or cultural knowledge also serves to destabilize the reader’s position as a possible consumer of Haisla culture via the text, but it is additionally a practical concern for Robinson in considering what she is allowed to write about. In *Sasquatch* Robinson includes the following epigraph from the Haisla *nuyem* (most closely translated as law):

As clear and complete as we want this discussion of our nuyem to be, it is important to recognize that the Old People realized that some things cannot be shared. This was and remains a way of preserving our culture. In time past, it was recognized that whatever the missionaries knew about our culture, they tried to suppress. The less they knew, the safer our traditions remained. Nowadays, we simply realize that there are aspects of our traditional perspectives and values that non-Haislas would never be able to understand. (13)

Robinson also explains that she was not allowed to print any clan stories because the copyright is held by the clan and require permission and a feast in order to be published (*Sasquatch*, 31). Soper-Jones also examines these omissions at some length, citing interviews with Robinson where Robinson explains her discomfort in detailing specific traditions, and also says that her uncle received some criticism upon publishing *Tales of Kitamaat* because some Haisla members insisted that those stories aren’t supposed to be written down (17-18). Despite the many passages that are clearly intended to act as explanations for the non-Haisla readers, there are parts of the novel that will be fully intelligible only to the Haisla reader.

It’s important to consider the gaps in the cultural explanations offered by the novel not only because it reminds the reader that the novel is not meant to be an anthropological account of Haisla culture, but also because it is a technique that allows Robinson to negotiate between Haisla and settler-colonial culture. There is a tension

between Haisla and settler-colonial traditions that Robinson demonstrates through Lisa's initial resistance to her gift and then her attempts to access it, as well as through the importance of Mick and Ma-ma-oo as mentors in Lisa's life, while remaining on the fringes of society. As Kulperger suggests, *Monkey Beach* both demonstrates this tension and performs it. However, in that same sense, the novel also demonstrates that such a tension can exist without being paralyzing, and therein lies the success of *Monkey Beach* and its ability to present what I insist is hope at the end of the novel.

I also want to address the depictions of intergenerational trauma that run through the novel. Lisa's Uncle Mick and Aunt Trudy are both survivors of the residential school system, having been sent by their mother, Ma-ma-oo, as a way of keeping them away from their abusive father (himself a WWII veteran with his own trauma). Of course this move did not protect them from abuse and Trudy holds a grudge against her mother for the rest of her life. Both Mick and Trudy are alcoholics and although Mick finds some relief in his activism for Indigenous rights and in spending time with Lisa, he is ultimately haunted by it for most of his life. Josh, Trudy's on-again-off-again boyfriend, also went through the residential school system. He is also uncle to Jimmy's girlfriend Karaoke and Lisa's friend Pooch. Near the end of the novel Lisa reveals that she found a photograph and a card in Jimmy's room. The photograph depicts a priest and a little boy with a cut-out of Josh's head pasted over the priest and one of Karaoke's head over the little boy. The accompanying card depicts a stork with the words "It's a boy!" on the front, and inside reads: "Dear, dear Joshua. It was yours so I killed it" (365). These two items taken together imply that Josh is perpetuating the same abuse that he endured at the residential school. It is also heavily implied that Pooch's eventual suicide is the result of

his experiencing the same abuse from Josh as Karaoke, though this is never made explicit. In fact the photograph and card from Karaoke are the clearest indication of sexual abuse, other than Lisa's rape, that Robinson provides.

Some of the obscurity surrounding the reality of trauma in the novel is the result of Lisa's young naivety. She doesn't initially understand the implication of residential schools nor does she understand her marginalized position as a Native woman.<sup>14</sup> However, I would argue that it is also a strategic move on Robinson's part not to place these stories front and center. Though these traumas are often the driving force behind the characters' actions and motivations (it is Jimmy's drive for revenge against Josh that results in his death at sea), Robinson does not allow them to dominate the novel. Rather it is Lisa's time learning about Haisla food traditions with Mick and Ma-ma-oo that is afforded a level of detail not seen elsewhere in the novel. The trauma becomes an almost unspoken undercurrent in the novel. "Writing," Nixon says, "can challenge perceptual habits that downplay the damage slow violence inflicts" (15) and I would argue that by depicting colonial trauma as a haunting presence underlying the narrative, while depicting endangered traditions in great detail, Robinson demonstrates that the loss of those traditions is not only equally violent but is also an extension of the more obvious kind of colonial violence seen in the residential schools. She is able to give due attention to the stories that are more obviously traumatic without immediately obfuscating or trivializing the trauma of slowly losing one's culture.

## **Embodied Knowledge, Embodied Taste**

“The recovery of the people is tied to the recovery of food,” writes Winona LaDuke in *Recovering the Sacred*, “since food itself is medicine: not only for the body, but for the soul, for the spiritual connection to history, ancestors, and the land” (210). LaDuke is a well-known Anishinaabe activist who has long made the connection between food practices, native community resiliency, and ecological restoration. *Monkey Beach* also makes this connection through the food practices that Lisa picks up throughout her life from her parents, Ma-ma-oo, and Uncle Mick. As I mentioned above, Mick finds some comfort in guiding Lisa and encouraging her more resistant tendencies (such as when she sings “Fuck the Oppressors” at school rather than read aloud a passage from her history text book that depicts Indigenous peoples as cannibals). He teaches her how to check the fishing nets and how to set crab traps, takes her to pick salmonberries and gather early spring shoots called *q<sup>o</sup>alh’m*. After Mick dies, Lisa starts spending more time with Ma-ma-oo who also takes her berry picking and teaches her about different medicines, like *oxasuli*, which can also be used to ward off ghosts. She warns Lisa that it is dangerous, and not to be eaten, but used carefully for arthritis and joint pain. Too much, she tells Lisa, will stop the heart (152). Lisa finds comfort in these excursions with Ma-ma-oo and she’s able to talk to her about Mick and the visits from the little red haired man. The excursions with Ma-ma-oo become a reprieve from school, where she has few friends and is performing poorly in her classes.

Though the reader never gets Ma-ma-oo’s perspective, she appears to enjoy teaching Lisa about the old ways, especially in the wake of Mick’s death, and there is a sense that she takes comfort in these familiar activities that keep her busy. In a passage

just after Mick's funeral, Ma-ma-oo, Lisa, and Lisa's mother spend a day smoking salmon. Lisa's mother is impressed with the speed at which Lisa picks up her job of decapitating the fish and together with Ma-ma-oo they work through half of the fish, saving the other half for canning, a job that Lisa's mother takes on. Lisa stays in the smokehouse with Ma-ma-oo while her mother starts on the canning and notices, "now that she didn't have anything to do, she sagged. I sat down on the ground beside her, yawning. She covered her eyes with her hand. Her shoulders started to shake. She never made a sound when she cried. I rested my head against her knee. She put her other hand on my neck. The skin on her fingers was rough; her hand was warm and smelled of fish" (149). The salmon smoking—and their future excursions gathering plants—offers Lisa and Ma-ma-oo a space to come together and share in their grief over Mick's death, to connect with one another and participate in the passing down of knowledge, even when some of that knowledge is lost along the way when people, like Mick, die. While it's certainly far off from solving all their problems or even fully healing their grief, the reader can see how these kinds of practices function to strengthen communities and offer space for healing.

The process for smoking salmon, though not as detailed as the passage in which Lisa describes rendering oolichan grease, is still detailed enough that the basic steps are provided. The salmon need to be decapitated, de-finned, cleaned, deboned, sliced into thin strips, the meat put on sticks, and then put on racks up in the rafters of a smokehouse. One almost feels that with a bit more research, it wouldn't be too difficult to replicate. Meanwhile the detailed passage on oolichan grease reads much like a recipe, suggesting that it could easily be replicated:

Fill a large metal boiler with water. Light the fire pit beneath the boiler and bring the water to a boil. Then add the ripened oolichans and stir slowly until cooked (they will float slightly off the bottom). Bring the water to a boil again and mash the fish into small pieces to release the oil from the flesh. A layer of clear oil will form on the surface. Scrape out the fire pit and keep the boiler covered. Let simmer, but, before the water cools completely, use a wooden board to gently push the layer of oil to one end of the boiler and scoop it into another vat. With a quick, spiraling motion, add two or three red-hot rocks from an open fire to the vat of oil, which will catch fire and boil. Once the oil has cooled, do a final straining to remove small twigs, water and scales. Put oil in jars. Keep your fresh oolichan grease refrigerated to prevent it from going bad. (86)

Yet just one page earlier Lisa mentions that her mother was disappointed that Lisa wasn't going to make the grease this year because, "she wanted someone in our family to learn to make grease" (85). Despite the detail Lisa uses to describe the grease making process, it is clear that she doesn't know this process well enough to carry it out herself. In order to truly understand these food ways, one must have tangible experience with them: writing them down is not enough. These food skills constitute an embodied knowledge that can only be learned by repetition and practice and by learning from someone who has that knowledge.

Jacquelyn Ross, in her chapter in *Original Instructions*, writes about the importance of the connection to food for Indigenous communities. Of the time she spent with her parents gathering ocean food, she says, "the sense memories that accompany these lessons anchor them to particular places. The connection with a specific ecosystem and the knowledge that I can provide for myself and my family is important to me" (228). It's important for developing an ethic of care for that ecosystem as well. This can be seen clearly in the resistance put forth by so many Indigenous groups in response to Enbridge and Northern Gateway. Particular flavours come to be associated with these places as well, flavours that might seem odd or distasteful to outsiders. Lisa tells the reader,

“oolichan grease is a delicacy you have to grow up eating to love” (85) and explains, “people who haven’t grown up with salmonberries call the taste watery and seedy. I think of the taste as a soft sweetness, a gentle flavour” (76). She has a similar experience with *uh*’s, a whipped foam, like ice cream, that is made with soapberries and has an extremely bitter aftertaste. It isn’t until the end of a summer eating it with Ma-ma-oo that Lisa eventually grows to like it. Just as the rendering of oolichan grease and smoking of salmon must be practiced to be fully understood, these foods must also be eaten to be fully known and appreciated.

It isn’t until Lisa takes Jimmy to Monkey Beach in an attempt to sober him up after Karaoke leaves that she realizes how much more she knows about fishing and traditional food practices than he does. Jimmy spent much of his childhood pursuing a career in swimming and as such missed out on many of the lessons that Lisa in some ways took for granted. He never built a relationship with either Mick or Ma-ma-oo, calling Mick “a nut” and Ma-ma-oo “a cold fish” and tells Lisa that he never understood why she missed them so much (348). When they’re stranded on the beach he initially rejects many of Lisa’s suggestions for food and is squeamish about killing the crabs they catch to eat. It’s difficult to imagine Jimmy having any enthusiasm for salmonberries or *uh*’s. He then acknowledges that despite the fact that she ran away to Vancouver, she handled the losses of Mick and Ma-ma-oo better than he handled the loss of Karaoke. In some ways, having those connections and those ties to particular places and food practices gives Lisa something to come back to and helps her to begin healing.

### **“Old ways don’t matter much now”**

Lisa’s education in food is also tied to her education in the Haisla language. On one of Lisa and Ma-ma-oo’s berry picking excursions, Ma-ma-oo points out some berries to Lisa calling them *pipxs ’m*. Lisa asks if that’s what blueberries are called in Haisla, but Ma-ma-oo tells her only these particular ones are called *pipxs ’m*, which means “berries with mould on them” (160). Upon eating them Lisa finds they’re sweeter than “the real blueberry,” *sya ’k<sup>o</sup>nalh*, which is prettier, and bluer without the white dusting found on the *pipxs ’m*. They continue searching until they find a third type of blueberry, more pear-shaped, called *mimayus*, which loosely translates to “pain in the ass” because they’re so hard to find. Lisa notes, “I had never noticed that there were different types of blueberry bushes. If it was blue and on a bush, you picked it. Ma-ma-oo pointed out the contrast in the leaves and the stems, but it was easier to see the distinctions in the berries themselves” (160). In this particular example it’s easy to see how the very meaning of these words assists in identification. The “real blueberry” is the common berry, the standard to which other berries are compared, while the *pipxs ’m* are identified by their white mould and the *mimayus* are going to be hard to find. Though Lisa is able to learn about these different berries even with her minimal knowledge of the Haisla language, it is clear that the loss of language is tied up with the loss of cultural knowledge.

Ma-ma-oo teaches Lisa a new Haisla word everyday, but she laments that at this rate, she’ll never reach a point of fluency, and her disappointment in this is heightened when Ma-ma-oo tells her that “to really understand the old stories you had to speak Haisla” (211). There is a sense throughout the novel that as much as Lisa is learning from Ma-ma-oo and Uncle Mick, she is also missing out on older knowledge that even her

mentors don't know. This degradation of cultural knowledge is reflected in Ma-ma-oo's inability to provide further insight into working spirit medicine, as a medicine woman might, as well as in Lisa's limited knowledge of the Haisla language and the fact that she will likely never learn it as well as she'd like. As Ma-ma-oo tells her, "Old ways don't matter much now. Just hold you back" (153). She says this in reference to the making of canoes, noting that it's easier to go out and buy a boat than to make one.

The decline in the Haisla language and "old ways" is further mirrored by the decline in the oolichan runs and the economic difficulty of fishing for oolichan in a capitalist society. In *Sasquatch*, Robinson notes: "you have to be fairly well-off to eat traditional Haisla cuisine. Sure, the fish and game are free, but after factoring in fuel, time, equipment, and maintenance of various vehicles, it's cheaper to buy frozen fish from the grocery store than it is to physically go out and get it" (22). A similar chronicling of the barriers to oolichan fishing shows up in *Monkey Beach* with Lisa citing the difficulty of getting the three weeks time off work that would be required to catch enough oolichan to make grease. Cara Fabre writes, "ultimately, Robinson's novel betrays how the material conditions of late capitalism exacerbate colonial trauma, which manifests as social suffering, and extends colonialism's acculturative shadow" (127). The inextricably entwined nature of capitalism, colonialism, and environmental degradation is made clear through the oolichan. Runs have been depleted due to pollution and rising water temperatures, forcing people to travel farther and for longer periods to maintain the tradition of making grease. Oolichan fishing is then rendered even more difficult by an increased reliance on wage jobs in a capitalist system, which further divorces the Haisla people from their cultural heritage, exacerbating the trauma wrought through residential

schools, the decline of language, and continued industrial expansion into Indigenous territories. And Robinson leaves no doubt that this is a process. When recounting a story of when she set crab traps with Uncle Mick in her childhood, she says, “a forestry camp is there now. They built their base over one of the best crab beds on the channel, but back then, the crabs caught there were large and fat” (95). Food sources have been reduced even in the short 19 years that Lisa’s been alive.

In “Indigenous Food Sovereignty,” Dawn Morrison writes, “Due to lack of intergenerational transmission of Indigenous food-related knowledge in the home and education system, Indigenous food-related knowledge systems are being rapidly eroded” (103). This transmission of knowledge is further hindered by environmental degradation. By aligning the declining oolichan run with declining “old ways” and demonstrating that an understanding of these “old ways” constitutes embodied knowledge, the novel depicts this knowledge erosion as a kind of trauma. Ma-ma-oo’s warning to Lisa about *oxasuli* demonstrates eroded knowledge as slow violence particularly well, since if one does not know how to properly administer *oxasuli*, it can be lethal. Eroding knowledge can be dangerous and this is further emphasized through Lisa’s gift.

### **The *B’gwus* Howls**

If colonial trauma haunts the novel as a way of underscoring the violence inflicted on aboriginal communities, then Lisa’s gift and the *b’gwus* haunt the novel as a way of underscoring the lingering presence of Haisla “old ways.” The *b’gwus* is a recurring figure throughout the novel. He is a sasquatch figure that features in several Haisla stories and is the namesake of Monkey Beach, where he is often spotted because of its

abundance of cockles and clams (some of his favourite foods). Lisa's father tells a sensational version of the story to Lisa and Jimmy when they're little, complete with a *b'gwus* mask. The story inspires Jimmy to search out *b'gwus* in order to take his picture and make them rich by selling the photos to a tabloid magazine. During the family's excursion to Monkey Beach, in part to fulfill Jimmy's quest and in part to harvest cockles, Jimmy takes off by himself and while their parents are searching for him, Lisa tries to follow him. Before finding Jimmy, however, Lisa catches a glimpse of a large man covered in hair that she presumes is the *b'gwus*. No one else in the novel ever catches a glimpse of him.

Though Lisa's gift and the *b'gwus* both, at times, make Lisa fearful, they do not present real threats if they are treated with respect. Though Ma-ma-oo warns Lisa, "You have a dangerous gift. It's like *oxasuli*. Unless you know how to use it, it will kill you" (371), this is not a warning to Lisa not to use her gift, rather to use it carefully and to gain a better understanding of it before going so far into the spirit world, as she does at the end of the novel. The second time Lisa spots the *b'gwus*, this time while driving from Vancouver to Kitamaat Village with Frank to attend Pooch's funeral, it is a comfort rather than a source of fear. "As I drove away," she says, "I felt deeply comforted knowing that magical things were still living in the world" (316). The world that Robinson creates in *Monkey Beach*, with its supernatural elements, reflects what Thomas King writes in *The Truth About Stories*: "Native writers began to use the Native present as a way to resurrect a Native past and to imagine a Native future. To create, in words, as it were, a Native universe" (106). With her gift and her ability to see the *b'gwus*, Lisa

becomes a link between past and present and embodies hope for a future in which, perhaps, the old ways don't hold her back, but strengthen her.

### **A Farewell Song**

The decline of Haisla culture produced in the decline of the oolichan runs is not just a handy metaphor in the novel; the two are inextricably linked. Though the Haisla people continue to thrive in their small community, their traditional food ways, as well as the language, stories, and ceremonies that go along with them, are under threat. As demonstrated earlier through the voices of Haisla people, pipeline expansion threatens their traditional lands and that in turn threatens their traditional way of life. Cara Fabre expresses concern that *Monkey Beach*'s ambiguous ending—one in which Lisa might very well be dead—"risks reinscribing the Vanishing Indian myth" (141). However, as with the rest of the novel, it is far more complex than that. Soper-Jones sees a much more hopeful ending. She cites the following passage: "When I dreamed, I could see things in double exposure—the real world, and beyond it, the same world, but whole, with no clear-cuts, no pollution, no boats, no cars, no planes" (265). The passage continues with Lisa dreaming of replenished animal populations and oolichan that run as thick as they once did, so that she could almost walk across them without getting her feet wet. Rather than seeing this as a romantic harkening back to the past, Soper-Jones writes:

Through the "double exposure" of Lisamarie's dream visions, Robinson imagines the possibility of a culturally centred restoration of the Haisla's traditional landbase (one partially realized by the land claims agreements the Haisla have fought so hard to secure) even as she critiques romantic notions about Indigenous peoples and their 'balanced' relationship to the land. If trauma can be passed on from one generation to the next, Robinson thus tentatively suggests, then positive social and behavioural patterns can as well. (29)

Soper-Jones goes on to call Robinson “a hard-boiled realist” and I believe she’s right. Robinson refuses, at all turns, to shy away from the reality of the challenges faced by the Haisla people if they are to recover and restore their culture. But neither is she willing to give up hope and with *Monkey Beach* she has done precisely what King has suggested and created a Native future in a Native universe.

While Lisa is still in the world of the dead at the end of novel, after Ma-ma-oo’s warning that she’s come too far and must turn back if she is to return to land of the living, she hears Jimmy, Mick, and Ma-ma-oo singing: “I can understand the words even though they are in Haisla and it’s a farewell song, they are singing about leaving and meeting again, and they turn and lift their hands” (373-374). That Lisa can understand the words in Haisla suggests that the language is not yet lost to her, and the fact that the farewell song involves meeting again, also leaves the reader with hope that some aspect of Lisa’s dream vision might be possible. The last line of the novel blends the Haisla old world with the Haisla new world: “The howl echoes off the mountains. In the distance, I hear the sound of a speedboat” (374). It is possible that Robinson leaves the reader to wonder if Lisa lives or dies because she does not yet know what is to be the fate of the Haisla, or indeed the planet if climate change and environmental degradation continue at their current pace. The answer to that matters less than the possibility offered in those last two sentences: that if Lisa does live, it will not be in the picture perfect world of her dream vision, nor will it be in a devastated world where Haisla ways die completely, but it will be in world with both sasquatches and speedboats.

## CHAPTER 5

### MUSSELMAN'S LAKE

I startle awake from a dream where I'm drowning. In the dream the lake is covered in algae and seaweed reaches up from the bottom to twist around my ankles, tugging me down into the murky depths. There are no cottages along the shore, just overgrown forest, pine trees with vines hanging from them and weeping willows whose branches drop into still water. Someone is in a canoe nearby, but I can't tell who, and they won't come to my rescue.

I open my eyes and the sun is coming through the window, spilling through the yellowed curtain in a muted splash on the brown carpeting. I drag myself off the couch and flick the flimsy fabric of the curtains aside. A lone goose honks from the lawn, just on our side of the plastic orange fence that's supposed to keep them out. My heart is pounding from waking so abruptly, though I can't remember exactly what woke me, and I press two fingers against the pulse in my neck until it steadies. I don't remember falling asleep. I glance back at the couch, trying to trace my movements through the day until they lead here, just to make sure I'm not still dreaming, but no. I can see my book on the floor, its pages bent under where it fell open, face down.

I pick it up and flatten out the pages before tossing it on the side table. My mouth is cottony from sleep and tastes like stale coffee. It doesn't deter me from the fresh pot sitting on the kitchen counter though. Ronnie must have made it. She's not in the kitchen and I doubt she'd be outside with my family, so she's probably left to buy food for

dinner. I feel slightly guilty for not being with her since she doesn't know the area, but if she'd really needed the company she would have woken me.

I pour fresh coffee into my mug, not bothering to rinse out the dregs from earlier that day. We're out of milk and no one bothered to bring sugar, but there's plenty of Sweet'N Low stashed in the cupboards, little packets of it that Grandma had saved from coffee shops and restaurants over the years. It at least makes the coffee drinkable even if it does leave a strange taste on my tongue. She also built up a collection of salt and pepper packets, mustard, ketchup, vinegar, and drawers full of coupons. When she died, Gramps refused to get rid of any of it but the coupons, and those only because they'd expired. He arranged all the condiment packets back into the drawers and cupboards we'd pulled them out of with a muttered, "waste not," and then never said another word about them. The funny part is, if Grandma had known he was hanging onto all of it for posterity alone, she would have told him to chuck it all in the trash.

I slide the glass door open, finally remembering for the first time since getting here a couple days ago to lift it slightly so it properly unlatches. It used to be second nature, but, well, it's been awhile.

I hop quickly onto the grass, avoiding the heat of the stone-paved entryway that's been baking in the sun. It's even hotter than the day before, the humidity pressing in on all sides under the aggressive glare of the sun. Mom and Dad had planned on doing yard work in the garden, overgrown from years of neglect, but I find them on the patio swing under the big maple tree, Dad with a cold beer and Mom with one of those cheap vodka coolers she usually hates.

I walk over and take a seat on the lawn chair that's next to the swing.

“Ronnie went for food,” Mom says.

I nod and take a sip of my coffee.

“I don’t know how you’re drinking that right now,” she adds, eyeing my mug.

I shrug. “Aunt Sharon is relentless,” I say, lifting my chin towards the garden where she’s hunched over a mass of weeds that she’s attempting to thin. She’s wearing a wide brim straw hat that I’m almost certain belonged to Grandma. From here it looks like she’s made pretty good progress. There’s a large pile of discarded greens beside her and a section of the plot that is distinctly less overgrown.

“She’s determined to get the strawberries under control,” Dad says, and raises his eyebrows at me to demonstrate his skepticism.

“What about the raspberries?” I ask. I can see she hasn’t tackled them yet. Their thorny stalks are still arching towards the bed, threatening to consume the entire thing, like the vines that grew up around Sleeping Beauty.

“Uncle Bob went to buy new shears.” Dad replies.

I give him an incredulous look. Gramps used to spend a good portion of late fall and early summer not just cutting back the raspberry bush, but digging some of it out. If he didn’t, the entire thing would start to choke itself along with the rest of the plants in the garden. When we were little, my cousin Colin, my brother Greg, and I would spend hours picking the bush over, collecting them for Grandma. Once we ate so many we made ourselves sick on them. After that Grandma would only send us out for them in the morning to each fill a small bowl, over which she would then pour a bit of cream and sprinkle some sugar for breakfast. It was sweeter and richer than any of the sugary cereals she and Gramps kept here at the cottage.

“Did Colin and the kids go with him?” I asked. They weren’t on the beach or out on the raft and the canoe was upside down on the shore by the dock.

Dad shook his head. “Colin took them to the candy store up at Cedar Beach.”

“Abigail,” Aunt Sharon calls. “Abigail can you come here for a second and see if you know what this plant is?”

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Musselman’s Lake is a borough just outside of Stouffville built up along the edges of a small kettle lake of the same name. Kettle lakes are left over from melted glaciers that left large craters in the earth to be filled by rainwater or more commonly groundwater from springs just under the surface. Musselman’s Lake—both the lake and the township—is also sometimes called Musselman Lake, without the possessive apostrophe, but more often people use the former and it’s the form that appears on the city sign as you drive into town. Most of the beaches along Musselman’s Lake are private, extensions of the private properties that line the shore. You used to be able to access the lake over at Cedar Beach, but they’ve since closed it off to anyone except those staying at the resort.

The whole township is located in the Oak Ridges Moraine, an ecologically important area that stretch 1900 square kilometres from the Niagara Escarpment east to Rice Lake. It’s a highly contested area of land because even though it’s part of the government protected Greenbelt, the nearby cities of Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Oak Ridges, Stouffville, and Aurora are growing rapidly, putting the moraine under constant threat of development. Currently only the designated Settlement Area of the moraine can be developed for houses, but the continued expansion of the Greater Toronto Area makes moraine land highly appealing to developers. Musselman’s Lake is a still a summer

cottage town, though people do live there year round, so it feels less of this pressure.

There's sand and gravel mining to the south and east that's been ongoing since the 1950s, but most recently an international airport has been proposed just south-east of Stouffville and one of the landing strips would be directly over Musselman's Lake.

I used to have dreams I could fly and in almost every one of them I would fly over Musselman's Lake, so the proposed airport gives me a strange sense of these dreams as foreshadowing. When I told Grandma about them she said it was probably the wee folk trying to lure me to Faerie to join in their night revels, so to watch myself and never eat anything if I were ever offered food in those dreams. I don't know how she expected me to control what I did in a dream, but I never questioned her either.

Greg never thought much of my flying dreams. Always chalked it up to silly childishness on my part, always thinking himself so superior because he was thirteen months older. Like that was such a monumental age difference. Despite his insistence on his own maturity, the first time he ever caught a fish—a huge pike that I thought looked almost prehistoric—he cried when Mom suggested eating it. So instead we kept it in a bucket of lake water for a few hours before setting it free.

He grew out of this tendency pretty quickly when Colin showed up because even though Colin was a year younger than me, he had no such qualms about eating fish, and Greg was not about to be showed up by someone two years his junior. At first I thought Colin's ease with eating fish meant that Greg just cared more about animals than Colin did, but it's more likely that Colin had just been primed by all the fishing trips he'd taken with his dad. Our family was not really the fishing and wilderness type. (I was secretly relieved when Greg didn't want to eat the fish either. I never much liked meat and I've

been a vegetarian for years, and even at that young age I was horrified at the thought of eating animals. I'm more amenable to it now because Ronnie is decidedly *not* a vegetarian and we've learned to compromise when planning meals.)

Luckily for Greg he didn't have to keep up this pretense all that often because Bob and Colin didn't fish much up here. Not that you can't eat the fish in Musselman's Lake, you can, but it's more of a recreational activity here and even the resident's association recommends catch and release. The water quality is sometimes a concern and there are some years you can see it just in the excess of weeds coming up on shore and the scuzz of algae on the surface of the lake. You're more likely to catch catfish anyhow, which no one in the family much likes to eat. I almost never took part in the fishing excursions either way. I found it boring and hated that you couldn't talk, so I would spend my time stalking frogs in the tall grass at the edge of the property, wading through the reedy shallows, listening intently for their gentle croaking.

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I push myself out of the lawn chair and make my way over to the garden. Sharon gestures at some stalks with diamond-shaped powdery green leaves.

"It's lambs quarters," I tell her, reaching out to rub one of the soft leaves between my fingers.

"So it's not a weed?" she asks.

"Well," I say, "people treat it like a weed and it grows like a weed, but you can eat the leaves. Grandma used to make Gramps keep some to mix in with sautéed vegetables."

“It’s everywhere,” she says, rubbing the back of her arm over her forehead to rub away the sweat. “But so are the strawberries, so I wasn’t sure.”

I look around the garden and see that the lambs quarters has grown up between just about everything, with the strawberries covering the ground beneath it and the raspberries encroaching from one end. And there’s a clump of something else...

“Watch out for that over there,” I say, pointing at the plant with serrated leaves. “It’s stinging nettle.”

“Yeah I wasn’t sure if I should leave that,” she says. “It makes great soup, but a lot of people don’t bother with it. Maybe if I mark it with a sign.”

I nod. “You should take a break,” I tell her. “It’s supposed to be cooler tomorrow. Ronnie and I can help you then. It’ll be much faster with more people.”

“I like that Ronnie,” she says. “Much better than that flighty thing that you used to hang around with in the summers. What was her name?”

“Amy,” I say, grinning.

It was Amy, in a lot of ways, who was responsible for my knowledge of wild edibles. Her grandmother and mine were good friends and to keep Amy and I out of trouble, they would take us for long walks to hunt out different plants. They’d show us a picture in Grandma’s beat up field guide and then let us loose on one of the hiking paths until we came back successful.

It was amid the trees, crouched near the ground in search of lambs quarters, in fact, that I first kissed Amy, fast and dry, a nervous peck of my lips on hers, clumsily landed, while my heart beat near out of my chest. She giggled uncontrollably, leaving me

momentarily mortified, until she leaned forward and kissed me back, her sweaty hand clutched around my wrist as though she were afraid I might run away.

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If you're looking for lambs quarters, head first to disturbed areas—roadsides and construction sites. If there's a lot of it, make sure to check that the soil there isn't contaminated. Lambs quarters is a purifying plant that likes to grow where soil needs to be restored with healthy nutrients and that means it absorbs soil contaminants all the more readily. It has light green leaves with a powdery white coating that are shaped like a goose foot. You can eat the leaves sautéed, steamed, or raw in salads or smoothies, but they contain oxalic acid, which can be toxic in large quantities, so you shouldn't eat too much of it raw. Cooking removes the acid. The seeds are likewise toxic and shouldn't be consumed in excess, so you're best to probably avoid them altogether. The leaves will be best in early summer, when they're young and the humidity of the southwestern Ontario summer has yet to descend and solace from the heat can still be found in a cool breeze.

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"I bought corn," Ronnie says as she steps out of the car. Her hair is piled in a messy knot at the back of her head and her arms are loaded with two plastic bags that are bursting with ears of corn. "I thought we could barbeque it," she says.

She pauses long enough on her way toward the cottage to give me a peck of a kiss and then grins before turning to make her way down the sloping lawn to the main doors.

"Come help," she calls up to me once she's set herself out on the stone patio in front of the cottage doors, exactly where Grandma used to sit when she was husking corn. When I was still really little I used to sit on the grass near her and play with the discarded

husks, but once I was a bit older I'd sit next to her in one of the chairs to help, watching her tug their papery sheaths away and enjoying the familiar squeaky sound. Ronnie looks good there. Like she's been there her whole life and it's strange to watch her slide into this space so easily. She looks more comfortable here than Greg ever did. I almost wish we weren't selling it.

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One summer Grandma taught me how to make her famous dinner rolls. It was a rainy day. Mom was reading and Dad and Greg weren't up at the cottage yet because Greg had a soccer tournament in Whitby. The dinner rolls weren't for any special occasion. She made them at least once a week at the cottage, for Sunday dinner, and sometimes more if Uncle Bob and Aunt Sharon came up mid-week or if we had some of the neighbours over. Everyone loved them, and if she didn't make them for larger gatherings, someone would comment on their absence.

I was usually resistant to helping her. As with fishing, I grew bored with the waiting part of making bread. There's so much time spent letting it do its own thing while the yeast grows and I was often too distracted by the inviting summer weather to be held in one place long enough to see the whole process through. But as I said, it was a rainy day and I had no one to play with, so she had me.

We were playing cards, a simple game of Go Fish, and she had just beaten me the third hand in a row, leaving me grumpy and frustrated. She was never the type to let you win just because you were a child. She gathered the cards and shuffled the deck while I sat back in my chair with my arms crossed, wearing a deep scowl. I was waiting for her to deal the next hand, determined that this time I would win, when she set the deck down

on the kitchen table and got up. At first I thought she was trying to teach me a lesson in losing gracefully by refusing to play with me anymore, but then she said, “Come help me make the rolls for dinner.”

I was so surprised that I didn't have the wherewithal to come up with a reason not to, so I got to my feet and came to stand next to her in front of the counter. She didn't say much. Just went about her business with me watching, offering occasional tips and instructions. “Watch and learn,” she told me, which was the same advice she gave for learning to play euchre and I had yet to figure out the rules of that game. But she moved slower than she normally would have. I knew this because though I'd never spent much time in the kitchen with her beyond sharing meals, I'd seen her make dinner rolls enough times to know how fast she usually moved through the motions.

She let me mix the yeast slurry using a mixture of half water and half milk, warmed to dissolve the yeast and sugar. I'd seen her use the leftover water from boiled potatoes for the yeast slurry before, but the milk in the fridge was a couple days past its expiry, so she wanted to use it rather than throw it out. Once that was done she put the bowl aside to sit for ten minutes and started melting shortening on the stove. She cracked an egg into a bowl and demonstrated the quick whisking motion she used to give it a quick beating. Then she handed off the fork and let me try. She'd had enough foresight to put the egg in a fairly deep bowl so that when it was my turn I only sprayed a little bit of egg on the counter. I couldn't quite get the motion right to do it as fast as she could. I found my wrist stopping abruptly of its own accord as I lost my rhythm, causing the fork to smash down in the yellowy puddle and spray it up the sides of the bowl.

“Good,” Grandma said as she took the bowl back from. “You’ll get faster with practice.” And she dumped the egg into the yeast slurry along with the shortening, a bit of salt, and some more sugar. I watched as she measured out the flour. Two cups before mixing it in with a wooden spoon. She made me stick my finger in the mixture before adding a third cup of flour to see how wet it was. Then she added three more cups of flour and abandoned the wooden spoon in favour of her hands. Once most of the flour was incorporated she had me poke it again to show me the way it was slow to spring back.

“We have to knead it more,” she said, then split the dough in two, giving me a much smaller amount to work with, and showed me the push and pull, back and forth, turning motion to use.

I tried to copy her, but was once again frustrated by my own slow movements. Grandma was done with her ball of dough in minutes, while I was still trying to figure out how to stop mine from sticking to the counter. She pressed her finger into the dough, watching it come back slowly, and said, “Almost,” before dusting more flour over top. Once she was satisfied with the elasticity of my dough, we rounded it out and set it next to hers.

“Now what?” I asked.

“Now we wait for it to rise,” Grandma said.

“How long does that take?”

“Probably about three hands of Go Fish,” she told me. “Maybe less. It’s pretty humid so the yeast might grow faster than it usually does. And it depends how fast we play.”

I considered this and then sat down at the kitchen table again, reaching for the deck of cards. “I’ll deal,” I said.

She smiled and nodded.

It only took two hands of Go Fish for the dough to rise. It grew to twice the size and I marveled at the way it collapsed under our hands as we shaped it into smaller pieces for the rolls.

“That’s why we have to let it rise again,” Grandma said, as we set the rolls of dough on a baking pan.

When we finally got the rolls in the oven, after they’d once again risen to twice their size, the cottage became laden with the familiar scent of baking bread. It was a kind of sweet, yeasty smell that I’d experienced every summer of my life, but I was more aware of it this time, more attuned to how that smell indicated the results of our labour. Grandma’s rolls turned out much better than mine. They were lighter and more evenly shaped and I suppose I should have expected that, but it was a little disappointing nonetheless. Despite the dense, heavier quality of my rolls, Grandma seemed satisfied with them.

“These are a good first effort,” she said, after chewing one thoughtfully. “You learn quickly. You’ll be making rolls as well as me in no time.”

I had my doubts and I never found out if that would have been true. She was too sick the following summer to make dinner rolls with me, and the next couple summers after that I was too busy running around with Amy to pay much mind to baking, and then she died. Gramps tried replicating her dinner rolls a few times, but they never came out quite right and I certainly didn’t remember enough from that single lesson to be of any

help. I can still remember that smell though and the way it used to work its way through every inch of the cottage and waft outside enough that you could almost smell them from the beach, luring you to the dinner table.

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That night I have a dream that I'm flying. It's the same recurring dream I had as a kid, but I haven't had it in years and the landscape is a bit different. I'm still flying over the lake, but there are more cottages. It's not as wild and overgrown, though willow boughs still trail through the water, leaving ripples on the surface when the wind blows. I'm riding a current of air, surfacing above the clouds and then dipping back down to skim above the glass-like water. Dragonflies zip along beside me. Grandma and Grandpa are in the canoe in the middle of the lake and they wave at me as I soar overhead. They look much younger, like in the pictures Mom and Dad have in their photo albums, like that one of them with Dad when he was twelve or thirteen. They look happy.

I'm awoken by the honking of geese on the beach. Beside me Ronnie is snoring softly and I can feel her back rising and falling with the deep breathing of sleep. The light has a soft pinkish quality, so I know it's early. The sun hasn't quite risen. Other than the occasional honk from the geese, it's quiet. The air is still damp with humidity, but it's cooler than yesterday and there's a breeze coming in through the window, bringing with it the earthy wet scent of the lake. Greg is coming today and we'll take the canoe out and Ronnie and I will help Aunt Sharon finish cleaning out the garden and then we'll eat the rest of the corn for dinner.

I fall back asleep and the next time I wake, it's to the sound of tires crunching on the gravel outside.

## END NOTES

1. Though I don't address it in this paper, there is also a substantial body of poetry about food. Since poetry about food could constitute a paper in and of itself, I've chosen not to talk about it here, though it could certainly be included in food pedagogies of literature.
2. The food sovereignty movement is the driving force behind the notion of food citizenship. The term was coined by La Via Campesina, an international movement of farmers, peasants (*campesina* is Spanish for *peasant*), and agricultural workers working against trade liberalization and corporate-driven agriculture. According to their website: "Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems." The movement consists of about 164 local and national organizations in 73 countries and has advocated against the World Trade Organization's push for greater trade liberalization.
3. The definition provided by these two bodies present food literacy simply as the ability to understand nutrition labels and Canada's Food Guide for the sake of being able to navigate a grocery store and prepare safe, healthy meals. It does not include critical thinking skills or encourage even a broad understanding of how the food system functions.
4. The Bloods and Crips are two African-American gangs in Los Angeles, California with a violent rivalry. Jeremy's use of these terms to group types of chefs is problematic (the term "crip," being slur for cripple, is problematic in its own right), but is also indicative of his character, as someone who is not overly concerned with what is appropriate.
5. The Slow Food Movement began in Italy as a reaction to a proposed McDonald's to be built at the Spanish Steps in Rome. It is an international movement "founded to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how our food choices affect the world around us" (Slow Food). There are currently chapters in over 150 countries.
6. The term "foodshed" was chosen for its deliberate connection to "watershed" as a way of imaging the flow of food into a particular place. Getz defines it as, "the area that is defined by a structure of supply" (quoted in Kloppenburg, et al.), but Kloppenburg, et al. narrow that definition to refer specifically to local foodsheds as opposed to the global food system.
7. Kheraj uses the spelling Whoi Whoi to indicate this settlement, after the spelling adopted by Vancouver archivist James Sleitt Matthews. *Xwayxway* is one of many alternative spellings and I've chosen to use that spelling here because it the version most commonly used by the Squamish people.

8. “Evicted” is a polite word. The Chinese settlement there was actually burned to the ground as a method of forced removal (Kheraj).
9. These “squatters” would have been those Indigenous, European, and Chinese settlements that had been there for decades. The families living at Brockton Point were likewise considered squatters, despite their residency there going back generations (Kheraj).
10. Kheraj notes that with every storm that significantly damages Stanley Park’s trees there is public mourning over the loss of “virgin” and “old growth” forest despite the fact that many tree species, such as the Douglas Fir, had been introduced throughout the park’s history for being hardier or more aesthetically suited to a park.
11. This is most commonly seen in the wines and cheeses of France and Italy. There are several governing bodies that control these appellations such as the *appellation d’origine controlee* (AOC) in France and the *denominazione di origine controllata* (DOC) in Italy. The protected designation of origin (PDO) is a parallel system for the entire European Union. Other examples of such protected products include Roquefort cheese, Asiago cheese, Chianti wine, and Cognac.
12. *Terroir* is the geographical, geological, and climactic characteristics of a region that affect the flavour of what is produced there, seen in such items as wine, coffee, chocolate, and tea.
13. *Oolichan* is a Chinook word, Chinook being a trade language to facilitate communication between groups who spoke different languages. It has a number of different spellings including *eulachon*, *ooligan*, *ulican*, and *hollikan*. I use *oolichan* throughout this chapter unless using a direct quote because it the spelling that Eden Robinson uses and appears to be a common spelling among the Haisla.
14. In one memorable scene, Lisa shouts back at some white men in a car harassing her on the street and Trudy later tells her that she’s going to get herself killed. When Lisa scoffs at this, insisting that nothing would happen with so many people around, Trudy tells her that would be true if she were a white girl but “you’re a mouthy Indian, and everyone thinks we’re born sluts” (Robinson, “Monkey,” 255), and then references the priests that “helped” themselves to kids in residential schools.

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