

ENCLOSED EDENS, CONTESTED WATERS & FAILED UTOPIAS:  
AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF EPISTEMIC LAND CLAIMS IN  
OKANAGAN LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation, *Enclosed Edens, Contested Waters and Failed Utopias: an Ecocritical Reading of Epistemic Land Claims in Okanagan Literature*, examines regionally specific literary sites of intersection, conflict and transformation. Focusing on the Okanagan region, which rests in the southern heart of British Columbia and remains the unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan people, this dissertation observes literature from the region as an epistemological field. This dissertation primarily deploys an ecocritical and bioregional approach to literary analysis. This work also employs autotheory, a mode that seeks to lay bare some of the “entanglement of research and creation” and “reveals the tenuousness of maintaining illusory separations between art and life, theory and practice, work and the self, research and motivation” (Fournier 2; 2-3). Building on Frank Davey’s neologism “regionality” (15), this dissertation observes the region as an ideologically diverse space where many voices communicate what Laurence Buell terms “a terrain of consciousness,” through which humans may ponder their relationships with the region and the other-than-human (Buell 83). These “terrains of consciousness” function as what Lorraine Code terms “instituting imaginaries,” as they can disrupt and defamiliarize master narratives and initiate counter possibilities capable of interrogating and making new, established social structures (31). This dissertation offers a sustained examination of regionally born imaginaries through literary works by writers, including Susan Allison, Jeanette Armstrong, Jason Dewinetz, George Bowering, Nancy Holmes, Patrick Lane, John Lent, Alice Barrett Parke, Harold Rhenish, Laisha Rosnau and Dania Tomlinson. This dissertation aims to trace the contexts that inform the finding and making of home within the Okanagan by situating the study in the specifics of the habitats and inhabitants of the region. Each chapter focuses on a contested topographic feature, including orchards, lakes,

and small cities. Through this examination, we might trace a common thread of seeking to reconcile one's singular subjectivity within the "tangles and patterns" of a violent and vexed settler colonial history and within in a distinct geographic region (Harraway 1). As the ecological and emotional toll of the settler colonial project is felt acutely by the region's residents, we might also discern an invitation to reassess after epistemic failure and to chart new ways of being within the bioregion.

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## PROLOGUE: AN UNSETTLED SUBJECTIVITY

I first perceived the Okanagan from the back seat of a Volvo station wagon. I was seven or eight, shoulder belt strapped across my chest, with my window rolled down. The air was hot and dry, unlike the cool, humid air on the coast. In the Okanagan the air smells like slow baked pine and rattlesnakes, rather than of the moss, rain, and slugs of my childhood. The various ascents and descents on the drive over the coastal range had taken hours, but there we were. The valley opened up before us: dry golden hills, dotted with ponderosa pines, rolled down into a long lake, cobalt blue and astonishing. I loved it immediately, and I knew that I wouldn't want to leave but leaving (and returning) would prove to be inevitable and near-cyclical.

On this first vacation, we stayed at a Provincial campground, putting up tents in a campsite next to the choppy, but warm, lake. We stayed for a week, and thanks to the park naturalist who gave evening talks to visiting children, I learned to love the bats, snakes, marmots, and magpies who call this region home. On leaving our campsite, we drove south, close to the border, where the desert houses rattlesnakes, cacti, and pictographs. I marvelled at the mountain sheep who clung to rocky outcrops at the side of the highway as I ate apricots in the back seat. On our day trips, we stopped at historic sites, at a dry-docked sternwheeler, the S.S. Sicamous, where I thought of the pioneer women from my *Little House on the Prairie* paperbacks, the girls in gingham and women in corsets, existing in a less crowded version of this place. I imagined myself, like them, settling in surrounded by the dry, golden grasslands. For me, the valleys were a kind of Eden, complete with orchards, and I knew I wanted to live there, as did the rest of my family. About five years after that initial trip, we would move, rolling into the valley with a U-Haul packed high with furniture, the station wagon loaded with cats and dogs. My parents

bought land and a house, and we settled, working to call the Coldstream Valley at the Northern end of the region home.

Unfortunately, the valley would prove less than Edenic for I would spend my teenage years finding the human tensions that tear at the margins, sometimes unhoused and constantly despairing. I'm lucky to have survived these years, perhaps partly due to the relatively mild climate and my being white in a space characterized by Luis Aguiar, Ann McKinnon and Dixon Sookraj as "racialized as a white space" (Aguiar, McKinnon, Sookraj). As a child of first-generation settlers of European descent – a combination of Maltese, Irish, Dutch and Jewish—I was (and am) afforded systemic privileges and protections that I know others in my circumstances did not, and do not, benefit from. At the age of sixteen in pre-cannabis-decriminalization Interior B.C., when the police found marijuana in my backpack, I faced no criminal charges but was offered sympathy for my circumstances and was released from my holding cell within a few hours. I was offered similar compassion when dealing with poverty and homelessness, as a social worker presented me with an escape route via the system, an offer not always extended to others, including my friend and platonic partner during this time, Shane. As an Indigenous teenager, Shane was subject to racism (casual and overt) and met with damaging apathy from the same social worker who readily offered me help. Shane had moved from the prairies and was (like too many Indigenous children in Canada) swept into the foster care system. Together, we survived homelessness in the small interior towns we moved between, as I navigated PTSD following a sexual assault, while Shane carried his own traumas. Our paths diverged when I took a job cleaning motel rooms in an isolated roadside mountain hotel on the Rogers Pass, beginning a tortuous and often troubled path of precarious labour and housing, cleaning hotel rooms and waitressing in various small towns from the Rockies to the Yukon, and

he moved to the city. My time navigating the dark margins of the Okanagan, a space sold as a paradise but rife with painful contradictions, continued to trouble me into adulthood and eventually became a force that compelled me to undertake the work I do in the following pages. As I return again to the Okanagan Valley through the work I'm doing here, my history in the place often becomes visceral. I think of the community of troubled and marginalized people I travelled with, of our constant walking in broken shoes, of the dry hills around us, all of us enclosed in a geography we couldn't understand, restless, homeless, and unable to settle.

## INTRODUCTION: “RE-STORYING” OKANAGAN VALLEYS

For settlers, British Columbia’s histories (local and provincial) have tended to be “rumoured rather than known” argues historian Justine Brown, in *All Possible Worlds: Utopian Experiments in British Columbia* (12). Though born and raised in the province, I too grew up with the sense that British Columbia’s past was somehow elusive, that there was a kind of reticence in the readily offered regional histories that began abruptly in the mid to late nineteenth century and glorified the various arrivals of Europeans. The obfuscating nature of British Columbia’s settler-configured regional histories is something that anthropologist Elizabeth Furniss explores in her work on the Cariboo-Chilcotin. Furniss, who examines how rural B.C. has defined itself around frontier myths (and the cottage industry of books and museums valorizing the achievements of settlers), notices that in tales of origin from these rural spaces there is that systematic forgetting of, or disregard for, the contentious issues of the past (issues which remain urgent in the present), especially those pertaining to Aboriginal land title, the Indian reserve system and residential schools.

This is likely the reason I knew more about a man named Cornelius O’Keefe, a postmaster and farming entrepreneur who had owned a ranch (which was later turned into a museum/theme park where school kids are taken on field trips), than I knew about the Suknaqínx people who are a part of Okanagan Syilx Nation. The stories of the Suknaqínx people, who had lived since time immemorial on the unceded and unsundered land that Cornelius had pre-empted in 1867, did not form part of the ‘Historic O’Keefe Ranch’ narrative which holds Cowboy Dinner Shows every Friday night during the summer months and valorizes O’Keefe and his business partners Thomas Greenhow and Thomas Wood’s initial appropriation of 480 acres

(160 each, the maximum allowed by the Colonial Government) and O’Keefe’s eventual securing of 12,000 acres of prime Okanagan bottom land by 1900 (Ormsby 47; *Historic O’Keefe Ranch*). This celebration of the opportunist seizure of land by settlers continues to obscure the longer history of region, and the dramatic events that occurred concurrent with O’Keefe’s land grabs. Events that included the near uprising by the Okanagan and Shuswap Nations against aggressive settler incursions and land pre-emptions, and the climactic meeting of Nations held just south of O’Keefe’s pre-empted land in 1877 to discuss a possible confederation and war tactics (Fisher 84). Instead, as Furniss argues, through narratives that celebrate “European expansion, settlement, and industry,” together with frontier mythography<sup>1</sup>, settler culture invents “selective historic traditions” that “legitimize the process of colonization and the subjugation of Indigenous peoples” (8), wherein Aboriginal peoples are presented (if present at all) as a homogenous group and rendered nearly invisible.

These heroic settler narratives, like O’Keefe’s, rest precariously on the fiction that the land was empty, a mere wilderness free for the taking. As Cole Harris documents in his collection of essays, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, settlers (like Harris’s grandfather, who had made a home in B.C.’s Slocan Valley) preferred to believe that “God had given [them] a beautiful land and with it the opportunity to start again and right past wrongs” and that in B.C.’s interior “civilization” had “found a new, empty place for itself” (xx-xxi). The ahistorical sense that B.C. was empty, or “nowhere,” has long underpinned settler British Columbian understanding its own geography (Brown 12) and has in turn fostered the steady marginalization, and attempted erasure, of Indigenous presence from provincial and regional narratives, fictional

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Limerick, in *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, argues that “as a mental artifact, the frontier has demonstrated an astonishing stickiness and persistence. [...] Packed full of nonsense and goofiness, jammed with nationalist self-congratulation and toxic ethnocentrism, the image of the frontier is nonetheless universally recognized and laden with positive associations” (Limerick 94)

and otherwise. Sherene Razack, in *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, provides a useful definition of settler society and its fundamental workings:

A white settler society is one established by Europeans on non-European soil. Its origins lie in the dispossession and near extermination of Indigenous populations by the conquering Europeans. As it evolves, a white settler society continues to be structured by a racial hierarchy. In the national mythologies of such societies, it is believed that white people came first and that it is they who principally developed the land; Aboriginal peoples are presumed to be mostly dead or assimilated. European settlers thus become the original inhabitants and the group most entitled to the fruits of citizenship. A quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is, therefore, the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour. In North America, it is still the case that European conquest and colonization are often denied, largely through the fantasy that North America was peacefully settled and not colonized. (1-2)

It is against settler-colonial lore that the land is somehow empty, that Indigenous peoples have vanished or peacefully ceded their lands to settlers, that Jeanette Armstrong, noted Syilx scholar, writer, Executive Director of the En'owkin Centre, faculty member at UBC Okanagan and the Canada Research Chair in Okanagan Indigenous Knowledge and Philosophy, has sought to assert and teach Indigenous history and presence and, with this, Syilx ecological ethos. Armstrong, who argues for the primacy of story in shaping and creating the land, contends that today's stories, faced with the present "dark age of ecological illiteracy," should speak to, and teach, the "people-to-be" (Armstrong, "Literature of the Land," 355). With this, Armstrong urges writers and critics to attend to "the polyvocal history of the here" that is particularly attuned to

“particularities of place” and to “bioregional perspectives” (Armstrong, “Keynote”). Similarly, Lawrence Buell, in his influential book, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, argues that the “environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity’s relation to it” (Buell 2), arguing that the way we imagine the world through literature and the arts is not merely mimetic, but itself has an impact in how we engage with the natural world.

The urgency of these calls to listen to the stories we are telling ourselves and our children about the natural world can be heard in the voices of activists, scholars and residents who are observing, and working to counter, the toll that increased settler incursions is taking on the Okanagan’s endangered ecosystem (Wagner; Kenney). These concerns may also be heard in the writing coming from the valleys, settler and Indigenous, as those dwelling and writing in this space work to situate themselves on unceded territory contested on various fronts. Building on Frank Davey’s neologism “regionality” (1997), which eschews the essentializing “ism” in regionalism, and observes regions as ideologically diverse spaces, I read the literature of the Okanagan as informed by a fraught plurality. Like Michelle Hartley and Francesco Loriggio, who advocate a toponchronic reading of region, which “privileges space but without disavowing time” (Loriggio), this project works to read the ongoing and reciprocal relationship between human subjectivities and the geographic and temporal contexts within which they dwell. In what follows, I examine how competing interests and agendas express themselves in contemporary literature from and about B.C.’s Okanagan valleys, as I pay particular attention to questions of how the bioregional context of human life informs the imaginative finding and making of “home.”

This project reads region through Lorraine Code's model of ecology, a model that Code defines as a rethinking "of established theories of knowledge, and relations between humanity and the other-than-human," and understands ecology as "a study of habitats" where "ethos and habitus" are enacted, and where differences "between and within" a bioregion are both articulated and negotiated (12). By examining regionally connected narrative constructions of space, I propose that we might further our understanding of how individuals and communities of diverse cultures and backgrounds work to imagine and shape the lands on which they dwell.

Focusing on the Okanagan region, which rests in the southern heart of British Columbia and straddles the American/Canadian border, this project aims to observe contemporary literature from the region as an epistemological field. While this project will acknowledge earlier regional histories and mythography, its focus will be on writing from 1985-2018, works produced during what critics, including Daniel Coleman and James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, have called the "Indigenous renaissance" or "resonance" (Coleman 12; Henderson 432). These texts, written during a period when Canada as a nation state was increasingly viewed as a "project" or "experiment" and less as natural or foreordained (Henderson 5), serve as particularly potent sites of confluence and conflict where Wild West mythography is confronted by its colonial crimes, the Nsyilxcen language and Syilx culture work towards resurgence and where environmental pressures are increasingly felt as the narrow valleys contend with fresh waves of settlers who place new demands on finite resources. The Okanagan, which has one of the "highest levels of biodiversity and concentrations of species at risk in Canada" (Bezener et. al. 1), is a fragile dryland region which, since the arrival of settlers in the 1850s, has undergone increasingly radical agricultural and urban development. It is a space where ecosystem degradation is acutely perceived by conservationists, writers, artists and local residents, as human impact on the desert



terrain “scars the landscape” (Kenney 132). While the impact of accelerated development has caught the attention of residents, local environmental organizations and the region’s writers, artists and educators, and has inspired a “move towards more sustainable ecological management practices” (Wagner 23), the impact of rapid settler incursions on the Syilx Okanagan people and their traditional territory has been less visible to settlers, many of whom still understand the land as a *tabula rasa* on which they establish and enjoy the new Edens that spring from settler-colonial imaginations.

In what follows, I examine the literary representations of the metanarratives of mastery that have allowed settlers to believe that they may set themselves, “the perceiving subjects, apart from nature, the perceived object,” and have allowed settler culture and systems to violently work to overwrite Indigenous presence and land with colonial systems (Sullivan 38). By examining the stories settler society tell about the unceded Okanagan, I endeavour (with aims analogous to those of Furniss) to “make accessible the normally unexamined assumptions by which we operate and through which we encounter members of other cultures” (Furniss xii). In order to do this work, I employ some of the tools of autotheory, a mode that lays bare some of the “entanglement of research and creation” and “reveals the tenuousness of maintaining illusory separations between art and life, theory and practice, work and the self, research and motivation” (Fournier 2-3). Through this project, I aim to better acknowledge and understand my own complicity and enmeshment in ongoing white settler colonialism and to challenge my own sense of innocence. As Alissa Macoun suggests in “Colonising White Innocence: Complicity and Critical Encounters,” doing this work means constantly revisiting my “own political and epistemological limits” (85). I cannot claim that the work of this doctoral dissertation has the power to disrupt or dismantle the colonial systems I am enmeshed in, but my modest aims are to

participate in, and support, dialogues about the ways that the settler imagination impacts geographic and human terrains on unceded Indigenous territories.

Lauren Terbasket, Executive Director of the En'owkin Centre, in Penticton B.C., argues that “we only learn through story” and that through “restory-ing,” or rewriting colonial narratives that frame Indigenous peoples as victims, rather to shine light on the stories of heroism and resilience for those who have suffered from colonial violence. Terbasket argues that for non-Aboriginal Canadians it is necessary to bear witness to the stories Indigenous people are telling, particularly with regards to the violence colonial oppression has wrought on Indigenous communities; to be prepared to sit with impulse to recoil and to just listen as the act of “hearing is helping survivors heal” (Reconciliation and Indigenous Education). One non-Aboriginal Canadian bearing witness to Survivor’s life stories at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission event in Regina, Saskatchewan, said simply, “By listening to your story, my story can change. By listening to your story, I can change” (*Truth and Reconciliation* 21). As I write this in the unceded territories of the Sinixt, Ktunaxa, Secwépemc and Syilx Okanagan peoples, I hope to contribute to an undoing of the systemic forgetting that refused to, or could not, hear the stories the people who have been here since “the beginning of people on this land” (Armstrong, Derickson, Maracle and Young-Ing 1). The Okanagan Syilx Nation, as Terbasket states, have maintained “intact knowledge systems,” systems that are held in protection from appropriative colonial forces that “weaponized education” and have misrepresented Indigenous knowledge, nations and cultures. As a settler scholar, I do not seek to tell or interpret Syilx stories, but rather to listen attentively to what Syilx educators, authors, critics and authors are imparting to settler audiences, and from this listening to examine the stories settlers (myself included) have told and are telling about our place on unceded Syilx territory.

Through a sustained exploration of the literary work of writers who are rooted in and writing about the Okanagan—Jeannette Armstrong, George Bowering, Jason Dewinetz, Don Gayton, Nancy Holmes, Patrick Lane, John Lent, Harold Rhenisch, Harry Robinson, Laisha Rosnau, Kelly Shepherd and Dania Tomlinson—I seek to listen to some of the voices that communicate a bioregion, as these writers, utilizing a range of narrative modes, create what Robert Kroetsch calls “the imagined real place” (*The Lovely Treachery* 7-8). These ‘imagined real places’ function as what Code (building on the work of Cornelius Castoriadis) terms “instituting imaginaries,” as they have the capacity to disrupt and defamiliarize master narratives and their “pretensions to naturalness and wholeness,” and to imagine places that initiate counter possibilities capable of interrogating, and making new, established social structures.

Through my study of the literary Okanagan as a microcosmic regional site, where “societies and their places and spaces exist in ongoing, reciprocal relation with each other” (Harris xiv), I argue that we might document a fraught process that resists the totalizing discourse of a “centralizing nationalism” (Riegel and Wyile xii), as Okanagan writers, instead, establish a space characterized by difficult heterogeneity. This project, which intervenes in ongoing critical discourse about regionalism’s “counter-universalizing and decentralizing tendencies” (Riegel and Wyile xiii), advocates for a decolonizing regionalism that is attentive to the ways in which “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste xvii) has repressed, ignored or overwritten regionally situated Indigenous paradigms. I propose in examining literature from and about the Okanagan that we might observe the beginning of a shift in literary representational practice, as increased engagement with the Okanagan’s Indigenous “situated knowledges” has led to critical re-examinations of settler-colonial ethics of land use and ownership, and an increased interest in “relearning” (Armstrong, Keynote) Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Wisdom (TEKW)

systems (Turner, Boelscher Ignance and Ignance). By observing and defamiliarizing orthodox colonial, essentialist and reductivist understandings of region (which fall under what Code terms “instituted imaginaries”), I propose that we might begin to discern how a “plurality of independent and unmerged voices” (Bahktin, *Problems*, 6) are working to articulate, challenge and create the culture and history of a region and are, in turn, “interrupting and restructuring the dominant social and philosophical imaginary” (Code 9).

### DIFFICULT TOPOGRAPHY: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

“Gradually we are becoming regarded as trespassers over a large portion of this our country”

(Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, “Laurier Memorial,” August 25, 1910)

Unlike Canada’s other provinces, British Columbia joined confederation largely in the absence of treaties and in direct contravention of the Royal Proclamation of 1793 that stipulated the Crown had “no right to colonize without first buying lands occupied by Aboriginal owners” (Armstrong, Derickson, Maracle and Young-Ing)<sup>2</sup>. To this day, and with the “exception of a small number of historical and modern treaties signed between First Nations and the federal and provincial governments,” most of the lands in B.C., including lands in the Okanagan region, have not been “ceded by Indigenous peoples to the Crown” (Molander 1). In British Columbia, First Nations currently are in possession of only “approximately 0.24% of the total provincial

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the question of title as it relates to land claims in British Columbia, see Paul Tennant’s *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (1990). Tennant’s work is helpful in establishing the context from which the June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014, landmark ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada confirming that the Tsilhqot’in Nation have title to a 1,750 square kilometers region of central British Columbia (Tsilhqot’in), came into being.

land base” (1). Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, an artist of Coast Salish and Okanagan descent, has argued that the very name of the province misrepresents the history of the space, asking, “Why do we have British Columbia? Why do we have to have this name when they never paid for it? This is our land. This is First Nations territory” (Griffin). While Yuxweluptun argues that the name needs to change in order to recognize the need for a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, suggesting names like “Northwest Coast Territory or Traditional Native Territories” are more appropriate, the name remains and continues to obscure the fact that the Province has been home since time immemorial to Indigenous peoples, including “198 distinct First Nations [...] each with their own unique traditions and history,” where more than 30 different First Nation languages and close to 60 dialects are spoken” (“B.C. First Nations”).

In terms of its geography British Columbia is a “clearly defined space, enclosed by the Pacific Ocean, by the Rocky Mountains, by the cold, north country and by the United States drowsing fitfully to the south,” yet many settlers described the Province as “topographically bewildering,” as a “topographical labyrinth,” and wanting in “geographic coherence” (Brown 13; Bryan 13; Alan Burke Cullen qtd. in Ricou, 115; Barman 352). From the 1850s onward, the multitude of north-south mountain ranges, including the Coast, Skeena, Monashee, Selkirk, Purcell and Rocky, that carve the land from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, into deep and discrete valleys, have shaped settler narratives from the province’s interior. These narrow valleys, hemmed in by peaks, have ensured, as Barman notes, “that isolation would be a major motif for many of the province’s inhabitants” (4). Poet and Canadian nationalist Charles Mair, who spent six weeks in the province’s interior in 1892, complained that British Columbia is “a Province *sui generis*, each valley with its own little secluded community, shut off until yesterday from the outer world” (Mair qtd. in Barman). While settlers, like Mair, and early settler pioneers

in the Okanagan, including Alice Barrett Parke and Susan Allison, would struggle to imaginatively situate themselves in the “Ponderosa Pine-Bunchgrass” bioclimatic zone (Thomson 18), the Syilx Okanagan People, whose lands<sup>3</sup> lie on “both sides of the Okanagan River, east to the Selkirk range, west to the Cascades summit, south into Washington State bounded by the Columbia River and Lake Chelan and north to the Salmon River,” and who have been in the Okanagan “since the beginning of people on [the] land,” faced no such existential uncertainty with regards to their geographic situation (Armstrong, Derickson, Maracle and Young-Ing 4, 1).

While British Columbia’s Okanagan remains the unceded territory of the unconquered Syilx people, settlers, with the active support of the Provincial Government, would work to displace the Okanagan People, seizing prime agricultural land. Despite the governor of B.C., Sir James Douglas’s pre-confederation assurances, which took the form of oral agreements between himself and the High Okanagan Chief that “land pointed out by village chief themselves would be protected from being bothered by the ‘Queen’s children’ forever” (Armstrong, Maracle, and Derickson 44), the 1859 discovery of gold in Rock Creek and reports of gold in Mission Creek began a process which would erode and all but nullify Douglas’s promises. As “unruly miners” began to flood into the territory and proceeded to stake claims on the land, Douglas, looking to come to “an official peaceful agreement with the Okanagans” that would allow him to “administer justice to the White intruders,” between 1858 and 1862 set out to create large reserves, to the extent “as they may be pointed out by the Natives themselves” (Armstrong, Maracle, and Derickson 46; Letter to the Dominion Government 1874). These reserves were large and included “hunting, fishing territory as well as farm and grazing lands” and preserved

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<sup>3</sup> See Figure 1. “Okanagan Nation Territory Map.” Syilx Okanagan Nation Alliance, 2017. Web.

the Okanagan people's "full hunting and fishing rights on all lands around their reserves" (46-47), rights and lands to be protected, "As long as the sun rises and the rivers flow and the imperial flag continues to fly over Britain" (47). Despite these promises, with Douglas's retirement in 1864, the attitude of the Colony of British Columbia changed, as its large debts to Britain made it difficult to purchase Indigenous lands for the "Queen's children" to live on (48). While Governor Douglas had preferred to foster nation-to-nation relationships with the region's Indigenous peoples, Joseph Trutch had no interests in fostering or maintaining reciprocal relationships with Indigenous peoples (Fisher 3).

Trutch, who was appointed Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, and was tasked in 1864 by Frederick Seymour, the new Governor of the Colony of British Columbia, to cut down the size of reserves, offering a variety of justifications for the ensuing thefts, writing:

The Indians really have no right to the lands they claim, nor are they of any actual value or utility to them... It seems to me, therefore, both just and politic that they should be confirmed in the possession of such extents of land only as are sufficient for their probable requirements for purposes of cultivation and pasturage, and that the remainder of the land now shut up in these reserves should be thrown open to pre-emption. (Trutch)

Trutch, who was "very much a product of imperial England's confidence in the superiority of her own civilization" is remembered by historians as a vociferous racist who felt that the other "races came somewhat lower on the scale of human existence than the English, and the North American Indian was barely part of the scale at all" (Fisher 5). His descriptions of Indigenous peoples "tended towards the bestial rather than the human" and would frequently include the racist epithet "savage" (5).

Given his mandate to cut the size of reserves, Trutch requested a report on the interior reserves in 1865, and from this report determined that it seemed likely “that the Indians may have altered the boundaries of reserves by moving the stakes after [William] Cox had laid them out” and that Cox, Assistant Commissioner of Lands, has “exceeded his instructions” in granting such large reserves (Fisher 13). Trutch sought to correct these “mistakes” and began to dramatically reduce the size of reserves, often simply drawing lines on maps, without any consultation, and calling them reserves (Armstrong, Maracle, and Derickson 48). As Lynn Blake notes, by the 1870s, after more than 5 years of Trutch’s policies, “many Native people in BC were feeling the effects of substantial reductions in the size of reserves, white encroachments upon reserves, dwindling water rights, [and] restrictions on grazing and pasturing animals” (31). Faced with these land seizures under Trutch’s reduction policy and with new rules that punished Indigenous people for leaving their drastically reduced reserves, in 1877 the Okanagan people decided to go to war in order to drive colonists out of their territory (Armstrong, Maracle, and Derickson 49).

Prior to this decision, news of a possible “Indian outbreak” in the Okanagan and Shuswap region had reached Victoria and Ottawa (49). I.W. Powell as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the province was tasked with addressing the rumours and complaints of “serious dissatisfaction among Shuswap and Okanagan Natives” and travelled to portions of the interior in the summer of 1874 (Blake 34). Powell, who required that his meeting with the Okanagan people be moved to Head Lake because he could not continue in his buggy, left the Okanagan people with a less than positive impression of himself and the government he represented (36). Father Jean-Charles Pandosy (whose life as an Oblate priest would be imaginatively recounted in Edmond Rivère’s



2012 work of narrative non-fiction), witnessed the meeting between the Okanagan people, and writes:

La visite a irrité les sauvages. "Comment, disent-ils, ce grand chef nous fera-t-il rendre justice pour les terres qu'on nous a enlevée, s'il ne vient pas sur les lieux? Nos réserves sont déjà bien petits, toujours les blancs nous les rongent et personne ne nous rend justice. Nous pensions que les Anglais ne sont pas comme les Américains, mais nous savons maintenant qu'ils sont pires. Les Américains prennent les terres, mais ils payent, les Anglais ne payent pas et les laissent prendre, en promettant un chef qui viendra lorsqu'il n'y aura plus de terre ou lorsque nous serons tous morts."

[The visit irritated the savages. "How, they said, can this great chief do us justice for the lands that have been taken from us, if he does not come to the spot? Our reserves are already very small, the whites already eat away at them, and no one gives us justice. We thought the English were not like the Americans, but now we know that they are worse. The Americans take the land, but they pay, the English do not pay and let them be taken, promising a chief who will come only when there is no more land or when we are all dead." ] (37)

In 1874, at Powell's urging in order to "raise public opinion and to press the provincial government on the land question," Father C.J. Grandidier, an Oblate priest from a mission near Kelowna, penned an open letter to the *Victoria Standard News* (24). In this letter he decried the brutality of the reservation reduction policy, its impacts on the Okanagan people's ability to "eke out a living" on the meagre and poor lands they were left with and cautioned that if "the Indians are persistently refused their demands, if [there is no] redress from the proper authorities, their dissatisfaction will increase, meetings shall be held again, as it has about their grievances, until

they come to an understanding, the end of which I am afraid to foresee” (24). Grandidier's article was followed in November of 1874 by a petition in the name of the Chiefs of Kamloops, Shuswap, Okanagan, and Similkameen bands to Powell that claimed “the reserves have been laid out generally without our agreement and against our own will. The Magistrates have treated us as if we were slaves and as if we had no right to our own land” (Blake 37). Faced with these growing frustrations, the Okanagan Chiefs, between 1875 and 1877 “called a council of war with their allies, the Shuswap and formed a confederacy,” which came to be known as the Okanagan Shuswap Confederacy (Armstrong, Maracle, and Derickson 51).

By 1877 the tensions that Grandidier reported, and the frustration that the Chiefs articulated in their petition, had become acute as a Royal Commission, formed at the urging of nervous settlers on the matter of Canada and the Aboriginal Nations of B.C., in one telegraph wire to Ottawa reported: “Indian situation very grave from Kamloops to American Border – general dissatisfaction – outbreak possible” (Armstrong, Maracle, and Derickson 51). Faced with a possible uprising by Okanagan Shuswap Confederacy, the Commission, under Alexander Anderson, Archibald McKinley, and Gilbert Malcolm Sproat were tasked with quelling dissatisfaction and given power through an Order-in-Council to negotiate the size of reserves, but “not to negotiate the larger question of underlying title or rights” (51). This commission deployed the colonial strategy of “divide and conquer” (Wotherspoon and Hansen 32) as they made large offers to the smallest bands of the Okanagan Shuswap confederacy and succeeded in a dissolution of both the confederacy and the threat of war (Armstrong, Maracle, and Derickson 52). Instead, reserve boundaries were redrawn and many lands that had formed part of the original and larger Douglas reserves in 1877 were designated as commonage, which allowed settlers to graze livestock on reserve lands (53). This common land, called the Okanagan

Commonage Reserve, would begin to be aggressively re-appropriated for settler use beginning with a Dominion Order-in-Council in 1889 (53) and many reserves, between 1880 and 1898 under the head of the Indian Reserve Commission, Peter O'Reilly, would be cut down in size<sup>4</sup> (55).

Discontent over land usurpation and increasing “astounding acts of racism” (including granting settlers 160 acres land each, free of charge, while restricting Indigenous peoples to 20 acres per family) drove the Indigenous resistance movement across the Province, as “coastal and interior First Nations mobilized rapidly to assert First Nations’ relationship with the Crown and invoke colonial law to make an argument for Indigenous title and rights” (Manuel and Derrickson 6; Feltes, “Research as Guesthood” 469). In addition to launching petitions and letters across the province, country, and to Europe, delegations representing the Province’s First Nations sought audiences abroad (469). In 1904, a delegation including Syilx Chief Chilahitsa of Douglas Lake, and Secw’epemc Chief Louis of Kamloops, accompanied by Oblate missionary Father J. M LeJeune went to England seeking an audience with King Edward VII (Feltes, “Research as Guesthood,” 469; Armstrong, Maracle, and Derickson 58; Galois 6-7). While they failed to gain audience with King Edward VII, “undeterred, they went to Italy, where they were received by Pope Leo XIII” (Feltes, “Research as Guesthood,” 469). Despite this audience, the concerns of the Nations were far from being addressed. The continued usurpation of lands fomented in the document known as the “Laurier Memorial,”<sup>5</sup> a document composed by the

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<sup>4</sup> For more on Okanagan Reserves see: Armstrong, Jeannette, Lee Maracle, and Delphine Derickson. *We Get our Living Like Milk from the Land: History of Okanagan Nation*. Theytus Books, 1994. Print.; and Thomson, Duncan Duane. *A History of the Okanagan: Indians and Whites in the Settlement Era, 1860-1920*. Diss. University of British Columbia, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> The Laurier Memorial is the subject of a 2004 play by Tomson Highway, called *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout*, in which four Indigenous women prepare for Laurier’s visit to Kamloops (Feltes 471).

Chiefs of the Secw'epemc (Shuswap), Syilx (Okanagan) and Nlaka'pamux (Thompson or Couteau) Nations of the interior plateau of British Columbia and presented to Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier on August 25, 1910, while he was visiting Kamloops on an election campaign stop (Manuel and Derrikson 4-6; Feltes, "Research as Guesthood," 470). Arthur Manuel, a prominent Indigenous political leader of Secw'epemc and Ktunaxa heritage, explains that the Laurier Memorial "represented, in a very precise way, our collective memories of our history with the settlers" (5). In the Laurier Memorial, the Nations sought to chart,

the history of relations between the interior nations and newcomer populations, starting with the arrival of the French fur traders (who, by and large, respected Indigenous jurisdiction and self-determination) followed by American gold miners and British settlers (who did not). It then puts forward a different model of relations based in Indigenous law, reciprocity and shared jurisdiction. (Feltes, "Research as Guesthood," 470).

While Laurier was sympathetic to the appeals of British Columbia's First Nations, and "made several gestures to put the issue of Indian title on the national agenda once and for all, including proposed amendments to the Indian Act and an Order-in-Council to the federal court" (470), these sympathies came to naught. In British Columbia, the Provincial Government, under Richard McBride, "refused to go to court on the question of aboriginal title" (Armstrong, Maracle, and Derickson 60), while Laurier's initiatives would soon be quashed after his 1911 election loss to Conservative Robert Borden, who would implement the McKenna-McBride Commission in 1913, a commission which sought to settle Indigenous land questions "once and for all" (Armstrong, Maracle, and Derickson 61). On October 8, 1913, the Commission took statements from the Okanagan Chiefs on the Penticton Indian Reserve (61). Before the

Commission, Francois Timoykin testified, “We get along from the land – it is our father and mother – we get our living like milk from the land, therefore, we have no land to sell – it would be just like selling our bodies” (62).

Despite these words and the protests of the Okanagan Chiefs, in 1916 the McKenna-McBride Commission issued its report recommending further appropriations of Syilx land. Cutoffs were made to 54 reserves across the Province to accommodate settlers who wanted those lands, most of these cutoffs occurring in the Okanagan (64; Thomson 152-157). In total the Syilx saw a net reduction of 15,936.8 acres of their ancestral lands and were left with twenty-four reserves (Thomson 158).

The Okanagan Nation has never ceased to dispute the legality of these seizures and continues to maintain their claim to the lands. In 2015 The Okanagan Indian Band filed a motion of claim to the British Columbia Supreme Court in the form of an “interlocutory injunction to stop the sale of railway lands from Canadian National Railway (CNR) to the City of Kelowna” as the Okanagan Indian Band claimed “that the lands in question were part of a reserve established in 1877, referred to as the Commonage Reserve, and that the rail corridor was never surrendered and therefore never properly acquired by CNR” (Okanagan Indian Band v. Canadian National Railway Company). While the Okanagan Indian Band’s injunction was dismissed and the sale went ahead, Chief Fabian Alexis, representing the Okanagan Indian Band, asserts that these lands, which include “travel routes, as well as important sacred, fishing, hunting and gathering grounds” (Helston), were “taken from us without our knowledge or consent. We were never compensated. We have been waiting a very long time, 130 years, to have our claim resolved. We are determined to negotiate a full and fair restitution for the loss of this land” (Alexis qtd. in Dolha).

While, as *Vernon Morning Star* journalist Richard Rolke reports, talks between the Government and the Syilx Nation “have languished, including the colonial claim which covers much of modern-day Vernon. [And] The Commonage claim has also been sitting on a shelf, gathering dust,” slowly, the Okanagan’s settler communities are beginning to recognize that the land on which its communities sit is the unceded territory of the Okanagan Syilx Nation. In July of 2017, with the celebration of its 125<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Council of the City of Vernon began to explore implementing a policy that “would possibly see traditional Indigenous lands recognized at the beginning of council meetings or in another form” (Rolke). Juliette Cunningham, Vernon City Councilor, has countered the concerns of her fellow councillors over the legal ramifications of such a statement of adopting a policy of Indigenous territorial recognition by arguing that “other communities across the country have done this. It’s a statement, a true statement” (Rolke).

Despite the fact this full and fair restitution has yet to occur and those territorial recognitions have yet to be adopted, the influx of settlers to the Okanagan has steadily increased. Since its first census of 1881, British Columbia’s population has grown from a total of 50,387 to 4.631 million as of 2017, as waves of settlers, including fur traders, forestry workers, miners, cattle ranchers, farmers, orchardists, religious dissenters, back-to-the-landers, draft dodgers, hippies and retirees have sought to inscribe, or be inscribed by, the landscape. The Okanagan, as reported in 1974 in the Main Report of the Consultative Board, of British Columbia Water Resources Service, “is both scenically attractive and climatically desirable, and has consequently experienced a rapidly expanding resident and tourist population growth” (5). The report goes on to state that “this influx of people has been accompanied by intensified, and sometimes conflicting, uses of the limited water and land resources of the basin (5). These 1974 findings were reinforced in the 2006 *Final Report of the Participatory Integrated Assessment of Water*

*Management and Climate Change in the Okanagan Basin, British Columbia* where a dramatic population increase is charted and assessed showing that the Okanagan's population has grown "from approximately 210,000 in 1986 to 310,000 in 2001," with the population "expected to continue to grow, reaching nearly 450,000 by 2031" (Cohen and Neale iv).

Every time I crest the dry hills and drive back into the Okanagan valley basin from my current home in British Columbia's West Kootenay, I find the place changed, as new subdivisions and strip malls spread like rhizomes up and under the valley basin's walls. This rapid change has left many of the region's residents reeling, as they seek to understand the place in which they find themselves, more often than not with little to no sense of Syilx history and presence. Don Gayton, an ecologist, writer and relatively new resident to the Okanagan writes of his own experience:

Having lived in the Okanagan Valley for a few years, I was frustrated by the agonizingly slow growth of my local knowledge. Here was this place, this contradictory Okanagan: part urban big city, part rural orchard and ranch, and part wild ponderosa pine and rock bluff. A local culture that encompasses both Ballet Kelowna and monster truck rallies. I was not satisfied with the conventional view of this region, which was all about real estate, conservative politics and golf. I needed to take the Okanagan on, immerse myself in it, drill down through layers of superficial understanding and traverse it and all its contradictions, from the US border to its northern terminus (Gayton, *Okanagan*, 11-12).

As I begin to examine how the region's narratives are coming to terms with shifting terrains, I too seek to be attuned to the contradictions that inflect and underpin the narratives rooted in, and rising from, the valleys. Rather than "removing literature from its physical, emotional and moral contexts" (Bentley 88), which D.M.R. Bentley argues has done literature a disservice, I aim to

situate the texts in my study, and my own work, within a wide web of these contentious contexts.

## MAKING HOME: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Land was the new opportunity; life here was about occupying, controlling, and managing it, about establishing who could do what where. In the process settlements were created and space was reconfigured.” (Cole Harris xvi)

Like Jean Barman, who contends that “any historical interpretation of British Columbia must be firmly grounded in the province’s geography” (3), George Bowering argues for the primacy of geographic space in the analysis of literary works from the province. Bowering suggests that it is an uneasiness with British Columbia’s geographic space that forms one of the unifying themes of Provincial culture, and that Home, “or, more specifically, the attempt to find or make a home,” may stand as an “informing symbol for the culture” (9). This project sits at the intersection of four fields of discourse and criticism: ecocriticism, settler-invader “post” colonialism, decolonization, and bioregionalism, all of which, in one way or another, explore questions related to how we write ‘home,’ and the ethics and epistemological underpinnings of such writings.

These questions are at the heart of this project and have been ongoing concerns of a host of writers and critics working in the interdisciplinary field that has been called ecocriticism. At its most fundamental, Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). Ecocriticism, as Nicholas Bradley and



Ella Soper argue in their introduction to *Greening the Maple*, has aspired since its inception “to make the study of literature (and other cultural manifestations) relevant to the innumerable environmental crises, local and global, that characterized the end of the twentieth century and that threaten to define the twenty-first” (xiii). Questions foundational to ecocritical study and practice include: What does it mean to write place? How does narrative shape and/or sustain place? And what are the ethical implications of our narrative constructions? In “Greening the Library: The Fundamentals and Future of Ecocriticism” Loretta Johnson provides a useful etymological unpacking of the word ecocriticism and its cognates. She writes,

“Eco,” from the Greek root *oikos*, means “house.” The OED cites the German *oecologie* as the first appearance of “ecology” (in 1876), meaning “the branch of biology that deals with the relationships between living organisms and their environment.” Just as “economy” is the management or law of the house (*nomos* = law), “ecology” is the study of the house. Ecocriticism, then, is the criticism of the “house,” i.e., the environment, as represented in literature (7).

This notion that, as ecocritics, we are examining what it means to write and imagine the places we call home is something that Don McKay explores at length in his influential work of ecopoetics/criticism, *Vis à Vis*. In this work, McKay posits that “home” is “the action of the inner life finding outer form,” and is a vehicle that “makes possible the possession of the world, the rendering of the other as one’s interior” (22, 23). While this provides a clear place from which to begin to inquire into the processes we use to imagine, build and possess the spaces we call home, Buell argues that ecocriticism, as a theoretical model, must do more than understand “represented nature as an ideological screen” that does no more than offer a “projective fantasy or social allegory” (Buell 36). Buell argues that ecocritical practice demands a fundamental

rethinking of “our assumptions about the nature of representation, reference, metaphor, characterization, personae, and canonicity” (2). Similarly, critic Daniel Anderson calls for a “historically-informed and materialist approach to Ecocriticism,” an approach that “looks to the past as a field of determinations and limits on the present: [wherein] the present [is] the given product, finished or not, of past causes” (34). This approach, rooted in a scholarship that, at its foundation, views “Ecocriticism-as-advocacy” asks that we read our cultural texts as a means by which we can better understand our present, and often vexed, engagement with ecology.

Wilderness, Jean Baudrillard proposes in *Simulacra & Simulation* (1994), has steadily become a sign without referent, where the virgin forest exists only in a posthumous state (24). Similarly, ecocritic Rebecca Raglon argues that we live in age “which has deconstructed or “problematized” the presumed hegemonic idea of the wild” where “we must now surrender the idea of wilderness, and accept the consequences of the human presence in the world,” and where contemporary nature writers and critics increasingly understand nature as “thoroughly anthropogenic” (Raglon 61). Ecocritics William Major and Andrew McMurry, too, argue that our understanding of our ecological situation has radically shifted, and that we have moved beyond our infancy, entering what they call an “awkward adolescence,” typified by an angst over “our difficulties and frustrations with dealing effectively with environmental realities” (7). This adolescence, Major and McMurry argue, not only fosters a nostalgic “looking back to an idyllic childhood” when “we could revel in nature,” but also causes us to look ahead fearfully at a “rapidly approaching [ecological] adulthood [that] looks increasingly difficult and limited” (7). Major and McMurry contend that from this liminal adolescent space, we, as “gangly, fearful teenagers,” may finally be able comprehend the “planetary tragedy” that is playing on “well into its third act” (7, 2).

This troubled planetary “third act” has fallen under the widely accepted term: the Anthropocene—the age of humans. The term, which “was coined by ecologist Eugene Stoermer in the 1980s [...], has gained prominence since 2000, when Paul Crutzen, a Nobel-winning atmospheric scientist urged scientists to adopt it” (Purdy 2), and has come into common usage when discussing our current ecological planetary predicament. As Jedediah Purdy writes in *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*, “for the past 11,700 years we have been living in the Holocene epoch,” a period which “takes its name from the Greek for “totally new,” [and] is an eye-blink in geological time” (1). The “real news” of the Holocene, as Purdy argues, has been people:

Estimates put the global human population between 1 million and 10 million at the start of the Holocene and keep it in that range until after the agricultural revolution, some 5,000 years ago. Since then, we have made the world our anthill: the geological layers we are now laying down on the earth’s surface are marked by our chemicals and other industrial emissions, the pollens of crops, and the absence of the many species we have driven to extinction. Rising sea levels are now our doing. As a driver of global change, humanity has outstripped geology. (2)

It is from anthropocentric, hyper-awareness that we have made the planet our “anthill” that Timothy Morton coins the term “dark ecology.” Morton, recently dubbed by Alex Blasdel of the *Guardian* “the philosopher prophet of the Anthropocene,” posits that dark ecology is “ecological awareness, dark-depressing. Yet ecological awareness is also dark-uncanny” (5, *Dark Ecology*, Morton). The uncanny, as Sigmund Freud famously writes, is a concept linguistically tied to the German words “‘heimlich’ [‘homely’], [and] ‘heimisch’ [‘native’]” (218). While the *unheimlich*, or uncanny, can thus be easily read as “frightening precisely because it is *not* known and

familiar,” in Freud’s reading of the uncanny, it is precisely what *is* familiar that is frightening (218). The uncanny, or unhoused, in Freud’s reading, never strays far from home, but is instead a familiar and frightening manifestation of repressed anxiety (240). Morton explores this dis-ease at home, and underlying anxieties, arguing that

We have gone from having “the whole world in our hands” and “I’d like to buy the world a Coke” to realizing that the whole world, including “little” us, is in the vicelike death grip of a gigantic entity—ourselves as the human species. This uncanny sense of existing on more than one scale at once has nothing to do with the pathos of cradling a beautiful blue ball in the void. (24)

It is perhaps due in part to the intense anxiety that global ecological awareness has the power to inspire, that critics, environmentalist, writers and artists (and the author of this dissertation) have often turned their attention to the local, to the human place within specific bioregions and towards bioregionalism.

As a school of thought, bioregionalism emerged as part of the environmental movement of the 1970s (Lynch, Glotfelty and Armbruster 3). Bioregionalism, as a “green movement (or ethos),” has, since its inception, as Jenny Kerber notes, sought to challenge the “the homogenizing forces of globalization” and has had as “one of its consistent goals has been to get people to recognize the interdependencies between themselves and the physical ecology of the local and regional places in which they live” (207). In *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice* (2003), Robert L. Thayer defines bioregion as,

literally and etymologically a “life-place”—a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological, and ecological character capable of supporting unique human communities. Bioregions can be variously

defined by the geography of watersheds, similar plant and animal ecosystems, and related, identifiable landforms (e.g., particular mountain ranges, prairies, or coastal zones) and by the unique human cultures that grow from natural limits and potentials of region. (3)

Thayer goes on to argue that the bioregion is “the most logical locus and scale for a sustainable, regenerative community to take root and to *take place*” (3). While Thayer advocates fostering communities rooted in and responsive to place, Gayton argues that “places are unique and distinct, and that people are changed – uniquely and distinctly – by living in those particular places” (Gayton, *Kokanee*, 82).

While this logic is appealing, particularly for those vexed by the “dark ecology” Morton describes, and for those who are seeking a sustainable refuge in the local in the midst of biospheric ecological crisis, the logic of bioregionalism has been put, as Kerber notes, “to more disturbing ends” (207). As Kerber writes, “the ‘blood and soil’ ideology of National Socialism, [...] adeptly enlisted deep-ecological ideas to legitimate a political program of extermination during the Second World War” (207-208). In his analysis of the historical scholarship on Nazi ecology, Greg Garrard points out that the Nazis justified their extermination of the Jews by appealing to various groups, including small farmers, georgic philosophers, and conservationists (Garrard, 121). The rationale behind this justification was that the Jews were perceived as having traits such as “internationalism and urbanism,” which were seen as incompatible with a strong allegiance to German soil (121). In this way, their extermination was partly justified based not only based on “not only by their ‘blood’ but by their supposed lack of allegiance to German soil” (121). These kinds of arguments resurfaced “in the late 1990s as anti-immigration groups external to the U.S. Sierra Club – most notably the Federation for American Immigration Reform

(FAIR) – attempted to influence the organization’s agenda using language that drew upon bioregionalist discourses of natural boundaries and carrying capacities” (207-208). While, as Kerber notes, there are ways in which “some of the expressions and concepts of bioregionalism risk being co-opted by exclusionary social movements for ends many bioregionalists would staunchly oppose,” and as Gayton argues, bioregionalism, can be “a messy, contradictory, and dangerous idea,” bioregionalism continues to advocate a place-based environmental ethic, that encourages “the possibilities for imagining environmentally responsible global citizenship” rooted in “a political and cultural practice that manifests as an environmental ethic in the day-to-day activities of ordinary residents” (Kerber 24; Gayton, *Kokanee*, 81; Lynch, Glotfelty and Armbruster 10, 3).

Bioregionalists, including Lawrence Buell, Cheryl Glotfelty, Tom Lynch and Karla Armbruster, argue the ethics through which we engage with the material world are governed by how “we imagine nature and humanity’s relation to it” and that “imagination is one key to developing new and better ideas about how to live in our specific places, including a sense of how our individual bioregions are embedded in a larger biosphere” (Lynch, Glotfelty and Armbruster 11, 11-12). Lynch, Glotfelty and Armbruster note that among bioregionalists there is the widespread belief that Indigenous people “who have lived mindfully and sustainably in particular places for long periods of time have something to teach [settler culture] through their stories and related practices” (12). Jeannette Armstrong, who has sought to teach a Syilx ecological ethos rooted in the concept of “regenerative reciprocity” has similarly encouraged the adoption of “bioregional perspectives” that listen to, and are shaped by, story of the land (Armstrong, “Literature of the Land,” 347, 355; Armstrong, “Keynote”). Her paper, “Literature of the Land – An Ethos for These Times,” positions Indigenous oral literature “as ‘the voice of

the land’, as a record of the way the land itself established how humans, over generations, might speak its required realities,” arguing that Indigenous story serves to carry “‘ecological conscience,’ because it describes a relationship of unmitigated interdependence and reciprocity with nature” (354). John Clarke, one of the scholars upon whom Armstrong draws upon, in *Voices of the Earth*, suggests,

in a very important sense, we do not *discover* the natural world but rather *construct* it [...] we do not experience reality direct, but rather in a form which is filtered through the lenses of symbolic creations – our mythologies, sciences, philosophies, theologies, through language itself.” (3, 4)

While Armstrong makes the powerful case that Indigenous oral literature, particularly Okanagan Syilx story told in Nsyilxcən, works as ‘the voice of the land,’ this dissertation explores how settler literature from and about the Okanagan territory is engaged in the imaginative construction of the bioregion and examines the ethos that underpins these constructions.

Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson argue that for literary scholars working in the field of settler-invader postcolonialism (the “post” in postcolonialism being enduringly problematic in Canadian contexts), it is particularly important to examine the ways in which the contestations between settler-colonial and Indigenous people over “textuality and land” are played out in representational practice (375). The colonial project has long undergone a process of rewriting the land through what Mary Louise Pratt terms “imperial eyes” (Pratt). Pratt argues that natural history, travel writing, sentimental and otherwise, provided a potent means for the imperial project to achieve “territorial surveillance, appropriation of resources, and administrative control” (39). Following Carl von Linné’s or, in Latin, Linnaeus’s, 1735 publication of *Systema Naturae* (*The System of Nature*), which provided “a descriptive system designed to classify all

the plants on the earth, known and unknown, according to the characteristics of their reproductive parts,” Pratt charts how Linnaeus’s “disciples (for so they called themselves),” deploying a “messianic strategy” achieved a “a deep and lasting impact not just on travel and travel writing, but on the overall ways European citizenries made, and made sense of, their place on the planet” (24). These Linnaean strategies for classification appear (both critiqued and otherwise) in settler literary attempts to write the Okanagan as a bioclimactic region. This dissertation, which examines the way the Okanagan region is imagined in representational practice, pays particular attention to the ways the contemporary writers in this study both challenge and employ a host of commonplaces inherent in imperial and colonial discursive practice.

This dissertation, which works to counter the “negative effects of epistemology of mastery” (Code 1) that have underpinned colonialism and allowed settlers to British Columbia to imagine the land as “nowhere” (Brown) or a *tabula rasa*, seeks to contribute to the ongoing project of decolonization. Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that decolonization “is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels” (20). The editors of the journal *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* argue that “decolonization seeks to explore the relationships between knowledges and tears down the artificial disciplinary demarcations of dominant ways of knowing and being.” They go on to argue that since “colonial power affects all areas of life and study” their editorial mandate “seeks to engage and confront that power at every level.” Decolonization, Tuhiwai Smith argues, asks that researchers, in addition to making visible the ways in which “imperialism frames indigenous experience,” need also be attentive to the “underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform [their] research practices” (20-21). Laurie Ricou, in his paper “So Big About Green,” argues that “the very coinage



‘ecocriticism’ implies politics” (112). This project is not politically neutral, nor will my own subjectivity be cloaked in the rhetoric of objectivity. Instead, I acknowledge that I pursue this project from my own deep unease, and feelings of complicity with, the colonial settlement of the Okanagan and from an acknowledgement that the way settler-invader culture has established itself in the Okanagan has wrought serious—and often devastating—ecological, social and cultural damage. With this, I must, like Harris, acknowledge that I am the heir to, and a continuing participant in, “a pervasive, and ongoing colonialism” (xvii). Through the course of my writing, I strive to remain attentive to the motivations, assumptions and the values that inform my work.

While I was a student pursuing an Associate of Arts degree at Okanagan College in the late 1990s and early 2000s, my English instructors frequently assigned readings from local writers and poets who were settlers in the area. My aim with this project is re-read these texts (and others being published in the region) in order to build a critical framework through which to initiate discussions into the ways we write and teach British Columbia’s interior valleys. This dissertation constitutes the first book length critical study on British Columbia’s Okanagan as a distinct literary region, is indebted to, and builds on the work of Jeannette Armstrong, Elizabeth Furniss, and Cole Harris, who have worked diligently to unsettle and decolonize British Columbia’s settler colonial narratives of mastery.

Northrop Frye’s oft-cited question: “where is *here*?” is one that will sit uncomfortably at the heart of my project (220). In seeking to answer this question, earlier critics, including Margaret Atwood, D. G. Jones, and John Moss, have sought thematic frameworks that stitch together a national ethos and foundational psychology. While, as other critics have noted, these kinds of approaches might serve to naturalize Canada’s colonial project, I seek an approach

which foregrounds and defamiliarizes what Tuhiwai Smith calls “the imperial imagination” (23) and counters “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste xvii). The question “where is here?” in this framework, can no longer ignore what Terry Goldie has termed the “absent presence” of Indigenous people in literary texts, or in the bioregions Canadian settlers inhabit. I argue that within contemporary settler imaginings of the Okanagan valleys as “abstract diasporic space” (Coleman 1), wherein subjectivities grapple with Frye’s epigrammatic Canadian question, new answers to the question are emerging, answers that are informed by Indigenous presence, and by urgent bioregional and biospheric concerns and perspectives.

#### OVER LANDS: CHAPTER BREAKDOWNS

In what follows, I root my examination of contemporary Okanagan literature in a socio-historical and geographical mapping of British Columbia’s South Central interior in order to begin to delineate what David Jordan calls the “borders that define difference” (10). Jordan argues that for the regionalist author, geographic, epistemological and cultural borders all serve as sites of confrontation, along which the distinct regional community works to assert itself against the “larger society within which it exists.” In order to identify the regionally specific tensions that will inform my readings, I listen to the history of Syilx Okanagan People in works sanctioned by the Okanagan Tribal Council, including *We Get Our Living Like Milk From the Land*, as well as in the autobiography by Mourning Dove, and the recorded oral histories collected in *Q’sapi: A history of Okanagan people as told by Okanagan families*; in the journals of early missionaries, settlers and anthropologists, including those of Father Pandosy, Alice Barrett Parke, Susan Moir Allison, and James Teit, whose various agendas and names will mark

the land; and in the studies of biologists and conservationists (including John Wagner, Nancy Turner, Marianne Boelscher Ignace, and Ronald Ignace), who have examined how local species and landscapes function and have been affected by settler incursions. Together, these texts allow me to begin to gather the relevant contexts from which to consider how landscape aesthetics (Wagner), settler strategies of duplication (Harris), Syilx ecological ethos (Armstrong), and the dialectic between globalism and location (Harris) that are at work and critiqued in the contemporary representational practice.

The Okanagan is perhaps best known for its orchards and vineyards and has been repeatedly characterized in literature (for tourists and otherwise) as a “lost garden of Eden” (Wagner). In Chapter One, “Enclosed Edens: Orchards, Gardens and Other Failed Utopias,” I examine how this “powerful dream” of a new Eden plays out in literature and on the land (Rhenisch 2006). Carolyn Merchant argues that foundational to the settlement and so-called improvement of the American continent is what she terms “the American heroic recovery narrative,” a narrative in which “Euramerican men acted to reverse the decline initiated by Eve by turning it into an ascent back to the garden.” Entailed in this narrative of frontier expansion is “a story of male energy subduing female nature, taming the wild, plowing the land, [and] re-creating the garden lost by Eve” (146). Patrick Lane in *Red Dog, Red Dog* (2008) and Harold Rhenisch in *The Wolves at Evelyn* (2006) situate their narratives in these new gardens, and more specifically in orchards. The men at the center of the Lane and Rhenisch narratives are imbricated in the national projects of Westward expansion and settlement that pit individuals (mostly men) against North American landscape. In both of these texts, masculine projects fail, and the orchards become sites of violence and degradation. The postlapsarian nature of the valley’s new Edens is similarly critiqued in John Lent’s *The Face in the Garden* (1990), as the

region as a “geometrically calculated Eden” is characterized as a space of boredom, stasis, and guilt, as Indigenous presence powerfully asserts itself in the sudden presence of a dead aboriginal man on a protagonist’s manicured lawn. As Harris notes, the farm landscapes and gardens that began to appear in the Okanagan from the 1850s onward “were expressions of introduced cultural and ecological arrangements and were a drastic departure from indigenous pasts” (Harris 233). The human cost of these “rearranged local ecologies and an increasingly engineered nature” (233) is at the heart of Armstrong’s *Whispering in Shadows* (2000), as Penny, an Okanagan Syilx orchard worker, turned artist, turned environmental activist, dies of a rare form of cancer brought on by exposure to the strong pesticides used in the valley’s orchards. In Laisha Rosnau’s *The Sudden Weight of Snow* (2002), the protagonist seeks another kind of Eden at the Pilgrims Art Farm, a place that “could loosely be called a commune,” where individuals marry back-to-land principles with artistic pursuits (Rosnau). In these texts, the orchards, gardens, and utopias, which stand as material enactments of an imagined recovery, are far from Edenic. What is foregrounded in these works is not the planting of seedlings and the hope entailed in such plantings, but a resulting decay, as dreams of mastery are unsettled and uprooted.

Chapter Two, “Lakes, Rivers, Monsters and Irrigations Schemes,” examines the foundation upon which settler agricultural schemes and man-made-Edens rested: the ready supply of water. While, as Wagner documents, promotional literature circulating in 1912 claimed “that the Okanagan possessed ‘an inexhaustible supply’” of water, the British Columbian government “had long recognized [...] that water was in scarce supply throughout the southern interior of the province” (Wagner 30). This chapter examines how water is figured as a resource—scarce, abundant or otherwise—in the work of Armstrong, Dewinetz, Holmes, Rhenisch, Robinson and Rosnau. In Rhenisch’s part memoir and part history, *The Wolves at*

*Evelyn*, water is both contested and harnessed by settler culture. Rhenisch charts how the Syilx, forced by incoming ranchers and orchardists onto increasingly diminished reserves, are denied ready access to the water successive settlers would build small agricultural empires around. Rhenisch's anecdote-rich text also tells tales of gunboats patrolling Okanagan Lake waters, threatening Syilx settlements, and of a swindler from Montana who sold land plots on the bottom of the lake to incoming immigrants. While in Rhenisch's *The Wolves at Evelyn* water is central to settler ambitions, in Harry Robinson's stories, water and the mysterious creatures who dwell in its depths have the power to heal and kill. In Robinson's story, "Throw Me in River," a man who has suffered a knife wound is healed by immersion in the Thompson River, while in "The Big Fish Swallow That Horse," "Maybe That Lake Might Be Tunnel," and "They Find That Man by His Power," lake depths are homes to monsters and sinister forces. In the lyric poetry of Rosnau and Dewinetz, particularly Rosnau's "Night Swimming" and Dewinetz's "Map of Stars," lakes are not overtly sinister, nor healing, but provide a space where poetic personas meditate on the traditional tropes associated with water, including death, rebirth and sexual desire. While lakes are an abstract presence in Rosnau and Dewinetz, in Armstrong's *Slash* and in Holmes's poem "Life Support," Okanagan Lake is situated firmly within a contemporary context and is a body of water increasingly under threat from human pollutants. Lakes and rivers, which are so central to life in the semi-arid valleys, in these texts are sites where human subjectivity contends with its own often fragile presence.

From the orchards, lakes and rivers, Chapter Three, "Monstrous Settlements, Failed Utopias and Communities of Hope," moves into the small cities and towns that, since the late-nineteenth century, have thrived on agricultural expansion (Barman, Harris). This chapter reads these towns as spaces where colonial and imperial ambitions are made manifest and examines

how competing epistemologies and cultures intersect. In British Columbia, as Harris writes, “a society was being composed out of extreme displacements and disaggregations: a severely disrupted indigenous population, and a largely immigrant population detached from the circumstances of former lives, juxtaposed to unfamiliar peoples and ways, and perched amid some of the most dramatic terrain in the world” (276). These displacements and disaggregations are central to life in the small towns as figured in the work of Armstrong, Bowering, Lane, Lent, Rhenisch, and Rosnau. The towns are figured as lesser Sodoms and Gomorrahs, spaces of bourgeois lassitude, or are nightmarishly reified through a kind of Norman Rockwell-esque nostalgia. These are often spaces of ecological and cultural failure, where the implications of global capitalism are felt and critiqued. In Lane’s memoir *There is a Season* (2004) and novel *Red Dog, Red Dog* (2006), the Okanagan town is a space mired in secrets and horrific violence, where the dump hides bodies and capitalism’s waste. In stark contrast, in Bowering’s memoir, *Pinboy* (2012), Penticton is largely remembered as a kind of playground where adolescent fantasies, sexual and otherwise, are easily realized, while issues of class and colonialism rest uneasily in the narrative’s fringes. In Rosnau’s *The Sudden Weight of Snow*, the small town is a place of enclaves and competing ideologies, as conservative Christians live uneasily alongside Marxist draft dodgers and back-to-the-landers. In Armstrong’s *Slash*, the town is a site of moral and cultural degradation, where Syilx children are forced to go to schools rife with racism and where adolescents find new and damaged communities in local barrooms. In Lent’s *So It Won’t Go Away* (2005), the town is a site of both degradation and lassitude, as the central protagonist, who is the heir of a long diasporic tradition, comes to terms with a new and unfamiliar geographical stasis. In these texts, the small Okanagan town and its complex social structures are interrogated and critiqued.

In order to begin to trace the contexts that inform the finding and making of home within the Okanagan, this dissertation works to situate itself in the specificities of the habitats and inhabitants of the Okanagan, including the micro and macro histories and politics that have shaped (and continue to shape) the bioregion. Each of the subsequent chapters finds its locus in contested topographic subdivisions. My dissertation moves as a figurative journey over land, and endeavours to proceed with “methodological caution and humility” (Hoy 18), as I aim to work in an interrogative mode that opens up, rather than forecloses, modes of inquiry.

CHAPTER 1:  
ENCLOSED EDENS: ORCHARDS, GARDENS AND OTHER FAILED UTOPIAS

Between the mighty Monashee and the Coast Range of B.C.  
Where the rivers flow like fountains, on their way out to the sea  
And the apple blossoms splendor in no other land is found  
For it's heaven, really heaven, when they're blooming all around.

- "Blue Okanagan," song by Buddy Reynolds, 1947

They found a desert and made it bloom, made  
it green, but even the trees feel blue

- from "Desert Elm," George Bowering

My first memories of Okanagan orchards are of roadside fruit stands where my vacationing family would sometimes stop. Advertised with giant signs, often in the shape of apples or peaches, these spaces offered delight as ripe fruit (peaches, apricots, and nectarines) almost glowed from their green cardboard boxes. The sight of the Okanagan orchards, their green expanses stretching down to the shores of the lake and marking a stark contrast from the surrounding golden grasslands, and the smell of their ripe fruit, for me, signalled that summer had arrived in earnest after a long, wet, coastal winter. Later, when I was a troubled teenager navigating the valley's margins, the orchards would become places for transgressions or hiding, spaces where we could pluck apples from forgotten groves of twisted trees. These groves provided shelter from policing by the corrupt and dangerous adult world. While these fallow



spaces were inviting, the commercial orchards were forbidden, fenced-in areas whose pesticide-drenched trees sat behind fencing wire. The orchards' fruit and workers hid in the green, and the orchard's secrets off-limits from curious onlookers. As I return to the valley every few months to visit my husband's family, the orchards are shrinking, the green of the fruit trees giving way to boxy pastel-coloured homes and florescent-lit strip malls. The orchards increasingly function less as viable economic ventures and more as a selling feature for housing subdivisions that press against and slowly subsume them. The orchards, which serve as signifiers of an imagined golden age of rural idyll, have proven as transitory and precarious as other manifestations of settler dreams on unceded Syilx Okanagan territory.

In what follows, I examine the cloistered, exclusionary space of the orchards and gardens as represented in literature from and about the Okanagan valleys and how these spaces function as material enactments of settlement. I look at spaces where settlers, like Harold Rhenisch and his family, tried to work "a living piece of the earth, into society" (Rhenisch, *Out of the Interior*, 207); at spaces where issues of race and class are acute and expressed in who is invited to own land, who is expected to perform the labour, and whose stories are told and valorized; and at the agricultural project in the Okanagan as an act of theft of the unceded lands of the Syilx Okanagan people. By interrogating how Okanagan orchards are constructed through textual representation, I argue that we can trace a process of reckoning as settler communities and individuals contend with their historical and topographic situations. Through an examination of the Okanagan orchard as distinct regional space, we might, to borrow Jennifer Henderson's phrasing, begin to read "the microphysics of power in a settler colony" (4). Alexander Wilson, in *The Culture of Nature*, argues that "The North American landscape, and our presence on it, constantly takes on new meanings," noting that this landscape, and the earth more broadly, serve

as “home or habitat, as resource, as refuge and inspiration, as playground, laboratory, profit center [and, as] the place where human and natural economies meet” (11-12). Wilson argues that this space where human and natural economies meet is always “mediated” and shaped by our “rhetorical constructs” (12). This chapter examines the stories settlers tell about the agricultural development of the Okanagan through various forms of writing, such as memoirs, histories, poetry, novels, and advertising copy. Through these texts and their omissions, I explore the underlying power dynamics at play in these constructed environments. My focus is on texts that document the patterns of diasporic settlement and the resulting discomfort in inhabiting these landscapes. Although agricultural endeavors are often initially portrayed as heroic, they eventually give way to various forms of failure and self-reflexive critiques. These critiques are becoming more relevant to the ecological crisis that we are currently facing. As Wilson notes in his observations on the North American landscape, the “current crisis is not only out there in the environment; it is also a crisis of culture. It suffuses our households, our conversations, our economies” (12). In contemporary narratives about the Okanagan, concern over our current climate crisis is evident, as writers trouble the “imperial stylistics” at the roots of the settler-wrought agricultural landscape (Pratt 199). Through the lenses of cultural geography and literary analysis, what follows examines narrative representations of Okanagan agricultural space as structural expressions of multidimensional experiences.

## EDEN AND THE GLAZING GAZE

Settlers writing from and about the Okanagan often engage in what Mary Louise Pratt terms “imperial stylistics,” a term which describes a colonial writing practice that privileges “the

I/eye of a single (and foreign) viewer” whose descriptive terms colour the landscape with “a European palette” (Pratt 199; 204). Through this gaze, the local is devalued in the face of the viewer’s ability to aestheticize (or “civilize”) the scene (204). We see these imperial stylistics in the reflections of Rev. Father Charles Jean-Baptiste Felix Pandosy, who founded the first Mission in the Okanagan in 1859. Pandosy, who was of the order of the Oblates of Mary the Immaculate, was born near Marseilles, France, in 1824, left for the Oregon Missions in 1847, and would eventually found the Mission of the Immaculate Conception in what is now Kelowna, planting the valley’s first grapevines and the first apple trees (Ormsby, *Pioneer Gentlewoman*, 108). Pandosy, on his early visits to the shores of Okanagan Lake, noted that “the Douglas pines at the edge of the lake exhaled an odour comparable to that of the Maritime Pines of his native Provence” (Rivière 73). Writing to his Superior, Father d’Herbomez, “the Great Bearded one,” of the agricultural potential of the valley, he exalts in the “fertile soil found all around” and joyfully imagines the vineyards he and the Brothers would plant, writing, “We will be able to sing: My vineyard, sheltered from windy days, / Is warmed by the rising sun ablaze; / Where I am like a lizard green... / With the finest grapes I’ve ever seen. [tr.]” (Pandosy qtd. in Rivère 74). Edmond Rivère, reflecting on Pandosy’s writing, notes that Pandosy, on settlement in the Okanagan valley, “almost believed he was back in Provence” (74). Pandosy, who joyfully imagines himself as Provençal “lizard green” among his grapevines, demonstrates his willingness to see the landscape through a Eurocentric lens. As Pauline Butling argues, writers who readily adopt these kinds of Eurocentric lenses as they gaze upon colonized landscapes are, in turn, working to establish a “cultural superiority over the indigenous peoples in the sense that the foreign viewer alone has the ability to transform the landscape into an aesthetic experience” (89). Okanagan-based critic and poet Nancy Holmes, in an examination of Okanagan settler poetics, similarly

notes that the Okanagan landscape is often filtered through a “euro-cultural film,” or what Susan McCaslin (quoting P.K. Page) terms the “glazing gaze” (Holmes, “Okanagan Poets”). Through this euro-cultural ‘glazing gaze,’ Holmes observes the “colonial tendency to substitute signs for reality, [and] how English words and names can act as barricades as much as conduits to the natural world” (“Okanagan Poets”).

We see this willingness to substitute signs for reality in the writings of “Confederation poet” Bliss Carman, who, in his book *The Kinship of Nature* (1904), asks, “who shall prove that nature is not a metaphor?” (Carman, “Miracles and Metaphors” 39). Here, Carman suggests that what “seems real is in fact the product of discourse” (Soper and Bradley xvi). Carman, in the 1900-1920s era, had taken to “wandering about the countryside and writing poems and painting” as he engaged in what he termed “vagabondia,” what Holmes playfully describes as a “sort of middle-class gypsy lad on holiday” (Holmes, “Okanagan Poets”). Carman found himself in the Okanagan, where he wrote a suite of poems extolling the pastoral virtues of the region. In the final stanza of his poem, “In the Okanagan,” he writes: “Here time takes on new leisure / And life attains new worth. / And wise are they who treasure / This Eden of the North.” (13-16). Here, this ‘glazing gaze’ is acute, as place has the power to alter perception, slow down time and urge a revaluation of core values. As Holmes notes, the Edenic trope is often used in narrative descriptions of the Okanagan and serves as a kind of filter, or gauze, through which the valleys are understood and obscured.

Carolyn Merchant, in *Reinventing Eden*, argues that “The Garden of Eden story has shaped Western culture since earliest times and the American world since the 1600s,” positing that “we have tried to reclaim the lost Eden by reinventing the entire earth as a garden” (2). Sharae Deckard, in *Paradise Discourse, Imperialism, and Globalization: Exploiting Eden*

(2014), looks at the Caribbean, Zanzibar, Sri Lanka, and Mexico, which at different points in history and within Imperial discursive agendas, all served as “ideal locations for paradise” (3). Deckard argues that the “paradise metaphor is extraordinarily portable and intertextual, circulating across colonies and continents, empires, and ideologies” (3). Allan Pritchard, a critic who looks at thematic patterns in literature from British Columbia, argues that in this body of literature one of the primary themes is the “quest for Eden” and the notion (flawed and otherwise) of “B.C. as a potential Eden” (“Shapes of History” 62, 63). It is unsurprising that British Columbia’s Okanagan, best known for its orchards and vineyards, is repeatedly characterized in literature (for tourists and otherwise) as a “paradise on earth” and as a “lost garden of Eden” (Marten and Aguiar; Wagner 26).

Amanda Claremont, in her study of the orchard in the Australian literary imagination, notes that the “orchard as an imaginary space” draws upon the potent “quasi-religious discourse and imagery of the Garden of Eden, the orchard as paradise, and hence a haven, a place of comfort” (122). While, as Claremont acknowledges, “the Genesis story describes a garden [...] the presence of fruit trees” invites us to imagine the space as an orchard (122). Achva Benzinberg Stein, in her analysis of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the passages on the Garden of Eden in the book *Genesis*, notes that the garden, while the “epitome of the perfect garden that we strive to reach and recreate on earth, [...] is unattainable since only the Lord can create such a perfect garden” (Benzinberg Stein 43). As Stein notes, “The garden is not just beautiful, or the word *yafe* (beautiful) would have been used to describe it. Instead, the word *nechmad* is used, carrying the meanings of both “endearing” and “lovely.” This same term is used in the Ten Commandments for “covet.” Thus, not only is the garden beautiful, but so much so that one wants to have it for their own (43). The Garden of Eden, as read by Stein, exists as a

powerful conceptual force whose perfect actuality we may only covet. Claremont notes that the orchard as an “idealized place, or symbolic landscape,” is at its root precarious, fundamentally “destabilized by the notions of exile and loss with which that mythic, Edenic site is also associated” (122). Merchant also observes the inherent instability of Eden as an idealized place or symbolic landscape, arguing that inherent in the mainstreamed Eden narrative is a powerful “counternarrative [that] challenges the plot” (2). Merchant observes that “recent postmodern and postcolonial stories reject the Enlightenment accounts of progress” and that many “environmentalists see the loss of wilderness as a decline from a pristine earth to a paved, scorched, endangered world” (Merchant 2). In Okanagan literature, the Edenic trope (with its inherent fall and exile) allows “for an ability to claim to treasure a place while accepting its loss and destruction” (Holmes, “Okanagan Poets”). The notion that “we are in the act of [the] ‘Paving Paradise,’” that settler orchardists wrought pervades later settler narratives from and about the Okanagan, as Edenic space is increasingly seen as falling into postlapsarian ruin (Holmes, “Okanagan Poets”). In contemporary narratives set in the Okanagan, such as those of Rhenisch, Lane, Bowering, Lent, and Holmes, discomfort and unease with and within the settler-wrought Edens is evident. The postlapsarian nature of the valley’s new Edens is powerfully critiqued in John Lent’s *The Face in the Garden* (1990), as the Okanagan is described as a “geometrically calculated Eden” and characterized as a space of boredom, stasis and often of guilt, where the “advertisements for Eden [...] enslave us” in various ways (165). In Patrick Lane’s work, whether it be in fiction, memoir, or poetry, he often returns to the troubling geographic locus of his youth: Vernon, in the North Okanagan. In his memoir, *There is a Season*, ruminating on a tortuous path away from this locus, Lane writes, “I think at times that, like Adam, I was thrown from a garden (165).

While contemporary narratives often focus on postlapsarian decay, in earlier settler narratives from the region, the “quest for Eden” trope that Pritchard identifies is prevalent. We can observe this theme in the writings of Alice Barrett Parke, whose diaries recount settlement in the Vernon area from 1891-1900, and in those of Susan Allison, who settled in the “unsettled” Similkameen Valley in 1868. In these earlier narratives, agricultural labour is valorized as settlers seek to create lush green spaces of rest, haven and comfort in the otherwise arid terrain. In her reflections on life in the Similkameen Valley in the 1860s, Allison reflects on the abundance the land proffered:

The Similkameen River and its tributaries gave us trout, Dolly Vardens and Greyling in abundance. We had heavy crops of Saskatoons, raspberries, strawberries, huckleberries, in their season. Wild roots and vegetables for those who knew enough to gather them, and for those that desired meat there was deer, bear, grouse, wild chicken and ptarmigan. In short, the place was then what Phillips Wooley [Phillipps-Wolley] afterwards named it, “A Sportsman’s Eden.” (31)

Here, the Similkameen Valley is Edenic in its abundance. While much of the subsistence labour largely fell to Allison in her gardening, food gathering and homemaking activities, Phillipps-Wolley, (who drew heavily on Allison’s writing for his book, *A Sportsman’s Eden*, published in 1888), assigns a masculine gender to the act of the cultivating this space in his choice of the word Sportsman. Phillipps-Wolley shifts the pursuit of creating a new Eden to the realm of outdoor adventure, but Allison’s account shows that maintaining Edenic ideals in the Similkameen rested on the work that occurred in the domestic sphere and its environs (Ormsby xlv).

Alice Barrett Parke, who also revels in the beauty and abundance of the Okanagan valleys in her journals, writes of inculcating the Eden narrative in a Sunday school class in the North Okanagan in 1894:

we were talking of Adam & Eve & the devil tempting them in the garden, and Ellie Ellison surprised us all by gravely telling me that she had seen the devil. She finally explained that it was at a concert – I remember it was a man who had dressed for the carnival, & his dress was most conspicuous. [8 April 1894]. (Parke 91)

In this humorous account, we can see how the story becomes animated anew through the telling, as young Ellison moves beyond the relatively static myth and starts to see its figures as alive and active within the community.

While the Eden narrative is firmly entrenched and informs settler culture, Wendy Wickwire, in her work with Harry Robinson on the living stories of the Okanagan People, the Eden myth had permeated regional Indigenous stories long before the widespread settler occupation of the valleys following the 1850s. Ethnographers like Franz Boas and Charles Hill-Tout, who worked among the Okanagan people in 1911, deployed a “salvage paradigm” that sought to record “the mind of the native as it was before contact with white influence” (Wickwire 22-23).

Ethnographers using the salvage paradigm often excluded the stories from publication if they were deemed to contain “cultural impurities,” i.e. evidence of “history and change,” as they sought to document what critic Michael Harkin describes as “some overarching, static, ideal type of culture, detached from its pragmatic and socially positioned mooring among real people” (Wickwire 22-23; Harkin qtd. in Wickwire 22). We see this settler ethnographic practice at work in Thomas King’s short story, “One Good Story, That One,” as the three white anthropologists seek out the “old stories” about “how the world was put together” (5). These anthropologists



have little interest in hearing the contemporary stories of living Indigenous peoples, such as the one about “Jimmy and his car” or the one about “Billy Frank and the dead-river pig” (5). In this story, the unnamed protagonist, rebuffed in his willingness to tell contemporary stories, offers a satiric version of the Genesis story featuring Ah-damn and Evening. While the telling of this story in King’s frame narrative works a kind of Coyote trick, which leaves the protagonist cleaning “up all the coyote tracks on the floor” (King 10), the anthropologists depart delighted by their acquisition. Similarly, the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists working in British Columbia’s interior, Boas and Hill-Tout, work omit such stories, rife with “cultural impurities” from their published collections (Wickwire 22-24). While Boas and Hill-Tout engaged in acts of omission, other anthropologists, like James Teit, Leslie Spier and Wendy Wickwire, would see such narratives as acts of cross-cultural engagement with rich historical contexts of their own. One Okanagan creation story published in 1938 by Spier, and attributed to Suszen Timentwa, chief of the Kartar Band, is not locked in the settler’s static ideal of prehistorical culture but is imbricated in the lived experiences of its teller, who is several generations removed from precontact times:

After Adam and Eve did wrong, God took away one land from the top and put it to one side for the Indians-to-be. God took the laws with the Indian and left the other land without laws. Then God built an ocean to separate these lands: one land was for the Indians, another for the white people. Indians did not need books because they knew things in their minds and they learned from the creatures. About the time of Christ, God made the creatures. This was before Christ was born, so that Christ could preach about the other land... When the white people came to the Indians here, the priest told the Indians what they had forgotten. (Timentwa qtd. in Wickwire 26)

Timentwa's story directly engages with settler culture and its foundational Eden myth, putting this myth in conversation with existing Okanagan creation myths, while telling a version of the settlement narrative in which cross-cultural engagement occurs. While the Eden myth may be codified in canon, it undergoes "reconfigurations as it travels" (Deckard 3), taking on new iterations and valences in Okanagan narratives.

### "THEY FOUND A DESERT AND MADE IT GREEN":

#### URSULA SURTEES' ORCHARDS AND THE RISE OF BOOSTERISM

The arid, semi-desert terrain of the Okanagan figured in settler narratives is rarely merely picturesque, awe-inspiring or sublime but is characterized as space readily subdued and transformed through a process of "reclamation" (Wagner 26). John Baillie, in his *Essay on the Sublime*, building on the work of Longinus, notes that some landscapes, particularly mountains or desolate landscapes, can inspire the same "Flight of Grandeur" in spirit that the literary sublime is capable of producing, arguing that "Vast Objects occasion vast Sensations, and vast Sensations give the Mind a higher Idea of her own Powers" (Longinus 4; Baillie 7). Daniel Worden, in his reading of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*, notes that the American desert is often characterized as "indifferent and hostile to real estate developments and user," a space that in Abbey's work "demands that the reader pay attention to the desert itself, a landscape often misrepresented as a kind of wasteland or a picturesque tourist destination" (Worden 88). Rather than being figured as an indifferent or hostile landscape, sublimely capable of inspiring awe, the Okanagan's desert terrain is often characterized as inviting settlement.

Ursula Surtees's 1979 history of early fruit ranching in Kelowna, *Sunshine and Butterflies*, rests heavily on the notion that the land was empty and a blank slate to be inscribed by settlers (only mentioning Indigenous peoples once and only in reference to a trail on the West shore of Okanagan Lake). Surtees' history, which is still being reprinted and given prominent placement in Kelowna Museum bookstores, opens with an account of the province as described in the London Truth in 1881 by R.K. Johnson, as "a barren, cold, mountain country that is not worth keeping," which is shortly followed by Queen Victoria's description of the Province as the "certain wild unoccupied Territories on the North West coast of North America" (Surtees 3). Against this vision of wild, unoccupied and worthless land, Surtees describes the Okanagan as a kind of oasis, writing, "the smiling placid valleys of the Province lay hidden in the interior, tucked behind the mountain ranges waiting to be discovered and recognized as potential settlement and agricultural areas" (3). Here, the Okanagan is anthropomorphized and is a smiling, placid force just waiting for settler reclamation. That Surtees's historical narrative still reiterates corrosive *terra nullius* tropes is no real surprise, as historian Elizabeth Furniss notes, "similar constructions of history can be found in virtually any small city and town across Canada," since in these spaces the everyday world of its settler citizens is "permeated by the values and identities of a selective historical tradition that celebrates European expansion, settlement, and industry" (Furniss 7). Furniss, whose work concentrates on Cariboo-Chilcotin in the Central Interior of British Columbia, notes that Cariboo-Chilcotin (roughly 450 km North of the Okanagan) is promoted in the "last vestige of the Canadian Wild West, a frontier still rich in historical traditions where the wilderness remains "untamed" and "untouched" (7). In contrast, it is not "untamed" wilderness that typifies the characterization of the Okanagan, but rather the "smiling placid valleys" ready to be transformed into the new Edens of settler fantasy.

In many ways, these settler fantasies were generated by those who sought to sell land. In the ads and pamphlets which circulated in England, Eastern Canada, and the eastern United States, the Okanagan was characterized by boosters working in the service of early 20th-century land companies as a “‘newly found earthly paradise’ without extremes of climate” (Craib 27). As defined by Patrick Craib, boosterism is

the promotion of land with extravagant promises, among them the potential for rapid investment capital growth. Lying beyond financial considerations, this view was one which predicts transformation of the land from raw and unused to a paragon of progress. Rather than a sale of what the land is, boosterism is the sale of what land will become.

(28)

With the coming completion of the CPR spur line from Sicamous to Okanagan Landing in 1892, boosters like George McKay and Lord Aberdeen saw an opportunity to transform the region from one primarily focused on cattle ranching, wherein in large tracks of land were held by a small number of individuals, into smaller subdivisions to be focused on farming and orcharding (27-28). From the 1890s on, with the support and financial backing of the Okanagan Land and Development Company, McKay and Aberdeen mapped out “the first farming and subdivision activity in the region” as their work led the region becoming home to 7000 acres of planted fruit trees by 1901 and 29,000 by 1905 (Craib 27). Land developers, including J.M. Robinson, who established the communities of Summerland, Naramata, and Peachland, subdivided the large tracts of land adjacent to Okanagan Lake and creeks into small, irrigated lots, some as small as “2 ha with the average being closer to 4 ha” (Wagner 26). Robinson, seeking to promote and sell the community he had established and named Summerland, in promotional material he published in 1912, describes the region's history as

an unparalleled romance of reclamation. Twelve years ago the site of today's producing orchards was an arid cattle pasture, covered with sage brush, cactus and scrub pine. After dark one lone light, the dim fire of an Indian camp, was the sole indication of human habitation. Now waterfront and orchard benches glow with all the brilliancy of electric lighted streets and roads, and hundreds of happy homes send twinkling gleams far over the lake and across the mountains. (Robinson qtd. in Wagner 26)

The ethos that underlies Robinson's alliterative celebration of the "romance of reclamation" abounds with what Lorraine Code describes as the "self-certainties of western capitalism and the epistemologies of mastery it underwrites" (Code 4). This self-certainty that Code recognizes as part and parcel of the Western capitalist project enables the colonial "resettlement" of British Columbia, as "a heterogeneous [. . .] society with neither an Indigenous tradition nor a focused sense of identity" continues to function with an "enveloping momentum that discourages perspective" (Harris 86). In Robinson's case, shallow historical memory or a willful lack of perspective allowed him to conjure a romantic vista where, "After dark one lone light, the dim fire of an Indian camp, was the sole indication of human habitation" (Robinson qtd. in Wagner 26). This picturesque vision too easily obscures the roots of the radical depopulation of Indigenous peoples from the Okanagan basin and the inherent grimness of the scene he paints.

In 1862 a smallpox epidemic flowed inland with the Cariboo gold rush and settler incursions into new regions (Dunford). John Thistle estimates that the 1862 epidemic probably reduced Indigenous populations by one-third, noting that "George Grant, secretary to a transcontinental survey for the Canadian Pacific Railway, wrote from Fort Kamloops that smallpox had reduced the number of native people 'in this part of the country' to 'the merest handful'" (Thistle 420). In her unsparing historical text, "The Dispossessed: Interior Indians in

the 1800s,” published in 1978, a year before Ursula Surtees’s history of early fruit ranching in Kelowna, *Sunshine and Butterflies*, (which ignores Indigenous presence and history in the Okanagan valley), Mary Balf notes that during the 1800s, “the experts - medical, sociological and governmental - believed the Indians to be a doomed people soon become extinct” arguing that this notion, “continued in vogue until at least 1910, since tuberculosis and other infections also became a scourge” (Balf 12). As Daniel Coleman (drawing on the work of Māori literary scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville), in “Toward an Indigenist Ecology of Knowledges for Canadian Literary Studies,” aims to unpack what he terms “colonial epistemicide” (Coleman 22). Coleman argues that “the myth of the dying Indian of the vanishing race” is “the most repeated trope of ongoing settler colonialism” (Coleman 22). Jace Weaver argues that this myth and the “declaration of indigenous cultures as vanishing or extinct becomes a means in settler colonies of establishing an uneasy illusion of indigeneity (indigenusness) on the part of the colonizers” (Weaver 228). In the case of Robinson’s ad copy of 1912, settlers are invited to take up the darkness surrounding the “dim fire of [the] Indian camp” and to fill this darkness with “hundreds of happy homes [that] send twinkling gleams far over the lake and across the mountains,” thus themselves becoming indigenous to the vista. While Robinson’s text gives the impression that the land he sold was nearly empty, save for a small Indigenous camp, the Summerland District remains the traditional unceded territory of the Syilx speaking people of the Okanagan First Nation whose rights to the land have not been extinguished or dimmed. Throughout the early settler descriptions of the Okanagan, it is evident that a dehistoricizing, colonial epistemicide is at work to render Okanagan Syilx claims void, the land near-vacant and ripe for colonial settlement.

In British Columbia, colonial settlement called for a widespread, provincial, regional, and microregional process of re-imagining geographic space through the lens of western colonial capitalism. In the Okanagan, the most visible material re-imagining geographic space took to the form of the orchards, whose wide green expanses starkly contrast the dry bunch grass landscape. Of course, this was not simply the case in British Columbia's Okanagan, but as Helen Humphreys charts in *The Ghost Orchard*, the orchard and "the apple [...] from its infancy in North America, [was] a tool for colonialism" (14). Claremont, who examines orchard space in Australia's literary imagination (a country which shares a similar settler-colonial history with Canada), observes that "the idyllic image of a harmonious, settled, cultivated space [...] is based on a landscape created with a high degree of intervention, control and exclusion" (Claremont 123). Jason Bennett, in "Blossoms and Borders: Cultivating Apples and a Modern Countryside in the Pacific Northwest, 1890-2001," similarly argues that the settler-colonial orchards served as a "catalyst for far-reaching social and environmental change in the North American West" (iii). Cole Harris, too, argues that the farms and orchards that sprang up during the settler invasion of British Columbia serve as "expressions of introduced cultural and ecological arrangements and [are] a drastic departure from indigenous pasts" and that "the whole operation rested on rearranged local ecologies and an increasingly engineered nature" (Cole 4; Harris 217, 233). In the Okanagan, British colonial capitalism, with its unbridled self-certainty, unwillingness to view its project from Indigenous perspectives and indulgence in fantasies of "reclamation," continue to propel cultural and ecological re-arrangements on unceded Syilx territory.

## SCENIC VISTAS

The so-called ‘reclamation’ in the Okanagan involved transforming the lower elevation ecosystems at the valley bottoms, which are “formally classified as shrub-steppe and grasslands and are typically dominated by such species as Bunchgrass [...], Sage brush [...] and Antelope brush” into an “oasis of green” (Wagner 24, 28). To undergo an agrarian transformation, the Okanagan, which is “largely a semi-arid benchland with prohibitively short growing seasons and insufficient rainfall,” required the implementation of water rights legislation, wherein “water was declared the property of the Crown” and the riparian rights of smaller landholders were “discarded in favour of a centrally controlled licensing system” (Craib 27; Wagner 30). Despite the challenges the arid climate sometimes posed to agricultural ambitions, the land continued to be characterized “by boosters in the early 20th century as a ‘newly found earthly paradise’ without extremes of climate” (Craib 27). As Wagner notes, the commoditized settler landscape aesthetic that arrived in the early days of orcharding from the mid 1890s was typified by the images which would adorn the fruit boxes, wherein “the seductive qualities of sun and fruit, as well as orderly, green rows of fruit trees” were captured in pastoral images and where “the dry hills and mountains became, increasingly, a mere scenic backdrop to this oasis of green” (28).

In *Okanagan Odyssey: Journeys through Terrain, Terroir and Culture*, Don Gayton works to read Okanagan vistas, beyond those sold to tourists and potential settlers, through the language of ecology, history, viticulture, introspective narrative and “even the reproductive biology of the copper butterflies that flit about the sage” (11). Each chapter opens with a meditation on specific points along Highway 97, which runs north to south and connects the towns and communities of the Okanagan. For Gayton, “Landscape is the axis around which much of [his] life seems to slowly rotate ... is both constructed and natural” and is “hopelessly entangled in aesthetics and culture” (67). The contemporary Okanagan vistas, for Gayton, are



“contradictory,” geographically and culturally, made of “part urban big city, part rural orchard and ranch, and part ponderosa pine and rock bluff,” where local culture is encompassed in “Ballet Kelowna and monster truck rallies [...], real estate, conservative politics and golf” (12).

In his 2015 anthology *Writing the Okanagan*, George Bowering reflects on the 1947 song “Blue Okanagan” by Buddy Reynolds as he considers his lifelong connections to and writing about the Okanagan region. Bowering writes of gazing down on the valley from partway up a mountain near Oliver. Looking

south toward Osoyoos there seemed to be a light blue haze over everything. If you looked at the ground at your feet you saw bushes that were grey and brown, dry soil likewise. If you looked along the valley floor you saw a mile-wide band of green, the orchards that made the area’s biggest economy. (*Writing* 84)

Drawing on this vista, where the stark contrast between the desert and settler agricultural ventures are plain, Bowering, in his poem, “Desert Elm,” deploys the recurring phrase, “They found a desert and made it green” (*Writing* 84). In “Desert Elm,” this phrase is modified and becomes, “They found a desert and made it bloom, made / it green, but even the trees feel blue” (*Writing* 85, 16-17). An unease with the colonial agricultural project of orcharding is evident in this poem.

In Jeannette Armstrong’s *Whispering in Shadows*, which follows the life of Penny Jackson, a Syilx orchard worker, turned artist and activist, who will eventually die from a rare form of leukemia brought on by exposure to the strong pesticides used in the orchards, we are offered another vista of the valley and its orchards in the form of a chapter epigraph (one of which precedes each chapter in her novel):

Indian Summer in the Okanagan. The sky, a clean blue, swept by the evening breezes, carried no hint of cloud. It was good for the apples. Extra Fancy Sweets, they were called by the boss. The sugar comes up with hot days and crisp fall nights. They shipped them all over the world and people paid grade A fancy prices to put them on their counters. The hills, slopes and benches on the sides of all the lakes, creeks and rivers were a massive checkerboard of orchards bristling with sprinklers pulling water from the lakes' reservoirs. But in the hottest part of the summer, when there is no wind and mountains capture and hold the dust in the valley for weeks, the still air became hazy and heavy with the sharp smell of orchard spray. (*Whispering* 23)

This epigraph precedes a chapter early in the novel in which Penny takes a job boxing apples and in which Penny is first exposed to the pesticides, which carry the strong smell of "oil and paint and something else, like turpentine," that will eventually cause the cancer that kills her (25). In the above description of an Okanagan vista, Armstrong observes a range of economic, geographic, social and cultural forces at work. The opening two sentences paint an idyllic scene, one you might find depicted on apple boxes or in the ads booster-used to sell fruit lots, as atmospheric forces conspire to ripen the fruit perfectly under clear blue skies. From there, we are introduced to the product, "Extra Fancy Sweets," whose name is revealed by a boss, a signal of the power dynamic between worker and manager. The apples, which are sold all over the world, carry fancy prices to match their names and are, in turn, products that orchard workers, like Penny, are alienated from. As in Bowering's vista, we are shown the orchards as bands of green, but here they become a 'massive checkerboard' described as 'bristling with sprinklers' which cling to and draw from every available source of water, the 'lakes, creeks and rivers.' Again, the orchards are an invasive force spreading over the land. Finally, in an act of foreshadowing, the

valley, with its abutting mountains, becomes a vessel where for weeks, ‘the still air became hazy and heavy with the sharp smell of orchard spray.’ Here, not only are the orchard workers at risk from the poison sprayed on fruit trees but so are the valley’s residents, as the poison fills the air and likely leaches into the waterways.

The spreading green from rapidly increasing settler irrigation agriculture signalled the mounting dispossession of the Syilx from their traditional territories, as they found themselves “deterritorialized from their land and cultural ways, and reterritorialized in reserves” (Aguilar and Marten 133; Harris 165). While the green that flooded the valley was celebrated by boosters and settlers, unsurprisingly, “the Syilx perceptions of Okanagan landscapes continue to be demonstrably different from that of Okanagan settler culture” (Wagner 29). Instead, as Wagner argues, looking to the work of Mourning Dove, Jeanette Armstrong, and interviews with Syilx elders and knowledge keepers, the Syilx hold a landscape aesthetic “rooted in a diverse appreciation of landscape features with a high value placed on grassland environments,” as “the Syilx, a people long accustomed to the use of horses, would value the grassland environment on which both wild and domestic horses depended” (29-30). The arid Okanagan landscape is described as a place of abundance and renewal by Mourning Dove (Christine Quintasket), a member of the Colville Federated Tribes in eastern Washington State, born in 1888 and best known as the first Native American woman to publish a novel. Mourning Dove, who frequently travelled with her family to both the Okanogan (on the American side) and the Okanagan in the 1890s (before the widespread incursion of fruit lots and colonial settlement), describes trips by horse with her mother and other women to “gather bitterroot (spit-lum),” a food staple, “which grew abundantly on the sage brush flats” (19), and onto S’oo-yoos Lake (referred to by settlers as Osoyoos) with her family to fish dog salmon (kee-su) in the early fall, to fill a food scaffold

for their winter home at Pia (Kelly Hill) (20-21). As an adult, Dove returned to the Okanagan to learn more about the ancient beliefs she had once scorned in a pivotal girlish outburst at her grandmother. To regain the knowledge she had lost, Dove turns to Lake Okanagan women, and one in particular named Mary, an elder who would take her to White Top Mountain (Mount Baldy) to find a root that would work as a love charm, which works with mixed and humorous results (80-90).

For Dove, the Okanagan is a site of emotional and cultural renewal and a space she remembers fondly, rich in its capacity to nourish. In Jeanette Armstrong's penultimate poem, "World Renewal Song," from her 1991 collection *Breath Tracks*, the Okanagan landscapes, particularly its grasslands, is also a space of renewal, though one that is under threat. In her first stanza, "Nothing was good/ The winds blew/ and grasses died" (1-3), the grasses become victim to an unnamed ecological ruin. But, as the poem moves to its central stanza, the poem's persona, who in silence, describes herself as "listening by dying grasses /began hearing /at dawn/ A new fire is lighted" (13-16), can discern renewal in the dying grassland. By the final stanza, the grasses, which had been dying, are "talking grasses," who urge the persona's epiphany.

#### A GENTLEMEN'S PARADISE

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century settler boosters and land developers saw in the region an opportunity to offer another kind of renewal and to market the region as a "gentleman's paradise" (Craib 30). Central to this strategy was playing into the desires of Arcadianism, a movement flourishing in an increasingly industrial Britain. The concept criticized modernity and was favoured by writers and thinkers like John Ruskin and William Morris, who "extolled the

virtues of pastoral life over industrial cities” (Craib 30). Craib argues that Arcadianism “resounded with the modern industry’s middle and upper classes [...]. And created a generation of future gentlemen emigrants were brought up in an environment which extolled a mythical portrayal of the rural idyll and ingrained a psychology of the rural aristocrat” (Craib 30). David Demeritt argues that Arcadianism “enframed the countryside as an important site of emotional consumption and individual spiritual escape” (30). Similarly, Wagner, pointing to the work of historian Keith Thomas, argues that due to “the radical transformations of the English countryside during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries,” as the industrial revolution was transforming cultural and geographic landscapes, “a sense of nostalgia [was growing] among city dwellers for rapidly disappearing wild landscapes” (Wagner 23). This nostalgia prompted those living at the metropolitan centre of the British Empire to look to its fringes, particularly in British Columbia’s interior (Wagner 23). For British aristocrats and aspiring landowners, “faced with an industrial economy that marginalized their land-based power and influence, fruit farming emerged as the ‘anti-modern’ antidote of the aristocracy with its valorization of rural privilege over urban capital” (69).

As many ranchers sold their property to British and European developers and to international land development companies who began to prepare it with irrigation systems for agricultural production, these developers sought to recruit British gentlemen into the region. They mounted aggressive campaigns, running ads in “the *Times* and the *Illustrated London News* filled with pastoral scenes of overlaid fruit trees surrounded by beautiful children dressed in immaculate English style” (Aguiar and Marten 133, 134). In one advertisement for fruit lots near Kelowna, orcharding was promoted as a distinctly erudite activity:

Fruit growers as a class are among the most intelligent people in the world. They have leisure to read. By investing in ten acres of our land you are easily assured a splendid income for life. Can you earn \$3,000 a year as easily in any other way? If you are a stranger, you're one of us, for we all came here as strangers. Intelligent, educated and cultured English and Canadians form the bulk of the population. (Zoellner 112-13 qtd. in Aguiar and Marten 133).

While this ad invites strangers, it quickly indicates the kind of strangers who are welcome. Ishbel, Countess of Aberdeen, known as Lady Aberdeen, and her husband, Lord Aberdeen, the Governor General of Canada who arrived in the Okanagan in the 1890s, were just such strangers. Lord Grey, who was also one of these desirable émigrés, declared in Summerland that fruit farming “was a most beautiful art” and that “fruit growers are a refined and cultured class of people - the finest class on earth” (Grey qtd. in Bennet, “Apples of Empire” 69). As Bennett remarks, it is unsurprising that “concern for attracting the ‘right sort’ of settler also found expression in the pages of Lady Aberdeen's journal,” noting her rejoicing that “settlers of a good class” had taken up residence in the region (Bennett, “The True Elixir” 69). Patrick Dunae notes that “Gentlemen Emigrants” and gentlewomen like Lady Aberdeen were “well aware that they were taking part in a crucial phase in the country's development and cognizant of the fact they were laying the foundation for future generations” (Dunae 11). The orchards that this new class of landowner established, which had steadily subsumed the large ranches in the valley basin, started what Bennett argues was a “process of imposing a new image upon the landscape” (69). The new image that emerged “of the blossoming orchard,” Bennett argues, “animated, represented, and legitimized an escalation of the imperial enterprise” (69).

In Dania Tomlinson's 2018 novel, *Our Animal Hearts*, the protagonist's father, Noah, is attracted to the Okanagan by these kinds of idyllic images and is of the “right sort” that the

Aberdeens sought to attract. The novel's protagonist, Iris, describes her father as spending his days tending to his juvenile orchard "in shirtsleeves, often with a book under his arm" (Tomlinson 18). Noah, a blue-blooded Englishman and progressive bohemian who grew up on an estate just outside of London, is precisely the sort of candidate for settlement the boosters sought. Noah moves his young family to the Okanagan at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to establish the valley's first peach orchard, "despite warnings from orchardists [...] about the fastidious and delicate nature of the stone fruit," as a wedding gift to his wife Llewelyna (Tomlinson 40). Noah's lark into orcharding was never meant to be permanent, as the orchard was meant to be a space "he could escape away from as easily as he escaped *to* it" (18). Yet, Noah's foray into orcharding brings unintended consequences for his family and other members of the aristocratic orcharding enclave. Craib argues that these enclaves that were engineered by boosters who capitalized on "prevailing [British] middle-upper class delusions of the myth of the rural idyll" ultimately suffered due to "the functional limitations of their targeted classes and rootless ties to the British Columbian landscape" (Craib 27). Many of the individuals attracted by the images of a "fruit bearing Eden of Arcadian fancy" (Craib 34), who had no "prior agricultural knowledge," grew tired of the less-than-glamorous material realities of orcharding and packed up and left.

In Harold Rhenish's *The Wolves at Evelyn*, which has been described as "part history, part memoir and part extended essay" (Rettie qtd. in Diotte 156), Rhenish recalls seeing the "lavish advertisements for fruit land in the Okanagan," where the "the comfort, and the dreams, were seductive: the fruit simply grew on the trees," recalling, in particular, the image in one of the advertisements of "a tall square-jawed Englishman in white cricket flannels [who] stands under his juvenile fruit trees in the spring sun" (76-75). Rhenisch, the son of German immigrants and orchardists raised in the Okanagan, devotes much of his literary work across genres to

considering the confluence of forces that brought him and his family to the Okanagan basin and their experiences on arrival and in settlement. In Rhenisch's lyrical autobiography, *Tom Thomson's Shack*, he ponders the legacy of these and other aristocratic orchardists on his experience of the valley:

My country, the Interior, and its culture were founded, largely, in 1909, in an era of art, formality, dance, and classicism. It was a time of Beauty and Empire, of honour, loyalty, royalty, polo, snobbism, suppression of Indians, repression of women, and a belief in progress, pianos, and war. Whatever prejudices we bring to this matrix, and whatever knowledge we have gained, whatever we have suffered and endured because of it - however we have grown beyond it - it is still only through that point that we live, however it may have changed in its contact with the wild, inhuman land. We live here at the edge of the wilderness, the edge of the human. We live in landscape. This is the painting entered, and lived. We are the explorers of the terrain of Beauty - strange romantic journey! - just as Fraser and Mackenzie explored the rivers of the West. It is only through that point in time that we enter the past, the stream of history. (55)

Through Rhenisch's proposed matrix, the forces of history, aesthetics, culture, race, class, and geography all contribute to the now of being in geographic space. Rhenisch here unpacks part of the "process of imposing a new image upon the landscape" as he shows us the various lenses through which we might experience a place at a particular point in history (Bennett 69).

Rhenisch offers what we might call a toponchronic reading of the Okanagan valley. As Michelle Hartley explains, a toponchronic reading of region privileges "space and time," as it roots the literary text in historically and regionally specific experience (iii). Rhenisch, in Nancy Holmes's eloquent assessment,



is a poet who indicts settler culture, who understands the roots of the problem, who is a poet of failed economies. There is no better poet to go to for an analysis of causes. You learn about the post-contact history of the place from him and he shows how difficult it is and why it is so difficult for the Euro-ethnic settlers to create homes here.” (Holmes, “Okanagan Poets”)

Much of Rhenisch's work is elegiac, a mourning for the “failed economies” of the agricultural aspirations of Euro-cultural settlers in the Okanagan Valley and an attempt to reckon with the roots and ongoing legacies of these failures. For Rhenisch, the failures are personal, as his family would suffer the whims of economic trends and eventually lose their orchard. In the penultimate paragraph of his elegiacally titled autobiography, *Out of the Interior: The Lost Country*, Rhenisch writes

The farm was all we had. As it was of no value to society, to Canada or to the world, it fell apart under economic strain, and we all blew away with it, not knowing for years that what we had lost was precious and rare. The economics were nothing, only a way to try and fit the farm, a living piece of the earth, into society, into the mind of men and it didn't work. [...] It was all a European dream and held together by the will alone until the dream vanished, dissipated, could no longer hold out against the strain. (207)

While Rhenisch grew up under the relative shelter of the “European dream” bought and sold by the valley's aristocratic settlers, Patrick Lane's *There is a Season* describes a childhood lived at the economic and social margins of the valley. Lane, whose work unpacks these margins through his poetry, fiction and non-fiction, might also be dubbed a poet of failed economies. His work, too, seeks to understand his family's various economic and emotional failures in settlement and the broader economic impacts of the “European dream” on the lives of the valley's residents.

Lane's family moved to the arid Okanagan when he was a child from the West Kootenay to help with the silicosis his father had developed after years of hard-rock mining. Lane recalls days spent with his brothers exploring Vernon's dump on the outskirts of town. Here Lane witnesses another side of the orchards as failed economies:

A broken-down army truck blew black exhaust as it grumbled past the horse and wagon.

Behind the truck were three more, all piled with apples from the orchards. There was no market for them anywhere in Canada and rather than give the fruit away it was burned.

The trucks rumbled onto the flat and then backed up to the tip where they disgorged their loads.

The edge of the dump was a cliff of fruit. At the bottom were women and children. They were Chinks, Ragheads, Injuns, Bohunks, Polacks, or Wops to us. They were at the dump to scavenge apples. They leaned into the charred pile and tried to find fruit that hadn't been burned. When they found a fresh lode, they carried armfuls to small wagons and wheelbarrows they had pulled or pushed all the way from town. The man on the tip watched them and when they began to cluster around a spill of fruit he would pick up a can and fling a twist of kerosene and diesel down the slope. When it flowed through the burning air, it exploded and the women and children dragged their wagons back. The man on the tip rolled cigarettes and smoked as he watched them sidle back into the billowing smoke and flame. (30)

As in Rhenisch's work, here we witness a "historically and regionally specific experience (Hartley iii), a toponchronic snapshot of a moment in time and place. The military truck carries resonances with George Bowering's description of the orchards amid which he was raised in his retrospective part-memoir, part-anthology *Writing the Okanagan*, where fruit trees are described

as “military-positioned” (2). In Lane’s post WWII Okanagan, military trucks are deployed in the service of the powerful orcharding enterprises whose deference to capitalist economies is heedless of the immediate human needs of the valley’s racialized and impoverished residents. Lane, here, is acutely aware of his place in the valley’s racial hierarchy. While he and his brothers are themselves scavengers who often return home from their expeditions with their finds, they do not join the female and racialized Others, who, to the observing boys, in their struggle for food, are reduced to racist epithets. In this scene, the Lane boys join the truck driver in almost bemused wonderment as marginalized Others to the Edenic dream of the aristocrat class of orchardists are driven back by flames, only to, out of desperation, “sidle back into the billowing smoke and flame.” Lane, who tended the neglected and broken orchard on his family’s small farm, would spend summers working as a picker in larger orchards to get through the winters. Like Rhenisch, Bowering and the characters that populate Tomlinson’s novel, *Our Animal Hearts*, Lane is both imbricated in and critical of the legacy of the valley’s “gentlemen” orchards.

## RACIST ROOTS AND GARDEN MARKETS

Historian Jason Bennett and cultural geographer James Duncan argue that the colonial landscapes that emerge from the settler process of rearranging local ecologies are instrumental in “sustaining and perpetuating social hierarchies” (Bennett, “Blossoms and Borders,” 10). Duncan argues that these landscapes “act as a signifying system through which a social system is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored” (17). While fruit lots were “selectively sold to other incoming Okanagan-bound British gentlemen,” they were “withheld from locals in

Vernon, who were considered ‘mere colonials’” (Aguiar and Marten 133). This exclusion from land ownership and title, of course, was not limited to “mere colonials,” and the Syilx who were forced onto increasingly smaller parcels of land set apart from so-called “vacant” viable agricultural land with its ready access to water, but to a range of racialized people considered Other. The labour of the Syilx and racialized Others was readily exploited by orchardists for the intensive work of tending trees, picking fruit, and building and maintaining irrigation systems. At the same time, these populations were excluded from ownership of the fruit lots from the 1860s until the end of the First World War, when “the overt cultural dominion of the gentlemen émigrés began to wane” (Craib 33). In Jeannette Armstrong’s *Whispering in Shadows*, Penny Jackson, Armstrong’s Syilx protagonist, in a job interview for a fruit packing position, is asked if she’s “Indian” by the white middle-aged male foreman, who states he gets a “subsidy for hiring minorities and women” (24). In Armstrong’s novel, we are afforded a rare (though brief) glimpse of orchard work from the perspective of an individual categorized as Other in the racialized white space of Okanagan orcharding.

Luis Aguiar and Tina Marten argue that since the beginning of “settlement” in the early twentieth century the Okanagan has been a space where “whiteness is no coincidence” and where this whiteness was actively “sought and organized” (130). Aguiar and Marten argue that Okanagan cities, like Kelowna, are “racialized as a space of whiteness offering sanctuary from a province and a country growing increasingly racially diverse” (130). As Craib, Aguiar, and Marten document, throughout its history of “settlement” the Okanagan has been a space where new immigrants, especially those who are non-white, faced backlash from the selectively imported white and largely British-in-origin settler community (Aguiar and Marten 130). While whiteness was actively sought and organized, the work required by the labour-intensive and

seasonal nature of orcharding was not typically done by members of the British émigré demographic (Bunn, Cohen, Hjalmarson, Gahman, Terbasket 79). Instead, “early laborers were often from Aboriginal communities or were Japanese or Chinese immigrants” and were positioned by the land-owning class “as necessary but unwanted community members” (79). In a speech by Duncan Ross, MP for Yale – Cariboo, reprinted in the *Kelowna Courier* and *Okanagan Orchardist*, in 1911, “enunciates the fears and exclusionary character of the Okanagan fruit growers,” arguing that “allow the Chinese, the Japanese and the Hindus to engage in this [fruit] industry, to take possession of the land and to cultivate it, and you completely destroy the industry, so far as white man is concerned,” and celebrating the efforts of the colonial forces to “people the vacant lands of the North West with a desirable class of settlers” (Craib 32; Ross qtd. in Craib 32). The racism and fears articulated by Ross are again evidenced in an article published in the *Penticton Herald* dated Jan. 8, 1920, which describes a meeting where “Nearly 300 citizens listened to speakers and took preliminary steps to rid the district of yellow evil” (Boyd). Manda Maggs, Executive Director Oliver and District Heritage Society, notes that the ‘Keep Penticton White’ movement was not limited to Penticton, “with meetings in Kelowna and Vernon taking place around the same time” (Boyd). Maggs, who provided “100 scans of articles and advertisements taken from the archives of the Penticton Herald from around 1905 up to the mid 1920s” related to the ‘Keep Penticton White Movement’ at the Penticton Gallery’s Summer 2018 exhibit, called “Keep Penticton White: A Historical View in Partnership with the Penticton Museum,” notes that apart from meetings attended by citizens looking to exclude community members along racial lines, the extent of the movement was visible in the advertisements placed in local papers, where local laundry services used “phrases like ‘Are you White? Then Patronize a White laundry,’ or ‘Employs only white labour’ [...]. and ad from the 1920s that ran for a year

that stated in all capital letters “KEEP PENTICTON WHITE” (Boyd). Beyond being unwelcome spaces to those who were not of the “desired class of settler,” the region, particularly Oliver and Osoyoos in the south, was known as “treacherous territory” where individuals would be driven out by racial hatred that sometimes culminated in newsworthy violence (Höller). One clipping from January 16, 1936, describes Oliver as a “district which is said to be death on admission of Chinamen and Doukhobors” (Höller and Crawford). A little further north, “in Kelowna in the 1940s, billboards at the city’s boundary warned “Japs” to stay out” (Aguiar and Marten 132).

The 2018 Penticton Gallery exhibition “Keep Penticton White: A Historical View” is described by gallery curator Paul Crawford as a means of holding “our community accountable for our past” (Crawford, Penticton). Crawford also saw the exhibit as a means to consider there may be “some direct correlation to the lack of visible minorities we see in our community to this day” (Crawford, Penticton). Like Crawford, who looks to tease out correlations between the racism practiced and implemented in the earlier “settlement” of the Okanagan and the invisibility of the visible minorities in the cultural landscape of the contemporary valley, scholars, including Marten, Aguilar, Elise Hjalmarson, Robyn Bunn, Amy Cohen, Edna Terbasket, Levi Gahman, Delacey Tedesco and Jen Bagelman, work to make visible those who have been left out of the Okanagan’s dominant settler colonial “white washed narrative” (Tedesco and Bagelman 16-17). Bunn, Cohen, Hjalmarson, Gahman and Terbasket argue that programs like Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) continue to place racialized labourers in “positions of precarity, often resulting in worker isolation and superexploitation” (77).

In their work, Bunn et al. chart the institutional discrimination the Okanagan’s racialized agricultural labour encounters and describe “the everyday prejudices and aggressions they endure due to their status of being labelled both ‘foreign’ and ‘temporary’” (77). Similarly,

Marten and Aguiar examine how “labour recruitment policies have played a role in securing, reproducing, and maintaining whiteness in the Okanagan Valley,” demonstrating how “white high-skilled workers are brought in to fill jobs, settle, and reproduce, whereas non-white labour is on short-term contract with little or no possibility to stay, sponsor family members, or produce the next generation of Okanaganites,” thus creating a racialized segment of the population that is “wanted as unwanted” (Marten and Aguiar 130). Delacey Tedesco and Jen Bagelman, examine the consequences of this state of being “wanted as unwanted,” arguing that labour recruitment policies are part of a “structural violence that produces certain bodies and communities in the Okanagan as politically present and others as politically missing” (16). While contemporary concerns regarding the SAWP are justified, the correlation between SAWP and the racism practiced and implemented during the earlier ‘settlement’ of the Okanagan against the Syilx, Chinese, and Japanese populations deserve further examination.

What is evident in literature from and about the Okanagan is that racialized voices are missing and minimized. Historian David Dendy, in his pointed critique of Sharron Simpson’s *The Kelowna Story: An Okanagan History* (2011), notes that in Simpson’s telling of the city’s history, “Native people get only a vague page and a half, with no mention of their actual habitation and activities within Kelowna” noting that, the Chinese community “who made up over 10 percent of Kelowna’s population in 1930, [also] get short shrift, receiving only scattered mentions” (132). In many of the literary texts I examine in this survey, the voices of these politically missing and suppressed communities are primarily absent or only present in the periphery of the narratives, particularly those pertaining to orcharding and agriculture. Most of the authors in this study reflect the Okanagan’s socially engineered white demographic, as most of the authors who write about the Okanagan arrived in the region as white settlers or are

descendants of area settlers. Writers who (like myself) have been implicitly encouraged to remain and settle by existing structures built through racist practices. The stories that are told about the Okanagan orchards are, for the most part, the stories these settlers tell. In examining all the stories settlers tell and paying particular attention to the voices pushed to the margins, we might, as Marten and Aguiar urge, begin to “scrutinize this blinding whiteness” that underlies the imaginative framing of these narratives (144).

In the writings of T.L. Gillespie, an Irish lawyer turned orchardist who arrived in the Okanagan basin in 1910, whose typescript forms the Kelowna Museums Society’s 2009 publication, *History of the K.L.O. Benches: Their Tragedies and Comedies*, Gillespie offers insights his life in the valley through a series of retrospective vignettes. These vignettes often offer humorous accounts of living with a host of eccentric and or aristocratic orchardists, who are European and American in origin, many of whom are described as “given to brooding” and whose suicides are described flippantly in Gillespie’s often sardonic prose as “hardly a surprise” (14). Gillespie, who cuts the figure of the “Gentleman Emigrant” orchardist and is mocked by his neighbour for “sitting in his shack an’ readin’ bloody books on Philosophy” (6), is a keen observer of the social hierarchies at play in the valley he’s chosen to call home. In the work of stoning the orchards (an uncommon and costly practice which entailed digging into the earth and removing underlying stones before planting), Gillespie notes a racial hierarchy at play, as behind the men of unspecified origins drove the plows that furrowed the earth, “came Chinamen with pick axes” who did the brunt of the labour, creating a “pile of stones as a big as a large house” (11). Catherine Kyle, who explores the absent presence of Chinese and Japanese communities in the Okanagan, in her paper, “Chinese And Japanese Market Gardening in the North and Central Okanagan Valley, British Columbia,” notes that “Occupational opportunities for many minority



groups, including Chinese, Japanese, and Indigenous workers, were strictly limited by the whims of the dominant society,” and that workers from these communities were “typically paid less than white workers and were assigned to menial or dangerous tasks” (1). We see this work undertaken in Gillespie’s narrative as Chinese workers do the work of clearing stones from land seized for orcharding.

Despite the racist resistance white settlers expressed and the barriers they sought to enact to the purchase of lands by their Japanese and Chinese neighbours at different points between 1860 and 1947<sup>6</sup>, Chinese and Japanese market gardens continued to thrive. As Kyle documents, the growing of vegetables had become a specialty for Chinese and Japanese immigrants in British Columbia, who, from the 1860s on in the Okanagan valley operated market gardens. Market gardens were “small farm operations that are usually located close to an urban community [...] [and] are typically five to twenty acres in size and grow a variety of vegetable crops for market” (Kyle). Japanese and Chinese market gardeners in the Okanagan “practiced many types of land tenure, including owning, renting, and leasing,” many setting up market gardens on dispossessed Indigenous reserve land, often renting directly from Indian agents (6). These thriving market gardens “served both local and distant markets, with distribution ranging from door-to-door sales through to wholesalers serving larger urban centers on the coast and Prairies” (1). Despite the constraints of “race-based legislation and systemic racist ideologies [that sought to deny] both Chinese and Japanese immigrants their place in the historical narrative of Canada,” Chinese and Japanese market gardeners in the Okanagan played an essential role in establishing the Okanagan as the agricultural center it is today (Kyle).

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<sup>6</sup> For more on this topic see: Lanthier, M., and Lloyd Wong. “Ethnic agricultural labour in the Okanagan Valley: 1880s to 1960s.” *Royal BC Museum Living Landscapes Series*. Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum." (2002).

PIONEERS JOURNALS AND HAIKU CLUBS: ALICE BARRETT PARKE AND DENBEI  
KOBAYASHI

While Japanese or Chinese workers primarily exist at the periphery of early white settler narratives, mentioned in passing by Gillespie and Susan Allison<sup>7</sup> in Alice Barrett Parke's journal, we see a more profound acknowledgment of the Chinese workers and the larger community. Jo Fraser Jones, who took up the task of editing and compiling the voluminous writings found in the thirty-one scribbles that Alice Barrett Parke had filled between 1891 and 1900 that record her experiences in the Okanagan during this time, makes particular note of Parke's engagement with the Chinese community in the chapter titled, "I have been as busy as I could be: Life at the BX Ranch and Encounters with the Chinese." In her work on Parke's journals, Jones observes that Parke's attitudes towards the Chinese community are racist. In one journal entry, Parke laments, "I know it is a prejudice, for any that have worked for me – my different washer men in Vernon and now this man [GooEe] – have been most polite and obliging – still I don't enjoy having them around" (192). Parke, whose journals shed light on the attitudes of the early farming and orcharding community, notes, "So many people advised me when I first came to be very strict & exacting with the Chinaman – they said "You can't give them any privileges, or they will impose on you" (193). While many of Parke's racist attitudes persist, Jones notes a significant shift in Parke's thinking, arguing that,

At the BX Ranch Alice met a man who was to be pivotal in her intellectual and emotional development – her cook, Lou-Ee. ([...] the spelling of his name fluctuated from volume to volume. [...] In her pages he was at first Lou-Ee, then Loo-Ee, before finally settling in

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<sup>7</sup> Allison reflects on a lonely winter in Princeton in the 1880-81 when her husband was away, where she relied on "the Chinese, Ah Lee, Ah Jack and Sam, [who] lived in the old cabin and helped to build fences and get firewood" (57).

as GooEe.) Her relationship with this man demonstrated a definite and permanent change in her attitude towards another race. Ever willing to learn, she was eventually able to acknowledge that Lou-Ee's humanity mattered more than the colour of his skin. For her, this was a huge step, since it caused her to question much of her early conditioning. During her stay at the BX, Alice's attitudes towards the Chinese underwent a lasting transformation. (191)

Through their mutual labour within BX Ranch's domestic sphere, in food preparation and cleaning, Parkes begins to see the humanity of one of the settler community's Othered members, noting that a "good many people would laugh" at her for such an acknowledgement. Parke, who gets to know GooEe as she teaches him to read English for half an hour each night after their chores are done, begins to learn about his life and education in China, about his network of family and friends and the wider Chinese community in the Okanagan (196-205). In perceiving GooEe's humanity, Parke began to observe the injustice around her. In 1897, writing about reports out of Vancouver of renewed excitement for the Chinese Head Tax, Parke writes, "a great many people want to raise it to \$500 a head – it is now \$50. For my part I don't think it is right to tax them at all" (195). Parke qualifies her statement by asserting that she does not have "enough knowledge to be a judge in these National problems" (195) and appears to confine her opinions on racist injustices within the pages of her private scribbles. While Parke does not become an active voice against injustice, she does work to extend her ties with the Chinese community, volunteering as an English language teacher in the evenings at the Chinese School in Vernon and "paying her first formal call upon a resident of Vernon's Chinatown" in 1900, where she visits the home of merchant Kwong Hing Lung and his wife (204).

While Parke's journals are invaluable for understanding regional settler attitudes and how these attitudes might shift within the toponymic site of the BX Ranch, Parke can offer little depth of insight into the lived experience of the man she calls GooEe, nor of the broader Chinese community. Patricia Roy, in her article, "'Active Voices': Third Generation of Studies of the Chinese and Japanese in British Columbia," drawing on the work of Keibo Oiwa, terms this kind of history "in which a people, instead of being the main actors and thinkers, were the objects of other people's action and thought," a "history in passive voice" (51). Roy argues that the accounts fall into three generations: "The first included anti-Asian propaganda pieces and sympathetic first-hand observations by social scientists"; the second, which began to appear by 1970, is a generation of books by scholars who have gained access to archival sources; and the third generation, which emerges in the 1980s, takes the form of books written in the "active voices" of Chinese- and Japanese-Canadians who "told their own history in English language monographs, memoirs, oral histories, and anthologies" (51). Parke's limited account of the Chinese community falls into the first generation of "sympathetic first-hand observations." But it is through the "second generation" work of scholars and writers like Audrey Kobayashi, Rev. Gordon G. Nakayama, and Michelle Fiwechuk that we might hear the "active voice" of pioneering orchardist and poet Denbei Kobayashi.

Kobayashi's life in British Columbia follows a similar pattern to that of many of the province's settlers, involving a journey across an ocean and work in a range of extractive and agricultural fields. Kobayashi was born in 1878 in Nagano-ken, Japan. He grew up working on his family's silkworm farm and briefly worked as a gold miner on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido before emigrating to Canada in 1906 (Denbei Fonds). On arrival in Vancouver in 1906, Kobayashi worked as a fisherman on the Skeena River in northwestern British Columbia.

Not long after, Kobayashi joined the Canadian Pacific Railway work gang that was sent to the Okanagan to build the rail line that would replace the steamships that transported fruit to the north end of the Okanagan Lake (Lake Country; Orsmby, *A Study of the Okanagan Valley*, 156-161). In 1908, Kobayashi and his lifelong friend, Eijiro Koyama, would become the first Japanese men in the Okanagan to be naturalized as Canadians and purchase land (Okanagan Wine and Orchard Museum). In 1914, after marrying Hiro Yanagisawa, Kobayashi bought an orchard property in the Okanagan Centre. Michelle Fiwchuk, in her slim report for the Lake Country Museum, *The Japanese Pioneers of Lake Country*, paints a vivid picture of the Kobayashi house as “encircled by a classical Japanese garden that contained many of the flowers that Denbei had imported from Japan” as well as the flowers that Hiro, who practiced the Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging. The property was complete with a traditional outdoor bathhouse heated by a small wood fire which the Kobayashis would light at noon so as to have the tub hot and ready by evening (14-15).

This idyllic house would become a social center for the Japanese community in the region, playing host to United Church services; Japanese language lessons for children; traditional holiday celebrations and festivals; the *Koyukai* (Friends and Fellowship Association); the Japanese literary club called *Aoba Kai*; a Haiku Club (that Kobayashi ran), which would welcome “everyone from Japanese consuls to ordinary folk” (Fiwchuk 5-6, 4-15; Denbei Fonds). Kobayashi, who had developed expertise in fruit trees, was interested in Japanese plants, bringing “early cherry blossom trees (higan sakura), Japanese peonies (botan), persimmons (kaki), bamboo, butter burr (fuki), coltsfoot and Japanese asparagus (udo) to Canada from Japan” (Nakayama). Despite most of these plants dying due to the severe winter condition, the cherry, fuki and udo survived. The Kobayashis marked the blossoming of their cherry trees yearly with

“the celebration of the cherry blossom, the Sakura” with a large gathering at their home, for which “Hiro would make rice cakes tinted pink and wrapped in a cherry leaf,” which more than one unwitting guest would try to eat, leaf and all, to the good-humoured laughter of other guests (15). Kobayashi’s early cherry blossom trees reproduced well enough that he was able to send plants “to many parts of Canada” where they can still be “admired by visitors to the many Canadian parks and boulevards in the springtime” (Nakayama). Kobayashi’s life of work in agriculture was recognized in 1966 when he was bestowed “a citation and a silver medal by the Prince Takamatsu, brother to the Japanese emperor” (Denbei Fonds).

In addition to his work as a celebrated orchardist, Kobayashi was a poet and teacher of Japanese poetry (Fiwchuk 5). Kobayashi organized a local writers’ group in 1921, the Haiku Club, where he taught Japanese poetry to men and women of the Japanese community while also judging entries to haiku contests from across Canada (Fiwchuk 5; Denbei Fonds). As Audrey Kobayashi notes, these kinds of poetry groups and the writing of haiku rose in popularity during the Meiji “Restoration” (1868-1912), a period of “extensive, rapid, and very effective modernization, through which the Japanese government undertook to transform its political and economic foundations radically and, although not as straightforward a task, the cultural conditions of everyday life as well” (243). As this “restructuring of nearly every aspect of Japanese life” occurred, “long-established, even ancient, cultural precedents,” were drawn upon to “provide the stability in which social change could occur” (243). But, as Kobayashi notes, even ancient cultural precedents and traditions were undergoing reconstruction during this period, as the common people adopted practices that had formerly been the domain of the upper classes (246). It is in the context, as Kobayashi observes, that “poetry writing became a pastime of the common people,” culminating in 1874 when “an ancient edict was rescinded” allowing

commoners to write poems (247). Andrea Kobayashi, who writes about Japanese poetry as it moved into the Canadian literary landscape, argues that Japanese vernacular poetry was one of “the most important social activities of the *Issei*<sup>8</sup>, Japanese immigrants who came to Canada during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (243). Kobayashi argues that in Canada, poetry groups and the composition of poetry that happened both within and outside of these groups “provided emotional sanctuary against the difficulties of immigrant life” (250). Poetry served as a means of moral expression, where “the poems provided a structure of feeling by setting forth the maxims, values, and common terms of experience by which social life was organized,” thus helping people not only to “adjust to change, but also to maintain the moral values of Japan against the strong forces of change that rocked their lives as immigrants, a project of great concern to the *Issei*” (250). Denbei Kobayashi’s poetry circle was typical of other groups operating in Canada and America, as it was organized around an individual “who had developed the art before emigrating from Japan and who was recognized as a sensei, or teacher, of poetry” (249). Kobayashi’s club, which initially limited its membership to men, eventually welcomed both men and women (Fiwchuk 5). While Hiro Kobayashi was a gifted poet in her own right, she did not share her work with the club, keeping her writing private and hidden until her family discovered an exercise book filled with years of poetry after her death (Fiwchuk 14).

Despite Kobayashi’s achievements as a leader of his community and as a poet and teacher, his contributions remain in the margins, while the exploits and the names of early settler orchardists and farmers of European descent loom large in the region. In today’s Okanagan, the journals and historiographic narrative retellings of white settler exploits are reprinted and sold by

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<sup>8</sup> The word *Issei* means “first generation” and refers to the immigrant generation. Japanese Canadians identify themselves by generation as *Issei* (first), *Nisei* (second), *Sansei* (third), and so on.” (Kobayashi 255)

local museums and tourist gift stores. Settler heroics are also celebrated through near theme park style historical sites, like O’Keefe Ranch, the Guisachan Heritage Park (once home to Lord and Lady Aberdeen), and the Pandosy Mission, where the various accoutrements of early settler habitation are on display. While Kobayashi (who often wrote under the pen-name Hosui) self-published his autobiography and a collection of his haiku poems in 1963, this publication has not been reprinted nor translated from Japanese, nor is it housed in the collection of the Kelowna Museum and Archives or contained in the Denbei Kobayashi Fonds at the University of British Columbia (a sole copy, curiously, residing in the library at UCLA). The same is true of the commemorative volume printed to honour Kobayashi, which is housed in the private collection of Andrea Kobayashi, which she describes as “a collection of haiku, handwritten in sophisticated calligraphy, collected in a book, and bound in silk” (256). While, at present, you can pick up a copy of Gillespie’s wry recounting of his life as an orchardist, Ursula Surtees’s history of early fruit ranching in Kelowna, *Sunshine and Butterflies* (a history which ignores the contributions of anyone other than white settlers), or Edmond Rivère’s narrative history of the life of Father Pandosy, on the shelves of Kelowna museums’ gift shops, Kobayashi’s absence on these shelves is notable. One of Denbei Kobayashi’s haikus was printed and displayed in a place of prominence in the Okanagan Wine and Orchard Museum, forming part of a temporary exhibit 2018/2019 exhibit mounted by the UBCO students, which recognized the work of racialized Others within the systemic racism of the valley’s orcharding industry. Denbei Kobayashi’s haiku, which is displayed next to an undated sepia picture of a middle-aged Kobayashi, who stands upright in a crisp suit before wooden steps, reads

Increasing in glory and peaceful light

Now shine in the garden of God



As the Yamato Cherry bursts into bloom

While it seems probable that this poem is a translation, given the irregular syllabic pattern that does not conform to haiku conventions, following a 10-8-11 pattern rather than the standard 5-7-5 pattern, the poem achieves the “transcendence and immanence” that Andrea Kobayashi argues is the aim of haiku. As is recurrent in many literary representations of the Okanagan, the Edenic trope is present. While Eden, in the works of Lane, Lent, Tomlinson, and Rhenisch, is often figured as postlapsarian, in Kobayashi’s haiku, the “garden of God” is not fallen, but “increasing in glory and peaceful light” as the Yamato Cherry tree, which Kobayashi had imported, tended and propagated blooms (244). The garden in Kobayashi’s haiku is at once immanent, the divine existing within the material space of the garden and exemplified by the transplanted Yamato Cherry tree, and transcendent, as this space proffers access to divine glory and light. While there is still scholarship to be done to shine a light on Denbei Kobayashi’s literary work, life writing and his historical centrality to the early orcharding communities of the Okanagan, the writings of Audrey Kobayashi, Rev. Gordon G. Nakayama, and Michelle Fiwchuk do much to begin this work.

## GHOSTS, PERIPHERIES & MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

The Okanagan’s marginalized Japanese community appears in Dania Tomlinson’s 2018 novel *Our Animal Hearts*. In Tomlinson’s novel, the protagonist, Iris Sparks, fosters what becomes an adversarial relationship with Azami Lin Koba. Azami and her family are the first Japanese fruit pickers in the fictional settlement of Winteridge, moving from Japan following the Russo-Japanese war of 1904, where they had to abandon their fleet of fishing boats due to the

financial hardships that followed the war. With the encouragement of Noah Sparks, the Koba family moves to Winteridge where the entire family, including the children, become orchard workers in the McCarthy's orchard, which is adjacent to the Sparks. In Iris's first encounter with Azami, the girl appears from the margins as a spectre. The encounter is described as follows, "I saw, between two pine trees, the flash of a girl's face. She had dark eyes and black hair, a Lake Person, a spirit. She darted behind the next tree. I expected the girl to be gone or transformed into a bird or a deer" (48).

Henry, the novel's sole Indigenous character (apart from the ghosts of his family and relations lost to smallpox who haunt the lake and the Winteridge's surrounding forests), is also aligned with spectral presence. Henry serves as a teacher and guide to local Indigenous history for the Sparks children, as a lover to their mother, Llewelyna, and as a conduit through which Llewelyna melds Welsh and Indigenous mysticism. Terry Goldie, in his examination of the representations of Indigenous people in settler literature, observes that Indigenous people in literature "are not reflections of themselves but of the needs of the white culture which created that literature," arguing that "the indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker" (Goldie, *Fear and Temptation*, 78; 70). The notion that a Canadian sublime may be acquired from its First Nation inhabitants had long been a cornerstone of the Canadian literary project. Thomas D'Arcy McGee, in his 1858 essay "Protection for Canadian Literature," argued for this strategy, urging Canadian writers to channel the "grave mysticism of the Red man" in their literary work (McGee 44). In Tomlinson's narrative, Henry is a figure very much in line with this tradition. Henry is marginal but instrumental, as he appears in moments of strife for the white characters as a saviour, teacher, counsellor and friend. He also serves as a critical figure in the novel's denouement. On a post-war trip to Wales, Henry provides the final

key to unlocking the mystery of Llewelyna's lost daughter in a letter that Iris will find after her mother's death. Henry also provides both Iris and Llewelyna with a means of understanding the spirit of the lake, correcting Iris, who initially suspects that the lake monster is an addanc (a lake monster that figures in the Mabinogion), who had followed her mother from Wales. Henry explains that the creature "haunted the lake long before" the Sparks family had arrived (Tomlinson 23).

In Tomlinson's novel, the community of Winteridge is built atop a Syilx burial ground, and the Syilx people, who are nearly wiped out by smallpox, exert their presence as spirits that "still misted the trees," appearing to the protagonist as silent forces throughout the narrative (24). Llewelyna, Iris's mother, dubs these spirits "Lake People," telling her daughter that they "knew the land better than anyone because they were part of it. Created from it" and that these spirits could "turn into birds, bears, fish, and even trees" (24). In his analysis of Xavier Herbert's novel *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975), Terry Goldie notes the recurrence of the trope of Indigenous ghosts in numerous settler colonial literary texts. Goldie argues that in many of the texts he examines, "contact with the emanation of the dead indigene" (137) offers settler characters "an overt certificate of indigenization," sometimes even allowing characters, through mere contact with the ghost figures, to become "indigenized shaman" themselves (136-137). As numerous critics have noted, including Renée Bergland, "the figure of the Indian ghost" has long been prevalent in North American writing, arguing that

When European Americans speak of Native Americans, they always use the language of ghostliness. They call Indians demons, apparitions, shapes, specters, phantoms, or ghosts. They insist that Indians are able to appear and disappear suddenly and mysteriously, and

also that they are ultimately doomed to vanish. Most often, they describe Indians as absent or dead. (Bergland 2)

The “Lake People,” as described by Llewelyna and as they appear throughout Tomlinson’s novel, exist squarely within this tradition. Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte, who examine how the gothic, uncanny and ghostly function within Canadian literature, argue that the “Canadian national project is inherently haunted”; hauntings in many works of Canadian literature take the form of an “an aura of unresolved and unbroachable ‘guilt;’ as though the colonial/historical foundations of the nation have not been thoroughly assimilated” (ix) and can operate as a form of cultural mourning “signaling a loss of cultural memory/history resulting from colonialism or migration or, alternatively, because of a perceived illegitimacy in one’s tenancy of the land” (xi). The orcharding community of Winteridge, which we are repeatedly reminded is built on a Syilx burial ground, where “bodies upon bodies” (317) were interred, eventually burns to the ground, killing many residents and turning the community into a “ghost town” where “new ghosts mingle with those that existed here long ago” (336-337). The fire acts as a force that ends an illegitimate tenancy and renders the ground on which Winteridge stood doubly haunted.

While the fire spares the secluded Japanese farms and orchards built on the margins of Winteridge, the destructive force of racist government policy removes this community from the land. Iris, the settler protagonist and daughter of one the valley’s gentlemen orchardists, bears witness to the treatment of the Koba family by the community and, under the laws of the nation-state, will ensure the Koba’s eviction from their land and subsequent internment, and herself betraying Azami in the course of the narrative. Azami, who Iris initially perceives as one of the “Lake People,” an Indigenous spirit, is part of a racialized and marginalized community whose living and unsettled presence continues to haunt the protagonist, Iris, throughout the novel. In an

interview, Tomlinson describes her intentions in writing the fictional orcharding community in which her novel is set, writing that Winteridge is touched by “global events and national injustices, including the internment of ethnic communities during the world wars, and the theft of Indigenous land” (Chau; Tomlinson). For Tomlinson, Winteridge “became a microcosm of Canadian history,” where it became “really important to [her] that all these historical scars were laid bare” (Chau; Tomlinson). In Tomlinson’s microcosm, the Okanagan’s racialized population, which Marten and Aguiar characterize as the “wanted as unwanted,” haunts the narrative from the margins, the forest and the orchards (130).

#### ADAM, EVE AND FAILED ORCHARDS

Just as Tomlinson’s novel that charts and ruin of an orcharding community, so too do Harold Rhenisch’s work of creative non-fiction, *The Wolves at Evelyn* (2006), and Patrick Lane’s novel, *Red Dog Red Dog* (2008), explore the spaces of the orchards as material enactments of settler quests for Eden, spaces doomed to ruin and decay. Carolyn Merchant argues that foundational to the settlement and so-called improvement of the American continent is what she terms “the American heroic recovery narrative” (141). Entailed in this narrative of frontier expansion is “a story of male energy subduing female nature, taming the wild, plowing the land, [and] re-creating the garden lost by Eve” (146). Lane and Rhenisch situate their narratives in these new gardens, specifically in orchards. These orchards, which stand as material enactments of an imagined recovery, are far from Edenic. What is foregrounded in both texts is not the planting of seedlings and the hope entailed in such plantings, but rather a resulting decay, as

these orchards and small farms, established in a territory imagined as nowhere, or forgotten, fall fallow and are subjected to, or become sites of violence.

Rhenisch's *The Wolves at Evelyn* and Lane's *Red Dog Red Dog* focus on arrivals and ensuing attempts at settlement. The central male figures in both texts work to imagine or inscribe (to borrow Daniel Coleman's phrasing) "Diasporic Space on Indigenous Place." Coleman, in *Masculine Migrations*, proposes that by examining the narratives of men's migration, we might see how masculine codes and practices are reassessed and challenged" in a process that he calls "cross-cultural refraction" (Coleman 4). In Rhenisch's and Lane's texts, we can observe this process of cross-cultural refraction and a process of cross-geographic refraction as settler masculinities change and are changed by their topographic situations. Rhenisch, in *The Wolves at Evelyn*, proposes that such strategies are necessary if one is to begin to understand a place, suggesting that in a Canadian context, national history, and personal story, must be wrought from a reading of "our confrontation with the landscape and the social mores that come from that confrontation" (Rhenisch 220). This notion that individual and national identity is born from confrontation with geography has long figured as key to Wild West and frontier mythography and figures prominently in both Lane's and Rhenisch's bodies of work. The men at the center of the Lane and Rhenisch narratives are imbricated in the national projects of Westward expansion and settlement that pit individuals and nations against the North American landscape.

Lane's gothic western novel, which unfolds over a week in 1958, charts a family's migration and settlement to what is described as a "desolate farm in a forgotten valley" (39). The orchard on the farm, which might traditionally be associated with fertility, abundance and the pastoral, is the place where unharvested fruit rots in the undergrowth and where, by the end of the novel, seven bodies (mostly family members) are surreptitiously buried. The Stark property

and the valley it sits in are far from Eden. In Lane's text, the "heroic recovery narrative," which propelled the family ever west, is buried with half the Stark family in the orchard turned graveyard. While Iris Sparks, in Tomlinson's novel, too, buries a child in the family orchard (in this case, a child she has miscarried), the bodies, in Lane's novel, that accumulate on the Stark family orchard find their way there through violence and neglect.

Lillian Stark, a daughter of dustbowl austerity and the abusive, alcoholic and murderously neglectful matriarch of the family, reluctantly oversees the small scrap of land purchased by the oft-absent, equally abusive patriarch, Elmer Stark. Lillian, who kills three daughters (burning one) and takes her eldest teenage son as a lover, embodies what Carolyn Merchant calls a "Fallen Eve" as she perverts and thwarts propagation. In her study, Merchant observes the ways in which gender is "encoded into the mainstream [Edenic] Recovery Narrative" (21), noting that, in this narrative, "after the Expulsion, initiated by Eve's tasting of the fruit, the ground is cursed and brings forth thorns and thistles [...]. Fallen Eve is a desert, a dark disorderly wasteland waiting to be reclaimed" (Merchant 110-111). Lillian takes pleasure in frightening her sons with the Bible, particularly with Jeremiah's curses and Job's suffering, verses from the book of Isaiah (44). Her son Tom finds himself haunted by verse 34:13 from Isaiah, ruminating on the words, "And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be a habitation of dragons, and a court for owls" (45). Lillian, who oversees the "desolate farm in a forgotten valley" with its "hard clay soil" and graveyard in the orchard, does indeed oversee a similarly menacing fortress, haunted by the ghosts of murdered children and within which the living, breathing monsters of domestic and sexual violence lurk (Lane 39; 6). At one point in the novel, Lillian wanders the halls of the family home, speaking verses from Jeremiah 6:26, her voice frightening her young son, Tom, as her "words slipped

under the door. *O daughter of my people*, she said. *Gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes*” (45). Lillian lives in a fallen world of ruin and disappointment, far removed from the glamorous cities with their dancehalls that she had imagined calling home (39). As overseen by Lillian, the Stark farm is fallen space, quite aptly characterized as a postlapsarian “dark and disorderly wasteland” (Merchant 111).

In Lane’s novel Lillian operates as a kind of Fallen Eve, while Elmer, too, is lost in postlapsarian murk. In the heroic recovery narrative mapped by Merchant, “fallen Adam becomes the inventor of the tools and technologies that will restore the garden, [while] fallen Eve becomes the nature that must be tamed into submission” (21). The “Adamic hero” in this narrative “through labor in the earth replace[s] the hope of redemption through mere presence in a ‘natural’ Eden” (107). Elmer, who often abdicates his role as patriarch, making no effort to tend the family’s farm and leaves for long stints of time, has little interest in the role of “Adamic hero.” Elmer has no interest in its restoration or redemption, nor does he seem interested in taming Lillian into submission (though she is often the subject of his physical abuse). Elmer is instead reduced to a kind of paralysis as he takes to sitting in the orchard graveyard, where “He’d perch on his heels beside little Rose’s stone and sing his songs. [...] He’d sing “Blue Okanagan” as he drank from a Bottle of Crown Royal, little Buddy Reynolds lilting on his tongue” (33). Reynolds’s song, which sings the praises of the Okanagan valley as a new Eden, contains the refrain: “And the apple blossoms splendor in no other land is found / For it’s heaven, really heaven, when they’re blooming all around.” These words, as sung by Elmer within his orchard graveyard, are spiked with irony, as the land that should be an earthly paradise is anything but.

Early in Lane’s novel, Tom seeks to establish the geographic coordinates of this failed Eden on a world map he’s torn from a *National Geographic* magazine, drawing “a black X” on



the empty place where the town should have been (23). Justine Brown argues that a “sense of nowhere-ness” has long underpinned settler British Columbian understanding of its own geography (Brown 12). With this “sense of nowhere-ness” comes the belief that the province resists or somehow defies articulation. While Jeannette Armstrong argues that for the Okanagan Syilx People, “stories *are* the land,” for Elmer Stark, the land defies the telling of stories. Elmer, who comes from a parentage mired in frontier atrocity and bloody family feuds, is a retired rodeo cowboy schooled in rootlessness. While Elmer is prone to tale-telling and secret-spilling when drunk, when sober, like the Western male heroes Jane Tompkins observes in *West of Everything*, Elmer is “antilanguage” and, I argue, anti-place (50). Elmer Stark rejects the notion that one may narrate themselves into geography, arguing “that the country they lived in was too big for any tale to hold it.... [and that] the story gets lost each time you try to fit it into the land” (35). While Elmer doubts the efficacy of stories to root what is rootless, for Eddy, his eldest, deeply damaged son, “stories about the past, anyone’s past, were deadly” as they might resuscitate trauma (102). Faced with this distrust of language and stories, the novel’s central protagonist, and youngest Stark son, Tom, is described as “hungry for the past” (41) as he tentatively coaxes stories from those closest to him to narrativize his family’s presence in the valley. Through the novel’s polyphonic structure *and* Tom’s central acts of listening and retelling, Lane offers a critique of the frontier code of masculine silence and stoicism and points to a process by which collective traumas gathered in geographic place may together begin to articulate a region.

Like Lane’s character, Tom, Harold Rhenisch, in *The Wolves at Evelyn*, listens to and gathers stories of migration, exile, arrival, and settlement in the face of a patriarchal reticence that resists such telling. Rhenisch, the son of German immigrants with direct ties to the Nazi Party, is acutely aware of the disparate epistemologies (including European, American, and

Indigenous) that vie for dominance in the valley. For Rhenisch, raised by German-speaking parents in Osoyoos in the 1950s, next to the American/Canadian border, “to be Canadian meant rather little” as German, British, and American culture prevailed. In Rhenisch’s Okanagan, the official culture was British. It was a space where announcers on CBC Radio, and anyone with governmental authority, spoke with BBC élan and where imported English consumer goods (often unsuitable for the terrain) filled store shelves. While official culture was British, American culture flowed steadily across the border, bringing movies, music, and baseball. Rhenisch also uses the moniker “Wild West” to describe how the Okanagan was encountered and imagined by visitors and residents in the mid 1950s, who uneasily transposed the mythography they found in American Westerns onto the valley and its settler and Indigenous population. To account for the multiple (and often discordant) lenses through which settlers sought to read the valley, Rhenisch employs a structure that is “part history, part memoir, and part extended essay” (Rettie qtd. in Diotte 156). Through this tripartite structure, Rhenisch seeks to account for the socio-cultural plurality that characterizes the region and to examine how imported epistemologies speak to the land as he understands it.

In one of the text’s polemical essays, “The Hudson Bay Blanket,” Rhenisch rails against Canadian thematic criticism as espoused by the likes of Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, which, in his view, does not account for the lived experience in British Columbia. To cede to national essentialisms, for Rhenisch, is to “colonize ourselves” and to “give up our particular sense of *land* in order to become *Canadian*” (131-132). For Rhenisch, who claims that he and his mother “were born so deep within the land we confronted the earth instead (of Canada),” Canada is a term which effaces “*his* Canada” and “all the other silenced Canadas.” To counter the violence of naming, Rhenisch (in a particularly odd moment) proposes more naming,

offering a list of potential new names for what he calls “his” country in British Columbia, including “Transmontanus; The Interior; Columbiana; Heimat; The Land; Eden; The Heartland; [and, of course] The Middle of Nowhere” (145). Rhenisch’s imagined act of renaming, his claim to a kind of settler indigeneity born of closeness to the land, and his use of the term “colonization” is, as Richard Pickard argues, a “risky move,” and “is – at the very least – asking for trouble” (Pickard, “Reluctance, Protest, and Hybridity”). This is not to say that Rhenisch does not acknowledge Indigenous presence nor the problematic nature of land ownership in the province, but in Rhenisch’s text, the claims of earlier agricultural settlers (those arriving before the 1950s) and those of British Columbia’s Indigenous Peoples are often imagined as analogous and aligned against the forces of creeping modernity and totalizing nationalism.

Rhenisch seeks to counter what he understands as Canadian essentialism with regional specificity. His essays, memoirs, and histories find their locus in the valley’s orchards. As in Lane’s text, the orchard for Rhenisch is far from Edenic but is a space of failure and discord. Unlike Lane’s orchard, described as desolate and forgotten, Rhenisch’s valley (though forgotten by the larger Nation) is increasingly crowded and noisily contested. Rhenisch describes growing up among “the stumps of the first fruit trees in the interior” on land seized through the machinations of an American rancher named Frank Richter<sup>9</sup>, whose land appropriation in the 1870s would force the Syilx onto a reserve on swampland tucked away and next to the border.

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<sup>9</sup> Francis Xavier Richter (1837-1910), was “born in Bohemia, mined in San Antonio, Texas, and in Arizona before moving onto Lewiston, Washington, in 1862. From there he went to Colville, where he formed a partnership with a Swiss named King who had packed for the Hudson’s Bay Company. In 1864 they purchased forty-two head of cattle in Oregon, drove them across Washington, and crossed the boundary at Osoyoos. Richter pre-empted land in the Similkameen Valley in 1865 at the present town of Cawston. This land he sold in 1885 to R.L. Cawston and Mrs. Ella Lowe, widow of W.H. Lowe. Richter then took up a pre-emption in Boundary Valley, and in 1895 he bought a ranch near Keremeos from Francois Suprenant. There in 1897 he planted the first commercial orchard in Similkameen (see Sam B. Manery, “Keremeos Chronicles,” Okanagan Historical Society, Twelfth Report [Penticton: Penticton Herald, 1948], pp. 115-20; and Kathleen S. Dewdney, “Francis Xavier Richter,” Okanagan Historical Society, Twenty-Fifth Report [Penticton: Penticton Herald, 1961], pp. 78-101)” (Ormsby, *A Pioneer Gentlewoman*, 114)

Rhenisch charts how Richter's vast ranch and pear orchard is subdivided over the intervening decades. Rhenisch also observes how water and pesticide use become fraught issues for the new orchards that spring up in place of Richter's pear trees, as these new orchards tax the region's scarce water supply and are doused in dangerous pesticides. While the farm in *Red Dog Red Dog* is a relatively insular space, provincial politics, world events and changing global markets impact Rhenisch's orchards. The Vietnam War sent draft dodgers and hippies north to pick fruit (to young Rhenisch's delight), while free trade, new highway infrastructure and rising land costs forced the original fruit-growing families off the land. As in Lane's text, for Rhenisch the orchard is also a place of domestic discord and family secrets. The orchard is a space where secrets about the Rhenisch family's Nazi connections are harboured, where the children are described as being "sent out into the poison trees" to work, and where Rhenisch's father, facing financial failure and in a drunken rage, lights his apricot trees on fire. As in Lane's text, the orchard becomes the place where the North American "heroic recovery narrative" goes to die, as the imagined Edenic space offers no reprieve from a fallen world.

In both Lane and Rhenisch's texts, imported settler narratives contend with geographic actuality within agricultural spaces, as lineages born of restlessness, migration, and exile, wrestle with stasis. Against willfully inarticulate male patriarchs, the men at the center of both texts counter silence with narrative, tracing settlement patterns and working to articulate their births and upbringings on land their parents will not, or cannot, call home. In both texts, the orchards are material embodiments of settler agendas that clumsily seek and radically fail to establish roots. It is in these failures that we might observe a process of cross-geographic refraction, as the land does readily not cede to, nor support, Edenic heroic recovery narratives. While these texts do not teach the people-to-be how to live on the land, they start dismantling frontier

mythographies and narratives that would seek to dismiss the primacy of place. Rhenisch's text ends with the sentence: "Welcome back to the land," and invites settlers, old and new, to reassess their connections to the land on which they dwell.

## EROTICIZED LANDSCAPES & SHADOWY ORCHARDS

While for Patrick Lane, Harold Rhenisch, and Dania Tomlinson, orchards are often marked as spaces subject to ruin and decay, in contemporary Okanagan literature, particularly in the works of the male writers in this study, the orchards, too, become spaces of Eros. These spaces exist within a broader feminized landscape perceived through a sexualizing male gaze. The orchard as an erotic space perceived through the male gaze has deep roots in Western literature, particularly in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the myth of Pomona, a hamadryad (a wood nymph) of Latium, and a Roman goddess of fruitful abundance, her name coming from the Latin word *pomum*, "fruit," specifically orchard fruit. In Ovid's myth, Pomona is a masterful orchardist who loves "not woods nor rivers, but a plot of ground /And boughs of apples all around" and who has "no spear, only a pruning knife" (Ovid XVI 31-33). Pomona, who pours "her love, her passion" into her orchard, "walled her orchard in to keep away/ The sex she shunned" (XVI 39; XVI 41-42). Pomona's barriers do not deter her suitors, who gather at her walls and devise tricks to woo her, one of them, Vertumnus, who appears to her disguised as an old woman and delivers a lengthy speech (running nearly 100 lines of verse) that utilizes the language of grafting and propagation and draws upon examples of love from myth and history, does manage to sway her with his verbosity, as she the final line of the tale "with answering love is born away" (XVI 771). Roxanne Gentilcore observes in her reading of the myth that Pomona

herself is “objectified through the tale and never speaks” and through “the sexual images of the enclosed garden and of ripe apples, [...] [is] made synonymous with the landscape” (101).

Vertumnus does not seek a dialogue with his subject, but instead, through the overwhelming force of his rhetoric, breaches Pomona’s walls and thus dominates the landscape. Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan, who examine the language of tourist promotions, argue that “landscapes are shaped by the discourses of patriarchy and (hetero)sexuality” and that how “places and their peoples are perceived” is often shaped by “the male, heterosexist gaze” (Pritchard and Morgan 885-901). Eva Mackey, who writes about the significance of landscape in Canadian nationalist mythology, notes that figurations of the Canadian landscape as female are still frequently deployed in Canadian discourse and observes that

in the debates about free trade in the late 1980s the nation, and the land, in particular, was constructed as a natural, pure, fertile yet vulnerable woman, constantly defending herself from the more masculine and aggressive hulk of the United States, the southern neighbour who sought to rape her natural resources and colonize her culture.

As Jody Berland and Mackey argue, these gendered metaphors are a “staple of Canadian culture” and are present in imaginative representations of the Okanagan (Berland 522).

For George Bowering, in *Writing the Okanagan*, a retrospective anthology of and on his writing about the valleys where he grew up, the orchard is primarily a masculine space. In Bowering’s masculine orchards are spaces where fruit trees are “military-positioned,” where apple tree saplings that need thinning become enemy soldiers to be cut down, and where groups of men of diverse European backgrounds labour share jokes that cross linguistic divides and pick up each other’s idiomatic slang (2; *Pinboy* 57). While the action of cultivating and tending the orchard is coded as masculine, the landscape is feminized through a “male, heterosexist gaze”

(Pritchard and Morgan 901). Bowering, travelling the highway that runs north and south through the valley, remembers

looking forward to a certain little mountain range near Okanagan Falls, because from a certain stretch of Highway 97 this little arête looked like the profile of the firm and sumptuous breasts of two young women lying on their backs. In fact the more I looked, the more I anthropomorphized, or maybe I should say eroticized, the landscape. (213)

The orchard is also part of this eroticized landscape, where Bowering discerns, “the secret tits complete with nipples on the orchard scene of the apple box label” and in viewing “certain trees [sees them as] voluptuous.” (Bowering, *Pinboy*, 213). In his sexually explicit, self-reflexive meta-memoir, *Pinboy*, the orchard, for Bowering’s teenage protagonists, is a welcome and shadowy space to commit Onan’s sin and engage in erotic trysts with his girlfriend (71).

The trope of trysts in orchards is recurrent within the valley’s contemporary literature. In Kelly Shepherd’s poem, “Bench *Rutland*,” from his poetry chapbook, *A Hidden Bench*, a poetic exploration of emotional and geographic space within the Okanagan Basin, the eroticism that the orchards offer is on full display

Trees twisting together, fingers squeezing

overripe fruit to make it slide and burst

between, to make hot Okanagan night.

Apples in the orchards swaying heavy and dark

storm clouds. You and I went for a walk someplace

out onto the sweltering shade of hillside

rows of trees and you knew a hidden bench.

A place to push me backwards, feel branches

moving in warm soft of leaves and scrape of bark

orchard breath until the clouds could not keep silent.

The lyric poem, in which the speaker meditates on a sexual encounter in an orchard, abounds with sexual imagery. In the first stanza, the trees that twist together and bear overripe fruit that “slide and burst” are engaged in procreation. As in the work of Bowering, the orchard here provides shelter and hiding, a place “soft of leaves and scrape of bark” that itself breathes and, in the poem, is a willing participant in the eroticism of the scene. While Pomona’s walled orchard in Ovid’s myth is a space that men seek to breach, in Shepherd’s poem, it is a space to be invited into and shared.

Shepherd’s poem depicts the orchard as a space of enthusiastic sexual consent, while in contrast, Lane’s poem, “The Calf,” conjures the orchard as a site of bestiality and rape. In this short lyric poem, as in much of Lane’s work, Lane sheds light on a darkness at the heart of lived experience in Interior B.C. Here, the adolescent speaker is invited to an orchard where two of his adolescent friends take turns raping a calf that they’ve tethered between fruit trees. The speaker refuses to participate but is scarred by the act of witnessing. Unable to remember the healthy sexual encounters he would engage in later that summer, he is drawn back to the memory of walking away from the spot where the rape had occurred, “afraid / the trees heavy with green fruit in the heat, /the swollen grass breaking with pollen / against his legs, covering him with



dust” (16-20). Here we can discern a parallel between the speaker, who is young and sexually naïve and the green fruit he observes ripening in the heat. The speaker leaves the scene of the rape covered in pollen dust. Pollen, which consists of “microscopic grains discharged from the male part of a flower or from a male cone,” in this moment takes on additional resonance (“pollen, n.”). The speaker leaves the scene of brutal sexual violence marked by what he has witnessed, his pants covered with the dust of swollen grasses' procreative act.

In another of Lane's poems that finds its locus in the Okanagan, “Naramata,” the landscape is, as it is in Bowering's work, perceived through a “male, heterosexist gaze” (Pritchard and Morgan 901). In “Naramata,” the name of a small orcharding and wine-producing community on the southeastern shore of Okanagan Lake, the landscape is perceived by the speaker as having

the full breasts of a woman,  
a yellow the colour of stone  
when it is first quarried, startled  
by the air that touches it. (1-4)

Here, the feminized landscape is perceived as vulnerable and exposed, like quarried stones. The act of quarrying, typically gendered as male labour, becomes analogous with removing clothing, the stones here becoming vulnerable, naked flesh. The poem, which like much of his other work, confronts the latent violence that dwells within lived experience, moves from here to a meditation on a spider attempting to trap a wasp in the “mouth of the bronze bell” at a temple and to the reverie he experiences in hearing the wasp thrashing inside the bell (14). The life and death struggle in the temple bell is understood and embedded in the ritualized act of noticing.

This noticing of inherent tensions and life and death struggles moves the speaker to “delight” (29) and brings them back to their meditation on the landscape:

It is why I love the clear water  
moving very slowly down this woman's  
curved belly, drying there in the heat.  
She is waiting and she does not move,  
her nipples still hard, her eyes  
all willow leaves and almonds  
as the wind rises from the river  
into the temple sound of early morning. (31-38)

Here, the mute and feminized landscape, anthropomorphized as a woman, is locked in a sexualized waiting, an erotic moment of stillness when it becomes latent with tension in the poem's final line. Here, “temple sound” is not a generic recollection of temples in the early morning but recalls the wasp’s resonant struggle against the spider and its death. As in Bowering’s work, the feminized landscape becomes a cipher for the male observer, a means through which they might decode the intricacies of their desires.

The Okanagan landscape offers Bowering and Lane opportunities for transcendent observation, whereas the Okanagan in John Lent’s *The Face in the Garden* (1990) is a space of psychological confinement. Lent’s narrative, composed of prose and poetry, described as “jazz-like in its shift and movements,” traces the struggles of man to situate himself within history, geographic space, and interpersonal and familial relationships. Lent’s protagonist, Peter, who is contemplating a family photo, in the final epiphany of the prose section of the text, considers the following as he

stares at that humbling image fading now into sepia as it rises and lurches toward the fridge. He knows suddenly what's wrong here: since we don't know how to live in nature any longer we build the surfaces of an artificial one which soothes us, but which, essentially, we are unhappy in. So we constantly measure, trim, cut, mow, arrange, transform, anaesthetize everything beyond the screen we see through into some safe, geometrically calculated Eden. And sometimes, when we're bored enough to really look into its surfaces, we admit that they nauseate us, violate some deep instinct a lust for uncontrolled vegetation and flesh; some violent, chaotic landscape which would occupy us fully, and through which would occupy us fully, and through which we would move sensually, without fear, no time for it. Ah. (Lent, *Face*, 116-117)

As in Lane's work, Lent's protagonist perceives latent violence in man-made Edenic space. Enticed into these spaces by "the advertisements for Eden that enslave us" (165), Peter articulates "a lust for uncontrolled vegetation and flesh" for "some violent, chaotic landscape." Here, as in the work of Bowering and Lane, landscape and lust are paired. In his long poem, "Facing the Garden," in the second section of Lent's text, the speaker, who is wrestling with addiction, boredom and unsettlement, wonders whether he could simply "fuck their way through / these gardens" as a means of achieving some kind of "epiphany" within the stultifying stasis of the pastoral (Lent, "Facing," 165).

While Pomona, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, channels "her love, her passion" into her orchard, shunning sex and building a wall to block suitors, the feminized landscapes and orchards, as described by Shepherd, Lane, Bowering and Lent invite sex or its contemplation. Paired with this, in the works of Lane and Lent, is latent and overt violence. As Pritchard and

Morgan note, within “the discourses of patriarchy and (hetero)sexuality” that shape how we view the landscape is the discourse that writes land as embodying the “uncontrolled sexuality of the women” and as “ripe for rape by the conquering colonizer” (121). A further critique of this heteropatriarchal discourse of mastery is called for in the face of rising ecological consequences. Consequences are acute in the Okanagan region, where water is scarce, and a growing population places increasing stress on finite resources.

### GOODBYE ORCHARDS, HELLO SUBDIVISIONS: THE ETHICS OF STAYING

In artist Fern Helfand’s photo essay, “From Forested Hills to Paved Plateaus,” Helfand documents the steady transformation of Kirshner mountain on the northeast edge of Kelowna from forested land into sprawling subdivisions and the contradiction at play in how the valley is sold to consumers of real estate. Helfand notes that the region’s orchards and lakes have become selling features for homes in a subdivision on artificially plateaued and treeless lots, spaces which have little connection to the commodified and “vaunted beauty of the Okanagan Valley” (17). Helfand argues that sprawling urbanization and land restructuring contribute to destroying the very vistas and “healthy environment” that these subdivisions use as marketing tools. Rhenisch, too, in his collection of short prose pieces, *Tom Thomson’s Shack* (2000), expresses anxiety over the rapid urbanization of the valley and its displacement of a generation of orchardists. Rhenisch, who had worked for Kelowna orchardist Hugh Dendy and had established a friendship, reflects on how the valley has changed around Dendy’s orchard,

The night sky above Hugh's glows yellow with the lights of the subdivisions that have in the last two decades, pushed through the ravines around him. The grass under his cherry trees glows, pale. There are no stars: no real light. It's like farming in a parking lot. (157)

The elegiac lament for the valley's dead and dying orchards is a refrain that courses through Rhenish's many reflections on the valley, its orcharding community, and his own experiences of growing up on an orchard under stress from market forces. While less elegiac, Bowering in *Pin Boy*, his wild romp of a memoir, also observes the rapid series of transformations that the Okanagan has undergone. Bowering's protagonist reflects that the "valley had been a desert where the Okanagan Indians had enjoyed living. Then it became ranching country, and then mining country. Now it is wine country, but when I was a kid, it was orchard country" (9).

Like Rhenisch and Bowering, Nancy Holmes is a poet and critic who has been acutely aware of the changes settlers have wrought and continue to exert on the Okanagan landscapes. Holmes, a creative writing instructor at the UBC Okanagan, organizes eco-art projects in the Okanagan valley through The Eco Art Incubator. The Eco Art Incubator is a large-scale research project that fosters the research, production, documentation, and dissemination of eco art in the Okanagan valley. This project links graduate and undergraduate students with community artists, ecologists, activists, and scientists through a comprehensive series of Okanagan-based resources and projects. Her work with the Eco Art Incubator inspired Holmes' 5<sup>th</sup> collection of poetry, *The Flicker Tree: Okanagan Poems*, a collection of poems about the place, people, plants and animals of the Okanagan valley in the southern interior of British Columbia, where Holmes has lived for the past 20 years.

Many of the poems in this collection spring from her work on the Woodhaven Eco Art Project in Kelowna, B.C., one of the Eco Art Incubator's many initiatives. The Woodhaven

Project was an artistic endeavour in Woodhaven Nature Conservancy Regional Park from April 17 to November 6, 2010. Local artists and students created multiple works of art “in the park and in response to the park” (Mairs). The project and its artwork aimed at having “minimal impact on the natural environment, leaving nothing in the park and similarly removing nothing from the park” (Mairs). In one Woodhaven project of note, graduate student Lara Claire Haworth created a site-specific, durational installation of a border patrol service at Woodhaven Nature Conservancy. Haworth’s project investigated and critiqued the separation of wilderness spaces from civilization spaces in contemporary culture. Haworth’s project also examined our relationship with borders, both international and metaphorical, and “our relationship to ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ as two distinct entities” (11).

In Holmes’s *The Flicker Tree* similar questions are explored through the particularity of place, as a regionally specific ecosystem and its other-than-human residents challenge and are challenged by the settler-imposed ideological frameworks that assert themselves over and into physical space. In this collection of poems, split into three sections titled: “Living Beings: Okanagan Plants and Animals”; “This Place Here: Okanagan Places and People”; and “Woodhaven: A Crisis of Place,” Holmes interrogates moments where the other-than-human urges humankind towards self-reflection. In her poem “Snk’lip” (the N’Syilxcen Okanagan word for Coyote, a trickster figure), the corpse of a coyote pup inspires the poem’s speaker to imagine Coyote (Snk’lip) rising from death and the ever-encroached upon endangered grasslands, wearing a jacket plastered with “billboard bling, loving it / strutting around with garish ad jewelry,” wearing “sunglasses the size of swimming pools,” kicking out the “homeless / snakes, owls, pine trees and other weaklings” and gleefully rejecting myth and story in favour of a capitalist fervour, and finally exclaiming: ‘Rip up the place! / Rip! Rip! Rip!’” These kinds of

acerbic turns abound in Holmes' collection of "Nature Poems." As with many so-called "nature poems," Holmes' poems have more to do with the speaker's embodied and emplaced subjectivity than they do with geography. In these poems, Holmes critiques her complicity in settler consumption while playing with the traditional form of the nature poem. The dead coyote puppy, which might initially appear in her poem as another victim of human encroachment on wilderness space, rises, gleeful, ever-the-trickster to remind the reader that he is not imperilled, but a human culture bent on its own destruction.

Holmes's poetry is not so much concerned with the problems of settling but is more concerned with what it means to stay. In Holmes's lyrics, staying requires a long-term and ethical engagement with place, while settling entails blind and destructive appropriations. Holmes's lyrical meditations on staying on unceded First Nation territory challenge other regionally situated representations of place, including those of naturalists, tourists, developers, and scientists (92). In her poems, like "Guide's Book: Wildflowers of the Southern Interior of British Columbia" and "Off the Path, in the Dark Woods," the scientific language of bioclimatic zones and the naming of flora and fauna are shown to be massively inadequate and problematic in the face of the embodied experience of place and of Syilx presence. In "Guide's Book," the Nsyilxcen names the Latin, English, and often-nostalgic names bestowed on the Okanagan's flowering plants that haunt the speaker. At the same time, the intersection of disparate bioclimatic zones creates what the speaker facetiously calls a "crisis of place" in "Off the Path." Imported appellations and regional descriptors sit uneasily in Holmes's Okanagan.

Holmes's series of nature poems repeatedly recognize the primacy of Indigenous Syilx epistemology and a personal alienation from this knowing. In the poem "Landing," Holmes's speaker describes being in one of Jeanette Armstrong's classes and her experience of listening to

Armstrong speak Nsyilxcən and of “writing down words [they] cannot say” and “ashamed of [their] own handwriting.” Here, the speaker longs to discern in the words they cannot understand the place where they dwell but remains beyond comprehension. Her collection closes with the poem “Guide’s Last Words” and with the line “ask yourself, ask the rattlesnake, could you stay?” (106). Here, Holmes provokes an ethical response from her readers, urging them to consider what it means to stay and the ethical implications of long-term habitation, particularly within fragile ecosystems and on unceded territory. Holmes’s lyric poetry and work through the Eco Art Incubator provide a potent critique of settler culture, and they work to promote new instituting imaginaries and new ways of staying.

## VANISHING ORCHARDS

As contemporary narratives about the Okanagan shift away from settling and the frenetic activity involved in overwriting grasslands with Edenic manifestations of settler fantasies, the region’s writers are increasingly considering what it means to stay and the impacts that the perspective of wanting settlement has had. The orchards, rapidly displaced by housing subdivisions, golf courses and vineyards, are steadily becoming a sign without referent (Baudrillard 24). Kelowna’s Orchard Park Mall, the region’s largest shopping complex, serves as a shopping hub in the wider region and sits on the central point of a 10 kilometre stretch of strip malls and big box stores. The mall’s name and its glowing red apple logo refers to a point, before its construction in 1971, when the land on which it sits was an orchard. This history is marked in a series of poorly labelled photos of orchards and orchard workers that line a corridor’s walls leading to a busy set of public washrooms. As in Baudrillard’s analogy of the worn, frayed and



near-ruined imperial map, the orchard here has “discrete charm of second-order simulacra [...] whose vestiges subsist” in various forms (1). The Okanagan orchard, as Tomlinson argues in an interview with David Chau, can serve as “a microcosm of Canadian history,” a space through which “historical scars” might be “laid bare.” Lorraine Code argues that to generate “more responsible knowings” of epistemic locations, like those of the Okanagan orchard and the lands on which they are rooted, a “specifically located, multifaceted analyses of knowledge production” is required, one which observes “biographical, historical, demographic, and geographic locations” (7). Jeannette Armstrong, like Code, argues for an attentiveness to “the polyvocal history of the here” that is particularly attuned to “particularities of place” and to “bioregional perspectives” (Armstrong, “Keynote”). Armstrong, in her critical work, argues that our current climate crisis calls for particular attentiveness to the stories we are telling about the land, as it is stories that shape the land and are what speak to and teach the “people-to-be” (Armstrong, “Literature of the Land,” 355). These kinds of analyses lack the self-certainty and the “reductionism endemic in the positivist post-Enlightenment legacy” and instead initiate a process of inquiry, wherein we might begin to discern the convergence of forces that shape how we understand the places in which we dwell, why we tell the stories we tell about those places, and begin to determine what stories we want to tell next. In narratives about Okanagan orchards, we can start tracing the multiple historical and cultural threads bound together in these agricultural spaces. Through this process, we might also note the voices that are absent and overwritten while also noting the broader ecological and cultural consequences of the orchards as settler-fashioned Edens.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ, THE OGOPOGO & CONTESTED WATERS

Until a few years ago, a large concrete play sculpture of the Ogopogo lake monster sat in uneasy vigil over a kids' splash park on the shores of Okanagan Lake. The statue, designed and installed in 1990, was concrete and 53 feet long and 8 feet at the highest point (Berry). The sculpture, which depicted a cartoonish, bright green Ogopogo breaching a surface and ensnared in a net, was large enough that my seven-year-old son needed a spotter as he climbed the ropes and scaled the trapped cryptid's neck (Figure 2).

We had found ourselves at the Kelowna park as a reprieve from visiting family and my husband's grandmother, who was in the hospital dying from leukemia. My brother-in-law, Morgan and I watched as my husband and son played; the lake, gray under March skies, behind them. Morgan, who shares my killjoy tendencies, mused about how the sculpture was functioning as a problematic settler iteration of the Syilx Okanagan story of n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ, a story that we knew only through rumour, despite both growing up in the Okanagan. A story which we believed had something to do with a murderer who was turned into a monster that demanded blood sacrifice. Our musings were put on hold by the calls from my son for Morgan and me to join him on top of the ensnared monster. We exchanged guilty glances and quickly found excuses not to climb the sculpture and further disrespect the spirit of n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ. Instead, I took a picture and promised myself that I would do more to learn the story of n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ as a small act of respect.

Several months later, the four of us found ourselves at the same park again, but the statue was gone this time. We laughed, imagining a vengeful n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ breaching the surface of the

lake to take to shore to address this settler colonial act of disrespect. However, through my research for this project, I was disappointed to learn that the sculpture of Ogopogo was not removed through supernatural intervention (Figure 3). Instead, it was removed by the city in April 2019 due to safety concerns for not meeting current safety codes that forbade “climbable features at spray parks” (Berry). *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ*, even in the form of a cartoonishly ensnared Ogopogo, had proven dangerous.

In what follows, I examine how settlers navigate and write about the Okanagan waters and the creatures and spirits that call these waters home. I start with *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ*, better known to settlers as Ogopogo, who has had a presence in the valley’s eponymous Lake Okanagan since time immemorial and who appears in literary and imaginative representation in a variety of guises. This chapter begins by examining the many ways the Ogopogo surfaces in the popular imaginary and the literary works of the region. I then look to texts in which the Okanagan’s lakes are situated firmly within a contemporary context and where bodies of water are increasingly threatened by human pollutants, texts where the lakes are so central to life in the semi-arid valleys. This chapter examines how Okanagan waters are figured as a resource, scarce, abundant, haunted, sublime and otherwise, in the narratives of writers Jeannette Armstrong, Jason Dewinetz, Nancy Holmes, John Lent, Laisha Rosnau, Gail Scott, and Dania Tomlinson. What follows looks primarily at texts that emerge from, or contend with, diasporic European settler-invader narrative traditions and examines how these texts imagine the hydrological character of a space contested on various fronts. Again, this chapter adopts a bioregional approach, one that views literature embedded in and contributing to a bioregional imagination (Lynch, Glotfelty and Armbruster 10; Aberley, ‘Interpreting,’ 24; Thayer 94). In examining water as it moves through literary texts, I take the counsel of Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and

Astrida Neimanis, who argue that “thinking with water encourages relational thinking,” a mode of inquiry that looks to “notions of fluidity, viscosity, and porosity” (12). While, as Chen, MacLeod and Neimanis argue, thinking with water encourages the navigation of a body of watery metaphors, they also argue that “water does not exist in the abstract. [...] All water is situated” (Chen, MacLeod and Neimanis 8). What follows considers the actualities of context and the imaginaries that shape the bioregion within the situatedness of the Okanagan basin (4). This chapter examines literary representations of the Okanagan watershed, noticing an acute attentiveness to regional myth and history and the fragility of the relationship between humans and their watery counterparts.

## NŁAŁŁITK<sup>w</sup> AND THE OGOPOGO

In the Okanagan, the Ogopogo is omnipresent, appearing in various guises to welcome tourists and sell various goods. The Ogopogo was part of the ideological air I breathed, a figure that was both comforting and a reminder of a time when as a child, I would stare at the waves in the lake, hoping to see the creature emerge. As I grew up, the cryptid became less a figure of awe and instead something kitschy, overplayed, and embarrassing – a figure of fun for tourists and ignored by locals. While the Ogopogo statue at the Kelowna City Park splash pad proved too dangerous for its intended purpose, you can still find a sculpture of the Ogopogo in Kerry Park along Kelowna’s downtown waterfront. The statue, created by Peter Soelin in 1960, is one of Kelowna's oldest pieces in the City’s Public Art Collection (City of Kelowna). The fibreglass sculpture, painted a vibrant green and depicting a friendly lake monster, is a favourite of tourists and children. In today’s Okanagan, the ubiquitous Ogopogo swims in the popular imagination of

those on shore and beyond its home in Okanagan Lake. The Ogopogo has long been the touchstone for the Okanagan's lucrative tourism industry, a 2017 report prepared by InterVISTAS Consulting for Tourism Kelowna entitled *Economic Impact of Tourism in Kelowna and the Greater Kelowna* was calculated to be worth \$1.25 billion in economic output ("Tourism Kelowna"). As you travel the length of the Okanagan, the Ogopogo's image greets you from postcard racks and shelves of tourist knickknacks. At the same time, its name graces various local business and clubs, including a bed and breakfast, a parasailing operation, a propane supplier, a swim club and a radio operators association.

In many ways, the Ogopogo functions as what Ulrich Magin terms *Summe der Persnlichkeit*, "an embodiment of the collective psyche of a place" (Magin 211). In his article "Necessary Monsters," Magin examines the Ancient Roman concept of *genius loci*, in which places were understood as holding localized deities or protective spirits that would often be depicted in altars and religious iconography (211). One such *genius loci* is Nehalennia, a Celtic goddess of seafarers, patronized by wealthy Roman citizens who were Celts and perhaps also Germans, and worshipped at altars in the province of Zeeland, the Netherlands, where the Schelde River flowed into the North Sea (MacKillop; Dekker 209). Nehalennia, who is depicted as a young woman who was "often seen seated in a chair with fruit baskets in her lap and besides," was worshipped "not only by local people, but perhaps more frequently by travelers" (MacKillop; Aldhouse-Green 11). Many such altars to *genii loci* exist throughout the Western Roman Empire. Magin argues "that one could claim that this happens still [...] when, for example, the people of Kelowna, on Lake Okanagan, erect a statue of their local lake monster, the Ogopogo" (Magin 211). The Ogopogo sculpture in the heart of Kelowna's lucrative tourist district embodies the collective psyche of settler-configured Okanagan, wherein the frontier has

been tamed, domesticated, and reimagined as a family-friendly, capital-generating tourist attraction.

As the Ogopogo continues to grin at visitors and residents from tourist paraphernalia, the Okanagan Indian Band has taken steps to discourage further misappropriations of  $n\acute{x}a\acute{?}\acute{x}\acute{?}itk^w$  (N'ha-a-itk). In response to the publication of *Ogopogo Odyssey*, a children's book written by Victoria writer Dorothy Hawes and illustrated by Maggie Parr, employed by Disney in Los Angeles, California, Chief Byron Louis of the Okanagan Indian Band, in an interview with CBC News, charged that the book "misappropriates our culture and our beliefs and our structures" (Fisher). *Ogopogo Odyssey* tells the story of a young boy who spots the Ogopogo ( $n\acute{x}a\acute{?}\acute{x}\acute{?}itk^w$  or N'ha-a-itk) while visiting his grandparents in the Okanagan Valley and meets a First Nations woman who tells him an Indigenous story about the N'ha-a-itk (Fisher). Hawes, who grew up in Vernon, responded to Chief Louis in an email to CBC by arguing that "many other non-indigenous people have written about this same myth many times" (Fisher). Hawes goes on to argue that having grown up in the Okanagan, "the Ogopogo and the stories surrounding the mysterious lake creature are very much a part of my heritage. The Ogopogo itself is a Canadian icon (just as the Loch Ness monster is to Scotland), and the story of Chief Timbasket is in the public domain" (Fisher).

This sense that Indigenous stories are in the public domain and fair game for settler appropriations has long been part of the fabric of Canadian cultural identity, as has Indigenous resistance to such appropriations. In Lenore Keeshig-Tobias's "Stop Stealing Native Stories," first published in *The Globe and Mail* on January 26, 1990, Keeshig-Tobias argues that

Stories, you see, are not just entertainment. Stories are power. They reflect the deepest, the most intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture, thinks. (Keeshig-Tobias 583)

Keeshig-Tobias goes on to challenge her settler audience to do better, quoting Metis writer Maria Campbell in a CBC interview who stated, “If you want to write our stories, then be prepared to live with us,” with Keeshig-Tobias adding an important addendum: “And not just for a few months” (585). While Hawes did consult with the Okanagan Indian Band at the end of her writing process and said that in the meeting, she was able to correct the “spelling for N'ha-a-itk and referencing of the Okanagan Syilx People,” Chief Louis said that Hawes was “advised during that meeting that the Okanagan Indian Band did not support her book and did not want her to publish it” (Fisher). Chief Louis went on to argue that

If you're really serious about wanting to have people learn about a culture, you don't come in there with a finished product. At that point you are not serious about seeking to make sure that your book is authentic, and everything is being followed. What you're doing is you're looking for some type of check in the list that says, ‘Yes, I've consulted.’ (Fisher)

Twenty-six years after the publication of Keeshig-Tobias’s essay, the deeply rooted settler impulse to misappropriate Indigenous stories persists. The Ogopogo, whose statue beams vacantly above the shores of Okanagan Lake in the tourist hub of the Okanagan in Kelowna, might be read as a bright green and monstrous embodiment of the Canadian practice of misappropriating Indigenous stories and culture in the service of settler fantasies.

## OGOPOGO STORIES: HISTORY, MYTHS AND FABRICATIONS

The lake monster is not one thing but multitudes. It is a memory, a premonition, a haunted history, a cursed future. (Tomlinson 330)

On 23 August 1926, at a luncheon in Vernon, B.C., where the Vancouver Board of Trade were guests of the Vernon Board of Trade and the Vernon Rotary Club, the Okanagan Lake monster, known to the Syilx as  $n\check{x}a\text{?}\check{x}\text{?}itk^w$ , was given its settler moniker, ‘Ogopogo’ (Ormsby, *Pioneer and Gentlewoman*, 22). It was before this assembly of businessmen that “The Kalamalka Players, a group of talented amateurs at Vernon,” sang a H.F. Beattie parody of a song written by Davy Burnaby, which contained the refrain:

I'm looking for the Ogopogo

The bunny-hugging Ogopogo

His mother was a mutton,

his father was a whale,

I'm going to put a little bit of salt on his tail. (22)

While Margaret Ormsby and Dorothy Hewlett Gellatly, author of the 1932 publication, *A Bit of Okanagan History*, agree that the name originated at the 1926 Vernon Luncheon, Peter Costello, in *In Search of Lake Monsters* and Arlene Gaal, in *Ogopogo: The True Story of the Okanagan Lake Million Dollar Monster*, propose that the name originated from a David Burnaby song parodied by *Vancouver Province* reporter Ronald Kenvyn, which *The Province* newspaper in 1955 reports, was sung by Bill Brimblecome at a 1924 dinner held in Vernon for the Vancouver Board of Trade (*The Province*). Kenvyn’s parody is equally irreverent and has the following lyrics:



His mother was an earwig;  
His father was a whale;  
A little bit of head and hardly any tail –  
And Ogopogo was his name.

While Elizabeth Knowles concurs that the name ‘Ogopogo’ is an invented word derived from a British music hall song, she dates the piece as having been written in 1924. She attributes it to a C. Clark, noting that “no contemporary copy of this has been traced.” The name stuck, and in 1932, the ‘Ogopogo’ achieved wider fame when “a report of Mr. J. L. Logie's chasing “Ogopogo” in his automobile eventually found its way into the columns of *Punch*, a popular British weekly magazine of humour and satire” (Gellatly 23). Gellatly writes that “after that, [...] no one could say that ‘Ogopogo,’ of Okanagan Lake, was not famous” (23). While the origins and provenance of the name ‘Ogopogo’ are murky at best, in all these accounts, the lake monster is named by the settler community in the “spirit of fun” (Gellatly 23).

In this renaming of n̓xaʔx̌itkʷ, we see another instance of white settler culture working to control the Other semiotically. Lawrence Berg, who looks at settler naming in Vernon, a town at the northern end of the Okanagan valley, argues that the “symbolic politics of naming are imbricated in the very material politics of accumulation by dispossession” (14). Sherene Razak, in *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (2002), contends that implicit to North American white settler mythologies is a construction that places “European settlers as bearers of civilization, while simultaneously trapping Aboriginal people in the pre-modern” (Razack 2). Drawing on Razak's work, Berg posits that this trapping of Syilx in the premodern enables white Vernonites to “safely ignore Aboriginal people” and continue naming and forcefully appropriating unceded lands. Berg contends that this ongoing settler renaming of

Indigenous territory forms part of a process “that reinforce[s] the effacement of this dispossession and marginalization of Aboriginal people” (Berg 21).

In the enthusiastic adoption of the name ‘Ogopogo,’ whose dubious provenance perhaps traces back to a parodied British dance hall ditty. The dancehall song trivializes and diminishes *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ*, reducing the spirit of the lake to a figure of fun. In both pieces, *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ*’s imagined parentage is the subject of humour, described as the offspring of a union between a whale and mutton or an earwig and a whale: ludicrous interspecies unions that ridicule the origins of *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ*. In both songs and subsequent settler iterations, *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ* become ‘Ogopogo,’ *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ* undergoes what Baudrillard terms a “murder by simulation” by the settler institutions of power (Baudrillard 24). Through the Vernon Board of Trade and the Vernon Rotary Club, *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ* is divorced from Syilx cultural context and is stripped of “any substance or an autonomous reality” (Baudrillard 24).

In an introductory essay for the program to the recent operatic production, *The Lake | N-ha-a-itk*, Jordan Coble of the Westbank First Nation works to undo some of the damage that the initial misnaming, trivialization and ongoing commodification have wrought on *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ*. As Coble explains, “The word *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ*, pronounced n-ha-ha-eet-kew, translates to “the sacred spirit of the lake,” an embodiment that is to be “respected and honoured not feared or trivialized” (Coble). The Syilx, Coble explains, observe “protocols centred on respect for the lake and its spirit and also acknowledge that if this respect is not maintained, the waters will become angry; *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ* will appear and not be kind to those who disregard these protocols” (Coble). In his essay, Coble dismisses the widely held and repeated settler “misperception that Syilx people would honour *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ* by offering sacrificial animals to *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ*, specifically chickens and pigs,” clarifying that “we pay our respects by offering medicines to the water in the form of

tobacco or sage.” This settler-held belief that the Syilx people would routinely offer animal sacrifices was repeated in the *Princeton Star* on August 12, 1926, as the editor reported that when crossing the lake in a storm, “the Indians were wont to carry a pup, a pig or a chicken, which they would throw overboard to appease the monster” (Stern 57). In his work to debunk and clarify a host of misapprehensions, Coble explains that

Although the Syilx people have referred to the creature of the lake as *n̓xaʔx̌ʔitkʷ* for centuries, *n̓xaʔx̌ʔitkʷ* actually refers to more than just one single creature. It is the creature(s), the lake itself, the rivers and waterways that feed the lake, the flora and fauna that surround the lake as well as all fish and other life that reside within the lake. *n̓xaʔx̌ʔitkʷ* is exemplified through our connection to all its facets. [...] When the lake can be restored to a healthy state, *n̓xaʔx̌ʔitkʷ* will once again play in the waters that have been its home since time immemorial. (Coble)

This understanding of *n̓xaʔx̌ʔitkʷ* as encompassing an ecosystem and a relational, reciprocal ethos of environmental stewardship is wildly at odds with the contemporary settler manifestations of an ‘Ogopogo,’ a creature who is often described through “imperial stylistics” that view the landscape and its inhabitants through a Eurocentric lens, as “Canada's Loch Ness Monster” (Pratt 199; Radford).

The popularly held settler notion that *n̓xaʔx̌ʔitkʷ* was “a bloodthirsty killer [...] that would demand a live sacrifice from travellers for safe passage across Lake Okanagan” first appears in the writing of memoirist and poet Susan Allison (Radford). Allison, noted for being the “first non-native to clearly see Ogopogo [...] in 1872,” is remembered for her prolific writings on her experience in arriving in the Okanagan in the 1860s (Freeman). Susan Louisa Moir was a Scot who grew up in Sri Lanka before landing in the Okanagan. There she met John

Allison, who “ran a pack train for the Hudson's Bay Company” and had three children with his Indigenous wife, Nora Yakumtikum (Twigg). Marriage to Allison offered Moir an escape from poverty, as she and her family faced “straightened circumstances” after the disappearance of her stepfather, Thomas Glennie (Twigg). Glennie, who brought the Moir family to British Columbia with the hope that he would become “a country squire in the rich land of the goldfields,” vanished in 1864, leaving the family to make do on their own (Twigg). John and Susan would raise “14 children (two from John’s first marriage and 12 of her own)” and would become “deeply interested in the Indian peoples of the region” and their stories (Pawsey qtd in Hunt; Twigg). While, as Allison recounts in her memoir, her “husband always laughed at Indian yarns,” she “did not, for [she] thought there must be some foundation for what they said” (Allison, *Pioneer and Gentlewoman*, 41).

Allison, in her autobiographical writing, recalls first hearing a tale of the Ogopogo as she travelled over the waters of Okanagan Lake, noting that “the Indians did not call him [Ogopogo] but spoke as if it were some supernatural entity” (41). Allison did not hear a harrowing tale of the bloodthirsty lake monster from the Syilx people but from Johnny McDougall, a Metis “the son of a mill owner at Red River,” born in 1827 who for 20 years worked as a packer with the Hudson's Bay Company. McDougal took wagon trains into the Okanagan Valley in the early 1840s before he retired from the Company in 1861 upon his staking land near Kelowna (Ormsby 117). McDougall had helped build the Allison house and assisted the family with haying and planting oats. He accompanied them as they traveled north from the Similkameen to what is now West Bank on the western shore of Okanagan Lake. McDougall tells Susan Allison of his narrow escape from the cryptid around a campfire after the children have gone to bed. Allison recounts McDougal’s story as follows,

Johnny wanted to bring a team across the lake to assist haying, so he drove them to the Narrows where he often crossed the horses he used hunting, but he had always taken a chicken or little pig and dropped it into the lake when they neared the middle. This time he forgot the chicken and was towing the horses by a long rope. Suddenly something, he couldn't see what, dragged the horses down underwater and the canoe he was in would have gone too had he not severed the rope with his sheath knife and hurried across. He never saw any vestige of his team again. (42)

McDougall's story reads as a tall tale. James Hart defines a tall tale as "the type of frontier anecdote characterized by exaggeration [...], with realistic details of character or local customs that work toward a cumulative effect of the grotesque, romantic, or humorous," wherein the humour depends "upon the incongruity between the realism in which the scene and narrator are portrayed and the fantastically comic world of the enclosed narrative" (Hart). Allison, who professes that McDougall's tale holds "a strange charm" for her, does not question the veracity of McDougall's tale but instead seems to have taken it as sincere cautionary tale (42). Allison will later claim to have seen the lake monster herself from her log cabin at Sunnyside Ranch in autumn 1873, as she watched her husband make a treacherous journey across Okanagan Lake to obtain winter supplies (Ormsby 1). Allison's fascination with the lake monster extends to her poem, "Okanagan Lake Monster Was Baleful Creature with Supernatural Powers," printed in the *Princeton Star* on August 12, 1926. Allison sets her narrative poem in the waters around Rattlesnake Island off Squally Point, rumoured to be the home of the lake monster, and focuses on the plight of an unlucky group of fishers (who, like her husband, found themselves on the lake in a storm):

Upon that barren island  
A fell monster makes his bed.  
The night is calm and pleasant,  
All fears are laid at rest -  
How could evil lurk beneath  
The calm lake's pellucid breast?

[...]

Over the lake a moaning comes  
Like a soul that's full of woe,  
Softly breathing forth its sorrows  
In a mournful voice and low.  
The black waves are drawing nearer  
And their white crest foaming gleam,  
As the wind that drives them onward  
Bursts forth with a ghastly scream.

[...]

'Twas floating on the heaving lake,  
Two troubled skies between,  
But of the crew that manned her

Not a living soul was seen.  
Far westward on the island,  
The grim island all men dread,  
Their bones lie bare and bleaching  
Among rocks all stained with red.

(Allison, *In Her Words*, 59-60)

As the poem's title states, the monster here is indeed baleful. The poem employs accentual-syllabic verse and is composed of octets and sestets. It has a singsong quality that creates an atmospheric and melancholic lament and warning for readers. Like McDougall, who offers up the lake monster through the tall tale's sensational mode, so does Allison's poem seek to captivate and disquiet its readers. McDougall and Allison's lake monster, who breathes "forth its sorrows" and is described as an "evil" that lurks and leaves the bones of fishers "bare and bleaching / Among rocks all stained with red," is far removed from the smiling version of the monster we see grinning from tourist knickknacks up and down the Okanagan basin. At the same time, Allison's portrayal of Okanagan Lake is not just a picturesque selling feature for real estate or recreation. Rather, the lake is depicted as a body of water that contains danger, sorrow, and evil, personified by the monster who has supernatural power over the weather.

#### OPERATIC ADAPTATIONS AND CRITICAL RESPONSES

The lake monster Susan Allison professed to have seen in the stormy waters of Okanagan Lake in 1873 resurfaces again in *The Lake*, a modernist, one-act chamber opera written as a collaboration between composer Barbara Pentland and poet Dorothy Livesay. The opera was

produced as a radio play on CBC's Wednesday Night program in 1954 (Keyes 40). The opera is set around John and Susan Allison's home at Sunnyside Ranch (whose homestead today exists in restored condition on the land currently occupied by the Quails' Gate Winery in Westbank, B.C.) (Ingraham and Wells 105). n̓xaʔx̓ʔitk<sup>w</sup>, called Na-a-it-ka in the Livesay and Pentland collaboration, is central to the opera's dramatic event, where John Allison and Johnny Mac (a character based on Johnny McDougall) cross Okanagan Lake in a storm in the autumn of 1873 to obtain winter supplies, while a nine-months-pregnant Susan Allison watches from land in fear that Na-a-it-ka will take them below the waves.

Critics Mary Ingraham, Brianna Wells, Daniel Keyes, and Dylan Robinson all provide critical readings of Pentland and Livesay's 1954 modernist opera's settler colonial problematics. Daniel Keyes's "Whites Singing Red Face in British Columbia in the 1950s" considers the "persistence of neo-colonial red face in the Canadian national imaginary" (30) while paying particular critical attention to *The Lake*. In *The Lake*, Keyes argues that "Naaitka [the lake monster] poses a monstrous but temporary threat to the colonial order of John Allison" (49). Keyes goes on to argue that Pentland and Livesay's opera functions as a kind of "red face," which he defines as the means by which "invader settlers seek to control the Other semiotically [...] and thus gain a sense of identity that ameliorates their settler status to make them 'native'" (30). As Keyes points out, the opera does not address the historical realities of the Allisons' pre-emption of stolen Syilx land. Nor does it "interrogate the exalted narrative of agricultural progress that assumes settler-invaders improve the lot of First Nations by bringing them the benefits of European modernity" (42-43). The opera, Keyes argues, consigns its "racialized characters of Marie, McDougal, Cherumshoot, and even Naaitka" to subsidiary roles, where they serve as background to the "main exalted themes of civilizing settlement" (42-43). Indeed,



Marie, in the play's character summation, is described as "an elderly Indian woman from the Reserve, child nurse and domestic to Mrs. Allison" (Livesay and Pentland 1), is a figure without the specific tribal affiliation and from a reserve that could not yet exist, as the Indian Reserve Commission did not impose its reserve system in the Okanagan until after 1887 (Armstrong, Derickson, Maracle and Young-Ing 52). Keyes argues that the opera ignores, or glosses over, historical realities and instead offers a vision of "early colonial relations from a sympathetic albeit naive white liberal feminist perspective" (40). Similarly, Dylan Robinson argues that rather than strictly valorizing settlement, Pentland and Livesay use the settler figures of John and Susan Allison

to voice a critique of the relationships between settlers and First Peoples, drawing out tensions between the Okanagan First Nations characters' views regarding care for the land, and the settlers' views of its productivity and development. (245)

As Ingraham and Wells note, Livesay and Pentland's opera was "written at a time in Canada's history in which the Canadian government had legislated revisions to the Indian Act that would reinstate Aboriginal rights to public performance of rituals and ceremonies" (104-105). Like Robinson and Keyes, Ingraham and Wells argue that the Livesay and Pentland opera serves as "a mid-twentieth-century reflection on a late nineteenth-century story of settler-Indigenous contact," one that invites "cross-examination for its representation of a historical settler-Indigenous encounter from the 1860s through to the 1880s" (105).

The opera closes with the onset of a birth, as Susan Allison, who, during birthing contractions, sings, "let our children grow to love and nurture it [the land] from wilderness, / fruitfulness, close to the land, knowing the Lake," following which all the characters sing

“Na-a-it-ka, Na-a-it-ka, Na-a-it-ka” in unison (52-53). Keyes argues that this birth at the end of the opera serves as “a triumph for white heterosexual settlement that is coded as an inevitable and pastoral white fertility” that leaves “settler-invaders as the “new” natives to improve the land” (Keyes 42). In *Settler Feminism and Race Making in Canada*, Jennifer Henderson argues that criticism has long tended to observe a “gendered sense of an aboriginal relation to the wilderness” in settler women’s writing about wilderness encounters (4). In *The Lake*, giving birth to a child “close to the land, knowing the Lake” offers the Allison a means through which they might claim an indigenous relation to the land under the eye of Na-a-it-ka, the invoked spirit of the lake. As Henderson and Keyes argue, these kinds of claims to an essential feminine connection to the land “reinvents nineteenth-century attempts to indigenize settler culture, or render it ‘native’,” thus replicating “the microphysics of power in a settler colony” (Henderson 4; 3). Na-a-it-ka, who earlier in the opera appears beyond the fourth wall in a moment that Keyes “suggests the monstrosity is not some ancient First Nation’s spirit, but the white audience entertained by this spectacle” (Keyes 42). Na-a-it-ka is described in phallic terms as “a huge tree trunk—undulating—moving fast,” is no longer a figure of spectacle by the end of the opera, but a unifying force (Livesay and Pentland 35). Settler and Indigenous epistemologies are presented as coalescing with the settlement project in the birth of the Allison’s child and the communal singing of “Na-a-it-ka.” At this moment, the settler family claims a kind of Indigenous connection to place—a claim that ignores the settler-invader “machinations of power” (Henderson 4).

The lake monster Susan Allison professed to have seen in the stormy waters of Okanagan Lake in 1873 resurfaces again in 1995 when opera singer Heather Pawsey found a handwritten score for *The Lake* in the archives of the National Music Centre (Hunt, “Ogopogo”). Pawsey,

who was instantly enamoured with *The Lake*, performed it as a concert version at the Vancouver Chan Centre in 2012 to mark the 100th anniversary of Pentland's birth (Hull). Here, Pawsey met Delphine Derickson, a musician, singer, teacher and member of the Westbank First Nation and keeper of the Westbank First Nations cultural tradition. She was in the audience and introduced herself to Pawsey following the performance. In an interview for *The Globe and Mail*, Derickson explains that she felt compelled to approach Pawsey, stating, "Our history [is] never really told from our point of view, so it was an opportunity for me, because I'm a teacher ... to [provide] the correct information." As Pawsey recalls of their first conversation, Derickson told her, "one of the functions in my nation is that I own my family, I own songs to do with the lake and the creature in the lake," before Derickson offered to share a Syilx song about n̓xaʔx̓ʔitk<sup>w</sup> with Pawsey (Hunt).

Through this meeting, a collaboration between Pawsey, Derickson, Westbank First Nation Member (WFN), Vancouver's Turning Point Ensemble, and Astrolabe Musik Theatre was born. This collaboration culminated in *The Lake / N-ha-a-itk*. This production draws on Pentland and Livesay's 1954 opera but also includes Syilx dance, song, drumming, storytelling, and an original composition by Montréal-born pianist, conductor and composer Leslie Uyeda. The collaborative process began in 2012 and culminated in August 2014 when three live performances took place on an outdoor stage at Quails' Gate Estate Winery (West Kelowna) ("The Lake / n'-Ha-a-Itk Opera Documentary Film"). Between May 13-24, 2019, *The Lake / N'-ha-a-itk Opera Documentary Film* was filmed on location at Quails' Gate Winery in the original Allison homestead cabin and outdoor sites overlooking Lake Okanagan and in the Westbank First Nation (ibid.). The film features interviews and reflections on the opera and its creative

process with key artists and collaborators in nsyilxcən and English. The film, released in 2021, became the first and only Canadian opera on film.

Critics Mary Ingraham and Brianna Wells argue the intercultural collaboration that brought *The Lake / N'-ha-a-itk* into existence serves to reorganize “structures of authority and authorship common in opera into a process akin to some forms of ‘collective creation’” (102). Ingraham and Wells note that “collective creation” in spoken theatre is based in some way on existing texts and forms a response to a prior form of theatre-making that is felt to be “aesthetically, interpersonally, and/or politically constraining, oppressive, or in some manner, unethical” (Ingraham and Wells 105; Syssoyeva and Proudfit 5). The production uses Livesay and Pentland’s opera as a source text and intentionally disrupts “the settler stories with Syilx voices in Livesay’s libretto and Pentland’s musical setting” (Ingraham and Wells 109). It encourages viewers to consider “accepted historical ‘truths’ about settler motivations, Indigenous lifeways, and cultural values” (Ingraham and Wells 109). Ingraham and Wells argue that

In addressing the representation of Okanagan peoples within the 1952 text collaboratively, the creators of *The Lake / N'-ha-a-itk* unsettled the opera in terms of its dramaturgical structure. They also confronted operatic traditions of privileging the authority of composers (if not always librettists) over the communities whose stories are shared through music. Without changing any of Pentland’s actual notes, therefore, they re-centred the responsibility and rights of authorship away from a settler representation of Indigenous “Other” and towards collective learning and music making. (115)

Ingraham and Wells further argue that the collaborative act of collective creation involved in making *The Lake / N'-ha-a-itk* might be “a model for thinking through opera as a possible site for both cross-cultural community building and for exploring settler–Indigenous interactions more

broadly” (104). Jordan Coble, a Westbank First Nation cultural heritage researcher who worked closely with the Pawsey and Derickson, explains that for him, it was vital that “we have our representation from our perspective [...] to ensure that there was Okanagan people there, [...] representing our voices, our songs, our history, our connection to the lake and N-ha-a-itk” (Coble qtd. in Ingraham and Wells 108). Coble goes on to describe the experience of working on the production as

a celebration of two worlds coming together, in a very good way, to represent the aspect of time from Susan Allison to the creation of the actual opera itself in the 1950s to the contemporary times today and that we live in, where we share the lands, we work and we walk alongside one another . . . in a very good way . . . but there’s also things that have happened over history that need to be addressed and that’s what I wanted to focus on.

(Coble qtd. in Ingraham and Wells 108)

This sense of two worlds coming together in a “good way” mark a stark shift in the history of settler representations of *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ*, a shift that recognizes *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ* as “the sacred spirit of the lake,” an embodiment that is to be “respected and honoured not feared or trivialized” (Coble). Unlike Dorothy Hawes, author of *Ogopogo Odyssey*, charged with misappropriating Syilx culture and beliefs (Fisher), *The Lake / N-ha-a-itk* through its praxis of collective creation, offers a model by which Indigenous individuals and communities may be heard. This act of collective creation also provides a means by which *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ* may cast off the settler assigned misappropriation “Ogopogo,” and reassert itself as a force intrinsic to a living culture and bioregion, a force that calls for respect and even reverence.

#### SIGNS, SIGNIFIERS AND THE OGOPOGO IN *OUR ANIMAL HEARTS*

In Dania Tomlinson's *Our Animal Hearts* (2008), n̓x̓aʔx̓ʔitk<sup>w</sup> dwells in the shifting terrain of the Canadian historical novel. The genre of the historical novel has worked to popularize and mythologize what Carole Gerson calls "Canada's neglected history" (Gerson 91). Andrea Cabajsky and Brett Josef Grubisic, in their introduction to *National Plots: Historical Fiction and Changing Ideas of Canada* (2010), observe that for two centuries, "the Canadian historical novel has also enjoyed the dubious distinction of being a problematic genre" as it has grappled with "the psychological damage of Canada's fraught cultural inheritance" (Cabajsky, and Grubisic viii). Herb Wyile, in *Speculative Fictions*, notes that over the past three decades, writers of historical fiction have "become more aware of the interrelation between finding and telling that is such a preoccupation of current theorizing about historical discourse" (Wyile 5). Wyile argues that Canada's writers of historical fiction are "contributing to an investigation of the role of representations of the past in the construction of social, political, cultural, and, not least of all, national discourse" (5). Tomlinson's novel is engaged in this project, as it examines the Okanagan as a social, political, cultural and geographic site between 1904 and 1942. It unpacks how settlers from England, Wales, Japan, Ukraine and Scotland might project personal and cultural ways of knowing onto Lake Okanagan and the wider region. In an interview with David Chau for *The Georgia Straight*, Tomlinson explains that, for her, the novel "soon became a microcosm of Canadian history. Looking at the story through a microlens—or a macro lens—changes what the story's about. It was really important to me that all these historical scars were laid bare" (Tomlinson qtd. Chau). Tomlinson's novel seeks to uncover the oppressive structural racism that works conjointly with the colonial project in British Columbia. The novel, rooted firmly in the geographic terrain and histories of the Okanagan Valley, is attuned to the

“psychological damage of Canada’s fraught cultural inheritance” (Cabajsky and Grubisic viii). It is also attuned to our current cultural moment, in which scholars and writers reassess settler relations with Indigenous peoples and the foundations, practices and omnipresent tendrils of the colonial project in Canada. In *Our Animal Hearts*, n̓x̓aʔx̓ʔitk<sup>w</sup> (Naitaka), which serves as the novel’s dominant leitmotif, navigates all of these currents.

In Tomlinson’s novel, n̓x̓aʔx̓ʔitk<sup>w</sup> is bestowed with an ever-shifting series of names and significations, depending on who gazes upon it and in what context. It is alternately called an addanc, Kami and Ogoopgo in the narrative. The creature also has an Indigenous name that the protagonist Iris Sparks, cannot pronounce, instead using “Naitaka,” a version easier for her tongue. In the novel’s prologue, set in Winter 1941, Tomlinson considers these various iterations and how, to use Magin’s terminology, “Naitaka” functions as the Okanagan’s *Summe der Persnlichkeit*, or “embodiment of the collective psyche place” (Magin 211).

In the prologue, the novel’s monster is multitudinous, part of the polyvocal history of the Okanagan Valley’s Indigenous and settler inhabitants and introduced through the clauses: “some say” and “others claim” (Tomlinson 1). The monster is presented as a creature that may glide “through waterways beneath mountains to get from lake to river to ocean and back again”; as a monster that “some say” may have been an evil man who committed the first murder and who becomes an “evil that never dissolves, only changes shapes, drift from one body to another” – though how he ended up in the lake “was never part of the story”; as a possible “descendant of the biblical Leviathan, or Kelpie, or the Loch Ness, or the Mizuchi dragon”; and as a creature that may have travelled “underground” or “was brought [...] from the green lakes of northern Wales or Japan or the Mediterranean Sea, its larval form hidden under a hat or sewn into a bodice or sucked like a stone in the mouth of a child” (1). After introducing settler postulations

on the monster's origins, the protagonist lays out an Indigenous account of the monster's presence. However, this account is filtered through her limited understanding, as some Indigenous stories (as her Indigenous teacher, Henry, has told her) are not for her. Again, this hypothesis begins a polyvocal clause:

And still there are some who claim that the lake monster was never a man or a descendant of some foreign monster, but had existed in this valley long before the settlers came with their books and relics and shrines, before the first people canoed from shore to shore to hunt the forests surrounding the lake, even before the lake itself, which arrived in the form of ice poured from a hole in the sky. They say the monster is the spirit of the lake, the very face of the deep. (1-2)

In this account, we can hear the words of Jordan Coble, of the Westbank First Nation, who seeks to correct misapprehensions about n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ in his collaboration on *The Lake*, writing that n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ is “the lake itself.” However, the focus on Indigenous knowledge in this passage is undercut by the last clause, where we can again hear a call back to Western narratives with the words “the very face of the deep” (Tomlinson 2). This, of course, recalls the first passage in the “primeval history” section of the Book of Genesis, in which “God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep” (Coogan 9; Genesis 1.1-1.2). Here, we are reminded that the narrative that follows in Tomlinson's novel will be filtered through what Nancy Holmes terms a “euro-cultural film,” or “glazing gaze” (Holmes, “Okanagan Poets”). Mary Louise Pratt argues that this kind of gaze filters landscapes through an “imperial stylistics” that privileges “the I/eye of a single (and foreign) viewer” whose descriptive terms colour the landscape with “a European palette” (Pratt 199; 204). Tomlinson draws on these



misunderstandings and misreadings as she plays with the various filters through which settlers perceive the region.

In the prologue's last meditation on "the monster," a new epistemological framework for apprehending what swims below the surface is explored, as is a brief reflection on the nature of naming:

Now, so many years later, scientists poked and prodded and vaguely concluded that the lake monster is not a monster at all but a fish, perhaps a sturgeon. But back when we cast our own shadows onto the lake and each claimed the monster we saw there as our own.

We called our monster by name. We called our monster by many names. (2)

Here, Tomlinson's protagonist observes the move from regional myth-making and imperial projection into another kind of imperial framework bent on scientific naming and classification. We also see an acknowledgement that much of what settlers do when casting their gaze upon landscapes in the unceded Indigenous territory is "cast shadows" as they name what they see as their own.

Magin argues that in order "to remain a symbol of a locale, Ogopogo had to adapt to different perceptions of landscape over time" (214). Magin observes the shift in perception of the Ogopogo from being perceived by settlers as a "dangerous elemental" to its contemporary Disneyfication (214). Magin makes a note of the inscription on the plaque erected across from Squally Point by the Department of Recreation and Conservation, making a note of its "naïve Rousseauism with racialistic undertones" (214):

Ogopogo's Home. Before the unimaginative, practical whiteman came, the fearsome lake monster, N'ha-a-itk, was well known to the primitive, superstitious Indians. His home was believed to be a cave at Squally Point, and small animals were carried in the canoes

to appease the serpent. Ogopogo is still seen each year – but now by the white man!

(Magin 214)

As recorded by *The Kelowna Daily Courier*, this ‘Stop of Interest’ marker stood at the side of Highway 97 about 30 kilometres north of Penticton until 2009, when it was damaged by a car. Archaeologist and anthropologist Joanna Hammond, who lives and works in the unceded territories of the Secwepemc, Syilx and Nlaka’pamux nations, has undertaken a project to defamiliarize these ubiquitous public history markers installed by the B.C. Ministry of Transportation. Hammond argues that these signs tell “a tired old story: white people came here, conquered wilderness, and now here we are, prosperous masters of the domain” (Hammond). Hammond notes that these signs, “actively maintain discriminatory structures of settler colonialism by rationalizing unjust historical acts and, in turn, rationalize contemporary marginalization of indigenous people” (Hammond). Indeed, in the text of the sign marking “Ogopogo’s Home,” we see this vividly at play. In this text, the Syilx Okanagan people are described as “primitive, superstitious Indians,” while the “whiteman” is described as “practical” and “unimaginative.” In this context, the word ‘unimaginative’ sets the “whiteman” within a Western framework of scientific empiricism that rejects other epistemes and explicitly those of the region’s Indigenous populations.

With this rejection of Indigenous epistemes comes a renaming. Within the 59 words inscribed on the roadside plaque, “N’ha-a-itk” becomes “Ogopogo.” As many scholars have noted, and as is apparent to anyone looking at place names in territories invaded through colonialism, cartography and place names are cornerstones of settler colonial projects worldwide. Nur Masalha has noted that the main feature of the colonial toponymic project is memoricide and erasure (Masalha 1). On the roadside plaque, this act of erasure is laid bare, as

“N’ha-a-itk,” part of the Indigenous epistemic cosmology, becomes the “white man’s” Ogopogo, a benign presence that may be harnessed and Disneyfied by tourism offices looking to promote the region. The monster itself, n̓xaʔx̓ʔitk<sup>w</sup>, or “N’ha-a-itk,” described as “fearsome,” is rendered toothless by its settler re-nomination.

How settlers have perceived n̓xaʔx̓ʔitk<sup>w</sup> has shifted radically over the relatively short span of years since the colonial project began in the Okanagan. Magin traces this shift in the various titles Arlene Gaal chooses for her books on the Ogopogo (a staple on the book racks at every tourist stop in the region). Magin notes that the shifting titles show

a progression from the descriptive to the interpretative, from the neutral to the adoption of the ‘monster’ as an almost holy symbol: ‘Beneath the Depth’ (1976, neutral), ‘Ogopogo: The True Story of The Okanagan Lake Million Dollar Monster’ (1986, commercialism and tourism), and finally, ‘In Search of Ogopogo: Sacred Creature of the Okanagan Waters’ (2001, ecological awareness). (214)

In Tomlinson’s novel, this shift is dramatized and summed up in the following section from the short and penultimate chapter of the novel:

The lake monster Henry called Naitaka disappeared from local memory the day Viktor and his mob gutted the fish on the shore of the lake. The demon was replaced by the Ogopogo, a mockery of the original. The Ogopogo has snail-like antennae, forest-green flesh, and cartoon eyes. Children still sing songs about the Ogopogo and dress up as comic creatures at parades and festivals. (329)

In Tomlinson’s narrative, we are witness to the moment when Naitaka undergoes a symbolic death at the hands of the settler community, becoming a sign without a referent (Baudrillard 24). Baudrillard unpacks the process by which Indigenous communities and epistemologies fall

victim to a Western ethnological practice that renders “a world completely cataloged and analyzed, then artificially resurrected under the auspices of the real, in a world of simulation,” a world where the “White Community” seeks to make the Indigenous world “posthumous: frozen, cryogenized, sterilized, protected to death,” where the Indigenous community becomes “referential simulacra” (Baudrillard 1561-1562). The lake monster that Henry, the novel’s Indigenous guide, called Naitaka, is described as disappearing “the day Viktor and his mob gutted the fish on the shore of the lake,” soon after becoming the Ogopogo, “a mockery of the original” (Tomlinson 329). Following another monster sighting during a storm by a steamboat captain, a group of the First World War’s “wounded and injured” men who had taken to regular drinking “arranged a mob to go and hunt the lake monster,” gathering in the boat and singing a drunken song that “echoed through Winteridge”:

*I’m looking for the Ogo-pogo, the funny little Ogo-pogo*

*His mother was an earwig, his father was a whale. (293)*

Iris, considering this moment, reasons that “Ogopogo was the name they gave to tame it,” imagining that for each of these men, broken by the war and each “disfigured in some way,” the monster means “something else. Something they might defeat. An enemy they might finally kill” (294; 293). As the 7-day hunt for the monster intensifies, “the lake monster, [...] like Moby Dick, was only ever a vessel they poured their individual evils into” (294). While the Ogopogo may signify a range of things for these men, it never signifies Henry’s Naitaka and certainly not n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ.

When the men eventually return, declaring they have caught the monster, they produce a 6-ft sturgeon and desecrate the fish’s body on the lake shore. Iris is disgusted by this desecration. Again, citing Henry as her source of knowledge, Iris laments the increasing settler developments and damming

of rivers that had endangered the “sacred places that sturgeons came to spawn in,” causing their numbers to dwindle (295). This flash of ecological awareness, which, as Magin notes, would come to inflect contemporary settler readings of the lake and its cryptid inhabitant, feels anachronistic in this interwar narrative. Indeed, the rage Iris feels over the men’s desecration of the sturgeon’s corpse feels alien to her, as she doesn’t “recognize the rage that filled [her] as [her] own” (295). The sturgeon, now Ogopogo, is left to rot on the shores of Winteridge, the stench carried to where the settlers gathered on the pier (296). In the death of the sturgeon, we have a murder of a symbolic form, as *n̓x̓aʔx̓ʔitkʷ* or Naitaka, is symbolically neutralized, no longer alive and a threat in the lake waters, but instead a corpse rotting on the shore, whose monstrous decomposing form will be forgotten and subsumed by the Ogopogo of the drunken songs, a harmless figure of fun and “a mockery of the original” (329). Through this act of symbolic murder, the Naitaka, the demon of Tomlinson’s novel, becomes the Ogopogo. The Ogopogo is not the fearsome creature with the “head of a horse and the body of a snake” that we meet earlier in the novel, but “has snail-like antennae, forest-green flesh, and cartoon eyes” (21; 329). Through a process of what University of Birmingham anthropologist Paul Lester terms Disneyfication, nature and animals are interpreted in such a way as to “represent the final taming and domestication of the frontier wilderness” where the other-than-human is given a “‘homely,’ ‘lovable’ quality denuded of violence and savagery” (Lester 15). The Ogopogo, who was a presence to be feared throughout the novel becomes a figure for children’s songs and a comic creature that is central to the region’s parades and festivals (Tomlinson 239).

Jerome Jeffery Cohen, in *Monster Theory*, argues that monsters are the “embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place” (4). The monster’s body, Cohen argues, “incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy” of the culture that produces them, “giving them life and an uncanny independence” (Cohen 4). Cohen argues the monstrous body is

“pure culture” (4) and is “both corporal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift” (5). Cohen argues the monster can never be caught but instead “dispersed temporarily,” becoming a “revenant” (5). In Tomlinson’s novel, the monster undergoes a series of transformations and is introduced in the prologue as a form springing from the human capacity for evil:

Some say the monster used to be a man, an evil man, and this evil man committed the first murder. I don't know how he ended up in the lake. That was never part of the story. What I do know is that evil never dissolves, only transforms. Changes shape, drifts from one body to another. (Tomlinson 1)

Here, the monster springs not from a single murder but from “the first murder.” In this passage, the specifics of the story of the murder are vague, lost to time, but the evil remains and “never dissolves,” displaying the propensity to shift that Cohen argues is essential to all monstrous bodies.

The monster at the heart of Tomlinson’s novel is uncanny in the Freudian sense. It is the familiar and frightening manifestation of repressed anxiety, unhoused but never straying far from home (Freud 240). Tomlinson’s monster returns throughout the novel to be appeased by, or to prey upon, the characters. Early in the novel Jacob, the eldest of the Sparks children, is nearly killed by the monster. The incident happens shortly after Jacob’s secret romantic relationship with his best friend Ronald is uncovered and mocked by local bullies, causing Jacob to avoid Ronald. As Ronald is helping his father unload dry goods on the pier, surreptitiously watching Jacob swim off the dock with his sister Iris, the monster attacks. Shortly before the attack, Jacob taunts Iris, pretending to see the monster, teasing, “It’s your monster, the addanc. Or is it Leviathan?” He further mocks her when she tells him that Henry calls it “Naitaka,” dismissing the knowledge of the novel’s sole Indigenous representative in the response, “Henry’s an Indian”

(83-84). Immediately after this exchange, Jacob is pulled under the water under the gaze of his spurned lover and in a moment of novelistic hubris. When Jacob is rescued near-dead from the water, he has a wound on his leg that will become infected and take months to heal. Following the incident, Jacob refuses to speak of what had happened, denying his sister's request that he confirm it had been the monster who had attacked him. Azami, who is an adherent of the Shinto religion, argues that Jacob has seen the Kami (divine) who lives in the lake, and now that he has seen it, "it may follow him" (89). Jacob is indeed haunted by the incident. As the wound becomes infected, he undergoes a transformation, seeming older, bearing a darkness that "crept over his features" and complaining of hearing "muffled voices in his right ear" (93). The attack and his relationship with Ronald become a profound source of shame for Jacob, who leaves Winteridge to attend boarding school in England, and spurns both the monster and the region as a "dreadful place" (206). The monster, for Jacob, becomes aligned with an internalized homophobia and a disdain for the rural community he escapes in favour of cosmopolitan London.

While Jacob vehemently rejects the monster, as it serves as a material expression of a deep-seated shame, we again see the monster's "propensity to shift" in the eyes of its beholders in Llewelyna's reverence for it (Cohen 4). The monster in Tomlinson's novel indeed "incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" (Cohen 4). For Jacob, the monster is an expression of both fear and anxiety, while for Llewelyna it also embodies her desires and fantasies. Llewelyna is a character steeped in Welsh mysticism who obsessively works at overwriting and correcting a bowdlerized version of the *Mabinogion*. Llewelyna spends much of the novel cloistered in her overgrown garden in the family's peach orchard, followed closely by her ethereal pet peacock Saint Francis. Llewelyna is described as a kind of Pre-Raphaelite beauty

with long hair of “a fantastic orange” and “green eyes that made her magnetic” (12). She is a woman who might easily inhabit John Everett Millais’s painting *Ophelia*, both in her physicality and the way she is romantically at peace with the notion of her own demise. Llewelyna, who blends Catholicism with Northern Welsh mysticism, is fond of telling her children of “beautiful women turned into horses or owls or disappeared into pools of water” and claims that their family finds its roots in the union between a fisherman and water nymph (13).

One of her most affecting stories that will underpin much of the narrative is of the Addanc, “a kind of water-monster in the whirlpool of Llyn yr Afanc on the River Conway in north Wales” (McKillop). In Llewelyna’s telling, the addanc is born from the rape of a young girl by a pwca, “a creature that takes many forms, one of them being human” and has “the heart of an animal” (20), at the behest of a queen nymph who is jealous of the girl’s beauty. The girl, impregnated by the pwca, prematurely gives birth to a creature in the pond with “the head of a horse and the body of a snake” (21). In much of the contemporary tourist literature, the Ogopogo is described in these same terms (“Legend of Ogopogo”). While the Ogopogo in these iterations is defanged and suitable for tourist consumption, Llewelyna’s monster is “a creature deformed by jealousy and betrayal, unloved and unwanted by even its own mother” (21). Llewelyna’s daughter Iris, who palpably feels the addanc’s presence in Winteridge, will later learn that Llewelyna’s story parallels her mother’s youth in Wales, where she abandoned a child born of a rape. In Llewelyna’s story, the girl, even after her new lover moves her to a new land across the sea, “dreams of the monster’s empty eyes” (21). In Tomlinson’s novel, the lake monster is often called addanc and is hypothesized to have travelled hidden within clothing or held within a mouth (1). The addanc’s presence follows Llewelyna throughout the course of the novel.



Following Jacob's run-in with the monster near the pier, Llewelyna uses the inaugural voyage of the *SS Rosamund* as it cruises north from Penticton, to make an offering to the lake monster. With her daughter looking on and as the other guests are having dinner, Llewelyna, goes to the ship's deck and pulls her neighbour's recently deceased and buried pet dove, Angel, from her purse. As her daughter watches, Llewelyna entices the monster's approach before it breaches, rocking the boat, its head "long and horse-like, its smooth skin iridescent" (97). Iris, who breathes the name "Leviathan" as her mother feeds the dead dove to the monster, is corrected by her mother, who says, "Naitaka" (97). At this moment, the monster is no longer given the Old Testament name, Leviathan, nor the Welsh addanc, but is recognized as the "Naitaka," the name that the novel's Indigenous character, Henry, uses for the lake monster. Throughout the novel, Llewelyna, who we learn is engaged in an enduring romantic relationship with Henry, increasingly melds Welsh mysticism with Indigenous knowledge. In offering the pious Mrs. Bell's dove, Angel, to the monster, we see a Christian symbol devoured and subsumed by the Indigenous Naitaka, who rocks the boat before returning below the waves. While there are screams and yells in the dining cabin, the source of the turbulence will remain lost to the settler celebrants. Following the sacrifice of the dove, with all its weighty symbolism, Llewelyna appears pleased with herself, smiling and using a hand mirror and puff to proudly powder her nose (97). Llewelyna's addanc, which had haunted her as it carried the weight of her traumatic history in Wales, is recognized as Naitaka, a dangerous presence, but one that is not entangled with Llewelyna's personal trauma and history.

Throughout the novel, Llewelyna's fascination and kinship with watery monsters are aligned with her unconscious drive towards dissolution and death, her *Thanatos*. This culminates in her final sacrifice to the lake's monster. Llewelyna, who has lost a son, a husband and a

daughter, and whose mental and physical health has radically deteriorated, gives herself to the waters that have haunted her throughout the narrative. Her daughter, Iris, who, like Llewelyna, shares her clairvoyance, has a vision of the moments before her mother's death:

The lake is calm. She clutches a large rock to her chest. As she walks into the lake her dress floats around her knees, her hips, her stomach. The monster raises its head from the lake. [...] The lake becomes turbulent and takes Llewelyna with it. (268-269)

Here, Llewelyna enters a final communion with the lake monster. Like her ancestor, the fisher who falls in love with a water nymph, and like the girl and the pwca in the pond of *Mabinogion* lore, Llewelyna gives her body to the creature in the water. Llewelyna, like the monster, enters local myth as a spectral presence that haunts the lakeshore and surrounding forests (269).

After her mother's death, Iris brings her mother's copy of the *Mabinogion*, which her mother has annotated to near obliteration, to the lake, dropping it into the water where it "sank into the bottomless lake" (270). In releasing her mother's vexing talisman into the waters, Iris realizes she doesn't need the book since her mother's intricate mythographies live within her. Iris, who shares her mother's seeming madness, expressed by seizures, visions, fatalism and frequent witnessing of the monster in the lake, meets an end that mirrors her mother's. In the novel's final paragraph, Iris stands on the shores of the lake. With her appears her mother's long-missing peacock, Saint Francis, while the coyotes (who symbolize Indigenous presence in the novel) are yipping in the distance, and the jaguar (imagined as a Shinto kami, in this case, a spirit manifestation of her guilt over her action towards Azami) stands close by. As Iris stands on the shore, surrounded by symbolic representations of Welsh mysticism, the Shinto religion and the sound of Indigenous presence, she laments that "in this crowded world I am alone" (341). As in Llewelyna's final moments, Naitaka appears in the turbulent water before Iris as she steps into

“the cool waters of our bottomless lake” (341). For both Sparks women, the monster is a corporeal and incorporeal embodiment of an emplaced selfhood, incorporating, as Cohen suggests all monsters do, “fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy” (Cohen 4).

In one of the novel’s final ruminations on the lake monster that navigates the periphery of the often-turbulent narrative, the narrator Iris Sparks offers a kind of encapsulation of the monster and its place within the regional culture:

Although the town still chooses to ignore it, the spirit of the lake continues to haunt its depths. Naitaka does not require our belief, nor our food. It does not need our stories, nor our forgiveness. It took me years to understand this, and though I would never claim to have a kind of innate wisdom of this place, for I will forever be a stranger to the land, a thief, I believe the lake monster is not one thing but multitudes. It is a memory, a premonition, a haunted history, a cursed future. It is the culmination of all of our sins, all of our wonder” (Tomlinson 329-330)

At this moment, the narrator recognizes a settler inheritance that makes her “a stranger to the land” and “a thief” while recognizing Naitaka’s autonomy from the stories settlers seek to impose upon it. Alexander Wilson, in *The Culture of Nature*, argues that the North American landscape “constantly takes on new meanings” under the Eurocultural gaze, just as the spirit of the lake in Tomlinson’s novel “is not one thing but multitudes” (Wilson 11; Tomlinson 330). Bliss Carman’s query, “who shall prove that nature is not a metaphor?” is resonant in the narrator’s assertion that the monster serves as a metaphor, or as a vessel, that carries “the culmination of all of our sins, [and] all of our wonder” (Carman, “Miracles and Metaphors,” 39; Tomlinson 330). Naitaka’s autonomy from these settler filters and projections is asserted in this passage, as the narrator states that the monster does “not require our belief, nor our food. It does

not need our stories, nor our forgiveness” (Tomlinson 330). While the fibreglass sculpture of a cartoon dragon dubbed Ogopogo continues to smile vacantly at tourists from the shores of Okanagan Lake, in Tomlinson’s novel and the work of Indigenous writers and storytellers like Jordan Coble, n̓xaʔx̓ʔitk<sup>w</sup> lives beyond and impervious to settler appropriations.

## COWBOYS, THE EXHAUSTED FRONTIER & POSTMODERN MONSTER SIGHTINGS

In Gail Scott’s postmodern short story, “Tall Cowboys and True,” the ‘Ogo Pogo’ makes a grotesque appearance as the recurrent butt of a dirty joke. Like the cartoonish Ogopogo that greets tourists to the Okanagan, this lake monster mentioned in Scott’s story bears little kinship to n̓xaʔx̓ʔitk<sup>w</sup> but is instead reduced to a euphemism for the male anatomy within a story charged with sexual tension and underpinnings of sexual violence. The story moves between Annabelle, “the last frontier town, tucked under the outcrop of the Rockies,” and the Okanagan (Scott 219). Scott’s story plays with the familiar Western, water and agricultural tropes as filtered through the fractured and trauma-laced consciousness of its protagonist, Véronique.

In the short story, the Western landscape is dominated by reluctantly verbal cowboys who embody the kind of “antilanguage” Western Male heroes that Jane Tompkins observes in *West of Everything* (50). In Scott’s story, cowboys’ voices carry through their “loud boots” and the “beer gushing out of their bottles” rather than through their dialogue (Scott 219). While Western figures dominate the landscape, it is Véronique’s story. As in Patrick Lane’s *Red Dog Red Dog*, with its “shotgun trailers[s] with old towels for curtains” (53), the West in Scott’s short story is bleak. In the opening paragraph, we are introduced to Annabelle, “the last frontier town,” a place marked by horses and oil tankers, a place where “a poor cowboy [sits] in front of a blind house”

waiting for the “explosion of bullets that would never come” (219). The West in Scott’s short story is very much the “exhausted frontier” that Richard Slotkin describes in his book *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the American Frontier in Twentieth Century America*. Starting in the 1970s, Slotkin observes a stark shift in the way the Frontier begins to live in the American mythos. Slotkin argues that this shift is caused by disappointment in the outcomes “of the high hopes embodied in the New Frontier” (Slotkin 625). Slotkin describes this period as one in which,

Instead of contemplating a future of limitless economic and political improvement, Americans in the 1970s were asked to accommodate themselves to the limitations of “spaceship earth,” a world of exhausted frontiers whose rising and hungry population must draw on limited natural resources—a planetary ecology reduced to “zero sum game” in which every gain entails a concomitant loss. (625)

In Scott’s “last frontier town,” where its citizens live in trailers or move to new communities in search of a better financial time, the frontier is indeed exhausted. At the same time, the poor cowboy continues to wait for the cinematic “explosion of bullets that would never come” (219).

As in Lane’s *Red Dog Red Dog* and Tomlinson’s *Our Animal Hearts*, this bleak Western landscape is haunted by the ghosts of Indigenous presence. As Véronique and her Leninist boyfriend hitchhike their way out of Annabelle, Véronique sees “a crowd of ragged vultures cowered over an old Indian. A woman in sky-blue moccasins wade[s] unevenly through the long grass towards him. After her ran a small girl with grasshopper legs” (220). While Véronique sees these figures, her partner sees nothing and “lit a cigarette, his thoughts galloping confidently towards the sunset” (220). At this moment, Véronique is able to discern Indigenous presence, stopping to smile at the small girl. At the same time, her partner displays a blindness that has typified settler and theft of Indigenous land and attempts to overwrite and ignore Indigenous

culture. As previously discussed, “the figure of the Indian ghost” has long been prevalent in North American writing (Bergland 2). These ghosts hold “an aura of unresolved and unbroachable ‘guilt;’ as though the colonial/historical foundations of the nation have not been thoroughly assimilated” and speak to “a perceived illegitimacy in one’s tenancy of the land” (Sugars and Turcotte xi). The sense of a shaky tenancy of the land is announced by the volatile driver who picks up our hitchhiking protagonist and her partner, whom the narrator bestows with the moniker the “charger cowboy” after the Dodge Charger muscle car he drives. As they drive, he proclaims of the landscape they pass through, “This is called the Valley of Peace,” using what the narrator calls “the voice” (223). The voice goes on to proclaim the valley was “filled with fornicating good-for-nothings (excuse me miss he tipped his Stetson) with whom the settlers had to fight and teach how to farm” (223). In the odd bracketed authorial intrusion ‘(excuse me miss he tipped his hat),’ the mannerisms and false-fronted genteelness of the movie cowboy make an appearance. This genteelness belies the genocidal violence of the settler colonial project. In this passage, the contradiction between the settler named “Valley of Peace” and its violent history sits tensely at the surface of the casual conversation.

Along with this tension sits a sexual tension that borders on violence. The rape fields are mentioned twice in Scott’s story, and both times speak to the undercurrents of violence and sex that course through the short narratives. While rapeseed, also called canola or oilseed, is a common crop in the prairies for its oil-rich seed and as stock feed, in Scott’s story, “rape” is not benign mere benign terminology, but carries the connotations of threat and sexual violence. Surrounded by yellow fields of ‘rape,’ the hitchhiker-narrator finds herself in a truck with a volatile driver. The charger cowboy poses a threat. His eyes are described as “fastened on her moist lips,” and his voice is described as “tightening like a lasso” (220). The charger cowboy

insists on discussing Jesus with his reluctant passengers, asking, “In his relationship with you [...] did Jesus uh hold up his end of the stick” (224), going on to ominously repeat the phrase “the stick” as his frustration with his non-believing passengers builds. This interaction, which boils with the potential for violence and rape, instead culminates in a deadly crash that impales the charger cowboy on the phallic “six-inch fuchsia statue” of Jesus on his dashboard (223).

Jane Tompkins, in her examination of gender in the Western genre, observes that women in the genre were often presented as “silly, blathering on about manly business that is none of her concern, and beneath it all really asking for sex,” the heroine coming to “see herself as he sees her” and dissolving “into a caricature of herself” (Tompkins 61). In Scott’s story, Véronique called to respond to the “well-honed” voice, and “the eye” of the charger cowboy “began talking to the eye quite fast. ‘It’s beautiful here. Blue Sky up above. All you need is love. ...’ She stopped, guilty, ridiculous” (221). The knife-like voice and “the eye” that watches and assesses her for resistance are placated by her show of weakness, the well-honed voice growing “golden again” (221). In this exchange, Véronique intuits the charger cowboy’s potential threat and uncomfortably dissolves in caricature to assuage the threat of male violence.

While Véronique placates the Western male and his capacity for violence, she is unable to avert the male gaze that seeks to police her sexuality and silence her voice. In each of the story’s italicized interludes, an unnamed speaker observing Véronique recalls the local priest who gave “her shit every Sunday” for her “terriblement décolleté” appearance (221). Veronique herself recalls her father putting clothespins on her tongue until it bled to silence her, and she recounts that her uncle sold her a trailer to “spare the family shame” and in which “to hide her fatherless children” (222; 223). External patriarchal forces seek to neutralize Véronique as a sexual force, and the presence of a “clitoris that pounds in the closet” provides another current of

tension in Scott's taut short story. Through Véronique's perspective, the settler settlement is sexualized, its grain elevators described as "ticking crotches" (220), as is the charger cowboy, who is described through Véronique's gaze as having an impeccable crotch (222).

The word crotch also appears again in the two flashbacks, called "Interlude: A True Cowboy in Love," where the word is aligned with the appearance of the "Ogo Pogo" (222). In these grotesque interludes, a "fat young driver whose pants stink" of urine and his partner, an older woman with "greasy gray hair" named Ma, drive the hitchhikers, Véronique, her two children and future partner. In these interludes, punctuated by the scent of sage and cherry blossoms that smell like "cherry Chiclets" (222), the "Ogo Pogo has just surfaced between the feet of a petrified water-skier." Ma's speculation, "Maybe we'll see the Ogo Pogo," is followed by her hand creeping closer to the crotch of the "fat young driver" (222). This exchange is followed up in the second interlude, where Ma states, "I bet anything we see the Ogo Pogo," as "she fondles the pee-stained pants" (225). The Ogopogo, like the 6-inch fuchsia Jesus on the charger cowboy's dash, is a grotesque phallic symbol in this volatile settler landscape.

In Scott's short story, the Okanagan is part of a web of Western space, where various cowboys hold a tense dominion over land, women and the challenge of Indigenous presence. Place names, like "the Valley of Peace," are shown to be absurd, while the emblematic and kitschy symbols of a region and culture, like the Ogopogo and a dashboard Jesus, are rendered bawdy phallic objects. Through Véronique, who operates at the cultural margins, we see Wild West and Western Canadian regional tropes as corroding and absurd, and their symbols both grotesque and ridiculous. The Ogopogo in Scott's short story is far removed from the waters of Okanagan Lake but has swum into much murkier waters.



The Okanagan Valley is a landscape dominated by a chain of five large lakes that link communities and draw tourists searching for recreation. These lakes moderate the winter climate and supply irrigation water which allows the orchard and vineyard industries to thrive “farther north than in any other region of North America” (Walker et al. 51). The lakes also provide a fundamental resource for human existence, a readily available supply of drinking water. As John Wagner documents, since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the region's promotional literature claimed that the Okanagan region possessed an “inexhaustible supply” of water, a claim that drew the early orchardist whose projects would come to dominate the landscape (Wagner 30). The Okanagan Valley has become one of Canada's most rapidly developing regions. This growth has led to a “rapid suburban expansion [that] is encroaching on fertile agricultural land, reducing natural vegetation tracts, and threatening air and water resources” (Walker et al. 51). Increasingly, as I.R. Walker et al. document in their study of Okanagan lakes, the smaller of the lakes are at risk of becoming eutrophic. At the same time, the region’s water is increasingly recognized as a scarce resource within a region that is “essentially a desert” (Walker et al. 51; Wagner 30; Holmes and Kenney 32).

While the Okanagan’s lakes are critical to human settlements, they also figure prominently in the regional imagination, as Laurence Buell terms “a terrain of consciousness” (Buell 83). Claire Omhovère, in her article “The Poetics of Geography in English-Canadian Literature,” argues that landscape is “not an object, but a mediation through which human subjectivity connects with an empirical reality” (347). Omhovère goes on to argue that “as a mediation, landscape is therefore bound to be historically variable, socially and culturally

malleable” (347). We see this interplay between human subjectivity and its historically, socially and culturally bound geographic situatedness at work in the poetry of Nancy Holmes. In Nancy Holmes’s poem “Life Support,” Okanagan Lake serves as a vital organ for the settler city, crucial to its existence, but passively abused by bad habits and an unhealthy lifestyle. The lake is the vehicle through which the poem’s speaker engages dialogically with the human and the “more-than-human” (Chen et al. 11).

Holmes, who is a critic and educator in addition to being a poet, in a 2016 blog post for Brick Books on Okanagan Poets, notes that in the work of contemporary Okanagan poets, one can discern their “own struggle to write and live here” as they recognize “so clearly the problems and heartbreaking beauty of this place” (Holmes, “Okanagan Poets”). In the same article, in a meditation on the work of a fellow Okanagan poet, Sharon Thesen, Holmes writes that Thesen is a “poet of ‘solastalgia,’ a term environmental studies researcher Glenn Albrecht coined to talk about the feeling of loss, pain and homesickness for a place when you are living it, watching it be devastated and desolated” (Holmes, “Okanagan Poets”). Holmes’s poetry collection, *The Flicker Tree: Okanagan Poems*, abounds with this solastalgia, as the poems are at once elegiac and reverent.

Holmes’s poem works as a call and response, with questions posed (demarcated using an italic font) and answered by the speaker. Each question pertains to the Lake, and each response is a meditation on its life-sustaining presence in the settler valley. With echoes of “How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the questioner asks how the geographic region’s more-than-human being loves the lake and provides a cataloguing of responses.

The questions and answers tell us more about the speaker and their toponymic situatedness than about Okanagan Lake as a geographic feature. In the opening stanza of “Life

Support,” the lake operates as a kind of opaque mirror, as the first speaker in the call-and-response poetic structure asks: “*How does the moon love the lake?*” (1). The respondent speaker replies, “Like an heirloom, a silver spoon or platter. / It polishes the lake all night / then puts it away.” (2-4). In these lines, the lake is increasingly archaic (but once ubiquitous) tradition using and passing down silver dinnerware. We might, in these lines, recall the settler act of transporting these kinds of household objects from Europe and across Turtle Island. In these lines, the lake becomes a heirloom, polished and put away, in much the same way that the lake becomes a backdrop to settler existence in the valleys, as it is valued, beheld and perceived as vital to day-to-day existence.

The body of water is anthropomorphized and made corporeal in the following two stanzas. When the questioner asks, “*How does the cloud love the lake?*” the respondent replies, “When it’s black / and the lake is bruised all over, /they cry together in sympathy” (5-8). Here, the lake is a body that shows evidence of injury, which feels pain and expresses pain through crying. In the following stanza, again, the lake is corporeal, as is the surrounding valley. When the questioner asks, “*How does the valley love the lake,*” the respondent replies, “Like a limb or a tongue, / as a muscle that moves it / and lets it speak” (9-12). In this stanza, the lake is limb, tongue and muscle, a body capable of movement and enabling speech. The bodily simile is carried on in two more stanzas as “the blind hill” loves the lake, like an eye, while the stream loves the lake like the “chamber of the heart” (18-19). Here, the lake is part of a larger body, only connected to the surrounding hills and streams. In *Thinking with Water*, Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis argue that thinking with water encourages “relational thinking” as “bodies share and connect through their common waters” (12). Arguing that “corporeal sensibility draws us back to the rootedness of language in our material entanglements

with the watery world” (12). This sense that water may share our embodied human experience of the world is one that Pamela Mittlefehldt observes in her study of water as metaphor and muse, arguing that “our bond with water is literal and organic. We are 75% water. [...] This is not merely an abstraction” (138). Through the poem’s anthropomorphisms, the lake has a force and may exert physical agency within its material surrounds, using its limbs and muscles. It is also a body that may experience pain and be bruised, and for which we might feel pathos and a human connection.

While the surrounding hills and streams become part of a larger body, the more-than-human creatures in the poem harbour another kind of relationship with the lake. When asked how the swan loves the lake, the speaker replies, “As it is loved. / [...] They stare into each other’s eyes for hours” (13-17). With allusions to the narcissus myth, the swan is transfixed by its reflections, while here, the love is reciprocal as the lake gazes back at the swan. The swan, unlike the valley, the blind hill, and the stream, is not a part of a larger corpus but is an autonomous being. Like the swan, the salmon who swims into the poem is not a part of the larger encompassing body of connections but instead offers an irreverent response to the poem’s repeated query, “how do you love the lake?” responding, “what lake?” (20). Just as ideology is often understood as invisible to us, functioning like the air we breathe, here the lake (so significant to the rest of the poem’s more-than-human respondents) is invisible to the salmon. While it understands itself as autonomous, the salmon is imbricated and unknowingly immersed in the lake.

In the final two stanzas of the poem, the questioner, who has queried the respondent about how the cloud; the valley; the swan; the blind hill; the stream; the swan, and the salmon love the lake, asks, “*How does the city love the lake?*” (21). To which the speaker responds

Like an organ transplant.  
The city treats it tenderly,  
keeping it warm,  
keeping the lake attached to its body  
with a thousand tubes,  
letting drugs and chemicals  
bathe it,  
regulating its flow. (22-29)

Unlike the valley, blind hill, and stream, which share organic connective tissue with the lake, the settler-built city uses the lake as a transplanted organ. The simile is unsettling, particularly given that transplanted organs are susceptible to failure and often rely in part on the behaviour of their recipients to survive. In this stanza, the city's tending to the lake borders on the monstrous, as it tends to the lake with "a thousand tubes" and bathes it in "drugs and chemicals." While the love the city has for the lake shares a kind of bodily symbiosis we see with the valley, blind hill, and stream, the love the city has for the lake differs in terms of the power dynamics at play. The lake in the poem is placed under the control of the city and subjected to its ministrations. In the final stanza, the questioning speaker ends with the statement, "*The city's reflections / pass through the lake, a kidney.*" (30-31). Here, the lake becomes a kidney for the city, an organ that purifies the blood and excretes excess waste products. The city's reflections are continuously purified by the lake that takes its waste and allow the city to sit by the shores cleansed. Kelowna's image as a city on the shore of the land is sold to tourists and residents as a signifier of Edenic achievement. Still, this image ignores the vast and troubling complexities of the ecologically unsustainable suburban settlement on unceded Syilx territory. The poem's lake, at least in terms of the city's

reflection or image, does act as a purifying force that subsumes these tensions and instead presents an idealized vision of the city back to itself.

This solastalgic unease with the settlement project runs throughout Jason Dewinetz's 2002 collection of lyric poetry, *Moving to Clear*. Like the speaker in his poems, Dewinetz grew up in the Okanagan and left (like many people who grew up in rural locales) to pursue educational and professional opportunities in larger urban centers, only to return. Many of the poems in this collection contend with what it means to return to this specific geographic landscape, having undergone personal change, while also noticing the surrounding landscape through a new perspective. The speaker in Dewinetz's short lyric poem, "Construction Site," laments the destruction of the beach where he and his lover had spent time. The site, which had been "the most beautiful stretch of pebbled beach / on the north end of the Okanagan" (5-6), a space once raucous with ducks and geese, becomes a construction site "all gravel and crushed stone" (4), with "No birds, now." (8). From these images of destruction, the poem moves into nostalgia for the times he'd spent with his lover, a space where he had built a "wall for her to lean into" (11), both of them becoming an "Architecture of bodies beside the lake" (12). Here, the architecture of physical bodies is shown to be ephemeral in the face of a construction project. Fern Helfand, in her article "From Forested Hills to Paved Plateaus," offers a critical response to the manufactured suburban landscapes that have come to dominate the Okanagan Valley, noting a marked contradiction between "the society's relationship with the landscape" (17). Helfand notes that a premium is placed on nature's beauty, demonstrated through a "willingness to pay top dollar for dwellings with panoramic views," arguing that these dwellings are complicit "in exploiting and destroying this sought-after commodity through deforestation, land restructuring, and sprawling urbanization" (17). In Dewinetz's "Construction Site," the beach whose beauty

was celebrated by the speaker is destroyed through the kind of act of exploitation and commodification that Hefland details. Dewinetz laments the destruction of the beach, and his use of the language of construction and architecture to describe his and his partner's presence on the beach lays an analogous claim to the space, one that is not a stark renunciation of the human impulse to claim and shape landscape.

Writing with water, as Chen, MacLoed, and Neimanis argue, is often about more than our "material entanglements with the watery world" (12) and, as Mittlefehldt proposes, often serves as "a celebration of a connection between the Self and the world" (137). In Dewinetz's prose poem, "Morning Swim," the speaker meditates on his material situatedness at a family cabin on Okanagan Lake after four years away, marking it as a place of "rebuilding" (32). The speaker, who observes geese on his dock, sees them both as a nuisance of "feathers and soft green shit" (31) and as a conduit through which he imagines the navigation of the lake waters "their thick bodies [...], diving, snapping at slender silver" (32). Pondering his uneasy return to the North Okanagan and the cabin on the lake, he observes a spider in a web within the cabin saying, "you're stuck with us" (32). In the poem's penultimate stanza, the lake offers the speaker a grounding and immersive connection between speaker and landscape, one that opens the door to resolving the speaker's unease with return:

Thick blue, glinting. Cracking into it, black at first, then sparkling phosphorescent under eyelids as cold green moves down under shoulders ribs testicles thighs feet. Then up, pulling with hands into green, two three times pulling, then up, smooth, into air while blue then green of hills and colours of houses, boats, sky. Back towards the dock for soap, toothbrush. My morning swim. (32)

Here, the speaker has a full sensory experience of the lake, as the language of the poems offers colours and sensations before returning to a description of the material world of houses, boats, soap and toothbrushes. In the final stanza, as the speaker makes his way back to the shore, he notices the geese, who he'd previously imagined as elegant denizens of the lake, watching him (33). In this scene, the speaker is able to move past what Don McKay terms a "perspectival cage" and to address the more-than-human, or "other," with the acknowledgement of his human-centeredness, but still envisioning a flow of recognition moving between himself and his fellow swimmers, the geese (McKay 99-101). The speaker's unease with the landscape to which he has returned finds a resolution through the act of swimming and through his recognition of a kinship with the lake's geese, both of which allow the speaker to emerge from the waters more grounded in the region.

Like Dewinetz, poet and novelist Laisha Rosnau grew up in the North Okanagan and would write a collection of poems with themes of nostos and unease. In her 2004 collection of lyric poetry, *Notes on Leaving*, bodies of water, also offer "a connection between the Self and the world" (Mittlefehldt 137). In Rosnau's poem "Night Swimming," the speaker situates the reader on a dock on the lake and, as in Dewinetz's poem "Morning Swim," the poem moves between an immersion in the lake waters, and a meditation on lives lived apart the lakeshore. In "Night Swimming," a group of female friends swim off the dock, feeling the draw of Thanatos, or unconscious drive towards dissolution, as the speaker imagines

how it would feel  
when the weeds wound slick  
around our ankles, pulled  
us farther into water



which had no measurable depth  
only layers of darkness,

knew how it would feel  
when, one by one, we would  
jerk our ankles free, split  
the lake's surface  
mouths gaping (5-15)

Here, the speaker is drawn to what Sigmund Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, might term the “oceanic” (3). Freud describes the oceanic as a “sense of ‘eternity,’ a feeling of something limitless, unbounded” (3), and as a feeling of being “indissolubly bound up with a belonging to the whole world outside oneself” (4). The oceanic, according to Freud, is a state where the borderline “between ego and object is in danger of becoming blurred” and a state sometimes experienced in erotic passion (5). Mittlefehldt, in her study of water as metaphor and muse, argues that “our bond with water is more than metaphoric. It is primal” (Mittlefehldt 138). In the poem, there is a dark enjoyment in imagining being pulled into water that “had not measurable depth / only layers of darkness” and a delight charged with eros in escaping that fate to “split / the lake's surface / mouths gaping” (9-10; 13-15).

As in Dewinetz's poem, there is a stark shift between the drive towards oceanic impulses and considerations of material conditions beyond the seductive pull of the lake. In the poem's 5<sup>th</sup> stanza, we learn of the tribulations of the speaker's female friends, one becoming “struck dumb with monotony” waiting tables, another “sell[ing] sex in Germany,” and a third friend who “would love women / and be hated for it” (20; 17; 21-22). The poem's speaker laments that they

each would quickly forget their connection to the lake but would still, on leaving the lake, carry the “lake water for hours in our hair, beneath / our breasts, between each toe” (25-27). The poem’s final stanza takes the speaker and her friends back in time and back to the lake, where they emerge from the lake water with “cuffs of imagined green / staining our ankles” (29-30) and where they knew “how it felt to lie open to the night, / nothing holding us under” (31-32). Again, we see this longing for the oceanic as the women, marked by the eternity of death and the lake’s depths, revel in being open to the capacity for dissolution while, in those moments, denying that impulse.

In Jeanette Armstrong’s poem, “Water is Siwłkw,” the lens widens from those in the lyric poetry of Dewinetz and Rosnau, where the speaker shares their subjective experience of the lake, and instead reads water as part of a wider interconnected series of pathways and relationships. As with all of Armstrong’s work, “Water is Siwłkw,” is rooted in Syilx ecological ethos, one that celebrates a philosophy of “trans-species, trans-phenomena interrelationship — cause and effect on the most vast and most intimate levels concurrently” (Halladay 10). In 2014, the Okanagan Nation Alliance recognized the Syilx Water Declaration set forth by the Natural Resources Council, which tended to serve as a living document. The document offers a comprehensive definition of the word Siwłkw, laying out Syilx Nation responsibilities, rights and titles to siwłkw, siwłkw is described as coming in “many forms and all are needed for the health of tmxwulaxw and for the timixw.” Richard Bussanich defines tmixw as “the nsyilxcən word that most closely translates as “ecology,” going on say that “tmixw includes everything alive – the land, water, insects, people, animals, plants, and medicines” (Bussanich 6). Bussanich explains that “underneath all of the tmixw is tmxwulaxw (the land)— the core spirit from which all of creation arises and which unites everything” (6). In Syilx Okanagan teachings, Bussanich elaborates,

“Everything starts and ends with the land and water” (6). For the Syilx peoples, as asserted in the 2014 declaration, “siwłk<sup>w</sup> has the right to be recognized as a familial entity, a relation, and a being with a spirit who provides life for all living things.” “Water is Siwłkw” explores this interconnectedness as the speakers work to interpret, or listen to, the Nsyilxcən word siwłkw (siwłk<sup>w</sup>):

siwłkw she murmured is an emergence the subsequence of all else  
a completeness of the design transforming to be lapped continuously  
onto long pink tongues in that same breathing to be the sweet drink  
coursing to become the body a welling spring eternally renewing  
a sacred song of the mother vibrating outward from the first minute drop  
formed of sky earth and light bursting out of the deep quietness  
siwłkw is a song she breathed awakening cells toward this knowing  
that you are the great River as is the abundant land it brings to carve  
its banks then spread its fertile plains and deltas and open its basins  
its great estuaries even to where it finally joins once again  
the grandmother ocean’s vast and liquid peace as are the headwater glaciers  
of the jagged mountains waiting for the yearly procession of thunder beings  
bearing the dark cloud’s sweep upward as spirits released from green depths  
cradling whale song dance on wind as are the cold ice springs feeding  
rushing brooks and willow-draped creeks meandering through teeming  
wetlands to sparkling blue lakes as are the silent underground reservoirs  
coursing gradually up toward roots reaching down to draw dew upward  
through countless unfurling into the sun’s full light as much as the salmon

and sleek sturgeon sliding through strong currents even the tall straight  
reeds cleaning stagnant pools equally are the marsh bogs swarming  
multitudinous glistening flagella and wings in high country holding dampness  
for the gradual descent through loam and luxuriant life to drink in silkw  
she said is to remember this song is the way it is the storm's way driving  
new wet earth down slippery slopes to make fresh land the river's way  
heaving its full silt weight crushing solid rock the tide's way smoothing  
old plates of stone finally deciding for all the way of ice piled blue green  
layer upon layer over eons sustaining this fragment of now so somewhere  
on her voluptuous body the rain continues to fall in the right places  
the mists unceasingly float upward to where they must and the fog forever  
ghosts across the land in the cool desert wind where no rain falls and each  
drop is more precious than blood balancing time in the way of the silvery  
hoar frost covering tundra where iridescent ice tinkles under the bellies of  
caribou her song is the sky's way holding the gossamer filaments  
of rainbow together guarding the silent drift of perfect white flakes where  
the moose stop momentarily to look upward her song in the forest ensuring  
a leaf shaped just so captures each glistening droplet to celebrate  
the vast miles of liquid pumping through the veins of the lion parting  
undulating savannah grasses lifting great Condor wings soaring last circles  
in the mountains of Chile accumulating in the places it chooses to pool  
in subterranean caverns moving through porous stone seeping and wetting  
sand deep inside of her caressing thunder eggs and smooth

pebbles at her heart

This song is the way

While the Syilx Nation Siwłk<sup>w</sup> Declaration offers a concrete and explicit definition of the siwłk<sup>w</sup>, Armstrong's poem, though its "song," takes a kind of flight, as it follows the "water's movements between animals and plants, earth and sky, poles, savannas, and deserts" (Chen et al.). As in the Declaration, Siwłk<sup>w</sup> in Armstrong's poem for its primacy as "the subsequence of all else," a being that embodies "a completeness of the design" (1). Through its almost breathless legato catalogue, the poem demonstrates the intrinsic connections between beings and landscapes forged through water, as water animates bodies that lap it with "pink tongues" (3) and shapes geographic landscapes, driving "new wet earth down slippery slopes to make fresh land" (25). In Armstrong's Siwłk<sup>w</sup> is a force that animates all it touches and manifests in a host of adjectives, "sparkling," "bubbling," "swarming," "glistening," "lifting," "unfurling," etc. In addition to contributing to the poem's syntax as the repetition of the "ing" ending pulses through the poem, these adjectives serve as manifestations of siwłk<sup>w</sup>. The "song" invoked throughout the poem is the song of water as a protean force. The song is described as "the sky's way holding the gossamer filaments / of rainbow together" and to hear the song "is to remember" (34-35). As in the Declaration, Siwłk<sup>w</sup> in Armstrong's poem, argues for water's primacy as "the subsequence of all else," a being that embodies "a completeness of the design" (1). The poem demonstrates the intrinsic connections between beings and landscapes forged through water through the poem's almost breathless legato catalogue. In this poem, water animates the bodies who lap it with "pink tongues" (3), and shapes geographic landscapes, driving "new wet earth down slippery slopes to make fresh land" (25).

For Armstrong, language has a special kind of power. In her essay, “Land Speaking,” Armstrong argues that it is her “conviction that Okanagan, [her] original language, the language of [her] people, constitutes the most significant influence on [her] writing in English” (175). She explains that

through language I understand I am being spoken to, I’m not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of Okanagan People and the land around them. I am a listener to the language’s stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns. (Armstrong, “Land,” 181)

Armstrong’s “Water is Siwłkw,” with its long lines that offer little pause from breath, mimics the flow of water as it “decentres the human,” and instead seeks to give voice, or song, to siwłkw, tmixw and tmxwulaxw” (Chen et al.). Unlike the works of Dewinetz and Rosnau, where distinct human subjectivities contend with their embodiments, the shifting pronouns of “her” and “she” in Armstrong’s poem signify the speaker, an unnamed person who shares wisdom, and siwłkw itself. As water throughout the poem is not one thing, so is the poem’s speaker, who channels many voices to sing her song. While Dewinetz and Rosnau’s poems foreground a speaker’s sensory encounters with a lake, Armstrong’s poem transcends subjectivity and fixity, offering water a vehicle through which we might begin to discern a complex and fluid interconnectedness foundational to our being.

## THE LAKE ABOUNDS

In John Lent’s poem, “Facing the Gardens,” the poem’s speaker, who is situated at a table with a cheap tablecloth and chipped bowl, is seated near “pine-sheafed windows” through which

“the lake abounds” (12-13). The speaker states, “that’s the only word that fits: / abounds in its blue lives: dreams incarnate” (14-15). In much of the literature from and about the Okanagan I’ve examined in this chapter the lake abounds in its multitudinous lives as it is refracted through the subjectivities that perceive it. It is of both dreams and nightmares incarnate, a source of terror and home to monsters and threats of drowning, or a space of sensory delight where subjectivities may achieve healing and transcendence. It is also a space where ecological anxiety may be felt acutely as the waters, once believed to be abundant, are understood as scarce and under threat from human pollutants.

Through all this swims the *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ* and the Ogopogo, two creatures who are linked but bear little resemblance to each other, the latter becoming “a vessel [settlers] pour [...] their individual evils into” (Tomlinson 294), before becoming the cartoon dragon with blunted teeth deployed to hawk cheap goods to tourists and bring joy to children. *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ* has never left, but, as Jordan Coble explains, it is “the lake itself, the rivers and waterways that feed the lake, the flora and fauna that surround the lake as well as all fish and other life that reside within the lake. *n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ* is exemplified through our connection to all its facets.” The Lake, and water more generally, encourage this kind of relational thinking, and what Neimanis terms a “radically embodied ‘hydrocommons’” that might be better suited for thinking through the “interbeing of bodies of water on this planet” (161). As the Syilx Nation *Siw̓lkʷ* Declaration states, water, *siw̓lkʷ*’s “movements, pathways, resiliency and power teach us who we are and who we can be as people.” Water, in Okanagan literature, offers a means of thinking through relationships, of self to place, and of culture to land.

CHAPTER 3:  
MONSTROUS SETTLEMENTS, FAILED UTOPIAS & COMMUNITIES OF HOPE

We make ourselves at home only in our estrangement.

(Robert Harrison, 247)

In my frequent returns to the Okanagan Valley from my current home in the sparsely populated West Kootenays of British Columbia, I'm frequently surprised by how much the Okanagan settlements have grown between visits. Even Highway 97 between Kelowna and Vernon, a two-lane stretch of road that snaked along the shores of Wood Lake from Winfield to Oyama, has expanded and taken to higher ground, cutting wide 4 and 6 lane swaths of heavily used tarmac through what was grasslands and bluffs. Like the highway, new housing developments stretch farther up the hills displacing orchards and grasslands, while the strip malls and hotels along the highway arteries continue to multiply. The downtown cores of Okanagan cities, which once catered to working-class populations, have been radically gentrified. These spaces now house high-end restaurants, artisan boutiques, specialty home goods and furniture shops, all catering to the wealthier class building massive homes next to the lakes, on the ridges and near expanding golf courses.

These downtown cores bear little resemblance to the places I knew as a child and teenager in the late 1980s and mid-90s. In Vernon, where I spent my adolescence, sometimes homeless and always looking for ways not to be in my childhood home, the downtown core was a refuge for people like me who sought or were forced to the margins. It was a space avoided by the middle class, who did the bulk of their shopping in the new strip malls lining Highway 97.



Instead, downtown was a hub of run-down barrooms and decrepit buildings left over from the settler boom of the late 1890s, places like the Kalamalka Hotel and The National and The Coldstream. These places offered daily, weekly, and monthly room rentals and had a committed crew of locals who spent days and nights drinking in their dimly lit bars. Downtown, the heart of the city, paradoxically, was a space where those marginalized and excluded from the levers of local decision-making gathered. It was a space where sex workers stood vigil over the parking lots by the train tracks and paint store and where many of the town's homeless population congregated in Cenotaph Park by the now-defunct Greyhound station.

The valley bottom was primarily home to the working class, people who lived in the small, run-down houses originally built for soldiers returning from WWII, and the shabby apartment complexes perched over busy roads. It was a space encroached upon the two prongs of Highway 6 and Highway 97 and their attendant gas stations, car washes and strip malls. The city's core was a space neglected by city planners, left to market forces that increasingly favoured strip malls with readily available free parking on what had been farm and pastureland. In the late 1990s, as the surrounding hills and lakefronts became increasingly desirable to wealthier residents and outsiders looking for outdoor playgrounds, communities recognized the marketability of celebrating settler "heritage" buildings and revitalizing their cities' neglected cores. While those at the margins never left the downtown core, they have been increasingly policed, harassed and sometimes even patrolled by local chapters of the anti-immigrant group the Soldiers of Odin<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> For more on the outrages facing the Okanagan's marginalized residents see the following news reports: Arendt, John. "Man Charged in Assault on Penticton Homeless Remains in Custody." *Vernon Morning Star*, Vernon Morning Star, 30 Aug. 2019. Tamminga, Monique. "Penticton Business Owner Apologizes for Throwing Poop." *Penticton Western News*, Penticton Western News, 7 Apr. 2021.

I continue to experience the Okanagan towns as places of stark contradictions, places situated in Edenic terrain that houses deep and painful divisions along the lines of race and class. In what follows, I return to the valley through literature that explores how subjectivities and imaginations move through this same human and geographic terrain.

## REARRANGED ECOLOGIES

This chapter moves from the lakes and orchards of the preceding chapters and into the space of the Okanagan's small cities and towns as they appear in literary representations from and about the valleys. In what follows, I read the space occupied by the Okanagan's small cities and towns as expressions of sets of relations within the broader structures of settler colonialism, race, class and geography. Cole Harris, in *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, offers a valuable characterization of the social formations that emerge through the process of settler-colonialism, describing the British Columbia that emerged post-confederation as

a society was being composed out of extreme displacements and disaggregation: a severely disrupted Indigenous population, and a largely immigrant population detached from the circumstances of former lives, juxtaposed to unfamiliar peoples and ways, and perched amid some of the most dramatic terrain in the world. (276)

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Hennig, Clare. "Vernon Votes against Relocating Homeless Camps from Public Park to City Hall." *CBC*, 26 Nov. 2019, [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/vernon-votes-against-relocating-homeless-camps-1.5373252](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/vernon-votes-against-relocating-homeless-camps-1.5373252). Accessed 25 May 2021.

Helston, Charlotte and Ashley Legassic. "Thompson-Okanagan Soldiers of Odin: Are These the Guys You Want Protecting Your Streets?" *INFOnews*, 5 Oct. 2016, [infotel.ca/newsitem/thompson-okanagan-soldiers-of-odin-are-these-the-guys-you-want-protecting-your-streets/it35229](http://infotel.ca/newsitem/thompson-okanagan-soldiers-of-odin-are-these-the-guys-you-want-protecting-your-streets/it35229). Accessed 25 May 2021.

The tension inherent in these displacements and disaggregation is central to life in the small towns and cities, as figured in the work of Jeannette Armstrong, Patrick Lane, Laisha Rosnau, and Sharon Thesen.

In works by these authors, Okanagan settlements are figured as spaces of ecological and cultural failure, where the implications of colonialism and global capitalism are felt and critiqued. In Lane's memoir, *There is a Season* (2004) and novel *Red Dog, Red Dog* (2006), the Okanagan town is a space mired in racist stratification, secrets, and horrific violence, where the dump hides bodies and capitalism's life-denying waste. In Rosnau's *The Sudden Weight of Snow*, the small town is a place of enclaves and competing ideologies, as conservative Christians live uneasily alongside Marxist draft dodgers, back-to-the-landers and an artists' colony. In Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*, the town is a site of moral and cultural degradation, where Syilx children are forced to go to schools rife with racism and where adolescents find new and damaged communities in local barrooms. Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows* offers a similar critique of colonial spaces, as her protagonist advocates for the regenerative space of Indigenous communities on Indigenous lands. Like Armstrong, who provides a sustained critique of colonialism as a "culture of discontent," Harold Rhenish, in *The Wolves at Evelyn*, diagnoses colonialism as a disease which has infected his family and continues to impact him and the Okanagan community in which he dwells (Armstrong, *Whispering*, 274). Similarly, in John Lent's *So It Won't Go Away* (2005), the town is a site of both degradation and lassitude, where the accelerating forces of capitalism are eroding the foundations of community. In Sharon Thesen's long poem, "The Fire," Okanagan settler-subjectivity comes up against the force of wildfire, the climate crisis and its colonial culpability. In all these works, we see protagonists and

speakers working to make sense of the spaces they live in and the forces that impact their lives and communities.

Northrop Frye, in his oft-cited “Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada,” proposes that Canadian literature, “whatever its inherent merits, is an indispensable aid to the knowledge of Canada” (215). Frye argues the literature “records what the Canadian imagination has reacted to, and it tells us things about this environment that nothing else will tell us” (215). The literary works examined in this chapter offer a potent means for examining regional imaginations and the threads that link disparate groups and interests in particular geographic and temporal space. In Edward Soja’s influential paper, “The Socio-Spatial Dialectic,” he argues that “space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies” (207). Soja, who builds on the work of David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, Ernest Mandel and others, proposes an opening up of orthodox Marxist spatial analysis that examines the “vertical and horizontal expressions of the relations of production under capitalism (i.e., relations of class),” to explicitly incorporate “the social production of space” as more than an “epiphenomenon” (225; 214; 225). What Soja proposes is not a substitute for class analysis but a spatial problematic (210). The spatial problematic incorporates class consciousness as it recognizes that the spatial organizations of human society are shaped by “complex interrelationships which may vary in different social formations and at different historical conjunctures” and are organizations that arise within the “physical frame of ubiquitous, contextual space” (210; 225; 210). In *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*, Lorraine Code calls for similar attentiveness to spatial problematics and generative structures. Code’s model of ecological thinking “eschews the abstraction and reductivism of orthodox western epistemology, in order to relocate inquiry ‘down on the ground,’ in everyday lives and situations” (Code 1-2). This model has the potential to generate a “remapping of the

epistemic and social-political terrains, animated by an informed attentiveness to local and more wide-ranging diversity” (Code 1-2). In the context of British Columbia’s contemporary interior valleys, examining spatial problematics through Code’s model of ecological thinking provides a means of tracing the epistemic tensions that underpin settler colonial projects on unceded Indigenous land.

Ecocriticism, described broadly as “the study of the relationships between literature and the environment,” provides another lens through which to examine representations of settler towns and cities, and these places serve as “home” (Glotfelty xviii). William Cronon, in his paper “The Trouble with Wilderness,” argues that “wilderness” is a category created by “very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history” (7). Cronon challenges the binary between wilderness and the human world, pointing to the construction of the concept of wilderness and arguing for a paradigmatic shift that finds “a common middle ground in which all of these things, from the city to the wilderness, can somehow be encompassed in the word ‘home’” (24). Cronon argues that this shift would foster greater accountability and connection to the other-than-human world because “home” is the “place for which we take responsibility, the place we try to sustain so we can pass on what is best in it (and in ourselves) to our children” (24). This concept has long been part of Indigenous epistemic frameworks. Jeannette Armstrong has long advocated for the kind of ecological responsibility Cronon proposes with the concept of “home” through her work writing and teaching Syilx ecological ethos, an ethos rooted in the concept of “regenerative reciprocity,” which accounts for, and is responsible to, generations past and future (Armstrong, “Literature of the Land,” 347). In an interview with P. K. Srivastava, Armstrong advocates for these teachings and the need for a broader integration of indigeneity into how cultures engage with place.

I believe that my responsibility does not just rest with my people. I really believe that the earth needs indigeneity. [...] I am not opposed to the idea of development. I think development is necessary: that's part of being human. How we ethically understand, and are informed about, the things that we cause and the effects that we have and the decisions and the choices that we make needs to be informed by everything that surrounds us, not just for me, for my family, for my race or for my culture. [...] So, to my mind, many of the knowledge systems of the world are missing that really important component that indigenous tribal peoples have retained and maintained that sustains them within their landscape. (Armstrong qtd. in Srivastava 241-242)

In the face of our state of global crisis, Armstrong argues for the urgency of developing “a higher level of knowledge,” one that embraces indigeneity and is attentive to human cause and effect to sustain human life within a diversity of bioregions.

While the benefits of adopting this as a new framework for how we engage with “home” is self-evident, as Daniel Coleman argues in his paper, “Toward an Indigenist Ecology of Knowledges for Canadian Literary Studies,” Western knowledge systems have been instrumental in suppressing other forms of knowledges (6). Boaventura de Sousa Santos, João Arriscado Nunes, and Maria Paula Meneses argue that the suppression of the “forms of knowledges and, at the same time, the subaltern social groups whose social practices were informed by such knowledges” is “a form of epistemicide [...] the other side of genocide” (xix). They also argue that a “global cognitive justice” and an “ecology of knowledges” is needed to counter the “monoculture of [Western] scientific knowledge” (xix; xx). In the Okanagan, where Syilx presence and knowledges have long been ignored, suppressed and worse, there is a sense, as Arthur Manuel and Grand Chief Ronald M. Derrickson point to in *Unsettling Canada*, that “the

flood waters of colonialism are, at long last, receding” (223). With this receding, and with the intensifying ecological pressures faced by residents of British Columbia who dwell in the wildland urban interface, it is possible to envision a future where an ecology of knowledges might begin to replace the orthodox Western “epistemologies of mastery” (Code 215).

While it is possible to envision such futures, the on-the-ground realities in the Okanagan continue to privilege settler narratives of mastery and to efface and ignore marginalized voices. In Luis Aguiar and Tina Marten’s book chapter, “Shimmering White Kelowna and the Examination of Painless White Privilege in the Hinterland of British Columbia,” they argue that contemporary Okanagan settlements remain highly stratified along racial and economic lines, as “the service-based bourgeoisie reproduces the city as shimmering white” works to exclude non-white immigrants through “labour policies [...] securing, reproducing, and maintaining whiteness in the Okanagan Valley” (Aguiar and Marten 128). Building on the work that Aguiar and Marten undertake, Delacey Tedesco and Jen Bagelman, in “The ‘Missing’ Politics of Whiteness and Rightful Presence in the Settler Colonial City,” observe a pattern whereby “dominant material and narrative practices render Indigenous Syilx communities and temporary migrant farm labourers as ‘missing’ or ‘out-of-place’” (382). Non-white communities, including the region’s “2,500 temporary migrant agricultural workers” and the “contemporary political and territorial claims of the Syilx people,” are largely “‘missing’ from public view” and denied political agency (382).

The Okanagan’s small cities and towns cannot be divorced from the issues of race and class that have restructured the valleys into plots that articulate these stratifications. In the Okanagan, lake-front properties are the domain of the rich and super-rich, while the wealthy “pay top dollar for dwelling with panoramic views” on the surrounding hillsides (Helfand 17).

As a result, the homes of the rich are highly visible, dominating lakeshores and hillsides. At the same time, the city of Kelowna sought to implement policies that would house migrant workers in “temporary structures without permanent foundations, removed from the view of roadways and adjacent residential communities” (Tedesco and Bagelman 393). Similarly, there have been consistent efforts by the small cities and towns to remove the valley’s homeless residents from public view, one notable instance occurring in 2019 with the relocation of a downtown Kelowna tent city from its central and highly visible location on Leon Avenue to a policed site in North Kelowna (Rodriguez). Despite all of these land use allocations, the valleys remain the unceded lands of the Syilx, as asserted by the Okanagan Nation Alliance in 1987, with the proclamation:

We are the unconquered aboriginal people of this land, our mother; The creator has given us our mother, to enjoy, to manage and to protect; we, the first inhabitants, have lived with our mother from time immemorial; our Okanagan governments have allowed us to share equally in the resources of our mother; we have never given up our rights to our mother, our mother’s resources, our governments and our religion; we will survive and continue to govern our mother and her resources for the good of all for all time  
 (“Okanagan Nation Declaration”)

The Syilx have long been pushed to the margins, forced by settlers from vast swaths of their ancestral lands and left with twenty four reserves made of eight member communities and represented by the Okanagan Nation Alliance. The Okanagan Nation has continued to forcibly push back against settler erasure (Thomson; Okanagan Nation Alliance).

The Okanagan’s small cities and towns, are spaces where cultures and histories intersect within dramatic geography, spaces rife with class and racial tensions, and where issues of topographic control and lack thereof continue to dominate. These spaces exist within semi-arid



terrain, threatened yearly by wildfires (increasingly severe in scale and intensity), where water is regularly rationed in the summer months, and where settler colonial practices have altered and continue to alter local ecologies. Cole Harris argues that in British Columbia, “new settlements and landscapes,” like those that sprang up the length and breadth of the Okanagan Valley, were settlers’ “principal creations” and were spaces where “issues of power characteristically turned on the control of land” (xvi). Harris argues that for settlers, “land was the new opportunity; life here was about occupying, controlling, and managing it, about establishing who could do what. In the process settlements were created and space was reconfigured” (xvi). Today’s Okanagan is a space of “rearranged local ecologies and an increasingly engineered nature,” where the small cities and towns serve as the regional loci for these settler colonial projects and as the command centres of topographic control (Harris 250). For better or worse, these small cities and towns exist in “ongoing, reciprocal relations” with the geographic spaces that support them and within the damaging frameworks of settler colonialism (250).

What follows is an examination of the literary representations of these small towns and cities, observing what Frye terms their “conscious mytholog[ies],” which have the power to create “an autonomous world[s] that gives us an imaginative perspective on the actual one” (Frye 235). Through this ecocritical reading of literary representations of home and the finding and making of home within Okanagan terrain, we can, as Claire Omhovère suggests, envision geography as “shaping influence which exerts itself upon a place but also on the people who live there, drawing them together into the intimacy of dwelling” (358). Through the works of Jeannette Armstrong, George Bowering, Patrick Lane, John Lent, Harold Rhenisch, and Laisha Rosnau, we might begin to trace the ongoing and reciprocal relationship between human

societies, subjectivities and the geographic and temporal contexts within which they dwell, and all of the tension inherent in such dwellings.

## YEARS OF MONSTROUS INEQUITY: VIOLENCE IN PATRICK LANE'S OKANAGAN

Patrick Lane's literary work often returns to the Okanagan of his childhood, depicted in his work as a place of hardscrabble and violent existence in an arid and keenly perceived landscape. Lane, one of Canada's most acclaimed and anthologized poets, was born in Nelson, British Columbia, in 1939. In his teenage years, Lane's father (a former miner who suffered from lung problems) on his doctor's advice moved the Lane family two mountain ranges west through the Kootenays and Monashees to the semi-arid Okanagan Valley and the small town of Vernon (Lane, *Season*, 10). While Lane would leave the valley immediately following high school, the valley would remain a place of return for him. Lane, in an interview with Joseph Planta following the 2008 release of *Red Dog Red Dog* (his first novel after decades as a poet), explains that the text sprang from his work on his 2005 memoir *There is a Season*, as the "memories [of the valley] had caught hold of" him. Lane reveals that for him the valley has long remained 'a complicated place,' and though he has long rejected it as a place to settle, he often returns to "renew a neurotic affiliation" (Planta). In a 2019 interview for *The Tyee*, Lane describes the Okanagan he returns to through his poetry, fiction and memoir as the place he knew in 1958, not the contemporary valley with its "600,000 people". The Okanagan of Lane's childhood memory is a place that "was only 75 or 80 years old," a place of small, isolated towns that "had practically no access to the outside world," and was a place that Lane argues "lived outside of history" (LaPointe). The Okanagan Valley of Lane's childhood is also one of a deeply embedded

violence that Lane argues “as a society we’ve chosen to forget” (LaPointe). In his fiction, memoir and poetry, Lane unearths and lays bare the violence inherent and foundational to settler colonial communities.

In *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, Richard Slotkin explores how the myth of regeneration through violence evolved and gained credence in the frontier mythography and in the American cultural imagination. Slotkin charts how the “first colonists saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortune, their spirit, and the power of their church and nation,” going on to argue that “the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence” (5). Slotkin argues that foundational to America’s settler mythography is “the myth of regeneration through violence,” which “became the structuring metaphor of the American experience” (5). Lane’s Okanagan is a space populated by exiles and inheritors of this frontier mythography and its inherent belief in violence (Lane, *Red Dog*, 129). Lane argues for a ruthless examination of the violence at the heart of the settler colonial project, pointing out that

When we go into the past, we find who we are as people, villages, and countries. Stories are our foundations. And when you investigate our stories, you find that it’s a history of violence — hundreds of years of monstrous inequity — and yet as a society we’ve chosen to forget our stories, even though we’ve built society upon them. This leads to a terrible denial. When we lack understanding of our stories, nothing ever changes. (129)

In Lane’s novel *Red Dog*, *Red Dog*, memoir *There is a Season*, and long prose poem “Weeds,” Lane does not shy away from this violence but instead explores its complexities, reverberations and legacies for individuals and the communities they inhabit.

Lane's memoir finds its footing in Lane's lush garden on Vancouver Island. It operates as "a scriptotherapeutic text in its chronological, month-by-month account of a year of recovery from decades of alcoholism and drug addiction." In his memoir, Lane's half-acre Vancouver Island garden serves as a sanctuary from which he revisits and reconsiders his youth and childhood in the Okanagan; a childhood rife with violence that "was so common you didn't think about it" (LaPointe). In an interview with Michael LaPointe, Lane describes the violent terrain of the Okanagan Valley in the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and his early perceptions of that violence, explaining that "violence happened all around you. It fascinated me, and I was intrigued by it. In my world, it was normal, but I knew at the time that it was not normal, and it deeply disturbed me" (Lapointe).

Through his memoir, Lane explores this violent terrain in visceral detail. One of the first places Lane revisits in his memoir is Vernon's dump, which housed the "discarded effluvium of the town" (31). For Lane and his brother, exiled from the family home from early morning until sundown, exploring the town dump and playing war games on Cactus Hill offered two sources of entertainment (32). At the dump, Lane witnesses the violence of capitalism enacted as the surrounding orchards' fruit that failed to find a market was burned rather than given away before a crowd of hungry women and children. These women and children, racialized others within the violent town's settler colonial hierarchy, are further dehumanized by Lane and his brother through their use of the racist epithets "Chinks, Ragheads, Injuns, Bohunks, Polacks, or Wops" (30).

At the dump, Lane watches as one of these dehumanized children, using a whip he made from a copper telephone wire in an act of displaced violence,

flaying the decaying head of a coyote. Its tail was gone for bounty. Bits of fur and rotting flesh fluttered through the air. The boy's face was red with intensity as he cracked the whip across the coyote's empty eyes. (31)

The intensity of the violence and the act of degradation is amplified by the fact that coyotes have a profound spiritual significance for the Syilx Okanagan, Sənk'lip (translates as coyote in Nsyilxcən), being a central figure in traditional stories from and about the region. In this scene, even before the boy's assault on the corpse, it is clear this is not the first time the body has been defiled and degraded, as the coyote's tail had been removed for "bounty." While the boy exerts his rage on the corpse, Lane's depiction of the "coyote's empty eyes" renders the act all the more senseless and futile. In addition to finding the town's hungry, vulnerable, and enraged population amongst the waste, Lane describes finding a dead baby girl wrapped in a cotton shirt (31). This "secret grave" would become one of the myriads of secrets and unspoken things that Lane would carry through his life, as "the small body existed and didn't exist in [his] mind" as he "placed the dead baby deep inside where it could be lost" (31). The playground/dump of Lane's childhood is a space that houses those cast aside by the town, a place of despair and rage, and a place that Lane had long tried to forget.

While the dump is a place of horrors and despair, the domestic spheres behind closed doors in the town offer other sites of violence and deprivation. In the world of Lane's childhood, "secrets and the silences that surrounded them governed [his] young life," and "to do or say anything was anathema" (33). This silence is finally broken in Lane's return to the past as he lays bare the litany of secrets he'd kept about the violent acts he had taken as "normal" within the fabric of his community, whereby

a neighbour beat a small friend to death in his woodshed when I was six, that another neighbour locked his idiot daughter away in the attic for year, and that a man that my father worked with beat his wife insensible every weekend were what I thought was normal. (33)

Lane describes his time in Vernon as “hard brutal years,” where “wives and children were murdered and babies aborted with coat hangers or boots” and where his friend’s father “prostituted his Down syndrome daughter for twenty-five cents to anyone who had the money” and where the girl’s brother “sold her to older boys for half a popsicle” (32). It was a place where such things were “left to a family,” where “privacy was a measure of freedom” (32). Lane learned early in youth to hide the dark things he learned about his community and family, “for whatever he might tell would have repercussions” (32). Lane’s domestic sphere was also plagued by violence and substance abuse. He grew up in a home where he feared that his father’s beatings would leave him “half-dead,” and his mother’s mental illness left him feeling abandoned (213).

Like the town’s dump and domestic spheres, the small town’s downtown core is also a site of violence in Lane’s memoir. At seven or eight years old, Lane would sneak downtown at night to watch the “nightly drama of loners and drunks” on Main Street (75). In one particularly brutal extended flashback, Lane recounts hiding to witness the rape of an Indigenous woman by three men lurking in “the shadows where the back of the Alliston Hotel met the back of the fire hall” and seeing “her one eye open and staring at” him as he hid and as the rape occurred (75; 76). Lane’s passivity during this scene is particularly hard to bear, as is his resignation. Like the other acts of violence Lane witnessed, Lane writes, “the memory of the woman being raped was yet another secret I had to keep. I stored it away just as I had stored other things I’d seen and

done” (78). In another harrowing scene, Lane describes the violence of the core spilling from the downtown as a group of drunken men and women left the bars to stone a house, piling “wood and boxes on the front lawn of a little bungalow and set them on fire” while they stood and “jeered and cursed the people inside” (212). The people inside were newlyweds, a young Japanese man and his white wife, and it was their marriage that had incensed the crowd, who, eight years after WWII had finished, harboured ferocious racist hate. These scenes of racially inspired violence recur throughout Lane’s narrative, as settler violence finds its victims in marginalized communities within and outside of the downtown. Even in the small mill community of Avola, where Lane would later land for work, he would find the same violence and despair amongst the Interior’s settler and diasporic communities,

The Sikhs, lonely and ostracized, fought each other on weekends with fists and knives, the white men in the bunkhouses raped Indian girls they’d shipped up from Kamloops, the seventy-year-old Chinese cook sat drunk in his room drawing pictures of his child-bride back in China, the white husbands locked their wives in closets and bathrooms to keep them quiet, people drank and traded a wife or daughter for a bottle of whiskey. Drunks, passed out, never saw their wife or husband abuse a child or sleep with a best friend. (225)

Lane describes a profound dysfunction in the settler colonial communities in his memoir.

Andrew Woolford and Jeff Benvenuto, building off the work of Patrick Wolfe, argue that settler colonial societies are “a specific social formation that is continuous and involves processes of invasion, dispossession and settlement that [is] ongoing” (“Canada” 380). Settler colonial societies are built on invasion, and as Wolfe argues, “invasion is a structure not an event” (Wolfe 388). This invasion, according to Wolfe, is structured around what Wolfe terms the “logic of

elimination,” which includes the “summary liquidation of Indigenous people” and serves as the “organizing principle of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence” (388). In order to erect new colonial societies on the expropriated land base, Wolfe argues that settler societies deploy strategies that can include “the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations” (388). Wolfe argues that all of these strategies, “including frontier homicide, are characteristic of settler colonialism” (388). Settler colonialism, rooted in what Wolfe argues is “originary violence,” with its processes of dispossession and elimination, continues to be the structure upon which towns, like Vernon, B.C. are built (Woolford and Benvenuto, “Canada,” 382). Lane, who is unflinching in his recollection of the violence that reverberated through the interior communities of his youth argues that ignoring this violence leads “to a terrible denial,” and that without coming to terms with our stories, no matter how shameful and unpleasant they are, “nothing ever changes” (LaPointe).

While violence is foundational to Lane’s experience of the Valley, so is the Okanagan landscape itself. Lane writes evocatively and with precision about the valley’s flora and fauna. In his poem “Weeds,” Lane’s speaker describes his passion for learning the names of the plants and animals he found in what he calls “the waste places” as something he picked up in childhood (Lane, “Weeds,” 414). In his memoir, the Okanagan landscape of desert and mountains looms large, becoming part of him, writing, “a boy is a boy and he is the place he inhabits. He is what surrounds him and the boy I was remains with me in the image of yellow lilies and creamy anemones among the grasses and scattered stones” (*There*, 3). For Lane, the Okanagan landscape is something that “lives in the blood and muscle of me” and the thing he can “still call it up and



bring it into spirit” (Lane 2). Stating that, “my bones remember the water and stones. I grew my body from that mountain earth, and my cells remember the cactus and pines, the lilies and grasses” (3). Lane, whose recollections of the past are mired in the violence of his community and home, this ability to viscerally conjure the landscape some 50 years after calling the valley home, feels “as much blessed as burdened by this” deep connection to the Okanagan landscape.

The violence and beauty that typifies the Okanagan in Lane’s memoir are present and amplified in his novel *Red Dog, Red Dog* (2008). The novel, which grew out of his work on his memoir, found its genesis in Lane’s memories of the North Okanagan party he went to as a teenager, “with all the typical drugs, booze, rape and pillaging” (LaPointe). The violence and dysfunction that underpins the Okanagan’s settler communities in Lane’s memoir shows up in his novel and is explored from vantage points of multiple characters. The Okanagan valley in *Red Dog, Red Dog*, is described vividly by one reviewer as a “stagnant backwater peopled with losers, no-hopers, dopers and white trash” (*Hamilton Spectator*). Lane’s Okanagan, populated by broken people, is also a place of stark beauty, where, as George Grinnell observes, landscape works as “a ceaseless force upon [Lane’s] characters and reminds us that desertification can take place in the psyche and amid social relations as much as it does on the land” (109). Lane’s novel, set in his valley of neurotic return, unfolds over a week in 1958 and flashes back to the 1930s, 1920s, and 1880s as it charts a family’s migration and degradation into further violence.

While mainly focalized through the family’s youngest son, Tom Stark, the novel is told through multiple perspectives, including those of the living and the dead. The opening chapter of Lane’s often harrowing novel, is narrated through the only first-person voice we will hear, that of Rose Stark, a baby who dies of neglect and whose bones and ghost dwell in the branch of an apple tree in the family’s decaying orchard (2). The orchard, often associated with fertility,

abundance and the pastoral, in Lane's novel, is where unharvested fruit falls fallow and where (by the novel's end) six bodies (mostly family members) are surreptitiously buried. While the orchard is haunted, the valley and the town, described as squatting "in a bowl beneath desert hills," is filled with the ghosts of cultures that have been marginalized, overwritten, or abandoned (15). The fictitious *tabula rasa* that settler imagination has long imposed on the Western Canadian (and American) landscape is troubled in Lane's text by the ongoing presence of the Syilx Okanagan people, who were forced onto reserves without treaties in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tom, scanning the valley, perceives he lives in "a land without history. The tree and stones without stories, the hills a vacancy" (119). The word 'vacancy' here implies a prior tenancy, a tenancy he acknowledges when he hears "in the creeks and rivers a white water sound he knew the Indians had always listened to" (119). While the Syilx Okanagan, who live on "the reserve at the head of the lake," are described as "strange visitors to [the] town," they are not the only othered presence to dwell uneasily in the squatter valley (44, 119).

Billy, one of Lane's narrators, is a third-generation resident of the region and the inheritor of a local dog fighting outfit. He chronicles a settlement history, describing his grandfather's journey from Portland in 1865 up the Okanogan Trail through the interior, followed by "cowboys and gold seekers, farmers and settlers, all of them believing the valley was God's own country" (280). Here, we can see the movement of a host of individualistic agendas that will begin to carve up the valley according to its available resources and under the omnipresent legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery. In "Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery" (2018), the Assembly of First Nations argues that the Doctrine of Discovery, which "emanates from a series of Papal Bulls (formal statements from the Pope) and extensions, originating in the 1400s," offered the "legal and moral justification for colonial dispossession of sovereign Indigenous

Nations” and was “invalidly based on the presumed racial superiority of European Christian peoples and was used to dehumanize, exploit, and subjugate Indigenous Peoples and dispossess [them] of [their] most basic rights” (Assembly of First Nations 2). The legacy of the Doctrine’s ideology was to form a “foundation of genocide” and “lead to practices that continue through modern-day laws and policies” (2). This ideology underpins the settlers in Lane’s valley’s unquestioning belief that land was there for the taking while marginalizing Indigenous claims and presence.

In Lane’s novel, this influx of settlers continues well into the 1940s and ‘50s. Rather than simply remaining a region rife for the exploitation of resources, the valley becomes a place of exile. Pondering an empty and decrepit train station, Tom

thought of the people who’d come to the valley. They were men from the war, the ones who missed the marching into guns and the ones who marched through them. They were also the immigrants from Europe who wanted to put the war behind them, and find work in the valley, families who’d drifted north from the States, west from the prairie, and from the crowded cities in the East. Tom had seen them arrive as a boy, speaking languages he couldn’t understand, showing up confused in their strange clothing with their frail belongings or in dilapidated trucks piled high with mattresses and children, only to stand and stare in amazement at their dream, the high hills, the valley with lakes, its green orchards and fields. (129)

These moments of reverie are brief and unsustainable in Lane’s bleak valley. Veterans are described as descending into madness and isolation on scraps of land. At the same time, immigrant groups and the impoverished exiles of the dustbowl remain marginalized, described as living in “shotgun trailers[s] with old towels for curtains” (53). While a distinctly working-class,

white and masculine community, the valley is marked by its exclusions and segregations that run along the lines of race, class and gender. It is a place of barely suppressed and hidden violence, where, as Lane remarks, “families were private, [and] what happened in the family stayed in the family” (Lane).

This squatter valley remains nameless throughout the novel and is described scornfully by characters as “a forgotten valley” (39) and as “a place without story” (232). The town, in one scene, is crudely situated on a world map that one of the young characters has torn from a *National Geographic*: “a black X marking the place where the town should have been, no name there but for his enigmatic sign” (23). Using a panoramic lens focalized through Tom, Lane offers a topographic situating of the town within the broader landscape:

In the heart of it was a valley leading nowhere out but north or south. North was going toward narrower cuts of rock, deeper winters, darker forests, and even more desolate towns that turned into villages, villages into clusters of trailers and isolated shacks in the trees, nothing beyond but bush that ran clear to the tundra. South was going toward the desert states where there was no place a man could get work unless he was Indian or wetback, someone willing to take cash wages half what anyone else might ask. The only way you could stay alive down in Washington or Idaho was to break your back in the onion fields and orchards, set chokers on a gypo logging show, or steal. East were mountains piled upon mountains, the Monashee giving over to the Selkirks and Purcells, and finally the Rockies and the Great Plains. To the west was a rolling plateau where nothing lived but moose, bear, and screaming, black-headed jays. At the edge of the plateau, the rolling forest rose up the Coast Range until it dwindled against the scree, and on the other side of the peaks and glaciers was the sea, something most people in the

valley had only heard of, never seen, the Pacific with its waves rolling over the dead bodies of seals and salmon, eagles and gulls shrieking. (14-15)

The valley here is profoundly isolated, surrounded by inhospitable geographic and human landscapes and divorced from the Pacific Ocean, with its larger cities, that most people had only heard of. The racial and class inequities in the Okanagan Valley are more acute south of the border, where working-class white settlers, the speaker laments, are subject to the same degrading wages as offered Indigenous and Latinx workers. While the animal inhabitants of the landscape, the “moose, bear, and screaming, black-headed jays,” are given dominion over the lonely terrain, Indigenous populations are absent from this topographic survey of the province, apart from existing for cheap labour to do back-breaking work on orchards and onion farms. Lane describes the town in similarly stark terms and again deploying a panoramic lens, but this time the lens follows one of the region’s most feared inhabitants, the rattlesnake.

The town squatted in a bowl beneath desert hills, its scattered lights odd fires stared at from up on the Commonage where a rattlesnake could be seen lifting its wedge head from the heat-trail of a white-footed mouse and staring down at the three lakes, Swan in the north, Kalamalka to the south, and Okanagan in the west, the Bluebush hills and mountains hanging above them in a pall. Against the sky were rocky outcrops with their swales of rotted snow where nothing grew but lichens, pale explosions that held fast to the rough knuckles of granite as the long winds came steady out of the north. In the valley confluence where the lakes met were the dusty streets and avenues of the town shrouded by tired elms and maples. What the snake saw only it could know. (15-16)

The town’s surrounding landscape is seen initially through the lens of a hunting rattlesnake and then through a narrator who perceives the broader landscape using a language resonating with

sadness, violence and decay. As with much of his prose, the language is rich with the unsparing lyricism that defines Lane's poetic oeuvre. In this passage, the Bluebush hills and mountains are described as hanging over the hills "in a pall," while the desolate outcrops are described as "rough knuckles of granite" (15). The town itself is a place of "dusty streets and avenues [...]" shrouded in tired elms and maples" (16). Here the town feels desolate, while the outcrops and mountains are places of sadness and muted violence. Later, the town is described as squatting beneath the desert hills. The language here is the language of impermanence; squatting here implies a temporary stay. Lane, who writes from "a deep understanding of the ways in which colonial settlement" had played in the Okanagan, presents the settler town not through the language of valorization that "celebrates European expansion, settlement, and industry," but as a space of profoundly uneasy settlement ( Furniss 7).

In Lane's work, the key to countering the valorization of settler heroics and the forgetting of the violence that underpins the settler colonial project is to tell the stories and lay bare a "history of violence" that as a "society we've chosen to forget" (Lane qtd. in LaPointe). George Grinnell, in his examination of Lane's *Red Dog, Red Dog*, argues that the novel offers a window to the Okanagan, "a four-season tourist playground that is perhaps not nearly haunted enough by its violent past" and that the novel offers a reflection "on the ways in which the truth of a place arrives in fiction better than it does in the laboured fantasies of a leisure economy" (109). The novel itself offers reflections on storytelling and the efficacy of stories in understanding a history of violence and settlement in western landscapes. For Elmer Stark, the novel's family patriarch, "the country they lived in was too big for any tale to hold it," and "the story gets lost each time you try to fit it into the land" (35). Similarly, Eddy, Elmer's deeply damaged second son, tells us "stories about the past, anyone's past, were deadly and he wanted none of it" (102). While Eddy

escapes the troubled past into a violent present, his younger brother Tom (who has suffered his share of trauma) is described as always “searching” and as “hungry for the past” (41) as he tentatively coaxes stories from those closest to him. Cathy Caruth argues that the act of narrativizing trauma does not simply produce “a story about the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but [is] a story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another... [and may lead] therefore to the encounter with another” (108). These encounters, Caruth argues, may awaken both the imperative to speak and the imperative to survive (7, 108). While Tom ultimately fails to fully comprehend his father’s violent life and the complexity of the tragic legacy it has borne, listening has ensured Tom a kind of survival. At the close of the novel, surrounded by ghosts “from another time,” Tom sees, in the glinting of the eyes of the dead, a “small window leading him *finally* to another life” (320). Lane’s novel, which culminates in Tom’s crossing of a threshold into another life, is not solely an amalgamation of the stories Tom gathers throughout the narrative but, in its polyphonic structure, articulates the collective violence of a place and time.

#### GATHERING POINTS IN LAISHA ROSNAU’S

##### *THE SUDDEN WEIGHT OF SNOW*

Laisha Rosnau’s novel, *The Sudden Weight of Snow* (2002), is wrought from the same geography that Lane explores in his memoir and novel. Like Lane, Rosnau spent her teenage years in Vernon and, like Lane, feels the semi-arid landscape has remained a part of her. Rosnau, in a 2008 interview, states that “the [valley’s] landscape is insidious” as “it [continues to] creep into [her] work” (“interview,” Rosnau). Set roughly 25 years after Lane’s *Red Dog, Red Dog*, the

imagined north Okanagan town is no longer nameless. Sawmill Creek has a more sophisticated sense of itself as a community, complete with a set of moral codes and self-policing that are largely absent in Lane's text. Just as the town in Lane's *Red Dog*, *Red Dog* does not appear on a map, Sawmill Creek does "not register on the Husky-placemat map of Canada" (Lane 23; Rosnau 35). The North Okanagan town of Rosnau's novel is no longer 'nowhere,' nor is it yet somewhere. Rosnau's bildungsroman charts the development of Harper, née Sylvia Harper Kostak, a teenager struggling to come to terms with her place within a geography that increasingly feels like a source of confinement.

The novel opens with Harper's acerbic first-person assessment of the town and surrounding valley, revealing a place rife with the tensions we first witnessed in Lane's novel. As in Lane's novel, Rosnau's narrator offers a topographic, social and cultural overview of the space she inhabits, one that charts the tensions inherent in her surroundings:

Sawmill Creek is a small town in British Columbia in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, a clearing where several small valleys meet. It is five elementary schools, one high school, one mall, a 7-Eleven, a mill that goes through cycles of lay-offs like seasons and is always threatening closure, and too many churches. A place that hollowed out a pit in my stomach like hunger. People in Sawmill, as we called our town, had distinct values, a moral code informed the whole community. Some things that people objected to were child abuse, homosexuality, vandalism, laziness, single moms, welfare moms, public nudity, lying, cheating, stealing, the decline of family values, zealous feminists, and most prominently, anyone who protested a man's God-given right to make a living and support his family. The last mentioned were mainly environmentalists from the city who knew nothing about the land or how to live off it honestly. (3)



Just as the town of Lane's memoir and novel is governed by a code of privacy and secrets, so is Sawmill Creek governed by its own set of unspoken rules. Sawmill Creek is described as a place that has "distinct values, [and] a moral code [that] informed the whole community" (4). As in Lane's text, the community of Sawmill is primarily defined by what it rejects and who it marginalizes. While the populace of Lane's valley does not seem to adhere to Christian principles, instead brutally cleaving along the lines of race, Sawmill Creek, a place of "too many churches," dogmatically adheres to code aligned with the Christian Right that "has existed since the early twentieth century, and movement activists have played a role in debates over prohibition, anticommunism, civil rights, feminism, abortion, gay rights, and tax policy" and has "always possessed a "custodial impulse" believing that "God commands them to guard against amorality in the broader society" (Dowland). The list of community objections is long and includes the prohibitions that might be expected, i.e., child abuse, cheating, stealing and lying, but also includes heteropatriarchal strictures that police along the lines of class, gender and sexuality, including objections to homosexuality, single moms, welfare moms, the decline of family values, and zealous feminists (4). The fiercest community objection, as argued by the protagonist, Harper, is "anyone who protested a man's God-given right to make a living and support his family" or the "the environmentalist from the city who knew nothing about the land or how to live off it honestly" (4). In the aptly named Sawmill Creek, resource extraction is considered a "God-given right." Here we might see the Judaeo-Christian claim of "Dominion," which, Lynn White Jr. (1996), Paul Corcoran (2017) and Greg Garrard (2012), explore as underpinning various aspects of the colonial project and its justifications. We might also see the Doctrine of Discovery ideology at work in, as its legacy lends "legal and moral justification" to resource extraction on unceded Indigenous lands (Assembly of First Nations 2). British

Columbia's forestry industry has long offered settlers, especially settler men, a form of articulation through labour. The origins of this ethos as perhaps most powerfully expressed in Martin Allerdale Grainger's 1908 work of non-fiction, *Woodsmen of the West*. In Grainger's text, British Columbia's forests are a space where settler men achieve regeneration through labour and where their work is described as yielding "visible result[s]" and as having "obvious importance" (12). While the town in Lane's novel is populated by "losers, no-hopers, dopers and white trash" (*Hamilton Spectator*) and is governed by normalized violence and a code of secrecy, the town of Rosnau's novel is governed by the exclusionary ethos of the Christian Right and by the near worship of resource extraction.

Though Harper's mother, a single mother with financial struggles, in some ways falls outside of the community's principles, the Harpers' attendance at the Friends of Christ Free Church largely keeps them within the community's fold. While Harper is keenly aware of hegemonic community expectations, she is also cognizant the valley is host to a range of individuals who transgress the code:

Even in a community as strong as Sawmill Creek, not everyone followed the code. There were old draft dodgers living in the hills with ham radios and Marxist manifestos, though the war they were running from had ended thirteen years before. There were those who stitched marijuana crops into the fabric of the forest and clerks at the health food store who claimed we could cure every ailment with the right herbs and tinctures. Somehow, we even had teachers infiltrate our secondary school who taught passive aggression, relaxation techniques, and conservative forestry practices. These teachers came from a bigger place — Vancouver, Calgary — and came to Sawmill Creek as student teachers, were lured to stay by the fruit-filled valley, the ski hill half an hour from town. We knew

better than to tell our parents what they taught us. We hung on to these glimpses of the larger world. Dreamed of ways to get there. People told us we'd want to return – *This is such a good place to raise a family* – but we'd been raised here and knew it wasn't true.

(4)

Those at the margins, literally and figuratively, hold ideologies outside the norms of the settler town (i.e. Marxism, New Age beliefs, and forest stewardship), ideologies imported from larger cities and south of the border. We see these similar tensions at play between fundamentalist Christianity and Marxist ideals at play in Scott's short story, "Tall Cowboys and True." Unlike Lane's valley, which is described as largely divorced from cities and the wider world, in Rosnau's text, the conservative center is increasingly infiltrated by belief systems that counter hegemonic norms. For some of the Sawmill Creek's population, like Rosnau's protagonist, who are exposed to divergent epistemic practices, the core principles of the town are increasingly understood as oppressive and corrosive, rendering the town a place to escape at the earliest opportunity.

While the novel begins in the heart of Sawmill Creek's Christian conservative center, Rosnau's novel is more concerned with the fringes. As the novel progresses, Harper increasingly lives in the margins. Much of the novel takes place on the valley's northern edge, at Pilgrims Art Farm, a place that "could loosely be called a commune" (70). Pilgrims Farm offers a space where individuals might marry back-to-land principles with artistic pursuits. While in many ways the antithesis of Sawmill Creek, Pilgrims Farm is a space governed by its own strictures, where vegetarianism is expected and where sexual inhibition and sobriety are suspect. Pilgrims Farm is also a space of decay, tragedy, and collapse, as two members of Sawmill Creek's toxic male population, who have sexually assaulted the protagonist and her best friend, drive to the farm in a

drunken rage and burn down its core buildings, leaving the already tenuously stitched together community in shambles.

West coast writer Jack Hodgins has observed that British Columbia is a land “littered with failed utopias,” where fantasies of regeneration through immersion in prelapsarian paradises are undermined by social realities that demand more strenuous transformations (Hodgins 77). Howard White, the founder of B.C.’s *Raincoast Chronicles*, argues that British Columbia has “tended to attract people who were unhappy where they were before and wanted something different,” positing that “each arrived with their own different little program for solving the universe’s problems” a notion that Jack Hodgins’s explores in his Vancouver Island novel *The Invention of the World* (1977) (White qtd. Barman 354). The ahistorical sense that B.C. was empty or “nowhere” offered sites upon which settlers could devise personal Utopias (Brown 12). The word Utopia derives from ancient Greek ou-topos, which means “no-place” (“utopia, n.”). It has also come to describe any non-existent societies described in considerable detail (Delahunty and Dignen). Ian Buchanan, in his analysis of Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*, argues that “it is not the end result, the perfect place, that is crucial, [in More’s work], but rather the process of imagining what it would take to make the present world different than it is” (Buchanan, *Dictionary*, 478). In *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, Michel Foucault argues that we might also understand utopia as “at once absolutely real, relating with the real space surrounding it, and absolutely unreal, a virtual image” produced by the those working to create the space (333).

Pilgrims Farm, started by Americans fleeing the Vietnam War draft, is described by Thomas, one of its founders, as a place where “no one really [...] stays for good” (Rosnau 199). It is a place that attracts a steady stream of transients, who arrive in “van or station wagons

stickered with slogans” and come seeking “unconventional romance and clean air, collecting welfare cheques so they can pursue these through volunteer work and shared meals” (196). When the novel’s protagonist, Harper, asks Gabe (the son of two of the Farm’s founding members) what the transient community members expect from the farm, he replies, “everything to be sweetness and light, something like that,” going on to state that what they wind up finding is the “same shit as everywhere else” (196). Thomas explains that the farm is “close quarters for a lot of people. A lot of decidedly eccentric people” and that to stay for too long would “drive you mad” (198). The “absolutely unreal” utopian dream of Pilgrims Farm continues to attract and sustain community members. Rosnau’s novel also explores the disillusionment with the “absolutely real” material space of the farm, where conflicts fester in a claustrophobic and “dirty” space (Foucault 333; Rosnau 197).

At the Pilgrims Farm’s annual Winter Solstice Fair, Harper is introduced to this utopian space, a world that, like Sawmill Creek, is rife with its own internal conflicts. And it is here where she meets another outsider: her doomed love interest, Gabe, around whom a portion of the novel’s plot and subplots moves. Like so many of the characters in Lane and Rosnau’s novels, Gabe has not chosen the valley but has found himself there due to familial discord and migrations imagined as regenerative. Using a second person narration, Harper traces the circuitous historical, emotional, and geographic trajectory that takes Gabe between his father’s home in California and Pilgrims Farm. Gabe is envisioned by the Harper as working (mostly without success) to determine his locus: “you have always imagined where you are at any given time, as a point on a map. In your mind’s eye, the map lies flat, north at the top, and you are simply a speck on the page” (278). In this instance, Gabe is understood as neither confined nor

protected by the valley that contains the narrator. Harper, who uses her capacity for imaginative mapping to chart Gabe's path into her world, works just as hard to account for her own presence.

Using first, second and third person narration throughout the narrative, Harper transcends her own topography and historical moment as she charts her mother's immigration from Ukraine to Western Canada, her father's youth in Alberta, and the disastrous marriage that would take her parents into the badlands and south to Nevada, before the ultimate disintegration of their marriage in a small Albertan town. Towards the novel's close, Harper, in a meta-textual moment, acknowledges potential pitfalls in her narrative project, stating, "It's dangerous to try to imagine the coordinates of another mind, even more so to lodge yourself in there" (302). Harper's restless polyphonic structure ensures that she never lodges in any one consciousness long but instead moves amidst a host of coordinates before finally returning to her first-person narration.

Rosnau's protagonist closes her narrative (and project) with the following statement, which might well serve as the novel's thesis:

Needing to understand where we all started, where we came to, I try to trace a route back to a place I thought I knew, to map my way back with words. When you lose something before really knowing it, what is recoverable becomes the shape of longing, a story you tell yourself. I follow the fingers of several valleys, but all of them round in on themselves again, seeking some kind of centre, the lowest point a place where things gather. (341)

Here, we are invited to read the novel topographically as a text born of trauma that seeks to marry a host of unmerged voices within a common geographic space. For Harper, the novel serves as a means to find a commonality or gathering point in the valley and its communities. In

both Lane and Rosnau's novels, the North Okanagan becomes a site of new cohesions for the novels' central protagonists.

COLONIAL SPACES AND THE SURROUNDING VALLEYS:  
JEANNETTE ARMSTRONG'S *SLASH & WHISPERING IN SHADOWS*

While Lane and Rosnau's work explores the psychological impact of the settlement project on their characters and communities, Jeannette Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows* and *Slash* are both novels deeply invested in unpacking the material and political structures that govern the lives of their characters. Armstrong, who was born in 1948 and grew up on the Penticton Indian Reserve, was integral to the development of the thriving En'owkin Centre in Penticton. Through her continued work with the En'owkin Centre, Armstrong is committed to "making sure that those people in our community that have suffered under the violence of cultural imperialism, have the opportunity to learn from the traditional families and to share that" (Armstrong qtd. in Martinez). Armstrong's work as a novelist is driven by this commitment to teaching and is evident in the didactic nature of both *Slash* and *Whispering in Shadows*. *Slash*, published in 1985, has explicitly pedagogical origins. It was produced for the Okanagan Indian Curriculum Project and originally directed toward eleventh graders, though it has been widely embraced by adult readers (Sarkowski 74-75). The novel is a *bildungsroman* that follows Thomas Kelasket, also known as Slash, from his childhood in the Okanagan to his movement into activist circles across Turtle Island and later back to his home community. *Slash* records key events in Indigenous activism, like the "Occupation of Alcatraz between 1969 and 1971, to the Trail of Broken Treaties caravan to Washington, DC, in 1972, and to the Wounded Knee incident

one year later — and beyond” and has been used by educators, including Kit Dobson, to introduce “younger readers to the social movements that came before them” (Dobson 8).

Similarly, *Whispering in Shadows*, published in 2000, examines activism (its limitations and potential) as it follows its protagonist, Penny, a Syilx Okanagan artist and environmental activist. A *kuntstleroman*, *Whispering in Shadows*, charts Penny’s movement from her youth in the Okanagan to her education within, and apart from, colonial systems and into her activism, as it connects her life story with “an investigation of societal co-authorship” (Sarkowski 73). As Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy postulate in *Writing in Our Time*, about both coming-of-age narratives, *Slash* and *Whispering in Shadows*, Armstrong powerfully links “the liberatory discourse of empowerment with a historical materialist focus on the conditions of cultural production” (239). Armstrong’s novels weave her characters into the local and continental histories, tensions and geographies of place, locating her inquiries “‘down on the ground,’ in [the] everyday lives and situations” of her characters (Code 1). Her novels, which begin on the cut-off reserves of the south Okanagan, end there as well, as Penny of *Whispering in Shadows* and Slash of the novel by the same name, both find renewal in their ancestral lands.

*Slash*, which is explicitly didactic, perhaps fittingly opens at a reserve school, one of many spaces in the novel governed by colonial forces. The school, which only goes as far as grade six, is described as cold and reeking of “dust bane” and the oil from a stove. In Armstrong’s novel, children who aged out of the reservation school were sent to residential school, or like Danny, Thomas’ older brother, kept home from school entirely by their parents. Thomas (Slash) and Danny Kelasket learn about the residential school from their older cousin, who describes the hunger, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, telling them that the school “made people mean inside from being lonely, hungry and cold” (Armstrong, *Slash*, 3). While the



boys are spared residential school, a change in policy by the local Indian Agent brings the closing of the reservation school and the busing of children to the town school where the settler children attend. Before arriving at the town's school, Thomas's father calls the children together to offer them words of counsel,

You are going to have to go to the school with the white kids. It's going to be hard because you're different. They will probably treat you mean and make fun of how you talk and how you dress and how you look. Now I want you kids to go to that school and don't listen to them. Be proud that you're Indian. Don't worry about your clothes or your looks or how you talk. We are the people who have the right to be here. We ain't sneaking in from somewhere and pushing our way in. Remember that every time one them says something bad to you. You know who you are. (8)

Thomas's father's words quickly prove incisive as the children face prejudice, cruelty, and suspicion at the town's school. On arriving at the town school on the first day of classes, the children from the village are separated before being allowed to join their white peers and told by the school's principal that "you Indians are lucky to be here. We'll get along just fine as long as you don't steal from the other kids," and subsequently screened by a nurse for lice and diseases (9). This introduction to the settler school leaves young Thomas perplexed, as he wonders "what [the principal] meant by stealing and checking out heads. [Thinking] maybe he wanted the nurse to look at our hair colour or something because everybody else seems to have blond hair" (9). As the school year progresses, Thomas sees new iterations of the racist stereotypes upon which his first interaction with the principal and nurse was fostered. He hears these stereotypes in the taunts of other students, including one boy who says, "Injuns are nothing but thieves, full of lice" (9). This persistent presumption by settlers that Indigenous people are thieves serves as a form of

psychological projection for the novel's settlers, which, as Thomas's father points out in his counsel to the children, have snuck and forced their way onto the land and are themselves inheritors of, and participants in, the theft of Indigenous land. Despite his father's counsel, Thomas comes to internalize the racism that surrounds him as he grows to hate his looks and clothes and comes to feel like "we weren't good enough to mix with the white kids," "always feeling shabby and poor" (9; 19). The town school, while not filled with the horrors found at the residential school, is a space where racism is rampant and where racist colonial structures are learned and internalized. In Armstrong's novel, the town school acts as a site of assimilation, where Indigenous people are taught to be "middle-class whites" (37). As Thomas continues his life's work of "learning decolonization," he, as a mature speaker, reflects on his experience and comes to understand the role of settler schools in the colonial project:

I understood that most Indian people have knowledge of different ways and values, and that's what comes into conflict with some of the values that are taught to them in schools and by society as a whole. I realized that schools are meant to teach the young of the middle class the best way to survive their society and to maintain its system. They are not meant to instruct those who do not have the values of that society. So confusion arises inside each of the Indian kids who begin to question which value system they must live by. Some of the ones who have parents that are more assimilated than others, as far as material wealth are concerned, have an easier time at those schools, but they still have a difficult time coping with ordinary living. The conflict usually comes out in forms of social problems, like heavy drinking or other harmful things.

I could see how ones like me, who had more of those values at home, really got screwed up. When every single thing that meant something good to me was being

battered from all sides, I had to fight to justify my existence the way I was. It seemed to be the only way I could survive. I saw then that anger and bitterness was a natural outcome. I saw then why so many of our people became angry and fought back, then finally gave up and became defeated. (172-173).

Thomas comes to see both the aims and impacts of the settler colonial school on Indigenous peoples. The schools function as a means to “maintain its [colonial] system” to inculcate middle-class white values and are not designed with Indigenous value systems in mind. From this mature, hard-earned vantage point, Thomas pulls back and sees the systems that operate to inflict psychological and social harm to Indigenous populations and can see how this system has impacted him directly. Thomas, who by the end of the novel becomes a leading voice in his community, recognizes the crucial need for “Indian control over education” to counter colonial systems of oppression and to see in his people a “new determination” for cultural empowerment in the face of decades of disenfranchisement (173).

While the space of the settler school is described as sterile and hostile, the settler city itself is also a space of environmental degradation and alienation (8-9). Town, for young Thomas, is a place of “strange sounds at night” where “the trains, the airplanes and cars never seemed to quiet down,” where “the sky [was] always seemed to be lighted up so you couldn't see the stars very clearly” (5). The town, divorced from the natural cycles of night and day, is also a space of “strong smelling junk,” smells far removed from the “fir and pine smells mixed with sage” that Thomas craves beyond the oppressive classrooms (21). Thomas receives advice from his Uncle Joe, who is knowledgeable in Indigenous medicine, to avoid consuming too much of the town’s food. Uncle Joe argues that the “white people sometimes put stuff into foods that weren’t good for people,” “stuff that will poison you,” pointing out that the air itself is being

dirtied by similar poisons (23). Joe counsels his nephew to leave white settlements as frequently as possible and to “go out where the air is clean to get food” (23). While the town is a space of environmental degradation, it is also a space where Band members find another deadly poison in alcohol. Thomas’s father laments, “Good young people, who might have had big families,” have died from drinking. Here, Thomas’s father does not only mourn the deaths, but the generations lost to addiction. While the town is a toxic space for *Slash*’s characters and Indigenous communities, the surrounding valleys still offer a reprieve. The novel ends with an epilogue that finds Thomas sitting high above the valley on Flint Rock, looking down “to the thousands of lights spread out in the distance where the town is creeping incessantly up the hillsides” (209). Thomas, who has escaped the town at this moment, recognizes incessant creeping of the settler town up the hillsides continues to pose a pervasive threat. While acknowledging this threat, Thomas turns his attention away from the valley bottom and to the landscape above. Thomas looks to the sunset and the mountaintops and hears wind that “moans swaying through the pines as coyotes shrill their song to each other in the gathering dusk” and watches the “long, yellow grasses [that] bend and whip their blades across cactus, sand and sage” (209). In this animate other-than-human landscape away from the town’s lights, Thomas recognizes the need to tell his story “for his son and those like him,” to live with a pain born of colonialism that “is an everyday reality,” and to take up a role as a teacher and leader in his community. *Slash*, which is a pedagogical text at its heart, ends with a profound sense of hope and renewal. At the same time, it acknowledges the depth of the struggles faced by Indigenous peoples, particularly in the face of the incessant creep of settler colonial settlement.

While ecological concerns figure in *Slash*, these concerns are central to *Whispering in Shadows*, whose protagonist, an environmental activist and artist, ultimately battles a rare form of cancer born of the pesticides she was exposed to through her work in orchards. Katja Sarkowsky argues that while *Slash* “explores forms of activism and citizenship that are compatible with Indigenous communities’ distinctiveness,” in *Whispering in Shadows*, “environmental issues are foregrounded and presented as globally interconnected” (73). Sarkowsky argues that in *Whispering in Shadows*, “sovereignty is not only about systems of governance, but also about a broader understanding of individual and collective agency, and the local is inextricably linked to the global” (73). The protagonist offers extended meditations on environmental theory and activism through the novel’s sometimes epistolary structure. In one of her letters to a former Okanagan College classmate, Julie, Penny, who is now an art student at UVIC, explains how she landed upon an image whose themes she’ll explore via mixed medias at an “environmental campout” (Armstrong, *Whispering*, 83). Penny describes creating an art installation where a tall tree is lit “up with strobes to make it look like it was dancing with hundreds of people surrounding it” (Armstrong, *Whispering*, 83). This image of the tree becomes a vehicle through which Penny “gets to talk about technology and it’s [sic] effects on the natural world” (83). Through her artistic practice work, Penny comes to see humans as the “natural environment, too,” and as environments that can be “wounded by technology,” psychologically and otherwise (84). Indeed, much of Penny’s environmental activism is not rooted in environmentalism preoccupied with preserving wild spaces, or what Cronon terms “bipolar moral scales in which the human and the nonhuman, the unnatural and the natural, the fallen and the unfallen, serve as our conceptual map for understanding and valuing the world” (Cronon,

“The Trouble with Wilderness,” 24). Penny is instead interested in environmental degradation's toll on human lives and communities. In her letter to Julie, Penny thanks Julie for her earlier rage at the ecological degradation that surrounds them (a rage that at the time Penny did not understand), writing of her newfound outrage at what she sees:

You should see the miles and miles of cut logs moored on the Fraser. And the sludge from every kind of industrial operation is something else. It stinks. Them salmon must be choking! And you know, I took the kids to Beacon Hill park over here, to the beach. Cripes, the garbage that washes up! You'd think the ocean was too big to pollute! It's dangerous. It makes me so outraged! How could this be allowed? It's like one huge bloody rape scene. (84)

Faced with the scenes of place-based ecological violence, Penny asks, “how is the human organism, as one whole unit, faring in what it has wrought? The pinnacle of evolvement? After eons of other life forms perfecting the cosmos for us to be able to exist?” (84). Here, Penny broadens her lens towards the global. Living with, and learning from, what has been wrought by human environmental actions is central to Penny's journey in the novel.

Penny's keen eye for the psychological toll ecological violence wreaks on human organisms is evident in her interactions at a Peace Camp on Vancouver Island. The camp is made of primarily white protesters who have gathered to stop the logging of an old-growth forest. The opening section of the chapter, where Penny arrives at the camp, is interspersed with short lines of italic text that invite the reader to experience them separately. Together, the lines work as a kind of poem:

*It seems so solid. It's so familiar.*

[...]

*Golden Light touching green.*

[...]

*Even the air seems close and thick.*

[...]

*It feels like it's humming a dark green song. Like someone familiar.*

[...]

*The camp between.*

[...]

*Between plunder and sanity. Between the jagged edge of the saw and delicate lichen.*

[...]

*Here I am. The famous five valley coast of Vancouver Island. Home of the Nitnat and others. People of the mist. (93-94)*

This section's third person prose sections serve as digressions into the material space of the camp. At the same time, these poetic lines offer a psychological interiority, operating as a kind of interior monologue. Penny's deep kinship with the forest is evident in these lines. While the camp is not in the territory of the Syilx Okanagan but in that of the Nitnat people and others, Penny can discern in the "dark green song" something profoundly familiar. The camp sits in a liminal space between "*plunder and sanity. Between the jagged edge of the saw and delicate lichen*" (94). The logging operations that threaten the forest are figured as a kind of insanity rooted in greed and plunder, an insanity embodied in the jagged edge of the saw, an image violently juxtaposed against that of delicate lichen.

In many ways, the Peace Camp serves as a microcosm of the broader environmental movement in British Columbia. Penny, who is identified as the sole Indigenous member of the

camp, is asked by the camp leader, Jim, for advice on how to engage with the Indigenous people on whose lands they are camped and who have not seemed willing to take up the fight as vigorously as the camp's protesters. Penny, who is at the camp as a student and observer, is asked for help fostering trust between the camp and the apprehensive local band. However, she declines because she has no direct connection to local Indigenous activists. Instead, she offers counsel to Jim, who wonders why hundreds of Indigenous people, instead of a handful, don't join them in the "immediate struggle":

Maybe it's just not the way they do things. Maybe they don't know that they could make an impact. Maybe like my community, the Chief and council are the ones that go out and deal with things outside their community. Maybe it has something to do with the way Native people get treated every time they do make a stand. Here and everywhere else. There's a lot of racism that surfaces. Maybe they know in the end that nobody really wants them to be part of the forest. That people want the trees saved but not with them in it. What they really want is a park managed for tourist dollars. (109-110)

Penny articulates a struggle with more depth and complexity than the "immediate struggle" Jim and his fellow activists at the Peace Camp are engaged in, one that Indigenous people across Turtle Island face when they seek to defend their lands from settler incursion and exploitation. In "The Incarceration of Wildness," Thomas Birch argues that the kind of wilderness protection advocated for by the Peace Camp has served as a "cloaking story to cover and legitimate conquest and oppression" (Birch 5). Birch argues that settler colonial acts of wilderness protection have turned Indigenous lands into the "park[s] managed for tourist dollars" that Penny speaks of (Armstrong, *Whispering*, 110). Similarly, William Chaloupka and R. McGregor Cawley, in "The Great Wild Hope: Nature, Environmentalism and the Open Secret," argue that



the environmental “rhetoric of wilderness,” which often elevates “land over humans,” has worked to diminish “several other histories, most notably histories in which naturalistic terms conspire with hegemonic power to deflate the hopes of women, blacks, Indians, and every group marginalized as the human Other” (20). Penny, who has seen settler racism surface as Indigenous peoples have sought to assert their title over their land, understands the Nitnat skepticism of Jim’s appeals regarding the ‘immediate struggle.’ Penny, a keen observer of the psychological and sociological complexities of the environmental movement and its various facets and of the camp itself, diagnoses the settler dis-ease in the camp. This dis-ease is particularly evident in her interactions with Clairisse, a white woman who is “always asking questions” and who befriends her on her arrival at the camp (95). Clairisse is described as a “third generation Canadian. No real roots anywhere. Retired father and stepmother in Oshawa. Mother in Florida. A half-sister, in Texas. Dispossessed without knowing of what” (100). Penny asks Clairisse what it is she is searching for, to which she replies, “I don’t know really. Something better. Something more meaningful” (101). Penny does not respond directly to Clairisse’s admission, but Penny’s interior voice speaks in italics throughout the chapter, asserts: “*It’s all here all around you!*” (101). Clairisse, described as questioning, dispossessed, and carrying a sadness, feels untethered from a cultural inheritance and cannot feel the connection with the surrounding forests that she has come to protect. Clairisse will instead leave the forest, doubly sad, having ultimately failed to save the trees, destined to continue her search, but still not knowing for what. Both Jim and Clairisse, locked in the ‘immediate struggle’ of the Peace Camp, are ephemeral figures on Indigenous territory. In the novel’s final standoff at the camp, the local Indigenous protesters face violence and racist taunts from loggers before being arrested by the RCMP, while the rest of the Peace Camp’s members find exile in waiting vans. As the Peace Camp dissolves, the Nitnat

continue to fight for their hereditary territory against the colonial forces of the courts, the logging company and the RCMP.

Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows* redounds with eco-grief and solastalgia as its characters push back against the horrors of the Anthropocene and often fail despite their efforts. In the ill-fated cedar forest at the Peace Camp, Penny is overcome by a "deep, dark sadness" as she whispers "her language [nsyilxcən] into the shadows" (111). This moment of grief, from which the novel takes its title, is also when Penny finds comfort in her language and the land itself, though the forest around her will fall. As Penny leaves on the bus, knowing the trees she'd come to protect are about to be felled by "machines that already started their crawling advance on the trees," both she and the members of the Peace Camp in the van weep openly for the environmental destruction. In 2003, Glenn Albrecht sought to situate "the emerging literature on eco-grief, climate grief, and ecological grief within the concept of solastalgia" as a means of offering "conceptual clarification to the experience of people whose home environment was being changed in unwelcome ways" (9). Albrecht sought a means of conceptualizing "the human emotional, psychological, and cultural equivalent of what biologists called 'ecosystem distress syndrome'" (Albrecht 9). Albrecht argues that "due to the increasing pace of "development" and environmental and climatic pressure, human distress connected to disrupted relationships to "home" and landscape has become a defining feature of the twenty-first century" (Albrecht 10). *Whispering in Shadows* offers an extended meditation on this distress as Penny navigates sites of conflict within the environmental movement, her profound sense of solastalgia, and finally, the physical toll her exposure to the orcharding industry's deadly pesticides take on her body in the form of cancer. When asked by a friend who is visiting her after her appointment with her oncologist what her people, the Syilx, say about cancer, Penny responds,

I don't think they have a word for it. At least not any I have ever heard, and I speak the language. One thing though, I was thinking coming over here. I was thinking about our Coyote stories about the flesh-eating monsters during the transformation of the world into this one. That's what came to mind. I'm being eaten by something which I can't see. It was the image I saw when that doctor described the kind of cancer I have. [...] Those stories tell of how the world rid the flesh-eaters so we could survive. How they conjured themselves and how they shape-shift and change their form continuously. They were banished but only if we kept the balance which was established. The balance is the order of the natural world. Now everything is out of balance. We are causing another transformation. Our old people say they're back. In all kinds of different forms. Not just cancer, but aids, mad cow disease, superbacteria, mutant viruses and so on. It makes sense to me, literally and metaphorically. (247)

Here, the flesh-eating monsters of some of her people's oldest stories are made manifest again in the world as sickness and result from a lack of balance between humans and "the rest of nature" (248). Penny explains that this separation has caused a process that renders humankind vulnerable to the massive global transformations that threaten human existence, leaving humanity "like the dinosaur" as we face our extinction (248). Again, through her protagonist, Armstrong's narrative moves from a focused moment of personal grief, from two friends sitting on the beach after an appointment with an oncologist, to a broader solastalgic meditation on the human toll of environmental degradation and mismanagement exact.

Both of Armstrong's novels foreground protagonists' journeys from their home communities to activism and home again, where they impart the lessons they've learned. As Sarkowski argues, "*Slash* explores forms of activism and citizenship that are compatible with

Indigenous communities' distinctiveness, whereas *Whispering* presents a struggle of environmental citizenship" (Sarkowski 73). Both novels offer complex, extended critiques of colonial systems and their impacts on Indigenous communities, ecosystems and global ecological health. Often didactic in tone, both novels contain explicit calls to action. For instance, Penny, facing her demise and seeing the climate crisis deepening, urges, "People [to] have to stand up and fight [the ecological crisis] like a war. We are at war" (246). While both novels are rife with mourning over the impacts of colonial violence on Syilx communities, there is hope and empowerment in the novels' many calls to action and the visions of the community as regenerative spaces. As Penny begins her final struggle with cancer, she returns home and finds she provides a respected and healing presence to her family. She is particularly comforting to her sister Lena, who is escaping an abusive relationship and her life in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, where the lights are "dull and dingy with what's behind them" and who seeks "the rainbow back" to her community (272). Penny, whose studies and work have taken her away from her Penticton community (similar to the long hiatus of Thomas Kelasket in *Slash*), at the close of the novel, in her talks with Lena, realizes that it was the community that she was missing:

Maybe it's our community together in a certain way on the land which makes us a full person. A thing deeper and more enduring than any of one of us, which we need to make us whole. Something which gives deep comfort and security. Which gives us grace. Maybe it's the natural state we are blueprinted for. [...] I think it could be a longing felt by more people than you and me. It might have more to do with what's wrong with the world than we think. Maybe it's such an old and deep yearning that it's become the norm. Only we've had something to recognize it by. People are separated into little pieces of

family because of the way they have to make a living now. It's been that way in Europe for a long time. Community has come to mean a collection of people, unrelated strangers, living side by side. A town, a city. An uncaring and dangerous place. [...] I think it's being separated from real community connected to the land that is at the bottom of that yearning. [...] A culture of discontent. It's what's sucking up everything clean and healthy. (273-274)

In this exchange, Penny and Lena express deep gratitude for their Indigenous community that operates “like somebody holding” them, offering comfort, rootedness, and deep connections. Connections that Penny views as integral to wholeness, something that she perceives here as lacking a settler culture defined by fracture and rootlessness. While this “culture of discontent” poses a clear and present threat to her health, community and the broader global community, the novel's return to community offers hope in the face of the horrors of the Anthropocene.

#### SETTLER DISCONTENT, A NEW FEUDALISM & WILDFIRES

What Armstrong identifies as a “culture of discontent” is explored in the work of Harold Rhenisch, John Lent, and Sharon Thesen, who all touch on the deep sense of melancholy that underpins the Okanagan settlement (Armstrong, *Whispering*, 274). Like Armstrong's protagonist Penny, who offers a grim diagnosis of the contemporary state of human engagement with the natural world, Rhenisch in *The Wolves at Evelyn* shares a deep skepticism for and aversion to the colonial project and its human outcomes. Reflecting on his parents' arrival in Kelowna as immigrants and their realization that “they had made a terrible mistake,” Rhenisch imagines that “if you left civilization because it really stuck in your craw, by the simple act of coming here to

escape it you defined this place as wilderness and yourself as civilization, and you were lost” (107). Rhenisch’s parents, who arrived as immigrants in the early 20th century, quickly recognized that they had been sold a fantasy whose emblem was “a Hudson’s Bay Company blanket” (107). Just as Armstrong’s protagonist in *Whispering in Shadows* perceives greed and plunder as a kind of insanity, so too does Rhenisch identify a sickness in colonial “civilization,” writing,

Civilization is a disease. Opium, heroin, cocaine, the Cariboo Gold Rush grown in hydroponic installations under haystacks in Forest Grove and Buffalo Creek and powered by stolen propane trucks, even the bud grown in rental houses throughout Burnaby and Chilliwack or tended in the cedar forests of Nelson and Sorento and False Bay, are cheap substitutes for the real thing. The real drug is land. It is the primary bacillus, the Ebola virus, so to speak, the epidemic of civilization. [...] There is no vaccine. (105)

Here, Rhenisch uses the language of addiction and disease to describe the greed that propels colonial ambitions. Civilization, for Rhenisch, is a kind of madness rooted in hunger for land. The madness here originates in regionalisms (the bud grown in rental houses and cedar groves) and thrives even in small communities like Forest Grove and Buffalo Creek. The Hudson Bay Company blanket fever dreams that settlers bring with them run counter to the “colonial reality” as Rhenisch understands it and operates as follows:

“you settle wild land, attempt to produce items of value to some distant culture, to which you export them, while struggling to import and maintain the cultural values and traditions of that foreign culture. It’s like communism: it should work, but it doesn’t.” (214)

In Rhenisch's work, the colonial foundations that underpin Okanagan settlements are rooted in a kind of madness, with colonial projects doomed to failure, inciting familial misery and personal unease with settlement.

While Rhenisch is concerned with the roots of the Okanagan's "culture of discontent," John Lent, in *So It Won't Go Away* (1990), sees a new feudalism radically altering the fabric of the North Okanagan town he's known, where the downtown core has become deserted, writing,

Something is happening to this small city that is happening everywhere else, too. All the franchise, box stores have set themselves up out on the highway, past the city limits so they can pay cheap taxes, and have constructed malls where people go look for things, even restaurants and bars. Downtowns have been emptied, and the sad truth is that things are getting worse, not better. A new kind of feudalism is settling in and, on some level at least, we all know it, participate in it, and to a certain degree, help it along. It's crazy, but it's happening. [...] We'll close down all the service bays, fire all the mechanics, open up little convenience stores that sell everything at the highest prices the market will bear, and hire sixteen-year-old high school dropouts to run the places and be mugged at night. [...] Sure, something in me knows it isn't quite that simple, but there's something going on that is ushering in a new kind of, seemingly benign, serfdom. (188-189)

Here, market forces have caused the city's core to become desolate, devoid of the bustle that previously defined such spaces, as people choose to frequent places that are primarily accessible by car. While shifting commercial land use alters the makeup of the town, so does automation, making higher paying jobs obsolete and creating low wage, low skill jobs that exploit and endanger their workers. While all of this happens in plain sight, Lent's protagonist acknowledges

his apathy and complicity through his participation and that he is, to a “certain degree, help[ing] it along” (189).

This sense of complicity with, and culpability for, the destructive forces at work in the Okanagan, be they market forces, or the force of settler land exploitation and mismanagement, is at play in Sharon Thesen’s poem “The Fire.” Dis-ease with Okanagan settlement sits at the surface of Thesen’s long poem, “The Fire,” from her 2006 poetry collection, *The Good Bacteria*. Composed of fourteen untitled and unnumbered poetic sections, the poem explores the impact of wildfire in rural-urban interface zones on human settlements and other-than-human habitats. Like many residents of British Columbia during increasingly destructive fire seasons, Thesen was evacuated from her Kelowna home in 2003 due to a wildfire that would destroy over 200 hundred homes but would spare hers (Holmes 97). In section 9, Thesen’s speaker eggs on the anthropomorphic fire, urging: “Go ahead fire./ Dot with embers the patios / of citizens trying to dine al fresco” (100-103). Here, the speaker urges the fire to disrupt those who seem willfully ignorant of the fire and continue to ‘dine al fresco’ while the inferno rages. In the following stanzas, the speaker’s calls to the fire to act become more violent, as they invite the fire to “aim flame-throwers /at the forest service, the army, /the navy for that matter, who also came / to help,” and calls on the fire to make those who had resisted leaving their homes despite evacuation orders, “give up” (104-107; 109). The speaker’s alignment with the force of the fire extends to section 11, where the speaker concedes, “We shouldn’t be living here / anyway,” where “At night /coyotes howl with laughter / and desire” (123-126). Coyote appears in this poem as a kind of trickster figure aligned with the malevolent fire, howling with laughter and desire, as the speaker concedes that “we,” which might be read as settlers, who are living precariously and unsustainably in the wildland urban interface shouldn’t “be here anyway.”



Thesen's poem ends in elegy and amid the waste left by the fire, in the "shocked humps of hills / self-conscious and sad, evicted / from their leafy life /naked rock, empty scorched treetops /where for weeks no bird had / or now would / ever sing" (143-149), where "a spray of brown needles / on the forest floor we pretend / are a carpet of grass / and not a scorch of tears" (164-167). Here, the speaker, who had egged on destruction in a kind of madness, ponders its ruin amid the "scorch of tears" (167). The sense of complicity, melancholy and profound dis-ease present in the work of Lent and Rhenisch also runs through this poem, where its speaker acknowledges their uninvited status while mourning the landscape they've called home.

#### WHERE THINGS GATHER

Laisha Rosnau's *bildungsroman*, *The Sudden Weight of Snow*, closes with the protagonist reconciling with the various intersections of culture, history and geography that have shaped her own story and the one she will write. She imagines this process of gathering stories, and making sense, in terms of the geography that surrounds her, writing, "I follow the fingers of several valleys, but all of them round in on themselves again, seeking some kind of center, the lowest point a place where things gather" (Rosnau 341). Underpinning the literary works examined in this chapter is a similar process of gathering as protagonists and speakers come to terms with their loci. Reading the work of Lane, Rosnau, Armstrong, Lent, Rhenisch and Thesen, we can trace this preoccupation with the finding and making of "home," as each of the works examined in this chapter contends with the cultural and material geography of the valleys they inhabit (Cronon 24). Just as Rosnau's protagonist seeks to gather the stories accumulated within a specific geography, so does Lane, in his memoir and novel, where he examines lives lived within

the geographic boundaries of the North Okanagan. In Lane's work, the valley is a site of unspoken violence, where the surrounding hills are "a ceaseless force" upon its residents (Grinnell 109). Lane aims to lay bare the violence he experienced and witnessed in the Okanagan settlements to counter the forgetting and denial he sees as endemic, arguing in an interview that if "a lack of understanding of our stories, nothing ever changes" (LaPointe). While Lane explores the violence at the heart of the settler colonial project, Armstrong, in *Slash* and *Whispering in Shadows*, unpacks the myriad impacts of colonial settlements and policies on the region's Indigenous individuals and communities, identifying a "culture of discontent" that is "sucking up everything clean and healthy" (274). In the work of Rhenisch, Lent, and Thesen, discontent and unease in settlement are woven into narratives and stanzas, as protagonists and Thesen's poem's speaker are confronted by the ongoing impacts of the settlement project on ecosystems and human lives. By reading the literary works of Lane, Rosnau, Armstrong, Rhenisch, Lent and Thesen together, we can perceive a process of gathering and making sense that disrupts the valley's polished tourist veneer. These texts, together, allow us to see the workings of space profoundly impacted on myriad levels by settler colonial systems.

## CONCLUSION:

### ECO GRIEF, INCREMENTAL DECOLONIZATION, AND CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

As I write this from British Columbia's Southern Interior, the region around me is burning. Outside my window, the ordinarily green mountain valley is brown with smoke, and my phone buzzes periodically with air quality advisories. I keep our windows closed, but still, the smoke seeps into everything. Nearby communities are under evacuation alerts and orders down the road, and I'll go to bed tonight wondering if we'll get a knock on our door telling us to flee. A few weeks ago, the town of Lytton burned down, and I watched the footage with deep horror, casting my eyes on the forests surrounding our small city.

Today, the White Rock Lake Fire in the North Okanagan, close to my old home in Vernon, B.C., is burning out of control. BCWS incident commander Mark Healey, who is heading up the response to the massive 58,000 hectare fire, reports that in his nearly three decades of fighting fires reports he has never seen such dry conditions, remarking, "This is a catastrophic event. This isn't just a wildfire" (Clow). Here, in Nelson, B.C., I have my family's Go-Bags half-packed, missing some essential items (like a first aid kit and a whistle), but the sense of overwhelm has been paralyzing while the sun struggles to pierce the heavy smoke. When I run into friends in town, I can hear the exhaustion in their voices as our conversations inevitably turn to escape routes and whether we'll do what so many others have done and flee over mountain passes and through fire zones to the less smoky skies on the Pacific coast. Every day lately, I go online to scan the official B.C. Wildfire dashboard to scan for the new fires indicated with orange diamond symbols and check the highway closures on the Drive B.C. website, assessing which potential escape routes are open to us. I also keep a wary eye on the

weather forecast, which currently predicts two weeks devoid of the possibility of rain, predicting more record-setting temperatures in the high 30s. We've entered Level Three Drought, and you can almost hear the forest dying when you go outside. At a local beach with a friend and my son a couple of weeks ago, we sat in the thick smoke after a swim in Kootenay Lake, a lake normally frigid with glacial run-off but disturbingly warm from cooking under the heat dome. Sitting in the acrid air, my friend remarked, "I guess we're all living in the consequences of our inaction." There was nothing particularly profound about her remark except that, as I watched my 10-year-old son playing in the eerie light of the orange sun, the word "consequences" carried a horror I hadn't yet fully contemplated. The Summer of 2021, in the Interior of B.C., has felt like a summer of consequences as another record-breaking heat dome settles over our desiccated landscape. I hope for a safe end to the fire season while dreading what will come in subsequent years.

As residents of British Columbia's interior face the inescapable devastation of the climate crisis, B.C.'s settler society is also beginning to reckon with the horrifying impacts of its colonial system more viscerally. On May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the announcement by Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Kukpi7 (Chief) Rosanne Casimir of the finding of the unmarked burial sites of children's remains adjacent to the Kamloops Indian Residential School sent shock waves across the province, country and world (Sterritt, "Investigation at B.C. Residential School"). The Kamloops Indian Residential School was the largest in the Indian Affairs residential school system. "Given the size of the school," Kukpi7 (Chief) Rosanne Casimir stated, "with up to 500 students registered and attending at any one time, we understand that this confirmed loss affects First Nations communities across British Columbia and beyond," hundreds of Syilx Okanagan children, were sent to either the Kamloops Indian Residential School or St. Eugene's Indian Residential School

in Cranbrook (Thomas, *Tk Emlúps Te Secwépemc*; Okanagan Nation Alliance). This announcement, and the subsequent finds of hundreds more unmarked graves at residential school sites across the country, including the discovery of 751 unmarked graves at a former residential school in Saskatchewan, led the Idle No More organization to call for the cancellation of Canada Day celebrations, releasing a statement which reads:

The recent discovery of over 1300+ unmarked graves of Indigenous children at residential “schools” reminds us that Canada remains a country that has built its foundation on the erasure and genocide of Indigenous nations, including children. We refuse to sit idle while Canada’s violent history is celebrated (Idle No More)

This call, and the pain experienced by Indigenous communities and by settlers, some only just awaking to the colonial crimes they inherited and continue to benefit from, led to the cancellation of Canada Day celebrations across the country, including in Ottawa, where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau acknowledged that

The horrific findings of the remains of hundreds of children at the sites of former residential schools in British Columbia and Saskatchewan have rightly pressed us to reflect on our country's historic failures, and the injustices that still exist for Indigenous peoples and many others in Canada. (Perez and Pringle).

While most Okanagan cities followed suit and cancelled their Canada Day celebrations, the City of Vernon decided to proceed as planned, funding a celebration at O’Keefe Ranch, “a kilometre away from the Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) community which has been heavily impacted by the recent findings” at the Kamloops Residential School (Kilawna, “Vernon’s Canada Day”). This decision upset many in the Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) community, including Cody Isaac, a Syilx Nation member,

This celebration is something that is so hurtful to us because it's a constant reminder of what we have lost, of everything that we have lost and what we have gone through as Indigenous people, and the effects of that are still very prominent to this day" (Isaac qtd. in Kilawna).

While the City of Vernon decided to proceed, neighbouring cities, like Salmon Arm, cancelled their events and instead "hold space for the grief of Indigenous Peoples" (Megan Louis qtd. In Kilawna). With Canada Day behind us, the acute shock around the findings at Kamloops Residential School and in Saskatchewan is being subsumed by new horrors as fires burn through communities in the interior of British Columbia, layering catastrophe on top of grief and shame.

Academic, ecocritic, and activist Donna Haraway, in her book *Staying with the Trouble*, argues that living "in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times," requires learning "to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings" (1). She further argues that "our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle waters and rebuild quiet spaces" (1). Ecocritic and professor in the Department of English at the University of Victoria, Richard Pickard, has sought to recognize our troubled ecological moment in his pedagogical practice. Pickard encourages his students to observe their "intellectual and emotional responses to environmental crisis" as they unpack place attentive works of literature (including Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* and Theresa Kishkan's *Winter Wren*) (Pickard 1). In opening up about their "eco-grief and rage," Pickard and his students have sought to "productively unsettle ourselves and our studies" (Pickard, "Eco-grief," 1). Staying with the trouble, as practiced by Pickard, and argued by Haraway, requires an attentiveness to the

“tangles and patterns” of the “real and particular places and times” in which we dwell (Harraway 3). Similarly, this doctoral project has sought to productively untangle narratives rising from ‘real and particular places and times’ as it examines unsettled subjectivities wrestling with eco-grief.

In literary texts from and about the Okanagan region that I have examined in this study, including those by Laisha Rosnau, Jeannette Armstrong, and Dania Tomlinson, we might trace a common thread – that of seeking to reconcile one’s singular subjectivity within the “tangles and patterns” of a violent and vexed settler colonial history and present in a distinct geographic region (Harraway 1). Many of these works explore the darkness at the heart of the settler colonial project that coercively claims Syilx homelands and how that darkness finds its way into homes and psyches. But these texts also have glimmers of hope as narrators and speakers find ways to narrativize their experiences. In Rosnau’s *The Sudden Weight of Snow*, the protagonist, who has gathered stories from a specific geographic locale, is finally able to process her trauma. Similarly, in Jeanette Armstrong’s *Slash*, the protagonist, who at the close of the novel sits on a hillside looking down on the Okanagan and reviewing his life, comes to understand that his pain served as a gift, as his story positions him to become a leader of substance and experience. A similar gathering and reflection occur at the conclusion of Dania Tomlinson’s *Our Animal Hearts*. Here, the protagonist, Iris Sparks, having explored and reconciled with the darkness at the roots of her community and family history and her culpability, is surrounded by the animal spirits and ghosts that followed her throughout the narrative on the shores of Okanagan Lake and stands poised to submit herself to the lake monster Naitaka as she takes a final step into “the cool waters of our bottomless lake” (341). In these three novels, firmly rooted in the Okanagan, the

protagonists first must reconcile with the histories, geographies and stories they are born into before they forge new narratives.

Many of the literary texts in this study see settler colonial dreams of mastery unsettled and uprooted. What emerges is an interrogative process that calls into question the ethical implications and obligations entailed in living in the Okanagan. In her lyric poetry and collaborative work through the Eco Art Incubator, Nancy Holmes provides potent critiques of settler culture as she examines new instituting imaginaries and new ways of staying. Similarly, Harold Rhenisch, in his poetry and memoirs, seeks to rewrite narratives of mastery through his examinations of orchards as microcosmic regional spaces. We are invited to read “the microphysics of power in a settler colony,” which is doomed to failure in Rhenisch’s texts (Henderson 4). Lane, too, is unsparing in his examination of the settler colonial colony in his poetry, fiction and memoir, as he seeks to lay bare a “history of violence — hundreds of years of monstrous inequity” (LaPointe 129). Lane argues that if we forget or ignore the violence that underpins settler communities, “we lack understanding of our stories, [and] nothing ever changes” (LaPointe 129). These literary works unsettle the fantasy that the Okanagan is what poet Bliss Carman dubbed “Eden of the North” (Carman 16), or geography to be unproblematically overwritten by settler colonial land use schemes.

While literary and critical works by settlers in this study open the doors for “interrupting and restructuring the dominant social and philosophical imaginary,” settler self-awareness concerning the destructive legacy and ongoing harms of colonial projects is in their early stages in the Okanagan (Code 9). Though slow in coming shift in thinking about settler relations with Indigenous communities is perceptible beyond the literary and scholarly community and on the ground in Vernon, B.C. In March of this 2022, in an unexpected move, Vernon City Council



relinquished its copyright to Ogopogo to the Syilx Okanagan Nation (Clow, “Ogopogo”), returning stewardship of n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ’s image to its people. With the return of stewardship of n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ comes the possibility that lands might also be returned to the Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB). OKIB is in talks to buy back the 2,310 acres of the land pre-empted by Cornelius O’Keefe, the postmaster and farming entrepreneur who pre-empted 12,000 acres of unceded Syilx Okanagan lands in 1867 (Matassa-Fung; Manchester). The sale would potentially be financed by and form part of a resolution to the ongoing land claim between OKIB and the federal government (Matassa-Fung; Manchester). While land claims continue to be contested throughout the Okanagan region (and the province as a whole), symbolic changes are afoot. On May 25, 2021, the Vernon City Council added a territorial acknowledgement to its meetings for the first time. Mayor Victor Cumming began the council meeting with the statement, “As mayor of the City of Vernon, and in the spirit of this gathering, we recognize the City of Vernon is located in the traditional territory of the Syilx people of the Okanagan Nation” (Manchester, “Vernon City Council”). The formal territorial acknowledgement comes three years after a City Council policy was introduced for discussion in 2017 and was the subject of some controversy (Rolke). Chief Byron Louis of the Okanagan Indian Band, when asked for comment about the potential implementation of the territorial acknowledgement policy by the City, said,

“It would be a nice gesture, but you want substance. If there is going to be a relationship, you have to have substance to it,” going on to describe the relationship between the OKIB and the Vernon City Council as “kind of like a marriage. There are ups and downs and you get into arguments, and then we get back together and we talk again. The main point is neither one of us have walked away, and that says a lot.” (Manchester, “Vernon City Council”)

There is reason to hope brighter days are ahead regarding the Okanagan settler community's respect for Indigenous communities. Still, there remains much to account for regarding the legacy of violence inflicted on Indigenous peoples by settler colonial forces, institutions and individuals.

Settler poet and scholar Norah Bowman's poetry collection, *Breath, Like Water: An Anticolonial Romance* (2021), is a powerful meditation on a white settler's complex relationship with the unceded Syilx territory on which she lives. Bowman's collection closes with the prose poem "Truth and" a title purposely leaving the word 'Reconciliation' out of the phrase 'Truth and Reconciliation,' taken from the 2008 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). As scholars, including Leanne Poitras Kelly, Christina Chakanyuka, and Sharon Stein, have noted, many efforts towards 'reconciliation' in the aftermath of the report have been and are "largely tokenistic and superficial, and respond selectively to Indigenous concerns" (Stein). Stein argues that these efforts can lead to the "fatigue of Indigenous people who are exhausted from being subject to colonial violence and frustrated by settlers who seek to transcend that violence without giving anything up" (Stein). The call for 'Truth Before Reconciliation' acknowledges that "we cannot even begin the long-term process of changing this relationship until settlers are first willing to face the full extent to which colonial violence has shaped Canadian higher education [and the wider national landscape] for over three hundred years" (Stein). Bowman's poem omits Reconciliation from its title and instead works focusing on the truth of the speaker's inheritance, describing their people "as church-building, gold-hoarding, land-fencing colonizers" and subsequently given "no truck" to them or their ancestors' claims to land (66). Though the poem's speaker expresses a deep love for the land, for the "deep gulches, dusty dry creekbeds, corpulent lichen-sprawled stones, middens of red fall leaves, goat bones and deer hair, grouse squawk and

aspen groves” the settler speaker makes peace with the “unpitiable heartbreak” that comes with knowing that though they love the land and were raised on it, they have no claim (66). In the poem's final line, the speaker reiterates this denial of a claim, writing, “I am new, I come from violence, and I have no claim” (66). Here, the speaker’s violent inheritance voids any claim they have to the land they love. In Bowman’s collection, being home on stolen Syilx land carries shame, grief and the responsibility to work to return what was stolen to the Syilx and to repair the harm colonialism has done.

In many of the texts I examine in this project, we can trace a preoccupation with the finding and making of “home,” as these works explore the cultural and material geography of the valleys they inhabit and often invite their readers to consider how settler society asserts itself on the landscape. While the settler narratives in this study do *not* teach the “people-to-be” how to live on the land, many of them do start to dismantle frontier mythographies and narratives that would seek to dismiss Indigenous presence and title (Armstrong, “Literature of the Land,” 355). Rhenisch’s 2006 memoir and manifesto *The Wolves at Evelyn* (2006) ends with the sentence: “Welcome back to the land,” which invites settlers, old and new, to reassess their connections to the space in which they dwell. In this sentence, we might also discern a gesture to return after epistemic failure, an invitation to reassess settler desires to create Edens that cannot be but that do leave material and emotional wreckage or wrack. After more than 160 years of European oppressive and violent settler incursion in the Okanagan, and with the existential threats of fire and drought, the question remains: what stories do settlers (like me) need to start telling to live ethically and sustainably on the land?





Figure 2. Harper, Renée. "Ogopogo: Kelowna City Park." Mar. 10, 2018.





Fig. 3. Ogopogo statue being demolished. Berry, Carli. "Off with his head: Construction work begins to remove Ogopogo statue." Kelowna Capital News, Apr. 4, 2019.

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