

## Forests, Clearings, and the Spaces in Between Reading Land Claims and the Actuality of Context in *Ana Historic*

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# Forests, Clearings, and the Spaces in Between: Reading Land Claims and the Actuality of Context in *Ana Historic*<sup>1</sup>

RENÉE JACKSON-HARPER

“WOMEN ARE GROUND, WOMEN ARE NATURE,” writes BC poet, novelist, and critic Daphne Marlatt in “Self-Representation and Fictionanalysis,” a paper that maps and theorizes her work in her 1988 novel *Ana Historic* (14). Such claims by Marlatt have led to accusations of essentialism from critics such as Dennis Cooley and Frank Davey, who have read Marlatt’s writings “as advancing a reductive search for origins” (Milne 86).<sup>2</sup> Although I do not read her claim of an essential female connection with “ground” and “nature” as reductive, I do hear in it, and in *Ana Historic*’s various references to indigeneity, an invitation to wrestle with the problematics of seeking self-identity with the land when dwelling on contested ground. Given that Marlatt’s novel was written prior to the 1990s, a decade, Sophie McCall argues, that was “pivotal in reconceptualising how we think of voice and representation in Aboriginal cultural politics” (3), I acknowledge that it is potentially unjust to examine work written in the 1980s with the analytical perspectives and tools available to critics nearly thirty years later. That said, Marlatt’s body of work has been (and continues to be) crucial in the development of Canadian literary studies. Widely taught at Canadian universities, and celebrated as a canonical work of historiographic metafiction, *Ana Historic* remains a prominent text in discussions relating to Canadian nationalism (see Percy), settler identity, and identity formation (see Mannani and Thompson; and Thompson). The ongoing prominence of Marlatt’s work in these discussions makes continued attention to the various and shifting registers within her writing all the more crucial. In this essay, in which I read Marlatt’s novel in light of current discussions on settler identity formation, I am particularly interested in the premise, put forward in *Ana Historic*, that female settlers might claim a kind of indigeneity, or what Jennifer Henderson calls an “otherness,” distinct from the colonial

project. Through an ecocritical reading of *Ana Historic*, in what follows I am concerned with the situational politics and problematics inherent in Marlatt's search for origins, a search that seeks to "enact" origin from the "actuality" of "context" (Marlatt, "Self-Representation" 16-17). As I examine *Ana Historic's* penetration and translation of British Columbia's south coastal space, I argue that, while the novel is critical of the province's male narratives of resource extraction and settlement, it is actively engaged in an appropriative ordering of geography positing that identity can be wrought from the space where forest and clearing meet.

In *Ana Historic*, Marlatt explores the possibility that one might foster an "ab-original" self born of the imaginative appropriation of contested geographic space (30). The territory, or "context," that her novel seeks to claim from British Columbia's patriarchal settler narratives of "domination" has long been contested ground, since for over a century and a half Coast Salish Nations have sought to assert their primary rights (Marlatt, "Self-Representation" 17; Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 19). On 25 June 2014, the basis for settler-invader claims on Coast Salish territory was officially discredited as the City of Vancouver passed a motion, the Protocol to Acknowledge First Nations Unceded Traditional Territory. In this motion, the city acknowledged that settler colonial land grabs, and the modern institutions that benefited from such seizures, "were established without respect for the [Coast Salish] people or their traditions." The motion goes on to state that "the modern city of Vancouver was founded on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations and that these territories were never ceded through treaty, war or surrender."<sup>3</sup> Although the Coast Salish do play a marginal role in Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, their claims sit at the nervous periphery of those made by the "city mothers" and their female descendants (28).

Marlatt situates the novel's central identity quest in this contested geographic space as characters lay claim to, and at points *become*, the land. Through the novel's various enactments<sup>4</sup> (which traverse historical periods and in which women are written into and onto the land), three distinct topographic spaces are both mapped and theorized: the forest, the clearing, and the space between them. Within Marlatt's framework, forests and clearings stand in binary opposition, since the forest is coded as feminine and the clearing (with its growing city) as male-dominated space, while in the space in between, made up of dense bush and nar-

row paths, one can evade such monolithic dualisms. As Milne argues, Marlatt asks that we read the in-between “not as an empty space but as a shared space of identification and possibility” (86). In the novel, genesis is achieved in the liminal, since the literal and figurative “obscurity of bush” (Marlatt 17) at the edge of the clearing offers opportunities for creative and sexual transgression outside restrictive binaries. Although the novel works to wrest discursive and geographic territory from white patriarchal history in order to tell/insert the stories of marginal groups (women and lesbians), the Coast Salish people in it remain silent figures, appearing only briefly as potential threats, as victims, or as apparitions (41-42; 91-93; 69; 96). The task of discursively mapping (or unmapping) the south coast is given to white women with distinct capacities within the ruling discursive system: Annie Richards, a research assistant and writer, and Ana Richards, a schoolteacher. Marlatt’s protagonist(s), as they work to realize their longings to be “*ingenuus* (born in), native, natural, free(born)” (127), make what Margery Fee terms “literary land claim[s]” (17). In her examination of contemporary English Canadian literature, Fee argues that many contemporary works of Canadian fiction<sup>5</sup> follow a common narrative pattern in which white protagonists, through a tangential “association with the Native,” seek to legitimize their claim on the land as they undergo a “therapeutic meditation on the evil of technology and the good of life close to nature, the latter offering a temporary inoculation against the former” (17). This pattern is evident in Marlatt’s text as “imaginative penetration” (Marlatt, “Entering” 17) of Coast Salish territory finally allows the protagonist, in the poem that closes the novel, to return to the grid imposed on the clearing, changed and emboldened.

*Ana Historic*, explicitly desiring to counter nationalist patriarchal discourse in its ecological engagement with place, is itself heavily invested in the old tropes of nationalism. Northrop Frye, in his “Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*” (1965), identifies the notion that one can imaginatively penetrate, and thus inhabit, the land as integral to the “mystique of Canadianism” since Confederation, in which to “feel ‘Canadian’ was to feel part of a no-man’s-land with huge rivers, lakes, and islands” (220). Frye argues that in the earlier phase of Canada’s social development the individual would define himself against “a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting,” whereas in the later phase “the conflict of man and nature” expanded “into a tri-

angular conflict of nature, society, and individual,” in which “the individual tends to ally himself with nature against society” (225, 245). In Marlatt’s novel, this triangulation is foundational as the individual turns away from society, looking to nature as both a “visible representative of an order that man has violated” and as a space from which one can emerge transformed and with the capacity to engage with society on new, more “authentic,” terms (Frye 245). The novel’s protagonists, imagined as straying “close to animism,” find in Vancouver’s verdant boundaries the same “new world” that has long been appropriated by Canadians for its transformative potential (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 84; Marlatt, “Entering” 18). Marlatt, who identifies herself as an immigrant to Vancouver, understands her writing as “a vehicle for entry into what was for [her] the new place, the new world,” a means by which she could “enter into its mystery, its this-ness, . . . [and] penetrate it imaginatively” (“Entering” 18, 17). Terry Goldie, who examines literary representations of Indigenous people in his study *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literature*, notes the problematic nature of the word *penetration* when used to describe white people who enter Indigenous lands, defining it in this context as “the forcible imposition of the dominator and his discursive system within the dominated space” (15). Although Marlatt’s novel seeks to subvert and undermine the dominant discursive systems created and upheld by patriarchal forefathers, her now canonical work of postmodern “historiographic metafiction”<sup>6</sup> is itself imbricated in the systems that it seeks to counter.

Although some critics have lauded the subversive potential of historiographic metafiction, a mode that began to take root in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s, others have increasingly contested this claim. As Owen Percy has noted, critics have long argued that “the historiographical effect” of Marlatt’s style serves “to dismantle patriarchal, linear, and authoritative representations of history” and, in the case of both Marlatt’s novel and George Bowering’s *Burning Water*, to “emphasize and enact the impossibility of any kind of authoritative or all-inclusive history for Canada’s Pacific Coast” (184-85). Smaro Kamboureli, conversely, is critical of such claims regarding historiographic metafiction’s subversive or deconstructive potential. She argues that, rather than undermining master narratives, or fostering plurality, what emerges through works of historiographic metafiction is “a totalized and total-

izing heterogeneity,” in which “history emerges as a single narrative — with a difference: it now includes its own nervous double” (173). Kamboureli goes on to argue that, though historiographic metafiction recognizes historical realities, its “‘re-presentation’ of the past works in tandem with the old Western desire to master history” (173). Indeed, in *Ana Historic*, which finds its raw materials in the “thin and fading ‘facts’ of British Columbian history” (Percy 183), history is both contested and pliable, since patriarchal narratives of “mastery” and “dominance” themselves can be untold and thus mastered (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 19). The trajectory of the novel moves toward synthesis, toward a happy ending in which Annie is reborn and fractious parts form a whole. Annie, in the penultimate section of the novel, meditates on the names that she has inhabited or imagined throughout the journey — “Ana or Ina,” “Ana Richards Richard’s Anna,” “Annie/Ana” — and imagines transcending them as she finally becomes “Annie Torrent” (152). In that final name, histories merge and are unified as Annie, who has mastered and unified competing narratives, closes the novel imagining “the pages ahead” (153). History’s “nervous double” still dwells uneasily in the novel, but through Annie Torrent what was disparate is unified in a single narrative.

In *Ana Historic*, the impulse of Mrs. Richards to inhabit and eventually master the narratives of “the country of her body” is made material through its literal and figurative penetrations, and representations, of Vancouver: a space rooted in histories, cultures, and geography (127). In “Self-Representation and Fictionanalysis,” Marlatt explains that

Mrs. Richards is a historical leak for the possibility of lesbian life in Victorian British Columbia, which like some deep-packed bedrock continues to underlie the leather shops and tinted glass of our high-rise 1990’s. We live in that context: the actuality of both. Just as we also live in the context of salmon rivers polluted with dioxins, harassed abortion clinics, Hong Kong’s historic jitters, eco-islands of Sitka spruce, half-hidden memories of child abuse, and whatever hungry ghosts still pursue each one of us — to pull only a few threads of the whole cloth. The context is huge, a living tissue we live together with/in. (16)

Here human story, recorded or not, becomes integral to a geographic rooting, becoming bedrock below the city’s grid. The city itself becomes a space of uneasy polyphony where personal histories, cultures, ideolo-

gies, and an increasingly threatened natural world together form a kind of living tissue/cloth. Bowering argues that this kind of uneasiness with British Columbia's geographic space forms one of the unifying themes of provincial culture and that home "or, more specifically, the attempt to find or make a home," can stand as an "informing symbol for the culture" (9). For members of TISH, the Vancouver-based group of poets of which both Bowering and Marlatt were members, even the words *place*, *setting*, and *landscape* caused unease, for these words might posit fixity (Omhovère 347). Bowering recalls that TISH, after the precedent of the American poet and critic Charles Olson, decided to use the word *locus* since, "if you said locus, it implies trying to find out where you are. It implies, I'm trying to locate myself" (qtd. in Omhovère 347). In this move from landscape to locus, landscape becomes "mediation," since geographic space offers a means for human subjectivity to locate itself (347). As Claire Omhovère argues, "as a mediation, landscape is therefore bound to be historically variable, socially and culturally malleable" (347). Reading Martin Allerdale Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West* (1908), Bowering notes that throughout the text the west is "not a space but a concept" (12). The west, for men driven by poverty and the drudgery of factory work from England's crowded cities, becomes a locus where they achieve regeneration, for their work in this space is imagined as yielding "visible result[s]," having "obvious importance," and being where home might easily be fashioned "from cedars at hand" (12).

Notably, *Woodsmen of the West* is one of the key texts that Marlatt draws from in *Ana Historic*, inserting passages that detail the work of resource extraction, which Grainger endows with a fundamental significance, in order to problematize his rhetoric and the labour itself. Quoting from his text (though the novel is explicit in its resistance to the practice of citation; see 81), Marlatt reproduces a passage in which Carter, with the help of his donkey, rigging, and a crew of men, hoists a tree from the woods onto the beach. This passage culminates in the imperative: "Think what this mastery over huge, heavy logs means to a man who has been used to coax them to tiny movements by patience and a puny jack screw . . ." (25). Marlatt's narrator, after a span of white space, responds, meeting the ellipsis without capitalization, as if to complete, or interrogate, the thought: "history the story, Carter's and all the others', of dominance. mastery. the bold line of it" (25). Whereas

Grainger celebrates a specific kind of mastery, a mastery over rigging that will replace a logging practice that entailed the slow and difficult coaxing of trees from the bush, Marlatt's protagonist reads in him a larger celebration of male dominance over nature, the word *mastery* thus imbued with connotations of patriarchal oppression. Although Grainger's text is rooted in an ideology that Marlatt's protagonist finds objectionable, arguably both Marlatt and Grainger, in their respective books, are engaged in similar projects that seek to find the locus of the immigrant experience. Grainger, who asks us to ponder the significance of rigging as a means to emancipate labourers from the difficulty of working in the bush, invites us to read in this successful technological innovation a sign that humans are adapting to, and learning from, their particular geographic locations. Grainger documents human interaction with geography in order to valorize the west as a productive site of re/generation, and Marlatt's novel engages in an analogous project as its protagonists find renewal and rebirth within the contexts of landscape.

For both Grainger and Marlatt, the forest serves as the medium through which immigrant human subjectivity searches for its locus. Grainger, singing the praises of British Columbia's south coast for its rich supply of "good timber," exults that the "country bristled with opportunities" (qtd. in Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 63). Mrs. Richards, too, finds the woods a source of exultation and opportunity, a space of literary genesis, for in "her spot in the woods . . . she could write in the midst of all this plenty undisturbed" (41). Even in her cabin, amid "the stumps . . . [and] the scarred face of the clearing that surrounds her," she "writes as if she were living alone in the woods, her vision trued to trees and birds, . . . and [she] see[s] herself ab-original in the new world" (30). In these passages, the woods offer aesthetic plenty as trees and birds further refine her vision, as the immersion in landscape allows her to feel "ab-original," the prefix *ab* signifying both a being *from*, and *away from*, *origin*. Annie, too, seeks the woods as a place of genesis, looking back to a time of childhood when she and her sisters would play in "the Old Wood," the "cedar stump hollow in the middle where they nestled in a womb, exchanging what ifs" (12). The forest offers the men in Grainger's and Marlatt's texts a form of articulation through labour, but for the women in Marlatt's text the woods proffer a space in which to achieve a sublime "communion" with something "inhuman" and apart from "the world of men" (18).

The forest in Marlatt's novel, which offers two distinct and gendered forms of articulation, is a contested space. Young Annie, who revels in the old woods, wonders "what if boys . . . what if men tried to bulldoze our woods?" (12). This threat is omnipresent in the text as men make claims on forested spaces. Annie and her sisters have made their own claim on the old woods; the forest that fringes her family home is described as "those woods men worked in, building powerlines and clearing land for subdivision. Those woods the boys on the rest of the block claimed as theirs" (13). Annie's grove is small compared with the swath claimed by men and boys. In Marlatt's novel, women and men make land claims, but women alone are coded as trees. Mrs. Richards, seeing "piles of fresh cut lumber," imagines that the trees "seemed to invite her eye to run along their surface," and she finds herself drawn erotically to "the tree stripped down to its bare flesh," imagining herself undergoing an analogous undressing as she feels "her skin expand beyond the confines of her clothes" (40). Mrs. Richards is again situated in an imaginative union with trees following an enumeration of the Douglas fir's benefits as a resource. Marlatt's protagonist engages in a game of free association, focusing on Grainger's line "*Average trees grow 150 feet high, clear of limbs, with a diameter of 5-6 feet*" and riffing "clear of limb? of extras, of asides. tree as a straight line, a stick. there for the taking" (14). The narrator breaks off into one of the novel's characteristic white spaces, a strategy, Stan Dragland argues, that provides "physical punctuation of the thematic search among words and within a voice so deeply inscribed with the male experience" (58). From this pregnant space between words, the narrator continues: "Mrs. Richards, who stood as straight as any tree . . . wasn't there for the taking" (14). Woman, made tree, is placed here in an antithetical relationship with men and their quest for resources. The threat posed by men becomes more than territorial because the work of resource extraction is aligned with rape. In another instance in which Marlatt employs Grainger, she quotes a passage in which he describes lines of old-growth timber prime for hand-logging, closing with his excited assertion, "Why! the country hadn't been touched!" (63). After another pause, the narrator responds by reading in this employment of the virgin land trope an essential male threat: "[T]ouched . . . felled and shot . . . that isn't touching or even that other diminished one you used to use, 'so touching' (violets and tears) as if the male touch (topping and felling) requires its polar

opposite to right the world” (63). Here Annie scorns sentiment that legitimizes, or masks, male violence, and she renders logging an act of gendered violence. Speaking of *Ana Historic* in “Self-Representation and Fictionanalysis,” Marlatt is unabashed in her conflation of women with nature. Her novel, which works to hear, and give voice to, “the silence of women / the silence of trees” (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 75), not only makes a female claim to the land but also argues that women are the land itself.

This claim is problematic given that the region to which she lays claim is in traditional Coast Salish territory. As Fee argues, such literary land claims call for scrutiny, given “the cultural, political, and economic situation of Native people in Canada” (15). Although Marlatt examines and employs the word *trespass*, she does not refer to settler incursions in Indigenous lands. Trespassing in the novel refers to the incursions of protagonists in male space (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 87), or in an imagined primordial forest space, where “no one human, no man preceded us” (19). Although archival research is used as a means of accessing subaltern narratives, Annie’s researching gaze does not examine the south coast’s heterogeneous First Nations’ cultures. Instead, it restricts its engagement to Mrs. Richards’s “period” perception of the people she meets. The Coast Salish people whom she encounters are largely silent figures who either resist, or are confounded by, the white symbolic order. Ruth, Mrs. Patterson’s Siwash maid, is described as passing “her fingers slowly over the slate, as if the letters marked thereon might leap into her very skin” (69). On witnessing this, Mrs. Richards considers that “Our Magic is different from theirs,” going on to imagine that the “quiet with which each seems wrapt” indicates an alternative mode of perception that “perhaps our words cannot speak” (69). In meeting the silent “Indian crone,” who appears “like an apparition out of the bush,” Mrs. Richards again reads something untranslatable and resistant in the silent other, first imagining her to be blind, then reading her as capable of discerning “snowy otherwheres,” before lamenting that she “would like to know what those eyes saw” (96). Goldie, who examines the role that silence plays in literary representations of the Indigene, argues that the silence of the Indigene often “comes close to representing the always unknowable, that which always lies veiled, the mystical” (127). While Marlatt’s narrator endeavours to hear and communicate the “unconditioned language” of women and trees (75), her Victorian protagonist resists communicating across the cultural divide posed by Indigenous

silence. Instead, Mrs. Richards is struck mute, as Coast Salish characters move past her in the bush, and is twice described as feeling as if she were “a bush or a fern” (96), “shaking in their way” (42). In these instances, faced with Indigenous presence, she is linked with plant life, uneasily maintaining a tenuous claim on the land.

Although women are coded as forest and fauna in Marlatt’s novel, they do not embody or inhabit wilderness as defined by Don McKay as “the placeless place beyond the mind’s appropriations” (87). Instead, Marlatt’s protagonists seek the liminal, and oft-contested, space between forest and clearing, without venturing into the backcountry. In *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, Robert Pogue Harrison, who examines representations of the forest in the Western literary canon from antiquity to the present, argues that the relationship between the Western world and forests has long been vexed, for these spaces represent divergent laws (1, 3). Harrison argues that, while humans have long regarded forests with nostalgia, recognizing in themselves “a genealogical affiliation with the wooded world,” forests have also been met with profound hostility, for civic spaces such as Rome came into being only by “overcoming, or effacing, the forest of its origins” (2). Although wilderness resists the mind’s appropriations, and the space of the clearing readily cedes to “the psychic reality of human consciousness” (8), Harrison points out that it is at the boundary, “the extreme edge,” where clearing and forest meet, where “opposing laws strive against one another” (3). Martin Heidegger posits that boundaries function as active spaces, arguing that “a boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing*” (154). In Marlatt’s novel, women are consistently presented as engaging the boundary, since they return repeatedly to the fringe between wilderness and clearing, compelled and frightened by a “desire for what lay out of bounds” (77). Frye, who famously proposes the “garrison mentality” as a foundational component of Canadian literature, argues that, for those who dwell in the monologic space of the garrison, where “moral and social values are unquestionable,” “the real terror comes when the individual feels himself becoming an individual, pulling away from the group, losing the sense of driving power that the group gives him, aware of a conflict within himself far subtler than the struggle of morality against evil” (226). In Marlatt’s novel, very much a *Bildungsroman* that charts the protagonist’s coming out as a lesbian,

the boundary serves as a space where heteronormative expectations can be transgressed, a place that evokes fear and fascination. Annie, as she begins to recognize her own sexual orientation, remembers a time in her adolescence when she came across two women making love in a car. She is struck now by the locale in which it occurred, at “the gap, the fork between two roads so long ago — though one barely a road, a dirt road, no bigger than a trail” — and she ponders the “leafy tunnel they’d chosen, the silence of dripping woods,” despite “loggers, bears and God” (107). This eroticized and liminal space, between roads and removed from the clearing, is understood here as contested ground. Loggers (who, as we have seen in Marlatt’s text, embody the violence of patriarchy), bears (which represent the wilderness that resists human appropriation), God (a symbol of the omnipresent moral and religious codes of the garrison), and the lesbian couple all vie for dominion. As the novel progresses, the bush increasingly becomes a site of erotic possibility; however, as her wanderings take Mrs. Richards off the path and to a pool where she finds, and joins, “two women sitting in the leafy water” (86), it is also a space that inspires dread. For a character such as Ina Richards, Annie’s troubled mother, to transgress societal norms was to be on “the far side of where you were ‘supposed’ to be, wrong therefore guilty of ‘going to far.’ (into the woods alone.)” (135). For Ina, to stray into the woods, or to go to the frightening space of “far,” is to stray dangerously from hegemonic thinking (135). Unlike Annie and Ana, for whom boundaries offer spaces where an authentic self “*begins its presencing*,” for Ina the world beyond the prescribed nuclear family home is one of “disasters” and dissolution (142).

Whereas forest and bush alternately offer regeneration and threat, in Marlatt’s novel the clearing is the space that *must* be negotiated. When Mrs. Richards arrives in the “bush settlement” (14) of Hastings Mill in 1873, she is confronted by “the rawness of new wood, the brashness of cleared land,” and a “man’s world of work” (21). In this space, male discourse dominates since “ordinary men [are] turned into heroes” and “city mothers” are all but invisible in contemporary accounts (28). As Annie draws Ana’s sparse story from the archives, she writes Ana into the clearing and into “deep-packed bedrock” that forms the foundation on which her city would be built (Marlatt, “Self-Representation” 16). Whereas Ana is written into the clearing, Ina is imagined as being imprisoned within it. Unlike Annie, keen to immerse herself in the

verdant fringes, “the anonymous territory where names faded to a tiny hubbub,” Ina seeks to retain her “English gentility in a rain forest” (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 18, 24). Annie imagines Ina’s world as one of “impasse: impossible to exit. dead end. when the walls close down. the public/private wall. defined the world lived inside, the world you brought with you, transposed, onto a Salish mountainside” (23-24). For Ina, radical transposition proves to be fatal, since the provincialism of the clearing stifles her, and her marriage home becomes a kind of prison, with “walls that closed in on [her], picture windows that never opened, doors that stayed shut against the cold” (136). Ina creates walls that block discursive potential rather than explores boundaries that invite engagement. Although her transplantation establishes a rigid dualism between the old world and the new world, the engagement between forest and clearing is not always so fraught. Susan Patterson, who invites Mrs. Richards and Jeannie Alexander to her home for tea, insists that “formality . . . will not withstand the rigours of life in ‘the bush’” (113). They have tea while they are “surrounded by trees at the edge of the clearing. . . . By the dark stand of timber, rain forest, and everywhere trees were cleared the rapid growth of bramble, salal, salmonberry thicket — ‘bush.’ But they were sitting with English china, Scotch shortbread, their talk dancing the leaf-shadow and light of weather” (118). In these passages, forest, boundary, and clearing coexist as hybrids. Here both imported customs and “bush” inform the burgeoning culture, since the women eschew formality in favour of more immediate ways of engaging with their new surroundings. Annie, like the city mothers, sees in the verdant boundaries potential for creative genesis. But unlike these women, who accept synthesis as a necessity, Annie, addressing Zoe, wonders if her own “talk of trees” has become a kind of “madness” (63). It is through Zoe, who uses the city as her “medium,” that Annie can return to the grid (59). The clearing and its city are thus not entirely antithetical to human creativity but offered as another medium through which Annie can express her human subjectivity. In the novel’s closing poem, the trees are described as “out there,” whereas the city streets are close and available (153). Frye argues that in Canadian literature the frontier has long served as “the immediate datum of [our] imagination,” serving as “the thing that had to be dealt with first” (220). In Marlatt’s *Bildungsroman*, this holds true, for Annie’s quest for locus requires an exploration and translation

of the frontier before Annie can return to the clearing. In many ways, her growth throughout the novel typifies what Frye calls the “myth of the hero brought up in the forest retreat, awaiting the moment when his giant strength will be fully grown and he can emerge into the world” (221). Although her psychological journey might be described in more tempered language, Annie does emerge heroically into the world of the clearing, from the “madness” of trees, equipped to dismiss or transgress the heteronormative codes that have radically silenced the women in her text.

In order to find and make a home in patriarchal discursive space, Marlatt’s narrator also lays claim to land. Marlatt’s text, though critical of male narratives of resource extraction such as Grainger’s *Woodsmen of the West*, celebrates British Columbia’s south coastal forests for their potential to liberate the repressed colonial psyche. Just as Grainger reads in British Columbia’s resource potential an opportunity for men to engage in emotionally productive and spiritually rewarding labour, so too does Mrs. Richards find herself invigorated by the “new world” (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 85). Although both Grainger and Marlatt recognize in British Columbia’s forest the means for human subjectivity to find its expression, in Marlatt’s text these forms of expression are gendered and deeply at odds, since the masculine coded practice of resource extraction threatens more meditative and aesthetic female mediations. This antagonism between men and women is heightened as Marlatt’s narrator conflates women with trees, thus rendering logging practices a form of male violence against women. Although the novel writes into and against the white male narratives of settlement, negotiating forest, clearing, and boundary, and posits that one might foster an “ab-original” self, born of the imaginative appropriation of contested geographic space, the hereditary claims of the Coast Salish nations to their traditional territories present an ongoing moral dilemma for Vancouver’s settler culture and its various narratives.

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Godard and Susan Knutson have argued that such accusations of essential-

ism form part of “a larger current in Canadian criticism in the late 1980s that attempted to dismiss feminist discourses addressing female specificity as essentialist in an effort to contain them” (Milne 86).

<sup>3</sup> This acknowledgement, which came days after the conclusion of the year that Vancouver mayor Gregor Robertson declared the “Year of Reconciliation,” was followed immediately, on 26 June 2014, by the landmark ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada confirming that the Tsilhqot’in Nation has title to 1,750 square kilometres in central British Columbia (*Tsilhqot’in Nation*).

<sup>4</sup> As critics Heather Milne, Rebecca Waese, and Caroline Rosenthal have explored, Marlatt’s novel circumvents and subverts the narratives of Vancouver’s “city fathers” in order to foster what Waese terms “a feminist poetics of enactment” (101).

<sup>5</sup> Some of the texts that Fee examines include Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*; Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers*; Marian Engel’s *Bear*; Robert Kroetsch’s *The Studhorse Man*, “Stone Hammer Poem,” and *Gone Indian*; Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners*; and Rudy Wiebe’s *The Temptations of Big Bear*.

<sup>6</sup> In *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, Hutcheon documents the rise of historiographic metafiction in Canada. Hutcheon defines “Historiographic metafiction” as “fiction that is intensely, self-reflexively art, but is also grounded in historical, social and political realities” (13). She argues that the genre is characterized by a postmodern “distrust of ‘meta-’ or ‘master narratives’” (13), by its foregrounding of “processes” rather than “products” (15), and by its capacity to “subvert the authority of language” (19).

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