

“IN THE CITY I LONG FOR”

“IN THE CITY I LONG FOR”:
DISCOVERING AND ENFOLDING URBAN NATURE IN ONTARIO LITERATURE

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the literary archives of three Ontario cities – Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto – to discover and enfold urban nature in our everyday lives. Beginning with a refusal to accept the popular notion that there is no nature in the city or that the city is separate from the natural world, I seek to engage with writers in these three cities to find representations of and engagements with the natural world in an urban setting. In the light of a growing environmental crisis marked by fossil fuel shortages, climate change, biodiversity decline, and habitat loss, this project is an attempt to craft a meaningful response from an ecocritical perspective. Central to this response are two key contentions: one, that the natural world is in the city, but we need to find ways to recognize it there; and, two, that the most efficacious and ethical way to respond to environmental crisis is to make this urban nature a part of our everyday lives by fostering attachments to it and protecting it, or, to put it differently, enfolding it into our human lives. Using literature, my project shows how the natural world is present in three Ontario cities and how writers like Di Brandt, John Terpstra, Phyllis Brett Young, and others are already including urban nature in their work. This work also addresses significant gaps in Canadian literary discourse which has tended to focus on wilderness or rural spaces and in ecocritical discourse which has also tended to eschew urban locations. This project adopts an interdisciplinary perspective to read a wide range of texts including fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, educational material, scientific publications, and others in order to encourage readers and citizens of Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto to discover and enfold the urban nature present in those cities.

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This dissertation is dedicated to all the residents of Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto, especially those who have come to discover and enfold the urban nature that each city has. Following the worthy example of Rachel Carson, it is my belief that environmental scholarship needs to be oriented towards a wider reading public. My hope is that this project has been written in such a way that it will be accessible to all readers, particularly residents of these cities outside of the university.

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“This is a poem about the world
that is ours, or could be.”

- Mary Oliver “Five A.M. in the Pinewoods”

Walking the Hidden Country, or Getting Back to Nature in the City.

“One day in desperation, tired beyond measure of walking the endless paved roadways of suburbia, I cut across an overgrown field and almost fell into a green, riverine land. I remember even now how I felt my chest expand, breathing in the oxygen from the trees. There was water down below, rushing over stones and darting through rapids. It sounded like water, looked like water, smelled like water. And though there was not a cloud in the sky, my cheek was wet.

I had not died and gone to heaven. I’d just found the secret, the real world that has always existed beneath the concrete and glass of the exhaust-fumed, deafening city. I had discovered what makes this city of Toronto both unique and human, which gives us the chance to reconnect with our roots, quite literally. The ravine lands: the hidden country.”

-Murray Seymour *Toronto’s Ravines* 6-7

Urban explorer Murray Seymour’s anecdote about discovering the “hidden country” of Toronto tells a revealing narrative of his experience of the city. Having grown up in a small town and lived most of his adult life on Toronto Island, his move into a high-rise in the city proper creates a crisis for him. He finds himself suffocated by “the endless paved roadways of suburbia” and pining for the freer and more wild landscape of his cottage farther north in Ontario. At this point, Seymour tells a familiar tale: cities do not have nature, they are dirty, and they choke the imagination with a homogenous and monotonous concrete and asphalt landscape. This tale is told time and again in phrases like the city is a “concrete jungle” or an “urban wasteland,” and it is reinforced each summer weekend as urban Ontarians head north to their cottages to enjoy their own little piece of nature. In popular discourse, nature is always beyond the horizon of the city, located in the rural farmer’s fields or farther out in untrammelled wilderness. Within a Canadian city, there can be no nature. There are a number of reasons for this belief, not least of which is the idea that Western civilization has been made possible by the conquering of nature through cultivating it and building up a human society. However,

what follows in Seymour's account is surprising not just for how it breaks from the clichéd tale of the unnatural city but also for how much Seymour is delighted with Toronto. Seymour's discovery of "the real world that has always existed beneath the concrete and glass of the exhaust-fumed, deafening city" leads him to experience "newness, wonder, awe and the thrill of discovery" (7). Moreover, this discovery also leads him to write and publish *Toronto's Ravines*, a guidebook with the express purpose of "mak[ing] at least some of the literally hundreds of walks in Toronto available to those who want the experience" (8). The content of the book actively resists the notion that cities are separate from nature, and it invites readers to experience the myriad green spaces that Toronto offers. Rather than simply assuming Toronto is only an unnatural place, Seymour actively engages with the city in a process of discovering urban nature.

Building on Seymour's Toronto-based project, this dissertation explores the literary archives of three Ontario cities – Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto – to discover and enfold urban nature into our everyday lives. Beginning with a refusal to accept the popular notion that there is no nature in the city or that the city is somehow separate from the natural world, I seek to engage with writers in these three cities to find representations of and engagements with the natural world in an urban setting. In the light of a growing environmental crisis marked by fossil fuel shortages, climate change, biodiversity decline, and habitat loss, this project is an attempt to craft a meaningful response from an environmental humanities perspective. While environmentalism has done a remarkably good job of bringing the importance of environmental issues to the public conscious and had considerable success preserving key habitats and areas in the form of conservation

areas and wilderness parks, its efficacy in urban areas has been varied. This project, then, attempts to respond to environmental crisis from an urban setting by taking up two key contentions: one, that the natural world is in the city, but we need to find ways to see it there; and, two, that the most efficacious and ethical way to respond to environmental crisis is to make this urban nature a part of our everyday lives by fostering attachments to it and protecting it, or, to put it differently, enfolding it into our human lives. From these two contentions, I ask questions like: how does our experience of nature in the city modify or shape our relationship to the wider natural world? How does the idea that cities are unnatural justify or legitimate environmental destruction in urban and near-urban areas? How might we change our relationship to urban nature so that such legitimations no longer happen or are made more tenuous? How do textual productions like novels, poems, and creative non-fiction inform, shape, and obscure our perceptions of the natural world in the city? And, drawing on the insights of environmental justice movements, how can we find ways to make urban nature a more equitable place for all peoples? In short, this project is an attempt to discover and enfold urban nature in three Ontario cities. In doing so, it also intervenes in Canadian literary discourses and ecocriticism by calling for a more focussed look at how urban areas need to be taken seriously.

The seemingly paradoxical nature of a phrase like urban nature points to the cultural baggage that the word nature carries, a baggage that needs to be addressed before I continue. The Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams writes, “Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language” before defining the word as referring to “(i) the essential quality and character *of* something; (ii) the inherent force which directs

either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings. Yet it is evident that within (ii) and (iii), though the area of reference is broadly clear, precise meanings are variable and at times even opposed” (219). Williams points to the already considerable semantic difficulties inherent in the word, but stepping back to the cultural associations that the word carries brings on a host of new problems. Philosopher Kate Soper explicates this when she writes that attempting to “disentangle [the] various threads of nature discourse is” to realize that nature

refers us to the object of study of the natural and biological sciences; to issues in metaphysics concerning the differing modes of being of the natural and the human; and to the environment and its various non-human forms of life. The natural is both distinguished from the human and the cultural, but also the concept through which we pose questions about the more or less natural or artificial quality of our own behaviour and cultural formations; about the existence and quality of human nature; and about the respective roles of nature and culture in the formation of individuals in their social milieu. [It] also carries an immensely complex and contradictory symbolic load. (2)

Certain strands of environmentalism, including deep ecology, tend to see nature as an Other to humans, a pure outside world that humans have fallen away from and that offers a redeeming role if we only allow it. In a Canadian context, wilderness often stands in as a synecdoche for nature: a pristine space that humans have not yet destroyed with their culture. For many, the term urban nature is itself a contradiction because it pairs two opposite poles of the commonly held binary of nature and humanity. There is not supposed to be any nature in the city because it is a human space, one built up through the machinations of culture. In European settler-colonialism, nature has been made into an object to be conquered, along with the Indigenous peoples who lived in its environs. Reacting against this dubious justification for imperialism among other manipulations, many critical thinkers have rejected nature as a useful category, instead arguing, as Bruno

Latour does in *Politics of Nature*, that nature needs to be jettisoned “because of the short-circuits that it authorizes” (91). In a similar vein, Timothy Morton writes in *Ecology without Nature* that nature is “a mere empty placeholder for a host of other concepts ... [and/or] ‘nature’ is a Pandora’s box, a word that encapsulates a potentially infinite series of disparate fantasy objects” (14). I share Latour and Morton’s suspicions that nature has been made to do much work under less than honourable terms; the cultural sense that nature is other than human animates the binary that separates humans from non-humans and cities from nature.

However, I am not entirely willing to jettison nature as a useful concept because, despite its complex baggage, it does carry weight. In some ways, the oxymoron of urban nature productively opens up a space in which to see the city again as a place embedded in the natural world. Moreover, a crude social constructionist take on nature leaves no room for agency in the natural world, instead positing that the physical world is nothing but a blank slate.¹ This seems not only willfully oblivious to the role that weather, climate, plants, and animals play in human everyday lives, but it is also a strain of arrogant anthropocentrism. I instead follow geographer Steve Hinchliffe’s definition of nature and society as systems that “make one another (so thus are not independent), but aren’t necessarily reducible to one another (so thus are not strictly dependent)” (9). We are embedded in a material world that surrounds us with minerals, plants, animals, and weather, yet we also help to produce this same world. When I use the word nature, then, I am referring not to a more-than-human world that exists completely outside of the human

¹ To be fair, neither Morton nor Latour deny non-human agency, but argue against a singular, impassive version of Nature. See Latour’s *Politics of Nature* in particular for a broad vision of an inclusive ecology.

realm, nor am I referring to the social construction of that same more-than-human world. Instead, I am referring to the way in which humans are intertwined into a complex system of life that extends from the smallest realms of cells and viruses all the way up to planetary weather patterns and outwards to the thermodynamics of our solar system, a set of relationships that we have been shaped by yet also have shaped in our activities as human beings. Investigating urban spaces will help to illustrate this complex intertwining as Hinchliffe and Sarah Whatmore suggest: “in other words, we might see urban inhabitants as more-than-human; more than animal; more-than-plant; and so on. They are complex assemblages, mutually affecting and affected by their fields of becoming” (128). My hope is that such a definition of nature unsettles the arrogant anthropocentrism that has underwritten much environmental destruction and exploitation while also making room for humans to develop an ethical relationship with the natural world.

This conception of nature begins to approach the meanings that the Indigenous term Creation carries. In Haudenosaunee cosmology, the Creation story is one of the most important stories because, as Paul Williams, Kayanesenh writes “the Creation Story helps define who we are as Onkwehonwe (the Original Beings)” (“Creation” 2). This is not an abstract conception of the natural world, but an intimate reality in which the Haudenosaunee are part of a “complex Web of Life, and an integral part of Creation” (2). Kayanesenh continues:

the Creation Story tells us of the great relationships within this world and our relationship, as human beings, with the rest of Creation. We learn how the Sky Woman became our Grandmother Moon, of how her daughter became our Mother Earth. We understand why we consider the animal and plant life our Brothers and Sisters. When we are born, we are born with numerous relatives to greet and welcome us. (2)

Born into a populated and vibrant world, each Haudenosaunee person bears a number of relationships to other beings, especially the plants, animals, and Mother Earth. This is radically different from the social constructionist position on nature in that the natural world is alive and, even more, is the substance which gives humans life. In explaining the concept of Indigenous Place-Thought, Anishnaabeg-Haudenosaunee critic Vanessa Watts writes “Place-Thought is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extension of these thoughts” (21). Her position completely reverses the social constructionist position in that agency, rather than being strictly human, actually comes from Mother Earth herself and then, only in having a relationship with her, is it granted to humans. Moreover, Nehiyaw (Cree) lawyer Sharon H. Venne explains that “our sovereignty is related to our connections to the earth and is inherent. The idea of a nation does not simply apply to human beings. We call the buffalo or the wolves, the fish, the trees, and all are nations. Each is sovereign, an equal part of the creation, interdependent, interwoven, and all related” (qtd. in Watts 27). In Venne’s terms, humans are not exceptional beings, but instead exist amongst an interwoven, interdependent Creation. This way of thinking works against deep ecology’s sense that humans can only ever have a destructive impact on humanity, instead proposing a familial role for humans amidst a host of more-than-human beings. Creation as an Indigenous concept, then, refuses to separate humans from the natural world but instead posits humans as deeply intertwined and interdependent with it. From an Indigenous standpoint, urban nature is not a paradox at all and the desire to demarcate space as urban or natural makes little sense. It is important to keep in mind, as Watts

reminds readers, that Creation stories are “not imagined or fantasized. [They] are not lore, myth or legend ... [They] are what happened” (21). This reminder points to the way that, even while I attempt to respect Indigenous knowledge, it is possible to read this kind of comparison as an act of colonial violence that removes the Creation story from its context and inserts it into an abstracted framework. Bearing this in mind, I use the term nature rather than Creation, actively working to decolonize the former word by associating it with the Indigenous principle that the natural world surrounds and intertwines with the human one in myriad ways.

Canadian culture has long put a premium on wilderness as a space of value and a marker of national identity. In 1965, Northrop Frye was certainly not the first to postulate the centrality of wilderness to Canadian identity when he described what he called the “garrison mentality,” a symptom of settlers having fought long and hard against an indifferent nature which makes Canadians wary and suspicious of wilderness even as it becomes central to their identity (830). Already here we can see how the natural world is evicted from and actively kept out of the human one in Frye’s concept, one which he believed marked past and current Canadian cultural production. Similarly, Margaret Atwood in *Survival* conceptualized the key theme that runs through Canadian literature as survival, most often bare survival in the face of an amoral and hostile Nature (47). Although both of these positions have since been strongly critiqued, particularly the hostile or violent relationship to the natural world they implicitly endorse, the idea that Canadian culture is defined by its relationship to wilderness has remained quite strong in

popular cultural discourse.² Roy MacGregor's 2002 book of nature writing/ memoir *Escape: In Search of the Natural Soul of Canada* explicitly sets out to explore the "sense of nature and escape" that drives so many Canadians to journey to cottages, campgrounds, or the woods each year (xi). Similarly, Allen Casey's *Lakeland: Journey into the Soul of Canada*, sets out to explore through travelogues, science writing, and memoir "Canada's lake-greatness" in all of its various forms (3). Both of these books struck a popular chord as *Escape* was a national best-seller and won Canadian Geographic's "Best of the Year" award in Nature Writing while *Lakeland* went one farther in winning a Governor-General's Literary Award for Non-Fiction. This kind of reception attests, at the least, to an elite readership's interest in the subject, but also to the continuing importance that Canadian cultural discourse places on wilderness. This importance has fueled the growth of the subgenre of creative non-fiction writing with the prestigious Banff Centre offering a Mountain and Wilderness Writing program annually since 2005. The fact that the Centre, advertising itself as "the largest arts and creativity incubator on the planet," singles out wilderness writing as a narrative form separate from the fiction, poetry, or non-fiction fostered in its Wired Writing Studio speaks to the popularity of this genre and the strength of wilderness in the popular imagination ("About"). Moreover, this attention to the relationship between Canada and wilderness continues in an academic setting in such recent publications as Kylie Crane's *Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Narratives* and Nancy Holmes's anthology of Canadian

² For some of the important critiques of wilderness in Canadian culture, see Eva Mackey's *The House of Difference*, 52-62; D.M.R. Bentley's "Rummagings, 5"; John O'Brian and Peter White's *Beyond Wilderness*; W.H. New's *Land Sliding*, 21-72; and Claire Omhòvère's "Out of the Garrison and Beyond." See also American environmental historian William Cronon's influential "The Trouble with Wilderness" for some of the first questions raised about environmentalism's exclusive focus on wilderness spaces.

nature writing *Open Wide a Wilderness*.

While I do not want to dispute the importance of wilderness to Canadian literary and cultural production, my project is meant as an intervention to change the trajectory of this discourse. Douglas Ivison and Justin D. Edwards issued a rallying cry in their introduction to *Downtown Canada*, a volume focusing exclusively on urban writing:

No longer are we content to engage in thematic studies which privilege the wilderness, rural areas, or the small town as the place upon which Canadian identity is constructed. Instead we seek to bridge the gap that exists between the lived experiences of most Canadians, who overwhelmingly live in urban environments and the public mythology of Canada and critical production on Canadian literature and culture, which has, until recently, largely focused on rural and wilderness spaces and small towns. We seek to shift the focus to that most placeless of places, the city. (6)

Ivison and Edwards's 2005 call has since met with a surge of responses that take up urban writing from a variety of perspectives, particularly through the lens of multiculturalism and critical race studies. For example, Dionne Brand's writing on Toronto in her 2005 novel *What We All Long For* has become a gathering place for scholarship with numerous critical articles published across a variety of journals. Moreover, novels like Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*, Timothy Taylor's *Stanley Park*, and Nicolas Dickner's *Nikolski*, among others, have risen alongside a growing body of scholarship on Canadian cities in other disciplines, particularly in geography, environmental history and sociology.³ While Canadian literary discourse is beginning to match these offerings in other disciplines, there have remained relatively few ecocritical examinations of urban

³ Such work includes geographer Richard Harris's work on the suburbs in *Creeping Conformity* and *Unplanned Suburbs*, the work of University of Toronto's Centre for Urban and Community Studies – see Robert A. Murdie's "Diversity and Concentration in Canadian Immigration" for a good recent example –, urban sociologist Annick Germain and geographer Damaris Rose's *Montréal: The Quest for a Metropolis*, environmental historian Sean Kheraj's *Inventing Stanley Park*, and sociologist Cheryl Teelucksingh's edited collection *Claiming Space* among others.

settings.⁴ This kind of disparity may have any number of explanations including the rise of multiculturalism and discourses of globalization in discussions of Canadian literary studies. By taking up the literatures of Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto, I seek to answer Ivison and Edwards's call for a more focused examination of Canadian urban writing. Rather than perpetuating a wilderness discourse that, in its crudest forms, tends to erase Indigenous presence, justify colonial exploitation, and exclude women and non-white cultures, I seek to investigate locations more germane to Ontario's diverse urban cultures.

That Canada is distinctly an urban nation bears some fleshing out as popular culture tends to tell us otherwise. In 2013, Statistics Canada reported that 69.7% of Canadians lived in urban centers with populations larger than 100, 000 people ("Canada's population"). This number alone does not reveal the massive shift that has happened in Canada's rural and urban areas over the last century. In 1911, 55% of Canada's 7.2 million citizens lived in rural areas while only 45% lived in urban areas. A slow migration from rural to urban areas occurred over the next 30 years, but following World War II this trickle became a flood. While the rural population remained stable between 1941 and 1951, approximately 2.4 million people moved into Canada's urban areas, shifting the balance of urban residents to 62% of the national population. Over the next 35 years, the rural population would climb slightly, growing to just under 6 million. On the other hand, the urban population grew exponentially with some 13 million people moving in by

⁴ For instance, in a search of *Studies in Canadian Literature* and *Canadian Literature*, the two flagship journals of Canadian literary discourse, since 2005 only Lianne Moyes's "Writing the Montreal Mountain," Travis Mason's "Placing Ekphrasis," Susie O'Brien's "Canadian Literary Environments," and Rachel Cowdy's "Ravines and the Conscious Electrified Life of Houses" take an ecological approach to literature of the twenty-two different articles that take up urban spaces.

1986.⁵ In 2011, 24.5 million people lived in large urban areas with only 6.3 million people living in rural areas (“Canada’s rural population”). While the explanation for this change from a rural to an urban population base is quite complex, the fact remains that Canada today is largely an urban nation.⁶ However, this change has not been uniform, but instead varies across provinces. In Ontario, the migration from rural areas to urban ones occurred earlier and has been more thorough as in 1911 the population was already over 53% urban while in 2011 86% of Ontarians live in population centres. To make this even clearer, in 2011 Toronto’s census metropolitan area held 5.8 million people, or just over 45 % of Ontario’s total population. Moreover, if we add up the populations of Ontario’s 5 largest census metropolitan areas – Toronto, Ottawa-Gatineau, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge, and London – 8.83 million people live in large urban areas or just under 69% of Ontario’s total population.⁷ These statistics all highlight the centrality of urban experience to contemporary Canadians.

The urbanization of Canada is by no means unique in world history. The United Nations Population Fund’s *State of World Population 2007* report opens by declaring:

In 2008, the world reaches an invisible but momentous milestone: for the first time in history, more than half its population, 3.3 billion people, will be living in urban areas. By 2030, this is expected to swell to almost 5 billion ... while the world’s urban population grew very rapidly (from 220 million to 2.8 billion) over the 20th century, the next few decades will see an unprecedented scale of urban growth in the developing world. This will be particularly notable in Africa and Asia where the urban population will double between 2000 and 2030: that is, the

⁵ These statistics are taken from Statistics Canada’s “2011 Census”.

⁶ Although they rely on the now out-dated metropolis thesis, Larry McCann and Peter Smith’s “Canada Becomes Urban” does a good job explaining how this process unfolded. See also Pierre Filion, Trudi Bunting, and Len Gertler’s “Cities and Transition” for a more current and in-depth discussion of the different contexts of Canadian urbanization.

⁷ The complicating factor in this calculation is the fact that Ottawa-Gatineau straddles the Ontario/Quebec border. The source for these statistics is Statistics Canada’s CANSIM “Table 051-0046”.

accumulated urban growth of these two regions during the whole span of history will be duplicated in a single generation. By 2030, the towns and cities of the developing world will make up 80 per cent of urban humanity. (1)

These stark facts point to a global movement from rural habitats to urban ones occurring in a compressed time-span. This is not to suggest that there will be no one left in rural areas or that urban living will be the only mode of life, but instead that the bulk of humans will be living in cities by mid-century. The UN report draws attention to this emerging phenomenon because most of the global south's urban populations will be living in poverty. They write:

cities concentrate poverty, but they also represent the best hope of escaping it. Cities also embody the environmental damage done by modern civilization; yet experts and policymakers increasingly recognize the potential value of cities to long-term sustainability ... The potential benefits of urbanization far outweigh the disadvantage: the challenge is in learning how to exploit its possibilities. (1)

Although the exact contours of urbanization differ vastly across the globe's many local contexts, attempting to understand why and how this change is happening is important not just for the pursuit of social justice, but also, as the report points out, for ecological justice. While I cannot offer a comprehensive solution to the deeply complex phenomenon of global urbanization, this dissertation does present and advocate for a careful re-thinking of the human relationship to place in local urban areas. Such an action will be a necessary first step towards addressing any of these emerging social and ecological justice problems in meaningful and long-lasting ways.

While ecocriticism has come a long way since its emergence in American literary studies in the mid-1990s, it has followed Canadian literary studies in not fully engaging with urban settings. Initially, it worked to establish nature writing as a productive and

engaging literary genre, recovering or re-establishing writers like Henry David Thoreau, Edward Abbey, and Annie Dillard. The 1996 publication of Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader* announced the field's emergence onto the playing field of literary theory and it has since solidified this position with an outpouring of theoretical, critical, and creative non-fiction works.⁸ However, critics like Dana Philips in *The Truth of Ecology* and Michael P. Cohen in "Blues in the Green" sounded warning calls about the lack of engagement with not just postmodern theory but also feminist and postcolonial insights. Heeding these calls, ecocritics have expanded into a vast array of fields with Morton taking up deconstruction, Catriona Sandilands utilising feminist and queer theory, Graham Huggan and Susie O'Brien working in the spaces between postcolonial studies and ecocriticism, Carey Wolfe making forays into animal studies and post-humanism, and Ursula K. Heise's recent work in globalization among others.⁹ Although it has emerged somewhat more slowly in Canada, ecocriticism is currently flourishing in the work of Pamela Banting, Sandilands, Jenny Kerber, Nicholas Bradley, D.M.R. Bentley, Laurie Ricou, Rita Wong, Cheryl Lousley and many others.¹⁰ Moreover, the coming together of scholars, writers and artists in the Association of Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada (ALECC) has resulted in the creation of *The Goose*,

⁸ In what might be a somewhat unreliable sign of critical acceptance, the publication in the last four years of several introductory books to ecocriticism alongside at least three different readers signals ecocriticism's ascension into the common vocabulary of English and Cultural Studies departments. These include Greg Garrard's 2011 *Ecocriticism* and his 2012 *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies*, Timothy Clark's 2011 *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, Louise Westling's 2013 *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment*, Ken Hiltner's forthcoming *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, and, here in Canada, Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley's 2013 *Greening the Maple*.

⁹ See, for example, Morton's *Ecology Without Nature*, Sandilands and Bruce Erickson's *Queer Ecologies*, Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, O'Brien's "Back to the World," Wolfe's *Animal Rites*, and Heise's *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet*.

¹⁰ For an overview of Canadian ecocriticism's development see Lisa Szabo-Jones's "Taking Flight."

a semi-annual journal, two conferences, and a number of readings and events. Similar to developments in the United States and globally, the work being done in Canada reflects a broad range of topics. However, this expansion and diversification has not been reflected in studies of urban literature.¹¹ In 1999, American scholars Michael Bennett and David W. Teague published *The Nature of Cities*, writing that “the purpose of the current volume is to sharpen this focus on the nature of cities by exploring the components of an urban ecocriticism” (4). This call for focusing on the “nature of cities” has not been fully heard as studies of urban nature have remained isolated on the peripheries of discussion.¹²

My project, then, aims to fill the gaps in both ecocritical and Canadian literary discourse by taking up urban writing from an ecological perspective. This work is important not just because it re-orientates these two discourses towards a pressing need, but it also provides an avenue for the wider urban public to begin thinking about and engaging with the natural world in the cities they live in. Although I engage with some more abstract forms of theory and discourse, I have attempted to write in an accessible language while continually coming back to the material world that the texts I look at are grounded in. By pulling apart the binary of nature and the city, I intend to make urban nature strange so that readers are encouraged to look again at the urban location they live in. While this kind of action requires both a willingness to learn the ecological features

¹¹ Creative non-fiction writing on urban nature is rapidly growing in popularity with American writer Lyanda Lynn Haupt receiving much attention for her *Crow Planet* and *Urban Bestiary* books. In Canada, books like Rhona McAdam’s *Digging the City*, Wayne Grady’s *Toronto the Wild*, and Doug Bennet and Tim Tiner’s *Wild City* have started to explore how the city is intertwined with the natural world. It proved beyond the scope of this project to include these works in any substantial way.

¹² Take, for example, the program of the most recent Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) Conference “Changing Nature: Migrations, Energies, Limits” in which there were over 700 papers presented. Of the 24 focused on urban spaces, 18 were academic papers while 6 were pieces of creative writing. Compare this to the 21 panels in the “Nature Writing and Ecopoetics” stream which featured 74 different papers.

and environmental problems of a place and the time and ability to do so, I do not believe that these are necessarily onerous tasks. To be sure, it is easier to borrow a tree guide from the library and attempt to identify local trees than it is to climb a mountain or hike into deep backcountry wilderness. Moreover, I also believe that this pursuit should not be individualistic but instead should lead to the formation of local learning communities. Speaking from my experiences as a bird and amphibian surveyor in Hamilton, it was much easier to be taught by local conservation workers than it was to try to teach myself the different calls of Ontario's frogs. It is my firm belief that if environmentalism is to be successful in changing the current directions of North American culture, it will have to happen through the widespread adoption of various local tactics that engage people with the environment they live in.

Most Canadians know what Latour calls the matters of fact about climate change, resource exploitation in the form of tar-sands oil, or the disastrous consequences of the mismanaged Atlantic cod fisheries. However, this knowledge has not translated into a broad cultural change in everyday lives. In "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?," Latour argues that critical thinking's tendency to focus on ideology has implied an easy distinction between matters of fact and their ideological distortions. He advocates refocusing on what he calls matters of concern: "reality is not defined by matters of fact. Matters of fact are not all that is given in experience. Matters of fact are only very partial and ... very polemical, very political renderings of matter of concern" (232). Following Latour's move away from matters of fact, I take up Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto as matters of concern. In reading narratives set in and about these cities, I trace how

conflicted, multiple, ambivalent, and uncertain human responses to nature in the city can be. This rich and complex record invites readers to respond in multiple and varying ways to the specific urban locations they find themselves embedded in. This follows Dianne Chisholm's recent argument that art "mobilizes our ecological sense by acting on it with 'percepts' and 'affects,' and 'visions' and 'auditions' that are more emotionally, mentally, and ethically moving than the functions and variables of science, even when science refers directly to landscapes of conspicuous environmental damage" (585). This is not to say that science is unnecessary, but to suggest that the ecological crisis is, in part, also a cultural crisis requiring, on some level, cultural counterparts to any engagement with it.

In saying this, I follow environmental philosopher John Passmore's distinction between a problem in ecology which is "a purely scientific problem, arising out of the fact that scientists do not understand how, for example, DDT finds its way into the fat of Antarctic birds" and an ecological problem which is a "feature of our society, arising out of our dealings with nature, from which we should like to free ourselves, and which we do not regard as an inevitable consequence of what is good in that society" (43, 44). Passmore's distinction makes it clear that cultural productions like literature have a vital role to play in addressing urban environmental problems. The ability of story to imagine and engage with situations that readers do not necessarily inhabit provides a space in which to imagine or re-think situations and potential solutions without causing real damage. This intellectual work will help to change the social side of ecology that needs to be addressed if a more-than-human urban ecology is to thrive. Science will be an absolutely necessary component of any successful attempt to address an ecological

problem, but cultural work also has a vital role to play. While it is beyond my expertise to offer technical solutions to the environmental challenges that urban environments face, I do make an attempt to sketch out ways to begin engaging with urban environments differently, a move that sets the conditions for ecologically responsible technical solutions to become possible.¹³ My hope is that this dissertation on cultural production and popular discourses will aid in making Canada's environment a matter of pressing concern, or to put it in feminist philosopher Lorraine Code's terms, that it will be a "local imaginative critique ... [that] prepares the way for a regenerative imaginary" which will re-invigorate our understanding of how humans are always embedded in the natural world and the responsibilities this embedding entails (33).

The epistemological underpinnings of this project are drawn from Code's ground-breaking work in *Ecological Thinking*. Unhappy with the "generic knowers" that mainstream epistemologies produce, Code presents a radically reformulated ecological mode of knowing: "an epistemic subjectivity and agency socially-culturally learned and practiced, for which community, ecologically conceived, is a condition sine qua non for the production, circulation, and acknowledgement of claims to know" (viii). Her ecological thinking challenges the individualistic, patriarchal and oppressive modes of being that mainstream epistemologies, particularly discourses of mastery, foster. It seeks to use ecology as both a grounding metaphor and praxis for enacting a more responsible mode of knowing. She takes ecology to mean engaging with "the implications of patterns,

¹³ There already are a number of excellent technical resources for ways of improving a city's ecological systems including Lucia Athens' *Building an Emerald City*, Roger L. Kemp's *Cities and Nature: A Handbook for Renewal*, and *The Nature of Cities* website.

places, and the interconnections of lives and events in and across the human and nonhuman world” (4). Ecological thinking, then, calls humans to continually keep in mind the ecological contexts that inform their lives including the many human, animal, plant, and geological actors that make up the setting of our lives. She attaches this kind of thinking to a strong sense that an “ecological subject” is “well placed, collectively and singly, to own and take responsibility for their epistemic-moral-political activity,” meaning that her project resists oppressive or hierarchical epistemologies, instead embracing a diversity of positions and knowings (5). In this capacious vision of action, Code makes ample room for my own project of engaging with the urban spaces that Ontarians live in and questioning how ecological community is or could be acknowledged. Moreover, she is clear that ecological thinking “does not reduce to a set of rules or methods; it may play out differently from location to location; but it is sufficiently coherent to be interpreted and enacted across widely diverse situations” (5). Bearing this warning in mind, I attend to the particularities that inform the writing of Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto – differences that produce a wide range of texts – but I also attempt to craft a knowledge that can speak to multiple urban settings in Canada without being so universal that it neutralizes Code’s attention to local specificity.

At the same time, I share Code’s wariness that ecology too often is thought to be a pure or benign place. Instead, I affirm her clear-sighted vision of how ecology operates:

assuming no such separations [between text and context], ecological thinking relocates inquiry ‘down on the ground’ where knowledge is made, negotiated, circulated; and where the nature and conditions of the particular ‘ground,’ the situations and circumstances of specific knowers, their interdependence and their negotiations, have claims to critical epistemic scrutiny equivalent to those of allegedly isolated, discrete propositional knowledge claims. (5-6)

In this sense, I treat the texts I take up as places where knowledge is made about the cities they are set in. For example, Hamilton's moniker "Steeltown" comes as much from the actual presence of large steel mills in the city's northeast end as it does from the newspapers, city booster material, opinion columns and the everyday conversation of Hamiltonians. However, this name covers over the fact that Hamilton has also been home to many other industries including International Harvester's first Canadian plant, the first Canadian Tire store, and the first Tim Horton's coffee shop. More recently, Hamilton's economy has shifted towards white-collar labour, healthcare, and a booming arts community after the decline of the steel industry, yet the "Steeltown" moniker persists.¹⁴ Code's attention to location and detail calls on me to pay attention not just to the fine details of context and text, but also to investigate the kind of power and hierarchies that are at work in any kind of knowledge claim. For instance, the "Steeltown" name paints Hamilton as a dirty and industrial city, a description that undercuts the wealth of green space the city possesses in the Niagara Escarpment and Cootes Paradise. Moreover, Code also makes clear the kind of consequences that thinking ecologically entails:

First and foremost a thoughtful practice, thinking ecologically carries with it a large measure of responsibility – to know somehow more *carefully* than single surface readings can allow. It might seem difficult to imagine how it could translate into wider issues of citizenship and politics, but the answer, at once simple and profound, is that ecological thinking is about imagining, crafting, articulating, endeavoring to enact principles of ideal cohabitation. (24)

Bearing this explanation in mind, my project understands that the cultural texts it takes up will call on readers to respond in various political, social, cultural, and even moral ways.

¹⁴ See journalist Jon Wells's "Leaving Steel but not Steeltown" for an investigation of the roots of the Steeltown nickname and a discussion of Hamilton's emerging cultural identity.

These responses will vary, as Canada's chequered history of response to environmental destruction shows, and it is unclear how present actions taken to ameliorate environmental damage may cause their own problems in the future.¹⁵ Put differently, the debate that the texts incite is not simple but complex, and it is easily misheard or misinterpreted.

Taking into account Code's caveat that ecological thinking carries "a large measure of responsibility," I ground each of the readings in a broad interdisciplinary understanding of the text's location. As part of my research process, I read widely in each city's archive: reading popular and academic histories of the place; seeking out environmental histories where available; investigating historical and contemporary maps; reading from current newspapers and dipping into their archives where appropriate; and researching each city's unique ecosystem and southern Ontario's environment more generally, including its geological past and contemporary situation. I was also privileged to be able to undertake several research trips from Hamilton, where I live, to Windsor and Toronto in order to walk their streets and experience the areas of urban nature that I write about. In some of these trips, I acted like a *flâneur*, walking without aim or purpose, following only a sense of what might be interesting, while on others I planned where and what I would see. While I was writing, photographs and maps gave me a sense of the closeness of Windsor to Detroit, but it was not until I stood on Ouellette Avenue looking northwest across the Detroit River to Detroit's imposing skyline that I realized how much Windsor lives in the shadow of the much larger and now bankrupt American city.

¹⁵ See Laurel Sefton MacDowell's eminently readable *An Environmental History of Canada*, particularly 249-65, for more on the limited successes of Canadian environmentalism.

Similarly, it was not until I hiked down into the Rosedale Ravine from Bloor Street that I really understood how much the ravines are a “hidden country” as Seymour calls them. I feel compelled to signal this experiential knowledge because much of this work is not necessarily visible in what follows, even as it exists beneath the surface of the readings and analyses I construct. This kind of research fits with what ecocritic Patrick D. Murphy calls transversal ecocritical practice. He writes that such work refuses to use “the universal as a category for interpretive claims” (1), and instead focuses on using context-specific information to guide thinking that moves between theory and practice in which “theory [is] tested in practice and emended, corrected, revised, or even rejected, based on the limitations revealed by its application to real world events; or, in the case of literary study, the application of theory to individual texts” (4). Further, I also believe that doing this kind of broad, on-the-ground research was one way of becoming responsible to the three locations that I take up. In *Space, Place and Gender*, Doreen Massey argues that “what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus” (154). By reading widely, walking in the cities, and talking with local residents, I came to a better understanding of each city’s “particular constellation of relations.” However, rather than seeking to become an expert that speaks for the three cities – two of which I have not lived in – I hope to become a voice in the conversations that already exist in these places.

The choice of Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto for study needs some explanation, as there are Canadian cities with larger literary archives and different ecological features

and relationships. Why not, for instance, study the three largest cities in Canada – Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver? Or why not aim for a more representative spread of Canada by sampling texts from Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal, Quebec City, Halifax, and St. John's? These are legitimate questions, yet I argue, along with Code, that in order to be responsible to the situation and location that each urban text emerges from, a scholar needs to have a broad and in-depth understanding of the ecological context of an urban place. Having grown up in southern Ontario, I knew Toronto as the big city to the south of the small town I lived in. However, this knowledge was very partial and was limited to tourist attractions like the Toronto Zoo, the CN Tower, and Ontario Place. This partial knowledge has only been rounded out by the much more detailed and vigorous research practice that I described above. Moreover, my own time in southern Ontario has given me a comfort level with certain intangibles like late summer's wild thunderstorms, the general lay of the land in terms of topography, especially the interruptive presence of the Niagara Escarpment, as well as a sense of how Ontarians view their own environment. Moreover, American critic Terrell F. Dixon notes there "is the growing realization that our cities are place-based. Knowing urban nature requires recognizing that Lake Michigan shapes human perception and experience in Chicago differently than does the East River in Manhattan" (xiii). To achieve this depth of knowledge in Montreal and Vancouver or across a range of Canadian cities would have been a very difficult task.

Moreover, ecologically and historically speaking, there are good reasons to group these three cities together. All three have deep historical roots in the Canadian nation-

state because of their locations on key transportation routes. In the earliest moments of the European invasion of North America, waterways were crucial for movement so the areas around Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto became vital locations for control of the fur trade and settlement. No less important was the fact that these areas were known territories for the local Indigenous peoples and European fur traders and settlers were more than willing to hire them as guides. With the emergence of railway technologies, all three cities were linked by various rail lines and became even more heavily integrated into a global trade of commodities with resources being sent back to Europe while manufactured goods were imported. Following World War I, automobiles became the primary mode of transportation and an expansive road network connected all three together. Currently all three cities exist on the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor, the most heavily populated and industrialized geographical strip of land in Canada. Important for my own purposes, each city also has a literary archive that can be traced back into the nineteenth century and offered historical depth to the range of English language texts I could study. Ecologically speaking, all three share broadly similar ecosystems, being located on Great Lakes waterways and within the Carolinian Forest region which features warmer temperatures than surrounding areas due to lake effect and a wide range of animals, plants, and other wildlife. However, in choosing urban rather than rural nature, I encounter some of the most disturbed and degraded environments; places that will seem “unnatural” according to popular ideas of what nature is. At the same time, each city has developed in its own way so that their differences from each other make them worth studying individually. For instance, while all three cities now have walking trails

alongside their waterfronts, Hamilton's steel industry limited the amount of residential settlement along the shore; the rise of the financial sector on Bay Street has fuelled the rapid erection of luxury condominiums along the Toronto's waterfront; and Windsor's proximity to the American border exerts not just a palpably policed aspect to its waterfront but also encourages businesses that cater to American tourists. Nevertheless, I draw linkages between the cities through their literary archives and ecological settings.

Given the locational specificity of this project, my work takes up the local as a way to understand and influence the global. For several decades, there has been a vigorous if sometimes cantankerous debate about the efficacy of focusing on local places or on larger, more global structures. Although most of the initial work was done in geography by scholars like Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph, the debate has ranged across a variety of disciplines including anthropology, literary criticism, and sociology.¹⁶ With the rise of globalisation and academic studies of it, a challenge to the primacy of the local was raised. The debate is symbolized in some ways by the contrasting terms of place, understood as a well-defined, historical, and rooted location, and space, a much more fluid and abstract location marked by transition, change, and global flows of capital and/or power. Defenders of the local advocate the solidity of place against the instability of a globalising world while critics of the local argue that a more fluid sense of location is necessary, in part, because our world has been made incredibly mobile by late capitalism.

In ecocriticism, there has been a recent turn away from focusing on the local, led by

¹⁶ For a good introduction to place theory see Tim Cresswell's *Place: A Short Introduction*. A representative list of important works on place might include Tuan's *Space and Place*, *Topophilia*, Relph's *Place and Placelessness*, Edward Casey's *Getting Back Into Place*, Lucy Lippard's *The Lure of the Local*, David Harvey's *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*, Doreen Massey's *Space, Place, and Gender*, and Arturo Escobar's "Culture Sits In Places."

thinkers like Heise and Morton. Morton, in *The Ecological Thought*, writes that ecocriticism needs to aim for “a progressive ecology that [is] big, not small; spacious, not place-ist; global, not local (if not universal); not embodied but displaced, spaced, outerspaced? Our slogan should be dislocation, dislocation, dislocation” (28). In a much more nuanced critique of place, Heise raises several objections to place-based thinking, including the problem of how to define what constitutes a local place, that it does not adequately question the assumption that “identity, whether individual or communitarian, is constituted by the local,” and the “ambivalent ethical and political consequences that might follow from encouraging attachments to place” (46, 42, 46). Heise’s objections present a tangible obstacle to any uncomplicated use of place theory or any attempt to use a single specific place as an exemplar for all models of ecological action.¹⁷ At the same time, I am not convinced that a turn towards thinking solely of the globe, as Morton advocates, is going to provide located Canadians with the resources they need to work towards a more ethical and just mode of inhabiting the world even as many of the challenges they face will have global origins. While I too am wary of the way, as Massey puts it, that place can lead to “reactionary nationalisms [,] competitive localisms, [and] sanitized, introverted obsessions with ‘heritage’,” I believe that a “progressive sense of place” is the necessary starting point from which one can engage with local, national, and transnational forces (“Power Geometry” 65). This progressive sense of place will need to be flexible enough to engage with the demands of globalisation and the flows of global capital, but it must also be attentive to how locally specific phenomena have important

¹⁷ Although I do not agree with Heise’s espousals of eco-cosmopolitanism as the way forward, her *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* contains an excellent discussion of the debates around localism (17-67).

roles to play in the construction of place and in each place's ability to resist, adapt, or succumb to outside influences. It seems unlikely that any proponent of either position is likely to wholly espouse one position at the absolute expense of the other. I believe that both positions need to be kept in mind even as my own work tends towards the local.

Moreover, in choosing the local over the global, I hope to gesture towards Indigenous epistemologies rather than reinforcing existing Western models of thought. One problem with eschewing the local for the global is that it can assign seemingly uncontrollable forces like capital or transnational corporations all effective agency and power while removing any kind of agency from specific locations. In doing so, existing modes of oppression and hierarchy privileging white Western males remain in power even as these positions are obscured beneath discursive constructions like global finance or corporate bureaucracy. Daniel Coleman has recently called for the development of a more diverse "ecology of knowledges that would be relevant for Canadian literary criticism" rather than reinforcing the epistemological supremacy of European modes of thinking (7). The Anishinaabe writer and critic Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm writes, "the Native peoples of this land are fundamentally different ... from Canadians. The basis of this difference is the land, our passion for it and our understanding of our relationship to it" (84). While I do not wish to appropriate Indigenous knowledge or set up this project as an attempt to become indigenous to the urban places we live in, I do believe that paying attention to place, as Akiwenzie-Damm argues Indigenous peoples do, needs to be an important part of any ecologically just culture. Paying attention to place makes it much harder to justify rampant ecological exploitation because every place is somebody's or something's place.

Mi'kmaq scholar Marie Battiste and Chickasaw scholar James (Sákéj) Young Blood Henderson argue that “the core belief of Indigenous spirituality is that everything is alive, and Indigenous peoples seek spirituality through intimate connection with ecological biodiversity... Such beliefs deny the distinction between the sacred and profane, since all life processes are sacred” (100). Treating all things as sacred, all life as meaningful, and seeing humans as having a relationship with all of these forms of life and things, would go a long ways towards stopping environmental exploitation, a form of destruction that often originates in urban boardrooms. But taking this seriously also means that the cities that we live in are not profane spaces; they are to be treated as sacred, as a place where we may develop relationships with many peoples, animals, and plants. This kind of radical re-orientation begins the process of enfolding urban nature into our lives.

I chose to use the words “discover” and “enfold” for two important reasons that warrant some explanation. Although I am hesitant about the colonial implications of “discovery,” particularly the notion that European settler-invaders ‘discovered’ an empty land that was conveniently there for the taking, I do think that for many urban residents, encountering urban nature will be like discovering something completely new as Seymour’s anecdote certainly attests. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one of the meanings of discover is “originally: (of a person) to make known, divulge, disclose, reveal (something secret or not generally known). Later also: to be the means or agency by which (something) is disclosed or revealed.” Although this meaning of discover is now rare and archaic, I like the way that it implies a process of making known, of revealing something that is not generally known. Most urban residents do not “know” that there is

nature in the city, and my hope is that this project can be the means by which that knowledge or lack thereof is disturbed. In another archaic form of discover, it can also mean “to reconnoitre, survey; (more generally) to explore (a region, country, etc.).” Although this hearkens to the imperial “discovery” of foreign lands, I hope that this project will lead readers to explore or reconnoitre the previously ignored green spaces of the city. In Hamilton, this might mean walking the Bruce Trail along the Niagara Escarpment, while in Windsor it might mean hiking along some of the former rail lines that criss-cross the city as poet Di Brandt did. Finally, there is also a third archaic meaning that I would like to invoke in that to discover can mean “to afford a view of; to offer to view, to display.” This project is an explicit display of urban writers’ depictions of nature in Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto. And, I hope, that by displaying urban nature, readers might come to enfold it into their own lives.

Enfold also has several meanings that I wish to amplify. In the first instance it means, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* “to wrap up, envelope *in* or *with* a garment, or a surrounding medium of any kind.” Cities already enfold nature with the built structures of roads, buildings, and infrastructure, but humans tend not to recognize this on a cultural level. To enfold can also mean “to encompass, encircle; to clasp, embrace” and I want to imply an active human action of embracing the urban nature in the cities we live in. If we do not take active action, its presence will continue, most likely in a more degraded or fragmentary way, but if we do embrace it, it can become a shared treasure and resource. It might also help us change our relationship to the wider natural world by teaching us how to value, care for, and build relationships with intimate Others. Finally,

to enfold can also mean “to imply or necessarily include” or “to involve in obligation, to oblige,” and I want to make clear that discovering urban nature can help lead humans to a deep sense of relationship with it. Recognizing a Black Walnut tree in our backyard as an important member of our community might mean ensuring that it has the things it needs to flourish even as its roots crack our pavement and its walnuts dent the tops of automobiles. Moreover, enfolding urban nature in our future urban planning is essential to changing the way urban ecosystems function and how humans view the cities they live in.

The project unfolds as follows: each chapter is organized around a city and a specific conceptual theme. However, throughout I make links across chapters as all three themes can be found in each city. In the first chapter, “Encountering Ambiguity and Ambivalence: Windsor,” I think about what it means to live in Windsor when the landscape has been heavily shaped by industrial pollution. If we see urban space as intertwined with the natural world, then one of the first perceptions of city space will be of its ecological brokenness. Although some cities have more or less functioning and healthy spaces, most are marked by pollution and low levels of ecological health. Coming to terms with this brokenness is a necessary first step towards discovering and enfolding urban nature. I begin with John Richardson’s two works of historical fiction: *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers*, excavating an ambivalent relationship to the natural world that animates his characters. I suggest that they fear and loathe the wilderness while also knowing that it is the source of their livelihood and future prosperity. Reading Richardson’s work in this way, I give some historical context for understanding how the city/nature binary emerges over time. After narrating a brief history of Windsor, I turn to

two literary representations of the Detroit River: Marko Sijan's novel *Mongrel* and Alexander MacLeod's short story "Adult Beginner I." Where the characters of *Mongrel* are paralysed by the pollution of the river, MacLeod acknowledges it but works past it in setting up the river as the grounds for his main character's rite of passage. These two works demonstrate two possible responses to the brokenness of urban nature, and any attempt to enfold urban nature would do well to listen to both voices. I then take up Paul Vasey's creative non-fiction work *The Age of the Cities* and Di Brandt's long poem "Zone:<le Détroit>" to think about ways to mourn the brokenness of urban nature without becoming caught in grief. I argue that both of these texts elegize the destruction of Windsor's land, yet push readers to imagine different ways of inhabiting urban space.

In the second chapter, "Finding and Understanding Resilience: Hamilton," I take up the discourse of ecological resilience to think about Hamilton's different ecological and cultural communities. Resilience thinking differs from previous models of conservation management in attempting to provide pragmatic solutions to current environmental challenges by focusing on an ecosystem's ability to maintain its identity in the event of disturbance while also stressing the need for adaptability. However, this discourse does present some conceptual challenges, particularly in how it has been taken up by other discourses like neoliberalism and in some of its operational methodologies. Yet I take it up because it refuses the apocalyptic environmental rhetoric which sees the current world as already doomed and instead provides various methods of acting in the world in environmentally progressive ways. I read a mid-twentieth century elementary school text called *Saga of a City* for the way that it aims to develop an attachment between local

children and Hamilton as a place. I also suggest that the kind of knowledge this book teaches increases Hamilton's cultural resilience. I then read two novels about two different marginalized communities with opposite trajectories for the lesson they offer about resilience. Rachel Preston's *Fishers of Paradise*, a work of historical fiction, takes up the now-gone boathouse community that blossomed on the shores of Cootes Paradise in the early twentieth century while John Lawrence Reynolds's *Beach Strip*, a crime novel, is set in the resilient community on the shores of Lake Ontario in Hamilton's east end. I end by reading John Terpstra's *Falling into Place*, a work of creative non-fiction, that explores his relationship with the Iroquois Sandbar, a geological feature that has been transformed from a lively place into a transportation corridor. His book challenges resilience thinking in productive ways while also reminding readers that a commitment to place is a good starting place for discovering and enfolding urban nature.

In the third chapter, "Building Inclusive Belonging: Toronto," I dig through Toronto's vast literary archive to think about the contours, limits, and possibilities of belonging. I conceive of belonging in both a social and an ecological sense and argue that both registers of the word need to be connected to each other. Drawing on environmental justice thinkers, I argue that urban nature needs to be inclusive for all humans and more-than-human beings, opening up spaces for community to arise. I begin by addressing the often fractious relationship between downtown Toronto and its suburbs. Rather than repeating stereotypes of the suburbs as bland or homogenous, I read Phyllis Brett Young's novel *The Torontonians* and Antanas Sileika's short story "Shale" as texts that work against suburban clichés. While Young's novel pushes readers to imagine how the

suburbs can be ecologically healthier, Sileika's story illustrates how one suburban family develops a strong relationship with the place in which they live. Rosemary Aubert's mystery novel *Free Reign* opens up a productive space to discuss Toronto's homeless population, many of whom live in the Don River valley, while also allowing readers to see the valley in a new light. In this section, the meanings of social and ecological belonging are intertwined even as they are in tension with each other. In the following section, I take up three different texts that address the marginalization of Toronto's racial others. Rabindranath Maharaj's *Homer in Flight* uses a changing relationship between Homer, the Trinidadian protagonist, and Toronto's urban nature to reflect on how Caribbean immigrants belong to the city while Sasenarine Persaud's short story "Canada Geese and Apple Chatney" features a transgressive scene of three Guyanese illegal immigrants eating Canada Geese which provokes questions about different cultural uses of the natural world. I read a brief scene of a Canada Goose feast under the Gardiner Expressway in Joseph Boyden's novel *Through Black Spruce* as a productive moment to think about how Toronto's Indigenous populations have been excluded from the city's narratives and how they have managed to find their own way of belonging to the city's place. I end by taking up a scene from Dionne Brand's long poem *thirsty* to trouble my discussion of belonging, warning that belonging must always be attuned to dynamics of power, race, gender, and class if it is to be socially and ecologically just. Throughout, I argue literature might push readers to imagine a more ecologically attuned world, or as Mary Oliver puts it in the dissertation's epigraph, the world as "it could be" (22).

Encountering Ambiguity and Ambivalence: Windsor

“Across the river, in Detroit,
the sun was melting behind a steel mill.
The river smelled of algae, oil, sludge ...

Sunk to its gunwales, a tugboat
towing a rust-caked barge chugged by.
A bell buoy clanged.

The western sky glowed acid red.
The bridge hovered over me.
A white feather blew along the riverbank.

- Len Gasparini “Under the Ambassador Bridge” (4-6, 10-15)

The Detroit River that Windsor writer and poet Len Gasparini depicts above is not the picturesque landscape that Anna Brownell Jameson first encountered when she visited the area in 1836, more than one hundred and fifty years earlier. Where Jameson writes of pleasantly experiencing “without exertion the cool air, the sparkling redundant waters, and green islands” while traveling on the ferry from Detroit, Gasparini instead describes a tired, polluted, and stinking river (343-44). In the long span of time between these two moments, Windsor rose up as a city in the shadow of Detroit. In the process, it began a long history of exploiting the natural world that surrounded it by polluting the Detroit River, dumping toxic material into its soil, and replacing what was once a rich and fertile forest with acres of concrete, large factories and steel mills that spouted noxious chemicals into the air, and a raised up a sea of houses for all of its workers. The speaker of Gasparini’s poem calls this all to mind with the pathetic tugboat as it tiredly pulls an aging barge towards Zug Island and Detroit’s heavily industrialized shore or to Windsor’s smaller but still functioning industrial parks. If we see the Detroit River as an element of

Windsor's urban nature, the view from underneath the iconic Ambassador Bridge is anything but appealing. The poem raises the question of why the speaker is contemplating the river from "a park bench" and why "a straw-hatted black man" is fishing from the pier (1, 8). A possible answer lies in the economic downturn afflicting North America during the 1980s which vastly inflated Michigan's unemployment rate and, along with it, Windsor's own unemployment lines, as the auto industry struggled to adjust to changes in the marketplace. Gasparini first published the poem in 1986, so the western sky's "acid red" glow adds a complementary apocalyptic glow to the scene. The white feather blowing along the riverbank could be read as a sign of a truce, or, just as plausibly, it could be the ghostly remainder of a gull now dead because of pollution. These ambiguous portents seem ominous in Gasparini's short poem, yet they remain precisely that: indeterminate even as they connote disaster.

And yet, I suggest, there is something aesthetically appealing about the scene. The poem opens with the speaker sitting on a bench under the Ambassador Bridge. While this is an everyday action, I think that part of the reason he sits here is because there is something deeply pleasurable about watching a river flow. Adding to this pleasure is the nearing sunset, a daily event that can paint almost any scene in beautiful colours. Gasparini's striking description of this sunset certainly possesses its own beauty even if readers recognize how humans have created the toxic conditions that frame that beauty. On a visit to Windsor, I was able to catch a sunset on the riverfront, and can attest to the way that the reds, oranges, and yellows that the setting sun casts over Detroit and Windsor are incredibly, even breathtakingly, beautiful. This sense of beauty co-exists

alongside the speaker's and my own sense that Windsor is a polluted place. Our shared reaction to the beauty and the damage in the landscape speaks to the ambivalent reaction that urban nature often provokes in those humans who seek it out. What I argue in this chapter is that an ambivalent reaction to urban nature can, in fact, be a productive response to have. Ambivalence towards urban nature can be a starting point for thinking about how we live in the city, and how we might better discover and enfold urban nature. Where environmental discourse is sometimes guilty of naive optimism or corrosive pessimism, ambivalence allows those who experience it to be attuned to both a deep sense that a place is damaged and to a caring attachment to that same place. Ambivalence towards urban nature allows for a range of affects to exist without necessarily resolving or dismissing them. It might also lead to ecologically beneficial action, but this does not always happen, as we shall see.

While most cities share similar environmental problems, the intensification of the industrial exploitation and destruction of Windsor's landscape and the reflection of this impact in Windsor's literary archive make it an ideal place to think through environmental ambivalence. Urban nature is not a pristine wilderness, but instead presents humans with clear evidence of how our lives are entangled and intertwined with the natural world. While evidence of this entanglement can be a freeing moment, it often provokes ambivalent reactions as we encounter, like Gaspirini's speaker, evidence of how we have wrought ecological damage on the land. Therefore, I seek out instances of ambivalence, self-contradiction, and paradox in Windsor's literary archive in the hopes of working through these moments towards an understanding of how the natural world

crucially informs Windsor as a city. For instance, the ambiguous images of the natural world in Gasparini's poem forces readers to question, on some level, how they read the natural world in an urban setting: where is the bird that lost its feather? Where are the fish the black man is fishing for? And why has the natural life of the river been replaced by a mechanized one, as seen in the rusty tugboat and its bloated barge? But I am also interested in how the ambivalent reaction that Gasparini's poem can produce might become a productive moment to re-think how the ways humans live in Windsor can be changed so that animal life might return to the river.

When speaking of ambivalence, I am not referring to a single set of contradictory feelings such as love or hate, but instead to the condition of having multiple, often contradictory or opposing, feelings towards the natural world. In the works I take up, there are a variety of reactions from despair and anxiety to wonder and awe or even the cool, detached contemplation that Gasparini's speaker evinces. While this state of multiple feelings is not in itself necessarily good or bad in ecological terms, ambivalence often sets up the conditions for violence to occur, as this chapter will show. Finally, a linked and persistent question asked throughout this chapter is how can we avoid the apathy that often accompanies states of ambivalence.

To answer these questions, I proceed as follows: I open by drawing on Karen Laura Thornber's work on environmental ambivalence in *Ecoambiguity*, using her work to flesh out an understanding of what that state of mind might offer an urban environmental praxis. Following this, I move down four different but interconnected paths on an exploration of Windsor's urban nature. The first steps back in time to address

John Richardson's historical fiction and the human-nature relationship that he sets up in *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers*. This relationship is essential to any understanding of urban nature because it prepares the way for the city/country or human/nature divides that define the popular discourse of Canada's cities. The second path moves through a short history of Windsor that helps to ground an understanding of the contemporary city and the environmental challenges it faces. The third path explores the ambiguous presence of the Detroit River in contemporary fiction. Its polluted waters produce an ambivalent reaction in Marko Sijan's novel *Mongrel* and Alexander MacLeod's short story "Adult Beginner I." The fourth path takes up the issue of industrialization and the automobile through Di Brandt's long poem "Zone: <le Détroit>" and Paul Vasey's work of creative non-fiction *The Age of the Cities*. These two pieces chart some of the human ambivalence towards urban nature created by Windsor's long history with industry while I ask what this ambivalence means for a human relationship with the natural world in the city. If Windsor is, among other things, a city of contradictions, these contradictions are not set in stone, and new configurations of the human relationship to the natural world are possible, opening up room for a more ecologically just sense of inhabiting the city. Throughout the chapter, I also keep a careful eye on what each text teaches readers about Windsor's urban nature, providing opportunities to think about some of the possible responses to urban environmental damage.

Ambivalence towards the natural world is complex because it can invite both productive and reductive responses. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ambivalence as "the coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and

hatred) towards a person or thing.” If we have ambivalent feelings about our role in the natural world or our place in ecology, then it can be easier to treat the natural world in whatever way we see fit. Returning to Gaspirini’s poem, if we see the rust-caked barge travelling the river every day, we might be motivated to advocate for changes in the way we use the Detroit River but we are just as likely to acquiesce to the continuing pollution of the river because we already see the river as in some way degraded. Moreover, if we imagine ourselves as both belonging to the natural and being separate from it, we can construct systems whereby swathes of wild space are set aside for our (recreational) use while building cities that we see as separate from the natural world. We have nature in one space and humanity in the other. Taking up a city park like Windsor’s Willistead Park, a three-acre garden with over 300 trees and Edward Chandler’s estate Willistead Manor, human responses to it are going to vary incredibly. Some might find beauty and harmony in its carefully landscaped grounds and trees while others might bemoan the fact that Windsor’s city council decided to preserve the manor as a heritage property in the 1980s rather than allowing it to become an even larger green space. Some Windsorites might also chafe against the “artificiality” of the nature that Willistead Park displays with its manicured gardens and carefully landscaped grounds, hoping for a less controlled and, in their minds, more natural type of green space. Still others might drive by the park and simply not care about the presence of green space. Finally, some might feel that this park should be demolished entirely to make room for development as condos, social housing, or commercial space. Urban nature is not going to produce the same reaction in every person who encounters it. It will produce a complex set of reactions in many different

people. Being in Willistead Park, for me at least, reminds me that parks offer a key space for urban dwellers to experience the natural world while still being cognizant of the fact that Ford's Windsor Engine Plant is only a few blocks away. This is a common reaction to urban nature: experiencing joy or gratitude at what does exist while also being reminded at how thoroughly we have altered what was here before. Urban nature can enrich our lives and remind us of its many absences in our everyday lives. It is this sense of ambivalence that I want to explore in this chapter.

Thornber's encyclopedic *Ecoambiguity* offers an important perspective on environmental ambivalence. Before surveying a vast body of East Asian literature that illustrates instances of environmental ambivalence and/or ambiguity, Thornber writes:

human attitudes towards the nonhuman are often marked by ambivalence. An individual or group can simultaneously feel positively (e.g., reverent), negatively (e.g., antagonistic), uncertain and apathetic towards different species. Just as frequently, a single plant, animal, or ecosystem will evoke positive sentiments in some people, negative sentiments in some people, uncertainty in others, and no discernible emotions in still others. (10)

Thornber gets to a key tension in environmental discourse: simply encountering nature does not automatically foster an environmentalist mindset. Showing images of a polar bear cub or a penguin will not necessarily provoke viewers into joining Greenpeace or donating to the World Wildlife Fund. While first wave environmentalism may have had high hopes for this strategy, it has since proven ineffective. In fact, as Thornber's work suggests, these images may even provoke antagonistic reactions. Ambivalence towards nature itself has at least two causes: confusion in the definition of what nature itself is and the overwhelming complexity of the natural world and its systems.

The definitional ambiguity of the word nature, as noted in the introduction, means

that nature is not going to produce any one reaction in a human viewer because not everyone shares the same definition for it. Therefore, it is understandable that it provokes different even contradictory responses in a group. Using deconstruction, Morton takes this lack of definition further in *Ecology without Nature* when he writes that “nature, a transcendental term in a material mask, stands at the end of a potentially infinite series of other terms that collapse into it, otherwise known as a metonymic list: fish, grass, mountain air, chimpanzees, love, soda water, freedom of choice, heterosexuality, free markets ... Nature” (14). Used in conversation, nature can be any one of these things yet it is also none of these things. This lack of definitional certainty leads Morton to proclaim it “a mere empty placeholder for a host of other concepts” (14). While I do not want to go as far as Morton does, his work does illustrate the difficulty we face when analysing nature in any sustained manner. Encountering urban nature, then, is not going to be straightforward or easy; in fact, it will often produce an ambivalent human response. Think, for example, of the annoyance a car owner might have for a flock of European Starlings that regularly defecate on her or his vehicle. This person may regularly travel to Algonquin to enjoy “nature,” yet birds that might be seen as “natural” become in this instance a nuisance, producing annoyance or hostility in the car owner. Human ambivalence towards nature comes, in part, from the ambiguity of our concepts of the natural world. It does not contain a legible set of instructions for proper responses to it.¹⁸

This ambiguity also arises from the complexity of the ecological world.

Discussing changes in ecosystems, Thornber points out that “strengthening one group,

¹⁸ At least, not in the textual sense. An ecologist might argue that biodiversity and species decline or extinction provide palpable signs of animal well-being or the lack thereof.

whether people, trees, fish, or parasites, often weakens another group; the more complex the landscape and the more nebulous its borders, the more difficult it is to evaluate changes taking place within it” (11). She rejects the classical ecological position which sees all ecosystems moving towards a static harmony with all parts operating at optimal levels. Instead, she adopts, as most contemporary ecologists do, a more complex position that sees all ecosystems as constantly changing and adapting to new or evolving pressures. Interpreting and discerning useful data about these changing landscapes proves difficult for scientists and even more so for the lay-person. The current debate over global climate change shows just how ambiguous facts and studies can become when highly charged and invested political forces make ecology their battleground. Expecting urban nature to signal clear meanings, then, proves a naive position.

Building on these ambiguities, Thornber argues that it is no surprise then that environmental degradation provokes so much ambivalence in human responses:

With ecosystems always in motion, with so much destruction and regeneration of the nonhuman occurring seemingly regardless of people’s behaviors, the precise human role in environmental transformation is often virtually impossible to decipher. Even when conditions are extreme, with industrial pollution visibly pervading the skies and agrochemicals the soils, data on ecodegradation, much less the human role in instigating it, often are contradictory or fragmented; interpretations and particularly policy implications of these data can be even more convoluted because so much is unknown and unknowable, at least at present. (160-61)

Trying to make sense of such data, and even deciding on viable, no less responsible, plans of action proves exceedingly difficult. As I discussed in the introduction, the current debate over the “facts” of climate change shows how contested and contradictory environmental damage can become. Complicating the situation even more, Thornber

notes: “human behaviors are nothing if not ambiguous” (214). Such ambiguity leads to the variety on exhibit among the wide range of environmental movements. Moreover, Thornber acknowledges that “general patterns exist, but ambiguities are often a basic component of even the most expected, repeated actions. This is part of what makes human damage of environments so difficult to prevent or remediate” (215). These various sources of ambiguities force any human response to ecological damage or crisis to undergo a series of complex and contradictory questions for which there may be no right or even wrong answer. Simply put, the natural world is too complex to be broken down into simple categories of good or bad when attempting to categorize human actions in the environment. The complexity of the natural world and our own inability to understand how our actions change this complexity for better and worse sets the conditions for environmental ambivalence to arise.

What this means for urban nature is that, because the cityscape is so profoundly reshaped by human ideas and actions, we should expect to see high degrees of human ambivalence towards the natural world in its literary portrayals. Cities, as a cultural space, are themselves inherently ambiguous.¹⁹ While in some cases it may be possible to define a city by a single idea or phrase, as in New York as the “Big Apple,” for example, such a move is always a foreshortening of the competing, cooperating, or co-existing narratives that animate a city’s life. Seeing Windsor as only a border city misses out on its role as an automotive centre, on its historical importance as a safe haven for escaped African-American slaves in the nineteenth century, and so on. Therefore, we should expect urban

¹⁹ This is not to say that nature is unambiguous, but to suggest that most people more readily recognize the city as such. Trained ecologists are far more aware of nature’s ambiguity than a layperson is.

nature to be similarly ambiguous. Some parks may evoke admiration and awe, such as New York's Central Park, while others, like Willistead Manor may produce feelings of disappointment, happiness, anger, awe, or even indifference. Similarly, someone who grew up in Tecumseh, a former suburb on the east end of the city that looks out on Lake St. Clair, will have a different sense of Windsor as a natural place than someone who lives in an apartment downtown near Caesar's Casino. If we are to enfold urban nature into our everyday lives, we must acknowledge that it is ambiguous.

What is most productive about Thornber's work is that she does not see ambiguity or ambivalence as stumbling blocks for an ecocritical practice. Instead they become starting points for a deeper exploration of what a human relationship to the natural world entails; how it functions on both a discursive and on an actual level; and how it might be changed to better respond to environmental damage. She argues that though all relationships with the natural world will be subject to some form of ambivalence, and such a fact may indeed cause ecological disaster, it also means that "with this uncertainty comes flexibility and possibility" (31). I want to engage with this flexibility and possibility by taking up ambiguity and environmental ambivalence, not as necessarily negative reactions, but instead as moments to re-think the place of nature in the city. Thornber takes up literature to do this because, as she explains in her chapter "Japanese Literature and Environmental Crises,"

Literature's regular and often blatant defiance of logic, precision, and unity enables it to grapple more insistently and penetratingly than most scientific discourse and conventional environmental rhetoric with the contradictory interactions among people and ecosystems. More specifically, literature's multivalence allows it to highlight and negotiate – reveal, (re)interpret, and shape – the ambiguity that has long suffused interactions between people and

environments, especially those interactions that involve human damage to ecosystems. (207-08)

Literature provides a flexible thinking site for examining and exploring what kinds of human reaction to urban nature exist. More important, Windsor's literature also provides an opportunity to think through how ambivalence might be used in a more environmentally just manner. Doing so accords with Code's call for ecological thinking and the mode of inhabiting that it makes possible, modeling "an active, thoughtful practice, socially, affectively, and responsibly engaged" (7). To that end, I turn towards ecological resilience at the end of the chapter to suggest some ways that ambivalence might be productively engaged as a part of an urban environmental practice.

What I hope becomes clear not just in this chapter but in the ones that follow is that when we examine urban nature, the tension between human well-being and more-than-human well-being is constantly being brought into focus. Where one hundred and fifty years of urbanization in Canada has decidedly favoured human well-being, and a select group of humans at that, my project proposes to look at the other side of the equation by addressing how plants, animals, and minerals might fit into the general well-being of urban places. There is no way to simply undo the damage cities have wrought on their environments, but instead we are going to have to think innovatively about solutions that can effect small scale changes that add up, in the long run, to a major ground-shift. Environmental discourse has sometimes been guilty of presuming an easy answer or the possibility of a cure-all. The environmental discourse that I present here harbours no such thoughts, instead advocating a more demanding, more involved form of thought that seeks to craft on-the-ground localized solutions to challenges that originate from many

different places and scales. In the course of pursuing this, some of the suggestions are bound to leave readers feeling ambivalent.

Take, for example, the on-going construction of the Windsor-Essex Parkway, an expressway that will connect Highway 401 to a second bridge to the United States scheduled to be built in the next few years. On the surface, this is a loss for the city's ecological health as it will increase the number of cars travelling in the area, cut up more of the city's fabric with high-speed, closed-access roads, and do nothing to wean the city off of its fossil-fuel dependency. However, as the Parkway's website declares, "tunnelled roadways" will provide "20 k[ilometres] of new recreational trails" and "more than 300 acres of green space" (*Windsor-Essex Parkway*). The tunnelled roadways will not overtly cut up the city but instead be covered by a much more ecologically and community friendly green space. While it would be easy to cynically dismiss this gesture, it is at least a pragmatic solution to the problem of where to place a new highway and a second bridge. Resisting the construction of the highway is likely an impossible task, so making the best out of the situation becomes a more compromised, but less destructive way to address Windsor's ecological health. Our reaction to this solution should be ambivalent in the sense that we resist the notion that more roads and easier access to cars will increase our quality of life, but we can also take joy in the creation of new green space.²⁰

This kind of ambivalence has a productive component in that it celebrates what exists while it also keeps our eyes on the continuing problems of urban living. Too often,

²⁰This is not to suggest that we should simply accept all new development proposals or assume that new construction is always in the best interest of a city's ecological community. We need to be constantly vigilant about such work. However, I do believe that effective urban ecological praxis will need to be flexible and adaptive if it is to succeed in any sustained manner.

environmentalism has relied upon a dour, pessimistic rhetoric, leaving little room for hope, joy, or even optimism. Ambivalence can be a way to manoeuvre around this by connecting elegy, despair, and anger to other emotions like pleasure, joy, and hope. Such a connection does not mitigate the tensions of these conflicting emotions, but it does provide a platform to think through them rather than attempting to hastily resolve them into either apocalyptic despair or a shallow and naive optimism.

Tracking Ambivalence in the Landscapes of John Richardson's Historical Fiction

While *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers* predate the rise of Windsor as a city, these novels set up a relationship that is fundamental to the city/nature binary which my project seeks to deconstruct. To be sure, Richardson is not solely responsible for enshrining a city/nature dualism, his two historical novels do productively illustrate the roots of this relationship in the early nineteenth century. One of the key features of *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers* is the complex ambivalent relationship the characters have with the natural world: Richardson romanticizes the forest as the home of noble and often vicious savages, but it also acts as a threatening space that might prove fatal for the white settlers; he sets up the forts as a refuge from the looming forest, yet he also sees that same forest as a necessary economic resource; and while he acknowledges the town and city as the end goal of settler culture, these places remain peripheral throughout these two novels. From this complex ambivalence, we can see how the contemporary understandings of humans and cities as separate from the natural world could begin to solidify.

Yet Richardson's work also illustrates how this contradictory stance is problematic. For instance, in *Wacousta* the British-occupied Fort Detroit, which represents civilization and enlightened humanity, is set up as a bastion against the wilderness. This status is troubled by the French town outside its walls which seems unaffected by the ensuing conflict, suggesting a more integrated mode of inhabiting the landscape. Further, the troubles that plague the de Haldimars seem to originate from the natural world and its Indian guardians, yet the key instigator in the conflict turns out to be the fort's commanding officer Cornish Sir Reginald Morton who is seeking revenge on Colonel de Haldimar.²¹ I suggest that although the British characters have an ambivalent, even antagonistic, relationship with wilderness in *Wacousta*, *The Canadian Brothers* fleshes out this relationship by showing how the wilderness can be cultivated into a productive landscape.²² The complex relationship that these two novels set up between humans and the natural world, then, sets the conditions that make it possible to separate humans from nature. Yet, nature is also a source of sustenance, a place of awe, and it holds the potential for a flourishing society. In this multiplicity of feelings, we can sense an environmental ambivalence: the characters loathe the forest for the dangers it hides but also need it for their very well-being. In Richardson's work, neither nature nor culture is straightforward or separate, but instead they are intertwined even though the characters might wish it otherwise. Understanding this ambivalent relationship in Richardson's work

²¹ I follow Daniel Francis in using Indian to refer to "the image of Native people held by non-Natives" (9) as opposed to indigenous or First Nations which I use in reference to actual peoples.

²² Canadian literary criticism has tended to play up this antagonistic relationship, sometimes overlooking the contradictory lines of Richardson's novels. Gaile McGregor's *The Wacousta Syndrome* uses the fear of wilderness in the novel as a key trope through which to read Canadian culture (3-10) while Clara Thomas writes "*Wacousta*'s fort-and-forest structure, its action, and its entire aura of fear are early explorations of man dwarfed by nature and beleaguered in its midst" (22).

affords some historical context for the contemporary city/nature dichotomy. Seeing the roots of this contradictory pattern of interactions between humans and the natural world in its earliest stages also gives some clues as to how we can develop a more environmentally just relationship.

Because of the seemingly antagonistic relationship it sets up between humans and the natural world, Richardson's *Wacousta* has become a focal point for arguments about Canadian literature. Michael Buma writes that *Wacousta* makes a strong case for the title of the "originating novel" of Canadian literature, with its text being a "treasure trove for many critics interested in establishing a 'progenitor of our [Canadian] tradition'" (143). As Buma goes on to explain, the novel served the thematic critics well in providing a ready-made example of Northrop Frye's garrison mentality while postmodern critics found much to admire in the novel's "plurality, marginality, and decentredness" (143). Although the centrality of this novel has come under question, I take it up here to provide a genealogy of the present in terms of how Canadians have related to the natural world. Having an antagonistic relationship with nature more or less leads into an understanding of humans as separate from the natural world. However, I also take up the novel alongside *The Canadian Brothers* to draw out a richer notion of Richardson's ambivalent sense of the human-nature relationship. Such a reading fits with some of the earlier criticism of Richardson's work, as Margot Northey notes how "Richardson exhibits towards nature an ambiguity which is the mark of true Gothicism. His attitude combines fascination with horror, seeing nature as a source of exciting vigour and also of ominous danger or doom" (22-23). Where Northey sees "a profound fear of nature" as seeming to

“override any other response,” I push my reading of Richardson’s work farther by suggesting that its tensions and contradictions present a more complex relation with the natural world. In doing so, I hope to open the door for an ecological reading of his work.

The physical setting of *Wacousta* reveals the antagonistic element of the human-nature relationship. While Richardson provides plenty of detail for Fort Detroit, Fort Michilimackinac, and the bodies of water that connect them, the forests surrounding these two colonial outposts become a vague, trackless wilderness. In his introductory chapter, Richardson carefully maps out his setting for a European audience, following the waterways down to the St. Lawrence Seaway. However, this is followed by a scant attempt to describe the forests:

Even at the present day ... the garrisons are both few in number and weak in strength, and evidence of cultivation is seldom to be found at any distance in the interior; so that all beyond a certain extent of clearing, continued along the banks of the lakes and rivers, is thick, impervious, rayless forest, the limits of which have never yet been explored, perhaps, by the natives themselves. (6)

Richardson’s tone reveals an inability to comprehend the forest in any cartographic sense while also suggesting a justification for the lack of concrete detail. This pattern continues throughout the novel with later descriptions like these: “the dark shadow of the broad belt of forest threw all that part of the waste which came within its immediate range into impenetrable obscurity” (29); while captured, Captain de Haldimar “imagined himself begirt by interminable forest” (273); “the forest, in a word, formed, as it were, the gloomy and impenetrable walls of the prison-house” (286); and the lack of view from Fort Michilimackinac is described as such: “neither indeed was there a single spot in the immediate vicinity that was not clad in the eternal forests of these regions” (285). What is

clear in these descriptions is that for Richardson, the forest becomes a veil that obscures all from view; on at least two different occasions, Richardson explicitly notes how the eye cannot penetrate the forest's depths (146, 295). His preferred adjectives for the forest include dark, gloomy, impenetrable, and dense. While these might seem like neutral descriptions, they are not, as W.H. New warns when he writes that "language is not natural (meaning 'given' or 'unlearned'), not neutral, not value-free and not without consequence" (24). Richardson's descriptions of the forest set it up as an inhospitable place for the British; entrapping and isolating those who enter it. Captain de Haldimar's failed attempt to escape the Indian camp further reinforces this inhospitality (261-63).

Moreover, Richardson makes the dichotomy between the fort and wilderness even more explicit by always placing the Indians inside the woods. Whenever Indians appear in the novel, they are either in the forest, emerging from the skirts of forest into the clearing or escaping into it (cf. 49, 59, 61, 138, 141, 233, 286). While describing the watchmen's paranoia in the fort, Richardson inadvertently summarizes the symbolic conflation of Indian with forest: "at times they fancied they beheld the dark and flitting forms of men gliding from tree to tree along the skirt of the wood; but when they gazed again, nothing of the kind was to be seen, and the illusion was at once ascribed to the heavy state of the atmosphere" (148). While the men dismiss the appearance of Indians as an illusion caused by the weather, their fears turn out to be true, as a band of Indians chase after the fugitive Captain de Haldimar. The characters of *Wacousta* rightly fear the woods as they harbour their image of blood-thirsty and wild Indians who continually

wreak havoc on the British settlements.²³ Even when the threat seems right before them, as it does when the Indians are invited in to conference with the British leaders, the Governor still warns Captain Blessington that “still it will be necessary to watch the forest closely. We cannot be too much on our guard” (192). Here, the forest and the Indian threat merge into each other. For Richardson’s British settlers and soldiers, the forest is a threat at all times, something to be deeply suspicious of. If you are constantly fighting the forest and its inhabitants, it becomes very easy to see the British outpost as separate from the dense forest with its warring Indians.

Yet this kind of antagonism disguises the other relationship to the natural world that is on display in *Wacousta*: the cultivation of a British civilization out of an Indian inhabited wilderness. At the end of his introductory chapter, Richardson writes:

What Détroit was in 1763 it nearly is at the present day, with this difference, however, that many of those points which were then in a great degree isolated and rude are redolent with the beneficent effects of improved cultivation; and in the immediate vicinity of that memorable bridge, where formerly stood merely the occasional encampment of the Indian warrior, are now to be seen flourishing farms and crops, and other marks of agricultural industry. (14)

The agricultural industry improves and cultivates what was once wilderness so that the European project of settler-colonialism wins out over *Wacousta* and his Indians even though the ending of *Wacousta* leaves most of the primary characters dead or in disarray. In this excerpt we also see a different relationship to the land: settlers build up a civilization through the careful cultivation of the land, first with the axe and then with the plow. Richardson alludes to this process when he describes “the inhospitable and

²³ See Manina Jones’s “Beyond the Pale” and Emma LaRocque’s *When the Other is Me* for strong critiques of Richardson’s depictions of Indigenous peoples (37-58).

unproductive woods, subject only to the dominion of the native, and as yet unshorn by the cultivator” (8-9). The rhetoric of this sentence demands that the forest be clear-cut and the land made productive while the Indian conveniently disappears. Postcolonial critic Robert J.C. Young writes that “the culture of land has always been ... the primary form of colonization; the focus on soil emphasizes the physicality of the territory that is coveted, occupied, cultivated, turned into plantations and made unsuitable for indigenous nomadic tribes” (31). Colonization, as Young sees it, is intensely interested in the natural landscape, but only to the extent that it can be owned and transformed into something else. Bearing this in mind, then, the natural world of *Wacousta* is also a resource to be used and improved upon rather than just a terrifying Other that constantly threatens.

The transformation of wilderness into a cultivated outpost is firmly established by the time Richardson writes an introduction to the 1851 edition. Reflecting on the changes to the area since the novel’s initial publication, he writes

the unsparing hand of utilitarianism had passed over [the old fort], destroying almost every vestige of the past. Where had risen the only fortress in America at all worthy to give antiquity to the scene, streets had been laid out and made, and houses had been built, leaving not a trace of its existence, save the well that formerly supplied the closely besieged garrison with water; and this, half imbedded [sic] in the herbage of an enclosure of a dwelling house of mean appearance, was rather to be guessed at than seen; while at the opposite extremity of the city, where had been conspicuous for years the Bloody Run, cultivation and improvement had nearly obliterated every trace of the past. (586)

Richardson waxes nostalgic for reminders of the glorious past because he can no longer see their physical remains. The historical markers that he saw in the landscape, the bridge and the fort, are replaced by “cultivation and improvement” which he ambivalently disparages by implying that the new buildings lack greatness and possess only “mean

appearance” even as he acknowledges the importance of utilitarianism in isolated areas. This introduction displays Richardson’s mixed feelings towards colonization: he approves of the cultivation and establishment of culture but also mourns the loss of the frontier world. It is important to note that when Richardson is writing his introduction, the settler’s relation to the natural world is changing again as railways open up more and more of the “eternal forest,” accelerating the processes of development and cultivation.

The Canadian Brothers, Richardson’s sequel published eight years after *Wacousta*, continues the history of the de Haldimar and Morton families. Set during the War of 1812, the novel takes up the descendants of the de Haldimar and Morton families. In the earlier novel the threat of violence lies with Indians and wilderness, but in *The Canadian Brothers* it is the Americans that threaten to destabilize the British settler project. Richardson’s sequel is also more mobile, moving from Amherstburg to Ohio and ending in Stoney Creek at the Battle of Queenston Heights. The Grantham brothers are the primary characters who try to fight the Americans but ultimately both die at novel’s end with Henry accidentally killing Gerald before he falls to his death in the arms of Jeremiah Desborough, a descendant of Wacousta. Like *Wacousta*, *The Canadian Brothers* is full of violence yet the colonial project is never truly threatened.²⁴

Sampson Gattrie, a comic character who lives in Amherstburg, illustrates the success of this project in his farm. Richardson describes its appearance:

on its highest elevation, stood a snug, well cultivated property ... crowned on its extreme summit by a neat and commodious farm-house Immediately in the

²⁴ Daniel Coleman pointed out to me that the novel’s final image of vultures hovering over the Niagara Escarpment and “the picked and whitened bones ... shining through the deep gloom that envelopes every part of the abyss, [visible] even to this day,” casts a dark future for Canada as a nation (473).

rear, and commencing beyond the orchard which surrounded the house, stretched forestward, and to a considerable distance, a tract of rich and cultivated soil, separated into strips by zig-zag enclosures, and offering to the eye of the traveller, in appropriate season, the several species of American produce, such as Indian corn, buck wheat, &c. with here and there a few patches of indifferent tobacco. (115)

The symbolic nature of this description shows human mastery over the natural world with Richardson even describing the house as “crowning” the hill. Splayed out beneath it is a wealth of agricultural crops and a fruit orchard. The wilderness of *Wacousta* has been turned into a productive landscape that allows Gattrie to indulge in alcohol without fear for his life. Daniel Coleman reads the hard work of Gattrie and his son as “function[ing] ideologically to justify Whites’ displacement of Natives from the land ... [W]hat justifies the White displacement of Native people is enterprise – that passion for organization, civic improvement, and development – invested in the soil” (55-57). Gattrie and his son’s enterprise requires a much different relationship to the natural world. Rather than seeing it as terrifying, they go to work on it to transform it into a European model of civilization. Even here, Richardson leaves some ambiguity, as the reference to Indian corn and tobacco points to the existence of Indigenous forms of agriculture, a notion that would nullify the doctrine of *terra nullius*. Unsurprisingly, Richardson does not address this.

In contrast to Gattrie’s orderly farm is Jeremiah Desborough’s disorderly farm, showing the possibility of cultivating poorly. Richardson describes it as:

unlike those however whose dwellings rose at a distance, few and far between, hemmed in by the fruits of prosperous agriculture, he appeared to have paid but little attention to the cultivation of a soil, which in every part was of exceeding fertility. A rude log hut, situated in a clearing of the forest, the imperfect work of lazy labour, was his only habitation. (98)

He is at pains to show how Desborough has every opportunity to succeed in a land with

soils “of exceeding fertility.” Moreover, Desborough’s fellow citizens wonder “how he contrived to procure the necessary means of subsistence” (98). In these “innocent” wonderings, Richardson makes it clear that Desborough is not doing his colonial duty in cultivating the land. In fact, as is revealed later, he makes his money by acting as a double agent for the Americans. It comes as little surprise that his son is the traitor who kills Henry at novel’s end while Gattrie’s son never leaves the farm at all, instead playing out his role as a dutiful farmer and good settler.

Read across these two novels, Richardson develops a complex relationship to the land. On the one hand, it would be easy to characterize the relationship as one of fear in the face of a hostile, amoral nature. Yet, *The Canadian Brothers* complicates this by showing how good settlers can cultivate a productive landscape out of the wilderness. Put this way, humans in Richardson’s novels fear and loathe the wilderness, but they also recognize that it is essential to their survival and can even be improved into a thriving place by hard work. These two attitudes, visible in both novels, demonstrate an ambivalent mindset towards the natural world. At the same time, I am not convinced it is this simple either. The introduction to the 1851 edition of *Wacousta* shows more than a hint of Richardson’s nostalgia for the rapidly disappearing wilderness. The two novels, the first of which was quite popular in its time, depend upon the wilderness to provide suspense and exhilaration to the readers.²⁵ Framed in this way, the natural world provides thrills and delights to its readers even as it suggests the woods are no place for the British. The relationship to land is more complex in *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers* than

²⁵ See xxiv-xlvi of Douglas Cronk’s “Editor’s Introduction” for *Wacousta*’s publishing history.

critical discourse has sometimes made of it. It is possible to read the characters of Richardson's work as fearing nature, delighting in it, and even finding it a drudgery as Desborough's laziness suggests. These multiple feelings come together to form an ambivalent sense of the human relationship to the natural world.

Richardson was not alone in espousing a vision of transforming the wilderness of North America into a richly cultivated human society. In *Civilizing the Wilderness*, historian A.A. den Otter uses numerous case studies in early Canadian history to argue

the notion of reclaiming the wilderness and turning it into a garden also fell on fertile intellectual ground in North America, where colonists sensed the mandate as soon they established their permanent foothold on the continent. As early as the seventeenth century, settlers in the northern regions made clear the intention to colonize, develop, and Christianize the land. (3)

Wilderness was to be feared and kept at bay, yet it could also be transformed into a new Garden of Eden. While den Otter does not use ambivalence to describe this notion, I believe that we can see it in this way, as colonists were called on to both see the existing land as forsaken and barren while imagining it as potentially bountiful. Den Otter expands on the sense of wilderness by suggesting that for most it meant "a place at once hostile, alien, and, above all, barren. To them, wilderness was unbridled nature, untouched by human hands and tools, a place that had to be civilized, to be understood by science and tamed by technology, to be exploited for its resources and wealth" (xvii). Not only did settlers see the landscape as a blank slate, they also felt a divine mandate to cultivate it.

We can see this in *Wacousta* when the captured Frederick comforts himself with

the vivifying picture of civilised nature. Corn fields, although trodden down and destroyed – dwelling houses, although burnt or dilapidated – told of the existence of those who were of the same race with himself ... there was something in the aspects of the very ruins of their habitations which carried a momentary and

indefinable consolation to his spirit. (273)

Even the temporary victory of Indians over the British cannot prevent the ultimate success of the cultivation project. Gattrie's farm in Richardson's sequel fulfills this prophecy as the threatening Indians are already receding from view. Den Otter's notion of civilizing the wilderness presents a teleology of nature that sees wilderness as a starting point and civilization as the end goal.

This teleology of nature is important in terms of my project because it prefigures the cultural discourse of the city as an unnatural space. Nature is a malleable object in Richardson's two novels, one that can be formed and transformed by the enterprise of British settlers. This evacuation of agency begins the separation of the natural world from the human, as nature becomes nothing more than a resource to be extracted or manipulated. In Richardson's writing, the town or village is distinctly placed within the natural landscape, depending on it for its survival. But with the coming industrial revolution, cities would be increasingly disconnected from their immediate natural surroundings. Historian Donald Worster points out that "in the nineteenth century, development also became a transitive verb, with humans as the subject, nature as the object. That is, it became man's proper role on earth to 'develop nature,' meaning to make nature over into useful, marketable commodities" (25). As cities begin to emerge in North America, those living in them were increasingly out of touch with the natural world that informs Richardson's novels. This separation was not a sudden one, but a slow historical change that began before Richardson was writing and was not complete until after World War II. Williams, in *The Country and the City*, helps explain this separation:

“there is also, throughout, an ideological separation between the processes of rural exploitation, which have been, in effect, dissolved into a landscape, and the register of that exploitation, in the law courts, the money markets, the political power and the conspicuous expenditure of the city” (46). Although he is discussing early modern England, his characterization of the spatial separation of production/exploitation from consumption still holds value. Richardson’s work, set in the earliest stages of this process in what is today southern Ontario, shows how the exploitation of the forest is replaced by farming in the transition between his two historical novels. In the process, the exploitation becomes less visible: the stumps that are visible signs of “cultivation” are replaced by farms like Gattrie’s. While the economies of both novels were largely local in that the goods produced would have been consumed in the same area, some resources like tall tree trunks were already being sent back to Europe for ship-building. Moreover, Richardson’s emphasis on the fort as distinct from wilderness and the farm as a subduing of nature moves toward the human/nature binary that is fomenting in the nineteenth century. As environmental historian William Cronon reminds us, “a city’s history must also be the history of its human countryside, and of the natural world within which city and country are both located” (19). Too often our urban histories and stories have excised the natural world, but in what follows I hope to remedy this.

Windsor’s Emergence as a City: A Historical Interlude

In this short section, I’m going to move from Richardson’s historical novels, set between 1776 and 1813, to post-World War II Windsor. Jameson on her visit to the

British side of the Detroit River in 1836 proclaimed: “I saw sufficient to convince me that Sandwich makes no progress” (346). Against this prediction, Sandwich did manage to emerge as a flourishing urban centre when it became part of Windsor in the nineteenth century, although it would never rival Detroit. With the rise of the automobile after the turn of the twentieth century, it became the most important automotive centre in Canada for many years. In its own way, it became marked by, using Jameson’s description of Detroit, by the “bustle ... of prosperity and commerce” (344).

Windsor did not become a true urban centre until the late nineteenth century. Up to that point, it was largely a remote settlement that depended on Detroit’s markets for its livelihood. In the first half of the nineteenth century, what would become Windsor was actually several different settlements including Sandwich, Walkerville, and Windsor. The city depended on agricultural production while all manufactured products were brought in via the river. However, in 1854, the Great Western Railway arrived, allowing for travel across Canada West to Buffalo and New York by train.²⁶ Historian Neil F. Morrison argues that this was “the crowning event of that decade for Detroit and Essex County” as it signalled the end of Windsor’s isolation with the possibility of year-round travel (30). The end of frontier life that Richardson elegizes in his novels arrived on railroad tracks, a transportation technology that rapidly changed the face of North America in the mid nineteenth century. Not coincidentally, Windsor incorporated as a town in 1858. Because of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Windsor also attracted large numbers of escaped or freed African American slaves. The opening of a rail line to Amherstburg in 1870 briefly

²⁶ This same railway also spurred a boom period in Hamilton where it had arrived a year earlier. Sir Allan McNab, the ambitious Hamilton politician who built Dundurn Castle, was at the heart of the company.

threatened Windsor's survival, but this line closed in 1883 because of problems with ice blockades in crossing to the American side (Morrison 123). A line connecting Windsor to the Canadian Pacific line was completed in 1890 and this sealed Windsor's position as the urban centre of the peninsula. Branch lines from the main railroads opened up vast tracts of the peninsula so that the lumber industry gained significant steam in the 1850s and peaked in the 1880s. By the turn of the twentieth century, the industry was already in decline (Morrison 216). Yet the rapid disappearance of the forests that characterized the Lake Erie Lowlands, the eco-region Windsor is located in, opened up space for agricultural production just as Richardson's novels show. Trains did not introduce any new forms of cultivation to the landscape, but vastly accelerated the already existing patterns of development. However, the railways also attracted industrial development which transformed the Windsor area from a resource-economy into a manufacturing one.

The most important development came in the expansion of the Ford Motor Company from Detroit into Windsor. This was a business decision made to gain access to the British market, but it also greatly benefitted Windsor. In the early years of the automotive industry the city was home to at least 24 different car builders, more than anywhere else in the British Dominion (Colling and Morgan vii). However, by the 1920s the market had been claimed by the largest companies: Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler. Each of these was firmly entrenched in Windsor's landscape. Along with the jobs and capital these companies brought, they also increased the need for roads and transportation routes. Plans for an underwater tunnel linking Detroit and Windsor had been proposed since as early as the 1870s. However, construction techniques were not

advanced enough for it to be possible, so it was not until 1928 that actual construction began. The Detroit-Windsor Tunnel was completed in 1930, a year after the Ambassador Bridge finished construction (Morrison 272-74). These two border connections allowed easy access for families with automobiles and increased local tourism and commerce. They also rang a death knell for the ferry, which had previously been the only reliable means of crossing the river. Beginning with the construction of railroads by flattening and cutting through elevation changes, these new modes of transportation signalled a desire to alter the landscape to fit more closely to human desires. They also produced ambiguous results: although they opened up more land to human habitation and usage they also created new environmental problems. More areas could be visited, enjoyed, and protected by Canadians, yet the increase in vehicles also meant increased levels of fossil fuel consumption and required huge amounts of government resources to create and maintain road infrastructure.²⁷ Like the railway, the automobile does not so much represent a change in kind as in degree, as exploitation of the natural world now happened at a much quicker pace and on a broader scale. Moreover, where once it might have been possible to imagine accommodating or working with the natural world, with urban migration people are less likely to view their relationship to the land in this way.

In conjunction with technological advancements, Essex County saw a massive shift of population from rural areas into urban ones. While in 1891, 63% of the population lived in rural areas, by 1911 the number dropped to 52% before plummeting to 33% by

²⁷ Gerald Killan discusses the crisis in Ontario's provincial parks in the 1950s as officials in the Department of Lands and Forests struggled to adapt to rising levels of visitors to its parks. For instance, the total number of cars entering Algonquin went from 28 662 in 1950 to 47 000 in 1953 while the beaches at Ipperwash attracted between 35 000 – 50 000 visitors on the weekend (77 -78).

1921 (Morrison 10). This demographic change came, in part, as a result of World War I. Historian Joel Baskerville notes that during this war, over one billion dollars in war contracts were handed out nationally while 60% of these went to communities in southern Ontario (162). Companies like Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler all retooled their factories to supply the war effort, fuelling continued growth throughout the 1920s. The Great Depression of the 1930s hit Windsor hard as industry was nearly crippled, but this setback did not stem the tide of rural outmigration. World War II reinvigorated Windsor's flagging industries, providing a strong stimulus to the city's local economy. The automotive industry and its subsidiaries continued to drive Windsor's economy along with other industrial enterprises like brewing, pharmaceuticals, salt mining and the manufacture of salt-related chemicals (Morrison 300). This boom also changed Windsor's landscape in that large suburban housing developments were created to house the newly emerging middle class. Baskerville notes that 43% of today's homes were built in the 25 years following World War II, a huge building boom that changed the culture of cities across Ontario (217). Windsor's contemporary form took shape during this period with a dense downtown core surrounded by suburban developments and assorted shopping malls dotting the landscape. The natural world continued to fuel Windsor's growth, but this fact was increasingly obscured by the outsourcing of resource extraction, increased mechanization in industry, and a growing middle class more involved in production than extraction. Today, the Ambassador Bridge and the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel continue to funnel traffic on key routes through the city with a downtown core sandwiched between heavy industry on the western, eastern, and southern fringes.

This short history illustrates how the cultural idea that a city is separate from the natural world has a tangible genealogy. Williams argues that “at every point we need to put these ideas [of country and city] to the historical realities: at times to be confirmed, at times denied” (*The Country and the City* 291). Viewed through a historical lens, Windsor was initially the outcome of the colonial process of civilizing the wilderness, yet the middle ground of this transition where humans are still part of the natural world soon disappears as Windsor’s landscape is transformed from forest and farmland to industrial and urban areas. This transformation begins with the arrival of the railroad, is fuelled by industrialization and urban migration, and is complete by the time that the family car is no longer a novelty. The industry that gives life to Windsor as a city is a blessing in the sense that it provides work and a home for many people, yet it comes at a heavy cost in terms of the exploitation of existing resources and the pollution of Windsor’s land.

Surveying the Conflicting Images of the Detroit River

“First of all
there is a river.”

- C.H. Gervais “Voice for a Birthplace” 1-2

“The Detroit River has been a working river in the industrial heartland. It has had the reputation of being a ‘polluted river in the rust belt.’”

- John H. Hartig, *Honouring Our Detroit River* 7

The Detroit River is a crucial part of Windsor’s identity and history. It is the reason for Windsor’s existence as a city, and it continues to be a key part of its economy. However, the river is not as clean as it once was, as Hartig suggests. In the front page story of the *Windsor Star* September 8, 2001 edition, a journalist describes how “many

areas of the riverbed are so toxic one science technician burned his hands scooping up a handful of sediment in the area near the Great Lakes Steel Plant, downstream from the Rouge River” (Mandel A1). Writer and environmental consultant Dave Dempsey attributes this toxicity and pollution to the fact that cities along the Great Lakes dumped sewage directly into the river in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A comprehensive environmental assessment in 1912 decried the state of the Great Lakes’ water and pointed to the Detroit and Niagara Rivers as the most heavily polluted. The International Joint Commission, established to produce that report, has continued to work towards the river’s health, yet the situation has worsened since 1912. In a section entitled Toxic Chemical Discharges and Contamination, the 1997 Detroit River Area of Concern Status Assessment notes that in Detroit there are 13 000 commercial and industrial dischargers connected to the city’s wastewater treatment plant with at least 446 considered major dischargers while Windsor had 1 300 commercial and industrial businesses connected to its waste water treatment facilities with 70 classified as major dischargers (sec. 2). The report also notes impaired fish and wildlife populations, restrictions on drinking water consumption, beach closings, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, and high levels of toxicity in the river’s fish (Table 1). While the report does highlight some positive restoration work, in the Concluding Remarks the IJC writes that:

Because of the industrial legacy, considerable environmental problems persist particularly in regard to contaminated sediment. Due to the magnitude of the existing problem and the continued input of persistent toxic substances, extraordinary efforts and funding are required to enhance the restoration process ... to date, too little effort has been devoted to specific remedial actions and too few persons have acknowledged the magnitude of financial resources needed to accomplish any sizable increment of remediation of the contaminated sediment or sewer infrastructure problem.

Years of industrial development and urban densification have resulted in a poisoned and polluted river. Where the river was once a source of life in its offering of fish and water passage, it is now a cancerous body of water with a dour long-term prognosis.

What does it mean for a city to have such a polluted body of water as one of its borders and as a key resource in the daily functioning of its body? In “Watersheds,” Rita Wong ponders what it might mean for her to take water and watersheds seriously. She writes that a watershed moment for her “would involve a reframing of our identities in relation to water, as a crucial part of the land” (116). So what would a watershed moment for the polluted Detroit River look like? This pollution is particularly menacing when we realize that as Wong notes, “we are roughly 70% water, and we are part of the hydrological cycle, not separate from it ... Water connects us to places, people and creatures we have not seen, life that is far away from us, and life that came long before us” (116). With so much of the earth and our physical bodies being intimately connected with water, water pollution is a serious problem. Windsor, like many other cities, has had a contradictory relationship to its primary waters: it needs them to survive and yet it acts in a way that threatens the water’s very health.

While polluted waters are a common feature for almost all cities on the Great Lakes, Windsor’s relation to the river is particularly important because the river has been crucial to the city’s history. In *The River*, a memoir of living in Windsor, Vasey writes that “the River is just part of the fabric of our lives. It’s part of our vocabulary. And it’s very much a part of who we are and what we do” (13) As suggested above, the national border that runs through the river is the very impetus for Windsor’s development as an

urban centre, unlike other riverside cities such as Chicago or Montreal; without Detroit, there is no Windsor. The city is oriented towards the river with its major north/south roads running perpendicular to the waterfront. This is a result of the French settlement patterns and the eventual development of the city along these lines. A road map of Windsor shows how much the city is oriented towards the water. All but a few streets change direction according to the shape of the Detroit River. The city's downtown core is built along this waterway, reflecting its historic economic and cultural connections. What does it mean, then, when a key player in a city's history has become heavily polluted, a constant reminder of the poor state of its natural environment?

While almost all works set in or addressing Windsor feature the Detroit River to some degree, I'm going to take up a novel and a short story which deal with this body of water in very different ways. *Mongrel*, by Marko Sijan, sets up the river as a dirty and polluted border that contaminates the lives of the novel's youth. Alexander MacLeod's short story "Adult Beginner I," on the other hand, features a watershed moment which acknowledges the river's pollution but attempts to find ways to think beyond such a degraded state. Throughout, I ask how Windsor's contemporary writers see the river in such vastly different ways, and what this might offer understandings of urban nature.

Mongrel is a complex novel because of its synchronous narrative structure and the stark portraits of teenage violence and sexuality. The novel tells the intertwined narratives of five Windsor youths, Sera, Milan, Gus, Sophie and Gunter, as they navigate the tumultuous confluence of puberty, high school, and life in a city that one character describes as "stultified by the violence and danger in Detroit" (39). The five teenagers

represent a broad swath of cultures as Sera is a child of Jamaican parents, Milan has a xenophobic Serbian father and a Croatian mother, Gunther has German parents who might have a shady past in the country's Nazi history, while Sophie and Gus's mother is Quebecoise. This range of backgrounds becomes a central point of tension in the conflicts between Gunther, the high school bully, and his frequent targets Gus and Milan. Sera's black skin gets her into trouble in Detroit after she attends a rave in Ann Arbor while Sophie hopes to escape her mother's embarrassing French-ness. The collisions of culture coupled with the hormones of teenagers make for a compelling if somewhat troubling narrative. Complicating all of this is the problem of unreliable narrators, as each of the characters narrates her or his own section of the novel, so readers must interpret the action through their various personalities. The timeline of the narrative is also mixed, as each character recounts a portion of the same day, June 10, 1999, but not in a chronological fashion. The first section, Sera's, occurs latest in the day while Gus's, Milan's, and Sophie's are more or less synchronous. However, Gunther's section weaves the endings of Sophie's and Gus's sections together in the penultimate scene. This complex chronological structure creates the effect of experiencing the same day in five different ways, complete with moments of *déjà vu* for the reader. This narrative structure emphasizes the multiplicity of individual experiences of time and place, so that the onus lies on the reader to construct the story that threads all five accounts together.

Windsor is a crucial element of the novel not simply because it is the setting but because the polluted atmosphere contributes to the claustrophobic and violent tone. Throughout the novel, Windsor is described by the youth as a dirty and polluted place.

Gus, high on marijuana and Tylenol after being assaulted by Gunther, wanders the waterfront of Windsor. On leaving the casino, he notes that the air “also reeks like dirty ass because the casino’s across the street from the river” (96). He heads down to the water pumping station along the waterfront to meet Sera. He sees her and starts running: “I take a deep breath but the stench of the river soaks into my lungs and I puke, but I didn’t eat all day so it’s just yellow-brown bile” (97). After a tense sexual encounter with Sera, he emerges from beneath the water pumping station: “[I] catch a whiff of the river which almost makes me puke again, but I’ve got nothing left to puke. The streets are kind of empty. I think it’s real late, this is bad. I’ve never seen Windsor so dead even though it’s a dead city” (109). The river’s pollution causes a visceral reaction in Gus. To be sure, the drugs Gus has ingested also have a part to play, but his descriptions of the city remind readers that such pollution is far from conducive to any human being’s health.

Gus is not the only one to notice this as two other characters make similar remarks. Gunther, while drinking outside the casino, thinks: “the river stinks like a dumpster full of tampons” (176). His vulgar description echoes Gus’s earlier thoughts. Sera, while on her way to a rave in Ann Arbor, thinks “cities are receptacles of filth and hate, and even the air is too sick to keep circulating. Soon our bodies will begin collapsing in the streets, restaurants and apartments of cities” (40). While her apocalyptic comment does not concern the river directly, it certainly paints a bleak portrait of cities. Her characterization of Windsor fits the city’s long history of using the river as a waste disposal system. There is an element of youthful restlessness in all of these characters as Windsor continually feels too small, too parochial, and too limited compared to cities like

Detroit and Toronto. Yet the fact that three different characters paint the river as a polluted, toxic body is significant. These repetitions underline how the polluted river forms a fitting background to the characters' own violent lives.

Whereas Richardson tries to mitigate the violence in his novels by a vision of cultivation and cultural progress, *Mongrel* offers no such escape. Instead, the polluted and corrupted nature of the novel's landscapes matches the violence and anger displayed by the novel's youth. For instance, the brokenness in Sera's description of the view along the interstate thematically foreshadows her violent rape in Detroit: "anorexic bushes and trees caked in black exhaust, bloated garbage, rusted trucks, shredded tires, shattered glass, squirrel and raccoon roadkill and orange pylons line the interstate ... I hear them whisper, *Go back to Windsor*" (16). The dead corpses, rotting garbage and struggling plants all suggest sickness and violence to Sera. Read symbolically, human culture appears sick, excessive, decaying, and violent. However, given Sera's earlier comment about cities as receptacles of filth and hate, readers may wonder whether going back to Windsor would be any better. When she is raped the narrative itself breaks down: "The doors open *God* balaclavas *Is this* sparks of light *Is this my* ringing" (57). The narrative's brokenness, rendered in pieces that force the reader to fill in the gaps, mirrors the broken and dirty landscape Sera noticed earlier. Thematically speaking, the exhausted and polluted atmosphere matches the brutal violence and self-destructive actions of the teenagers. Where once there was vitality, happiness, and life, there is now brokenness, rage, and violence. There is little redemption on offer for any of the human characters in Sijan's novel, suggesting, by connection, that Windsor's ecology is so far gone that there

can be no recovery. The violence of the industrial exploitation and pollution of the landscape echoes the racial and social violence of the youth which, in turn, stimulates more violence. This cycle of violence drives the novel's plot but also makes it difficult for readers to see any escape. Even the revelation that Sophie is pregnant with Gunther's child at the end of the novel is compromised by her attempted suicide and the ambiguity over whether she will survive. The violence in *Mongrel* is far from hospitable to any life.

The casino, which becomes a central location in the novel, reinforces this inhospitality as it appears exploitative, cheap and tawdry. Gus describes the casino as a “sea of slot machines in rows that go on forever making echo this brutal clanging noise ... it also smells like piss and shit” (94). This description evokes his earlier characterizations of the river. Gus is not fooled by the flashing lights and waterfalls of the casino, but sees the kind of exploitative development that the casino represents. While his mother is able to make good money working there, Gus sees “rows of fat middle-aged American white-trash types in red and white and blue shirts and Red Wings caps, jerking off the slots” (95). The casino caters to American tourist dollars, transforming the city into an entertainment district for Detroit.²⁸ Gunther and his gang come to the casino, mug a local man for cash to gamble with, and brawl with a group of black Americans in the parking lot before going in to the casino for a night on the town. Gunther, who is proud of Windsor and plans on staying there for life, comments that the casino's driveway is “bunged up with well-dressed rich snakes slithering out of their fancy cars” (178). He

²⁸ Sijan's novel draws on the contemporary reality of Windsor. The provincial NDP government pushed through a plan to open an Ontario Lottery and Gaming-owned casino on Windsor's waterfront in 1994. Although it has been successful at times, it has been a contentious point of debate since its creation. For more contextual information, see journalist Susan Taylor Martin's “These Casino Towns.”

then describes the kind of development that a casino brings in a surprisingly lucid section:

Nobody cares if we're under age. They just want our cash. My old man tells me this new casino is the best thing for Windsor, gives it an edge it didn't have before. More jobs for lazy slugs. And Americans have started spending their cash on us instead of the other way around. It was time this town got on the map. True, many parents have gambled away the savings they were supposed to spend on their little cunts' university tuitions, but that's not my problem. (179)

Gunther accepts the selling out of the waterfront to American tourists even though he is aware of the problematic effect it is having on local gambling addicts. The casino becomes a sleazy gambling den where racially driven street brawls happen, middle class workers become gambling addicts, and exploitative sexual encounters can take place. The casino does dominate Windsor's skyline and waterfront district in reality, but Sijan invests it with a lurid energy that fuels the chaos and violence of his novel. Thematically, this kind of exploitative human development fits the exploitative industrial development that has polluted the river. In the world of Sijan's novel, there is no effective barrier to stop corruption and violence flowing between the natural and human world.

Yet this porosity clashes with the reason that most of these characters' parents chose Windsor as a place to live. Sijan goes out of his way to inform readers that each of the parents chose Windsor because it appeared to be a safe and stable place. Sera's Jamaican parents chose Windsor because it was a former British colony and offered them steady jobs at the Chrysler plant (19); Sophie and Gus's French mother chose Windsor because of its historical French roots, job opportunities in the casino, and because she was tired of the Quebecois victim culture which marginalized her (183-84); Milan's parents fled the crumbling Yugoslavia and the ethnic violence that came with the nation's collapse (130); and Gunther's parents moved to Windsor from Miami in the 1980s to

escape the racial violence that was erupting there (156,160). In all of these decisions, Windsor appears to be a safe haven for the parents, but for their children it is anything but. In the disjunction between the parents and the children we see two different relationships to the city: for the parents, it is a safe place where a family can be raised, but for the children it is a violent and brutal city. Between these two views, we can see an ambivalent relationship to place unfolding. Although we are not given the parents' voices, we can potentially read them as having a positive attachment to Windsor whereas the youth have a more negative attachment to the city, in part because of the relative lack of safety. This lack of safety is mirrored in the polluted state of Windsor, both in literal terms and in cultural terms as racial, ethnic, and misogynistic violence stain the text.

The river becomes a metonym for the multicultural youth in *Mongrel*: just as the river is polluted and dangerous, so too are the children polluted by previous racial and ethnic tensions along with inherited misogyny and violence. Although many of these tensions and problems are exogenous to Windsor, the polluted landscape of Windsor provides soil for them to grow in. Gunther, the primary antagonist in the novel, saw his father shoot a black man at point blank range when he was trying to steal their television, an event that feeds his need to establish his dominance in his various schools by defeating the biggest and meanest person that he can in schoolyard brawls (159-61). Milan is scarred by his xenophobic Serbian father who fights with his mother because she is Croatian, and Gus and Sophie are raised by a single mother who left her husband because he was gay. Although their parents sought to escape violence in Windsor, ironically, it is passed on to their children. In a similar way, the industrial pollution of Windsor's

landscape is passed down from generation to generation and mirrors the human violence that Sijan explores. Urban nature in *Mongrel*, then, is anything but a positive space; it has been violently exploited and ensnares the young characters into a cycle of violence.

Mongrel raises the question of how to read a pessimistic account of urban nature: what kinds of ecological thinking might this novel enable? Sijan is very explicit about his young characters' feelings towards Windsor. For them, the city is a destructive and violent place. In illustrating this kind of exploited landscape, Sijan allows readers to experience horror and shock at how brutal we have been not just to other humans but also to the plant, animal and mineral world. Although I found it difficult to read Sijan's novel, it does provide a good counterpoint to some of the naively optimistic brands of environmental discourse that have emerged around buzzwords like sustainable development and multiculturalism. *Mongrel* raises the possibility that the current cultural and social systems are so broken as to render any kind of remediating action null. Practicing Code's ecological thinking means listening carefully to a diversity of voices, and *Mongrel* is a voice that needs to be heard though it may not appeal to all readers.

One environmental reading of *Mongrel* is that urban ecosystems are incredibly complex and deeply entrenched, making any kind of remediating action seem futile at best. Rather than trying to dismiss this reading, I believe it is important to keep it in mind when we engage with urban nature. When read through common understandings of what nature is, urban nature will appear broken and dysfunctional, making discussions of how to discover and enfold it much more difficult, if not disabling them outright. Representing pollution or blighted landscapes in literature does not guarantee an environmentally

positive response like campaigning against air pollution anymore than representing nature in a literary form is likely to produce an intense commitment to land conservation. Where earlier I suggested that representations of nature are ambiguous, polluted or blighted landscapes are often anything but ambiguous. They are easily read as broken, ruined, wrecked, dangerous, and inhospitable. It is hard to care for a place that so visibly bears the scars of human abuse and neglect. It is easier to focus attention and resources on less damaged landscapes like wilderness areas. Using cultural representations of urban nature as part of an urban environmental praxis, as my project sets out to do, is going to be difficult for this reason alone. The toxic Detroit River shows how intertwined with the natural world humans are and reveals how much damage we have done to its stinking body and, by extension to our own bodies.

However, I argue that *Mongrel* can also be read as a negative reflection of what Windsor could be like. Reading so much violence and pollution can produce a deep sense of longing in readers for a better state. Morton, in *Ecology without Nature*, argues that “although environmental writing is historically determined, and although it has been the tool of many a potent ideology, ecomimesis can allow speculation on other, more free and just, states of affairs, if only in the negative” (160). The cycle of violence that amplifies human and ecological violence in *Mongrel* can arrest a reader’s attention and force her to ask how this loop might be broken and how she might create places where neither youth nor the environment are caught up in violent forces beyond their control. This kind of reaction gets to the environmental ambivalence that I suggest will be part of any enfolding of urban nature. We can share *Mongrel*’s anger and angst, loathing how

violence is so evident in Windsor's landscape, yet we may also feel deeply attached to that landscape at the same time, caring for it in an ecologically beneficial way. I believe both emotions are necessary even as they are in tension with each other. In this sense, *Mongrel's* violence may be more productive in provoking a reader's affective response than a text which is less abrasive about ecological and cultural degradation.²⁹

Radically departing from *Mongrel's* literary world, Alexander Macleod's short story "Adult Beginner I" presents a watershed moment for Windsor as it acknowledges the pollution of the river but also sketches the possibilities for experiencing it as an emancipatory space. The story, part of his Giller-prize shortlisted collection *Light Lifting* primarily set in Windsor during the late 1990s, is a coming-of-age narrative with the protagonist Stace learning to overcome her childhood fear of water by taking adult swimming lessons. The story moves between a traumatic childhood experience in the Atlantic Ocean, swimming lessons at a local pool, and a late night with friends as they jump off an old theatre into the Detroit River. In the story, all of the bodies of water appear polluted or degraded. However, it is in the contaminated waters of the Detroit River that Stace comes of age as she conquers her fear of drowning while swimming out to search for Brad, her swimming instructor and budding love interest, after he dove in to check on her because of her poorly executed first jump. The story ends without dramatic resolution as she follows what she thinks is his body into the shipping channel, but then realizes that a large lake freighter is quickly bearing down on her and is forced to swim as

²⁹ See, for example, two short stories from Eugene McNamara's *Salt*: "The Unprotected Border" and "The Death of Buddy Holly." In the first story, environmental pollution becomes a thematic device for suggesting how the cultural politics of the Vietnam War have invaded Windsor while in the second story pollution becomes an object of aesthetic beauty and intellectual stimulation. Neither of these stories is nearly as critical of Windsor as Sijan's novel.

hard as she can towards shore to escape the pull of its giant propellers. There is no indication whether she survives so that although MacLeod sees the river as being more than a polluted body of water, its future, and Stace's, remains in doubt.

Chronologically, Stace's first encounter with the ocean sets up the motif of polluted waters in the story. When Stace, as a young child, and her parents go to Nova Scotia, the narrator describes the ocean:

The beach made Stace think of a city park during a garbage strike. To find a spot for their towels, they stepped through a jumble of sharp rocks, faded blue bottles of fabric softener and shredded Styrofoam buoys. There were a couple of broken lobster traps with short brown nails sticking out through the lathe and some larger, irregular shaped logs, even whole trees, bleached a petrified white, like the leftover boxes of a rotted sea monster. Long, unfollowable lines of yellow rope wove in and out of the boulders and there were dozens of smashed Alexander Keith's beer bottles scattered around a firepit. At the far corner of the beach, at the base of the cliff, Stace found a kid's inflatable raft with paddles and oar locks and everything. It was a faded pink and yellow colour and there was a picture of a surfing Barbie on the punctured plastic floor. (110)

In this long description, readers see how the natural world is intimately intertwined with the human world in the all-too familiar form of garbage. Stace's image of a city park filled with garbage amplifies the narrator's description of the detritus littering the beach. She finds both natural debris, as in the bleached and petrified logs, and human debris as in the smashed beer bottles and the punctured children's raft. Far from being a positive experience, this littered beach becomes the setting for watery trauma as she is sucked under by a strong undertow. A moment before panic sets in, she imagines having an intimate connection with the water: "she felt like a floating thing, like a person who might be able to move easily" (113). This is a moment of eerie intimacy with water, a moment that is cut short by her father's timely intervention as he pulls her out of the water by her

hair. It is only when she is lying on the beach that she realizes the danger she was in.

Following this, she develops a crippling fear of water so that when she is underwater she feels: “a familiar tightening in her diaphragm, the intimate constriction of her larynx, sticky weight in her arms and legs, the scurrying in her brain” (134-35). Stace’s first experience of a polluted beach with a strong undertow fundamentally teaches her that water is unsafe, an inhuman space. She spends most of her teen years trying to overcome this fear, and it is only as a result of Brad’s coaxing that she is able to swim safely.

However, I want to stress that this fear of water is intimately connected with its polluted nature. Similar to *Mongrel*, the garbage-littered beach amplifies the danger and violence of the ocean currents that tear Stace away from her mother. Water is always potentially unsafe for humans because of our biological need to breathe oxygen, but water framed by pollution and garbage proves even more dangerous.

Similarly, the waters of the swimming pool where Stace learns to swim are described in polluted terms. Like the ocean, the YMCA’s pool is marked by its unnaturalness: “spritizes of WHMIS-approved disinfectant squirted into the urine-soaked corners of the bathroom stalls ... rodent-sized nests of woven anonymous hair scooped from the filter traps. Robot vacuum cleaners tossed into the deep end and dispatched for a night’s work crawling along the bottom to consume lost Band-Aids, random coins, and flakes of discarded human skin” (101-02). Stace later notices “a thin slippery film of piss-warm water coating the entire deck ... a burning stench of antibacterial soap and chlorine wafting up from every surface” (133). This is a body of water marked more by stringent chemicals, organic waste, and daily cleaning regimes than by its “clean” water. Water in

this scene is described in negative terms, evoking in readers a queasy sense of what might actually be in the water of a swimming pool.

At the same time, it is in this water that Stace is able to overcome her deep-rooted fear of being in water. When she discovers she can, in fact, survive in the deep end of the swimming pool, she realizes that “a swimming pool was more parking lot than ocean. Right angles, a perfect square with no secrets, utterly transparent, bleached. It was like a beaker in the lab” (128). Even though it becomes a safe body of water, a place for Stace to experiment, it still retains an unnatural feel as MacLeod’s description invokes a sterilized and sanitized version of naturally occurring bodies of water like a river or lake. Yet, it is this containment which allows Stace to overcome her fears and swim in the Detroit River by story’s end. In her triumph over water, Stace retains a lingering fear of its power but also comes to love swimming laps in the mornings. Here, we get a sense of her ambivalent relationship to water, an ambivalence that makes MacLeod’s story a rich site for exploring urban nature. It can be both deeply polluted and unnatural, yet it can also be a freeing space that allows humans to achieve momentous accomplishments.

In claiming this ability for water, MacLeod runs the risk of suggesting that water can be freeing irrespective of contamination, a thought which can lend itself to complacency towards pollution. While a swimming pool is a good place to learn to swim, it is not ecologically healthy in any sense as there are no natural filters in the form of algae, plants, or wildlife. Hence, pools need to be cleaned by automated pool cleaners and have their chemical equilibriums maintained with daily doses of chemicals. A healthy body of water, like a river or a lake, has an incredible interconnected network of aquatic

plants which use photosynthesis to create oxygen which aids in the decomposition of organic material. This decomposition, in turn, creates carbon dioxide which feeds plants and animals alike. What I want to suggest is that McLeod does not let the polluted status of water prevent him from seeing productive uses for it; in a sense, he refuses to be paralyzed by its contamination and degradation.

In a similar way, the Detroit River is described as heavily polluted, but it is also an emancipatory space for Stace. As she contemplates leaping off of the old theatre into the river below, Stace remembers an urban legend she has heard about a mentally unstable homeless man who has been pushing shopping carts beneath the theatre for many years, creating “a tangled pile of steel rods and rusting wheels, waiting in the water for some kid to come slicing down head-first” (100). While this story is never substantiated in the text, the rusting shopping carts lurk ominously on the River’s floor throughout the story. They are all Stace can think about before, during and after jumping into the waters. On a symbolic level, they represent the palpable danger of pollution in the river; as Windsor has polluted the Detroit River, it has also violated its own ecological health. Human garbage becomes both a physical trap for the youth who swim in its waters and a metaphorical poison in the city’s ecological life-blood.

And this human action that pollutes the river is not the only one that MacLeod highlights in the story. In a conversation with Mel, a friend, Stace says: “I always thought the river would taste like chemicals or like gasoline. Stingy and hot, like Javex or something you can light on fire. Know what I mean? From all the pollution and the pesticides and the factories? Does it taste like that? Does the water taste like oil?” (99).

She wonders whether the pollution of the river is detectable by the human senses, whether the human body can detect when things are amiss in certain environments. This question is motivated by the presence of Zug Island, on the Detroit side of the river, with its long history of industrial usage and pollution. Stace looks over at the island and notices “the smokestacks leak unnatural combinations of purple and grey and almost pink” (116). However, Mel’s response is the closest thing to a positive statement about water in the story: “It tastes like nothing, like water. I wouldn’t drink a gallon of it, but come on. Compared to the pool, compared to what we work in everyday, it seems pretty clean and natural to me. Totally fine. And it’s a river, not a lake. It’s just passing through, not sitting around waiting and collecting all that crap” (100). Her dubious reasoning that river movement ensures pollutants are washed away overlooks how contaminated sediments remain in the riverbed while the toxic chemicals and effluents leach into the bodies of the river’s fish and invertebrates. She also has faith in the ability of nature to regenerate itself through natural processes with the movement of water “passing through” acting like a filter. Where these pollutants end up is not a concern for Mel, but her assurance that the water is “pretty clean and natural” presumes an inability for humans to truly damage the watershed. This shaky reasoning fails to do justice to ecological science yet mirrors the kind of reasoning that often justifies environmental exploitation. The polluted water will end up somewhere causing troubles wherever it goes, while the belief in nature’s ability to simply repair itself has been troubled by the long history of trying to restore the Great Lakes watershed after years of human abuse. Stace does not entirely buy Mel’s reasoning as her fears about the danger of the Detroit River’s water remain in her mind.

MacLeod does not give Mel the last word as he includes Stace's recollection of Jacques Cousteau's visit to the Windsor-Detroit Region from her childhood. Cousteau, the famed ocean explorer, spent part of 1980 and 1981 exploring the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Great Lakes on one of his numerous filming expeditions. A flotilla of four hundred boats escorted Cousteau's deep-sea diving vessel, *Calypso*, through the Detroit River while over five thousand people attended the ceremony when Coleman Young, Detroit's mayor, gave the explorer a key to the city (Munson 187). In this section, MacLeod changes tone for two pages as he enters into Stace's recollection of Cousteau and his marine documentaries. For an instant, water is no longer poisoned or polluted, but is a source of wonder and awe. Stace recalls "colours she had never seen before, real-life creatures that couldn't be real" (136). However, when Cousteau is presented with a key to the city of Detroit, he does not talk about wonder. Instead, MacLeod writes: "he turned furious and angry. His face contorted with rage and he talked about acid rain and illegal dumping, cancerous tumours and contamination of the food chain. Blind fish with confused sex organs. Mutating species" (137).³⁰ Stace recalls how Cousteau proclaims: "Your river, it is sick ... When we try to film, it is only dying we see down there" (137). In the Detroit River of MacLeod's story, the waters are not pristine but highly toxic and they have produced a chain of effects that most of the human characters are unaware of. The river is not a source of life, but is dying, producing only death and deformity.

By introducing Cousteau and his scientific work to the narrative, MacLeod uses science to lend credibility to Stace's subjective impressions of the river's cancerous

³⁰ Despite searching several newspapers' archives, I have been unable to verify whether or not Cousteau's speech is historically accurate.

nature. Paralleling Stace's understanding that the river is full of shopping carts and garbage, Cousteau brings a scientific critique to bear on the people who have let the river become this way. Cousteau's speech has clearly had an impact on Stace, yet MacLeod is careful not to privilege scientific understandings over local experiences and knowledges. Mel's comment that the water is safe conflicts with Stace's own understanding of water as polluted and unsafe. In the story, Stace's and Cousteau's perspectives are brought together in a kind of marshalling of forces. This is one of the strengths of a literary text: it allows multiple voices to exist alongside each other. Scientific texts often present a unified voice and a singular position where this story instead gives access to multiple discourses of pollution while allowing readers to draw their own conclusions. And yet, this is not just a coming-of-age story about a young girl learning to swim; it is also a chronicle of the river's slow death because of human actions. A human character is entering into the prime of her life, but the river is in a state of terminal decline.

What is also clear in this story is how the river has changed from a place for all life into an area reserved for human creations like large ships. The story ends with Stace furiously swimming to escape the pull of a giant lake freighter bound for the Windsor Salt mines. The diction in the final paragraphs of the story paints an interesting picture as MacLeod turns the giant vessel into a creature at home in the water. He writes:

Very soon the prow, two hundred feet high, will emerge from the fog and it will part this water like the gargantuan head of an axe cleaving through. They are the native creatures of this place and the river is their natural habitat. Only the largest pass at night to avoid the complications of smaller boats. The propeller will be the size of a two-story house and the twin off-loading cranes will fold back like the wings of a resting insect. It will be a Leviathan, three football fields long, rusting red hide stuffed with 5,000 tons of salt. The river boils in its wake, a froth even the ocean cannot match ... It rises out of the dark, advances over the water and

swallows everything in its path. (138)

The lake freighters now call the river their “natural habitat” even though they are physically massive creations that are anything but natural in the normal sense of that word. Calling them native creatures alludes to the long history of travelling the region by boat whether by steam ship or ferry which replaced the sailboats and canoes of earlier periods. Humans are not necessarily foreign to the river as the term “native creature” suggests, but the size of this freighter points to the problem of scale. MacLeod’s use of football fields and two-story houses as reference points emphasizes the monstrosity of this ship while underlining the danger it poses to Stace. This monstrosity turns the river into a very inhospitable space for any creature that finds itself in the vicinity when the freighters pass through. Note how they travel the river at night to avoid small ships, so that it is not just river creatures or nocturnal swimmers that are put at risk by their presence, but even other boats. The apocalyptic notes of this description also forecast a bleak future for the river’s health as the story does not provide any kind of assurance that humans have begun to address the river’s sickness. In fact, it seems likely that this kind of exploitation will continue as the ship’s prow swallows up everything in its path.

And yet, by figuring this ship as a threat to Stace’s safety, MacLeod also figures the river as a space for a rite of passage. Even though the river is sick and ruled by large freighters, Stace and her friends are able to turn it into a place of daring and bravery, if somewhat foolishly. By such actions, the youth of the story temporarily reclaim this space as their own in a way that gives it a form of positive value. The ending of the story shows that Stace cannot stay in the river for very long; it is a space that can be entered but must

also be exited quickly. It remains an inhospitable space even though for a moment it is a comfortable place. This need to escape also suggests that the river remains in dire need of intervention to transform it back into a welcoming and homely body of water. While there is nothing overtly environmental about swimming in a polluted river, McLeod's use of it as a staging ground for human growth suggests a critical re-valuing of a neglected and damaged place. Similar to *Mongrel*, the story, then, acts as a journey beneath Windsor's surface into a sub-strata of youth, charged sexuality, and rites-of-passage. However, if in *Mongrel* the river can only be a kind of negative influence on the youth, here it can become an emancipatory space even if it has dangerous, even fatal, underpinnings. MacLeod demonstrates a kind of productive ambivalence; he does not shy away from the ecological destruction in Windsor nor does he let it have the last word either. It becomes a motivation for imagining alternative worlds wherein the natural world is included and fostered rather than abused and ignored.

In these two literary texts, readers encounter the polluted Detroit River and are confronted with the tangible results of a long-lasting exploitation of it. The river on a warm summer day or a cool winter afternoon can be a very beautiful place, as I have experienced. However, its environmental challenges are many. *Mongrel* raises questions about whether it is even possible to restore some modicum of ecological health to the river. The harshness of the novel provides readers attuned to ecological thinking with an opportunity to stop and take stock of the seriousness of Windsor's poor watershed health. "Adult Beginner I" moves beyond this taking stock by imaginatively crafting an alternative way to relate to the river. Although MacLeod is clear that the river is sick and

this is a problem, he also moves past this pollution to suggest that it is possible for the river to serve other purposes, in this case as a staging ground for a rite-of-passage. Read metaphorically, MacLeod's story suggests that we need to recognize the dangers of polluted environments yet we also need to get our feet wet in them, coming to appreciate them as part of our lives. It is important to keep in mind that reading these two stories together, one of being hurt by the violence of the river, and the other of finding courage in the water, illustrates a form of ambivalence as we encounter two "parallel values, qualities, or meanings" of the river ("ambivalence"). Letting these meanings exist alongside each other without seeking to unify or foreclose them allows for a greater range of experiences with urban nature to be heard.

Ambivalent Experiences in the City: *The Age of the Cities* and "Zone: <le Détroit>"

Stepping back from the river, I now look at two texts that address Windsor and its ambivalent industrial legacy through elegy. Vasey, a long-time reporter for the CBC in Windsor, wrote a short creative non-fiction book on a western neighbourhood of the city known as Brighton Beach. The book, based on interviews and extensive research, chronicles the rich past of this neighbourhood which was facing the threat of expanding industrial development at the time of publication in 1996. It has since disappeared entirely and is now being developed as the site of the second bridge to the United States from Canada as part of the Windsor-Essex Parkway I discussed above. Di Brandt, a poet known more for her connections to the Canadian prairie than Windsor, wrote a long poem called "Zone:<le Détroit>" which details her ambivalent experience of the city and its

conflicted relationship with the natural world. Though both texts are attuned to the nuances of urban nature and elegize its loss in the face of human action, I argue that both can be read as hopeful and productive ecological texts. I suggest that effective elegy leaves ambivalence open; it does not try to resolve feelings of grief or mourning away as it also celebrates what once was. I believe that these two texts work towards answering how humans can begin to live in a place as seemingly cursed and blighted as Windsor.

Where Richardson, Sijan, and MacLeod are ambivalent about the natural world, the object of Vasey and Brandt's ambivalence is the human degradation of Windsor's land. The natural world, whether Brighton Beach's forests or the rogue wildflowers in "Zone: <le Détroit>," are unambiguously good. This adds a romantic subtext to their work as the natural world becomes a kind of paradise lost by human disregard. Their ambivalence emerges from this loss, rather than from nature itself. While both authors are right to be suspicious of human disregard for the natural world, this position is problematic because it unintentionally reinforces a human/nature binary. At the same time, I believe both texts move towards a reconciliation of the human within Windsor's landscape in a way that disarms the romantic view of nature.

Vasey's *The Age of the Cities* moves readers to Windsor's outer fringes in his elegy for a lost community. The book compiles interviews, news stories, personal reflections, and photographs to investigate Brighton Beach.³¹ The area is now all but gone with all of the houses demolished or burned to the ground by arson and security now patrolling the area. Journalist Owen Wolter writes that in the 1960s the City of Windsor

³¹ Brandt's long poem and Vasey's book were both part of exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Windsor, in 1997 and 1999 respectively, suggesting a renewed interest in local material.

developed the area as an industrial park although the scattered houses remained.

However, in the 1990s, amid pressure to build a second bridge, the Ontario government and the City of Windsor began expropriating land for the site of this bridge after the Detroit River International Crossing identified the area as a prime location (“Urban Exploration”). Vasey’s book tracks the development of this small community from its rural roots to an industrial middle age and its present decline. In the process, Vasey and the residents of the area assert an important value to the disappearing place, mourning its death by industry and government planning.

One of the most striking things about Brighton Beach is the way it can hardly be called urban. Instead, it is defined by its green space, the beach, and the relaxed communal atmosphere, even though it falls within city limits. Vasey describes the Beach’s history: “Once upon a time, it was a summer place; farm fields to the south, then a row of river-bank cottages a little further north, then the rather grand Brighton Beach Hotel, replete with screened verandahs and polished dance floor. After a time, people started building homes inland from the river: modest and serviceable, wood-frame bungalows for the most part” (4).³² While not quite a contemporary suburb, it does resemble an escape from the city in that homes are not crowded but spaced out, there is an effort to embrace the natural landscape, and a sense of living close to most people’s rural roots in the early twentieth century. When asked what defines Brighton Beach, Ivy

³² During the mid-nineteenth century, the area was also home to the Sandwich Mineral Springs, a popular health spa that advertised the sulphur-infused water as a health aide. Morrison writes that “The sulphur content in the water was so high that it would immediately blacken a silver coin dipped in the springs ... Towards the end of the [18]60’s, crowds had become so numerous daily that bath houses and hotel accommodation were being increased for those who desired the benefit of these medicinal waters” (77). As the nineteenth century came to a close, the area’s popularity waned, in part, because of the realization that there were little health benefits to the water.

Jamieson, a former resident, says that “When we first moved here, it was very very nice. Very woodsy. There was a lot of bush and birds galore. Pheasants. We had pheasants right in the yard” (12). Another resident said: “In the spring, our yard is like a park. The flowers and the trees. Our kids planted some of those trees. You know how kids will. Bring something home and plant it. Anyone else would pull it out. But they planted it, so you cut the lawn around it” (14). Other residents note the numerous horses residents kept despite bylaws banning them in the 1960s. Through these interviews, Brighton Beach emerges as a close-knit community of people seeking refuge from the city but not entirely willing to leave it behind. Many of the residents worked in the city, but refused to give up the freedom of the Beach. One resident, Roger Hunt, says he can have as many (broken down) cars as he likes in his driveway, while Kathleen and Clovis Cote point to the presence of vineyards, chicken coops, pig pens, horse corrals, gardens, and even bootleggers as favourite things in the area (17). There is a palpable sense throughout the book that this community lacks some of the strictures on human life that cities can impose; its peri-urban location allows its inhabitants to develop a stronger relationship with the natural world than those in Windsor’s suburbs.

The middle portion of the book collects childhood memories of former residents that Vasey calls “remembered snapshots.” These memories confirm this sense of uniqueness (26-36). While there is a strong sense of nostalgia at work in many of the residents’ tones and comments, the ramshackle nature of development in the area and its distance from Windsor’s downtown lend credibility to their descriptions. Local architectural historian Andrew Foot discusses how just before World War I, there were

rumours of a large steel plant being built in Ojibway, the regional name for the area, and rampant land speculation followed. However, the eruption of the war killed this dream and only a small plant was ever built. He notes how “in the end, the only people who got rich off the Ojibway real estate booms were the real estate companies ... One of the real estate companies that cashed in on the boom was the Page-Healy-Chappus Company. They were the ones responsible for Brighton Beach, and their names still appear on the names of the streets in the area” (“Brighton Beach”). The aerial photographs he includes with his piece illustrate how the area did not densify but was developed in patches and is now what he calls “urban prairie.” In a way, this neighbourhood’s unique local circumstances allow for the construction of an intimate community with a stronger sense of attachment to Windsor’s landscape than someone who lives in the row houses of southern Windsor might experience. As many of the residents note, children could fish in the river, play in the bush, and explore the area without worries over car traffic, police presence, or other inhibitions.

Part of what makes *The Age of the Cities* an interesting ecological text is the way that Vasey implicitly elegizes Brighton Beach. Literary critic Jahan Ramazani writes that “the modern elegy is not a refuge for outworn nostalgias and consolations ... At its best, the modern elegy offers not a guide to ‘successful’ mourning but a spur to rethinking the vexed experience of grief in the modern world. We should turn to it expecting not so much solace as fractured speech, not so much answers as memorable puzzlings” (ix). Vasey offers readers an elegy for a community that is already dissolving by the time the book is published. His collection of interviews, news stories, photos, and poetic

arrangements of text mourn the loss of Brighton Beach and the things it stood for. On one hand, it is tempting to see the book as a general elegy for lost ways of life, for a culture of intimacy that has disappeared in the face of rising real estate prices, increased urbanization, and the gentrification of poor neighbourhoods. On the other hand, *The Age of the Cities* is an intensely local book about a unique community existing in a very specific landscape. Brighton Beach could not have existed elsewhere because of the unique historical and ecological circumstances that allowed it to grow. Its closeness to the Detroit River, the unplanned and haphazard development, and the myriad gardens and animals that characterized it also mean that the book functions as an ecological elegy, a mourning for a lost community's closeness to nature. Such a relationship is simply not possible in a tightly packed suburb let alone in a thirty-story condo building. In "The Dark Ecology of Elegy," Morton argues that "ecological elegy asks us to mourn for something that has not completely passed, that perhaps has not even passed yet ... Ecological elegy weeps for that which *will have passed* given a continuation of the current state of affairs" (254). Vasey's work suggests that if the current pattern of urban development continues, any possibility of a space like Brighton Beach surviving or emerging will be lost. In this sense, Vasey's book mourns the loss of the communities that exist on the urban and rural fringes, those spaces that are difficult to quantify in urban planning terms. Using a chiastic structure, the book tracks the decline of Brighton Beach's human community against the rise of the industrial community.

Vasey is unequivocal about what industry has done to Brighton Beach. Early on, he takes pieces from the *Windsor Star* that propose urban renewal for the area and

juxtaposes them against pictures of the results. One article describes Brighton Beach:

“Surrounded by mean-smelling sludge heaps, a moth-balled hydro plant, railroad tracks, a fouled watercourse and the soot-belching steel mills of Zug Island, Brighton Beach is a patch of earth crying out for urban renewal – either the man-made or the natural kind”

(8). While the article’s author gestures to a different form of development, the subsequent fragments point to the former choice of renewal through heavy industry. The irony inherent in proposing more industrial development for an area blighted by industrial development seems lost on the author but not on Vasey as he chronicles the city’s decades-long attempt to transform the region into an industrial park. Historically speaking, the city has ultimately won as the area is no longer inhabited, yet this victory only came after a long battle with concerned residents and citizens. On the pages following the above quotation, Vasey points his finger squarely at the cause of the downfall of Brighton Beach: industrial pollution from Zug Island on the American side. Brenda Liveoak, a prominent Detroit environmental activist, tells Vasey about the Island and its prevailing winds: “If I remember, I have some wind direction monitoring data, about 55% of the time the wind is going towards Canada” (11). Following this revelation, Vasey writes that an alternative way of “divining the future” is to read the plumes: “Contaminants which are, or may be, contained in the plumes feathering up, yellow and white, grey and black, orange and brown, from the stacks of Zug Island, River Rouge, and neighbouring industrial communities across the Detroit River from Brighton Beach: Hydrogen Sulphide / Carbon Monoxide / Carbon Dioxide / Naphthalene / Chromium / Benzene / Copper / Lead / Zinc / Iron” (11). The list of elements visually resembles a

plume of pollution and the photo below has a battery of stacks emitting their own plumes. Based on the visual logic of Vasey's page, industrial pollution is the cancer that kills Brighton Beach. Yet the previous page mentions various other forms of divining the future, including "Read the Wind / Read the Clouds /... Read the Flights of Birds ... Read Tree Leaves ... Read the Witching Stick ... Read your History" while he lists an "additional method of divining the future / Read your Newspaper" (10). What these various modes of reading meaning suggest is a diversity of ways of knowing. Although Vasey sees the plumes and their poisons as overruling these other modes of reading, he is compelled to list alternatives.

While the book moves between an idealized peri-urban community and the presence of heavy industry, it is ultimately industry that wins out. Vasey concludes the book by asking what residents will miss after they have left the area. Most residents talk about how they will miss the green spaces, the river, the freedom, and the community, but several also talk about what things they will not miss. These are without fail, the foul odours of pollution, drifting clouds of smog which covered everything, and the medical consequences of these as one resident notes how he developed allergies while living in the area (43). This book of local history chronicles the poisoning of a historically rich community by the worst excesses of the modern age. Vasey paints this demise in a pessimistic way, showing no ambivalence about what the consequences of industry have been. His book elegizes the victims of urban industrial development, and refuses to let the narratives of government and industry have the final say.

Yet from another perspective the community was doomed to fail with the

development of Windsor as a city. Cities depend on industrial sectors to support commercial and residential areas, and Windsor, in particular, has rested heavily on industrial development. Most citizens do not want factories or power plants in their immediate backyard, so they are pushed to the fringes of the city. Mainstream urban planning holds that a city's economic health depends upon its ability to change its landscape to attract and encourage development, meaning that green spaces or areas of low density development are often sacrificed for the benefit of the city as a whole. Brighton Beach's existence on the margins of the city allowed for it to develop as a unique community, but this same existence is also its downfall as the city grew. By expropriating the community, the city has limited the amount of damage to human bodies. Brighton Beach becomes a kind of dead zone necessary for development, a place to dump toxins and industrial pollutants, a less-valued place that can be exploited to support other spaces. Since the expropriations, the area has become an unofficial dump with people regularly, and illegally, unloading their garbage in the now empty lots.

The book ends with a series of photographs that show the collapse of a smokestack in the hydro plant. The final page has a single photograph with a crowd of people looking through the barbed wire fence at the dust cloud rising up while the words "the end" are written in white over the photo. This ending is ambiguous: it seems to close the door on Brighton Beach as a place, yet the destruction of the smokestack hints at the collapse of heavy industry. Or, read differently, the demolition suggests that the fabled industrial development "solution" for the area has ironically proven unsuccessful. The ending haunts readers by implicitly raising the question of whether the closing down of

Brighton Beach was worth the cost paid by everyone involved.

The story of the neighbourhood is not over. It still exists on the City of Windsor's 2012 tourism maps and Google's online map database and as an evacuated and emptied space. In some ways, the space is even more "natural" now as plants and foliage have grown in and numerous white-tailed deer live there.³³ The space is haunted by human absence as street signs point to decaying streets while the burnt out shells of homes commemorate what was lost. Returning to the end of Vasey's book, does the use of "the end" suggest that the entire book has been some kind of fictional enterprise, a fable told to warn others of the dangers of industrial development? Or does the content of the photos suggest that industry itself is facing its end and a new era is perhaps emerging? The final text comes from Kathleen Cote, a resident, who looks over the devastated landscape and says "This was supposed to be their inheritance" (44). Such words support a reading of the book as a modern fable, Windsor's own *Silent Spring*. It suggests that if we are to build and protect urban nature, we face an uphill battle against the demands of the economy and industry. The elegizing of Brighton Beach implicit in *The Age of the Cities* opens up a space to grieve and mourn the loss of this community without necessarily moving past it. The symbolic "the end" of the final pages attempts to turn the page on the place, but it fails to do so as the documenting of loss that precedes it refuses to allow closure. Brighton Beach becomes a victim of development, yet Vasey's literary book opens up a discursive space to mourn its loss.

The ambivalence lies not so much in the book itself but rather in the question of

³³ These observations come from a research trip to the area in the fall of 2012.

what to do in the wake of Brighton Beach's loss. How can we protect spaces of urban nature when we know that industry will continue to demand more land and resources for its own purposes? What strategies are there available to people who face forced expulsion from the communities and places they call home? Urban nature, read through the lens of Vasey's book, appears a transient thing. It can exist for a period on the margins, but it will come to face the pressure all expanding cities bring to their landscapes. This is the reality of engaging with urban nature: that no space will ever be purely "good" or "natural," but will always come with a kind of qualifier. Brighton Beach was never a "natural" space akin to a provincial park nor was it necessarily a good space as the persistent presence of pollution attests. In fact, many Windsorites felt it was a public eyesore. Yet the range of reactions to the area means environmentalists must ask the hard questions about what spaces are prioritized, what value can be put on local places, and what land must be conceded to development. Brighton Beach was a thriving community that had a coherent identity, yet it was sacrificed first for industry and now for a second international border crossing. This is a difficult position to be in, and there are no easy escapes from it. Urban nature, then, necessitates a kind of ambivalent mindset, that we hate the ecological damage that has been done yet we also love and care for the spaces that do exist. We need to mourn the spaces that we have lost in the cities we live in, but we cannot let this act of mourning prevent us from working towards different modes of inhabiting urban space.

Moving back into the heart of Windsor, in "Zone: <le Détroit>" Brandt explores a complex ambivalent reaction to Windsor's landscape. Each of its five stanzas has its own unique voice that details a specific aspect of the city. When we read these different

voices, a complex portrait of Windsor and the speaker's ambivalent relationship to it emerges. She celebrates the beauty and promise of the region, but mourns how many lives have been sacrificed in the blind pursuit of first a colonial vision of landscape and then a capitalist one, both of which depend on ecological exploitation. Moreover, her attention to the various costs that this pursuit demands calls on readers to respond with action. I argue that her poem does not simply elegize a lost past and decry the costs exacted by industrial modernity, but it also calls for action motivated by a deep sense of being out of place. Read this way, Brandt's poem demonstrates another way to work through ambivalence towards productive ecological action.

The long poem bears a key intertextual connection to the work of the visual artist Stan Douglas. The poem was commissioned for an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Windsor of Douglas's photographs of Detroit's empty downtown core (*Now You Care* 115). Douglas's collection, also entitled *Zone: Le Détroit*, catalogues the ruins of Detroit with a series of 31 photographs and a black and white film. In her review of the exhibition, Ingrid Chu describes the photographs: "abandoned homes, depressed neighbourhoods and condemned buildings dominate the images ... From buildings left in disrepair to the barrage of shattered windows providing sure signs of vacancy, Douglas highlights the conspicuous details that reveal the city as a literal shell of its former self" ("Stan Douglas"). These haunting photos of urban ruin are matched by his film, *Le Détroit*, which visually chronicles a young black woman's return to what may have been her childhood home and her search for some object of interest in the house. Throughout, Chu notes that "all of these scenarios culminate in a suggestion of a supernatural

presence.” While the film does not actually show a ghost haunting the house, it does suggest that the house has been changed by some form of past trauma. After a door slams, the protagonist leaves the house and the entire sequence is played in reverse before starting again. In the gap between the film and the photos, Douglas suggests how past events have left an indelible imprint on the present as the young woman seeks for some memento or object of the past but instead finds herself haunted by the past.³⁴ The photos and film commemorate Detroit’s past greatness by showing its evacuated and impoverished present in a haunting elegiac manner. Brandt’s poem follows Douglas’s approach by venturing into the heart of Windsor and cataloguing the lofty dreams and failed realities of the Canadian city. Just as Chu notes that Douglas is “an outsider translating events that have shaped a collective history,” so too Brandt is an outsider to Windsor’s urban landscape even as she chronicles the city’s important events.

The first stanza of the poem offers a poetic history of the city and how it has fallen short of its initial dreams. Against a vision of cities as the culmination of progress, Brandt’s poem traces a narrative of failure. She writes: “Breathing yellow air / here, at the heart of the dream / of the new world, / the bones of old horses and dead Indians / and lush virgin land, dripping with fruit / and the promise of wheat” (1-6). The opening clause of the poem acknowledges pollution in the yellow air, but it also conceptualizes the city as the heart of European colonization’s ideal world. This connection between polluted air

³⁴ Chu suggests that the photos and the film illustrate “two sides of the same story in *Le Détroit* to survey the history, physical damage and psychological implications that reside within these abandoned structures” (ibid). Recalling Ellen Halloway’s curse in *Wacousta*, I suggest that there is an intriguing parallel between these texts in that violence to the landscape produces a form of haunting. In Douglas’s work, it takes the shape of an unseen but felt presence while the empty houses of Detroit seem to bear out Halloway’s curse. In *Wacousta*, it is played out in the inordinate and often senseless violence and in Richardson’s evocation of a supernatural presence in the landscape.

and the guiding vision of colonization suggests an intimate correlation between an exploited and exhausted world and Europe's plans for North America. It also resonates with Alfred Crosby's assertion that European imperialism "has a biological, an ecological, component" (7). This ecological component initially sees the landscape "dripping with fruit / and the promise of wheat," setting up Windsor as a bread basket to enrich Europe's coffers (5-6). There is a connection between colonialism and mobility in the sense that the New World's resources allow Europeans to be indifferent to or reject responsibility for place. If a colonizer can import raw resources like lumber and grain, he does not need to ameliorate his locally exhausted landscapes to provide these things. At the same time, colonizers do not need to be ecologically responsible to the place they are changing because it is not their "home." However, this dream itself is soon replaced as Brandt continues: "overlaid with glass and steel / and the dream of speed: / all these our bodies / crushed to appease / the 400 & 1 gods / of the Superhighway, / NAFTA, we worship you" (7-13). The agricultural vision of the landscape is replaced, better yet paved over, by a dream of urban modernity driven by the automobile. It is to this god that many lives are sacrificed. Her punning on Highway 401's name inverts the expressway's convenience and ease of travel by transforming it into a temple to NAFTA. NAFTA itself continues the colonial indifference to place as it provides the economic mechanisms for outsourcing agriculture, industrial production and the exporting of raw natural resources. Produce from Mexico can be imported cheaply into Canada allowing the rich farmland around Windsor to be changed into industrial or suburban areas while encouraging exploitative forms of industrial mega-farming in Mexico. Brandt points out that the dream

of glass, steel and speed has produced ambiguous outcomes for Windsor. What was once a paradise for agriculturalists has become a crucial platform for large-scale capitalists. Of course, all of this is built on Indigenous land and with exploitation of the natural world. The river's lack of "its ancient rainbow coloured / fish swollen joy" attests to the ecological cost of modernity (26-27). Moreover, Brandt's wondering who "will cover our splintered / bones with earth and blood," (33-34) at the poem's end raises questions about the long-term future of this course of exploitative modernity. In the first stanza, then, Brandt recognizes the potential in developing and cultivating the landscape, but also the high ecological cost that comes with such development.

Brandt also introduces the sense that bodies, like Windsor's land, can be polluted. This motif appears in three of the stanzas, positing the human body as fundamentally connected to the material world around it. This notion resonates with Stacey Alaimo's idea of trans-corporeality. This concept depends upon seeing "human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlin[ing] the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (2). Trans-corporeality opens up a "mobile space that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (2). In this nexus of human bodies, non-human beings, physical environments, and other actors, the human body is not separate from the natural world. Brandt's poetic depictions of the human body as imbricated in the polluted landscape of Windsor begins the work of deconstructing the human/nature binary that popular discourses of the city hold. But this

imbrication in the poem also produces a complex subject position as the body itself bears the consequences of pollution, something that should be resisted yet must also be acknowledged. Alaimo writes that “the human body is never a rigidly enclosed, protected entity, but is vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments, which may include industrial environments and their social/economic forces” (28). We are always a part of our natural environment; we cannot escape it. How are we to respond to this imbrication, which can be freeing, but also means we bear the weight of certain choices? Brandt’s poem suggests that elegy plays an important role alongside critiquing the actions that have poisoned our bodies and actively resisting further pollution by being attentive to bodies and place.

If Brandt’s first stanza sets up Windsor as a polluted space that has failed to reach the heights promised by the dream of speed and glass, the second stanza shows the bodily cost of this dream. The frenetic speaker presents an unnamed listener with a battery of questions: “you know how people keep disappearing, / you know all those babies born with deformities, / you know how organ thieves follow tourists / on the highway and grab them at night / on the motel turnoffs” (13-17). The lack of question marks suggests that these lines are following each other so quickly that there is no time to even consider answering these questions. The conspiracy-theory nature of her ideas is itself questionable, but it does suggest that her mind has, like the babies born with deformities, been addled by some external force or event. Looking back to the first stanza, this speaker has been forced to bear the cost of the ecological destruction wrought in the pursuit of glass and steel. She is a product of paranoia, fear, and anxiety, seeing threat in any

ambiguous sign because she knows, on some level, that her body has already been compromised. Adding to this fear is an eerie apocalyptic tone conveyed by the speaker's suggestion that "maybe there's nuclear war, / maybe when we get there we'll be the only ones," while noticing a "strange light in the sky over Detroit" and "the pink glow of its headlights in the mirror?" (4-5, 11, 24). In these fragments of speech, there resides a Cold War era fear of nuclear apocalypse. While this section seems easy to brush off as the product of an unsound mind, it does illustrate automobility's bodily and psychological consequences through an imagined apocalypse.³⁵

The third stanza builds on the sense of bodies being linked to the wider world with the complex symbol of cut-off women's breasts. While wandering in some of Windsor's green spaces "sniffing around / the railroad tracks/ in my usual quest for a bit of wildness," the speaker comes across a group of women's breasts "cut off to keep our lawns green / and dandelion free, / here they are, dancing / their breastly ghost dance / stirring up a slight wind in fact / and behaving for all the world / like dandelions in seed" (1-3, 15-21).³⁶ This is a complex scene as the breasts themselves are the brutalized remnants of a gendered chemical violence. In one sense, the breasts are ghosts dancing, alluding indirectly to Douglas's film, and mourning this violence; in a different sense, the breasts are performing a ghost dance that may allude to the Indigenous Ghost Dance movement that swept across North America during the late nineteenth century. This

³⁵ James J. Flink defines automobility as "the combined import of the motor vehicle, the automobile industry and the highway, plus the emotional connotations of this import for Americans" (451). For more on automobility see also Tim Edensor's "Automobility and National Identity," Mimi Sheller and John Urry's "The City and the Car," and John Urry's "The 'System' of Automobility."

³⁶ It is possible to read these breasts as solely a symbol or a metaphor, but I feel that such a move lessens the very real bodily consequences of chemicals on the female body that Brandt wants to bring to light.

religious-messianic movement centred on dances and prayer in the hopes that these actions would lead Indigenous peoples to a form of happy afterlife free of colonization and imperial oppression (Andersson 27). The breasts, then, are dancing to restore the broken bodies they have been cut off from. The comparison of the breasts to dandelion seeds also calls to mind the promiscuous reproductive habits of the flower. The speaker even calls them “treasure here / among these forgotten weeds” (11-12). The speaker’s reaction is to cry out: “so what am I supposed to do, / pretend I haven’t seen them / or like I don’t care / about all these missing breasts, / how they just vanish / from our aching chests” (24-29). These lines also become an elegy for the female body, a lament for how women have been made to bear the chemical costs of modernity. At the same time, there is a complex dynamic at work because readers are left unclear whether to read this scene as one of celebration for the female body which has remained vital in the face of violence, one of anger in the light of the violence, or one of resistance in the suggestion of a Ghost Dance being performed. The speaker herself seems unclear about what to do, and this complex ambiguity works to unsettle our notions of bodies and environment.

The speaker’s ambivalent reaction to urban nature comes out most clearly in the fourth stanza where the speaker wants to embrace the beauty of fall in the city in spite of the high costs of urban life. The opening lines illustrate this embrace: “This gold and red autumn heat, / this glorious tree splendour,/ splayed out for sheer pleasure,/ over asphalt and concrete, / ribbons of dark desire/ driving us madly toward death,” while near the end the speaker proclaims “the trees can still knock / you out with their loveliness / so you just wanna drop / everything and weep, or laugh” (1-6, 23-26). Urban trees can be quite

spectacular, particularly in the fall as the leaves change colours, and this stanza wants to celebrate that beauty. Yet it does so while acknowledging the polluted nature of the land. This stanza has the starkest declaration of Windsor's environmental state when it reads: "and even here, in this / most polluted spit of land / in Canada, with its heart / attack and cancer rates" (19-22). The speaker is fully aware of what living in this landscape might mean for long-term life prospects. She is all too aware of the trans-corporeal nature of human life. In this movement between natural beauty and unnatural causes of death, Brandt generates a fair degree of ambivalence: love for the world and recognition of its degraded state. These lines suggest that Windsor can be a beautiful even welcoming place that might be called home, but it is also deeply polluted suggesting an ecological unhomeliness. As if this were not enough, the stanza also introduces another ambiguous symbol in the "the queens on Church Street / grand in their carstopping / high heels and blond wigs / and blue makeup" (9-12).³⁷ These drag queens call into question received notions of identity and sexuality by their ambiguous appearance. Their refusal to abide by gender codes resonates with the way that the speaker refuses to abide by the human/nature binary in enjoying the trees and autumn heat in Windsor's degraded urban nature. Moreover, the speaker attributes a crucial phrase to these figures when they ask "who cares if it's / much too hot for November, / isn't it gorgeous, darling," (16-18).³⁸

The question raises the spectre of global climate change, but embraces it for the sake of

³⁷ The reference is also ambiguous in that although Windsor has an active LGBT community, Church Street seems to be a reference to Toronto's gay village, centred at the intersection of Church and Wellesley. However, the rest of the references in this stanza locate the speaker in Windsor.

³⁸ The question of who speaks what is difficult to interpret because Brandt does not use quotation marks in this poem. It is possible to read from line 15 onwards as the speaker's thoughts, but I believe that the appearance of darling indicates that the question is the drag queen's and not the speaker's. Regardless of who is speaking, the ambivalence of the stanza concerning nature and life in the city remains prominent.

simply living life as it comes. The speaker in “Zone: <le Détroit>” wants to do just this, but is hamstrung by her recognition of the far-reaching nature of environmental collapse and her own incorporation into these events. If we can categorize the four stanzas on a scale of overall emotional reaction to the urban nature of Windsor, we see a transition from an initially negative or pessimistic reaction towards a more positive one in the fourth stanza. This is not to say that the fourth stanza advocates a whole-hearted embrace of urban nature without any reflection on its compromised situation, but it is to say that Brandt does not want to simply decry the brokenness of urban nature.

The final stanza calls into question many of the city’s fundamental attributes. It seems to move away from an engagement with the urban natural world by critiquing automobility and the desires that propelled the construction of the Windsor-Detroit Tunnel. Yet cars and the lifestyle they entail have played an integral part in changing the city’s urban landscape. In this stanza, the speaker expresses some admiration for “the brave deeds of men! ... how they dazzle me with / their daring exploits / every time I cross the Detroit River, / from down under, I mean” (1, 4-7). However, this declaration is soaked in biting irony as her tone undercuts the seriousness of these “exploits.” Moreover, she asks “who else could have given / themselves so grandly, / obediently, to this water god, / this fierce charlatan, / this glutton for sailors and young boys, / risking limbs and lives, wordlessly” so women can shop more conveniently (8-13). The logic of digging a tunnel under the river is undercut by the motivation that the speaker provides. The question inherent in this section – was it worth it? – acts as a critique of the male desire to conquer nature. In many ways, this final stanza is the most difficult to come to

grips with because it seems most critical of Windsor as a city, suggesting that its civic accomplishments are nothing but a foolish bunch of “daring exploits” that are misguided at best. Drawing on her prairie roots, Brandt brings a skeptical eye to the city and asks readers to consider the costs paid for such technical wonders.

What can we do with the ambivalence towards Windsor in Brandt’s poem? Is “Zone: <le Détroit>” a failed attempt to find nature in Windsor? Or does the search produce ambiguous results? The presence of wildflowers and glorious tree splendour alongside asphalt and cancer rates suggests the latter. If we are looking for nature as an escape from urban culture, a refuge from the pace of modern life, or a place of quiet and calm, then we are bound to be disappointed with the hybrid natures we find in the city. Instead, the polyphony of Brandt’s poem shows a range of what we might find in the city. We will find, as the speakers do, both meaningful experiences and disheartening ones; natural beauty counterbalanced with dangerous or fatal levels of pollution; dreams of a more innocent state matched with failed realities. This range of responses to Windsor’s urban nature makes it a valuable document of urban nature.

The speaker’s active search for wildness in the third stanza presents readers with a productive strategy for revaluing the city’s green spaces. In “The poet and the wild city,” Brandt discusses how she used to walk with her dog in these spaces. She says that she experienced the city physically like her children did:

as grey blurs interspersed with living patches of sweet-smelling, endlessly fascinating damp or wet or dry patches of earth, and grass and riverbanks and squirrels and cats and birds and earthworms and acorns and twigs and pebbles and snowflakes and puddles and mud and clouds and rain and sun. (73)

This long list of earthy objects reassures humans that the city is not as unnatural as it

seems. It is built in and of the ground. Brandt's poem changes how we perceive Windsor, but embedded within its poetic critique is also a call for changing the exploitative conditions of the city. Brandt refuses to give up on Windsor, does not see it as a wholly unnatural human space, but instead sees it as located in the natural world.

Her celebration of wild nature in the third stanza affirms this desire. The speaker's quest to find a "bit of wildness" in Windsor alludes to a deep desire to find nature in the city (3). Not content with gardens or lawns, she is searching for "weeds, something untinkered with, / goldenrod, purple aster, burdocks" (4). The three plants she names are fairly common flowers that grow in disturbed habitats, especially ditches and roadsides. Most people can recognize them but do not know their names. The fact that she uses these flowers as symbols of wildness in the heart of the city is important. She is not fighting for rare or exotic forms of plant or animal life in remote places, but is arguing for common species that exist in the overlooked spaces of North America. These flowers get the speaker's "prairie blood surging / in recognition and fellow feeling," alluding to Brandt's own feeling of being out-of-place in Windsor (7-8). While this biographical reading might stretch the poem's integrity, I do think it adds something of value. It suggests that Brandt may not have felt completely at home in Windsor, perhaps even felt isolated and alienated. Her outsider status to Windsor enables her to see things that other writers and artists who have spent much more time in the city might not notice. Brandt's choice to seek nature in the city is important because it represents a refusal to seek nature away from the places we inhabit. It represents an intentional choice to find pieces of the natural world embedded in our everyday lives and places.

What also emerges from Brandt's poem is the realization that we do not have to call a place home in order to care for it. As discussed above, Brandt is clearly not at home in Windsor. In fact, Brandt shares this feeling with the characters of *Mongrel* and "Adult Beginner I". A failure to feel in-place can be seen as a kind of ambivalence, a persistent sense that Windsor is not truly one's home even though, at least in a temporary sense, it is. In her essay "The poet and the wild city," Brandt states that "despite my practised urbanity, I'm still country in my imagination and my bones" (73-74). Despite her attempts to feel at home in Windsor, she has been unable to graft herself into its soil. It is clear that Brandt wants to care for Windsor, yet this desire is frustrated by the decimated urban ecosystem and the human forces that have made it that way. In terms of discovering and enfolding urban nature, ambivalence can inspire a productive restlessness that leads us into a deeper engagement with a place. Brandt's poem is an engagement with Windsor in this sense. Being out-of-place, like ambivalence towards urban nature, can motivate one towards an earnest engagement with the city even if it can also produce a refusal to engage, a foreclosure of the possibility of inhabiting a place. Given the amount of damage and destruction that has accompanied European imperialism in North America, ambivalence may be the only legitimate response from humans towards their place in nature. This is not to say that humans have no place in the natural world, but it is to suggest that when we consider the city's place in the natural world we should proceed with caution and care. Even though Brandt's poem reveals Windsor's conflicted and painful history, it can also be read as a loving attempt to do justice to the place that she

lived in through elegizing what has been lost and dreaming about future possibilities.³⁹

Environmental ambivalence is not a handful of magic beans to solve all of environmentalism's problems. It is, as my discussion of five different texts shows, an ambiguous literary feature that can provoke a range of affects including desire, hope and joy, but also apathy and despair. Although I read both Vasey and Brandt's work as hopeful, they also carry a strain of exhaustion in the face of the seemingly unending list of casualties Windsor's development has produced. However, their refusal to simply give up or to indulge in a wholly apocalyptic tone exemplifies how environmental ambivalence does not simply lead to a dead end of cynicism. Vasey and Brandt allow their various affective responses to Windsor to exist in a polyphonic fashion. This slow contemplation of urban place and the move towards action is essential if we are to avoid ending up caught in the cycle of violence that the characters of *Mongrel* find themselves in. At the same time, as my discussion of Richardson's work illustrates, we face the difficult task of disentangling cultural discourses of nature and humanity before we can truly engage with the cities we live in as natural places. Works like "Adult Beginner I" and "Zone: <le Détroit>" provide thinking sites for readers, challenging us to think about Windsor as a damaged place while also calling on us to see it as more than simply broken. They invigorate readers to see Windsor not as somehow apart from the Detroit River or the forests around it, but as an integral part of that world.

³⁹ See also Bronwen Wallace's poem "Reclaiming the City" in which the poem's speaker reflects on Windsor's working class, the auto industry, and recovering from a broken marriage.

Finding and Understanding Resilience: Hamilton

“The city was then all forest through which roamed bears and wolves. The shores of the bay were difficult to see because they were hidden by a thick, almost impenetrable mass of trees and undergrowth. There were no roads. There was only one cow-path to Niagara and one to Caledonia. People could travel readily on water in canoes or bateaux, but on land they travelled on foot or on horseback because roads were still a luxury of the future, and streets had not yet been dreamed of”

- John Ryckman, qtd. in T. Roy Woodhouse “The Beginnings of the History of Hamilton” 24

Visitors to Hamilton today would be hard-pressed to imagine the city as Ryckman saw it in 1803. This is particularly the case if they arrive at the city’s eastern end, crossing the James N. Allan Skyway Bridge with the steel mills and industrial Hamilton in full view. The roads that were a luxury of the future for Ryckman now crisscross the entire waterfront, even climbing up the Niagara Escarpment, replacing the “thick, almost impenetrable mass of trees and undergrowth” and fulfilling the dream of a city that Hamilton’s European settlers once had. As with most urban places, it is easy to forget that the city’s landscape was once the wilderness that Ryckman describes. However, approaching the city from its northwestern side along Highway 403 or York Boulevard gives a much different view of the landscape, with Cootes Paradise on the west, Hamilton Harbour to the east, and enough trees that it seems the city has grown up amidst a forest, particularly when viewed in the first few days of summer. Hamilton’s nature has not simply disappeared or been destroyed, but has remained resilient in surprising ways. Learning to see how the city has been embedded in its landscape will help us to realize that the city is still very much intertwined with the natural world, that humans and nature co-exist and can do so in a more environmentally just manner.

After a short discussion of resilience thinking and its ramifications for ecocriticism, I read *Saga of a City*, a 1947 book of local history framed in narrative format and published by the Hamilton Board of Education, in order to show how care for place, an element of ecological resilience, can be fostered. I then take up two different 2012 novels, Fisher's *The Fishers of Paradise* and Reynolds's *Beach Strip*, to explore how their respective waterfront communities illustrate the strengths and failings of cultural resilience while also asking how the genres of historical fiction and police procedurals might be productive avenues of embedding people in local places. I end with John Terpstra's 2002 creative non-fiction *Falling into Place*, a book that poetically excavates the Iroquois Sandbar's history and character, asking how developing a relationship with a local place lines up with resilience thinking and what it might offer for an urban ecocritical practice.

Hamilton, a city at the western end of Lake Ontario, is a city defined by water because it is the drainage basin for its surrounding watersheds.⁴⁰ This abundance of water made the area thick with forest, animals and saw grass that "cut travellers' clothes to ribbons unless buckskin was worn" as Woodhouse explains (23). In its early stages, Hamilton's development was defined by the marshes, inlets, sandbars, and forests which surrounded it, yet this changed as the continued immigration of labour and capital transformed the landscape. This is not to say that humans have been able to simply dominate Hamilton's landscape – downtown Hamilton has had a long history of troubles

⁴⁰ Most of the creeks have now been routed underground through a vast network of culverts, tunnels, and drainage ditches, so that water is somewhat less visible in the city's downtown core. However, most of these creeks still spill over the Escarpment in spectacular fashion, leading to a recent campaign to brand Hamilton a city of waterfalls.

with flooding, inclement weather, so-called “pest species” like white-tailed deer, racoons, grey squirrels and skunks – but instead to point out that the coming of European settlers to the area heralded a defining moment for the area’s landscape as new technologies and cultural practices transformed the landscape to fit European ideas of what a city should look like. Yet it is not simply a matter of landscape either, as the relationship between humans and the natural world also changed as the city grew. In Ryckman’s recollections, Hamilton is a wilderness; it is a place that does not yet exist, a city that “was not yet dreamed of.” I open with Ryckman’s words because they draw attention to the natural world that undergirds Hamilton as a city even as it has been obscured by urban development and seemingly forgotten by its human inhabitants. Reading Woodhouse’s historical essay is like encountering an uncanny other: we see Hamilton as a strange landscape that seems somehow familiar. We recognize the contours and elements but are blinded by the lack of a recognizable built environment.

Ryckman’s wilderness did not last long after the first European settlers arrived in the wake of the American Revolution and began to build Hamilton as it exists now. In her 1966 history of Hamilton, *A Mountain and A City*, Margaret Freeman Campbell writes:

The willows and reeds of the Depew ancestral acres have vanished with the deer at the waterhole and with the wild berries that gave its name to Huckleberry Point, a onetime favourite picnic and duck hunting ground for Hamiltonians. In their place stretch hundreds of acres of reclaimed land, filled inlets, slag heaps and rusting stock piles, and the stark grey walls of the mighty mills and factories that have made Hamilton. The clouds of passenger pigeons that darkened the sky for days in migration have been replaced by the mills’ grey banners by day, their pillar of flame by night. The wolves have gone and the rattlesnakes, but so have the salmon and the whitefish, the water fowl and the fresh transparent air and waters of the bay.

Gone are the Depew orchards with their pink and white spring fragrance, their

autumn tang of fallen fruit rotting on the brown earth; the green and gold chequer of fields; the grateful coolness and the bird songs of the wood lot; the dry heat and the whirring grasshoppers of the sun-drenched cow pasture. All this has disappeared beneath city streets and city homes, leaving no trace except here and there a gnarled apple or pear tree clinging indomitably to life.

Yet the waterfront today has its own terrifying beauty of turret and towering blast furnace, of straddling crane, of flame and the roar and hiss of molten slag quenched in the long-suffering bay; the beauty of unloading bridges, like wingless planes, servicing berthed ships; the regimented beauty even of a parking lot, typifying the dignity of steady labour and the basic security of the regular wage cheque. (8)

This lengthy passage not only describes in broad strokes much of Hamilton's history but it also documents the changing relationships humans have had with the natural world in the city. The Depews, one of Hamilton's first European settler families, were part of the first changes to Hamilton's wilderness, cultivating fields and fruit out of the dense woods. In doing so, they carried out the vision of European settlers cultivating the wilderness that Richardson narrated in the Windsor area. In their early years, the Depews depended, as did the Neutral peoples who once lived in the area, on the rich bounty of wildlife including the passenger pigeons and fish. Yet they brought with them agricultural practices which allowed them to transition from a dependence on wildlife to produce, a change that allowed the Depews and other settlers to be more protected from the vagaries and harshness of the area's climate and landscape. Such practices still required a strong relationship with the natural world. However, the fields and orchards were soon exiled to the margins of the city or pushed farther inland along the Niagara Escarpment by the "terrifying beauty of turret and towering blast furnace" as Campbell describes industrial development. In this new form of urban life, the relationship to Hamilton's landscape changes greatly and the process begun by the Depews exponentially increases in scale

and scope, resulting in the “city streets and city homes” that Campbell represents as suffocating local nature. She attempts to find beauty in Hamilton’s built architecture but the final quoted paragraph is overburdened by nostalgia for a lost Edenic garden. This is a common theme in urban history, yet, as I have argued with Windsor, nature is not dead, nor has it gone away. It still exists in Hamilton and continues to define the way the city functions and develops. The seemingly monolithic industrial beast that Campbell writes about is itself crumbling as Hamilton, still known as Steel City, transitions away from reliance on heavy industry in the wake of recent recessions, cutbacks, and outsourcing towards white-collar work in Hamilton’s hospitals, McMaster University and Mohawk College (Davy A01).⁴¹ This change is producing a cultural shift in the city which presents Hamilton’s citizens with a unique opportunity to move away from an environmentally destructive relationship with the local landscape towards a more conciliatory one.

While the contours of Hamilton’s ecosystem have changed dramatically, it still remains a functioning ecological place. In fact, the area is part of the Niagara Escarpment UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, one of 16 such designated landscapes in Canada, and is, according to Robert Z. Dobos “one of the best overall birding regions in Ontario,” illustrating widespread recognition of Hamilton’s unique landscape (37). Pollution, resource extraction, urban development, and major changes to the landscape have had an impact on Hamilton as a place, yet it has remained resilient in a way that Windsor

⁴¹ See also “In the Shadow of Steel,” a CBC radio documentary for more on how Hamilton is adapting to the long-term decline of the steel industry. In October 2013, U.S. Steel decided to shut down its Hamilton blast furnace, ending over 100 years of steelmaking in that facility (See “US Steel Closes Hamilton Blast Furnace”). US Steel’s 328 acre plant site has become a site of debate over how best to use this land. See Teviah Moro’s “Port Authority Keen on U.S. Steel Land,” Joan Walters’ “Chicago a Model for Brownfield Lands” and Jason Leach’s “Transforming Industrial Parks into Civic Treasures.”

arguably has not. Learning how to discern these moments or places of resilience in urban nature will help focus attention on the city as an ecosystem and, more crucially, as a place where the human and natural worlds are intertwined.⁴²

Resilience as a concept offers a productive way of understanding ecological processes even if the term has been deployed in a number of different ways. I take it up because it does not sink into the pessimistic rhetoric of total collapse and still makes clear the importance of environmental restoration work; it provides an admirable balance of pragmatic attention to reality and hopeful visioning for the future not unlike the way I argued environmental ambivalence can work in the last chapter. At the same time, I am hesitant to use resilience as it has emerged as a buzzword not only in ecological circles but also in financial, security, and national discourses. Resilience, in the words of Susie O'Brien, has become "an unquestionable value, perhaps *the* unquestionable value, to which businesses, governments, social organizations, institutions and individuals aspire. More than simply a measure of viability in the face of change, it has come to function as a sign of the fitness, even the moral worthiness, of things in and of themselves" ("The Downside of Up"). Her critical comment points to the way that resilience has been used to prop up established oppressive hierarchies rather than fostering diversity which would contribute to truly resilient systems. Nevertheless, it has become a widespread term whose meaning has been stretched across multiple disciplines because it focuses on the ability of an ecosystem to absorb or adapt to unpredictable disturbances.⁴³ I take up

⁴² See Ian Dunlop's *Hamilton* for an urban green tourist guidebook that aims to increase the city's resilience by offering an alternative map of Hamilton, highlighting its cultural and ecological uniqueness as a place.

⁴³ See, for instance, Louise K. Comfort et al.'s *Designing Resilience*, Simin Davoudi's "Resilience," Andreas Duit et al.'s "Governance, Complexity, and Resilience," William J. McDonough's "Promoting

resilience in order to show how the natural world presents a complex set of agencies, amongst which is human agency, that have been active in Hamilton's history in spite of the changes that have occurred here. Understanding ecological resilience also entails knowing place-specific details, opening a space for cultural works to record the workings of local ecosystems in a textual archive and disseminate this information in an accessible format to a broad audience.

Understanding Resilience Thinking

Emerging in the 1970s as an alternative way of framing understandings of ecosystems and their dynamics, resilience thinking is interested in understanding how complex social-ecological systems change and adapt in their dynamic contexts. Brian Walker and David Salt define resilience in its simplest form as “the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and still retain its basic function and structure” (*Resilience Thinking* 1). What is clear here is that Walker and Salt refer to an ecosystem's ability to support life broadly rather than specific species or habitats.⁴⁴ This mode of thinking rejects the key tenet of classical ecology which argues that all ecosystems work towards some form of stable equilibrium or optimum efficiency. Instead, resilience thinking argues that ecosystems are dynamic systems that are anything but static, constantly changing and adapting to various pressures and forces. Forest ecologist C.S. Holling's work on predator

Financial Resilience,” Erica Seville's “Resilience: Great Concept,” and Matthew D. Turner's “Political Ecology I.”

⁴⁴ Walker and Salt do not explicitly state this ability, but it lies at the core of resilience thinking. This is one area where financial and national uses of resilience distort resilience thinking's basic operations. Moreover, resilience thinking also carries an inherent anthropocentrism as the unstated goal throughout *Resilience Thinking* seems to be the long-term support of human life. An early question makes this clear: “How can we make the systems *that we depend upon* resilient?” (emphasis added 2).

and prey relationships in Canada during the early 1970s convinced him that the conventional command and control models of ecological understanding and natural resource management were flawed. Carle Folke describes how Holling's seminal 1973 paper "illustrated the existence of multiple stability domains or multiple basins of attraction in natural systems and how they relate to ecological processes, random events (e.g. disturbance) and heterogeneity of temporal and spatial scales" (254). Ecosystems do not have a single ideal state towards which they work, but instead have multiple states towards which they might develop given any number of circumstances, events, and/or pressures. At its core, Holling's work posits a natural world that is far more complex than traditional ecological models allow.

The differences between resilience thinking and conventional ecological management become apparent in the management regimes they prescribe. In conventional resource management, an ecosystem would be optimized for the efficiency of a certain component, like profitable populations of commercial fish. Establishing maximum sustainable yields, crafting policy and legislation to reflect this optimization and creating a regulatory network to enforce these limits would be used to increase this efficiency. However, as was the case with the Atlantic Cod fishery, such understandings did not account for the possibility of change in the sense that maximum sustainable yield models of fishing caused far more damage to the ecosystem than once thought and fish populations stopped abiding by the population curves used in policy making.⁴⁵ Resilience thinking argues that ecosystems must be viewed as complex adaptive systems that operate

⁴⁵ Although not specifically aligned with resilience thinking, Dean Bavington's *Managed Annihilation* provides a critique of the mismanagement processes which led to the Atlantic Cod fishery's collapse.

on multiple levels at multiple scales. Each ecosystem travels through a series of stages, labelled an adaptive renewal cycle, which is itself nested into what Holling calls a panarchy whereby smaller scales are nested in larger ones and changes on any one level can flow up or down the hierarchy. Small changes can have large impacts such that an increase of phosphorus and nitrogen run-off from fields and industry will cause algal blooms at a higher level which, in turn, can cause fish and invertebrate populations to collapse, further increasing levels of algal bloom by the sudden increase in available nutrients in the water (Walker and Salt 68). This approach to ecosystems as complex and ultimately unknowable in any comprehensive manner allows scientists to acknowledge change and move towards working with it rather than ignoring it at considerable peril. Given the spotty track record of North American ecological management and the raft of environmental problems it faces, resilience thinking appears a more pragmatic and less programmatic method of engaging with the environment.⁴⁶

Part of the problem with previous models of ecological knowledge is that they excluded humans from their operational vocabulary. Resilience thinking views any ecosystem as a social-ecological system (SES). Walker and Salt write that “systems are strongly connected (though everything is not connected to everything else) and we are part of that system” (37). Ignoring human roles in ecosystem behaviour has meant that many past management solutions actually contributed to worsening conditions rather than ameliorating them. Returning to the cod fishery, its total collapse came as a complete

⁴⁶ Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* provides numerous examples of state environmental agencies actively contributing to the problem of wide-spread pesticide use in the mid-twentieth century despite other bodies warning that this use of chemicals was producing a host of adverse consequences (87-99, 156-72).

surprise to Canada's Fisheries Department because they had not accounted for the unpredictable ways complex adaptive systems work. In *Resilience Practice*, Walker and Salt write that "fisheries, for example, are often based on models of how many fish can be harvested over time, but the models focus only on our understanding of the biophysical domain – the dynamics of the fish population under various levels of harvesting – and quotas are set accordingly" (10). A more accurate understanding of fisheries must include human activities like the pollution of watersheds, changes in fishing technologies and the destruction of fish habitat because these human elements play a large role in ecosystems.

Social-ecological systems invite ecocritical approaches to urban nature that understand the city not simply as a human space, but one where natural processes and human ones are intertwined. We cannot account for how Hamilton works as an ecosystem without understanding how human actions have manipulated the landscape and how the landscape and its ecological systems have informed that manipulation. For example, in the process of building Hamilton, humans have filled in the many inlets and creeks along the southern shore of Hamilton Harbour to create more usable land.⁴⁷ This action has also meant that various areas of downtown face flooding whenever spring melting or heavy rains come through the area, and it also destroyed crucial fish habitat, reducing a once-bountiful fishery to a near non-existent state (Macintyre A9, McGuinness A1). Gilberto C. Gallopín writes that "the need to investigate the whole SES arises from the increasingly recognized evidence that understanding and anticipating the behavior of the social and ecological components of the SES in many cases requires simultaneously

⁴⁷ Hamilton Harbour used to be called Burlington Bay, but had its name changed in 1919. I will refer to it by its current name throughout.

taking into account both components; in other words, SESs are non-decomposable systems” (294). Resilience thinking refuses to separate the human from the natural, instead arguing that they form complex systems at different levels which intertwine in many different ways. Such thinking makes space for us to consider how cultural works play a role in an SES. If, as Raymond Williams argues, culture is “the signifying system through which ... a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored,” then culture is an important part of the social actions which mesh with the natural world in an SES model (*Culture* 13). In the construction of Hamilton itself, cultural ideas about what kinds of building, preferences for landscape, and acceptable types of recreation or leisure inform how the specific shape of the city emerges as we encounter it.

One of the potential pitfalls of resilience thinking is that, in its scientific formulations, it attempts to present itself as a kind of value-free or neutral discourse. This is partially a result of science’s quest for objectivity and its attempts to excise subjectivity or partiality from its workings.⁴⁸ It might also be a pragmatic attempt by resilience thinkers to work towards needed change in the contemporary world without getting caught up in the tangles of politics. Indeed, part of resilience thinking’s power is its acceptance of the present urgency of change given current world conditions. Walker and Salt open *Resilience Thinking* with a discussion of the current environmental crisis, arguing that resilience thinking is “about options and hope based on a different way of doing things through understanding how the world really works. But we do need to keep in mind what is happening to the world. The imperative message is that the world is

⁴⁸ See Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar’s *Laboratory Life* and Latour’s *The Pasteurization of France* for critiques of the objectivity of scientific fact.

shrinking, the human population is growing while its resource base declines” (4). This is an admirable goal, yet the pretence of objectivity runs the danger of overlooking how cultural politics interfere with or interrupt attempts to change current patterns of living. For example, in their discussion of the declining Caribbean reefs and the subsequent loss of tourism, Walker and Salt do not ask questions about whether tourism should be the primary economic driver in Caribbean nations’ economies, or how the long history of imperialism and colonialism has created the dire circumstances many of these island nations find themselves caught in.

Moreover, there is an unquestioned sense, in Walker and Salt’s book at least, that resilience thinking represents the “proper” or “right” method of doing ecology without questioning how the Western academic institution accords value to itself while discounting other modes of knowledge or action. For example, there is little attempt to listen to Indigenous voices in Walker and Salt’s book even though Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) has become a buzzword in environmental management discourses. Indigenous knowledge both reinforces resilience thinking’s emphasis on accounting for a wide range of actors including human and animal, but it also challenges this framework through its refusal of abstracted, bureaucratic, and technological solutions. Anishanaabe scholar Deborah McGregor writes that TEK is “a holistic form of understanding, encompassing all areas of human existence ... Native people tend to describe TEK as more of a ‘way of life’ than something which can be concisely described or written down” (144-45). This Indigenous understanding of being mindful of one’s place in creation and taking all of life into account does not fit within resilience thinking’s focus

on “a different way of doing things through understanding how the world really works” (Walker and Salt 4).⁴⁹ In this sense, resilience thinking might represent a new form of imperialism in that it attempts to control how all peoples manage their environments.

O’Brien and others have also expressed concern over how resilience thinking has been taken up in popular culture. Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper argue that Holling’s work coincides temporally with neo-liberal economist Friedrich Hayek’s work, ending up in “uncannily convergent positions” (144). They analyse how resilience is taken up in the United States as an “operational strategy of emergency preparedness, crisis response and national security,” turning the meaning of ecological resilience – the ability of an ecosystem to adapt to disruption – to a national one whereby the United States of America is made ready to withstand and recover from any kind of internal or external threat to its well-being (152). The acceptance of the seamless integration between ecology and capitalist economics allows a critique of resource management practices to be transformed into a complex system inflected by neo-liberal economics demanding creative destruction for capital’s sustained growth and that aggressively maintains existing social hierarchies. O’Brien expresses her concerns with how resilience has become “associated with words like optimism, flexibility, fitness, and innovation, [taking] on the aura of a moral imperative that is both engaging and troubling” (“Resilience Manifesto” 1). Her concern is that resilience thinking runs the risk of “becoming a legitimization of- even a spur to- increasing turbulence” (2), so that, as Walker

⁴⁹ Here, again, I want to stress that Indigenous knowledge is not a cure-all to be applied to Western epistemologies or science. TEK, in certain crude forms, represents a colonial appropriation of indigenous ways of life. There is a significant gap between Western modes of thinking and indigenous ones that will require significant labour if Western academics and indigenous thinkers are to meet in the middle.

and Cooper point out, Hurricane Katrina is no longer seen as a problem but an opportunity whereby New Orleans can be rebuilt while African Americans are strategically excluded from planning and construction (154-55). As these critiques show, neo-liberal thinking has adapted resilience thinking by shifting the focus on social-ecological systems in such a way that ecological health is subordinated to the flourishing of ‘natural’ capitalism.⁵⁰ Tony Juniper expresses his own concern over the openness of the concept when he points out that resilience thinking can produce very different reactions in all manner of directions. He writes:

strategies to render economies more resilient to an inevitable peak in conventional oil production might include measures to promote super-efficient vehicles, agriculture that needs less fossil energy, walking and cycling and different priorities for urban design. Equally, however, it might also lead to an expansion in the mining of tar sands, a more widespread uptake in technologies that convert coal into liquid fuels and the indiscriminate growth in biofuel production. These very different strategies might both increase resilience in the face of the specific threat at hand, but with radically different outcomes and implications.

Juniper’s concern points to both the potential power and the pitfalls that resilience thinking has. When taken out of its explicitly ecological roots and transplanted to different discourses and ideologies, resilience may become its own worst enemy in terms of the global environmental crisis. The very thing that is causing all of the ecological damage – human overconsumption and its ripple effects – might become the object that needs to be made more resilient.⁵¹ This certainly seems to be the case with financial and

⁵⁰ Thanks to Susie O’Brien for this insightful wording of how resilience thinking has been appropriated in discussions of neo-liberal economics.

⁵¹ See for instance the International Monetary Fund’s recent focus on “encourag[ing] stronger and sustainable growth” by restoring “the world economy’s resilience - strengthening financial systems, addressing high deficits and debts, supporting growth and jobs, and narrowing global imbalances and anticipating spillovers” (“Global Resilience”). Critiques of the IMF and its policies abound with two recent books being Naomi Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine* and Joseph E. Stiglitz’s *Globalization and its Discontents*.

corporate discussions of resilience. So while resilience thinking can be a powerful tool for motivating environmental justice, it can, as O'Brien suggests, also become a biopolitical tool for reinforcing current regimes of power. At issue is the question of whose resilience is being reinforced: natural systems, the free market, the nation state, or otherwise.

This question leads to a distinction that needs to be drawn between ecological health and environmental justice. Where resilience thinking understands its primary goal as improving the conditions for (human) life, it does not ask questions about how these conditions might exact a higher cost on certain portions of the population. Environmental justice, a movement emerging in the early 1980s in response to the locating of toxic waste sites in poor neighbourhoods, has forcefully critiqued environmentalism for its failure to pay attention to issues of race, gender, and class in its methodologies and goals. Kristin Shrader-Frechette gives a good sense of what the movement stands for when she writes:

Environmental injustice occurs whenever some individual or group bears disproportionate environmental risks, like those of hazardous waste dumps, or has unequal access to environmental goods, like clean air, or has less opportunity to participate in environmental decision-making. In every nation of the world, poor people and minorities face greater environmental risks, have less access to environmental goods, and have less ability to control the environmental insults imposed on them. (3)

Environmental justice, then, takes up not just the distribution of goods and environmental burdens but also the processes of decision-making themselves, calling for participatory processes that involve all members of affected communities. While not rejecting mainstream science, Phaedra C. Pezzullo and Ronald Sandler write that “the environmental justice movement also sought to redefine knowledge, by emphasizing how grassroots communities express their experiences and the knowledge they have to share”

(11). In doing so, sociologist Dorceta Taylor makes clear that environmental justice marks “a radical departure from the traditional, reformist ways of perceiving, defining organizing around, fighting, and discussing environmental issues” by insisting on exposing the various ways that class, gender, and particularly race, play unspoken roles in the workings of mainstream environmental action (38). Although there is certainly room for the voice of environmental justice to be heard in resilience thinking, it has so far not been accounted for. Geographers Muriel Cote and Andrea J. Nightingale point out that “the reliance on ecological principles to analyse social dynamics has led to a kind of social analysis that hides the possibility to ask important questions about the role of power and culture in adaptive capacity, or to unpack normative questions such as ‘resilience for what?’ and ‘for whom?’ when applied to the social realm” (479). Although resilience thinking offers a productive way of engaging with urban nature, its focus on a generic ecological health puts it in tension with environmental justice. In this chapter, I act on Cote and Nightingale’s call to situate resilience thinking so that attention is drawn to “issues of power, authority and complex rationalities, which allows us to ask difficult questions about whose environments and livelihoods we seek to protect and why” (485).

Returning to resilience thinking, a key part of the scientific concept of resilience is its understanding of thresholds and basins of attraction. Walker and Salt argue that all ecosystems exist in certain regimes, or what they call basins of attraction: “if you think of a system as a ball moving around in a basin of attraction, then managing resilience is about understanding how that ball is moving and what forces shape the basin” (59). As an ecosystem changes, new forces change the shape of the basin and the ecosystem, the ball

itself, moves according to the new shape of the basin. As the basin changes, once a certain threshold is crossed, because of the negative influence of a new force like pollution or invasive species, a new basin of attraction will form and the ball will move from the old and into the new. Once the system is in a new basin of attraction, it is much harder to revert back to a previous regime.

For example, the introduction of Asian carp into the Great Lakes ecosystem has proven extremely costly in terms of an environmental and economic impact as the fish, which is quite resilient and out-competes most native species, has spread far and wide. Part of the problem is the carp's eating methods as it disturbs sediment from the bottom, clouding up the water and eroding high quality fish habitats, while the fish's prolific breeding abilities allow it to out-reproduce any potential competition (Grady, *Great Lakes* 286-87). These carp have changed Cootes Paradise's aquatic ecosystem and moved it into a new basin of attraction where carp are the dominant fish species. Although the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) has introduced a fish gate at the entrance to Cootes Paradise, the work is ongoing and requires extensive labour and money to keep it operating. This work has made significant progress in bringing Cootes back towards its previous regime, but it is still in danger of reverting to a carp-heavy basin if a flood or mechanical failure at the ladder were to occur (Van Dongen, "Kicking" A3). A gradual lessening of Cootes Paradise's resilience over sixty or so years through over-fishing, fertilizer run-off in the watershed and industrial pollution before the introduction of carp moved the system closer to a threshold that it then crossed when the fish began to proliferate in the area. At the same time, Hamilton's citizens had no idea about this threshold and only discovered it

after it had been crossed. This ignorance is not uncommon, as Walker and Salt argue that discovering any threshold in real life proves quite difficult given the multiple factors at work across different scales in any given system (60). This example shows the fragility of an ecosystem and stresses just how carefully humans need to act now in order to avoid falling into undesirable and impoverished regimes. Resilience thinking refers to the difficult work of maintaining a preferred ecological system in the face of known and unknown changing factors which may push a place into a different system. Keeping Cootes Paradise ecologically healthy, or resilient, depends on species biodiversity, benefitting humans and more-than-humans alike. While the carp will suffer as a result of the RBG's attempt to build resilience, a much more diverse and richer network of life will prosper.⁵² If ecocritics and justice-minded scholars are to use resilience thinking, it is necessary to bring progressive politics into the equation so that human or animal welfare is not sacrificed in unethical or unjust manners.

At the same time, resilience thinking recognizes that in many cases it will be impossible to return to previous regimes. Walker and Salt write that

if the system is stuck in an undesirable basin of attraction then it might be that it's impossible or too expensive to manage the threshold or the system's trajectory. In such cases it might be more appropriate to consider transforming the very nature of the system – redefining the system by introducing new variables. Transformability is the capability to create a fundamentally new system when ecological, social, and economic and political conditions make the existing system untenable. (60-62)

For Hamilton, this means that returning to the wealth of animal life and natural resources

⁵² Even here some complications arise with resilience thinking as it seems to necessitate the sacrificing of the individual for the species and, at a larger level, the species for the preferred model of biodiversity that policy makers and scientists set out to achieve. This kind of abstracting logic is particularly problematic when applied to actual beings as becomes clear in my discussion of Hamilton's boathouse community and *The Fishers of Paradise* below.

that Ryckman and Campbell describe is impossible. This might seem self-evident, yet many conservation practices attempt to recreate previous ecosystems that are no longer tenable; even the RBG's work with the carp gate runs the risk of propping up an untenable social-ecological system.⁵³ Instead, resilience thinking suggests that, for urban nature, we must begin to make sense of how it currently works and how we might change the basin of attraction to work in a way that creates better conditions for all involved. Improving sanitation by implementing sewer systems and sewage treatment plants, as was done in the early nineteenth century in Hamilton, improves human well-being by reducing incidences of disease like typhoid and cholera, but it also reduces the pressure on natural systems by removing sewage outflows into the Harbour and Lake Ontario by treating grey water for re-use. Resilience thinking allows destruction, unforeseeable events, and vast changes to be incorporated into an SES without necessarily seeing these as solely negative events. While the abundant life that Ryckman saw in Cootes Paradise has been diminished, there is a real wealth of natural and human life and culture in Hamilton now. This is not to say that one event justifies the other, but to suggest that if we hope to live more ethically in the world while also improving the conditions of life for other beings, then we are going to have to put aside hopes for an impossible state of previous well-being and instead create more realistic and complex pictures of reality.

Lastly, resilience thinking incorporates epistemological uncertainty into its very methodology. This is a productive practice as the more we learn about global ecological

⁵³ I am somewhat uneasy with the mobilization of expense as a reason to discount ecological care. It seems to open the door to dangerous manipulations where expensive remediation work, particularly in urban settings, will always be discounted by those more interested in spending money in situations where profit is more assured. This is, in part, because remediating damaged environments almost never produces an immediate profit, even if it produces a host of other, and in my mind more meaningful, benefits.

forces, the more we tend to recognize that we may never know enough about what consequences any potential action will produce. Resilience thinking forces policy makers, scientists, and lay-persons alike to account for unpredictable occurrences or disturbances which can push a system across a threshold.⁵⁴ Walker and Salt point out how numerous long-term ecological studies have illustrated how “humans have both high discount rates and an enormous capacity in believing the future will generate solutions to problems that don’t have to be faced until the foreseeable future” (49). Such beliefs mean that environmental destruction continues and systems are pushed closer to or over thresholds into new ecological regimes that are far from amenable to the flourishing of life. Resilience thinking attempts to prepare systems for unknown events by increasing a system’s general resilience through fostering diversity, embracing ecological variability, and encouraging systemic modularity so that in the instance of any kind of cataclysmic or chaotic change, a system has the strongest possible chance to either adapt enough to maintain former characteristics or change into a new but still viable regime. In the case of Hamilton, we have no idea how long it will take for the Hamilton Harbour to fully recover, but we do have a number of different ways of increasing resilience so that this watershed does not become an untenable toxic pool. Making room for uncertainty, like making room for ambivalence, can be a productive practice in opening up our expectations and enlivening our interactions with the cities that we live in. Unexpected things may happen like Hamilton’s surprising spike in deer populations (“How Many Deer is Too Many?” A3); these are occurrences that present both challenging problems

⁵⁴ See Cheryl Lousley’s “Our Shared Home” and Sylvia Bowerbank’s “Telling Stories” for more on the incorporation of the Harbour’s local community with scientific practice in current restoration work.

and new opportunities to think through the human relationship to the natural world.

Even though I use resilience thinking as a way to enter into a discussion of Hamilton's urban nature, it is important to take into account different voices speaking from different places in different genres. This diversity resonates with Walker and Salt's reminder that "a resilient world would promote and sustain diversity in all forms" (145). Taking up Hamilton's writers becomes an opportunity to discern resilience in the natural world and to explore what strategies resilience thinking might offer attempts to discover and enfold Hamilton's urban nature. Each of these works questions resilience thinking in varying ways, adding an element of uncertainty that matches how this discourse models ecosystems. They also demonstrate a strong knowledge of Hamilton as a place and an attachment to that place. This embedded knowledge opens up a space to think about resilience outside of scientific boundaries and allows other voices to speak about place, voices that will be important in enabling a transition away from environmentally destructive modes of inhabiting a place. Finally, literature also proves to be a rich ground for understanding urban nature's resilience because the writers I take up all possess a keen eye for a broad range of detail and use that perception to make surprising and innovative bridges between different epistemologies and disciplines. This diversity of knowledges will also be crucial in increasing Hamilton's social and ecological resilience.

Building Resilience on a Broad Scale: *Saga of a City*

While resilience thinking is a relatively new scientific discourse, some of the ideas behind it are not. Undergirding ecological resilience work is a sense that conservation,

given the proper direction and intentions, might help to preserve and enhance resilience. Moreover, scientific work on resilience explicitly builds on previous forms of conservation management and ecological understandings. However, I want to expand the genealogy of resilience thinking by considering a project initiated by Hamilton elementary school educators in the late 1930s that eventually resulted in the 1947 publication of *Saga of a City*, a book collecting various articles of local history. The aim of the book was, as the superintendent of Hamilton's schools Frank E. Perney puts it in the foreword, to turn "dry-as-dust facts and mere memorization" into "outdoor experiences" through "short sketches on topics of local history and geography" that "infuse an element of reality into subjects that are too often abstract and formal" (3). The book was taught at the Grade 7 level in Hamilton's public schools from 1947 until at least 1970, reaching a significant portion of Hamilton's population. I argue that this publication and the work of the teachers connected with it sought to build and strengthen cultural attachments to Hamilton as a place, thus fostering a form of cultural resilience.⁵⁵ At a minimum, resilience thinking requires those using it to be attached enough to a place's identity to undertake the complex work necessary for enhancing that place's resilience. Although this book predates resilience thinking, it can be seen as a pedagogical tool that attempts to construct a cohesive community around shared narratives of place. In doing

⁵⁵ I use cultural resilience to refer to a vibrant and flourishing human culture located in a specific place. While SES implies that social systems are always linked to ecology, I am not sure that culture and social systems are analogous. Cote and Nightingale point out that "the conceptualization of social change in SES research is so problematic in part because it allows too much focus on the structures and 'functionality' of an institutional system, devoid of political, historical, and cultural meaning" (484). Yet human culture often seems to exist outside of any link to its locally situated circumstances. I believe, like Cote and Nightingale, that any attempt to build a long-lasting resilient ecology depends, in part, on an invested and attached local culture. *Saga of a City* explicitly links local culture with Hamilton's ecological community, so the two are intertwined as a SES should be.

so, young readers would develop a sense of care for the place that they live in, a necessary sense for the development of an environmental mindset.

Saga of a City has an interesting history of publication which suggests that it represented a grass-roots movement from Hamilton's educators. The project started as a series of local history articles published in the Saturday edition of *The Hamilton Spectator* from January 8 to June 25, 1938. The articles, with accompanying illustrations, covered a variety of topics ranging from Hamilton's geological history, accounts of the First Nations peoples who inhabited the area, stories of early settlers, to various significant historical events. In the first article, Milton Watson writes:

This little series of articles is issued under the auspices of the Grade 7 teachers of Hamilton. We do not pretend that it is an exhaustive work nor have we attempted to go to the original source for the material. The stories told are known to many citizens. All we have attempted to do is gather these historical tales and to rewrite them in a style which we hope the children of the public schools will find interesting. If we can awaken an interest in further study of our local history we shall be amply repaid. ("The History of Hamilton" 5)

From this justification it is clear that Watson was not alone in hoping to inspire a thirst for local history in Hamilton's children. The note also suggests that the work published in the articles was not academically rigorous but was more on the level of popular or folk history, aimed at gaining a broad audience. The articles were collected and republished by *The Hamilton Spectator* late in 1938 as *The History of Hamilton and District* which also included Perney's foreword and a partial list of the major sources Watson and an advisory committee used. The *Spectator's* willingness to republish the articles in a book underscores a general desire to spread a love of local history at the time.

The enthusiasm for this work was sufficient that Hamilton's Board of Education

took up the local history project. Nine years later, the articles were republished by the Board as *Saga of a City: 330 Years of Progress in Hamilton* to be used in the Grade 7 curriculum in Hamilton's public schools. The text of this book is substantially different with several new chapters by different authors added. Watson wrote up questions to close each chapter that aimed to test the reader's learning and added ideas for field trips and local excursions to learn more about the city. He also added an index and a detailed timeline of Hamilton's history at the end of the book. The book was used throughout the city for at least twenty-two years, demonstrating strong institutional support for the teaching of local history and suggesting some level of success in doing so.⁵⁶

Looking back at this educational project, it is possible to see the active learning of local history that Watson espoused as a method of increasing human attachment to place. He called the exercises, questions, and instructions at the end of each chapter "expressions" conveying an active sense of sending students out into Hamilton to learn the place. Some of these expressions include:

Visit Dundurn Park and see the exact position of Beasley's cabin. Make a sketch of the stone for your record book while you are there. (34)

With some bark, twigs, glue, and coping saws, you could make a realistic replica of a cabin about which you have read. Wouldn't you like to try it? (41)

Try to find out what the future plans about mountain roads will be. Members of the Town Planning Committee would be glad to answer a letter addressed to them, seeking information. (96)

On a sand table, make a model of the bay, to show position of James Street Docks, Beach Canal, La Salle Park, Beach Strip, and location of the old Land's Wharf. (103)

⁵⁶ John Aikman, manager of Hamilton's Educational Archives and Heritage Centre, confirmed that the book was used from 1948 until 1970 in Grades 4 and 7 for the study of local history in all of the city's schools.

These field trips and projects all help to reinforce the knowledge presented in the articles. Although it is difficult to determine how effective these expressions were in creating a sense of civic pride in Hamilton's children, the book's longevity suggests some level of success. Moreover, the content of *Saga of a City* fit firmly within the new social studies model of teaching history, geography and citizenship adopted by Hamilton's Board of Education in 1937, albeit told from a local perspective (Aikman and Williamson 114). Undoubtedly some students would have been bored or uninterested in Hamilton's history, but it is not hard to see the book as being an important agent in fostering a new sense of local civic identity during and after the war. If students were learning about Hamilton, completing some of the expressions, and engaging with the book, some sense of attachment to the city would have resulted.

Although this attachment does not necessarily lend itself to an environmental mindset, it would go some ways towards understanding the city as a site of change and different social forces. In resilience thinking terms, Xuemei Bai argues that "cities can be viewed as complex systems that are subject to constant change" (529). Although Watson et al do not frame Hamilton's history in such terms, the narration of the city's history sets up a textured portrait of a place and people who have been forced to adapt and change to various social, environmental, and economic pressures. By fostering an attachment to Hamilton's history and identity, Watson helps to build cultural resilience by inculcating a desire to protect and cultivate Hamilton in young readers. *Saga of a City* is heavily invested in narrating a story of Hamilton and its identity as well as preserving that same identity. In this way, the book works towards cultural resilience by cultivating an

attachment between young readers and the city they live in. Perney's explanation of the book's form and intent helps illustrate this:

The plan is simple. The Jones family, father and mother and two children, by means of week-end motor trips explore some of the many points of interest in and about Hamilton. The 'insatiable curiosity' of the children, particularly Tommy, makes incessant demands upon the fund of information possessed by the father ... Observation, investigation, inquiry, and comment upon scenes of interest to excite further curiosity constitute the factors employed in this introduction to the Social Studies of our schools. (3)

Here, Perney makes clear that the narrative structure is meant to illustrate a model of learning that the Board of Education hopes students will embrace. The use of a nuclear family with generic names – Tommy, Dorothy, Mr. and Mrs. Jones – suggests a kind of every-family, inviting readers' self-identification and empathy.⁵⁷ Watson and Perney clearly hope that the book's narrative structure will animate the historical, natural, and cultural details in an engaging manner. In constructing a community of invested and caring citizens through education, Watson et al. strengthen the social element of Hamilton's social-ecological ecosystem.

The intertwining of social and ecological worlds comes through in a unique way in the chapter entitled "An Elm Tree Tells Its Story." This chapter stands out not just because elm trees are talking characters but also because its narrative structure breaks from the rest of the chapters in using a first-person narrator. This moment is crucially important because a scientific text cannot, by its nature, enter into this mode of story-telling whereas *Saga of a City* is much more flexible. While walking along Hughson Street the narrator overhears an older elm tree talking to a much younger elm. What the

⁵⁷ Of course, any reader whose own family situation or ethnicity does not match the Jones's would not make this identification. Unfortunately, the history that *Saga* presents is largely one of white Anglo-Saxon males.

elm trees discuss consists largely of human history with the older elm recounting his planting by King Edward VII in 1860 before discussing other royal visits, the opening of the Crystal Palace, the arrival of street lamps and the electric streetcars that used to run through the city, and the transition from horse-drawn carts to the first automobiles (20-23). In this discussion, it becomes clear that the human and natural worlds are intertwined even as the horses that once populated Hamilton's streets disappear with the advent of the automobile age. While the trees' conversation is largely human-centred in content, the fact that it is two elm trees speaking to each other should not be discounted. Even though Ernest Monteith, the chapter's author, anthropomorphizes the elm trees, he still grants agency to the natural world by suggesting how it bears witness to human history.⁵⁸ The elm tree's ability to speak invites young readers to imagine the natural world as having a story to tell if only people stopped to listen. Listening to the story that the natural world is telling is a key part of resilience thinking's work. In fact, it is the first step to discerning how a system is functioning and discovering what forces might be pushing it towards some unknown threshold. Of course trees cannot communicate with human language, but the tools of biology and science allows humans to understand, on some level, a tree's method of communication, particularly when that tree is stressed or sick.

In a surprising moment, the older elm tree does just this when it criticizes the pollution caused by automobiles. It tells the younger tree that "the air we breathe is so impure from the carbon-monoxide which these machines give off that I cannot help but wonder if it won't shorten our lives" (23). Considering that *Saga of a City* was published

⁵⁸ See "On the Street Where She Lived," "Habitat," "Measures," "Memory," "Place," and "Speech" in John Terpstra's *Naked Trees* for more on how urban trees bear witness.

in 1947, this comment demonstrates a surprisingly prophetic insight about the future impact of automobiles on air quality and the natural world. It also demonstrates a complex awareness that the development of the city can have positive effects on the environment, i.e. the planting of carbon-consuming elm trees, and negative effects such as carbon monoxide poisoning. The chapter closes with the narrator hearing thunder and running for cover, “leaving the trees to their conversation, but rejoicing over what I had been privileged to hear” (23). While it would be easy to over-analyze this short chapter, I want to stress that the narrator’s listening in on trees represents a radical notion of what it means to live in an urban environment. It suggests that the natural world has stories to tell, stories we have had a hand in crafting and can attend to. It suggests an alternative mode of being in the city that moves the focus away from solely attending to human history, pushing young readers to see the trees as neighbours.

Although the attempt to build awareness of and connections to the natural world in this chapter is a crucial part of building ecological resilience, an unfortunate historical irony illustrates the need to prepare for and adapt to unexpected events. One year before “An Elm Tree Tells Its Story” was published, Dutch Elm Disease made its first appearance in Ontario. By the late 1960s, most of southern Ontario’s elm population had been decimated by this invasive species of fungus. Urban centres were particularly hard hit, as elms were highly valued for their large canopies and overall hardiness which led to a pattern of widespread monocultural planting. The fungus spread so rapidly through a native bark beetle and an invasive species of bark beetle that most cities were forced into mass cuts of the infected trees. An Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources publication

notes that “in parts of southern Ontario the elm population has been almost completely eliminated” (19). Journalist Paul Wilson writes that Hamilton once had over 10 000 elm trees, but by the end of the campaign against Dutch Elm it had fewer than 300 (B3). Reading this chapter now, the imminent destruction of the elm trees makes the older elm tree’s fears about car pollution seem misplaced as it has failed to identify the more fatal threat. Hamilton’s elm trees were wiped out in a relatively short time span by a non-native fungus that caught most North American cities unprepared. This event handily illustrates one of resilience thinking’s key tenets that all ecosystems are complex systems, open to change at any point. Even though Monteith shows a strong amount of insight in identifying the impact of automobile pollution, he could not know the impact of Dutch Elm Disease. If we are to foster urban nature, we need to be aware that whatever plans we set in place also need to be flexible and adaptable to unforeseen circumstances.

The one positive result of Dutch Elm Disease is that the city of Hamilton, along with most other North American cities, diversified their tree planting patterns so that the overall resilience of urban trees was increased. The Resilience Alliance’s *Urban Resilience Research Prospectus* argues that “urban resilience can be measured by how well a city can simultaneously balance ecosystem and human functions” (8). While Dutch Elm Disease proved disastrous for Hamilton’s urban trees, it nevertheless represented an opportunity to think through the city’s tree planting policies. The judiciousness of a commitment to greater tree diversity has already been affirmed in the current crisis surrounding Hamilton’s ash trees. Many of the ash trees that the city planted to replace its elms are now faced with extinction at the hands of the Emerald Ash Borer, an invasive

species of beetle. However, instead of the majority of the city's trees being threatened, Matthew van Dongen writes that only 8% of Hamilton's urban trees are at risk ("Ashes to Ashes" A1). There is some hope that a new method of inoculating trees with beetle-specific insecticide may protect these trees, averting a city-wide cull of ash trees before the beetle can cause any damage or spread infection. In any case, the decision to diversify tree species has increased the resilience of Hamilton's trees so that rather than being a city-wide problem, it is more isolated. By following Monteith's lead and paying attention to the stories that Hamilton's trees tell us, we can prepare for and react to the changing influences on the city's ecosystem.

Where *Saga of a City* departs from resilience thinking is in its desire to tell a narrative of progress about Hamilton, a desire that creates a tension between economic progress and ecological health. After a couple of chapters which explore Hamilton's waterfront industries, the book closes with a chapter entitled "The Birmingham of Canada" which goes into a surprising amount of detail about the steel mills. Mr. Jones explains to Tommy and Dorothy that what is "needed for the steel industry are iron ore, coking coal, limestone, and large amounts of fresh water. Hamilton is located close to all of these" before telling them how the development of railways and the Welland Canal further bolstered the growing industry in the first few decades of the twentieth century (125). This detailed explanation works on two levels: it sets up the steel mills in relation to the natural world while also justifying their presence in Hamilton. The need for Mr. Jones to explain why the steel mills are in the city arises from the scale of the industry and its negative impact on the landscape. For young readers, the steel mills would be a

foreign place characterised by massive buildings, loud noise, burning flares, mountains of black coal, and clouds of air pollution. Such details easily lend themselves to a perception of Hamilton as a dirty industrial city, a perception that J.W. Nairn, the chapter's author, alludes to. He writes "a visitor to our city might think that there is a disastrous fire raging in the northeast end, Tommy, but most Hamiltonians know that the reflection is from the huge furnaces of the Steel Company pouring their slag in rivers of running fire" (126). Nairn puts a positive spin on the aesthetic impact of the steel mills, recuperating it into a narrative of economic growth. The grand scale of the steel mills becomes, not an environmental or aesthetic problem, but a marker of Hamilton's progress in the world. Hamilton's steel industry is so significant that Nairn identifies Hamilton as the Birmingham of Canada, alluding to Birmingham's industrial importance in the British economy. Nairn continues his praise of the steel mills when he writes, "by now the sun was sinking beyond the horizon. Already a great reflection was visible in the sky," putting a sentimental closing on the book's work of exploring Hamilton's history (126). The reflection of the steel mills in the sky symbolically portrays Hamilton as a bright light in the darkness, while the sunset suggests that Hamilton will go forth boldly into the night.

To be sure, the steel mills certainly did drive much of Hamilton's growth and prosperity during the twentieth century, but they also had a disastrous impact upon the city's natural environment. Nairn praises the rivers of slag that create the fires, but the dumping of slag into Hamilton Harbour turned the bay into one of the most toxic sites in

Canada.⁵⁹ Although the full extent of the pollution of Hamilton's waters would not become known for many years, by the time *Saga of a City* was published, the Harbour's fisheries were more-or-less non-existent while the city's swimming beaches were all closed by the end of World War II. In "Blighted Areas and Obnoxious Industries," historians Ken Cruikshank and Nancy Bouchier note that "a provincial investigation in 1943 estimated 70 million gallons of industrial waste and 25 million gallons of residential sewage entered the bay every day, much of it untreated" (482). An editorial writer in 1946 noted that although the bay looked attractive from a distance, "nearby it is seen to be dirty and flecked with foulness, the pollution of its waters being the price we pay for modern urban life ... Our beautiful bay's water is unfit to drink. It is death to wildlife" ("Our Deceptive Bay" 6). Clearly the industrial pollution of the bay was known at a popular level, yet Nairn attempts to recoup the steel mills' environmental sins by inserting them into a narrative of economic health. The tension between economic and environmental health is visible in the editorial writer's comment that the pollution is the price paid for modern urban life. So although *Saga of a City* works to foster an attachment to and pride in Hamilton as a city, this desire forces it to criticize environmental damage through the elm trees and several chapters which espouse an environmental ethic yet accept the steel mills as part and parcel of economic progress.⁶⁰

From an ecological resilience perspective, this tension comes from a prioritization

⁵⁹ After 5 years of extensive environmental remediation, the Sydney Tar Ponds, a toxic dump of industrial waste created by what was Canada's second largest steel industry in Sydney, Nova Scotia, handed off the title of most toxic site in Canada to Hamilton. See "Tar Ponds get a facelift," and "At Last, Clean Water."

⁶⁰ See "Royal Botanical Gardens – Coote's paradise," in particular, where a guide tells Tommy and Dorothy that "if man continues on through the twentieth century like he did in the nineteenth century, there will be little left except the rat, the English sparrow and the starling. Man is wild life's greatest enemy" (80).

of the economic world over the natural one. Such a prioritization was bound to have an impact as industrial pollution became a noxious presence in Hamiltonians' everyday life for much of the twentieth century. At the same time, in 1947 Nairn and Watson could also believe that the conservation work done by the creation of the Royal Botanical Gardens and the transformation of Cootes Paradise into a nature sanctuary could exist alongside the industrial development on the waterfront. Although young readers were being instructed to embrace the steel mills as a part of Hamilton's progress, there is a possibility that the strong attachment to place developed throughout the book could also become a counterweight to industrial development as the ravages of environmental damage became more and more evident to the readers as they grew older.

Saga of a City is a unique book in Hamilton's history and marks an important point for a genealogy of the city's literature about urban nature. Not only is the book one of the first works of local history, but it was intended to be accessible to a young audience. The book built a community of young readers around the shared narratives of Hamilton as a place, and, from an ecocritical perspective, taught important elements of caring for that place even if there is a tension between economic and ecological resilience. While it would be impossible to clearly assess the impact of this book, it is not unreasonable to suggest that this book informed a large number of Hamilton citizens' understanding of the city itself. This attachment to Hamilton is a form of cultural resilience – a strengthening of the human desire to live in, protect and develop the city.

Communities on the Water: *The Fishers of Paradise and Beach Strip*

Hamilton has been defined by its waterfront for much of its history. The bay has given the city economic life, provided both resources and recreation to citizens, and has been a site of contestation.⁶¹ Similar to Windsor, Hamilton is a city defined by its relation to water. Yet this relationship has been rather one-sided in the sense that humans have used and exploited the water's resources to such an extent that it no longer has the capacity to sustain life as it once did. In one of the first written accounts of the area, Lady Elizabeth Simcoe, on tour with her husband, Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe, reports that "we saw Coote's Paradise, so called from a Capt. Coote, who spent a great deal of time in shooting ducks in this marshy tract of land below the hill we are upon. It abounds with wild fowl and tortoises" (324). This bounty of natural resources was a key factor in Hamilton's growth throughout the nineteenth century as it offered not only food, but also water, ice, space for recreation and transportation, and even aesthetic pleasure. However, much has changed since then. Bouchier and Cruikshank write that as Hamilton's industry developed during the nineteenth century, "sewage, garbage, and industrial pollutants such as dyes from the city's cotton mills altered the bottom surface of the Bay as well as the water chemistry" ("Sportsmen and Pothunters" 4). This problem was, for the most part, invisible until, as Cruikshank and Bouchier note "pollution became more visible in the 1920s, as oil and gas found their way from streets and garages into the waters. [It] coated swimmers and boats alike" (*Dirty Spaces* 70). The water was, and still is, heavily polluted with all fish unfit to eat because of toxic and heavy chemical

⁶¹ See Bouchier and Cruikshank's "'Sportsmen and Pothunters': Environment, Conservation and Class in the Fishery of Hamilton Harbour, 1858-1914," Cruikshank and Bouchier's *Dirty Spaces: Environment, the State, and Recreational Swimming in Hamilton Harbour, 1870-1946*", and Mark Sproule Jones' *Governments at Work* 135-42 for an overview of Hamilton Harbour's environmental changes.

accumulation while Cootes Paradise itself was drying up until the Royal Botanical Gardens intervened with restorative conservation work in 1986 (Bowen “Marsh” 1). Hamilton Harbour fared just as poorly as the steel mills amongst other industries used its waters as a dumping ground for waste, slag, and unwanted by-products. Yet all is not lost and the waters have maintained a degree of resilience as the waterfront today is becoming a lively place with multi-use paths, Bayfront Park, and intensive restoration work by the local Conservation Authority, RBG, Bay Area Restoration Council, and other stakeholders.⁶² The waterfront has demonstrated a surprising resilience in that it continues to be a centre of life, both human and animal, even though its ecological functions have changed significantly, crossing several thresholds and entering into a new regime.

Preston’s *The Fishers of Paradise* and Reynolds’s *Beach Strip* are contemporary works that explore two different but related waterfront communities. The former focuses on a boathouse community that occupied the fringes of Cootes Paradise and Hamilton Harbour beneath the High Level Bridge for a number of years before its denizens were forced out by development. The latter focuses on the Beach Strip community that continues to exist along the western-most shore of Lake Ontario on the spit of land that connects Hamilton to Burlington. Although very different in approach and content, both novels track social resilience in their respective communities as they face the threat of development. They also track interesting alternatives to popular discourses of urban life as these communities live much closer to and in greater harmony with their ecosystems.

⁶² See *The Hamilton Spectator*’s week-long “Bringing Back the Bay” series for a good introduction to the remediation of the harbour (Nov. 23- 30, 2002). The year-long investigative project also included a Town Hall for citizens to speak to experts and the paper actively sought the citizens’ own stories for their piece. The series was inspired by Robert Kennedy Jr.’s visit in 2001 and his critique that the birthright of Hamilton’s children to clean water and the ability to fish in the bay had been given away.

Both run the risk of romanticizing socially marginal and economically depressed communities, yet I argue these novels can be productive windows through which to view different modes of living in a city, modes that do not necessarily exclude the natural world from consideration or daily life. These modes also offer methods of increasing a city's ecological resilience by building a cultural knowledge of Hamilton as a place.

While not marketed as historical fiction, *The Fishers of Paradise* can be seen as a work in this genre, using historical material to create both a compelling narrative and animate an alternative view of historical events. In the acknowledgements, Preston writes:

while this novel is based on historical events – the boathouse colony of Cootes Paradise did exist, and the city of Hamilton indeed waged a ‘war on the squatters,’ – I have taken liberties with certain facts and, with the exception of Thomas McQuesten and his family, people the story with characters from my imagination. All actions and dialogue attributed to the McQuestens are also entirely of my making. (389)

Such forthrightness about the fictional quality of *The Fishers of Paradise* does not take away from its importance as a work that intervenes in how local history is told and understood. Bouchier and Cruikshank's “The War on the Squatters,” Preston's source for most of the historical material, corroborates all of the major plot elements concerning the eviction and demolition of the boathouse community. The close connection between the fictional world of *The Fishers of Paradise* and the actual events that occurred in Cootes Paradise in the 1930s means that the novel is able to speak intimately to a specific local place in Hamilton's history, even allowing it to be read as a kind of historical document.

Yet this series of historical events was itself little known until the beginning of the twenty-first century. Bouchier and Cruikshank lament that by “the end of the 20th century, all that remained of the boathouse community were stories told by local old-timers, a

handful of photographs in local archives and in people's attics, the occasional obituary of a former resident, and the scattered records used in this article" (45). Their research, consisting of several articles, does crucial archival work in uncovering and disseminating this obscured history such that the area and its history has now appeared not just in Preston's book but also in Terpstra's *Falling Into Place*. Through these various texts, this historical community has been reborn into Hamilton's cultural consciousness, even though it has almost completely disappeared from the physical landscape.

While Bouchier and Cruikshank's work is vital to both the literary texts that followed and to our understandings of the area's context, Preston's novel offers a different method of interacting with and animating history. Erin Aspenlieder writes that "historical fiction presents (re)visions of the past that function as histories, in that they offer readers a representation and an interpretation of the past" (13). *The Fishers of Paradise* offers readers an intimate and affective encounter with the boathouse community even if its characters are fictional. While I do not mean to critique the important work of historical research, I want to suggest that historical fictions like Preston's novel possess a much broader affective register and are better equipped to produce an affective response in readers. Recall Chisholm's argument that art "mobilizes our ecological sense by acting on it with 'percepts' and 'affects,' and 'visions' and 'auditions' that are more emotionally, mentally, and ethically moving than the functions and variables of science, even when science refers directly to landscapes of conspicuous environmental damage" (585). Preston's novel, then, moves readers in a way that historical research with its focus on facts and events is less able to. While Bouchier and

Cruikshank can express dismay and disappointment at the boathouse community's destruction, Preston's characters construct affective links between the reader, the characters and the landscape that is at the heart of the novel. In *The Historical Novel*, Georg Lukács writes, "what matters therefore in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality" (42). Although the characters of *The Fishers of Paradise* are fictional, they do present a counter-narrative of the people who lived in the boathouse community, demonstrating both the vices and poverty that reformers and politicians hoped to eliminate by changing the area into a park and the intimate connections of a close-knit community that had its own reasons to exist.

What both the historical research and Fisher's novel demonstrate is that the boathouse community existed in a tenuous marginal urban space that was transformed through a variety of different circumstances. Bouchier and Cruikshank argue that the community probably emerged during or just after World War I "likely in response to serious housing shortages in the city" ("The War on the Squatters" 16).⁶³ Of particular importance to this community were the readily available natural resources of Cootes Paradise. Bouchier and Cruikshank note that "the hideaway places on the waterfront where the boathouse community was located offered a major resource for Hamilton's workers who fished, hunted, and boated around Burlington Bay and the Dundas Marsh" (10). This food most often ended up on the community's dinner tables, a fact that the

⁶³ For more detailed information on the housing shortages, see John C. Weaver's *Hamilton: An Illustrated History*, 141-48.

main character Egypt's grandmother, who lives in a large estate close to the Niagara escarpment, disparages at one point (360). At the same time, the area's location outside of the city of Hamilton's jurisdiction and the difficulty of traversing to certain places like Cockpit Island meant that gambling, hard drinking, and cock-fighting were regular activities in the area ("The War on the Squatters" 26). Bouchier and Cruikshank note that middle-class moral reformers were offended by such activities and came to identify the boathouse community with Hamilton's North End community, another low-income neighbourhood filled with non-British immigrants and known for prostitution (24-25). This comparison was itself unfair because, as Bouchier and Cruikshank write, "compared to the over-crowded and unsanitary conditions of the North End, the boathouses looked attractive and had the benefits of their natural setting, well upwind from the stench and grime of the factories" (21). Further buttressing reformers' arguments against the boathouse community's existence were the regular presence of rail-riding hoboes like the character Matt Oakes. Bouchier and Cruikshank note that the community was located just before trains entered large railyards so hoboes would jump off, "use the resources of the bay and live off the land" until they moved on again on board another train (25). These factors meant that, as Bouchier and Cruikshank note, the attempt to re-develop the northwestern entrance to the city became a battle over meanings of nature, urban life, and community between the middle and upper class citizens of Hamilton and the largely working class people of the boathouse community (11). This conflict is demonstrated in the final pages of the novel when Laura Fisher is packing up her house while her daughter Egypt visits. Laura says: "It's only a matter of time. They have their minds set on this

property, on their great North West Entrance, and whether they have the money to develop it right now or not, the fact remains they want us out. Even in these dire times. Everyone will be gone eventually. This place is doomed” (386). This conversation is the final push for Egypt as she walks away from her mother’s place “in the direction of home,” towards Hamilton city proper (387). At the same time, this heading home is also a movement upwards in the social scale as her “home” is now located in the affluent parts of the city. Egypt and Laura sense the end of the boathouse community’s existence, acknowledging its tenuous status, while Egypt embraces the reformers’ vision of the proper life should be lived in her movement into accepted circles of society.

Although the boathouse community ultimately lost out to the vision of reformers and city planners like Thomas McQuesten, who appears briefly in the novel, the community does demonstrate its own form of social resilience.⁶⁴ As Bouchier and Cruikshank noted above, one of the key factors in the community’s development was the lack of jobs and money during the depression of the 1930s. In the novel, Laura initially works at a fireworks factory but is let go because the company relocates (44), Egypt is in teacher’s college and only gets a position at a local school when a wealthy student is unable to take it (380), while Ray never finds work. At the same time, through hunting, trapping, and fishing, the community is able to provide food for itself; Matt Oakes continually makes presents of rabbits, fish, and other trapped animals to the Fisher family and pays his room and board to the Byrd family by such contributions (117-19, 121-23, 219-20). The community protects itself from fire and other threats as when the Byrd’s

⁶⁴ See Nicholas Terpstra’s “Local Politics and Local Planning” for a discussion of McQuesten’s career and his use of various political committees to establish the RBG and create the city’s northwestern entrance.

house is lit on fire and the men try to save what they can (254). The community holds a wake and a town meeting later in the year to discuss the city's inquest into the area's fire safety (271-72, 376-77). That the community managed to survive for so long in spite of strong interest in developing the area into a conservation park demonstrates the community's high degree of social resilience. Of course, some of this resilience comes from more clandestine activities like cockfighting and gambling which could occur out of the view of the public and the police. The fact that several policemen and wealthy Hamiltonians attend the cockfights in *The Fishers of Paradise* attests to the external interests in the community's existence (96). However, for the most part the community keeps itself functioning and manages to retain its identity for about twenty years.

Part of this cultural resilience is linked to the natural area in which the community is located. Cootes Paradise provides food and water, a year-round means of transportation in boats and ice skates, firewood in the surrounding forests, and hidden places for gambling. Yet this landscape also poses unique problems for the community. Preston writes: "Drawn to the water, storms often get caught here, circling around the head of the lake ... Sometimes it would be an hour before the storm moved on" (307). Whipped up by Lake Ontario's large body of water and trapped by the Niagara Escarpment, these storms pound the community, creating dangerous conditions. The water, while a key resource, is also dangerous; several boathouse community children have drowned in it, Ray falls through the ice and nearly contracts pneumonia, and he lives in constant fear of Jimmy Jar's body being washed up onto the shore (308-09, 145, 216, 368). The natural world possesses its own agency in this sense, exacting a price on the community for their choice

to live closer to the water. In the final scene of the novel, as Egypt walks back towards Hamilton, she stops to look at Cootes: “she is facing Paradise. A breeze rustles through a patch of last year’s bulrushes. A muskrat breaks the surface of the water and stares at her a moment, as if surprised to find her standing there, before diving down again. A lull in the traffic and Egypt feels the landscape around her pushing up through the bones in her feet, humming along her synapses” (387). While I am hesitant to ascribe human emotion to the muskrat’s surprise, the emotion suggests that Cootes’ ecosystem will continue to function no matter what the human community does. The final sentence also suggests that the resilience of Cootes Paradise makes itself felt in Egypt’s body “humming along her synapses.” In this final moment of closure for Egypt, she sees the area as Paradise, but like the Biblical story of the garden she knows that she can no longer stay here. Her home is now Hamilton, signalled by the final line, “Whistling for George, she turns back in the direction of home” (387). This turning away suggests that the Cootes region has been pushed over a threshold and is changing into a different regime. Although the community had been a part of the ecosystem’s functioning, its cultural resilience proves insufficient against the reformers’ vision of Cootes Paradise.

It is possible to distort the boathouse community with nostalgia and a romantic attraction to a more “natural” lifestyle, but Preston does not do this. If anything, she makes it exceedingly clear that life is neither easy nor simple along the shores of Cootes Paradise. The Fisher family, along with most others in the area, walks a tightrope with the constant threat of job loss, the lack of comfort in the rudimentary houses during the cold snaps of winter, the regular scarcity of food, and the threatening presence of potential or

actual violence. Ray abandoned his family soon after his son Aidan's birth, trying to make his own way, but his return increases the tensions in the family as he steals Laura's savings for gambling, manipulates Egypt against her mother, and brings the unwanted attention of the police and criminals to the house. The gritty realism of the poverty and violence in *The Fishers of Paradise* acts as an antidote to the distortions of romantic nostalgia. This is not to say that there are not moments of beauty in the area or that there are not moments of intimate community solidarity, but it is to say that poverty is the primary reality of most of the members of the boathouse community. If we want to see this community as an alternative to urban living, we cannot escape from the primary fact of its poverty. Poverty is the reason the community settles in the area, and poverty keeps them in the area. In a way, the closing down of the boathouse community comes as a relief as it may allow Laura to begin anew while Aidan, through the help of his grandparents, might also be able to escape poverty.

The lack of nostalgia means that readers are always aware that this community could only exist within a certain time and space, and that it is impossible to return to it now. The fish population of Cootes Paradise is not strong enough to offer working class families a supplementary food source, not to mention the high levels of toxic material in the fish that have meant that there are severe restrictions on what you can eat ("2012 Fact Sheets"). The wildlife populations have not fared much better and there are significant concerns over heavy metal and PCB contaminations ("2012 Fact Sheets"). Simply put, even if Hamilton citizens wanted to supplement their diets as extensively as the boathouse

community does in *The Fishers of Paradise*, it is not possible.⁶⁵ Drawing on resilience thinking, the Cootes Paradise region has crossed over a threshold into a new regime, and it is impossible to return to the previous regime. The boathouse community demonstrates a no longer viable mode of urban inhabitation.

Yet this does not mean that it cannot offer productive tools for evaluating how we live in Hamilton today. Throughout *The Fishers of Paradise*, the reader's attention is drawn to the high level of integration between the natural world and the human one. In one of the most poetic scenes in the novel, Egypt and Aidan go ice-skating on the bay in the sunshine. Preston writes "after a wearying month of grey skies and fog, driving snow and ice storms, the sunshine has drawn everyone from their homes and Cootes Paradise is busy with skaters: families and couples and clutches of giggling girls, children on bob skates, even a group of curlers" (209-10). As they travel through the Desjardins Canal, Laura and Aidan skate around the numerous ice huts:

Aidan's giggles dart between the ice huts and bounce around the bay as they wind S shapes up and down, back and forth and around the huts, occasionally dodging the odd shelterless fisherman sitting crouched by his hole in the ice. One man opens his door. "You're scaring the fish," he yells. But as long as the air rings with Aidan's laughter, Egypt continues to skate, pushing past the burning in her lungs and her legs. (213)

The long first sentence mimics the graceful arcs that Egypt and Aidan carve along the ice. The playfulness of this scene also offers welcome relief from the tensions in the Fisher household caused by Ray's frequent absences and irritable temper. A scene like this is not just aesthetically enjoyable, but it also reminds readers that Hamilton Harbour and Cootes

⁶⁵ Certain species like White-Tailed Deer, Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, and the Canada Goose all thrive in urban ecosystems, so a limited supplementing of diet might be possible. Six Nations hunters have been harvesting deer at the RBG as part of a 5 year pilot project to manage the deer population. Unfortunately, this has sparked a racist and short sighted debate over hunting rights, cf. Andrew Dreschel's "RBG."

Paradise can be places for human recreation.

For most of Hamilton's history, the water was a central place of recreation and leisure. Pollution from industry and sewage, infilling of inlets, and the gradual encroachment by industry along the waterfront put a stop to much of this use of the waters. One productive aspect of *The Fishers of Paradise* is to remind readers that we can move back towards previous uses of the bay if we tackle pollution head on. Our urban lives do not have to be segregated from the Harbour or Cootes Paradise, yet moving towards a closer integration will require the difficult task of challenging industry, pushing local government to increase public access to the waterfront, and the continued use of the facilities like Bayfront Park and the Waterfront Trail.⁶⁶ Although the eviction of the boathouse community may have involved some level of injustice, what was once private property became public property in the form of a bird sanctuary, opening up the area to a greater number of Hamilton's citizens.⁶⁷ Hamilton continues to reap the benefits of this transition as the free access to the Royal Botanical Gardens' 27 kilometres of trails opens up large parts of the landscape to Hamiltonians and tourists alike. If we can find ways to incorporate the existing spaces of urban nature like Cootes Paradise into our everyday lives, paralleling the way the boathouse community did, we can begin to change the shape of Hamilton's urban landscape along with our own practices.

The novel also demonstrates the continuing tension between the interests of nature conservation and human well-being. Ironically, the close connection to nature that the

⁶⁶ For an illuminating discussion of how this tension between public and private use of the bay unfolded in the early 20th century, see Cruikshank and Bouchier's "*Dirty Spaces*".

⁶⁷ See Bouchier and Cruikshank's "War on the Squatters" 40-46 for detailed information on how the eviction process played out largely through the opportunistic use of fire code regulations in the wake of a fatal fire.

characters of *The Fishers of Paradise* enjoy was something that the City Beautiful movement sought to create in their city planning. In the wake of the sprawling, overcrowded and uncontrolled expansion of cities in the grip of industrialisation, architects and planners worked to counteract this negative influence by shaping a city's overall landscape. Historian Walter Van Nus writes that "a number of architects from the 1890s to the 1930s seemed to assume that an ugly environment did psychological damage to all who beheld it, and that therefore to beautify the city as a whole was socially beneficial" (169). Thomas McQuesten among others pushed City Beautiful ideas at city council until 1917 when Nolan Cauchon was appointed to draw up a plan to beautify the city. His plan, as Bouchier and Cruikshank note, "produced a grandiose urban design that featured garden suburbs, a high-speed electric commuter railway, and a boulevard from the bay to the mountain face. The trees of an elaborate parks system would clean the city's dirty air while providing a 'wilder and freer' parkland around the heights and the marsh" ("War on the Squatters" 29). This vision incorporated the natural world into Hamilton's urban space so that its citizens could live healthier lives. By creating parkways and boulevards, more middle-class Hamiltonians could access the wealth of natural beauty that Cootes Paradise offered. Of course, this came at the expense of evicting the community that already took advantage of this wealth.

While Cauchon's bold plan was not followed, two other events, both connected with McQuesten and nature conservation, accelerated the community's demise. A land deal orchestrated by McQuesten in 1927 through the Board of Parks Management allowed the Board to gain legal title to much of Cootes and shortly afterward the area was

declared a bird and game sanctuary (36). A 1928 contest by City Council for proposals to develop Hamilton's northwest entrance ultimately sealed the community's fate as McQuesten and city council used portions of the winning design to extend Longwood Road across the bay and create a grand entrance to the city (37-40). The key thread in all of these developments is at least putatively the official desire to increase public access to the natural world, whether by creating a sanctuary or roads with spectacular views of Cootes Paradise. In doing so, the city helped to increase Cootes Paradise's overall resilience not just by turning the area into a bird sanctuary but also by raising its public profile and fostering strong affective relationships between the area and Hamilton's people. The problem, from an environmental justice perspective, lies in the way that these developments played out, forcing the boathouse community from the area without adequately providing compensation. Without the money or leisure time for the affluent recreational pursuit of bird-watching or sport-hunting, the working classes of Hamilton would receive little benefit from the development of Cootes. This tension between two different sets of needs, a middle-class desire for healthy leisure and aesthetic appreciation of nature and a working-class need for sustenance, is not new to environmentalism but has animated its history for much of the twentieth century. Kate Soper writes that

the cause of ecology is therefore best advanced through a readiness to confront the tensions between the two types of evaluation it brings into play. On the one hand, there is the value we place on nature either intrinsically or as a domain of aesthetic pleasure and source of sensual gratification. On the other hand, there is its utilitarian value as a set of life-preserving, life-enhancing resources. Neither can be thought independently of the value we place on the human community both now and in the future, and both imply a concern with human moral well-being. (207-08)

The City Beautiful movement lines up well with the first position as Laura shows when

she ironically explains it to Matt: “If we live surrounded by beautiful – man-made – surroundings: parks, boulevards, fountains and such, we will be better and more worthy human beings” (39-40). The boathouse community lines up with the second as the characters depend upon the fish and wildlife of the area to supplement their diet, although this does not disqualify them from having an aesthetic appreciation of Cootes’s natural beauty as Matt demonstrates when he says he prefers Cootes over Dundas because “this is beautiful ... and so peaceful. It’s paradise” (23). Finding a way to negotiate the values we place on different human communities and their well-being is going to be a difficult challenge; *The Fishers of Paradise* can help us think through this tension by illustrating how competing claims over place, nature, and value were resolved in a complex manner.

Preston’s novel is a compelling case study because it offers no easy answers, instead delineating a complex, even ambivalent portrait of Cootes Paradise. On the one hand, it is easy to side with the boathouse community and decry their eviction. Yet this eviction arguably allows for the area to increase its ecological resilience by ensuring that private development is kept out and granting larger public access to a green oasis. From a resilience perspective, there is nothing wrong with what happened, as Cootes was given the opportunity to thrive. Today it is in the process of making a remarkable recovery with Bald Eagles now nesting and fledging chicks for the first time in over fifty years (“Bald Eagle Project”). Local journalist Jeff Mahoney goes even further when he proclaims Hamilton “an emporium of environmental wonders” before explaining that the city is “one of the most biologically rich areas of Canada ... boast[ing] a quarter of the country’s wild plants, and more than 50 species at risk” (“Hamilton” A3). This wealth of animal

and plant life is made possible, in part, by McQuesten's work to ensure that Cootes Paradise remained free from development. I regularly hike in Cootes Paradise, enjoying the abundant wildlife and the beautiful landscape. However, this enjoyment remains ambivalent for me as I cannot help but recall that this area was ecologically enriched through the eviction of the boathouse community. As Bouchier, Cruikshank, and Preston make clear, this historical event is layered with ethical tensions as the needs of the working-class were seemingly over-ruled by a more affluent upper class. While many residents were bought out by the city, a one-time payment is hardly a cure to the chronic condition of poverty as Egypt highlights when she worries "how long will it take someone like Manny to fritter away sixty-five dollars?" (347). Further complicating this event is the knowledge that the community's lifespan may have been limited anyway given the heavy industrial pollution of Hamilton Harbour. With increased toxic loads in the water because of the sky-rocketing pesticide use after World War II, fish populations plummeted while bird populations also suffered. As I noted above, one of the problems with resilience thinking is that it tends to sideline discussions of justice and ethics without adequately addressing issues of class, privilege and power. In *The Fishers of Paradise* we see a community caught at the confluence of an affluent middle class that desires more access to green space, industrial forces that have poisoned the landscape, and the very real necessity of providing a living for one's family in an economically depressed era. This novel raises the concern that if we are to use resilience thinking in seeking to increase the presence of urban nature in our everyday lives, then we must also be alert to the way any proposed changes affect those with the least ability to weigh in on such decisions.

While *The Fishers of Paradise* fits comfortably into the category of historical fiction, *Beach Strip* occupies a different genre entirely. Reynolds's book is a crime novel with a plot centring on the attempt of Josie, the protagonist, to solve the suspicious suicide of Gabe, her husband who was a police officer. The narrative arc takes readers into Hamilton's criminal realm with Josie visiting Mike Pilato, a local crime lord in Hamilton's north-west corner, to impoverished areas of Barton Street and into some of the crumbling houses along the Beach Strip. However, Reynolds also includes a significant amount of historical and cultural detail when describing the Beach Strip – so much so that it is almost as if the place itself demands the narrator's close attention.

Beach Strip is difficult to classify as a piece of crime fiction because it straddles both the hard-boiled and police procedural genres. John Scaggs writes that “in the hard-boiled tradition, it is the individual private eye who safeguards society and attempts to restore the order disrupted by criminal activity” while “in the procedural, it is the police detective as part of the state apparatus of the police force who safeguards society through vigilant and unceasing surveillance, in this way, replacing the often questionable vigilante justice of the PI” (88, 89). Gabe was a police detective, on the verge of uncovering serious corruption in Hamilton's police force, fulfilling the role of the police procedural. However, Josie is not a detective but his wife, a person outside of the law who must investigate the police and the criminal elements of Hamilton in her quest to find justice for her husband. The murderer, Gabe's partner Mel Holiday, proves to be of questionable morals given his position within the police force and his willingness to take bribes and drug money from Mike Pilato and Dougal Dalgetty. If, as Scaggs writes, “the transition

from hardboiled fiction to police procedural is, therefore, a transition from the private eye, in the sense of the personal, small-scale, and often self-serving investigation, to the public eye, in the sense of civic, large-scale policing that serves society as a whole,” then *Beach Strip* moves back towards the hard-boiled tradition with the individual protagonist investigating the public police force (89). Connected to this transition is a scaling down from the broader scope of police procedurals to the local level.⁶⁸

Place is a crucial element of crime fiction. It presents easily identifiable cultural codes for readers while also establishing a shared context from which the writer will distribute clues and, eventually re-assemble the crime. But it also is important because as Dennis Porter writes, “crime fiction texts constantly assure the reader of their mimetic function through continued reference to actual places, dates, people, and organizations. Part of the pleasure of reading depends on this sense of authenticity, allowing the reader to experience normally inaccessible or forbidden activities” (140). The mimetic connection between the textual world of the crime novel and the real world provides a voyeuristic thrill to readers but also establishes a shared context centred on the place depicted. Philip Howell writes that “the knowingness granted to the reader is indeed privileged, but it is based on the shared references of the everyday world – the street map and the street signs, for instance – that are not themselves exclusive. And in the sense that the urban references construct a sense of place, it is a construction of a truly shared place” (367). Crime fiction, then, helps to actively construct a shared sense of place through its

⁶⁸ This move parallels different approaches to environmental policy. Where police procedurals and early environmentalism uncritically accepted the role of top-down bureaucratic management, resilience thinking tends to be suspicious of bureaucracy, favouring entrepreneurial, small-scale approaches. My thanks to Susie O’Brien for pointing out this analogy.

verisimilitude. Readers of *Beach Strip* come to know the existing contours of the area through descriptions of the setting and the detailed history Reynolds gives. However, as Malcah Effron writes, it is important to keep in mind that while early detective fiction used elements of place as potential clues to the mystery, “the topographic details provided in the narratives that describe real city settings do not participate in the narrative on the level of ‘potential clue,’ as the streets and highway exits help articulate neither the problem nor the solution” (332). *Beach Strip*’s setting provides a thickly textured backdrop for Gabe’s murder but it does not provide any potential clues or push the narrative forward. Instead, as Howell notes, police procedurals like *Beach Strip* use “details of site and setting ... to interpellate the reader by locating her or him with respect to the places and people of the story” (366). Readers encounter Hamilton through Josie’s eyes; we are given place not as we know it, but as Reynolds constructs it even if there are significant interconnections between the two senses of place.

I am going to read *Beach Strip* against its grain. Rather than analysing its plot, I read it for its place, for the representation of Hamilton’s beach strip and how this local place works in the novel. This place-work is a way of exploring and building cultural resilience. At times, the descriptions of place slow down or stop the narrative momentum of the novel. If the overarching narrative purpose of crime fiction is to work towards solving the crime at issue, then these descriptions of the beach strip do not directly contribute to this goal.⁶⁹ In an indirect way, these descriptions help to flesh out Gabe’s and Josie’s characters while also casting a certain tone and mood on the novel’s action.

⁶⁹ I recognize that there is a high degree of artificiality in assigning a “goal” or a “purpose” to a literary work. However, in genre fiction there are specific contours and conventions that most texts follow.

However, beyond this, these descriptions seem to serve no identifiable purpose beyond drawing the reader into a place and establishing that place's extratextual reality. There are numerous descriptions of the Beach Strip ranging from the area's cultural history, to specific locations like the lift bridge, the Canal Amusement Park that operated during the twentieth century, and Tuffy's, a veiled allusion to the Dynes tavern.⁷⁰ Some of the descriptions are only a few sentences long but others cover several pages.⁷¹ When tracking their occurrences, it becomes clear that they occur much more regularly in the early portion of the book and disappear in the latter stages of the novel. This may be, in part, because Reynolds needs to set up the full contours of his setting in order for the crime narrative to properly unfold. If readers know the contours of the setting, then they are able to locate the crime, potential suspects, and motives within this limited world. While Reynolds may not have intended to write a novel of local place, *Beach Strip* functions as a compelling record of a distinct place even if some locations are thinly veiled. Reviewers of the book also picked up the importance of the setting with Chadwick Ginther of *Quill & Quire* writing that "Reynolds clearly enjoys delving into the eccentric details of his setting" ("Beach Strip") while Jack Batten writes "as the story unfolds, the matter of the locale – will we never get off this dratted beach? – gives the book a mildly irritating sense of claustrophobia" (IN7). Ginther's quip and Batten's annoyance at Reynolds's refusal to leave the Beach Strip points to how much *Beach Strip* is a local novel. By reading *Beach Strip* for its representation of place, we gain a deeper

⁷⁰ See Jeff Mahoney's "Only on the Beach Strip" for a short interview with Reynolds where he identifies some of the actual locations that he uses in the novel. See Daniel Hayduk's "The Dynes Tavern" for a description of the historical tavern and 122-24 of *Beach Strip* for a corresponding description.

⁷¹ Lengthy descriptions of the beach strip can be found on 1, 5-7, 9-10, 28-30, 32-34, 42-43, 64, 69, 73-74, 92-96, 98, 122-23, 173-74, 219-20, 270-71.

understanding of a marginalised urban community that, like *The Fishers of Paradise*, illustrates a different mode of inhabiting Hamilton's urban landscape.

Throughout *Beach Strip*, the community is defined more on its own terms rather than as a part of the city of Hamilton. In the opening sentences, Josie identifies her location not by naming Hamilton but by stating "I am on the shore of a Great Lake. If I look east, down the length of the lake, I imagine I can see all the way to the St. Lawrence River. If I turn to look behind me, beyond the high bridges and their incessant traffic, I see the things my mother called the devil's appliances, meaning the steel mills and refineries that line the shore of the bay" (1). In this description, Hamilton is not named but identified instead by one of its more distinctive features: the steel mills. This description also sets up the community's tenuous existence, sandwiched between industry and Hamilton on the one side and the cold waters of Lake Ontario on the other. This refusal to identify the Beach Strip with Hamilton is continued throughout most of the descriptive sections of the novel. In fact, when Josie does venture into the downtown to go to the Central Police Station, the details of setting are remarkably unspecific despite the opportunity to name streets or distinctive features (145). Similarly, when Josie goes to visit Pilato in Hamilton's north end, street names are not given and the location is rather imprecise, somewhere west of the steel mills but north of King Street. This is not surprising given that the Beach Strip has had its own identity for much of its history. Most of the characters in the novel are long-time residents of the area. Each has his or her own reasons for settling in the area but they are all united in their desire to live their lives looking out on the lake, away from the hectic pace and grime of Hamilton (3). Reynolds

writes that “the beach strip is peppered with misfits and eccentrics living among young professionals winding themselves up and retired people winding their lives down ... There are many distractions on the beach strip. There is little boredom” (42-43). Similar to the boathouse community of *The Fishers of Paradise*, Reynolds makes it clear that the beach strip community is a distinct group of people living in a unique place.

What is also important is how this community has remained resilient historically. There was a fishing community there during the nineteenth century but the area was transformed, as Cruikshank and Bouchier note, when in the final decades of the nineteenth century Hamilton’s city council began to see it as a “recreational suburb available primarily to that city’s social elite” (“Heritage of the People” 43). In one of the longer descriptions of the area, Reynolds explains how the summer breezes and the natural wealth of the area attracted the rich: “the strand was clean and uncluttered, the bay and the lake were teeming with fish, and air conditioning was an impossible dream” (32).⁷² Each summer the beach strip became an Edenic escape for the wealthy factory owners who “sailed dinghies on the lake, their privileged children flew kites on the strand, and their pampered wives gossiped beneath parasols in their gardens” (32). Of course, also present were their various servants and helpers: “Irishwomen cleaned the rooms and laundered the linens, Scotswomen made the cucumber sandwiches and sliced the ham, and Welshmen tended the gardens. God bless the Empire” (32). Reynolds’s ironic blessing of empire exhibits his sympathies towards the lower classes that soon came to inhabit the beach strip. With the increase in industrial pollution, the dirtying of

⁷² The historical contours of Reynolds’s novel are corroborated by Cruikshank and Bouchier’s “The Heritage of the People Closed Against Them” and Dorothy Turcotte’s *The Sand Strip*.

the water, and the increased mobility offered by automobiles, the beach strip was largely abandoned by Hamilton's wealthy following World War II ("Heritage" 49). As Reynolds writes "the soot and smells became unbearable for wealthy families with cottages on the strip. Luckily for them, air conditioning arrived just as the soot began turning the strip as black as the rest of the city" (33). After their exodus, the working classes took over the area and settled in year-round. Cruikshank and Bouchier note that "those who settled on the beach valued it as a relatively inexpensive place to live, even if market gardens and the fishery could no longer offer a living" (52). In this instance, the decline of the fisheries and the slow collapse of the cottage industry actually increase the area's resilience as it becomes a more inclusive space for Hamilton's people. The presence of long-term, embedded residents builds up a cultural resilience against sudden changes.

Although not reflected in the book, the community faced the threat of development when in the 1970s "a renewed interest among middle- and working-class Hamiltonians in local, outdoor recreation, generated demands for more public space," particularly along the Beach Strip (53). However, resistance from the local community has prevented the dispersion of the community, instead proposing the current mixture of public park land in Confederation Park and the Waterfront trail and private homes stretched out along the strip. Where in *The Fishers of Paradise* the needs of a small group of people were overruled in favour of the greater good, the Beach Strip community has successfully resisted drastic changes while also allowing for a greater diversity in

allowing some public land to be turned into green space.⁷³ This community has proven remarkably resilient in its ability to continue functioning as a place of social cohesion and identity despite the many social and environmental changes over its long history.

One of the reasons why this community has remained resilient despite pressure from city and municipal governments is that the inhabitants are closely linked to their landscape. The view of Lake Ontario is one of the primary reasons for settling in the area, and this spectacular aesthetic quality has remained even if the water quality has been degraded. After Josie's first marriage collapses, she confesses to Gabe that "I have always wanted to live in a house on the strip of beach that separates the bay from the lake. I want a house facing east toward the lake, where I can watch the sun rise up out of water in the morning" (3). Josie's desire is not a romantic hope for a closer connection to the Earth, but it is rooted in an aesthetic appreciation of the sun rising over the lake. She is not alone in her desire for this vista as she later thinks:

The high bridges are on the beach strip, but they are not of it. I ignore them, like everyone else who lives on the strip. We develop blind eyes and selective ears. We ignore the high bridges and pretend not to hear the noise of the traffic they carry. We turn our backs on them, and on the oil-slicked bay and the steel mills with their slag and steam and smoke, and we look east across the lake extending to the Thousand Islands, lovely green and granite jewels that, in the pictures I have seen, look like pieces of paradise. (7)

In this passage, the two massive bridges of the Queen Elizabeth Way are acknowledged but carefully cordoned off from the perceptual landscape of the beach strip. They are on the strip of land, but "not of it" as the narrator suggests. Reynolds does not shy away from the environmental damage in Hamilton Harbour but instead has his characters focus on

⁷³ For more on the Beach Strip's resistance to external development, see Sean Kheraj's "Environmental Justice on the Hamilton Waterfront" podcast.

the less visibly disturbed environment of Lake Ontario to the east. Similar to Egypt in *The Fishers of Paradise*, Josie describes Hamilton's waterscape as a paradise. The active turning away from urban pollution is problematic, yet the community's desire for Lake Ontario's aesthetic beauty is worth considering because this seems to be the tie that unites the heterogeneous community of the Beach Strip together. Even Tina, Josie's Vancouverite sister who repeatedly criticizes Josie's choice to live on the strip, acknowledges the beauty of the area when after seeing the moon rise over the lake, she states "I can see the attraction of living here on the lake" (60). The sublime vista of Lake Ontario's expanse provides an aesthetic beauty that draws a diverse community together.

Yet claiming that this attraction to the lake is simply aesthetic does not do justice to the deeper connections the characters have with the Beach Strip's environment. Gabe uses the lake as a kind of therapeutic device to help separate the often disturbing and traumatic experiences at work from his domestic life with Josie: "After we married and moved to the beach strip, he found another place, which was the lake. He did not need to be Gabe Marshall, free of everything including pain this time. Just free of things he didn't need, and he would stand staring at the water long enough to leave the things he didn't want to burden me with out on the water until they sank from sight" (64). Although Josie is sceptical of this practice, she affirms that "no matter how upset he might have looked when he got home and parked the car," he would always greet her with a smile after "looking at the lake until all the bad stuff was sent out there to sink to the bottom with the other pollution" (64). This conflation of toxic thoughts and actual pollution is an interesting one and suggests that Reynolds, and Josie on some level, are aware of how the

lake is being poisoned, yet they both believe in its ability to absorb such pollution and cleanse humans at least temporarily. The lake, despite its pollution, becomes a therapeutic blank slate for Gabe, freeing him from the violence and corruption he experiences in the city. While Gabe's use of the lake is anthropocentric and seemingly overlooks the problem of pollution, it does present a different mode of relating to the natural environment. Although the water becomes a literal and metaphorical dumping ground for pollution and stress respectively, in the second mode it is allowed to act as an Other that can offer healing to Gabe's scarred mind.

Josie also finds comfort in the lake during the murder trial. After witnessing the horrific death of Wayne Honeysett beneath the lift bridge, Josie watches the sunrise:

My father sometimes sang an old cowboy song whose lyrics said something about a new world being born at dawn. You do not understand that idea until you encounter horror in the darkest moments of the night, the world that exists half-dead or temporarily so around three a.m., and a few hours later walk into a bright summer morning by a lake that's all sapphires and diamonds, with people and dogs playing on the sand and cotton-ball clouds sailing across the sky. (120)

The lake's obliviousness to the horrors of human crime provides Josie with some relief from what she has just seen. On a narrative level, this calm is illusory as Josie's life continues to be caught in upheaval until she solves the crime of Gabe's murder. The lake functions as a therapeutic device that offers Josie something more meaningful than aesthetic beauty. In this instance, though, it is worth noting that it is not just the lake's "sapphires and diamonds" but also her interactions with her the beach strip community: "On the boardwalk, among the children, the dogs, and the Frisbees and within sight of the boats far out on the lake, I began to regain that New World at Dawn sensation, and it grew stronger when I passed the picket fence separating the Blairs' garden from the

beach” (120). Here, Reynolds creates a web of people, animals, and place which offers Josie emotional calm despite her ongoing troubles. At the novel’s end, Reynolds includes a panoramic view of the Beach Strip, detailing winter’s imminent arrival. Clearly there is a kind of comfort in the repetition of the seasons for Josie. She thinks:

Some days are golden for a while. Not July golden, of course, just golden with the sunlight. Nobody is fooled. Winter’s somewhere north of Toronto, heading our way. Sweaters smelling like mothballs have been hauled out of closets, people are looking at brochures with pictures of Caribbean resorts they can’t afford to visit, laggard birds are flying south, and tans have faded” (271).

This catalogue of seasonal transition shows the beach strip changing, but doing so in a familiar and cyclical manner. This cycling of seasons re-affirms for Josie that life will continue as she shares a pot roast with her neighbours while reminiscing about her mother’s struggles with old age (271). Although Josie’s life has been shaken by Gabe’s death, the natural landscape of the beach strip and its seasonal cycles offers her comfort.

The affective attachment to the Beach Strip that Josie and others in the novel possess is shared more broadly outside the novel. Popular histories of the area make it clear that the Beach Strip was and is a special place for large numbers of Hamilton’s citizens. In the final chapter of *Memories of the Beach Strip*, Gary Evans writes:

It was a place of many things. It was a great place to spend a holiday; a fascinating place to live; and a one of a kind place to have fun. It was a special place to watch the ships sail into the harbour, and one of the best places anywhere to hear the music of some of the world’s best entertainers. It was a place to fish and to hunt, and a place to play. But foremost, it was a beach. (165)

The heterogeneity of functions that the beach strip serves for Hamilton is clear in this catalogue. Yet all of these functions come back to the landscape itself: a place where the rock, soil, and sand of lower Hamilton gives way to the waters of Lake Ontario.

Similarly, Dorothy Turcotte's *The Sand Strip* opens with her acknowledgement that "this book is inspired by many happy summers spent at Burlington Beach" (iii). She then proceeds, in the first chapter, to paint an idyllic portrait of the beach:

Imagine a beach of fine white sand, four miles long and no more than a quarter of a mile wide, separating Lake Ontario from a sheltered bay. The lake bottom slopes gently, its firm surface neatly rippled by the lapping of the waves. Its clear water teems with perch, whitefish, trout, sturgeon, bass and salmon. Rabbits and raccoons scamper through the wild grape vines and the bamboo-like plants that grow here. There are plenty of birds, too, for this strip of sand has many oak and poplar trees. (1)

The description continues, detailing specific birds and trees in the area before stating "this was Burlington Beach as it was seen by the first white men to reach the head of Lake Ontario" (1). Although Turcotte is writing about the early moments of Hamilton's history in the eighteenth century, the image of a pure and undisturbed nature saturates her small book of local history. In fact, near the end she decries attempts by Burlington and Hamilton to transform the area into both a conservation area and a transportation corridor:

As a conservation measure, the creation of this parkland may be doomed to failure. Many Beach residents fear that if all buildings are removed from the Beach, erosion will turn the sand strip into a mere sliver. Also, with so much concrete, traffic and industrial development nearby, the swans, ducks, herons, and other wildlife may never return. (45)

The threat that wildlife may disappear hangs ominously over Turcotte's description of the Beach Strip in 1987 when the book was published. The plentiful wildlife and closer connections to an idyllic nature that made the Beach Strip such a fascinating place are now threatened by development in Turcotte's mind.

It is also interesting in Turcotte's text that the human presence is said to keep the sandy landscape stable so that humans are actually serving an ecologically productive

purpose even though some other human activities threaten wildlife. Numerous historical and archival photos are included in the book, showing houses intermixed with large trees, white sand, and the ever-present water of Lake Ontario. These photos suggest how human interventions in an ecological system are not necessarily destructive but can be positive factors in ensuring a system's stability. At the same time, the photographs add to the sense of romanticized nostalgia in *The Sand Strip* as Turcotte puts together a collage of a place seemingly untouched by the problems of modernity, full of quaint and colourful characters, and now threatened by an ominous modernity. Turcotte's desire to keep the Beach Strip in a pre-modern state is problematic because, for resilience thinking, nothing ever stays the same. The Beach Strip was bound to change, and a more prudent course of action lies in preparing for and adapting to these changes. At the same time, we need to be wary of simply embracing the future and discounting past models of life. As Cote and Nightingale suggest above, we need to ask whose livelihood is being protected and why. Both Turcotte's and Evans's books implicitly show that the beach strip did change over a number of years, yet it remains an important place in Hamilton's history because of its unique landscape. *Beach Strip* picks up on this uniqueness in its depiction of human characters embedded in the beach strip's milieu.

From a resilience perspective, one reason that the beach strip continues to exist as a mixed space of recreation, conservation, industry, and residential areas is because of the strong connection between people and the landscape. Although there have been several attempts to transform the area for different uses the local community has resisted such attempts and refused to give up on their vision of the place. Reflecting on the variety of

people on the strip, Josie thinks: “it is a community, as the sociologists say, in transition” (43). Even though the community is in transition, it has not lost its core identity, demonstrating a high degree of resilience. In resilience thinking’s terminology, it has absorbed disturbances and still maintained its basic form and structure. This is not to say that it has not changed – the yacht clubs, aristocratic hotels and dance clubs, and even the popular Canal Amusement Park have all since disappeared – rather to suggest that the community has continued to be a place of human inhabitation formed around a strong affective link to landscape.⁷⁴ Although the area has foregone the increased ecological resilience that a wholesale transformation into an ecological preserve might offer, it has increased its social resilience which benefits the ecological systems that are integrated into that community’s way of life. Unlike *The Fishers of Paradise*, where the creation of a bird sanctuary serves a greater good, the total resilience of the Beach Strip would be adversely affected by such a move. The more diverse community of the area ensures long-term sustainability by keeping people embedded in place while also making small changes to allow other human and animal visitors to use the landscape. This move does not sacrifice a pre-existing community but instead strengthens it through the community-building that accompanies the active resistance to outside development. While a crime novel like *Beach Strip* is not responsible for the community-building that has gone on, it can be a vector through which readers discover and appreciate an area’s local history.

Although *Beach Strip* is not an explicitly environmental text, it can be read as one in that it encourages readers to recognize the beach strip community’s worth, and such

⁷⁴ Current residents of the Beach Strip maintain a vibrant online forum addressing a wide range of topics including local news, history, clubs, and business at <http://hamiltonbeachcommunity.com>.

recognition works against the potential erasure of that community. As I suggested earlier with *Saga of a City*, learning about a place can be a productive way of building environmental awareness and knowledge. On a narrative level, the community of *Beach Strip* is able to absorb the shock of Gabe's murder and still retain its identity. By novel's end, Josie notes that aside from the season turning, not much has changed (271). The Beach Strip residents continue in their everyday lives while Josie slowly comes to grips with the loss of her husband. She deals with this loss by turning to her community, sharing a pot roast with the Blairs, visiting her mother at her retirement home farther up the strip, and even considering the purchase of a pet dog (271-72). Although the events of *Beach Strip* are fictional, they nevertheless model a resilient community that has maintained its social-ecological identity in the wake of a personal tragedy. In an urban setting, the human community is the primary agent of change in social-ecological systems, and seeing how it can maintain an ecological identity is important. This recognition by a wide reading audience feeds back into the community's overall resilience by providing a much broader cultural awareness of the community.⁷⁵

One of the things that a resilience perspective offers for environmentally minded literary studies is the agency it grants to cultural work. Resilience theory and its scientific practitioners make room for human actions within an ecosystem, and I want to stretch this inclusion farther. Cultural productions like novels, poems, movies, and plays can and do have direct impacts upon local landscapes. One need only look at England's Lake District

⁷⁵ *Beach Strip*, published by HarperCollins, won a 2013 CBC Bookie Award in the "Up All Night Award for the Most Spine-Tingling Canadian Book." The Bookie Awards, and award categories, are based on public polling, so they represent some measure of popular success. While I have been unable to find numbers of units sold, the book was reviewed in *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, *The Toronto Star*, *Quill & Quire*, and *The Hamilton Spectator*, demonstrating nation-wide distribution.

where William Wordsworth and his contemporaries' poetry transformed the area into a National Park in 1951, mobilizing a network of tourist economies that now operate in that landscape, sustaining and protecting it. In terms of Hamilton's Beach Strip, though, the connection between culture and landscape is much more diffuse. *Beach Strip* has not mobilized an active community so much as re-affirmed the pre-existing bonds that have held a diverse group of peoples together in one place. Within the genre confines of a police procedural, Reynolds's writing of people embedded in a place, demonstrates a cultural resilience that is a key factor in the Beach Strip's overall resilience. A community that is invested in and cares for a place will be more willing to take the time to consider the implications of proposed and actual changes that it faces.

What both *The Fishers of Paradise* and *Beach Strip* do is create a textual space wherein a given landscape can become enfolded into a reader's life. Preston's decision to write about Cootes Paradise and Reynolds's decision to write about the Beach Strip demonstrate an attachment to these places and an attention to the way that history has unfolded in these locations. The fact that both are works of fiction does not diminish each book's fidelity to their places; historical works like popular histories of Hamilton and sociological studies can corroborate their depiction of place. However, more importantly, for my purposes, these books gather together a community of readers using place, offering a partial view of a place as a shared context between history, writer, and reader. As art historian Lucy Lippard argues in *The Lure of the Local*, "space combined with memory defines place" and "when we know *where* we are, we're in a far better position to understand what other cultural groups are experiencing within a time and place we all

share” (emphasis in original, 9-10). These two books, then, offer ways to encounter their given locations as place by layering historical memory upon a place within a fictional narrative space. *Beach Strip*, more so than *The Fishers of Paradise*, offers a way of understanding where a given community is. However, as Lippard later notes “an art that is in place, or on site, can create a different (not necessarily) better relationship between the viewer and the place,” suggesting that such a knowledge of Hamilton’s Beach Strip may not necessarily lead to a better place (20). Nor does a book like *Beach Strip* necessarily guarantee that readers will endorse an environmental position. But what the novel does offer is a portrait of a community that has a strong relationship to its place, a relationship that flies in the face of the cultural discourse which divorces cities from the natural world. The beach strip, as Josie experiences it, is neither a space solely for nature consumption nor for human action, but is instead a mixed and diverse space with a multitude of uses and users. Her acceptance of this diversity and her refusal of attempts to resolve or diminish such heterogeneity suggest a productive approach to urban nature. It will (almost) always be compromised, hybrid, mixed, and less and more than we hoped for. Even though Josie is acutely aware of the polluted waters of Hamilton Harbour, she does not let this interrupt her pleasure in Lake Ontario’s beauty. Accepting this mixed quality and embracing it is one way of increasing cultural resilience and reversing the trend of exiling nature from the urban places in which most Canadians live.

Is This Sandbar a Place?: *Falling Into Place*

“This book is what happens when one person becomes completely enamoured of the landscape, and a particular feature of the landscape, in the city where he lives.”

- John Terpstra, *Falling into Place* 11

So reads the introduction to Terpstra's *Falling Into Place*, a work of creative non-fiction that meditates upon and through the Iroquois Sandbar. Terpstra, a poet by craft who has turned his hand to prose, writes lyrically and passionately about the sandbar that breaks up the relatively flat landscape of Hamilton's downtown, calling it "a relic. Half the bar lies beached like a whale on the shore of the bay, a landlocked swell under the streets and houses of the city. The other half is water bound, stretching out across the bay" (16). The mixture of poetic image and lyrical phrase with history means that *Falling into Place* does not read so much like a non-fiction account of a place as a uniquely crafted piece whose form attempts to do justice to the multi-layered body of the sandbar itself. Included in its pages are illustrations of the area by Wesley Bates, maps of the region by Glenn MacDonald, bits of local history that inform the sandbar's history, self-reflexive meditations on Terpstra's own relation to the place, and several poems. In all, the book is more than the sum of its parts, with literary critic Deborah Bowen writing that there is "an interdisciplinarity inherent in Terpstra's vision – sociology, psychology, history, biology, geography are connected" (138). The book is intensely local but offers a number of important clues as to how human care for urban nature should be modelled as well as insight into how cultural resilience might be fostered even in the face of the ongoing degradation of the natural world and its resilience.⁷⁶

Terpstra is careful to foreground how his attachment to place is partly a choice he

⁷⁶ Bowen writes that "a reading of Terpstra's work, particularly, *Naked Trees*, *The Church Not Made With Hands*, and *Falling into Place* will show that ... [the] experience of urban Nature can be as profound and lifegiving as any of those journeys to distant lakes and forests more traditionally associated in the Canadian imagination with access to the transcendent" (130). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to account for the insights that Terpstra offers across this body of work.

consciously made. He writes “the first time I emerged from my car and intentionally set foot upon this piece of geography ... I wanted to know if a land feature that was so decidedly a transportation corridor could also be a place, however that term might be defined” (56). Terpstra’s decision to enact an experiment of paying attention to place soon gains its own momentum so that he describes his walks and writing about place less in terms of a conscious choice and more as a kind of relationship. However, this first act of intentionally paying heed to the landscape is important for the whole of *Falling into Place*. Reflecting on a decision to sit in his car in a lay-by on York Boulevard for fifteen minutes several times a week, he self-reflexively describes himself as “one solitary person, sitting in a car, looking for some solid physical meaning in the time and place he finds himself, as half the population goes like mad in one direction, the other half equally mad in the opposite” (50). Here again, the act of looking is important, particularly in the context of the other drivers who are conspicuously not paying close attention to the landscape. It is a conscious choice to pay attention to urban landscape; a refusal to be distracted by more pristine landscapes located farther away from where most people live. This description comes from a series of 6 chapters titled “Lay-by” which are interspersed throughout the narrative, reminding readers of the repetitive nature of Terpstra’s experiment. From a narrative perspective, these chapters also become the textual space where Terpstra sorts through his developing relationship with the land and processes new insights into the place. *Falling into Place* builds its argument slowly but surely so that the narrator of the book arrives at a high degree of self-knowledge and appreciation for the sandbar by the end of the book. At a key point, Terpstra writes that “a sense of place and

belonging is a matter of blood, circumstance and choice ... It was not, however, the diked and drained land of my forebears calling and recalling me to myself, but this one. I felt myself a part of this landscape for the first time there, in that foreign landscape of my father's childhood" (200). This revelation comes while Terpstra is visiting his father's childhood home in the Friesland province of the Netherlands, a landscape that provides the distance necessary for him to realize his own comfort in Hamilton, Ontario. He makes it clear that an attachment to a single place is not simply a matter of choice, but is complicated by blood and circumstance.⁷⁷ His Frisian background seems to predispose him towards landscapes where earth meets water, so that Cootes Paradise and Hamilton Harbour feel like a surrogate home for the absent homeland of Friesland. However, as the text suggests, this call needs a response. Choosing to respond is a crucial action for Terpstra. Similarly, if we hope to discover and enfold our own local forms of urban nature, then we need to respond to it by entering into a relationship with it.

The importance of choice and intentional action is emphatically underlined in the final chapter of the book where Terpstra recounts a ceremonial dinner with friends. Planned to coincide with the two-hundred-year anniversary of Lieutenant-Governor John Graves and Lady Elizabeth Simcoe's visit with Richard and Henrietta Beasley, Terpstra, his wife, and another couple re-enact the encounter with matching food and wine. While attempting to find the former location of Beasley's house, Terpstra discovers that a "short stretch of the old shoreline, where the Simcoes landed their canoe, still exists, complete

⁷⁷ See also Laurie Graham's work of creative non-fiction *Singing the City* in which she describes moving back to Pittsburgh, a former steel city, after the death of her husband and falling in love with the place. Her book also makes a strong case for the importance of the now disappearing industrial landscapes that once characterized North America and how industry links us to place.

with a small patch of water and bulrushes” (308). This discovery fulfills Terpstra’s long attempt to find “one square inch, not clawed, raked, dug or filled” announced early on in the book (50). It is significant that this discovery does not occur until the final chapter of the book when Terpstra pays homage to the landscape in an improvised ceremony. As the group eats their meal, Terpstra ruminates on what it means to be attached to a degraded urban place. He writes “the habited landscape of this mid-sized city and surrounding countryside understands me, its brokenness mirrors my own. This long-term intimacy with the nature of where I live is both a choice I’ve made, and a daily decision” (309). Terpstra reiterates the importance of choosing to care for the landscape one lives in, using intimacy to describe his relationship to the Iroquois Sandbar. He pushes this farther and suggests that, like most long-term intimate relationships, it is also a daily choice that must be made. Discovering and enfolding urban nature happens best within the boundaries of a relationship and commitment to a place. Earlier in the book, Terpstra uses openly erotic terms to describe his attraction to the sandbar’s landscape, coming to see the place as a metaphorical lover that wants to give him knowledge and pleasure. After the meal, the group walks out along the Heights, as the Simcoes and Beasleys did, before a thunderstorm sends them home. Once home, Terpstra thinks “I am so pleased with this place, despite the hurt and history. This dwelling, where I feel myself both landed gentry and honoured guest” (313). In this statement, Terpstra moves beyond the idea that “I am attached to a piece of geography” which opens the book to a full affirmative declaration that he is pleased with this specific place, echoing the wording of Lady Elizabeth’s diary entry on her visit to Hamilton. The dual roles of landed gentry and honoured guest also

signals Terpstra's desire to claim the landscape as his own and his feeling that the landscape itself has laid claim on him.

The stage is set for this realization by the intentional re-enactment of a historical dinner. Terpstra's knowledge of the Iroquois Sandbar and his sense of relationship to it compel him to a ritual ceremony that pays homage to the place. Earlier in the book, he describes a visit to Oriah Mountain Dreamer's Winter Solstice Ceremony, a spiritual seeker's ceremony that borrows much from Indigenous spirituality (71-80). Although Terpstra has doubts about the integrity of the ceremonies performed, the experience has a strong influence on him and inspires him to perform two different ceremonies on the bar. The first, an attempt to sit in a copse of grass and trees and meditate, happens shortly after his visit to the Solstice Ceremony (87-91). The second, the meal which ends the book, builds on the first in that Terpstra moves from a solitary experiment to a communal ceremony where four people bless each other with presence, food, and laughter. These ceremonies are the active result of Terpstra's decision to pay attention to the sandbar and the ensuing relationship with place that develops.

Therefore, *Falling into Place* can be read as a chronicle of a budding relationship between one human and the place that he inhabits. He sets up this relationship in intimate terms throughout, referring to the Iroquois Sandbar as a newly-discovered sexual partner's body, a dance partner, and a spouse (249, 250, 309). He builds on this when he writes: "understand that this is a landscape I love, the one I have adopted, or that has adopted me, that reveals itself to me over a time in a kind of slow, affectionate undressing" (250). Here, Hamilton's landscape is granted agency and slowly reveals itself

to Terpstra over a stretch of time. Although marriage can be restrictive and damaging, Terpstra's use of this analogy is productive because it points to both a lifelong commitment and ceremony. Moreover, the marriage metaphor also gestures to the deep, long, and, often, painful process of living two lives in tandem, a process that can move from the ecstasies of intimacy and sexual enjoyment to the pains of anger, rejection, hurt, and intimate violence. These poles of eroticism and pain are clear in two separate passages: "I want to move through the various folds and creases, to travel the falls and rises, every square inch, and to stand wherever I am; wherever, by this gracious allowance, I am granted leave to stop and dwell upon and within what surrounds me, to see and touch what this physical familiarity reveals and gives" (250). In this passage, Terpstra's language resembles a description of a person caressing her or his lover and a lover's desire to intimately know every inch of her or his beloved's body. However, Terpstra's erotic discovering of the sandbar's body also means becoming aware that "within its escarpment embrace it holds our airborne contaminants, the exhausted smudge of industry, internal combustion and constant motion, for us to breathe in daily" (277). Alluding to the disastrous 1997 Plastimet fire in Hamilton in which huge columns of dense smoke and large amounts of carcinogenic chemicals were released, Terpstra sees the sandbar physically recording this damage.⁷⁸ The fire becomes just the latest in a long line of abuses that Hamilton's citizens have perpetrated on the landscape. Continuing the erotic metaphor, sex is similarly overlaid with the distortions of patriarchy, the degradations of misogyny, and its fetishization by advertising. Yet, this does not mean

⁷⁸ For more on this fire, see Cheryl Lousley's "The Hamilton Plastimet Fire."

that Terpstra abandons the Sandbar, but instead that his attachment to it is strengthened so that by the book's end he promises to "return the favour" to the Bar as it has invited him "to consider all that it has as my own" (313). Similar to Brandt's writing on Windsor, encountering degradation does not necessarily mean disconnecting from place. Instead, it can be a vector through which we come to care for a place's resilience.

What is remarkable about *Falling into Place* is that although it chronicles this growing relationship, it also documents in detail the long degradation of the sandbar in the name of transportation, industry and personal glory. In one section, he writes:

An operation of one kind or another had been performed upon it in each generation since settlement began, when Richard and Henrietta Beasley first stuck shovel in ground, chopped tree and began disassembling a landscape of oak savannah to accommodate their long-term stay. Theirs was a comparatively benign re-landscaping, all told, to which I do not object, much. It undid only the achievement of generations of trees. (254-55)

He goes on to list each bridge, rail line, highway, and trail that have since crossed and re-crossed the Sandbar's body, each changing and re-shaping the landscape. These changes produce in Terpstra a strong affective reaction: "all of this is accompanied by a kind of physical ache ... but what do you do with your feeling for a place when the changes that are brought to it continually drive home the point that you will be punished for your affection by having its object disfigured or destroyed?" (53). In the chapter on Mercer's Glen, Terpstra recounts interviews with the Mercers and the Bruntons, two families who were former residents, while also outlining the intimate and now-erased contours of the area. It is clear in this chapter that these families lived an idyllic life with the children enjoying the water as a swimming hole, ice rink, and playground. However, the glen stood in the way of rail-lines and highways, and those invested in transportation refused

to let it be an obstacle for long. Terpstra writes that the Highway 403 now “rides on a bed of landfill ten metres high, burying the third house at the end of [the Mercers’] laneway, their small acreage, half the pond, and almost every inch of the Bruntons’ large property” (136). Terpstra mourns the destruction of an intricate and ecologically rich landscape and its small community for the sake of railroad and automobile ease-of-access to the city. In the words of Mrs. Brunton: “I loved every minute that we lived by the marsh ... And I regretted ever having to leave” (152). While Terpstra has not lived in Mercer’s Glen, it is clear that he respects their memories and desires the kind of closeness to the sandbar that they once possessed. In reflecting on his attachment to the area, he writes “I care for landscape, earth’s shape. Yet I am attracted to these places of broken beauty, these abandoned parts of the broken body” (220). The primary cause of this pain, in the contemporary moment, is the noxious presence of the automobile so that when Terpstra attempts to perform a type of meditation by simply being-in-place, he notes “the pine needles act as a filter for the windblown fumes, the odour offerings to the gods of internal combustion, and exhaust hangs heavily within the branches. I am smudged with must” (88). The Iroquois Sandbar is poisoned, and Terpstra cannot help but be angry.

Here, Terpstra challenges resilience thinking in his elegizing what has been lost in the Iroquois Sandbar’s long history. His anger and mourning continually remind readers that the sandbar is a broken place, rather than a flourishing one. Resilience thinking, on the other hand, tends to eschew the past, focusing on the present and future instead. The sandbar has already crossed a threshold into a new state and attempting to return it to its previous richness may prove costly and ill-advised. Terpstra’s book actively challenges

this notion by asking readers to consider the judiciousness of this future-oriented approach. The history of human manipulation of the sandbar has many lessons to teach Hamiltonians, lessons that may be hard to hear. Remembering and honouring the past makes us aware that much needs to change before the sandbar can become a place that gathers many beings in again. Simply adapting to the changing conditions of the sandbar does a disservice to this rich place and the many beings that once called it home. What seems necessary is a sense of a place's history in order to guide what decisions are taken in any given social-ecological system. *Falling into Place* searches out the voices and livelihoods that have been sacrificed in the name of progress and invites readers to think on them, creating a productive critical pause in resilience thinking.

This elegizing also pushes resilience thinking to think about what criteria are used to evaluate and work on urban ecosystems. The barrenness of life in *Falling into Place* demonstrates that the Sandbar has crossed a threshold and entered a new basin of attraction with significantly reduced biodiversity. Terpstra calls on readers to imagine new ways of living in a place that do not continue this trend of slowly sucking life out of a place, but instead build up a rich sense of human, animal, and plant life. This is important for resilience thinking in urban settings as the ecosystems it will encounter are most likely going to be degraded and less than optimal. What these situations call for, then, is an imagining of how to make life more diverse and strong in many ways rather than simply trying to “conserve” the system as it is. *Falling into Place* challenges resilience thinking not just to ask whose livelihood is being protected, but also what livelihoods have been lost and how they might be restored.

What is important is that Terpstra is not rejecting human transformation of the Sandbar outright. While meditating on the various changes to the landscape, he writes:

It seems natural, too, for any human settlement that grows into a city to remodel its landscape in this and other ways as it shapes its own geography of houses, buildings and streets. The highs are gradually shaved lower and the lows are slowly filled in. One change is layered upon another. The changes that occur in one generation overlap the changes of the preceding generation in a kind of civic, sedimentary layering. (52)

Terpstra's sympathetic but resistant reading of urban development makes room for humans to grow and shape the place they live in. However, by its very nature this layering covers over what has come before, producing a kind of civic amnesia about local history and place. Terpstra's problem lies in the fact that, for him,

two hundred years of settlement can make the landscape appear as though it's been invaded and is under enemy occupation. To resist this occupying power had often felt futile to me, while the pursuit of these lost inlet lines, the lines of stream beds buried under city streets, the obscured lines of the glacial sand-and-gravel bar, had often become an exercise in melancholia. (55)

The act of searching out a former shape becomes a kind of elegy, mourning the lay of the land that has been lost beneath the weight of progress. While a cynical reading might see this passage as demonstrating a form of misanthropy with all human building seen as an invasion upon the land, this is not the case as *Falling into Place* also celebrates the beauty of Dundurn Castle, Whitehern, and the High Level Bridge.⁷⁹ Just as a marriage can be a liberating and awe-inspiring relationship, it can also become abusive and exploitative. Too often, the human relation to place for Terpstra sinks into the latter mode, ending in pain, anger, and environmental destruction.

⁷⁹ There is an element of anti-modern critique at work here as all three buildings come from earlier historical periods and reflect different cultural values. What also seems to be missing for Terpstra is a sense of history in current building practices, an amnesia that obscures the stories of our elders and neighbours. In this sense, *Falling into Place* pushes resilience thinking to imagine solutions that fit in with a place's past.

This does not mean that Terpstra exculpates himself from these actions. Upon realizing that the earth remembers, Terpstra reminds himself that he is “inextricably part of the land-filling, refuse-dumping, train-riding, steel-making, car-driving family of earthlings who dwelt here” (54). Although he may want to opt out of such actions, his residence in the area means that, on some level, he participates in these actions through using the roads in his car, producing his own waste, and so on. When encountering urban nature, we must be ready to confront the fact that no matter what we do, we are also in some way responsible for what has happened here, particularly in the form of environmental degradation. Terpstra has every opportunity to discount his participation in such activities given that his parents emigrated from the Netherlands after World War II, he grew up in Edmonton, and only moved back to Hamilton in his adult years, long after the process of manipulating the Sandbar had begun. Moreover, his direct responsibility for the cutting up, tearing away, landfilling, and destroying of the Sandbar would be minimal at best. All of which makes his admission of complicity more surprising. If in Brandt’s “<Zone: le Détroit>,” complicity in environmental destruction leads to a near-paralyzing ambivalence, Terpstra does not allow this to hold him back.

Instead, he attempts, throughout the book, to come to some form of relation with the Sandbar. He calls this relationship a gift, a slow undressing, and a favour, all words which gesture to the many dimensions that his exploration of the Sandbar’s history and identity takes. At another point, reflecting on how landscape might be able to absorb human pain, he writes “this whole venture into one particular place, one piece of geography, has everything to do with relation. A series of interconnected, overlapping

relationships that reach further and further out. Relation and reciprocity” (108). This attempt to conceptualize a relationship to landscape is a strong environmental tool because it opens up a space to both acknowledge environmental degradation, of which the Sandbar has plenty, and a space for wonder, gratitude, love, and a host of other positive affects which come with an intimate relationship to place.⁸⁰ Terpstra writes that “there is no way to explain this love of place other than to say that I want to be here” (250). This statement gets to the core of Terpstra’s environmental ethics: rather than being hung up on explanations or seduced by seemingly pristine wilderness spaces, he chooses to resist a culture that stresses mobility and choice by staying in place. This choice is neither simple nor straightforward, but is a key way through which we can approach urban nature. In many ways, *Falling into Place* can be read as a case study on how to learn about an urban place and develop a relationship with it. At the core of this project are Tersptra’s act of attention and the developing of a relationship.

The result of this relationship for Terpstra is a redemptive vision of the landscape that recognizes natural resilience while also stressing the need for continued vigilance and protection. He writes that “the Bar of my own memory is made, is created, out of this relation between the earth and myself, between its body and my own, in dream and desire” (250). This comment can be read meta-textually by seeing *Falling into Place* as a written record of Terpstra’s version of the Sandbar. However, I also think that the Bar of Terpstra’s memory is also something that exists outside of the textual confines of *Falling into Place*, as a complex network of affect, knowledge, memory, and experience all

⁸⁰ He also, whether knowingly or not, gestures towards Indigenous conceptions of the human place in the world. Recall Kayanesenh’s statement that human beings have a relationship “with the rest of Creation” (2).

lodged together within one place. Terpstra points to this when he writes:

If the bits of historical or geographical knowledge I have picked up and accumulated since, together with my experiences of the place, alone or with others, constitute my memory of it, then perhaps memory is built up in the same way the sand-and-gravel bar was, one stone at a time: one small stone for each day, for each story, a stone for each time the foot makes contact with the ground. I may have managed by now to construct a layer or two this way, like the layers of the Bar, but the top of my bar is still only slightly above water level. Which is as it should be, because this memorizing is no more a *fait accompli* than the Iroquois Bar was, and is. (249)

The humility of this description recognizes the vast work of the natural world that continues in spite of what humans have done and continue to do to it. The natural world is resilient in the very real sense that if humans push themselves into extinction, forces of climate, weather, and life on many levels, particularly at the microscopic level, will continue. In fact, one of the comforts that Terpstra takes is the seeming inability of humans to truly alter the sandbar. Seen from a geological timeframe, the bar has been in place for much longer than the city of Hamilton existed and the human ability to destroy it seems minimal at best.⁸¹ On a more specific level, as Terpstra notes, “it takes some geosleuthing to see beyond the visible and to unearth the original shapes of the landscape. What’s surprising, after all this, is that the shapes still exist. The landscape persists” (32). Such a realization clearly provides Terpstra with the motivation to continue deepening his relationship with place.

If, as Terpstra’s work suggests, the geological landscape is far more resilient than we give it credit for, the question becomes how we can make room for human resilience in the world. In the Earth’s long history, five significant periods of mass extinction have

⁸¹ Equally true is that from an even more abstract geological position, the Iroquois Sandbar is as transient as the leaves on a tree, a 12 000 year blip on a scale that spans billions of years.

happened with the Cretaceous-Tertiary, or K/T, Extinction being the most recent.

Geologist Richard Cowen writes that during this period “almost all the large vertebrates on Earth, on land, at sea, and in the air ... suddenly became extinct ... at the same time, most plankton and many tropical invertebrates, especially reef-dwellers, became extinct, and many land plants were severely affected” (315). Such devastation is troubling enough, but it is not the worst extinction event. The Permian mass extinction, occurring around 248 million years ago, is responsible for killing off 96% of all living species (BBC Nature). All life on Earth comes from that remaining 4%, so that it becomes clear that from such a perspective it is not so much individual species that matter so much as genetic life itself. This is a humbling thought for humans who often act as if all life will end when our species does. Given these facts, the challenge facing humanity today is finding a way to ensure that humans remain resilient in a changing world. As Terpstra suggests, geological features like the Iroquois Sandbar are far more resilient from a much longer historical scope than individual humans are. One of the things that resilience thinking does very well is move between different levels of systems from the micro-level of cells and bacteria all the way up to the geological and planetary level. Yet in moving all the way out to such distant and abstract levels, it becomes clear that when resilience thinkers talk about ecological resilience, they are not discussing the natural world’s resilience so much as its suitability for human life. Walker and Salt allude to this when they write that “the human species is living beyond *its* means on a planet with finite resources ... unless we use resources far more efficiently (and produce much less pollution) we will continue to erode the resource base on which *our* survival ultimately

depends” (emphasis mine ix). Amidst the waves of apocalyptic rhetoric that tell humans that the world is going to end, the sobering truth is that it will not end but we will. Given this future possibility, it becomes all the more urgent to find ways of living in the world that do not just stop the course of environmental damage North Americans and others are currently embarked on but also seek to find ways of repairing this damage.

This need makes work like Terpstra’s place-experiment all the more important as building up a relationship to the places we live in can provide us with ways to increase natural resilience so that the chances of human extinction are reduced. As I have argued throughout this chapter, building an attachment to a local place can be a productive method of increasing an area’s resilience. Building a communal knowledge about a place, how it functions ecologically, who lives in it, what the threats are, and so on, is a key starting point in increasing the social resilience of a social-ecological system. While it is possible to be paralyzed by the seemingly never-ending flow of news regarding environmental damage, we can take heart from Terpstra’s own successful experiment in paying attention to one of Hamilton’s most abused landscapes. As Terpstra experienced, we are not guaranteed absolute success in our attempts to develop a relationship to local urban places, but we may be surprised and enlivened by what happens when we do engage with our cities.

Although we need to be careful about how we use resilience thinking in engaging with urban nature, it does offer a number of productive ways of working to promote and enhance it. Building up a working vocabulary and knowledge of our urban locations is going to be crucial to putting resilience thinking into practice as *Saga of a City* suggests.

At the same time, we will not be able to identify all of the threats or potential changes that will happen as the history of Dutch Elm Disease teaches us. But we also need to constantly ask whose environment and livelihood we are protecting as Cote and Nightingale remind us, so that we do not bulldoze neighbourhoods like the Cootes Paradise boathouse community. While it might be easy to dismiss *The Fishers of Paradise* as historical nostalgia, the novel does ask readers to think about how and why certain environments have changed over time. Yet Hamilton does have resilient communities that have maintained their social-ecological identity over a longer time span as the Beach Strip community has done, and we would do well to pay attention to these community's stories and knowledge. *Falling Into Place* challenges resilience thinking by mourning the damage that has been wrought in the name of progress. The book also reminds readers that undertaking this kind of work necessitates a deep commitment, as broken landscapes like the Iroquois Sandbar can easily overwhelm us with anger and melancholy. What all of these texts suggest is that discovering and enfolding urban nature is going to be difficult work, yet it is also necessary work if we are to build ecologically resilient cities where plant, animal and human life is allowed to flourish in every sense of that word. This work is vitally important because, as O'Brien writes, resilience thinking "offers a sliver of hope: that all is not lost, that ecosystems, imagined as complex amalgams of human and more-than-human lives, can adapt to and even flourish through change" ("Resilience Manifesto" 2).

Building Inclusive Belonging: Toronto

“Toronto is a city of stories that accumulate in fragments between the aggressive thrusts of its downtown towers and the primordial dreams of its ravines. In these fragments we find narratives of unfinished journeys and incomplete arrivals, chronicles of all the violence, poverty, ambition and hope that give shape to this city and those who live in it”

- Amy Lavender Harris, *Imagining Toronto* 13

for eight months, Thursday nite traffic
stuck me on yonge
 my cabbie always secure
 no life story to offer or fetch
 sat quietly back in the immigrant cab
 with my immigrant self –
 absorbing the welcome of the textured city.

for eight months, i returned to you, Toronto
 the city that allowed me
 to become the me
i took for eight months, to another place.

- Laila Haidarali, “Union”

Toronto is a welcoming city in Laila Haidarali’s poem “Union.” The poem focuses on a weekly voyage to Kingston from Toronto via Union Station’s trains. In these embryonic voyages, where she “swayed in weekly motion” with “the train knocking its rhythmic time,” the poem’s speaker comes to discover “the strangeness of my being” (2, 7, 19). The poem alludes to a birthing image with Toronto’s approach being compared to “your first white light greeting/ then brighter,” the train becoming a cocoon/womb that the speaker must break out of to complete her growth (30-31). However, once in the city, she is allowed, as the last lines indicate, to “become the me/ i took for eight months, to another place” (52-53). This self is confident in her discoveries that she “love[s her] voice/ & space/ laughter/ & touch” (14-17). While it might be said that Toronto is not so much responsible for her development as is the time she spent in transit, the poem ends

with an ode to Toronto as a welcoming place. It is a city that allows space for people to develop, a city that is welcoming in its very texture. “Union” appears to be unrelated to the natural world or the environment, yet it is also intensely about the urban environment. The GO trains, cabs, streetcars and the literal paved streets and sidewalks of Toronto form an environment in which the speaker navigates her everyday life. Put in ecological terms, Toronto is the habitat she lives in. As I discussed in the introduction, urban environments are just as much a part of nature as the wilderness even if the built material form is quite different. In this sense, Toronto extends a form of ecological belonging by providing a welcoming and life-encouraging habitat for the poem’s speaker.

Yet this is not always the case with Toronto, as Amy Lavender Harris makes clear. In many ways, Toronto is marked as much by the “unfinished journeys and incomplete arrivals” as it is by those who have found welcome in its embrace. Haidarali is a unique immigrant to Toronto as a Trinidadian academic and poet who launched her poetic career through *Diaspora Dialogue*’s inaugural publication, *TOK: Book 1*, while completing a PhD in History at York University.⁸² In these circumstances, Toronto was not necessarily the final destination in her journey away from Trinidad, but a temporary stopover as she is now a lecturer at the University of Essex in the UK. Some, like Austin Clarke and Dionne Brand, have found Toronto far from welcoming, with a politely disavowed racism seeming to underpin the city’s social fabric even as they have remained

⁸² Helen Walsh, the executive director of *Diaspora Dialogues*, writes that the organization was launched “to encourage writers from diverse communities to create new work that explored Toronto as ‘place’ in their fiction, poetry and drama. We wanted to create a literature of the city that was current and vibrant and truly reflected the people who live in it” (viii). *TOK*, the annual anthology from the workshops and mentoring programs, is now in its seventh edition, collecting many of the new voices of Canada’s literary culture.

residents of the city for a long time.⁸³ Still others, like the homeless characters that populate Rosemary Aubert's crime novel *Free Reign* and the actual homeless community that inhabits the Don and Humber River valleys, have also experienced the city as less than welcoming, finding themselves forced into some of Toronto's urban natural spaces in search of a safe space to sleep the night. These different senses of belonging – Haidarali's acceptance, Brand's and Clarke's critiques of Toronto's racism while remaining residents, and the homeless persons in the ravines – point to a tension that animates Toronto's urban landscape, centring on the question of who may belong to the place. In ecological terms, a healthy ecosystem hinges upon the interdependency of its various actors, whether plant, animal, or human, so that no one species dominates but all are dependent upon each other. In Toronto's social world, there is a tendency towards less diversity marked by the structural racism Brand and Clarke critique and Toronto's reluctance to provide for those who are in the lowest classes. In this chapter, I am interested in the various demands for belonging that these different voices bring to the table, particularly the tension between environmental justice, which advocates for the rights of the marginalized, and mainstream environmentalism, which has too often pandered to the interests of affluent whites. I believe that urban nature can become a domain in which different forms of belonging are extended to all so that writers like Brand and Clarke will be able to call the city home and the homeless community might

⁸³ Brand's position is more complicated than this sentence suggests. Her writing suggests that it is possible to find welcome, even a non-nationalistic form of belonging in Toronto, but she is also intensely aware of how the city is very unwelcoming, marked by racial, class, gender, and sexual lines. See D.M. R. Bentley's "Me and the City That's Never Happened Before" for an exploration of Brand's relation to Toronto across her body of work and Joanne Leow's "Beyond the Multiculture" for an insightful discussion of *What we All Long For* and the myth of Toronto as a successful multicultural and global city.

feel a sense of welcome when their needs are met. In focusing on this tension, I affirm Code's conviction that "ecological thinking is about imagining, crafting, articulating, endeavouring to enact principles of ideal cohabitation" (24).

To imagine principles of ideal cohabitation, I take up a range of texts, all of which feature characters or settings positioned on the margins of Toronto's social and cultural world. I take up suburban Toronto as seen through the eyes of women and children in Phyllis Brett Young's 1960 novel *The Torontonians* and Antanas Sileika's 1997 short story "Shale." Aubert's 1997 mystery novel *Free Reign* provides a productive avenue to explore how Toronto's homeless population have found welcome in the ravines that break up Toronto's landscape. To open up a space to talk about the contours of racial belonging in Toronto, I read Rabindranath Maharaj's 1997 novel *Homer in Flight*, Sasenarine Persaud's 1998 short story "Canada Geese and Apple Chatney," and a scene from Joseph Boyden's 2008 novel *Through Black Spruce*. Finally, I end with a crucial section from Dionne Brand's 2002 long poem *thirsty* in which a Jamaican man is shot by Toronto police officers in his home, an act that troubles firm definitions of belonging in the city.

In all of these works, belonging to and in Toronto is addressed in crucial ways. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines belonging as "the fact of appertaining, relationship. *esp.* a person's membership in, and acceptance by, a group or society" ("belonging," n.). While I intend to take up the human elements of belonging, particularly elements that challenge the historically predominant white culture of Toronto, I also use the word to gesture towards ecological belonging. In this sense, I want to ask how people can belong to a place in an ecological sense. How does the physical landscape of Toronto,

its ravines, its resident raccoon and pigeon population, its weather, its community and backyard gardens fit into a person's sense of relationship to the city? Houses along the Don and Humber River valleys include some of the most attractive, and expensive, properties in Toronto with their spectacular views of the valleys' partially domesticated landscapes. Many homeless people also make these valleys their home, but their relation to the place is going to be very different from that of the home owners on the uplands above. This relation, in turn, informs how each person feels about belonging in the city, for the home owner may feel that purchasing a home with a view signals a level of success in Toronto's social world, while the homeless person who is evicted from the valley by a police officer will experience a distinct sense of being refused belonging. Building from this example, I want to ask how different elements of Toronto's landscape like the ravines, the suburbs, the waterfront, and the city's many parks function in Toronto's rhythms and cultural psyche. Are these spaces that mark the limits of belonging in the city, or could they become more than that?⁸⁴ Do certain elements of Toronto's urban nature, like the Don River's golf courses and walking trails, exclude some groups of people, such as women, the elderly, or the young, while others are more welcoming? In posing these questions, I refuse to draw a distinction between a city's human population and the natural world that it is embedded in. A city is always more than the sum of its people even if cultural perceptions of an urban space tend to obviate this equation.

In this chapter, I do not want to talk about national belonging even though Toronto is often taken as a metonym for Canada itself. I want to resist such a move as

⁸⁴ See Gene Desfor and Jennefer Laidley's *Reshaping Toronto's Waterfront* and Christina Palassio and Wayne Reeves' *HTO* for two recent discussions of how water fits into Toronto's cityscape.

Toronto in no way represents all of Canada, not just because Canada itself is a multi-faceted and incredibly diverse place and, as such, Toronto cannot possibly bear witness to all of this diversity. But such a move also re-instills a colonial sense that Toronto is the metropole to which the rest of Canada is a periphery. Instead, I focus on belonging to and in Toronto on a much smaller scale: on the level of local place and community. How can we find ways of belonging to Canada's most populated urban place? And what is the relation between the neighbourhoods Torontonians live in and those they don't, but which are connected to the city's economy and form a crucial part of the city's social fabric?

Even here the question of defining what makes up the community of Toronto is increasingly difficult. How can we define Toronto, particularly in the wake of the 1998 Metropolitan amalgamation when six municipalities making up and surrounding the city – Metropolitan Toronto-East York, Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, York, and the former city of Toronto – were merged together into a single municipality called the City of Toronto? These changing political lines raise the question of what, precisely, a Torontonian belongs to. Does a former resident of Etobicoke now become, by an act of political line-drawing, a denizen of Toronto? What about residents who live in one of Toronto's many suburbs including Richmond Hill, Vaughan, or Markham? Or what of those people who live in politically separate cities like Mississauga, Brampton, or Pickering, but whose built environments are integrated with the City of Toronto? The growth of the suburbs after World War II in North America and the emergence of the

exurbs as a spatial phenomenon all trouble common definitions of the urban.⁸⁵ In order to address the relation between a downtown and its suburbs, I take up two suburban texts, asking questions about belonging, identity, and environment.

Moving to a smaller scale, a people's sense of community, of ecological place, is going to be defined by their everyday life, their family ties, their leisure habits, and their labour which may or may not force them to commute to another place. In a sense, belonging also relates to one's neighbourhood. Toronto's neighbourhoods are important to the city, with *Toronto Star* journalist Christopher Hume recently writing that "the neighbourhood sits at the heart of what it means to be a Torontonion" (A10). The issue of neighbourhoods has also inspired a collaborative report called *The Three Cities Within Toronto* headed up by urban planner J. David Hulchanski. Such work illustrates how neighbourhood identity is a key part of what makes up belonging in Toronto. Yet I do not want to confine belonging to a single neighbourhood; instead in the remainder of this chapter I read texts from across Toronto's landscape. When I refer to Toronto as a community I am referring not only to the city as a whole, but to the smaller local world that each character inhabits, a world that is partial and constantly changing.

Part of what drives this chapter is a sense that if we want to seek ecological justice, we must also pursue social justice and vice versa. Too often, North American forms of environmentalism have, in their pursuit of a certain view of nature and its uses, trampled on the well-being of others. In American environmental discourse, there has

⁸⁵ There is a rich and diverse body of scholarship on the suburbs and the exurbs. Insightful works include Robert Fishman's *Bourgeois Utopias*, Andres Duany et al's *Suburban Nation*, Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, and Richard Harris's *Creeping Conformity*. Toronto-specific works include John Sewell's *The Shape of the Suburbs*, Julie-Anne Boudreau et al's *Changing Toronto*, and Harris's *Unplanned Suburbs*.

been a lively if not divisive debate between mainstream environmental organizations and proponents of environmental justice over issues of representation, voice, class, race, and gender. In 1990, the Gulf Coast Tenant Leadership Development Project sent a letter to the ten largest national environmental organizations “accusing them of ignorance, ambivalence, and complicity with environmental exploitation of communities of color within United States and abroad ... fail[ing] ... to take into account the ramifications of their agenda for ‘working people in general and people of color in particular’” (qtd. in Pezzullo and Sandler 4). While these critical words incensed a large portion of the environmental community, provoking both defiant responses and acknowledgement with a commitment to reviewing practices, they point to a key problem in environmentalism itself: the question of voice. Whose environmental issues are represented? Whose voices are heard in environmental debate? Unfortunately, the working class, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized populations have all too often been forced to the outskirts of environmental discourse by the privileged few in the centre. The fact that most of Ontario’s provincial parks are located outside of urban areas necessitates ownership of an automobile or, at the least, access to one in order to enjoy the benefits of these spaces.⁸⁶ By default, then, barriers exist for access to these spaces while money spent on them by different levels of government is money not spent on pollution control, on clean-up of toxic spills and dumps, often in low-income and/or racialized neighbourhoods, or on the lack of access to green space in high-density areas. Moreover, Indigenous peoples have often been removed from their lands during the creation of these parks, as occurred in the

⁸⁶ One reversal of this trend is the work currently being done to transform Rouge Park, an urban wilderness park between Scarborough and Pickering, into a national park. See Bruce Kirkby for an insightful overview.

creation of Rocky Mountain National Park in Banff with the Stoney Indians who had lived there or the more recent creation of Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba by removing the Keeseekoowening First Nation and continuing to prevent them from using their traditional hunting grounds (Kopas 8). In light of these neo-colonial injustices, many of which are still far from being resolved, environmentalism needs to be aware of and attuned to potential and actual social injustices connected to its work. This chapter attempts to listen to the critique raised by the environmental justice movement. By taking up texts that deal with marginalized voices, marginalized peoples, and marginalized spaces, I hope to create a more environmentally just vision of Toronto's urban nature.

The texts that I take up in this chapter are somewhat eclectic and in no way represent a "canon" of Toronto literature. Whereas Hamilton and Windsor's literary archives are limited by their smaller population size, relative lack of local venues and avenues for publication, readings, workshopping, and mentoring, Toronto has no such problem. All of Canada's major publishers have offices in Toronto while smaller literary publishers like Coach House Books, House of Anansi Press, The South Asian Review (TSAR), ECW Press, and BookThug are all based in the city. In many ways, Toronto has been regarded as the centre of Canadian literature in English, particularly since the late 1960s and early 1970s when Dennis Lee, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Robertson Davies, Northrop Frye and others played key roles in the establishment of Canadian literature as a distinct field of literary studies.⁸⁷ Toronto has a very large literary archive

⁸⁷ Montreal and Vancouver could make legitimate counter-claims to this title, particularly in the case of French-Canadian writing. However, Toronto's centrality to Canada's cultural economy in the twentieth century means that it has been more broadly influential even if these other cities have begun to match Toronto's cultural cachet.

that reaches right back to the earliest moments of Canada as a colony with representative texts and authors from each “period” of Canadian literature. Harris’s *Imagining Toronto* presents valuable work in the archiving and exploration of the themes that Toronto’s literature presents. Rather than only writing about what some see as the canonical texts of Toronto – any of Atwood’s Toronto novels, Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*, or Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces* – I take up lesser-known works of the city that explore the margins of belonging in productive ways.⁸⁸ Doing so provides spaces for these other voices to speak to a sense of belonging in Toronto. Yet, in order to do justice to the richness of Toronto’s literature, I signal parallel or alternative works throughout.

Historical Contexts for Reading Toronto

The building of Toronto was made possible through two key events: the War of 1812 and the building of continental railways. Although Indigenous peoples including the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and others periodically moved through the area, it was the Mississauga peoples of the Anishinaabe and the Seneca, one of the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee, who lived in the area when European settler-invaders arrived. A succession of French forts in the area during the eighteenth century tried to take advantage of Toronto’s excellent harbour and trade with the local Indigenous peoples.⁸⁹ However, it was not until the threat of American invasion in the War of 1812 that any kind of permanent European community was established. Governor-General John Simcoe

⁸⁸ Amy Lavender Harris lists the “Toronto Canon” as Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*, Davies’ *Rebel Angels*, Timothy Findley’s *Headhunter*, Hugh Garner’s *Cabbagetown*, Dennis Lee’s *Civil Elegies*, Gwendolyn MacEwen’s *Noman’s Land*, Michaels’ *Fugitive Pieces*, bpNichol’s *The Martyrology Book V*, Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*, and Josef Skvorecky’s *The Engineer of Human Souls* (“100 Toronto Books”).

⁸⁹ See Jon Johnson’s “The Indigenous Environmental History of Toronto” and Frances Sanderson and Heather Howard-Bobiwash’s *The Meeting Place* for more information on indigenous history in the area.

and his wife Lady Elizabeth set up their permanent base of operations in York, the original name for Toronto, because of its location on the lake and its harbour. Simcoe's initial preference for London as a permanent capital was not well-liked by Upper Canada's aristocracy, so Toronto was chosen as a temporary capital (Armstrong 28). The easily navigable waters and the protection afforded to the harbour by the L-shaped sand spit of what has now become the Toronto Islands allowed the colonial capital to move ahead of Hamilton and other rival Upper Canadian cities following the War of 1812.

However, it was the railway that dramatically transformed Toronto's landscape in the 1850s, allowing it to take advantage of a very large hinterland. Unlike Hamilton, whose proximity to the American border presented a potential threat during the nineteenth century and which could claim only a relatively small region encompassed by the Niagara peninsula, all of the regions north, west, and east of Toronto could be claimed by its railroad network. Through these networks, Toronto began "the wholesaling of goods – ranging from dry goods, hardware and liquor to books, stationery, china, and other finer items – [which] served a growing hinterland" (Jay Young 21). Moreover, the wholesaling industry influenced the establishment of several banks and insurance companies in the city, aided by English political forces intent on rivalling Montreal and French Canada's growing economic hegemony (21-22). This combination of manufacturing and financial institutions helped to seal Toronto's centrality in Upper Canada. In spite of losing the national parliament to Ottawa in 1865, the city's fortunes continued to rise.

Firmly entrenched in Imperial Loyalty, the city was a bastion of English Victorian ideals, sending large contingents of troops to support the British in the Boer

War, World War I and II. It also built so many churches that it became known as “the city of churches” while it outlawed gambling and drinking until well into the twentieth century. For its Victorian morality, Toronto also became affectionately and ironically known as “Toronto the Good.” Germaine Warkentin describes the cultural landscape of the city: “The city was laid out by and for gentlemen, and the early dominance of the Family Compact ensured that things stayed that way. For more than a hundred years, between the 1830s and the 1950s, Toronto was dominated by a powerful and unimaginative commercial class whose public discourse was Tory and Imperialist” (14). After a catastrophic fire in 1904, Toronto built upwards with brick and steel office and bank buildings while railways and port industries continued to dominate the waterfront.

Following World War II, Toronto’s physical and cultural landscape underwent a sea-change. With the increasing waves of immigration from Europe and elsewhere, Toronto became, seemingly by accident rather than design, an increasingly diverse city with a variety of ethnic enclaves challenging British hegemony. Moreover, the automobile allowed the city to expand its physical boundaries much farther, with numerous suburban communities arising before their eventual annexation at the end of the century into the city of Toronto. Downtown Toronto continued to climb upwards as office towers like the Toronto–Dominion Centre and the Bank of Montreal’s First Canadian Place were built while Viljo Revell’s avant-garde City Hall was constructed in 1966. If Toronto had thought of itself as a colonial capital, inferior to the great imperial capitals of London and Paris, in the 1960s it began to see itself as a world city in its own right. This change was linked to the city’s growing acceptance of its own diversity, but also to

Canada's own emergence on the global political and economic map post-World War II. This growing sense of self-confidence and importance is best symbolized by the construction of the CN Tower in 1976. The Tower is probably the most easily identifiable visual symbol of the city and, as Harris writes, "for a generation it was the tallest tower in the world and is still viewed as a symbol of technological and architectural ascendancy" (108). It continues to occupy an important position in the city's physical and cultural landscape, symbolizing Toronto's rise from a colonial capital into a global metropolis.

Toronto today is not the wilderness backwater that the Simcoes first encountered nor is it the colonial capital of industry and finance it became a century after they arrived. The landscape has been greatly altered from a marshy, sloping former lakebed into a sprawling concrete, steel and brick city, a fabric interrupted by two major river valleys and several creek beds. It is Canada's largest city set in the fifth largest metropolitan area in North America. Environmentally speaking, the city faces a number of significant problems including the heavy reliance on automobiles for transportation and the urban gridlock that accompanies it, vulnerability to extreme weather due to aging infrastructure and a lack of adequate funds to respond to crises, and a strong tendency to continue sprawling outwards as housing prices climb in the core and the desire for single family, detached homes stays strong. However, as Harris suggests in my epigraph, Toronto's size also means that it has a wide range of histories, stories and identities.⁹⁰ In providing this history, I do not intend to write the definitive account of the city, but instead to flesh out

⁹⁰ For more on the history of Toronto, see Frederick H. Armstrong's *Toronto: The Place of Meeting*, J.M.S. Careless's *Toronto to 1918*, and James Lemon's *Toronto Since 1918*. Derek Hayes' *Historical Atlas of Toronto* offers a visual record of Toronto in maps, Robert Fulford's *Accidental Toronto* gives an anecdotal history of the city's transformation into a global city, and Edward Keenan's *Some Great Idea* engages with Toronto's most recent history and the various political scandals that have enveloped Mayor Rob Ford.

the necessary context the works that follow draw on for their meaning.

Finding Place in the Suburbs: *The Torontonians* and “Shale”

Following World War II, Toronto experienced an unprecedented level of growth both in terms of population and physical size. Most of the physical growth has been outwards in the form of suburbs that sprawled away from the lake in large-scale developments centred on clusters of single-family homes, strip mall shopping centres, and roadways linking these developments to the city. In *Suburban Nation*, urban planners Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck write that “suburban sprawl, now the standard North American pattern of growth ... is an invention, conceived by architects, engineers, and planners, and promoted by developers in the great *sweeping aside of the old* that occurred after the Second World War” (emphasis in original 4). Although their seminal book centres on the United States, the growth of suburbs in Canada largely followed the American model. So much so that most of Toronto’s new growth happens in the suburban regions rather than in the city’s core. However, Toronto’s suburbs are not typically considered a “core” or “key” part of Toronto. Politically speaking, they have been a marginal force in municipal politics until the successful 2010 mayoral bid by Rob Ford, a victory carried primarily by suburban voters. Toronto geographer Edward Relph also notes this tendency when he writes “most tourist guides, goggle books, and indeed academic accounts of cities, are spatially prejudiced – they emphasize downtown and ignore the rest ... the heart of a city easily becomes a giant lobster pot; once caught in its concentrated attractions and familiar landscapes of accidental tourism, it is difficult to

escape” (7). Relph certainly poses the question of why Toronto’s suburbs have been so ignored in political and cultural discourses, despite being home for large portions of Toronto’s population. Further, Toronto’s culture is often seen as based in the downtown core rather than the suburbs, which are derided as homogenous, monolithic, philistine, and blasé. Of Harris’s ten canonical Toronto books, only Atwood’s *The Edible Woman* might reasonably be said to engage with suburbia in any manner. The relatively recent growth of the suburbs might explain part of this, yet it certainly seems striking that Toronto literature tends to excise the suburbs or push them to the margins.

However, this situation cannot hold much longer because the suburbs are part of the city’s future. Recently, Sean Hertel and Roger Keil, two Toronto academics, issued a call to arms in a *Toronto Star* op-ed piece where they declared “Toronto’s suburbs are our urban future.” The suburbs are an essential part of Toronto’s urban fabric, and to ignore them, as has been done in the past, is to overlook a key part of the city. Moreover, environmentally speaking, the suburbs represent a major challenge, as the large amount of land needed for low-density development, concentrations of industry and commerce into pockets, and the dependence on cars are all having a major impact. Hertel and Keil’s op-ed piece is an introduction to a multi-year, multiple-site, collaborative, global investigation of suburban landscapes.⁹¹ In their roundtable report, they write

Hear the word “suburb” and you already know the rest: sprawl, drive everywhere, sameness, consumer culture, boring, etc. This is the prevailing view – as if somehow time was still frozen in 1950s Leave-it-to-Beaver land – despite mounting evidence to the contrary. While the suburbs today have become as different from their 1950s versions as the Cleaver household was from the city at

⁹¹ A good introduction to their work and to Toronto’s suburban contexts can be found in their *The Greater Toronto Suburban Working Group: Roundtable Report*.

that time, our stereotypical view of these places has not evolved in the same way.

In short, the suburbs have grown up and moved on but how we think about them has not. (2)

They point to a cultural ignorance of suburbia, an ignorance that is convenient for the artists, cultural producers, and publishers who reside downtown. In order to correct this cultural gap, I take up two suburban texts, Young's *The Torontonians* and Sileika's "Shale," and read them as stories of Toronto while also paying attention to the way they define their respective suburban identities in opposition to the city.⁹² I also look at how suburban Toronto extends or disavows belonging in a social and ecological sense. In Young's novel, Karen Whitney and her husband Rick move into Rowanwood before it becomes a suburb, but soon find themselves disillusioned by the social conformity of their neighbours. By novel's end, they choose to move back into Toronto's downtown core, rejecting the homogeneity and materialism of their suburb. Young's critique of Rowanwood opens up a space to think about suburbs and their relation to place. In Sileika's story, two young boys meet an attractive young girl and her quirky father while trying to follow a homeless man living in the Humber River valley. While the class lines between the boys' Lithuanian family and the wealthy Lots are initially solid, they become much more porous in the Hurricane Hazel disaster that ensues.⁹³ I hope to illustrate how Toronto's suburban literature does not simply follow the clichéd narrative of suburbia,

⁹² In using the term suburbs, I run the risk of homogenizing what is a complicated landscape as not all suburban towns were designed similarly. Don Mills, for instance, was a planned community adapting Garden City ideals while the much-maligned Scarborough started as a working-class white suburb but has since become one of the most ethnically diverse areas of Toronto. See Mary Soderstrom's *The Walkable City*, 97-107, 126-35, and John Bentley Mays's *The Emerald City*, 153-72, for more on these suburbs.

⁹³ Hurricane Hazel has almost become a Toronto literary trope with a number of different works reflecting on its damage including Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*, Mark Sinnett's *The Carnivore*, Atwood's short story "Hurricane Hazel," and two children's stories: Steve Pitt's *Rain Tonight* and Eric Walters's *Safe as Houses*.

but instead offers productive moments to consider ecological belonging in the city.

The Torontonians was published in 1960 to immediate Canadian and international acclaim. Nathalie Cooke and Suzanne Morton point out that, for many, Young's novel was "Canada's answer to Grace Metalious, American author of the 1956 blockbuster *Peyton Place*" (xxii). In 1962, Donald Goudy wrote in *Star Weekly Magazine* that Young is "snugly and securely settled in as Canada's bestselling woman novelist" (qtd. in Cooke and Morton xxii). Part of the reason for Young's success was her willingness to dig into the habits and contradictions of the suburban world of Rowanwood. But what is also important is that Young aimed her novel at a female readership: women who read *Chatelaine*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and *Good Housekeeper*, the very magazines that Karen, the novel's protagonist, critiques. In Robert Fulford's review of the book, he dismisses it by calling it "an altogether unimpressive example of romantic commercial fiction. It has all the up-to-date touches, including the most fashionable sort of anxiety, but at heart it is strictly from *Ladies Home Journal*" ("Lament for a Dead Toronto" 18).⁹⁴ Although Fulford's criticism seems intended to damn the novel to obscurity, he unintentionally points out the growing power of a middle-class female readership who shares the same suburban world as Karen. Cooke and Morton point out that *Chatelaine*, the magazine in which a condensed version of the novel appeared in three instalments in 1960, also "explored the very issues at the heart of Young's novel – the roles and choices

⁹⁴ Anti-suburbanism sometimes has a current of misogyny in it as the suburbs are often characterised as feminine. Susan Saegart writes "women and suburbs share domesticity, repose, closeness to nature, lack of seriousness, mindlessness, and safety" before critiquing how this association "perpetuates inequalities" (S97). See also Judy Giles' *The Parlour and the Suburb* for a discussion of the misogynistic British reaction against suburbs post-World War I (38-47) and Susan Hanson and Geraldine Pratt's *Gender, Work, and Space* for a detailed discussion of the gendered geographies of the suburb and the city (89-148).

available for women in a changing world and the possibilities and anxieties caused by change” (xxv). Although *The Torontonians* lays out a strong critique of the tension between the male workplace and female domesticity in 1950s Toronto, I am more interested in its representation of the suburbs and their relationship to Toronto.⁹⁵

In her Author’s Note, Young addresses the fictional nature of her narrative. She writes that the characters and events in the novel are “wholly the product of imagination” (4). She goes on to clarify that “the residential suburb, Rowanwood, does not exist and has not existed” (4). However, she also writes that her usage of certain Toronto landmarks and icons is intended as “an outer framework of fact for an inner core of fiction” (4). In this statement, Young attempts to set up a high level of verisimilitude for her novel of Toronto manners. She wants to prevent readers from tracing a direct correlation between the novel and her own social circle, protecting her own family and group of friends. Yet she also insists that the issues she addresses are true to the city itself. There is a tension, then, between a novel about a fictional suburb and Toronto in the 1950s. Rowanwood’s fictional status means that we can read the novel as a cultural critique of Toronto’s suburbs even if it is not specific to any one place. In doing this, I follow American literary critic Robert Beuka’s argument that “suburban landscape ... stands as the material counterpart to specific drives and tendencies in American culture apparent from the postwar years onward” (2). So although Young’s critique of Rowanwood is on one level a critique of nowhere, it also reveals the cultural anxieties and practices that deeply

⁹⁵ Amy Lavender Harris writes that “Young’s subversive proto-feminist novel may be seen as a direct precursor to Margaret Atwood’s 1969 novel, *The Edible Woman*, which invokes startlingly similar landscapes and social conditions and whose female protagonist finds equally idiosyncratic solutions to her sense of social confinement” (30). The social critique in *The Torontonians* also links well with Atwood’s later novel, *Cat’s Eye*, which features a female artist revisiting her suburban childhood in Toronto.

informed suburban Toronto's development after World War II. While there is a danger that such a reading homogenizes all suburbs into Rowanwood without paying attention to the different ways that Toronto's suburbs historically emerged, I believe *The Torontonians* opens up a space to think about suburbs and ecological belonging.

Karen and Rick decide to move to the suburbs because they are unhappy with their cramped apartment in Toronto's downtown but also because of Rowanwood's beauty. When they first see their future home, it was still an "untouched pocket of land" along one of Toronto's "wide-spread tracery of ravines" (65). Karen delights in the "large windows [that] looked out toward pine trees, open fields, and the ravine where she could see a corner of Susan and Lewis's house" (70). The view provides both natural scenery and the reassurance that Susan, Karen's best friend, is only a few minutes away in this isolated area of Toronto. Part of their attraction to the house comes from the sense that the natural world is much closer here than in their downtown apartment. The ravine and pines convey a pastoral sense of a natural world that has not been spoiled by human action yet. Later in the novel, Karen escapes her summer barbeque into her backyard and thinks: "under the pines it was almost cool, and so secluded that you could, without too much difficulty, pretend you were anywhere. You did not have to remember that you were in Rowanwood" (110). Karen here sums up one of the appeals of suburban housing: possessing a backyard can convey a sense of space and freedom that a cramped apartment or downtown condominium simply cannot. Whether in the form of a front lawn, backyard, or proximity to Toronto's ravines, suburban housing offers a privatized and individual experience of the natural world, even if that "natural" experience feels artificial

or constrained.⁹⁶ In doing this, she also points to a tension between her desire to be in contact with the natural world and her desire that this experience be exclusive to her and Rick. The large houses which are built around hers infringe on her ability to experience the pines. This privatized and individual experience of nature runs counter to the interdependency that ecological thinking demands.

However, *The Torontonians* also critiques the sense that the suburbs are somehow more natural than the city. Early on, Karen looks at her house and thinks she is “caught in a gilt-edged suburban labyrinth from which [she] can see no satisfactory avenue of escape” (13). What appears to be a more rural or idyllic lifestyle is actually deeply rooted in economic and social capital. She illustrates this with her observations of other houses:

All the gardens in Rowanwood were large. Theirs was no exception. Everybody was always saying that if you lived in Rowanwood it was just like living in the country, which was, of course, quite untrue. It was not like living downtown, but neither was it a damn bit like living in the country. Which was sad, because it really had been the country when she and Rick had bought an old, dignified brick farmhouse with no intention at the time of turning it into a show place. (13)

One’s property becomes an avenue for conspicuous consumption with large gardens, carefully manicured lawns, and spacious bungalow style houses, all signalling the owners’ wealth. While reflecting on how the neighbours have resisted the paving of Rowanwood’s streets because they feel it maintains “the country-in-the-city atmosphere,” she also thinks this desire is just as much about resisting “the resultant increase in county revenue” (25). In the novel’s final scene, Karen rejects the suburbs and tells her husband

⁹⁶ Suburban housing is also deeply tied to the desire to own property, a key stepping stone in gaining access to middle-class stability for immigrants and working-class families. This desire may be more important than any sense of possessing a privatized experience of the natural world in these cases. However, for the more affluent classes, like Karen and Rick, the desire for the “country” seems to be more important. See Harris’s *Creeping Conformity* 24 -33 for more on the immigrant and working class desire for property.

that Rowanwood is “a dead end where, in time, I think I would go out of my mind. It isn’t the city, and it isn’t the country. I don’t know how to describe it other than to say that it’s an impossible compromise between the two, and totally lacking in the best features of either” (318). Although Karen’s binary of country and city is problematic in its own right, her critique of Rowanwood’s attempt to be both rural and urban is well founded. Moreover, her sense that the suburbs are just as much about displaying wealth as about living closer to a carefully manicured nature also works to debunk the idea that the suburbs are a more natural place. She recognizes that the image of Rowanwood is manufactured by its inhabitants rather than being rooted in the place itself.⁹⁷

By choosing to move to the suburbs, Karen and Rick follow a familiar middle-class path away from Toronto’s crowded downtown core and into the upwardly mobile peripheries of the city. The problem with their Gavin Street apartment, which is closer to Rick’s work, is that it is located amidst Toronto’s poor and immigrant populations, meaning that Rick’s social capital has a ceiling whether he likes it or not. Karen explains:

Toronto, unlike New York and Chicago, had been slow in accepting the concept of downtown apartment houses, and in general Torontonians had yet to get used to the idea ... In Toronto, if you were stable, you lived in a house. Your Dun and Bradstreet rating was helped considerably if you owned a house, even if, as was usually the case, the mortgage company could put forward a much better claim to stability in this context. (116)

Social ideas about acceptable forms of housing influence not just others’ opinions but one’s credit rating. Young further emphasises this point by having Rick promoted to an executive position in part as a result of his shrewd money management (77). At the same

⁹⁷ In this sense, the old farmhouse that Rick and Karen purchase is an uncanny reminder of the area’s original use as farmland, or what might truly qualify as rural space. However, the fact that it is empty when they buy it already signals the encroachment of urban space into the area.

time, Young is anxious to debunk the idea that this is social climbing. Karen reflects that

It was blind luck, rather than financial acumen, that led them to make one of the shrewdest real-estate deals of that year. For, although neither they nor anyone else guessed it at the time, they had bought a house and property that was to double its value within the year, and more than quintuple it in the succeeding ten years, during which Rowanwood became one of the wealthiest and most exclusive communities in the metropolitan area. (72)

What was a decision to move into a more rural area turns out to also be a slick maneuver upwards in Rick's business world, demonstrating real estate acuity by making the Whitneys a very large profit on their home. Here, Young critiques the world of big business on Bay Street where owning a home is not so much about finding a place to live well as turning a house into an investment venture. Read this way, the Whitneys' eventual decision to move back downtown completes the critique of Toronto's upper middle classes. It is important to remember that Young's novel was first published in 1960 so that this critique is part of an initial backlash against suburban developments in North America.⁹⁸ Yet there is a tension in the novel in that this investment allows Rick to move upwards in the company and achieve a stability which, in turn, allows them to move back into the city. Young criticizes the social structures of Toronto's business world in the 1950s, but is caught in terms of narrative plausibility by needing Rick to have enough stability to move back to the downtown without being seen as eccentric or lacking "money-consciousness." Karen and Rick hope to achieve belonging in Rick's affluent business world and purchase their home in Rowanwood, in part, to achieve this.

While it is tempting to dismiss Karen and Rick as simply following the plot of the

⁹⁸ In sociology, such works include David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), while novels like John C. Keats's *The Crack in the Picture Window* (1956) and Richard Yates' *Revolutionary Road* (1961) laid out strong critiques of suburbia.

upwardly mobile middle class, they do demonstrate a different kind of sensibility in the choices they make about their home. Faced with social pressure over their unruly twitchgrass lawn, the couple come up with an innovative plan to transform the hard clay into a verdant green without spending too much money. While washing dishes, Karen remembers hearing about buckwheat's ability to transform marginal soil into nutrient-rich planting material. A seed salesman warns her that it will involve a fair amount of labour but also admits "though he wouldn't want to be quoted on this, he personally was still a little dubious about the chemicals. There had been a good deal of talk about the possibility that they might, in the long run, upset Nature's Cycle. Personally, he did not think a lawn was a sufficient justification for this" (78). A buckwheat lawn becomes, in Karen's mind, a convenient way around having to purchase sod and fertilize it with chemicals. But it also poses a more environmentally friendly way of producing healthy topsoil. Karen and Rick decide to go this route, despite strong criticism from their neighbours, and end up making their soil grass friendly. Once they re-seed their lawn with grass, "it was, beyond a shadow of doubt, the best lawn in Rowanwood" (86). While we might question the actual ability of buckwheat to so rapidly transform clay into friable topsoil, the Whitneys' decision does pose an imaginative alternative to suburban landscaping practices by challenging their restrictive codes. Young emphasizes this point by satirizing the vanity of several neighbours who tore up "perfectly good lawns ... to be replaced by buckwheat lawns, because, as the people who did this explained to other people, there's nothing like a buckwheat lawn" (86). Karen's neighbours demonstrate a distinct lack of ecological knowledge in misreading the purpose of a buckwheat lawn

compared to Karen's ability to transform her yard into a lush green.

However, the buckwheat also presents an interesting comment on the landscaping practices of suburbia. During a heat spell, all of the lawns in Rowanwood are "sere and yellow" while their owners are forced to illegally use their sprinklers at night, joking that they "had to wash the baby in Haig and Haig" while still "set[ting] out their sprinklers as usual" (83). This comment shows not just how far the inhabitants of Rowanwood will go to preserve their lawn, even using Haig and Haig scotch as bathwater so they can have water for their lawn, but also demonstrates an ecological naiveté. The obsession with a manicured lawn of imported species of turfgrass like ryegrass, crabgrass, or bluegrass comes at the cost of radically altering an area's local ecosystem and requires the owners to maintain it artificially with fertilizer and herbicide chemicals. In a 2011 piece on lawns, American news magazine *The Week* reported that "lawn care is a \$40-billion-a-year industry in the U.S ... we use 90 million pounds of fertilizer and 78 million pounds of pesticides annually just to keep lawns thriving, bright green, and bug-free. Lawns also consume massive amounts of water – more than U.S. farmers use to grow wheat, or corn, or any other agricultural crop" ("Blades of Glory"). Clearly, suburban lawns are a major environmental problem.⁹⁹ They require large amounts of toxic chemicals which end up in local watersheds along with large amounts of now-contaminated clean water. Food activist and environmental writer Michael Pollan sums up the problem in a *New York Times Magazine* essay where he writes that "lately we have begun to recognize that we

⁹⁹ See Ted Steinberg's *American Green* and Virginia Scott Jenkins' *The Lawn* for histories of the North American obsession with lawns and F. Herbert Bormann et al's *Redesigning the American Lawn* for an attempt to craft more environmentally friendly solutions to the lawn.

are poisoning ourselves with our lawns” (“Why Mow?”). Although Karen and Rick end up planting turfgrass, *The Torontonians* implicitly critiques the use of these grasses for lawns. Karen and Rick are pressured into putting in an “acceptable” lawn, where before they were perfectly content to let the twitch grass surround the house. Karen even comments to Rick that “It’s heaven not to have to bother with a lawn ... Just one of the wonderful things about living here” (74). Karen’s critique of lawn care opens up a space to explore the way that we landscape our homes has an impact on the natural world. She is clearly unhappy with how social censure permeates so many parts of her life. In this longing to be free from social strictures, Karen also suggests an environmental critique of Rowanwood and its gas-powered lawn tools in sheds full of chemicals.¹⁰⁰ This kind of questioning invites readers to ask how suburban places fit into their ecological locations; in Rowanwood’s obsession with lawn-care, we see evidence of not fitting into place while the buckwheat lawn suggests a more appropriate way of belonging to suburban space.

In moving back to Toronto’s denser downtown, Karen and Rick reject the homogeneity and conformity of Rowanwood. As Karen walks along Yonge Street, she finds herself “amongst a stream of people, half of whom Millicent would probably have called foreigners in spite of her present preoccupation with New Canadians, Karen thought, I’ve missed this more than I knew. This vivid turbulence that, while denying homogeneity, nevertheless contrives a cohesiveness to which I can attach myself without loss of personal identity” (312). Karen finds the heterogeneity of Yonge Street a welcome

¹⁰⁰ The novel also consistently critiques forms of consumerism which demand an unceasing acquisition of goods to demonstrate affluence, particularly because it causes families to live beyond their means. This critique resonates with environmentalism’s sense that the West is living far beyond its ecological means, setting up the potential for a widespread systemic collapse.

relief from the strict social requirements of living in Rowanwood, also feeling a deeper sense of belonging than she had in the suburbs. She takes joy in the streams of newcomers that became more visible in Toronto following World War II as immigration restrictions were lifted. Taking Toronto's downtown as its own ecosystem, Karen revels in the diversity on display even if she mourns the lost connection to nature she had in Rowanwood. She is thrilled by the potential to join this diverse crowd in which "foreigners" and suburbanites can equally claim belonging unlike in Rowanwood.¹⁰¹

While the novel remains silent about race in Rowanwood, it does consistently point out how the presence of Mrs. Johnson, a single working-class mother whose house is falling apart, is a source of embarrassment and social censure to the community. These exclusionary social practices put up barriers to social belonging for anyone who does not fit within a prescribed set of economic and racial characteristics. The Whitneys' rejection of this exclusive mode of living shifts them towards a more inclusive sense of belonging.

While Karen condemns Rowanwood and abandons it for downtown, contemporary residents of Toronto do not have the same choice. Housing prices in the downtown core have sky-rocketed in a wave of re-gentrification, so that the goal of owning a home close to one's work can be impossible. Moreover, I do not believe that it would be beneficial to bulldoze the suburbs to create more dense and diversified living spaces. The mixed track record of planned large-scale developments and the long-term viability of ideal communities like Garden Cities or Britain's New Towns should serve as

¹⁰¹ Although Toronto has not really experienced white flight as have American cities as Amy Cole et al point out, it has been a consistent problem for many suburban areas in North America (285). At the same time, different ethnicities also began to concentrate in specific suburban areas, forming "ethnoburbs" so that a softer form of racial and ethnic segregation does exist in Toronto's suburban landscape.

a warning against rash and sweeping decisions. Part of what makes each city unique is its own particular ever-changing physical fabric. At the same time, using radical ideas like Ebenezer Howard's Garden City plan might help to refocus discussions of the suburbs towards quality of life, connection with the natural world, and the importance of community.¹⁰² Karen offers an apt metaphor of the city:

Whichever route you chose in order to get out of the city, you saw the same kind of thing. You saw the untidy, exploratory tendrils of a vine that, in this stage of its development, had none of the powerful beauty that distinguished its tap root. You saw excrescences which seemed to bear no relationship to the clean, tall shafts of steel and concrete that constituted the heart of this steady outward growth. (248-49)

Viewing Toronto as a vine, Karen conceptualizes the suburbs as the farthest reaches of this plant. These edges do not have the strength or vitality of the tap root/core, but they are connected to the city regardless. What is essential to Karen's metaphor is that you cannot simply cut off the tips of the vine. They must, instead, be given time to develop and flourish. Although the skyscrapers that Karen idealizes may not be the final goal that an environmentally friendly vision of urban planning might suggest, the emphasis on growth creates a more pragmatic way of interacting with nature in the city.

In questioning and satirizing the middle-class foibles of suburban Rowanwood, Young opens up a space for readers to ask important questions such as how can the suburbs become more inclusive for people and more-than-human beings? How can their structures be altered so that their human inhabitants can feel more belonging to the physical location that each suburb is embedded in? This question, in particular, is

¹⁰² Although Canada has no communities planned solely on Garden City or New Town principles, elements of these were used to design several Ontario communities including Don Mills. For a discussion of what Garden City planning might offer North American suburbs, see Robert Fishman's "The Garden City Tradition in the Post-Suburban Age."

important because, as Richard Harris notes, while “home ownership ... provides an incentive for social segregation,” it also “encourages a commitment to local issues” given the amount of work and resources necessary to obtaining a home for middle-class families (*Creeping Conformity* 36). This kind of local commitment can be a boon for progressive environmentally friendly urban change, for as Harris goes on to say, “home ownership, then, has helped to focus political energies close to home, where typically they have chosen to resist change” (37). On the one hand, the suburbs can create the kind of exclusive segregated community that Rowanwood is, but they might also become a place where belonging is extended to all, and residents, like those around the Oak Ridges Moraine, fight for their local green spaces (37).¹⁰³ Although the Whitneys reject the suburbs, we do not have to follow their path even as we utilize their critique as a method of addressing existing problems in the suburbs.¹⁰⁴

If *The Torontonians* critiques the suburbs, then Sileika’s “Shale” presents a more positive portrayal of them. “Shale” is part of a series of linked short stories in *Buying on Time* about a Lithuanian family growing up in Weston, a suburb of Toronto across the Humber River from the wealthy suburb of Etobicoke. Weston was an important manufacturing town throughout the nineteenth century, with the Humber River being a major resource for local industry. In 1967, Weston became a part of the Borough of York before being amalgamated along with York into the city of Toronto in 1998. As with Young’s Rowanwood, life in Weston revolves around single-family homes, the

¹⁰³ See L. Anders Sandberg, Gerda R. Wekerle, and Liette Gilbert’s *The Oak Ridges Moraine* for an environmental history of the region and an engaging discussion of the area’s future potential.

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, Young herself did not wholeheartedly embrace downtown Toronto as her daughter Valerie Argue says: “the Youngs lived in a variety of apartments and houses (both urban and suburban), eventually retiring to their country dream home near the town of Orillia, Ontario” (viii).

automobile and the politics of life in a residential suburb. However, unlike Rowanwood, the suburb that Dave, the protagonist for many of the stories, grows up in is much more mixed in terms of income, class, and ethnicity.¹⁰⁵ His own family's Lithuanian background stands in marked contrast to the English Taylors who live across the street and are suspicious of the Old Man, the term Dave and Gerry use for their father, and his strange ways. Part of this suspicion is linked to the fact that Dave's family moves into their house when only the foundation and basement walls have been poured, living for a period "like foxes" as Dave's father says (10). More of the house is added as money becomes available until it is completed. They are not alone in this as many of the houses in Weston are built this way by immigrants or displaced persons. Where the white Anglo-Saxons of *The Torontonians* seem oblivious to the landscape in which they live, Gerry and Dave are acutely aware of the place where they live, in the sense of both its physical and its cultural landscape. When "Shale" takes place, the Old Man has finished building his house and the family has the appearance of fitting into the middle-class suburb, although the Old Man's seasonal work as a carpenter does pose some threat to their stability. I argue that this short story narrates how Dave's family holds an intimate and close connection to Weston, a relationship that flies in the face of common criticisms of suburbia as homogenous and bland. Moreover, this relationship also demonstrates a high degree of ecological belonging in light of the differing fates of the two families involved.

"Shale" centres on the Humber River Valley, which is not just a dividing geological feature but also a cultural border between Etobicoke and Weston. Dave notes

¹⁰⁵ John Bentley Mays writes that a "1986 provincial study showed that almost half of Weston's inhabitants at that time had a mother-tongue other than English" (68). See 64-70 for more on Weston's cultural history.

this when he thinks: “the river marked the frontier of our town, and up on the opposite bank the world was more wondrous than ours ... the houses that came up from the mud of Etobicoke were far more magnificent than ours. No little brick boxes rose up there, but wide-slung houses with only one storey that miraculously held three or even four bedrooms” (75). The two brothers recognize the disparity in wealth and class that exists between the two suburban towns in the 1950s. Even at their young age, they hear the lure of a large bungalow with a big backyard and garages “big enough for two cars” (75). On the one hand, the valley is a place of wonder for the boys, but it also subtly makes them aware that their own home is less desirable and less valuable than those on the far side of the river. The boys encounter the uneven terrain of suburban housing where one development is more valuable than another not just because of more square footage but also because of location and exclusive access. The houses on Etobicoke’s side do not emerge slowly over a period of years like the boys’ own home, but emerge quickly over a few months and fit in with the Weston golf course located on the river valley below.

In ecological terms, the valley is an ecotone: a transitional area between two distinct ecological communities. From a biological perspective, the Humber River valley’s forests and meadows break up the fragmented and ecologically poor suburban landscapes. The term can also be applied to the social realm as the Weston side presents a more interdependent community where the Old Man relies on contractors and developers for work and the Lithuanian immigrant community for a sense of social belonging while the Etobicoke side is a much more individualistic lifestyle, akin to Rowanwood’s, where an upper middle class is able to sustain a sense of separation from its neighbours because

of more stable jobs and in the more spacious and less crowded streets of bungalows. At the same time, applying this ecological term to the social realm runs the risk of naturalizing the workings of capitalism. It might justify a form of social Darwinism whereby gentrification is seen as “inevitable” or “natural” rather than as an intentional action that benefits some while hurting others. As with resilience thinking, ecological language can enrich our understandings of cultural dynamics but we need to be careful not to let it remove ethical considerations from the discussion.

The Humber Valley is a place of possibilities for the brothers. In its confines, they are able to escape from the control of their father and they are free to do as they like (75). Dave later describes the valley as: “the no-man’s-land between Weston and Etobicoke, a place where the locks had been cut off the grates of the storm sewers embedded in the banks. We hunted rats with slingshots deep into the drains, using candle stubs to light the way” (76). The terrain that acts as a border between the two towns means that it is also left somewhat uncontrolled and unpoliced so that Dave, Gerry, and the other Weston boys can risk injury in their various pursuits. The cut locks on the storm sewer grates affirms the valley’s peripheral position from a policing standpoint, but they also allow young suburban boys to claim temporary ownership over the space.

What also becomes clear is that Dave and Gerry have a strong relationship with the place. Each spring, the boys descend to the river’s edges to

search among the roots for flotsam that had been trapped when the spring high waters came down. It was mostly liquor bottles and pieces of clothing that wrapped themselves around the tree bottoms or got caught in the dead long grass of the year before, but it was always worth looking carefully. Gerry found a gas engine model Spitfire in the branches of a low tree that year. (78-79)

Coming from a working-class family whose patriarch is loath to waste money, Gerry's discovery of a miniature airplane is akin to finding treasure. The brothers also know the wildlife of the Humber River valley, discussing at various points the rumour of wolves in the area, packs of loose dogs, and crayfish. Dave and Gerry know about the "deeper holes that held suckers and carp" in the river and they fish for them to give to their mother who "used them for fertilizer under the roots of her rose bushes. Nobody but a fool ate a fish that came out of the Humber" (79). The narrator displays a strong ecological sensibility by understanding that the polluted waters of the Humber River will have an effect on the creatures that live in it. At the same time, this does not stop them from swimming in the water: "we had to do it secretly. When they weren't talking about rabies, the teachers and parents went on about polio. We figured we were safe as long as we kept our mouths shut while we were swimming, but sometimes my mother could tell we had been in the water by the smell that clung to us when we came back home" (79). The parents' fears of polio are well-founded, given that polio is most often contracted through contact with fecal material. Like the Don River, the Humber has also been a receptacle for untreated sewage as the uneven and loosely regulated development of different suburbs coupled with more lax environmental laws before the formation of metropolitan Toronto opened the door for sewage and wastewater being dumped into the Humber.¹⁰⁶ What their adventures reveal is that the boys are not just intimately familiar with the valley, but they are also aware of the different ecological processes at work, taking advantage of seasonal changes while also being aware of the dangers of human pollution.

¹⁰⁶ In fact, it was not until 1960 that the Humber Wastewater Treatment Plant opened near the mouth of the Humber River, providing the area with a centralized sewage treatment facility.

However, as “Shale” progresses, the boys become increasingly aware that the valley is not their own but is shared with others. The story opens with them finally meeting a homeless man after a long search for one. They stand in awe as he crosses the river on a train trestle, narrowly avoiding getting hit by a fast-moving freight train by keeping his calm, demonstrating his own familiarity with the valley. Soon after, Dave and Gerry meet Mr. Lots and his daughter Patsy who help Dave out after he sprains his ankle by carrying him to their Etobicoke home along a long narrow path that the boys had never seen (82). This revelation shakes the boys’ sense of owning the valley because Mr. Lots and Patsy seem to know more than they do about its trails. This meeting proves fortuitous as Patsy ignites Dave’s developing sexual attraction, a desire that drives the remainder of the story’s plot. On a different level, the appearance of the homeless man and the Lots makes clear that the Humber River valley is a shared place between the suburbs. Dave and Gerry cannot claim exclusive belonging in it, but share it amongst many people. The Lots, who live on the other side of the river, allow the boys to temporarily fulfill their dream of making it to the other side by inviting them into their home.

The fact that many people can lay claim to the Humber River valley also suggests that belonging needs to be inclusive rather than exclusive. In *The Torontonians*, Karen’s neighbours desire their own small portion of the “country”; in “Shale,” by contrast, the boys’ experience of the valley as a public place works against this desire. The Humber River valley invites many people to come and be together in it. Philosopher Edward S. Casey argues that “*places gather* ... minimally, places gather things in their midst – where ‘things’ connote various animate and inanimate entities. Places also gather

experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts” (24). A non-exclusive sense of belonging then grows from the way that places gather things together. The Humber Valley gathers not just two Lithuanian-Canadian boys, but also middle-class Canadians, and Toronto’s homeless, not least to say the plants, animals, and other beings that inhabit the valley. What also seems important is the valley’s role as an ecotone: it is a place where social strictures are relaxed and borders are more porous so that Dave and Gerry can meet a homeless man and a middle class family in the space of an afternoon. In setting the stage for these meetings, “Shale” illustrates a more inclusive mode of belonging that is structured around community rather than individual desire. Sileika’s story challenges the stereotype of the suburbs as blandly homogenous or obsessively clannish. At the same time, I do not want to simply caricature the suburban desire to possess a place for oneself. There is something human in wanting stability or security and the suburban homes of Weston and Etobicoke offer these things. While some modes of suburban life are environmentally inappropriate and not conducive to an inclusive sense of belonging, other modes can be ecologically sensitive and broadly inclusive. Take, for instance, the way that Mr. Lots invites Gerry and Dave into his private space, allowing them into his community even though the boys are from a different cultural and class backgrounds. Therefore, while “Shale” leans towards a more inclusive sense of belonging, it also demonstrates how that mode of inhabiting a space is also in tension with the suburban desire to possess a place.

Sileika’s short story complicates both these kinds of belonging by showing how the Humber River valley is also a place of danger when Hurricane Hazel precipitously

floods the entire area. All of what I have outlined above is not new in terms of suburban literature as the narrative of young boys coming of age in the semi-wild spaces which often surround suburban areas is well-established.¹⁰⁷ Even in Toronto literature, there are notable examples including Ernest Thompson Seton's *Two Little Savages* and, more recently, Richard Scrimger's *Into the Ravine* with three young boys who build a raft and float down the Don River, Paul Quarrington's *The Ravine* in which a failing television scriptwriter attempts to come to terms with a traumatic childhood event in the ravines, and Barbara Gowdy's *The Romantic* which inverts the gender stereotype by featuring a young girl who ventures down into Toronto's ravines. What makes "Shale" stand out from these narratives is the catastrophic flooding of the valley that occurs with Hurricane Hazel.¹⁰⁸ The final quarter of the story revolves around this event, but its impact ripples outwards through everything that has come before. As the rain comes down on a Friday afternoon, Dave plans to visit Patsy so he can practice kissing with her. On his way over, he notices from the Lawrence Street Bridge that "the river looked high, like it did in spring, except there were no ice floes on it. It was a fast-moving brown from all the earth that had washed into it. There seemed to be a lot of stuff floating in the river. As I looked down, a big branch of a tree rolled up slowly and then went down under again" (99).

Dave notes the unseasonal nature of this flooding, and despite seeing a large tree branch

¹⁰⁷ This narrative pattern is particularly prominent in children's literature as in Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* and Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. Richard Louv's non-fiction book *Last Child in the Woods* mourns the contemporary loss of the connections between children and nature.

¹⁰⁸ Hurricane Hazel was a deadly 1954 hurricane that swept up the eastern American seaboard, killing many people and flooding several cities along the way. City officials believed the storm would not affect Toronto, but its collision with a cold front pushed it north and soaked the city with several days of rain. High levels in southern Ontario's water table created the perfect conditions for flooding so that as the water drained through existing watersheds to Lake Ontario, Toronto was hard hit with over fifty bridges destroyed, several thousand people left homeless and at least eighty one people killed. For more, see Jim Gifford's *Hurricane Hazel* and Betty Kennedy's *Hurricane Hazel*.

tossed around by the current, he continues to the Lots' house. Mr. Lots is unperturbed by the heavy rains or the flooding that is happening in his basement, even refusing the Old Man's offer of refuge at their Weston home (103). Dave and his father return home, in the process carefully crossing over a train trestle bridge because the road bridges are closed by the police for fear of their imminent collapse. While the scene parallels the homeless man's journey across the gorge on a different railway bridge, there is also an echo back to the harrowing escape from Nazi Germany that his parents undertook when fleeing Lithuania. It is only when they reach home that Dave realizes the potential danger they risked as his father's hands shake uncontrollably while pouring a whiskey. The action reveals that although the Humber River may be contained for the most part by human constructions, it still has the capacity to inflict tremendous violence.

While Dave and his father are safe from the floods, the Lots do not have the same fortune. Instead, they disappear in the flood and Dave phones for weeks while also searching the valley for traces of them once the waters have receded. When these behaviours become frightening to his parents, the Old Man sits Dave down and bluntly tells him of the horrors he faced in Europe including the death of several family members (108). He hopes to expose Dave to the brutality of human life, but Dave misunderstands the message and instead covers up his grief. In the spring, he returns to the site of the Lots' now-missing house and begins digging around the area: "Patsy still owed me a kiss. I needed to find them. Somewhere under the mud and the silt they were still to be found" (108). Although we might question Dave's motives, his refusal to give up on the Lots shows a humanity that is lacking in others. After days of front-page newspaper coverage,

Dave notes “the talk stopped. People were tired of it. The Lotses were still missing” (107). Even his own family seems somehow less human, with his brother no longer caring and his father made apathetic by his own violent past. Dave tells a homeless man that he is “looking for fossils” (108). In saying this, he alludes to the opening pages of the story where Gerry found a troglodyte fossil in the shale rocks of the riverbed. However, in this instance, Dave’s grief for Patsy and her family becomes sublimated into a search for some evidence of their remains. Not only their bodies, but their entire home has been swept away by the flood waters. This erasure goes unmarked in Toronto’s newspapers and seemingly unnoticed by anyone but Dave. What had begun as a youthful adventure story ends tragically with Dave’s abrupt entrance into adulthood via traumatic death, completing the coming-of-age narrative. The earlier sense that Mr. Lots and Patsy could claim belonging in the valley is torn apart as the flood plain funnels water toward the lake. Dave’s own sense of belonging in the valley is also shaken by this event, causing him to search for some kind of meaning in the mud and wreckage left from the flood.

The flood also reveals a kind of wilful blindness by humans towards land and the forces that shape it. Mr. Lots certainly knew about the valley’s ecosystem and its natural history, yet he convinces himself he is in no danger despite his house’s position on the floodplain.¹⁰⁹ In this sense, he proves himself more naive than the Old Man who recognizes danger when it arrives and acts accordingly. The Old Man recognizes that the natural world needs to be respected, even feared in the choice of location for his home as

¹⁰⁹ There is a Biblical pun at work in Mr. Lots name as he becomes a “Lot” figure who does not want to leave the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah even after he is warned by angels of immanent divine destruction. There may also be a further pun in the sense that the Lots family has lots of possessions. Thanks to Daniel Coleman for pointing out the various shades of meaning in the name.

he is well aware of the dangers it can pose. Even though Old Man does not seem to belong in the neighbourhood because of his obvious ethnic difference, his willingness to help others and to risk death in doing so also establishes him as an important member of the Weston community. Mr. Lots's short-sighted decision to refuse Old Man's offer by trying to save his own house reveals an ecological naiveté that discounts the flood's ability to cause lasting damage. In many ways, Mr. Lots' decision to stay is laudable given his significant financial and emotional investment in his home, yet the extreme forces of flooding also show this to be a poor decision as the house and its occupants are swept away. "Shale" reveals the differing terrains of suburban communities in that they hold very different views on the human place in the natural world.

The death of the Lots illustrates how the desire for a home with a view can often lead to building in an environmentally unsound area. Prior to Hurricane Hazel, developers were building homes in the flood plains of the Don and Humber River valleys because such homes often commanded spectacular views of "wild" landscape. The location also meant that houses could be sold at much higher prices even though the risk of flooding was much greater. However, it was not just building inside the valley that was risky, but many homes built too close to the ravine's edges were also destroyed by the flood as the large amounts of water washed out various cliff walls. These houses would have commanded impressive views of Toronto's hidden country, but in doing so they put themselves at a higher risk for storm damage and the long-term effects of erosion.

Historians Danielle Robinson and Ken Cruikshank describe some of the damage:

About 20 miles northwest of Toronto, 56 families fled the Pine Grove trailer park around midnight, before a flash flood 'drove like a sledgehammer' through their

homes. In the nearby town of Woodbridge, the Humber jumped its banks at a bend in the river and engulfed some 70 residences in 8 to 10 feet of swiftly moving current ... Near the railway bridge in the town of Weston, the flood swept three homes into the river, their occupants already having been moved out. Just south of the Lawrence Avenue bridge, only 60 of 96 people survived when the 15-to-20 foot waves tore homes from their foundations, sweeping 15 houses into the river and smashing others together on the shore. (38-39)

While some argued that the flooding was “a random, chance event,” conservationists had already been warning since the 1930s that human action was disrupting the natural water cycle. However, the ability of local conservation authorities like the Etobicoke-Mimico and Humber Valley Authorities to proceed with watershed management plans was limited by unwillingness on the part of provincial and municipal governments to spend much money (42). In the aftermath of Hazel’s destruction, the city of Toronto was confronted with a series of difficult questions about how human inhabitation has its limits in certain landscapes. In assessing the flood damage, John B. Carswell and D. Bruce Shaw recognized that there was a conflict between the desire to be near the ravines and weather-related risks: “there was nothing natural about this disaster – people lost not only their homes but their lives because the government failed to stop people from building homes and farms in dangerous areas” (46). Toronto’s municipal government, in conjunction with the provincial and federal governments, banned building in floodplains and took measures to ensure that high levels of rainfall would be channeled towards the Lake in an efficient, safer manner.¹¹⁰ “Shale” reminds readers that where we live is subject to wind and weather just as much as wilderness parks or rural farms are.

¹¹⁰ Robinson and Cruikshank go on to lay out a compelling critique of how Hurricane Hazel also became an opportunity for “urban slum clearance” that did not pay any attention to Toronto’s “marginal communities” that were more adversely affected by the flooding (61). There is a tension here between forms of belonging as cities used the disaster to create more parks and greenbelt space, extending ecological belonging, but in doing so excluding those who were forced out by the flooding and were unable to afford to return.

To be sure, Toronto is not alone in building homes in environmentally unsound areas: several of California's largest and most expensive cities including Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, and the exclusive Orange Country are built on top of a major fault line while developments in avalanche zones, flood plains, and other potential disaster areas are common across North America. Decisions to live in these areas reflect a lack of ecological belonging as humans show no strong sense of what is an appropriate way to live in a landscape. As Carswell and Shaw understood, many of the recent "natural" disasters that have afflicted cities have more to do with human ignorance of environmental processes than an angry "nature" taking vengeance. Urban planner Victoria Basolo makes clear that the flooding of New Orleans in 2005 was made far worse by the human decisions and actions over one hundred years that left vulnerable black and poor populations exposed to the worst damages while also limiting rescue and relief efforts (110). This is not so much to fault those living in these areas – many of them had no other choice – but it is to say that as an urban community, New Orleans, and Toronto, failed to extend belonging to its most vulnerable members. I suggest that Old Man and his family demonstrate a strong sense of suburban place that allows them to escape the worst of the flooding damage, while the short story asks readers to consider how the differing senses of belonging on display accommodate others.

"Shale" emphasizes this questioning through the presence and absence of the homeless in the valley. While Sileika explains the fates of Patsy's and Dave's families, the homeless men that the two brothers initially search for remain on the margins of the story. The first man the boys meet disappears from the narrative once Mr. Lots arrives.

The second homeless man who appears at the end is, as Dave notes, “not the same one we had met the year before” (108), signalling a kind of interchangeability in the homeless population. Significantly, neither of these characters are given names nor even any sense of identity beyond their itinerant ways, making them haunting figures on the story’s margin. When Dave is at Patsy’s house during the flood, she remarks, “Will you look at all that rain, Dave! It’s going to flush out all the hobos along the construction sites. In a little while, we’ll have hobos on rafts floating down the river like Huckleberry Finn!” (100). Patsy’s excitement over the potential re-enactment of Mark Twain’s story reflects a childish naiveté towards the real plight that the homeless people in the Humber River valley faced, while reinforcing her own obliviousness to danger. The two anonymous homeless men would have faced this storm without the assistance of a family, neighbours or even a telephone with which to call for help. At the same time, they might have been saved by their lack of possessions, as we can see in the way the second homeless man seems unperturbed in the wake of Hurricane Hazel. Either way, the haunting figure of the homeless man remains on the outskirts of Sileika’s story, asking readers whether and how these men belong in the valley when they do not own a home in the suburbs. Perhaps the first homeless man is among the eighty-one confirmed dead from the flooding, or he might have survived through his own knowledge of the area. If the suburbs are, at heart, about a specific type of cultural belonging through ownership of a single-family home and an automobile, then the homeless do not fit within this paradigm. And yet, they exist in these areas nonetheless, manoeuvring through the back alleys and river valleys that lace the suburbs of Toronto. Although Dave seems less interested in them at the story’s

end, they continue to function as haunting figures in a similar way that Mrs. Johnson disrupts the homogeneity of Rowanwood in *The Torontonians*.

The presence of these men also shows that it is possible to inhabit a space like the Humber River valley even though others, like suburban home-owners, might like to control belonging in it. These homeless men exist outside of the official economy of wage labour, instead scavenging a living from charity, refuse, and the land itself. Their presence troubles the middle-class sense that working a job to pay for a home is an appropriate action. Moreover, their ability to move freely through Toronto's landscape also troubles the sense that one can own land, and, in owning, control who comes and goes. Of course, there are very strong restrictions on the movement of the homeless, and I do not mean to romanticize them. Yet, similar to the way the boathouse community in Hamilton challenges readers in *The Fishers of Paradise*, these homeless men raise questions about the way that Torontonians currently live in their city, a mode of living that depends officially upon private property and a capitalist economy.

What the events of Hurricane Hazel also reveal is that Toronto's suburbs are intimately connected to the downtown, urban core. Weston is connected to Bay Street just as it is also connected to the Holland Marsh where the waters originally collected before rushing down towards Lake Ontario. The flood waters reveal that any sense of Weston as being ecologically separate from Toronto is culturally manufactured. Similarly, in *The Torontonians*, Karen's neighbours believe they live in the country, yet they all depend on work in Toronto proper in order to afford their Rowanwood homes. Suburban identity is distinctly tied to the urban core even as it defines itself in opposition. Weston is

swallowed up by Toronto's growth as Dave notes in a later story: "When I was a kid, it had already stopped being a little town and become a neighbourhood on the edge of Toronto. Then the years passed and the edges of the neighbourhoods got smudged. The boundaries were gone" ("Tempus Fugit," 217). In this self-reflection, Dave's sense of Weston's identity as a bounded small town is revealed to be untrue as it already was a part of Toronto's economic if not physical landscape when he was a child. While I believe Dave's more intimate sense of place allows for a more ecologically sensitive mode of inhabiting a given area, we also need to acknowledge that small places are bound up with larger regions and communities. Weston depends on Toronto just as Rowanwood does. Yet, as Karen's choice of downtown Toronto over Rowanwood reveals, there are different modes of belonging on offer in each location. In the suburbs, it is possible to have a more intimate relationship with a small place, while in the dense urban core, any sense of belonging will be much more connected to other people. I do not want to prioritize one mode of belonging over the other, but instead suggest that the natural world – the rivers, valleys, trees, animals, parks, and other geographical and topographical features of place – is one thread that binds these modes of belonging together. How a community lives in one area, like Weston, has an impact on those who live in another area, Toronto's downtown core. Denying this interdependency sets the conditions for not just oppression and exploitation to happen but it can also allow for tragedy as happened with Hurricane Hazel's flooding. Keeping in mind Code's ecological thinking, these two suburban texts demand that Torontonians consider not just their own local neighbourhood but the whole network of communities that make up the Greater Toronto Area.

What of Those Without a Home?: *Free Reign*

“The ravines are to Toronto what canals are to Venice and hills are to San Francisco. They are the heart of the city’s emotional geography, and understanding Toronto requires an understanding of the ravines ... A ravine provides a Torontonians’ first glimpse of something resembling wilderness”

-Robert Fulford, *Accidental City* 37

Looking at a topographical map of the city of Toronto, it is easy to see how the Don and Humber River valleys snake through the city’s body like blood vessels from Lake Ontario. These valleys and ravines also happen to be some of the wildest spaces in Toronto, after the city banned building or development in the valleys following Hurricane Hazel. Seymour’s appellation of the “hidden country” alludes to the valleys’ easily missed aspect as bridge and road construction has obscured them from drivers’ eyes (6). Both rivers cut through a variety of habitats with the Humber River’s headwaters lying north of the now-protected forests of the Oak Ridges Moraine while the Don River begins there; both then traverse the suburban fringes of the city down into the dense core and finally arrive at the industrialized areas along Lake Ontario’s shore. This makes them good places to think about how social and ecological belonging function.¹¹¹ While I discussed the Humber River above, I focus now on the Don River. Given the importance of the ravines to Toronto’s “emotional geography,” I ask if this place can be a domain in which belonging is extended, or whether it has been primarily a space of exclusion.

¹¹¹ Another important ecological place in Toronto’s topography that I do not have space to address is the chain of islands that form Toronto Island and the Leslie Street Spit. They have at various times been inhabited by humans, polluted by industry, but are now quite wild in the sense that they are home to large populations of birds, animals, and plants. See Grady’s *Toronto the Wild* 4-5, 106-12, 147-49 for more on the Spit and Sally Gibson’s *More than an Island* for more on the contested history of the Islands.

Unfortunately, the valley has not always been seen as important to the city's identity. From the 1850s until the 1940s, the Don River, like the Humber, was a convenient place to dump household and industrial waste with the current floating it all out of sight and mind. Environmental historian Jennifer Bonnell writes about how "at the peak of water-powered milling in 1860, the [Don River] watershed supported over fifty mills producing paper, lumber, flour, and wool" (69), several brickworks, and by the end of the century "the Lower Don had become an industrial hub, hosting breweries, tanneries, soap works and oil refiners," all of which dropped trash and by-products into the river (69, 84). It also received raw sewage and became a dumping ground for city trash with "household and industrial waste and street sweepings" used to fill up the ravines (299). This environmental degradation led to the river being proclaimed the most polluted river in a 1950 Ontario study (Ontario Department of Planning and Development 15). Little had changed almost sixty years later when a 2007 Environment Canada study labelled the river as one of the most polluted waterways in Canada (Bird A8).

This polluting and dumping led to a surprising development whereby, as Bonnell writes, "a connection exists ... between perceptions of the river valley as a polluted wasteland at the edge of the city and its function as a repository for marginalized people" (148). Over the course of the twentieth century, different groups settled in the river's ravines, including various Roma camps during the early twentieth century, a semi-permanent camp for the jobless during the Great Depression, and, most recently,

numerous camps for Toronto's homeless population (147-48).¹¹² Bonnell writes that, for these groups of people, "the Don was likely not so much a 'margin' or 'periphery' as a kind of borderland, a liminal space at the edge of the city (and, in the depths of its ravine lands, below it) where survival without housing or employment was at least narrowly possible" (22). In 2006, journalist Kris Scheuer wrote that "an estimated 111 homeless encampments are scattered throughout the city's ravines, parks, and woodlands, including many right here in the [Don] valley" ("Double Trouble in the Valley"). Only five years earlier, Margaret Philp had published a piece in the *Globe and Mail* with photographs by Patti Gower, detailing a year-long investigation of this resident homeless population, trying to put individual faces on the people rather than seeing them as an abstract social problem ("The Disappeared Ones"). These homeless persons have found refuge in the valleys and ravines of Toronto, claiming belonging in a space that has been alternately ignored, used as a dumping site, or, as is happening now, become a site for development.

Aubert's *Free Reign* is a suspense novel that provides a productive avenue to talk about how Toronto's homeless population has found refuge and belonging in this urban wilderness space. Aubert, a trained criminologist, published the novel in 1997, and has since written a series of Ellis Portal mysteries. In *Free Reign*, Portal, a disgraced former judge suffering from a bout of mental illness, has chosen to live in the Don River valley after multiple stays in various group homes when he discovers a human hand in his garden with a unique gold ring on it. The ring is one of five given to Portal and his law school classmates, but the hand is black while all of his classmates were white. This

¹¹² For a more detailed account of the socially marginalized peoples that have occupied the Don Valley, see Bonnell's dissertation "Imagined Futures and Unintended Consequences," particularly 145-210.

discovery sets in motion Portal's attempt to solve the murder, connecting him back to his former friends. He uncovers a shady medical research facility, and, at the novel's end, returns to his family, leaving the Don River valley and his itinerant lifestyle behind. *Free Reign* productively explores how a homeless community inhabits the Don River valley, demonstrating a very different mode of being in that landscape while also asking important questions about the place of Toronto's homeless community in the city.¹¹³

While *Free Reign* features numerous homeless characters and has its protagonist living in the Don River, its representation of homelessness in Toronto needs to be carefully handled. Several reviewers have noted how the novel struggles at times, particularly towards the end of the book, with clichéd writing and an ending which depends too much upon a large number of coincidences (Howard, Cannon). I believe that these mistakes are connected to the novel's flawed attempt to use homelessness as a narrative hook. From a structural level, Portal, despite Aubert's attempts to paint him as a homeless man, is clearly not a homeless person. Portal even acknowledges this halfway through the novel when, in a crucial moment, he realizes:

Along the park's edges, the dispossessed of the city mixed with business people on lunch break, even an executive or two. Both the rich and the poor flattered themselves into thinking that Toronto was a place where everybody got along with everybody. And yet, the walls between the rich and poor were impenetrable. Queenie, like everybody else in this neighbourhood, dreamed of winning the lottery. If she won, she would have money, but she'd never be rich, just as I, who lived on leaves and leavings would never truly be poor. I thought I'd lost everything. But I hadn't lost my education, my intelligence nor the orderly progression of my traditional upbringing. I hadn't lost all my friends either. (183)

In this instance, Portal comes to a complex understanding of class, power, wealth, and

¹¹³ I want to emphasize that while it is important to make room for Toronto's homeless population, this does not directly address the larger and more pressing problem of homelessness itself.

social dynamics. Homelessness is not simply a matter of money and the lack of it, but it also has to do with social structures that keep some groups in power and other groups dispossessed. He realizes that Queenie, described in the novel as a Swampie Cree street woman, can never truly enter Toronto's social elite because not only does she not have money, but she also lacks the proper education, social circles, and "traditional upbringing." What Aubert does not name here is Queenie's non-whiteness; her status as an Indigenous woman prevents her from entering Portal's former social circles because her presence there might unsettle the colonial social structure, one which depends on the pre-existing dispossession of Indigenous peoples for its own legitimacy. Moreover, what is also clear is that homelessness is a choice for Portal. For many homeless persons, such a choice does not truly exist in the sense that they have not "chosen" homelessness nor can they simply re-enter their former lives as easily as Portal does. Harris writes that unlike Portal, "people who live on the streets in Toronto are disproportionately likely to have grown up in poverty, experienced domestic violence, self-identify as Aboriginal, suffer poor and deteriorating physical and mental health, battle addiction, and have spent time in prison" (247).¹¹⁴ To be fair, Aubert does make clear through the other homeless characters in the book, that homelessness is a complex problem with a variety of causes, factors, and a troubling lack of genuine attempts by the city, the province or the federal government to address the problem. As readers we are introduced to Toronto's homeless realm through Portal, allowing us to build connections to a social realm that is obscured and ignored by most. So even though *Free Reign* runs the risk of romanticizing

¹¹⁴ For more information on homelessness in Toronto, see Cathy Crowe's *Dying for a Home*, Pat Capponi's *The War at Home*, Gerald Daly's *Homeless*, and the City of Toronto's 2009 *Street Needs Assessment*.

homelessness, it also becomes a site, like *Fishers of Paradise*, through which we can affectively engage with some of Toronto's marginalized people.¹¹⁵

What attracts Portal, and many of Toronto's homeless population, to the Don Valley is the ability to remain hidden away from prying eyes. Portal has no desire to be in contact with his old life after breaking a court injunction to stay away from John Stoughton-Melville, the leader of Portal's law school friends, and Harpur, the woman Portal falls in love with but who marries Stoughton-Melville. The Don River valley becomes a place of refuge for Portal, where he can live out a stable existence without the threat of his past life intruding upon his mental calm. He opens the novel with a declaration: "I am a vagrant. A voyager, a wanderer, a citizen of the kingdom of free reign ... nobody could ever find me. Available, yet not. Accessible, but not really ... That May I was living in a large wooden packing crate partially roofed with stolen tar paper and snugly nestled under a tree in the middle of a wood that could not be reached except by foot or horse" (1-2). Portal cherishes his privacy, a privacy that is found in a public yet inaccessible place.¹¹⁶ In fact, his family is only able to contact him by giving a letter to Queenie, hoping she would run into him. While Portal's ability to hide might seem far-fetched to readers, the Don River valley does present large sections of near wild land that

¹¹⁵ Two relevant works that address homelessness in Toronto are Richard Scrimger's 1996 novel *Crosstown* about an alcoholic ex-doctor forced to move across the city after his shelter has shut down and Shaughnessy Bishop-Stall's 2004 memoir *Down to This*, an account of his year in Toronto's Tent City. However, Harris points out that these books suggest that "Toronto's homeless population is comprised primarily of wayward professionals reduced to homelessness by some tragic flaw, empaths propelled by sorrow, or talented intellectuals driven onto the streets by an excess of creative genius" (247).

¹¹⁶ In Maggie Helwig's *Girls Fall Down*, Derek, a brilliant twin who develops paranoid schizophrenia, similarly disappears into the Don valley where his twin sister and Alex, the book's protagonist, eventually find him. He believes that this place is the only safe space for him in Toronto because it is hidden from the watching eyes of the government and the police. Likewise, in Alissa York's *Fauna*, the Don Valley is home to Lily, a woman who has fled an abusive home, and Stephen, a former soldier suffering from PTSD.

are difficult to access even on foot. Moreover, Portal later explains that “all the ravines were linked, which meant that theoretically a person could follow along from one to the next and eventually reach the inner-city neighbourhoods near the river’s mouth, where the greatest concentration of the city’s street people lived” (39). In these descriptions, middle-class readers see the Don River valley in a different light, one that contrasts sharply with the views from the homes on the valley’s edges or from the paved bicycle paths.

Yet Portal also feels at home in the valley because he is able to be self-sufficient, cultivating a garden to feed himself. Aubert writes: “Not to miss the benefit of the earliest real warmth of the year, I was working in my garden, my ‘encroachment,’ as the City Solicitor would call it. I was turning over the cold brown soil made rich by a hundred years of garbage dumping, wood-ash deposit and weed rot” (2-3). Rather than being a hindrance to gardening, the long history of dumping in the Don River makes the soil rich for Portal’s purposes. During his time in the valley, he has become an amateur horticulturalist, paying close attention to the river’s landscape. As he walks, he sees

the hard buttons of ferns that would soon unfurl their lacy softness into air polluted with auto exhaust. I had often studied wild flowers close to the valley highway, where the tires of the transports carried salt from the coast, and I had seen the coastal species thriving in the tiny tide pools oblivious to the fact that they were a thousand miles from their real homes. (6-7)

Later on, he describes a greenhouse he has built from scavenged materials and filled with plants from seed or stolen from gardens (55). His diet consists primarily of these vegetables and what food he can forage from the streets. While this scavenging and covert gardening seems to be a pragmatic choice for Portal, it is also an act of resistance towards the officially prescribed uses of urban nature. The City Solicitor’s comment

above points to this as, in the city's eyes, Portal's garden is an "encroachment," whereas Portal sees it as an essential part of his home in the valley. Here, contemporary readers encounter the Don Valley in a completely new light: not as a place of recreation or aesthetic pleasure, but as a place of sustenance. Yet this new way of living in the valley is not so new since farming was a key land use along the Don River in York's earliest days (Bonnell, "Imagined Futures," 41-87). Portal's garden can also be read as a partial claim to belonging in the valley as agriculture has often been the measure of belonging used by European settler-invaders to judge ownership of land.¹¹⁷ The garden is a key part of his ability to make a place homely, and it also allows him to be self-sufficient in a place that would otherwise be less than hospitable to human life.

However, Portal also recognizes that the valley is not always a welcoming space for humans. Shortly after moving his home because of vandals, Ellis decides to swim in the river in order to cool off: "Though the river was still quite polluted ... here the gravel bed seemed to filter it, and the water ran clear and cold ... I managed to dunk my whole body, then to jump up into the sun like some odd fish from whom the water splintered in glittering shards" (146). Portal's delight is short-lived as he wakes up that night with a high fever and vivid hallucinations. He is hospitalized after his collapsed body is found by William, a law school classmate and bird-watcher. Portal is not entirely surprised to find that "three doctors and a city health official [believed] that [his] condition was the result of polluted river infecting my lacerated skin" (157). The space that Portal thought

¹¹⁷ Of course, those same European settler-invaders refused to recognize indigenous forms of agriculture such as the Haudenosaunee's cultivation of the Three Sisters - corn, squash and beans - as "civilized." Historian Jon Johnson writes that there is substantial evidence to show that First Nations peoples grew corn in the Humber River valley and in the Black Oak savanna that now exists only in High Park (62-68).

was welcoming turns out to be less friendly than he at first thought. Of course, part of the reason for this is that Torontonians have long dumped their toxic waste into the river.

Portal literally suffers the consequences of the human misuse of the river valley.

This sense of the valley's hostility is strengthened when a far greater threat arises in a Hurricane Hazel-like event that careens through the valley, carrying houses, trees, animals and whoever happened to be in the valley down into the lake. Portal is aware of the danger of flooding: "The river was calm and shallow most of the time, but it could suddenly give way to latent anger. Once or twice a year, the rain, gathering in backyards, parking lots, streets, filled it with such force that it easily jumped its bank and swept away anything in its path" (20). Portal points out how the valley's natural tendency towards seasonal flooding is exacerbated by the structure of the urban environment: all of the pavement and parking lots which do not absorb water funnel it in the most efficient path towards the lake.¹¹⁸ He later reflects that

the flood-control system various city departments had worked on over the years was only one step ahead of the river. In places, the high concrete walls of spillways were eroding. In other areas, leaves and branches, the debris of many seasons, clogged drains. Sometimes rapid water skipped right over the wire baskets of rock intended to hold the river to its course. (21)

Here we see a clear example of how a city is not separate from the natural world, but intertwined with it, for better or worse. Seeing the Don River valley as a site of contestation between planning departments and the workings of the water cycle gives the natural world back a form of agency that is often not recognized until it is too late. This is

¹¹⁸ This continues to be a big problem for Toronto as the summer flooding of 2013 showed. See Alexandra Bosanac and Peter Kuitenbrouwer's "Deluge Brings GTA to a Halt" for more information on the storm and ecologist Blair Feltmate's "Extreme Weather? Adapt" for an intelligent call for working towards adaptation in the face of climate change-induced weather extremes.

precisely what happened with Hurricane Hazel and the parallel rainstorm in *Free Reign*.

Although Portal works hard to rescue people from danger on the night of the storm, he later finds out that William was killed in the flooding. The suddenness of the storm leaves “the highway completely submerged. Hundreds of cars trapped by the rapidly rising water floated in the murky darkness ... everywhere there were people struggling” (261). This scene of utter chaos acts as a counterpoint to the sense of safety that Portal feels, but it also points to the unacknowledged fact that numerous others died in the flood. Similar to “Shale,” *Free Reign* suggests that the homeless who inhabited the valley made up some of the casualties of the storm. From this perspective, the valley temporarily becomes an un-homely place, demonstrating how human belonging needs to take into account the ways that the natural world possesses its own sometimes violent form of agency.

Knowing a place ecologically means being aware of forces like flooding or drought that might threaten life in that place. In some ways, Portal’s make-shift home reflects a more sensible mode of inhabiting the valley, as he is able to leave in a moment’s notice and does not face the difficult reconstruction that those who lost their homes in the flooding did. And yet, Portal’s impermanent house also reveals how he and the homeless community in the valleys are also more vulnerable to the everyday effects of weather and storms. In some extremes they may be more adaptable, but in the face of cold winter temperatures, violent summer thunderstorms, and weeks of spring rain, they are much more exposed. In these violent weather events, *Free Reign* offers readers a window into a different Don River valley, one marked by storms and flooding. These images unsettle the human sense that the valley is a tamed and safe place for all people.

A second threat to the Don River valley homeless community lies in the push to develop the valleys as green space for the exclusive use of the middle and upper classes. A running subplot throughout *Free Reign* is Portal's interactions with Tim Garrison, a local ecologist and advocate for making the Don River valley a conservation area. This element is introduced early on in a conversation between Garrison and Portal:

“It's the usual land trust idea,” he went on. “The land is purchased by a consortium that pledges to keep it in its natural state in perpetuity”

“How do you keep a river in the middle of a city of three million people in its natural state?” I asked. “And anyway, what makes anybody think this river is in its natural state? It's been used as a sewer and a garbage dump for two hundred years.” (23)

The city's financial problems force it to consider selling the valley, but Portal shows remarkable clarity in seeing through this plan. He questions the naturalness of the river itself while also casting doubt on the long-term plans of any consortium, given the value of urban real estate. Portal is also worried by this plan because he knows that “bicyclists, hikers, joggers, naturalists, families ... did not consider vagrants to be a welcome component of the scenery” (113). Portal worries that his own ability to live there would be compromised. The land trust idea threatens to transform the valley into an exclusive place for those who have the time and money to invest in hiking, jogging and other recreational pursuits. Ultimately, this threat disappears as Garrison becomes a permanent city staff member working on valley restoration. In trying to recruit Portal, he argues “we don't have to sell the valley, and it stands to benefit greatly if you take this on” (316). Garrison's ability to sidestep the development deal hinges on city council's recognition of the importance of the valley to Toronto. Yet the threat of future financial hard times always hangs over the valley's ability to include all people as the whims of city council

and private donors are liable to change, putting the valley at risk again.

Stepping away from Aubert's fictional Toronto, portions of the Don Valley have been made into a conservation area by the Metro Toronto and Region Conservation Area following the damage from Hurricane Hazel. Bonnell writes that "between 1957 and 1994, approximately fifteen per cent of remaining natural areas in the Don Valley were protected as part of the MTRCA floodplains protection program" (310). While this positive work has ensured that portions of the Don River remain in a semi-natural state, the threat of development or budgetary cuts continues to loom large for the region. In its 2009 *Don River Watershed Plan*, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) writes that "the pressures on the watershed will continue to build as more and more residents settle in the watershed, either in the last areas of greenfield development in the northern reaches, or in the four urban growth centres designated for intensive redevelopment by the Ontario government" (v). While the current conditions continue to allow homeless persons to live alongside joggers, animals, hikers, plants, and insects in the Don River valley, this status is tenuous and uncertain. In the same document, the TRCA warns that "we must build an even stronger sense of community and common purpose, from the mouth to the headwaters. If the public doesn't fight to bring back the Don, the other constituencies eventually will lose interest. The most powerful impetus for change occurs when the whole community comes together and demands action" (vii). The threat of development for these green spaces is clearly recognized as are the potentially fatal effects of widespread apathy and ignorance. The TRCA should be lauded for its attempt to build a human community around the Don River, establishing networks of

connection between people, place, and its more-than-human inhabitants. However, I also wonder whether this plan makes space for Toronto's homeless or less affluent population.

Free Reign corroborates this thought in the way that it raises questions about the position of different social groups in the Don River valley. In a key section, Portal explores the variety of environments that make up the river:

At the heart of the city, the river was like a trapped animal. Its banks were encased in cement ... To the west of the riverside trail ran the railroad. On the east the high-speed parkway siphoned cars from the highways south of the city and sucked them up in a racing stream toward the suburbs in the north.

Old factories, run-down and empty government buildings, boarded-up warehouses, stark parking garages – these were the neighbors of the river in its lowest reaches. ...

After a few miles, the old buildings disappeared. The river and its valley widened. Now it was ringed by high-rise apartment buildings. The banks here were high and wide and covered with smooth lawn.

Then it all changed again and I found myself walking through a series of lovely parks. The further north I went, the wilder and more deserted the valley was, but the path was paved and I was still seldom alone as I walked.

When I'd been walking for nearly two hours, I entered the final park of the public valley system. This was a park of unnatural beauty – I mean artificial beauty. Every inch of it was manicured to perfection. (113-14)

In this narrative tour up the Don River, readers are given a sense of the varieties of landscapes that encase it. Portal neither condemns nor condones any part of this, but instead delights in its variety, extending a sense of belonging to all of these different forms and uses of land. He thinks "what I really loved in those moments when I was cupped in the hand of the city was life" (114). The mixture of industrial, commercial, residential, leisure, labour, and other spaces gives Portal a satisfying sense of life. There is a diversity of uses, buildings, people, animals, and places that, for Portal, represents a thriving, interactive life. There is space for a range of people to live and play in this valley and the development of the river into a conservation area threatens this

heterogeneity. Moreover, this kind of heterogeneity troubles the binary of nature and culture in that the landscape Portal sees represents a thorough intertwining of the human and the natural. While it might seem like Portal should privilege the wild spaces over the factories or the golf courses, he does not. He finds life in each one so that readers are presented with a range of different ways of interacting with the natural world. Aubert wants readers to notice not just the safety that the valley offers, but also the manicured perfection of a golf course and the eerie beauty of a decaying industrial section.

Stretching the meaning of biodiversity to cultural uses, these different uses of land suggest a healthy, diverse ecosystem at work. What is clear is that the Don River valley is not simply a wilderness nor is it simply a river that has been “conquered” by Toronto. *Free Reign* productively illustrates how the river’s reality is far more complex and varied, prompting readers to re-think their own experience of the valley.

Even now, the river is changing, as the Lower Don River and the Port Lands which surround the river mouth are in the process of being developed from industrial land created by infilling in the early twentieth century into a mixed-use neighbourhood that includes a healthy and thriving river in its design.¹¹⁹ In 2007, Waterfront Toronto called for proposals to redevelop the mouth of the Don River and, one year later, Michael Van Valkenburgh & Associates’ proposal won the competition with a much-touted urban estuary at its core. The plan attempts to craft a landscape where “the city, the lake and river interact in a dynamic and balanced relationship” (qtd. in Desfor and Bonnell 180). While these plans were highly praised and won international awards, including one for

¹¹⁹ For more details on this, see Gene Desfor and Jennifer Bonnell’s “Planning Nature and the City.” They compare how this most recent attempt both parallels and differs from earlier attempts to “improve” the Don.

the Best Futuristic Design at the 2009 Building Exchange Conference in Hamburg, Germany, its future remains unclear. Gene Desfor and Jennifer Bonnell write that the execution of the plan is highly uncertain because of “the precarious financial situation of Waterfront Toronto” and Toronto mayor Rob Ford’s “attempt to hijack current waterfront planning processes and radically alter plans for the Port Lands” by pushing for international development (184). The Don River valley is a highly contested space in Toronto; a place where various groups can and have made claims on it with their agendas coming into conflict over the city’s long history, conflicts that are ongoing today.¹²⁰

However, what *Free Reign* contributes to this debate is the question of where the socially marginalized fit into schemes for the Don River valley’s future. Are they simply an afterthought to plans for development which often privilege wealthy developers and corporations? Or, more radically, can they be made a central part of any plan for the Don River valley’s future? I am not suggesting that the city of Toronto seriously consider turning the Don River valley into some form of outdoor homeless shelter with the homeless as a protected species. However, I do think that any future planning needs to take into account the homeless population that inhabits these spaces. For instance, providing water fountains that run year round, ensuring adequate twenty-four hour access to washrooms, and providing better coverage for emergency services might be ways of ensuring that if the homeless choose to live in the Don River watershed, they still have basic services available to them. Moreover, such actions would also help to ensure that the Don River valley remains a place that generously extends belonging. Aubert’s

¹²⁰ See Bonnell’s “Imagined Futures and Unintended Consequences” for an in-depth historical perspective on how Toronto has utilised, contained, rejected, and, most recently, re-embraced the Don River.

mystery novel offers readers a different perspective on the Don River valley, showing how the homeless population uneasily exists in this space. No novel can solve homelessness, but *Free Reign* does productively open up a space to ask and think about the question of how the homeless might belong to the city in a more equitable fashion.

Racial Belonging: Listening to Marginalised Voices

Toronto was already home to a nascent community of Caribbean writers including Austin Clarke and Harold Sonny Ladoo when a group of new Caribbean writers including M.G. Vassanji and Nurjehan Aziz came together in 1981 to form the literary magazine *The Toronto South Asian Review* (TSAR). This magazine affirmed the city's status as a major centre for Caribbean literature.¹²¹ This status is crucially linked to the waves of immigration to Canada from the Caribbean and elsewhere that began after the 1960s when immigration laws were loosened. Driving this immigration was a sense that in Canada, one might make a good living in its more stable political climate. Guyanese-Canadian writer Cyril Dabydeen illustrates this perspective when he writes that "At that time I was living in Guyana, and [the 1960 West Indian issue of] *Tamarack*, in a sense, contributed to my view of Canada as an intrinsic place to fashion dreams, all conceived despite the overwhelming, even forbidding, sense of the Great White North, far different from the tropical milieu I grew up in; and, increasingly, Canada became the place of possibilities, unlike the U.K. or the U.S." (231). Most of the Caribbean arrivals in Canada

¹²¹ Austin Clarke has more or less made his career out of writing about Toronto and the Caribbean community. It is beyond the scope of this project to adequately address his work, but useful works would include any of his Toronto trilogy - *The Meeting Point*, *Storms of Fortune*, and *The Bigger Light* - along with *The Origin of Waves*, *More*, *Nine Men Who Laughed*, and *In This City*.

would have come through Toronto's Pearson Airport, and many stayed in the metropolis, contributing to a now vibrant Caribbean Canadian community while facing the realities of a polite but entrenched racism and the inability to find consistent, highly-paid work.¹²²

While some Caribbean immigrants have left Toronto, Dabydeen writes that "many of these writers live in Canada's major urban centre of Toronto, the 'meeting place,' giving an energy and vitality to the city's literary scene, particularly in dub poetry" (232-33). Given the presence of writers like Dionne Brand, Clarke, Lillian Allen, and Olive Senior, it is easy to see how Toronto is home to many of the Caribbean's major literary voices.¹²³

At the same time, these writers' residencies in the city have by no means been either simple or straightforward. Instead, what emerges through their work is a sense that their time in Canada has been marked by the transnational journeys many have embarked upon, the scars sustained from racism, and the problems of living away from one's homeland. In this section, I take up two Caribbean-Canadian writers' works to analyse multiple possibilities for and constraints on belonging in Toronto. Rather than choose some of the better known Caribbean authors like Brand, Clarke, or M. Nourbese Philip, I read two relatively minor authors – Rabindranath Maharaj and Sasenarine Persaud – not just because their work offers two productive avenues for exploring urban nature but also

¹²² I refer to Canadian forms of racism as polite, not because they are less insidious than the more public and vitriolic forms visible in the US, but because Canada as a nation invites immigration and seems to encourage equal participation only to prevent true integration or economic equality through arcane bureaucratic and unspoken corporate rules. At the same time, most Canadians and almost all Canadian politicians would vehemently deny the presence of a systemic and systematic racism in the country.

¹²³ In the last twenty years, Toronto has been actively branding itself as a multicultural city, even unofficially claiming itself as the most multicultural city in the world. I want to resist this label as it problematically announces that everyone is equally welcome in Toronto, which my analysis has shown to be untrue. It also suggests that other Canadian cities like Calgary, Vancouver, or Montreal do not have diversity while also implying that towns, villages, and the country are monocultural. See Riisa Walden's "Altered States of Rurality" for an engaging discussion of diversity in rural Ontario and Michael J. Doucet's "The Anatomy of an Urban Legend" for a discussion of Toronto's multi-cultural myth.

because I believe that giving their work attention helps to build the diversity of criticism on Canadian-Caribbean literature.¹²⁴ Beginning with Maharaj's 1997 novel *Homer in Flight*, I look at how Toronto's urban nature functions as a reassuring marker of national difference for Homer, the protagonist, throughout the novel. I turn to Persaud's short story, "Canada Geese and Apple Chatney" to ask questions about how urban nature is perceived and used by people who see themselves as outsiders to the city's landscape, questions that probe the contours of how nations and cities conceive of the uses of nature. I end by reading a few scenes from Joseph Boyden's Giller-prize winning novel *Through Black Spruce*, asking how Toronto's Indigenous peoples are presented as outsiders to the city which they gave the name "The Meeting Point."

Maharaj's *Homer in Flight* is a sweeping novel that crosses most of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Homer, who has a good government job as a filing clerk, immigrates to Canada hoping to escape "the randomness, the casual disharmony" which characterises Trinidad (12). After taking a bus ride across the island, he thinks "Eight hours to circle the land. Such a small, limited portion of earth, barely enough to contain its accumulated miseries" (12). Against this picture, Homer recalls a school teacher's descriptions of the vastness of the Canadian prairies and dreams of simply having enough space to claim his own place amidst others (12). The novel focuses primarily on his journey west across the GTA from his initial stay in Ajax to stops in Etobicoke, a high-rise off of Dixie Road, his new in-law's house in Burlington, to his eventual stay in

¹²⁴ For instance, Brand's work has attracted a large amount of critical attention with an Author as Subject MLA International Bibliography search of Brand yielding 121 results while Clarke yields 45 results. On the flip side, Maharaj's name yields only 2 results while Persaud's yields a single article written by him.

Hamilton. His life seems to promise much, but a drabber reality slowly sets in. Although this novel does not focus solely on Toronto, I follow my reading of Toronto's suburbs to raise questions about the different kinds of urban nature contained within the GTA's vast expanse, this time as seen from an immigrant's perspective.

Homer's attraction to Toronto comes primarily from the orderliness and beauty of nature that he sees along the highways and in the parks of the GTA. Even before he arrives in Canada, Homer builds up a sense of what the country will look like by perusing *Readers Digest*. He "admired its neatness and precision: the orderly gardens, the beautiful parks, the majestic lakes and rivers, the purpose and seriousness on the faces of the Canadians. Even the animals seemed noble and regal: huskies, polar bears, wolverines, so unlike the miserable, insignificant rodents which populated Trinidad" (15). Trinidad appears like an insignificant place to live in compared to Canada. Of course, the accuracy of Homer's vision of Canada is questionable given the kinds of animals he expects to see and the vested ideological interests of the magazines he reads. However, this imagined Canada is confirmed when he arrives in Toronto and finds the things he expected to find:

While Grants drove, Homer stared at the new, shiny vehicles, at the trees lining the sides of the roads, at the rows of red and grey brick houses with well-maintained gardens and neatly cut lawns. He noted with satisfaction the absence of litter on the streets, the orderliness of the city, the correct mixture of green and grey, of concrete and foliage, of buildings and trees. These Canadians are very constructive people, Homer reflected with a quiet satisfaction, staring at the flower-strewn terraces, the neat pavements, the clean rails bordering the road, and the total absence of landslips and raw, exposed mud. (22-23)

Homer sees Toronto through rose-coloured glasses, admiring the difference between Trinidad's landscape and Toronto's. His claim that it is possible to have a "correct mixture" of green space and gray buildings is striking, given that Toronto's landscape

when seen from Highway 401 is often anything but green. Also at work is Homer's sense that "everything that was missing or deformed in Trinidad was gloriously present here" (23). In this light, Toronto could only look like a well-ordered green paradise, given Homer's negative feelings about Trinidad and its messy landscape.

Homer continues to take great pleasure in Toronto's landscape even as his attempts to fit into Canadian society meet with resistance and turbulence. After falling out with Grants, Homer moves to Etobicoke to live in the same apartment complex as an old friend from Trinidad. He is not happy with the run-down appearance of the building and the clothes hanging from the balconies, but "he consoled himself with other comforts; he loved the beautiful park behind the building, the rows of willowy trees rising above the playground, where, during the evening, children spun around a giant wheel and jumped from an intricate wooden tree house ... he experienced a warm satisfaction whenever he stepped outside the lobby and walked along the park" (54). Homer's pleasure in the ordered landscaping of the building is buttressed by the sense that he fits into this vibrant community of children, women, and pets. He seems to have found his place in Toronto despite only being there for two months. Returning to my reading of Richardson's work, Canada's orderliness signifies a more developed civilization for Homer. Toronto is a land of progress unlike Trinidad which is marked by "randomness" and "casual disharmony" (12). Homer's "warm satisfaction" while walking about his new place in Etobicoke signals his own progress away from Trinidad's un-civilized ways.

However, several months later while working at Nutrapure, a juice factory, he feels "like a bleeding, confused animal kidnapped from its natural habitat and prodded

into a busy city, limping from street to street, forced to perform painful, impossible tasks, slinking into dark alleys at night, massaging its wounds” (62). As the reality of arduous, low paid labour sets in, Homer’s vision of a beautiful and ordered Canada begins to fail him. He begins to sense that the wealth that lies in the “beautifully landscaped parks, the well-maintained houses, the neat gardens and clean streets” will remain inaccessible to him (74). In a final attempt to reassure himself, he

concentrated on the beauty and tranquility that surrounded him. No detail, however minute, escaped his appraisal. There were no vines clogging the trees, no broken bottles strewn along the ground. The grass would never grow waist-high like in Trinidad, concealing poisonous snakes and other dangerous creatures. The dogs were well fed and dignified looking and thus not apt to suddenly escape from their owners’ clutches and tear off his ankle. (94)

Homer’s negative approach becomes even more apparent when in the next paragraph he admits that “he scavenged and paraded for constant nourishment his disgust with Trinidad and the reasons which caused him to pack his bags” (95). Where Toronto’s landscape seemed to promise him an ordered and successful life, he instead finds himself feeling that he does not belong in the city. Urban nature, then, functions as a mental crutch for him in his move away from Trinidad, but it proves to be a less-than-reliable tool.

Homer’s misplaced optimism is finally broken when he experiences his first winter in the city. While he is at first ecstatic about the many colours of leaves in fall, he sours when he realizes that all that is left are “dying twigs, the ravaged bark and the stripped branches remain[ing] on the emaciated trees” (109). With this realization he stops going out entirely because “he could not stand the sight of the violated trees and the leaves withering away on the ground, the promise of so much damp, decaying matter. Just like Trinidad” (109). The final sentence brings Homer uneasily close to a realization that

Trinidad and Toronto are not so different from each other. He later wonders if “Canada was just a nice, neatly packaged version of dirty little places like Trinidad” (123), questioning how Toronto’s landscape may cover over a difficult social reality. When winter does set in, Homer is shocked to find that it is not the friendly, playful, or welcoming season he thought it would be from his teacher’s descriptions:

He felt only sadness. The first flurries looked like despairing ghosts swirling around and looking for friends they had left behind. When he concentrated, he could hear the muted wailing. Soon the flurries were gone and the ghosts were frozen in icy clumps clinging to twisted branches or stifled by inconsiderate boots, destroyed by those who were unable to hear the desperate screams. (130-31)

With this vivid description, Homer begins to see the Toronto landscape anew, perceiving a haunted and horrifying landscape full of cruelty and cold. He feels loneliness as he stares out of his apartment window “and for the first time since his arrival in Canada he wondered what his parents were doing” (130). Urban nature has stopped being a welcoming agent for Homer, instead becoming something that repulses him and unsettles his sense of belonging while imprisoning him inside his high-rise.

What becomes clear in the first half of *Homer in Flight* is that Toronto’s carefully ordered nature at first appeals to Homer and seems to invite him into a sense of belonging in the place. Where it was once able to offer him solace and comfort, it no longer serves this function as the realities of a politely racist society become evident, the grind of a low-paid, high-risk factory job sets in, and as winter lowers the temperature and confines Homer to his apartment. While winter certainly does limit Canadians’ mobility, it seems that much more acute for Homer because he lacks any real human connections in his neighbourhood. In an ironic manner, Homer is attracted to the clipped and controlled

nature of Toronto, yet he finds his own ability to grow and flourish clipped by an unspoken racism.¹²⁵ A common metaphor for the immigrant experience is that of transplantation, picking up and planting oneself in a different climate in the hopes of growing strong roots. This is an apt metaphor as Homer literally places himself in the cultivated natural spaces of Toronto, hoping to establish himself. However, he soon finds himself unable to grow in the new soil because of the bedrock of racism. A “civilized” and ordered nature becomes a siren, promising belonging yet withholding it nonetheless. As Homer struggles to find any meaningful employment largely because he lacks “Canadian experience,” he continues to move west, leaving his wife and her sister in Burlington before settling in a ruinous and decrepit apartment in Hamilton.¹²⁶ At the nadir of his time in Canada, he begins to long for home, creating a “beautiful pastoral image [that] was far from the Trinidad he had known” by reminiscing over his past and purchasing two tropical plants in a desperate attempt to create a homely atmosphere (292). These exilic yearnings sharpen Homer’s sense of not belonging to Canada, reaffirming his sense that he has failed to take root in the GTA’s landscape.

Part of what makes Homer’s situation complex is the (post)colonial context of Trinidad. Homer’s education in Trinidad would have been thoroughly British given that Trinidad was a crown colony directly ruled by Britain until 1925 and only achieved full political independence in 1962. Part of Homer’s attraction to Toronto’s orderly nature is also an attraction to a British idea of what a cultivated and cultured landscape looks like. This colonial sense of landscape means that Trinidad’s disordered landscape will always

¹²⁵ My thanks to Daniel Coleman for this insight and poetic phrasing.

¹²⁶ See also Clarke’s “Canadian Experience” whose protagonist similarly struggles to find meaningful work.

be seen as inferior to a European one. Adding another layer of complexity is the fact that the disordered nature of Trinidad is itself a result of European colonialism as the island's landscape was vastly changed with contact in the 1500s. The Spanish cut down large portions of the evergreen, mora, and semi-evergreen forests that carpeted Trinidad in order to cultivate European crops like wheat, rice, olives, and citrus trees while also importing domesticated livestock (Newsom 80-85). However, their most important contribution was the introduction of a plantation-based economy that exported non-alimentary crops like cotton, tobacco and cocoa. The French and British colonials that followed the Spanish added to this working landscape by bringing in slaves and indentured labourers from Africa and India. These forms of ecological imperialism overrule any sense of local context or attention to native animal and plant forms, instead importing crops that are of use to the colonizers. In this sense, colonial politics are inscribed not just upon the landscape but in the way that a Trinidadian such as Homer's attitude towards land is shaped by a brutal colonial history of labour and subsistence rather than just aesthetics. This postcolonial history complicates any sense of belonging in a place. Homer unwittingly brings this colonial view with him to Canada, itself a colony of Britain for a long period, and, for a time, finds satisfaction in the more European landscape of Canada. However, this satisfaction proves short-lived as he finds that the same colonial views that privilege European ideas of landscape also privilege European bodies over Caribbean ones. Another metaphorical layer also exists in that the ordered nature that Toronto presents is itself imported from Europe so that Toronto, in a sense, is not that far off from Trinidad in having a European model of landscape forced onto it.

Amidst all these tensions and pulls, it is no surprise that Homer longs for Trinidad's ecologies, even if he knows that he is romanticizing them.

At the same time, it is while reflecting on Toronto's landscape that Homer has his most important transformation. Dismayed at his wife Vashti's self-improvement plans which exclude him, he ends up taking a GO Train journey from Burlington to Pickering on a whim. During this journey, he sees Toronto's landscape again and he realizes that "he was looking at the same buildings and the same landscape from a slightly different angle" (318). He admits that the romance and innocence with which he came to Canada are now gone. Yet, he recognizes the city is a beautiful place with its green spaces, skyscrapers, townhouses, and factories. He also realizes that Toronto was built up by "Italian and Greek and German immigrants," all of whom had his innocence and naiveté yet built the city that stands before him (317). He realizes, like Karen of *The Torontonians*, that Toronto is a vibrant and diverse place, and that part of its attraction for him is this vitality. With these realizations, Homer is freed from his paralyzing cycle of self-pity and apathy. He writes and self-publishes a novel and begins paying child support to Vashti, signalling a form of maturity. In these actions, Homer recognizes that his misconceptions about Canadian nature came more from his own expectations and from glossy tourist brochures than what he actually encountered. Instead he sees a different beauty than the one he initially imagined. In Homer's transformation, the novel asks readers to think about how members of different cultures encounter the built and natural forms of Toronto, particularly in ways that are not obvious to "established" Torontonians.

Moreover, Maharaj offers readers an example of a different method of interacting

with nature in *Homer in Flight*. Bay, Vashti's brother-in-law, has a very intimate relationship with his plants, particularly his prized ficus tree. Although Homer is skeptical about this relationship and hobby, it is clear that for Bay it is a sign not only of his successful arrival in Canadian society but also of his connection back to home. Bay's careful attention to his lawn and gardens means that his house is one of the most attractive in the neighbourhood. While this might seem to be simply conforming to a suburban desire for respectability, like Karen's neighbours in *The Torontonians*, Bay's careful attention and relationship to his plants signify something more. The ficus tree, or weeping fig tree, is a popular house plant but Bay treats it like a favoured child, carefully cultivating it so it can flourish. When Homer gets drunk at one of Lot's parties and vomits on the plant, Bay "ran up the stairs, but midway he stumbled and fell. He turned around and looked at Homer. Tears streaked down his face" (214). The ficus tree clearly plays an important role in Bay's emotional world, and Homer's action transgresses the growing closeness he shares with Bay. Moreover, Homer is struck by the strength of Bay's attachment to this tree and it causes him to question his own callousness toward Bay.¹²⁷

More important, it also causes Homer to reconsider his dismissal of Bay's earlier confession that he has planted a garden in the shape of Guyana. During this earlier conversation, Bay admits that he misses the Guyanese plants the most and laments that the Canadian ones will soon drop their leaves and flowers with the coming of fall (206). Bay then points at the garden and says "it's just a map of Guyana. The borders are tulips and the trailing campanula growing over the rocks is the forested mountain. The golden

¹²⁷ There is also an element of solidarity sacrificed by Homer's indiscretion as Homer believes both men are emasculated by Lot and her friends.

antheris and the mauve statis are the forest, and the birdbath is the Kaieteur Falls. It's visible only during the spring and summer. Then it's dead. Gone. Gone away" (206). This revelation reveals a deep sense of homesickness on Bay's part in that he longs for the Guyanese landscape. His botanical map speaks to exile and a sense of not quite belonging in Canada, a sense that Homer is not ready to admit yet.¹²⁸ At the same time, Bay is quite clear that he has no intentions of returning and prides himself on his success in Canada. So, he uses plants and gardens to express both his sense of belonging in Canada through a shared context of hobby gardening but also to express his own sense of not belonging to Canada by using a Guyanese shape to express a longing for a place that cannot be satisfied. Doing so makes his garden a hybrid space that signals a successful immigrant narrative of owning a house and being counted as a stable member of Canada's middle class. Yet this garden also signals where Bay has come from and his continuing emotional attachments to that place. If Homer seems unable to develop roots in Canada, this is certainly not Bay's problem as he has found ways to adapt to the climate. While Bay's garden seems paltry recompense for his exile from Guyana, it does at least allow him to metaphorically return home. In this sense, an urban garden becomes a way of navigating the tensions of transnational belonging. It also stands as an alternative to Homer's views of nature as a sign of an exclusive national character. If Homer feels left out by the orderliness of Toronto's nature, Bay complicates the use of gardening as a marker of national belonging in his Guyanese garden by having it signal his merger into

¹²⁸ See also the introduction to Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden (Book)* in which she talks about how "the garden I was making (and am still making and will always be making) resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it ... the garden is for me an exercise in memory ... a way of getting to a past that is my own (the Caribbean Sea)" (7-8).

Burlington's society but also his existing affective ties to the Caribbean.

If urban nature can become an avenue of belonging for immigrants to Canada, then Canadians must also be prepared for different uses of nature, some of which may clash with widely held notions about how nature can be used. Bay's garden in the shape of Guyana is fairly innocuous, but the actions of Writerji, Hermit, and Jones in Sasenarine Persaud's "Canada Geese and Apple Chatney" fly in the face of many Canadians' ideas of wildlife. Persaud's story focuses on three Guyanese illegal immigrants in Toronto and their struggles with various forms of racism and poverty. However, one of the ways that they deal with poverty is by deciding to use Canada Geese as a source of food, complemented by a crab-apple chatney.¹²⁹ While this act might seem to represent them as primitive hunter-gatherers, I argue that it is instead an act of resistance against the racism the Guyanese men experience in Toronto.

Not only is the Canada Goose named after the nation, but it is also a sacrosanct national symbol. The V shape of Canada Geese flying south in the fall is an annual reminder of the approach of winter but it has also become a distinct literary trope.¹³⁰ The eating of the Canada Geese by illegal Guyanese immigrants certainly flies in the face of a white Canadian cultural identity. However, it is also an illegal action in a literal sense as these men kill the birds without a valid hunting permit and out of season. Moreover, while many Canadian hunters actively shoot the Canada Goose, their motivations lie more in the pleasures of the hunt unlike the Guyanese immigrants who do so out of the

¹²⁹ Eating Canada geese also happens in *Homer in Flight* as Goose, a fellow worker at Nutrapure, claims he regularly dines on curried Canada goose (68).

¹³⁰ See, for instance, Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, Ethel Wilson's *Hetty Dorval*, Charles G.D. Roberts' "The Flight of the Geese" and Don McKay's "Song for the Song of the Canada Geese."

need to put food on the table.¹³¹ Persaud's story, then, confronts readers with a sacrilegious act that flouts the way Canadians view their national bird.

"Canada Geese and Apple Chatney" is clear that the three Guyanese men at its core feel the pressures of racism during their time in Canada, each suffering from a tenuous sense of belonging in Toronto's landscape. The story, part of a linked series of short stories about Writerji's journey to become an author, is narrated by Ramesh in a rich Guyanese dialect of English. The opening sentences set the tone of tenuous belonging: "Bai dhem time something else – rough – rough like rass. And was no laughter. Yuh want hear about dhem time? Let me tell yuh" (115). This opening makes clear that Ramesh, Hermit and Writerji were struggling to survive in their early days in Canada, but it also signals that this is no longer the case. At the story's end, Hermit and Ramesh are both legal residents of Canada, able to enjoy a barbecue with their wives and children free from the spectre of deportation, while Writerji has become a successful author in the US. Most of the story takes place in their early years in Toronto when Hermit, Ramesh, and Writerji were all illegal immigrants, doing manual labour, and trying to get official citizenship. Hermit comes to Toronto from Montreal because the racism and sovereignty politics not only make him nervous but make him feel unwelcome so that "Toronto tame compared to Montreal" (118). However, Toronto is not necessarily safe either as Ramesh narrates an episode in which Hermit gets into a tense stand-off with a Jamaican Rastafarian at a McDonalds in the Jane and Finch area over who will order next. Ramesh and Writerji are both frozen in fear but a young cashier opens up a new till to solve the

¹³¹ An exception to this would be the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples who hunt geese for subsistence across Canada's north. Of course, the hunt might also be deeply pleasurable for them as well.

problem with Ramesh wryly commenting “nothing like a pretty white girl to disarm a dread!” (118). This sense of racial tension not just between whites and blacks but between different Caribbean groups sets up Toronto as a place of tension and cultural conflict with each group vying for a stable sense of belonging in the city. Although Ramesh had fled Guyana because of the unrest and police brutality that spread to his country after the Rodney King trial and Hermit has left Montreal because of its own cultural problems, neither finds Toronto a completely welcoming place.

Within this complicated and racially-tense context, Writerji arrives and immediately begins learning about Canada. Rather than searching for work immediately, he goes to local libraries to learn about Toronto’s trees and birds. Ramesh comments: “whenever we go out anyway he pointing out birch, spruce, oak, cedar, weeping willow, pussy willow, ash, he pointing out bluejay, redstart, sparrow, starling, cardinal” (120). In an interesting inversion of roles, Writerji becomes a kind of native guide to Canadian landscape for Hermit and Ramesh, both of whom have been in Canada longer than Writerji. Writerji’s willingness to learn about Toronto’s environment seems to suggest that he will abide by the cultural norms that such knowledge comes encoded in, respecting the birds and trees in a detached, scientific manner, yet this is not the case.

Inspired by Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*, Writerji suggests that they could save money by eating Canada Geese from the park. Hermit and Ramesh are skeptical that Selvon would have written such a thing, but Writerji gets *The Lonely Londoners* out to show them how Cap decides to eat some of London’s seagulls. Reassured, the three friends go to Eglinton Flats Park to capture some geese before taking them home to eat

and agreeing “them geese taste good” (121). Of course, they heed Cap’s example and hide the skin and feathers well to avoid being caught by locals. Satisfied, the men then share their bounty with Prem and Kishore, two Guyanese women.

Buoyed by this success, Writerji finds his idea for his next culinary creation in the apples fallen on the ground in the park. Ramesh narrates: “people wasteful in Canada he muttering over and over. Writerji want help to pick some nice green apple on them tree. Why? He thinking just like how yuh use green mango, or bilimbi, or barahar to make achar and chatney why not green apple. And right then mango scarce in Toronto, cost a fortune” (122). Here, readers encounter Toronto’s urban parks through a different lens: Writerji sees the fallen apples as an appalling waste of food and comes up with a creative solution to this waste and to his roommates’ lack of money. Given the availability of food, productivity of agriculture, and the generally stable social system, most contemporary Canadians have not really known famine in the sense that many other countries have experienced it. Writerji’s perception that the fallen apples are being wasted shines a different light on Canadian landscaping practices where apple trees are decorative objects rather than sources of sustenance.¹³² Yet in Writerji’s apple chatney, the apples also become an avenue through which to connect back to a now absent Caribbean homeland. Similar to Bay’s Guyanese garden, Writerji, Hermit and Ramesh are able to experience a sense of distant intimacy with Guyana through their Canada goose and apple chatney.

¹³² Lorraine York pointed out to me that this practice is similar to the urban foraging movement which utilises the urban landscape as a place to gather fruits and vegetables for food. See Rebecca Lerner’s *Dandelion Hunter* and Wendy and Eric Brown’s *Browsing Nature’s Aisles* for more on this movement. While this movement holds potential for shifting human understandings of urban nature, it is important to pay attention to the issue of class as there is a significant gap between urban foragers and poor immigrants.

This moment is important because it comes in the middle of the three Guyanese men's unhappiness with the racism and social inequalities in Toronto. Writerji, in particular, becomes sick of the jealousy and envy at the factory because of his romantic relationship with Annette, the white factory-owner's niece. Ramesh says "don't let mi tell yuh, dhem white man in the factory vex. They gat all them forklift and checker and loader and supervisor and manager jobs but Annette ain't bothering with dhem" (123). Once gossip of Writerji's relationship gets out, his supervisors are constantly finding him more work including Ravi, a Sri Lankan floor hand who, Ramesh says, "he working there long and feel he is white man too. He don't mix with we" (123). Sick of this racial harassment, Writerji quits his job and makes plans to enter the US illegally, hoping that New York will be a more welcoming place. Before leaving, he narrowly avoids being caught by two immigration officers in an unannounced raid, probably tipped off by a vexed fellow employee. In this action, Persaud reminds readers that Toronto is not a welcoming space for those without citizenship.

In "Canada Geese and Apple Chatney," birds and apples become important objects through which Guyanese immigrants can feel a temporary sense of intimacy with their homeland while resisting the hegemonic grasp of Canadian culture. Their need to re-establish a connection to Guyana is fueled, in part, by the lack of belonging they experience in Toronto. The fact that they eat Canada Geese and make apple chatney not only signals their difference from Toronto the Good, but highlights their poverty as they struggle to put food on the table. The politely racist structures of Toronto require the three men to work low-paid menial jobs, but also refuse to grant them the same rights and

privileges that white Canadians enjoy. Missing home, yet knowing that return is impossible, Hermit, Ramesh, and Writerji are able to recreate a sense of home by eating Canada Geese with apple chatney. At the same time, this act resists the colonial impulse of Canadian nationalism by refusing to abide by the accepted cultural codes for the Canada Goose. Rather than treat them as a hallowed national bird, they instead symbolically consume a synecdoche of Canadian nationalism. By explicitly linking the story to Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, Persaud also signals a meta-critique of Canadian nationalism. Lisa M. Kabesh writes that when West Indians immigrated to Britain under the Nationality Act "migrants discovered that systemic discrimination limited their access to jobs and housing, resulting in an informal but pernicious system of segregation in the metropole" (2). This social context deeply informs Selvon's novel, so that when Persaud creates an intertextual link to it in his story, he invites readers to see Toronto as similar to London. Just as Cap and Galahad struggle to survive in London, Writerji, Hermit, and Ramesh find living in Toronto difficult. In this context, what seems like a primitive act of trapping and eating a national bird instead becomes a way for three men oppressed by Toronto's politely racist society to resist the impulses of white Toronto. While a certain element of pathos accompanies the act of eating geese and crab-apples, as it does in Selvon's novel, this action becomes a way to refuse a cultural hierarchy whereby their Caribbean roots are denigrated as inferior and less civilized.

Yet Persaud's story is not entirely pessimistic as Hermit and Ramesh do become citizens of Canada by marrying, raising children, and becoming model citizens in Toronto. At the end of the story, they are enjoying a backyard barbecue with their

families when Ramesh gives Hermit a copy of Writerji's first book. After finishing the book in one sitting, Hermit tells everyone "No, that bai nat like Naipaul he seh. He mek we proud! Dhem days, dhem days right hey, mixup and sanaay, sanaay good like rice and daal" (126). In this pronouncement, Hermit confirms Writerji's maturation as a writer but also that the difficult times they experienced are now over. Moreover, the reference to Naipaul suggests that Writerji, unlike Naipaul, has not rejected his Caribbean past and has instead found ways to remain faithful to it in his writing.¹³³ On seeing the dedication to the two friends, Hermit responds, "dhem days bai, dhem days is something else. See what we gain from dhem!" (126). In this sense, the three friends are able to survive and grow as people precisely because they ate Canada Geese and apple chatney. Their subversive act keeps them alive so that they can build a stable home life, culminating in a backyard barbecue where they can proclaim their past as "something else." They definitively locate their acts in the past while also painting them as distinctive and extraordinary.

In "Heads," the next story in Persaud's collection, Writerji comes back to Toronto and finds it far more welcoming than in his first visit, proclaiming "I was seeing Toronto differently and liking it more" (127). Even the character who leaves Toronto because of the racism he experienced is able to see the attractions of the city. In part this is because he notices "that spring was in the air, officially a few days away, but already there were a few days of temperatures above zero ... And poetry seemed to be sprouting out of everything around" (127). Here again, urban nature invites Writerji into the city, opening a poetic spring for him to drink from. He writes "I had returned this time for nine months

¹³³ My thanks to Daniel Coleman for explaining the implications of Hermit's reference to V.S. Naipaul and his complicated relationship to the Caribbean and Britain.

and with a feeling that I would take a book away from this stay. I had figured on a novel and here was all this poetry! Perhaps there would be two books” (127). In drawing on the city for inspiration, Writerji’s writing attaches him to the city in a metaphorical sense, signalling his own belonging in that city’s archive. Persaud’s short stories suggest urban nature can become an avenue through which belonging is felt or appreciated. At the same time, established cultural notions of what constitutes urban nature and what its proper “uses” are will be challenged by admitting more cultures to come to the table and offer their input. This challenging is a progressive act which may threaten traditional notions of nature and its uses, but a necessary one given the increasingly complex cultural negotiations that are happening within Canada, particularly in urban centres where cultural diversity is most pronounced.

The Indigenous characters of Boyden’s *Through Black Spruce* enact a further challenge in the way that they use a Canada Goose as part of a ceremonial feast under the Gardiner Expressway. Although the narrative of Boyden’s novel centres on the northern Ontario community of Moosonee/Moose Factory, it briefly stops in Toronto as Annie, a young Cree woman, searches for Suzanne, her sister who has gone missing while working as a model. While vacationing in the city with her best friend Eva, Annie notices an elderly homeless Indigenous man who cryptically acknowledges that he knew Suzanne. He invites her to a special feast under the Gardiner when she presses him for more information (70). Once she arrives, Annie is surprised to find that Old Man and two Indigenous women are drinking Perrier while Painted Tongue, a mute Cree who becomes Annie’s personal guardian, prepares a Canadian Goose with a newspaper fire in a teepee

made of tarp (72-73). Annie is unclear how to read the dirtiness and poverty of this group, yet she is impressed by their ability to perform a ceremony in a derelict space of Toronto. She realizes these homeless elders are carrying out their traditional practices just as she does in James Bay. Moreover, this scene is simply one of a number of goose feasts that occur in the novel so that it becomes clear that the homeless elders see the birds as part of Creation and something to be honoured by a feast rather than as a pest or national bird. Old Man acknowledges that the “cops will throw you in jail if they catch you doing it,” yet this does not stop him from performing ceremonies with the animals and plants of Toronto. While the homeless elders do not fit into Toronto, they nevertheless demonstrate a different way of belonging to the place. At the same time, Old Man’s feast, like Hermit, Ramesh, and Writerji’s meal, is a subversion of Canadian cultural practices so that immigrant “barbarism” and Indigenous “backwardness” parallel each other.

However, unlike “Canada Geese and Apple Chatney,” Boyden’s novel challenges the idea of “making it” in the city. Mi’kmaw scholar Bonita Lawrence points out that

because Toronto is located in Eastern Canada, where Aboriginal peoples on the whole are far less visible than in western Canada and where the presence of large numbers of people of color ensures that the racialized Other in Toronto is not Aboriginal, urban Native people in Toronto suffer from a certain invisibility ... Toronto in many respects represents the end point for urban mixed-blood Native people, the setting where the most extreme levels of dislocation exist among its Aboriginal population. (19)

The invisibility of Indigenous peoples in Toronto poses serious questions about how welcoming the city truly is. If the place’s first peoples are left out of any sense of community, then how can it be called a just or welcoming community? Boyden’s novel challenges readers by re-inserting Indigenous peoples into the narrative of Toronto. The

city is a dangerous place for Indigenous peoples as Annie finds out after leaving the feast when she is sexually assaulted by a racist white man in a dark alley (75-77). It is possible to read Old Man, Painted Tongue, and the two unnamed older Indigenous women as existing on the margins of the city, eking out a small existence. They have been systematically barred from participation in Toronto the Good. *Through Black Spruce* invites readers to ask why Indigenous peoples have been marginalized in the city while also pointing towards the ongoing problem of violence against Indigenous women.¹³⁴

Yet this is not a story of tragedy as Boyden's novel focuses on Annie's successful search for Suzanne and her Uncle Will's recovery from the brokenness of the violent, drug-addicted communities of Moosonee and Moose Factory. Old Man and the women help Annie recover from her sexual assault and appoint Painted Tongue her protector while she searches for her sister in Montreal and New York City. Old Man continues to offer advice and even shares a tent with them when they begin their return to the north (315-16). These homeless elders refuse to be broken by their marginalization, and, instead, maintain a healthy life of sorts on Toronto's streets. Lawrence points out, "for an urban and mixed-blood Aboriginal population to survive at all under such circumstances is itself a testament to ... the impossibility of in fact 'legislating away' or otherwise destroying a culture and the enduring nature of Indigenous identity despite continuous assaults" (19). While they improvise their ceremonies in an urban setting, they maintain a reciprocal relation with Creation, eating the geese, offering tobacco as thanks, and being respectful of their relations, just as Will and Annie do up in the northern bush country. In

¹³⁴ Violence against Indigenous women is linked to their "exoticism" in the novel as Annie and Suzanne are highly sought after models, underlining their marginal status in the predominantly white fashion world.

this sense, *Through Black Spruce* calls on readers to recognize how Indigenous people have been excluded from and exploited by Toronto, but it also shows they have remained resilient in spite of this. Boyden reminds us that if Toronto is to be a welcoming place, it must also pay attention to those who have been the most continuously marginalized over the long course of the city's history.

Urban Nature as a Meeting Point: Dionne Brand's *thirsty*

In closing this chapter, I take up a key moment in Dionne Brand's 2002 long poem *thirsty*, in order to trouble my own exploration of belonging. The moment in the poem when Alan is killed is a moment of not belonging, when systemic racism and state-sanctioned violence combine to create a tragic instance of misunderstanding. I feel that this is an appropriate, if ambivalent, way to end a discussion of belonging. As I stated earlier, I am not interested in using belonging as a category of exclusion or a tool of division. Returning to Code's work, she reminds us that "ecological human subjects are shaped by and shape their relations, in reciprocity with other subjects and with their (multiple, diverse) environments" (69). As ecological beings, we are informed by our interconnectivity with many other beings in our given places, so that a refusal to see connections between oneself and others is distinctly anti-ecological. Instead, I want to explore belonging as a means to build an inclusive community of diverse peoples along with the plants, animals, rocks, and any other beings that we find in the city.

Brand's long poem ripples outward from the moment of intense, traumatic violence when Alan, a Jamaican street preacher and guerilla gardener, is shot in the

doorway of his own home by white Toronto police officers. They shoot him because he emerges bearing a set of garden shears that he has “borrowed” from a neighbour. Alan thinks that the neighbours have come for this item, but the officers mistake it for a weapon and interpret his carrying it as an act of hostility (XII.9-26). Jody Mason argues that “Alan is caught in the threshold, arrested in its frame and a narrow stereotype of his black skin” (787). Similarly, Sandra Almeida reads the poem as “above all, an inglorious report of human life in the global city; it describes human suffering, the many prejudices the dispossessed have to face, and the fear of others” (124). However, I want to lay out a complementary reading of what Brand is doing not just in *thirsty* but also in her other works.¹³⁵ I read the event of Alan’s death as a failed opportunity to create peace, a violently interrupted moment of potential community-building. If, as Almeida points out, *thirsty*’s “poetic voice privileges an overwhelming description of a city devastated by indifference and abandonment” (126), then I argue that Alan’s death functions as an impassioned call for more inclusive forms of urban belonging to build up “the brittle gnawed li[ves]” that Torontonians live as the speaker declares (I.13).

Alan’s death presents two different misunderstandings, one of which has fatal consequences. In his attempt to apologize to his neighbours and return their gardening tools, Alan is seeking to share the “tulip, the infinitesimal petals of spirea, the blossoms/ he kissed this morning ... the branches of lilacs ... the two lengths of wild grasses that came off his hands” (XII.11-12, 13, 14). He is willing to offer the bounty of the flowers

¹³⁵ Johanna X.K. Garvey’s “Spaces of Violence, Desire, and Queer (un)Belonging” makes a strong case that a queer reading of *thirsty* and *What We All Long For* shows the impossibility of belonging, particularly for black or queer subjects. She proposes instead that Brand espouses an ideal of “unrooted relation” where subjects encounter each other “in relation, share space, and overlapping paths not yet mapped” (763, 766).

and grasses to his neighbours in a conciliatory gesture, and, in doing so, he would invoke a sense of ecological belonging amongst his neighbours. Johanna X.K. Garvey reads Alan's rogue gardening as a part "of his desire to assimilate, to plant himself and his family, and to take root in the inhospitable soil of Toronto" (763). However, as Garvey explains, "he has stolen the accoutrements of belonging even as he will remain an outsider and target of suspicion" (763). While she criticizes Alan for his naiveté and inability to see that his skin colour will always set him apart, I believe that his desire to plant himself in Toronto is worth considering. Like Bay in *Homer in Flight*, Alan yearns to develop roots in Toronto, becoming a member of the city's community. However, his planned peace offering is cut short by a brutal act of racist violence as the police misinterpret the garden shears as a weapon of violence rather than an invitation to peace. Alan's murder on his doorstep is not unlike the actual killing of Albert Johnson by Toronto police in 1979, a parallel that Brand clearly intends readers to pick up on. Even more appalling, then, is that the same police officer is cleared of blame and allowed to "sashay from a courthouse" as a "gunslinger/ this élan, law and outlaw, SWAT and midnight rider" (XXVI.1, 17-19) just as Johnson's killers were. *thirsty* presents readers with a radical invitation to imagine belonging in Toronto differently. Even though Alan is killed, his death calls readers to question existing forms of belonging that exclude otherness and difference, but it also suggests that urban nature could have been a meeting point for this rethinking of belonging. I would like to pose this reading alongside other interpretations of Brand's work, not as the legitimate or even the most plausible one.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ See Garvey's "Spaces of Violence," Almeida's "Impossible Citizens," Heike Härting's "The Poetics of

Instead, I suggest that this reading is a parallel reading – perhaps intended by Brand, perhaps not – that resonates with her overall work on diaspora, belonging, and identity.

Part of why I hesitate with my suggested reading is that Brand is very blunt about her stance on belonging. In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, she writes: “belonging does not interest me” (85). However, in this book, her problem is not so much with belonging as a concept, but more with national belonging and the way that it unfolds on the ground. She writes that as far as national belonging is concerned: “too much has been made of origins” (69). Moreover, she describes the “calcified Canadian nation narrative” as one that focuses exclusively on European origins, an act of erasure that covers over the many stories which inform Canada while also building walls against new inhabitants (70). Throughout *A Map*, particularly in the memoir of her time in Grenada, what is clear is that a definition of belonging that hinges on origins is highly problematic. As a black, queer, feminist writer from the Caribbean, Brand can have no place in the national narrative that is often deployed. As such, she declares no interest in this form of belonging, instead quoting Eduardo Galeano, she writes “I’m nostalgic for a country which does not yet exist on a map” (52). For those who live in diaspora, there can be no sense of national belonging precisely because they have crossed through the Door of No Return, an act which erases their origins and sets them permanently adrift. This is a strong critique of Canadian nationalism – indeed, all nationalisms – and one that I have tried to be sensitive to throughout this project. We need to think about and act on urban nature in

Vulnerability,” Heather Smyth’s “The Being Together of Strangers,” Jordana Greenblatt’s “Something Complicit,” and Mason’s “Searching for the Doorway” for readings that engage with queer theory, globalization, diaspora, multiculturalism, violence, and Brand’s use of doors as a trope respectively.

ways that do not create exclusivity or reinforce narratives of origins that privilege one group over another. Part of this reflection will come back to concepts of ownership and private property, which allow for the ability to exclude others. Ecological thinking stands against such exclusions and power-infused hierarchies. It operates on a critical sense of interconnectedness within given places that themselves overlap and intersect with other places and beings. So, like Brand, I am not interested in national belonging either.

However, where Brand's and my argument come together is the interest in exploring a more tenuous form of community, one that is not calcified into a single structure or that excludes others. Maia Joseph writes that

In *Map*, however, Brand favours the gerund form 'landing,' which suggests an ongoing process and indicates that she is not interested in mapping out a static, universalized landscape. Each time she 'lands' in yet another (post)colonial outpost, she does not simply become reinscribed within its regimes of power; rather she maps ways of seeing and moving, of making sense of space, that exist in the midst of or despite the systems of power that govern social relations. (77)

Joseph's productive analysis of Brand's landings in Burnt River, Toronto, and Vancouver unpacks Brand's desire to find a deeper form of meaning in the places she finds herself. Of course, this meaning must also exist against the dominant systems of power that Brand has written about for most of her career. In *thirsty*, Julia and her daughter want to be part of the city they see around them, but they are alienated from it by the violent murder of Alan. This longing to be part of a community also animates *A Map* even as Brand ultimately foregoes the nation-state as a community to which one can belong, instead finding meaning in other, more open or localized communities. Joseph ends her reflections on Brand's work by arguing: "in wandering and wondering her way into her desired country, she suggests that the answer lies in a particular kind of asking – in a

sustained, attentive querying of the contours of belonging” (90). This kind of careful attention and posing questions allows Brand to find her way into the place she lives, and in so doing, to explore a kind of community and belonging. Similarly, belonging to a local urban place can be a kind of tenuous belonging without the problems that attend official national belonging. As I argued in the Windsor chapter, we cannot enact minimum residency laws on the ability to speak to or about a place because doing so re-enshrines autochthony as the primary category for speaking about place. What the texts I have explored above also show is that outsider perspectives on Toronto – like that of Writerji or Homer – contribute key perspectives on the city’s community. So, if belonging to an urban place is to work in an ethically just manner, there must always be space for voices from the margins and the outside. Ecological belonging must constantly be seeking to allow others into the conversation. In doing this careful and attentive listening, extending belonging can become a mode of ecological thinking that strengthens connections between the many different beings that inhabit a healthy environment.

And this is where I think *thirsty* can be an important touchstone for reconceiving Toronto’s landscape: Alan works toward a form of community in the urban nature of Toronto. One of his character traits is that he is a guerrilla gardener of sorts. He borrows “rakes, saws, gloves, shovels, flowers, weeds – without asking,” but plans to return the lilacs and grasses he has taken (VI.2). This fugitive approach towards plants in the city is explained, in part, by the poem’s speaker when, in discussing his past, she writes “he only wanted a calming loving spot,/ we all want that but the world doesn’t love you” (IX.i.27-28). Alan finds in mimosa, tulips, and lilacs the love and calm that the racist society of

Toronto refuses to give him. At the same time, he finds the racist violence that surrounds him – “black men dragged, two, three young girls tortured/ and raped and killed by a sweet blond boy” – intolerable, and responds by preaching “inspired sermons at Christie Pits” that steam with outrage against this violence (IX.ii.5-6, 2). The extreme experience of not belonging that characterizes black life in North America assaults Alan’s conscience, driving him to seek belonging in other ways. Brand reinforces Alan’s quest to find belonging in the plant world when Alan is shot: “his chest flowered stigma of scarlet bergamot/ their petal tips prickled his shirt, spread to his darkening/ throat, he dropped the clippers to hold his breaking face,/ he felt dry, ‘Jesus ... thirsty ...’ he called, falling” (XII.23-26). Alan’s body becomes a flower as the blood spreads outwards from the bullet hole, imparting a painful beauty to his dying figure. His cry of “thirsty” may seem odd given that he has just been shot, yet it contributes to the flower imagery as plants depend on water for life. The passage also sheds a Christ-like aura on Alan as the bullet hole becomes a stigmata while his words echo Jesus’s own declaration of thirst while he was on the cross (*New Interpreter’s Study Bible* John 19:28). Jesus, according to Christian tradition, came into the world to call his followers into a new way of life. Here, however, Alan is a failed Christ figure as his death is seemingly inconsequential and he has no followers. Alan’s attachment to flowers is passed on to three women who surrounded his life as they are reminded of him each time they encounter flowers. Julia, his partner, tastes “the fiction of magnolia blossoms” on the anniversary of his death while she stands on church steps, suggesting that for her all flowers are now empty and meaningless (VII.7). So, while urban nature becomes a site of meaning for Alan and offers him

belonging, it does not do so for the women around him.

If we see Alan as a partial Christ-figure, one of the most important sites of his preaching is Christie Pits. This recreational park at Bloor and Christie Streets is not a wilderness space like sections of the Don or Humber Rivers. Instead, it has baseball diamonds, basketball and volleyball courts, a wading pool, and sloped sides used for tobogganing in the winter. It is a well-used and well-loved park that attracts a broad variety of people for many different purposes. It also provides Alan with a ready audience for his crying out against racial violence. But Christie Pits is important for other reasons, as it was home in 1933 to a violent racially motivated riot between the Jewish players and fans of a local junior softball team and the anti-Semitic fans of a white team. The five-hour brawl that spilled out of the park and into the streets shocked Toronto the Good. Cyrill H. Levitt and William Shaffir write that this event was “the violent expression of anti-Semitism in Canada at the shadow of the beginnings of Jewry’s darkest hours” when latent xenophobia in Toronto began to show its teeth (3). Brand seems fully aware of the racial violence that underpins Christie Pits, so that Alan is preaching a message of peace in a historically unpeaceful place.¹³⁷ Moreover, Peter Hobbs and Cate Sandilands identify Christie Pits as an important site in a map of Toronto’s queer community, being home to female-only sports leagues during World War II which also became, quite unintentionally from the organizer’s perspective, a “public space in which women could come together in numbers, without raising suspicion, to develop a social and sexual culture more or less on their own terms” (84). This queer history at Christie Pits is also important because it links

¹³⁷ In *In Another Place, Not Here*, Brand writes “Look at us laughing into the park. Henson-Garvey Park, we named it, right here in Toronto,” giving Christie Pits a new name to reflect black history (158).

the area to a wider network of marginalized people, many of whom resist dominant sexual patterns. Although this history exists on the margins of the park's official history, it nevertheless shows how this park can be a meeting point for a wide range of people. Christie Pits, as a public park, is home to some of Toronto's homeless population while also being a place of escape for apartment dwellers, university students, and those living in local boarding-houses. In this sense, Christie Pits becomes a very public place of refuge for the people who live around it. It is a shared space whose meanings and uses are in a fluid process of contestation. As such, it might serve as a meeting point for building a local sense of ecological belonging. Alan preaching sermons on social injustice to Christie Pits becomes a poignant figure that suggests ecological and social justice.

By illustrating Alan's lack of belonging, Brand opens up the possibility for envisioning a new form of belonging which does not involve racial injustice. For my purposes, the fact that she does this through urban nature is telling. Local places might become the nexus for building up interconnected communities that are expansive and inclusive. In 2009, Christie Pits became home to a community garden with a mission to "promote urban food production and community building in and beyond the Christie-Ossington area ... Together we will create an accessible space that operates on principles of inclusion and respect for each other and the environment" (Gardens in Action). With such a radical mission in place, community is already being formed in Toronto's urban nature spaces. Brand's trenchant criticism of Toronto as an unwelcoming city in her body of creative and critical work and the very hesitant embrace of Toronto by the poem's speaker in *thirsty* points to the need to remain vigilant against all kinds of racial, class,

sexual, and gendered injustice that have characterized much of Toronto's history. Read differently, Brand's criticism and protest also signal a committed and long-term attachment to the city, an allegiance that drives her to speak out against injustice. Although the Christie Pits community garden is being established seven years after the publication of Brand's *thirsty*, I want to suggest a link between Alan's sermons and the realization of an inclusive community in this area. By explicitly focusing on "inclusion and respect for each other and the environment," this community garden begins to build a form of ecological belonging that does not sacrifice either human or natural belonging in its vision of a communal good life.

With such a vision in mind, I return to Harris's argument that Toronto is full of "narratives of unfinished journeys and incomplete arrivals" (13). What this chapter shows is that these narratives and stories can become avenues through which readers, writers, and other beings can experience belonging in Toronto's many spaces. What is necessary for ecological and social belonging is the realization that we are all interconnected to each other and to the places that we live in, and that such interconnections lay a burden of responsibility on us to extend belonging to everyone within our homes. Toronto is a big city with many communities as my readings have shown. Yet, as I argued with Young's novel and Sileika's short story, the suburbs belong in the broader Toronto community just as the homeless and marginalized also need a place. My readings of Aubert, Maharaj, Persaud, Boyden, and Brand suggest how Toronto might offer belonging to these people, yet they also show how belonging is complex as it can just as easily exclude some as include others.

Growing Into Alternative Futures: The Role of the Arts in the City

As I sit in my fourth-floor office at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, I look out a window onto a courtyard filled with ash and maple trees, shrubs and some native grasses in a bean shaped planter. I cannot help thinking to myself that this project is somehow misguided. Of course, there is nature in the city. I can see it right outside of my office window. The male Northern Cardinal who chirrups and pips each morning from spring to fall on his high perch is hard to miss, particularly during breeding season in March and April. Not to mention the fact that Cootes Paradise is only a couple hundred metres away, filled with ducks, deer, foxes, squirrels, garter snakes, fish, and even turtles. To get to my office, I cycle along a recently paved trail that runs parallel to the Niagara Escarpment, and I have been blessed with year-round views of this geological feature and the trees, plants, and animals that call it home. It sometimes feels like it is only in my head that most people believe the city is disconnected from nature.

Moreover, I think almost all Canadian urban dwellers would admit that they know that cities are not separate from nature if the question were asked of them. Throughout this project I have shown some of the ways in which nature has appeared or interrupted narratives in Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto. If you asked Vancouverites about nature, they could simply point west to the ocean and east to the Rocky Mountains, while Edmontonians could walk you down to the North Saskatchewan River valley, and Haligonians could refer to the salty taste in the air that blows in off of the Bedford Basin or take you down to the pastoral woods of Point Pleasant Park. Nature is everywhere in the cities that we live in. To think that the city is set apart from the physical landscape

comes across as wilful blindness or ignorant foolishness. Cities have no more escaped nature than humans have overcome their reliance on the earth for all of our needs.

And yet, in the middle of a winter freeze, I was stunned to see a Peregrine Falcon perched on an electrical box on the side of another building across from my office.¹³⁸ I spent the next thirty minutes watching the falcon from a stairwell window, in awe of its size, stark eye patches, and its intent surveillance of the courtyard below. Peregrine Falcons were almost entirely eradicated from eastern North America by pesticide poisoning in the 1960s, but they have begun to make inroads back through conservation efforts and the reduction of certain kinds of pesticides. More particularly, recovery programs have been especially effective in urban locations so that in my five years of bird-watching I have only seen Peregrine Falcons in cities. However, I have never seen them at McMaster before, so this one was a revelation for me. It makes sense that a Peregrine Falcon would hunt for prey in the courtyard outside my window given the high perches available and the constant presence of mice, squirrels, and small birds. However, the fact that I was so surprised by this bird's appearance suggests to me that even my imagination of nature in the city is constrained. My awe was in part because here was living proof of just how intertwined buildings are with ecosystems. This gives me hope that urban nature can help shake our notions of the human place in the world while also allowing room for awe and wonder.

Even as I puzzle over this moment, it is important to recognize that our cities are not ecologically healthy places. In some ways, the Peregrine Falcon has recovered

¹³⁸ I did not have binoculars in my office, so I am unable to say with absolute certainty that this is what it was. It may have been a juvenile Red-Tailed Hawk, but its dark eye patches suggested a Peregrine Falcon.

because many other predators of small animals have been removed from the city. If we are to create meaningful, long-lasting changes in the way we live in cities, then we need to recognize that the way things are right now must change. Naturalist Lyanda Lynn Haupt writes in *Crow Planet*:

To suggest that urban nature holds profound lessons is not to suggest that our concrete-laced wilds are, in any sense, adequate. Ecologically minded social critics are most often correct in proclaiming them to be impoverished places that incite a rampant consumerism, contriving at every moment to cut us off from any connection to a wilder earth. Urban sprawl – and the degraded, chopped-up habitat it leaves in its wake – is the single greatest threat to species diversity in the current millennium. If we wish to have a positive impact on the places we consider to be most profoundly wild, then we must begin by inhabiting our home ecosystems with some semblance of knowledge and grace. (36)

Haupt reminds readers that cities are impoverished places even as they can offer profound lessons. What strikes me when I reflect back on this project is that I have been constantly pulled between the tensions of a surprising and deeply fulfilling learning and mourning what has been compromised or lost. As I argued in my chapter on Windsor, ambivalence may be our most productive response to urban nature. But it is also important to retain a strong sense of how the natural world remains resilient as I was reminded by the Peregrine Falcon's presence. This bird is just as much a part of the ecological community that exists in Hamilton as I am; thinking about how to include such a bird in my vision of community is necessary groundwork for changes to make Hamilton a more ecologically healthy place.

Although this was not clear to me at the time of writing, there is a progression in the chapters themselves as we move from an initial ambivalent reaction to Windsor's urban nature, to finding moments of resilience even as there are stories of negative

change in Hamilton's landscape, and on to thinking about how to extend belonging in Toronto's ravines, suburbs, and parks. Implicit in this pattern is a movement from initial experience to thoughtful reflection and finishing with ecologically inflected action that works, as Code puts it, at "imagining, crafting, articulating, [and] endeavoring to enact principles of ideal cohabitation" (24).

Yet in all of this, what is also clear for me is that the arts are absolutely essential to restoring ecological health to the city. Broken City Lab is a Windsor-based art collective that describe themselves as "an artist-led interdisciplinary collective and non-profit organization working to explore and unfold curiosities around locality, education, and creative practice leading towards civic change" ("About"). "...And Then the City," a 2010 piece was the final part of a five-month project called Save the City in which members of Broken City Lab listened to Windsorites' stories of why they first came to Windsor and why they have stayed. Not interested in reciting the depressing narrative of economic stagnation and decline, Broken City Lab sought to intervene in the city's cultural discourse. They decided to end the project by using two local billboards to capture the attention of those passing by. On the first was written "... and then the city knew it wasn't alone" while on the second was written "... and the city started to feel better" ("Save the City") While these interventions are aimed at reviving the city's cultural core, I also believe that they tell a story about Windsor's landscape. The city is not alone; it is, in fact, filled with many beings, including birds, animals, flowers, plants, and water. Embracing these more-than-human others will begin to revive our cities' health. And yet, it takes cultural work to make us realize this fact as the Broken City Lab

billboards fly in the face of the visual message signalled by the abandoned lot and the congested parking lot they stand in. Their work acts as a goad to incite us to action and inspires viewers to begin changing the narratives they circulate about the places we live in. Stopping to think and imagine is a crucial first step as Broken City Lab's Save the City project suggests. Yet as my project meditation's about ambivalence and the mixed uses of resilience suggest, this work is neither going to be straightforward nor always successful. But it is necessary work that needs to happen on a broad-scale.

Part of that work is longing for a different city where ecological health is not sacrificed in the name of industry or economy. The title of this project contains a line from Dennis Lee's 1972 long poem *Civil Elegies* that speaks to this longing:

But in the city I long for men complete
their origins. Among the tangle of
hydro, hydrants, second mortgages, amid
the itch for new debentures, greater expressways,
in sober alarm they jam their works of progress, asking where in truth
they come from and to whom they must belong
...
and then, no longer haunted by
unlived presence, to live the cities:
to furnish, out of the traffic and smog and the shambles of dead precursors,
a civil habitation that is
human, and our own. (1.81-86, 104-08).

Where Lee cries out against the "numbness of a colonized consciousness" as Dale Zieroth puts it in the lines above, Lee's speaker imagines humans asking themselves difficult questions about where they come from and to whom they must belong (36). Nicholas Bradley points out that "the question of how to exist in Canada and in the world in general, is for Lee, one that revolves around the relation between individuals and the place in which they live" (15). Lee's reference to smog and traffic calls on readers and

listeners to long for a civil habitation that rises above such a cacophony of noise, smells, and exhaust. My project is deeply motivated by a longing to see more ecologically healthy modes of urban living enacted in Ontario. Although the line from Lee's poem I use in my title contains a personal pronoun, I hope that my project spurs readers towards a collective vision of a city embedded in the natural world, a city that pays attention to and cares for its many members and beings.

I believe that all of the works I read in this project long for a more civil habitation in the broadest sense. Literature helps to sharpen our sense of crying out against injustice as Brandt, Terpstra, and Brand all do in their respective cities. It allows us to re-imagine the spaces that we inhabit, shedding new light on spaces that are broken by pollution and violence as MacLeod, Aubert, and Boyden do. But, and I believe this may be most important, it might also spur us on to action. While researching and reading for this project, I was continuously led out into these three cities, seeking the lessons they might offer to help us learn how to inhabit "our home ecosystems with some semblance of knowledge and grace" as Haupt puts it (36).

All of which leads me back to the epigraph that frames this dissertation. American poet Mary Oliver is well known for her lyrical and profound nature poems. "Five A.M. in the Pinewoods" takes up an experience of encountering two deer in a pine forest and the lessons that they teach the poem's speaker in learning how to "swim inward ... flow outward ... [and] pray" (34-36). The poem is clearly set in a forest and not in an urban setting. Yet the lines I use – "This is a poem about the world/ that is ours, or could be" stretch outwards beyond Oliver's pinewoods to encompass all landscapes (21-22).

Reading this poem while sitting by Cootes Paradise, I knew that these lines also referred to the urban world in which I lived. Hamilton is the world that I live in, one marked by Peregrine Falcons, White-Tailed Deer, and Eastern Grey Squirrels as much as by asphalt, far too many cars, and ugly concrete buildings. Yet Oliver's lines call me to imagine how this urban place can be so much better. This dissertation, then, is also a rendering of the world as it is in Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto, but also of the world as it could be. It is possible to live in a more ecologically healthy way, and I believe that for Canadian urbanites, it must begin in the cities that they find themselves in. I believe that literature and art push us into action, but, ultimately, it rests with viewers, readers, and listeners to respond to this call and begin to imagine and enact the world as it could be.

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