

“Where the Mysterious and the Undefined Breathes and Lives”: Kathleen Winter’s Annabel as Intersex Text

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Article abstract

Kathleen Winter’s *Annabel* (2010) tells the story of Wayne Blake, a hermaphrodite born in the village of Croydon Harbour on the southeast Labrador coast. In this land of extremes, Wayne’s body defies classification, and its multiplicity not only signifies “the emptiness of signs” but also unhinges the narratives of the people and the land that come into contact with him. His intersex body defies the social norms of his parents’ societies, the linguistic parameters of self-identification, and the supposed laws of nature by which so many of these characters live their lives. Yet as the novel progresses, almost everyone and everything in this landscape come to share Wayne’s multiplicity. As a result, this article argues, *Annabel* is an intersex text in which everything is revealed to be more than one thing at any given time, a philosophy of people and places also found in the ecocriticism of Glen A. Love and Lawrence Buell.

“Where the Mysterious
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as Intersex Text

PAUL CHAFE

KATHLEEN WINTER’S *ANNABEL* (2010) tells the story of Wayne Blake, born in early March 1968 in the village of Croydon Harbour, on the southeast coast of Labrador. As revealed to Wayne later in his teenage years, piecemeal through several people, he is born a “true hermaphrodite” (236). As the doctor defining his condition informs him, “It means you have everything boys have, and girls too. An almost complete presence of each” (236). Wayne’s true duality is revealed earlier when his mother, Jacinta, takes the infant Wayne to Goose Bay General Hospital, where the child is measured by a phalometer — a tiny silver ruler etched with a marking at 1.5 centimetres used to determine if the child is to be raised as a girl or a boy. As that doctor explains to Jacinta, “This baby can be raised as male” because the penis “is the necessary length. . . . It barely grazes one and a half centimetres” (52). Here, not for the only time, Wayne defies classification: stating that the child can be raised as male does nothing to deny the child’s potential to be raised as female. In land as extreme as Winter’s Labrador, Wayne will have a very difficult time claiming his space. He is raised as a boy, but his female self, Annabel, is always present. His body is not double but multiple, and its performance not only signifies “the emptiness of signs” but also unhinges the narratives of the people and the land that come in contact with him.¹ His body, neither male nor female nor both, but something other and something more, proves that Wayne as well as all other people and places can contain multitudes and cannot be limited, known, or claimed through a definitive story. His intersex body defies everything around him — the social norms of his parents and their societies, the linguistic parameters of self-identification, and even the supposed laws of nature by which so many of these characters live their lives at the edge of the Labrador wilderness. The presence

of Wayne/Annabel is an unhomely one, unsettling established narratives of people and place and promoting moments of deferral, avoidance, fear, and violence. Yet it becomes apparent as the novel progresses that Wayne's multiplicity is shared by almost everyone and everything, including rocks, animals, and characters who appear at first to be clichéd and one-dimensional. Winter's *Annabel* is an intersex text in which everything is revealed to be more than one thing at any given time. Her presentation of protagonists living their multiple lives upon and within the Labrador landscape comes no closer to understanding Labrador but focuses on the characters' continued realizations that there is always something more to learn about a person or place.

The Labrador of *Annabel* is one of extremes, and Winter makes certain readers understand that, had Wayne been born in another landscape, "things might have gone differently" (17). Winter's Labrador is also one of clearly delineated male and female spaces, which make life increasingly difficult for a child who is equal parts male and female. Wayne is born in his mother's house surrounded by women, his father not daring to enter the parts of the house commandeered by the women guiding Wayne into the world. Like most of the men in Croydon Harbour, Treadway finds his place outdoors. He lives "by the nuances of wild birds over land and water" and "detest[s] time in houses" (13). The women revel in the home and grow tired of the presence of their husbands once they have returned from months on the traplines. Wayne is born to the sounds of these complaints as the women discuss the freedom that they would enjoy if their men never returned home:

Every woman in Croydon Harbour spoke at one time or another of how she might enjoy living on her own. The women indulged in this dream when their husbands had been home from their traplines too long. . . . The women did not wish away their husbands out of animosity — it was just that the unendurable winters were all about hauling wood and saving every last piece of marrow and longing for the intimacy they imagined would exist when their husbands came home, all the while knowing the intimacy would always be imaginary. (9)

Winter's Labrador is a world where men are crowded out of women's spaces and where women cannot find room in the spaces of their men. It is a dangerous world for a child who cannot fit neatly into either sphere, and the mutability of someone like Wayne frightens the adults privy

to his secret. His intersexuality threatens the identities of characters who come in contact with him and disrupts their understandings of the world. While many will seek to preserve their identities and their narratives through violent reactions to him, others will recognize in Wayne the multiplicity present in all things. The bravest characters will understand through Wayne what ecocritic Lawrence Buell calls “the malleability and contestedness of the concept” of place and commit to “the willing acquiescence in not being able to know no matter how hard one tries” (61, 63).

Wayne realizes late in the novel that language fails to tell his story as he is experiencing it: “Wayne felt his own story amass as a cloud. He could not be coherent about it. He wanted to talk to someone but he did not know how, because somehow the facts, with their tidy labels and medical terms, reduced his whole being to something that he did not want it to be” (Winter 417). His irreducible nature reminds readers that everything — person, place, emotion — is inconclusively contained by the name. In *Annabel*, characters move from tyrannical spaces, where everything is named and categorized, to liberating spaces, where experiences and existences occur outside language and naming. This move into a non-linguistic space is terrifying and challenging, but natural and necessary, as many characters, not just Wayne, come to recognize by the end of the novel. Most notably, his father, Treadway, who “never called Wayne anything but his son” (440), by the novel’s end cares not if Wayne is his son or his daughter but only that he is living to his potential. Handing Wayne a bank book for an account that he has established for him, Treadway demands only that Wayne use the money to continue creating himself: “I want you to use it to do something with yourself. I don’t care what it is but I want you to think about it. Go and visit different places if you want, places where they can teach you something you want to know how to do. It has to be something you have an interest in” (435). *Annabel* presents narratives of people and place as living things that are not told and finished but lived and realized, and many characters in this novel must learn new ways of being at home in these unstable and evolving narratives. It is a refreshing attempt to tell a story of a people and a place, especially within the context of so many recent novels about Newfoundland in which protagonists attempt to penetrate, populate, and otherwise claim the land.

Writing (One's) Place

The final scene in *Annabel* juxtaposes Wayne's attempts to find a place for himself away from his homeland with his father's return to the Labrador interior. Reuniting with a childhood friend following her musical performance at Quebec City's Le Théâtre Capitale, Wayne presents Wally Michelin with a bouquet of Labrador flowers that includes pitcher plants: "carnivorous and threatening and beautiful in a way only someone from Labrador would know" (460-61). His collection of flowers brings home to the two Labradorians who have left the province to pursue their potentials: "The first thing Wally did with the flowers was break a leaf of the Labrador tea so that its scent, which is the scent of the whole of Labrador, broke over the two of them" (461). The pitcher plants "caught the changing light of Labrador mornings and springtimes and snow light, and they caught the sounds of the harlequin and eider ducks and hermit thrushes, and some of the sounds were considered beautiful and others were not, but the pitchers caught them" (461). Just as these sounds and sights are imprinted onto the plants, so too are they imprinted onto Wayne and Wally, so that they carry Labrador with them as they pursue their lives elsewhere.

As the friends remember their homeland hundreds of miles away, Wayne's father walks the actual Labrador landscape so that the final paragraph of the novel connects father and son/daughter. Yet this connection is based less upon a common homeland than upon a common desire to achieve the freedom to be oneself:

Treadway Blake came to this place as he had always done, this birthplace of the seasons, of smelt and of the white caribou, and of deep knowledge that a person did not find in manmade things. Only in wind over the land did Treadway find the freedom his son would seek elsewhere. Treadway was a man of Labrador, but his son had left home as daughters and sons do, to seek freedom their fathers do not need to inhabit, for it inhabits the fathers. (461)

The notion of the Labrador landscape inhabiting Treadway might seem romantic in the extreme and in this way appear to echo the conclusion to Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), in which Sheilaigh Fielding mingles people with place to recreate Newfoundland as a homeland within Newfoundlanders:

the northern night, the barrens, the bogs, the rocks and ponds and hills of Newfoundland. The Straits of Belle Isle, from the island side of which I have seen the coast of Labrador. These things, finally, primarily, are Newfoundland.

From a mind divesting itself of images, those of the land would be the last to go.

We are a people on whose minds these images have been imprinted.

We are a people in whose bodies old sea-seeking rivers roar with blood. (562)

The telling difference in these conclusions is that Johnston, via Fielding, is trying to create a “people,” whereas Winter is concerned with the becoming of a person. Fielding’s depiction of a Newfoundland people with blood and brains inseparable from Newfoundland rocks and rivers reflects what ecocritic Glen A. Love classifies as a prevalent postmodern tendency (and failure) to connect psychically and spiritually humans and their endeavours with an indifferent landscape:

Such subjectivism intimates no reality, no nature, beyond what we construct within our own minds. This is a world of human solipsism, denied by the common sense that we live out in our everyday actions and observations. It is denied as well by a widely accepted scientific understanding of our human evolution and of the history of the cosmos and the earth, the real world, which existed long before the presence of humans, and which goes on and will continue to go on, trees continuing to crash to the forest floor even if no human auditors are left on the scene. (26)

Fielding, a critical voice throughout *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, functions as an acerbic foil to the novel’s protagonist, Johnston’s fictionalization of Newfoundland’s first premier, Joseph R. Smallwood. Fielding regularly lampoons Smallwood’s attempts to modernize Newfoundland and turn it into “one of the great small nations of the earth,” yet she becomes romantic and nostalgic when confronting Smallwood’s career- and life-defining achievement of Newfoundland’s confederation with Canada (165). Having been unable to stop Newfoundland’s transformation into a Canadian province, Fielding is perhaps more fearful and panicked than she is idealistic at the novel’s end, resorting to romanticism in a last-ditch effort to create what Buell would define as a permanent, “place-connected” people (63).

Buell and Love agree that identifying a place as a home and consequently protecting and preserving that place are primary concerns in both life and literature. “Nature,” Love contends, “is an abstraction, true, but it is also an imposing material presence in whose highly contested fate we are deeply implicated, inextricably bound to it through our Darwinian bodies and their equally evolved brains” (26). Buell echoes this sentiment: “The more a site feels like a place, the more fervently it is so cherished, the greater the potential concern at its violation or even the possibility of violation”; he further argues that such concern over and connectedness to place have a “capacity to serve by turns as either an insulating or a galvanizing force” (56). Faced with the “violation” of her country through its confederation with a larger, foreign nation, Fielding preserves Newfoundland in the blood and bones of Newfoundlanders. She immortalizes a pre-confederation Newfoundland within the souls of a “people” and thereby turns this notion of nation into an “insulating [and] a galvanizing force.” Yet implicit in this action is a greater fear, a lament for the inability of Newfoundlanders to live up to the “imposing material presence” of Newfoundland. It is a fear shared by Fielding’s co-narrator, Smallwood, and several characters in other Newfoundland fictions who, as Love puts it, feel “deeply implicated” in and thereby existentially threatened by their inability to impose their will on such a stubborn and overwhelming landscape.

Johnston’s Smallwood identifies as the great failure of his life his inability to solve Newfoundland, to convert it into a “great small nation,” and admits as much in his final words in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*: “I did not solve that paradox of Newfoundland or fathom the effect on me of its peculiar beauty. It stirred in me, as all great things did, a longing to accomplish or create something commensurate with it. I thought Confederation might be it, but I was wrong” (552). A similar anxiety imbues the conclusion of Bernice Morgan’s *Cloud of Bone* (2007). The novel connects the narratives of three people involved in events that have shaped Newfoundland’s collective identity: a Newfoundland soldier from the Second World War, a modern-day anthropologist whose studies have led her to the island, and Shawnadithit, considered by many to be the last Beothuk. The novel culminates with the bringing together of all three narratives as the anthropologist “returns” Shawnadithit’s skull to Kyle Holloway, the now aged Second World War veteran. As in Johnston’s conclusion, there is a

mingling of person and place; yet, as Holloway moves through St. John's south side hills in an attempt to reunite Shawnadithit's skull with the rest of the girl's remains, there is no sense that Holloway has connected or made permanent these narratives, only that the land will outlast all of these stories: "Here is the green valley, the little stream, the moss that long ago covered the army truck and its driver, covered the broken beer bottles and knives, the rifles and rusting torpedoes, covered the spears and arrows, the shards of bone, the broken skulls of men and women and small children. Moss, given time, will cover everything" (442).

Annabel exists in the context of these and other Newfoundland narratives in which the protagonists find themselves overmatched and overwhelmed by the landscape. Near the end of Michael Crummey's *River Thieves* (2001), which fictionalizes the actual attempts by Newfoundlanders to make contact with the dwindling Beothuk population, John Peyton, Jr., the leader of one of these expeditions, loses his connection with the land. Despite his earlier belief that, while at work in the backcountry, he "was closest here to belonging, to loving something that might, in some unconscious way, love him in return," Peyton, following the death of Demasduit, the Beothuk woman whom he captured after killing her husband, is lost and admits that "All my life I've loved what didn't belong to me" (166, 327). Like Peyton, Treadway Blake in *Annabel* is a trapper: "Treadway belonged to Labrador. . . . Treadway kept the traplines of his father and he was magnetized to the rocks" (8). Also like Peyton (and Smallwood, Fielding, and Morgan's protagonists), Treadway is unhomed by the events of his narrative. Interestingly, it is his ability to accept his failure to make the landscape his own that enables him to remain at home in the unknowable, multiple wilderness of Labrador.

The protagonists of these other novels set themselves against the landscape and in their failures to tame it experience existential panic. Newfoundlanders cannot exist as a "people" if the land from which they derive their name resists them. Just before he disappears into the landscape at the end of *Cloud of Bone*, Kyle Holloway foresees a future Newfoundland devoid of Newfoundlanders, the island reclaiming the land as it overgrows human effort and culture: "Soon there'll be nothing. Grass will grow over the railway station, over Water Street. Kyle wonders if they will just let the harbour silt up once the town is gone" (Morgan 441). Such depictions of a resistant and hostile landscape

are examples of what Simon C. Estok defines as *ecophobia*: “an aversion towards nature (sometimes pathological), an aggravated form of anthropocentrism expressed variously as fear of, hatred of, or hostility towards nature. . . . Basically, ecophobia is all about the fear of a loss of agency and control to nature” (“Ecocritical Reading” 78-79). At the ends of their narratives, protagonists such as Fielding, Smallwood, Holloway, and Peyton see a Newfoundland unchanged despite efforts that have drained them. To use Estok’s terms, these protagonists learn to fear Newfoundland as “a nature that changes people, breaks them, spits them out, and remains itself unchanged” (79). Estok claims that ecophobia grows out of humanity’s inability to control nature and that literary depictions of this failed enterprise are often elevated to tragedy: “Human history is a history of controlling the natural environment, of taking rocks and making them tools or weapons to modify or to kill parts of the natural environment, . . . of first imagining agency and intent in nature and then quashing that imagined agency and intent. Nature becomes the hateful object in need of our control, the loathed and feared thing that can only result in tragedy if left in control” (“Theorizing” 210).

Characters in *River Thieves*, desperate to carve a place for themselves in the Newfoundland landscape, grow to hate the land, calling it a “bastard country” or, worse, “a whore [who’ll] spread her legs for you, but you’ll have to pay for the privilege” (Crummey 321, 256). Even Smallwood, who champions Newfoundland throughout Johnston’s novel, has to admit that the island is more about deprivation and bleakness than it is about potential and opportunity. This lack of control, this inability to foresee the effects of one’s actions, and this fear of the natural world are introduced in the lives of Winter’s Labradorians through the person and nature of Wayne/Annabel, who opens the eyes of many characters to the impossibility of grafting a narrative onto a nature that resists definition.

Songs of Myselfs

In her nuanced reading of *Annabel*, Mareike Neuhaus asserts that Winter’s novel testifies to “an alternative invention of sexuality that makes intersexuality a space of lived experience, grounded in a non-violent reality,” and asks its readers to “accept difference as a necessary challenge to the dominant understandings of the human” (123).

Neuhaus notes how Winter immediately equates Wayne's intersexuality with the natural world so that it is not presented as "just a beautiful idea or as a non-violent myth" but as a natural, livable space (132). *Annabel* opens with a prologue detailing the death of Graham Montague and his daughter, the first Annabel of the novel. Accompanying her blind father on his traplines, Annabel capsizes the boat in which they are travelling as she reaches out to touch a lone white caribou on the shore. Annabel forgets the rules of the land that she has been taught since birth and "outstretches her arms toward the enchantment" (2). The momentary lapse is lethal as both Annabel and her father, neither of whom can swim, are thrown into the frigid waters of the Beaver River. Thus, Neuhaus notes, "At the beginning of the novel, both Annabels are essentially dead: one because she has disobeyed her father's warning, and the other because his parents have chosen to hide his intersexuality from the world" (124). Thomasina Blakie, the mother of the first Annabel, is in Treadway and Jacinta's home delivering Wayne just weeks before her daughter drowns miles away in the Labrador interior. She is the first to notice that the baby is equal parts boy and girl: "Thomasina caught sight of something slight, flower-like; one testicle had not descended, but there was something else. . . . As she adjusted the blanket she quietly moved the one little testicle and saw that the baby also had a labia and a vagina" (Winter 15-16). As a testament to her dead daughter and as a defence of Wayne's true nature, Thomasina secretly christens Wayne's female self Annabel at the boy's baptism a few days after the funeral service for her husband and daughter. Even as Jacinta regards the christening of her child as "the last moment . . . of my daughter's existence," Thomasina whispers the name Annabel just as the minister names the child Wayne, and "The name Annabel settled on the child as quietly as pollen alongside the one bestowed by Treadway" (62). Thomasina continues to call Wayne Annabel despite the surgery and the medications that make Wayne a boy. Born just before the first Annabel drowns, and born again with the surgical eradication of the Annabel that comprises half of his identity, "Wayne grows up thinking he is a boy when, in fact, he is both male and female" (Neuhaus 124). Citing a study on "Antler Stiffness in Caribou," Neuhaus claims that his realization later in life of his "true hermaphrodite" self enables Wayne to transform "into what Thomasina's daughter was unable to touch. Of all deer species, caribou is the only one 'in which both males and females routinely grow ant-

lers.' . . . [T]he caribou in the novel's prologue is therefore a symbol of Wayne's intersexuality" (124). Linked to the land and its beauties and perils, Wayne is unknowable and dangerous. Connected to the caribou and what Gwendolyn Guth terms the "inscrutability of the animal other," he prompts in others powerful instances of ecophobia, the fear of an untamed wilderness (32). Wayne's incomprehensibility will defy others' desires to "always know, answer, define, catalogue, assert," and it will remind others of nature's tendency "to be wild, to be unknowable, to be itself" (43).

The appearance of the caribou on the shore of the Beaver River so mystifies the first Annabel because the solitary herd animal walked alone thousands of miles to have its fateful encounter with the girl. The caribou is so out of place that it is an "enchantment," and its anomalous nature mirrors Wayne's (Winter 2). Yet it is the nature of the herd that is perhaps more like Wayne, even if he does not realize it: "The herd is comfort. The herd is a fabric you can't cut or tear, passing over the land. If you could see the herd from the sky, if you were a falcon or a king eider, it would appear like softly floating gauze over the face of the snow, no more substantial than a cloud" (1). Because of the scarce amount of vegetation on the Arctic tundra, the caribou herd is in constant movement, for to stop is to starve. Although Wayne's intersexuality is reflected in the white caribou, his separation from his true nature is reflected in its unnatural, solitary inaction as it stands motionless on the shore: "Why would any of us break from the herd? Break, apart, separate, these are hard words. The only reason any of us would become one, and not part of the herd, is if she were lost" (1-2). Imprisoned by hard words and signifiers, denied the true story of his birth and self, Wayne is lost. Yet, like the single caribou defying its herd nature, his true nature will become what Karen E. Macfarlane terms a "layered performance in which both the signifier . . . and the signified . . . exist simultaneously, each element visible as the contradiction of the other, yet serving to create something *other than* any of its elements while privileging none" ("Taking" 40). Wayne is a boy and a girl despite the qualifications and medications used to force him into one of these identities, and his initial ignorance of his true nature does not prevent his body from "signal[ling], as it performs, the emptiness of signs."

As Neuhaus notes, Wayne's multiple identity challenges the binary of obstinate sexual identities "resulting in sexuality as a continuum in

which intersexuality is only one variant" (131). Wayne does not occupy a place — he is taking place, ever evolving. And this perpetual motion, reflected in the gauze-light, cloud-like movement of the caribou across the tundra, is more natural than any name or category can reflect: "places themselves are not stable, free-standing entities but continually shaped and reshaped by forces from both inside and outside. Places have histories; place is not just a noun but also a verb, a verb of action; and this action is always happening around us, because of us, despite us" (Buell 67). Wayne's irrepressible transformation is seen at first as abnormal and deviant by many characters, including Wayne himself. Yet, as he moves closer to what Neuhaus terms a "liveable life," the categories and medical interventions forced on him are revealed to be stagnant and empty "social, cultural, and political" attempts to establish a normalcy that misses the multiplicity of the natural (131).

Perhaps the most baffling instance of duality in *Annabel* is found not in Wayne but in Treadway, insightful at times yet too dull to see reflected in his intersex child the contradictions that he so loves in his landscape. Treadway is of Scottish and Inuit descent. He is a trapper who studies Plutarch and Aristotle and Pascal late into the night in his hut on his trapline. And he can read the landscape just as well: "it helped him to see birds and caribou and fish that were invisible to anyone who was not hunting and had not opened their second eyes" (26). Yet, for all his insight and second sight, Treadway is something of a blunt instrument when dealing with the child whom he has decided to raise as his son. Although Thomasina views the infant Wayne's intersexuality as "a strange blessing that had to be protected" (29), Treadway moves quickly to determine a sexuality for Wayne that is practical and livable in ways that he cannot imagine intersexuality to be. On learning of Wayne's obsession with synchronized swimming, Treadway has his friends working on the trans-Labrador highway perform a synchronized dance with their backhoes that mortifies Wayne. During an already painfully awkward "facts of life" talk, Treadway seems uncharacteristically ignorant as he tells Wayne "the real story" about sex and informs him that "Women have a vagina" without once recognizing that the "boy" in front of him has a vagina as well (158). Yet Wayne's uncontrollable nature has the father, not the son, confused at the conclusion of the talk:

Treadway had dispatched his duty but he felt extremely awkward and wished he had waited. . . . He felt he had not done the job decently. He had made it seem unnatural. And he had not been able to stop looking at his son's body and seeing things he did not want to admit. His son looked like a girl. He talked like a girl, his hair was like a girl's, and so were his throat and chest. When they had peeled down the tops of their overalls, Treadway had seen that his son had breast buds, small and tender through his undershirt, and it shocked him. (159-60)

Treadway's dismay at his son's unmanageable multiplicity is only heightened by Thomasina's appreciation and clandestine promotion of it. Returning to Croydon Harbour from Europe and taking up a position as Wayne's seventh grade teacher, Thomasina sees in Wayne the possibility of a life outside names and norms:

a thoughtfulness lay in his eyes that the other children, save for Wally Michelin, did not have. It was the spirit a poet might have, or a scientist, or anyone who sees the world not as he or she had been told to see it, with things named and labelled. Wayne Annabel, as she called him in her mind now, saw everything as if it had newly appeared. (171)

Just as she did when she unofficially baptized Wayne, so too Thomasina takes it upon herself to nurture his duality: teaching him about the child of Hermes and Aphrodite, the two-gendered Hermaphroditus; revealing to him the multiplicity in everything, including how an image of Isis disguises itself as Mary on the window of a palliative care ward dedicated to a Catholic nun; and finally, less overtly, revealing to Wayne that his is not a blood disorder, as he has been told, but "a different order. A different order [that] means a whole new way of being. It could be fantastic. It could be overwhelmingly beautiful, if people weren't scared" (208-09). Thomasina's tampering both counteracts and compounds the earlier tampering initiated by Treadway and Jacinta and forces many characters in *Annabel* to reconsider Wayne's being as well as their own and the very nature of the world through which they define themselves. As the narrative progresses, Wayne's indefinable nature becomes increasingly synonymous with the land, and *Annabel* becomes less about finding a space for Wayne than about other characters realizing through their interactions with Wayne that their identities and their understandings of "home" are unstable.

Flowing in Two Directions

Like Wayne, the landscape of Winter's Labrador is full of multiplicities and contradictions. One great sadness in the text is Treadway's initial inability to see how Wayne is the personification of the indescribable wonder of the Labrador wild that so moves him:

the centre of the wilderness called him, and he loved that centre more than any promise. That wild centre was a state of mind, but it had a geographical point as well. The point was in an unnamed lake. Canadian mapmakers had named the lake but the people who inhabited the Labrador interior had given it a different name, a name that remains secret. From a whirlpool in the centre of that lake, river water flows in two directions. . . . The whirling centre was a birthplace of seasons and smelt and caribou herds and deep knowledge that a person could not touch in domesticity. (14-15)

Multidirectional, mutable, unnameable, this whirlpool is less a place to be occupied than a continuum, a shifting, living entity. Like Wayne, it resists knowing and tampering. Like him, its multiplicity is natural and perpetual. Yet, even when the marks of human tampering are evident in the landscape, the result is no less multitudinous:

For Wayne, Croydon Harbour and all that was in it had a curious division between haven and exposure. The roads were dirt and there was dust, and this felt raw. The birches, in comparison, felt incredibly soft, their shadows a cool, sizzling green that quenched the parched burning of the roads. Loud engines of trucks and Ski-Doos played against the tinkling of the juncos that made their nests in the ground. A swoop and whisper of wings, then the gun crack. (72)

These multiplicities and transformations do not make these places any less "home" for Treadway, and this reinforces Buell's notion that, "[e]ven though place cannot be fully perceived or definitively theorized," it can exist within place-connected people such as Treadway as a "workable conception" that solidifies his "place sense" (64). So does "home" become what Macfarlane terms "heterotopic space" that "foreground[s] the inherently provisional, unstable nature of all such categorizations" ("Place" 237). A realization that his understanding of the land is, at best, provisional enables Treadway to accept Wayne's multiplicity and forget trying to claim a place for himself and his son.

Treadway's initial relationship with the whirlpool is not unlike those of the protagonists and the land in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* and *River Thieves*. Early in the novel, Treadway believes that "the place where waters changed direction belonged to him, and would belong to any son he had," but continued exposure to the landscape and his son reveals to him that such ownership is delusional and unnatural (15). Unlike Johnston's Smallwood, Treadway is able to relinquish his desire to modify nature without feeling overwhelmed by it.

Greg Garrard claims that ecocriticism is not about claiming nature any more than it is about admitting that nature is unknowable: "The choice between monolithic, ecocidal modernism and reverential awe is a false dichotomy" (79). Smallwood and Fielding fail to create and preserve a Newfoundland in their image, and thus Newfoundland remains at the end of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* both mysterious and mythical, and Newfoundlanders are somewhat lessened for not having solved that mystery. In Winter's Labrador, "human life came second to the life of the big land, and no one seemed to mind. No one minded being an extra in the land's story" (55). For these Labradorians, the notion of imposing one's narrative on the landscape is a foolhardy one: "You could live like a king in Labrador if you knew how to be subservient to the land, and if you did not know how, you would die like a fool, and many had done" (178). Despite his desire to control Wayne's nature and impose himself on it, Treadway has always known that nature affects one's narrative, not the other way around. Throughout the novel, he retreats to the unnamed whirlpool, the metaphor for his son's multiplicity, and speaks to a boreal owl that he believes listens to him. Once Wayne's nature has been revealed to him, Treadway heads deep into the woods and talks to the owl. Here, outside the narratives and norms of culture and society, outside what he has determined to be pragmatic and livable, the trapper admits that "I should have let well enough alone. . . . I think that now. What would have happened if I had let Wayne become half little girl?" (215). Admitting that he has tried foolishly to superimpose his narrative over Wayne's, Treadway has a vision of the daughter whom he lost when he chose his son: "The owl allowed Treadway to see Wayne as a girl child. So Treadway stood there in the wood and saw a vision of his daughter. She had dark hair and a grave face. She was an intelligent girl, and Treadway loved her" (215). Ironically, in trying to contain his son's identity, Treadway, so at home

in nature, has committed one of the gravest ecophobic crimes in the novel. It takes a greater ecophobic transgression for him to begin truly amending his own.

Estok links ecophobia and homophobia as two fears driven by the need to control an uncontrollable other whose existence threatens perceived normality: "When we are talking about connections between the regulation of sexuality and the containment of nature, the regulation in each case seems to follow similar impulses to deal with unpredictability and compulsion. Ecophobia and homophobia each loath unpredictability" ("Ecocritical Reading" 86). Although Wayne is not defined in the novel as a homosexual, his sexuality has certainly been feared and regulated by Treadway, who grows to lament this course of action during his epiphany with the owl:

If only the world could live in here, deep in the forest, where there were no stores, roads, windows, and doors, no straight lines. The straight lines were the problem. Rulers and measurements and lines and no one to help you if you crossed them. . . .

"I wish," Treadway told the owl, "I could bring [Wayne] in here with me for a good six months. Longer. Forget about the medicine that keeps him being a boy. Hospital medicine, no. The medicine in these trees. The turpentine. The smell of the blasty boughs. What would happen?" (216)

The fear of what could happen to Wayne in an intolerant society drove Treadway to tamper with his nature. Seeing the psychological and physical damage that his tampering has caused, Treadway now longs to see what "would happen" were he to remove his son from this society of "[r]ulers and measurements and lines" — from the "sexual politics, institutions, and practices" that Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson claim "have had an effect on the organization and regulation of nature as a socially produced set of places" (12). This epiphany is followed by a larger one in which Treadway realizes that, just as his initial tampering has only delayed Wayne's realization of his intersexuality, any future attempts to remedy Wayne's situation will play out against an indifferent nature. Visiting his adult son in his new home in St. John's, Treadway plots his revenge on Derek Warford, a local punk who viciously assaults Wayne after learning that he is a hermaphrodite. Visiting the site where his child was violated, Treadway turns to a red-tailed hawk in the same way that he did the boreal owl in the Labrador

interior. Treadway hopes that the predator will give him a sign condoning his desire to murder Warford, thereby “ridding this little place in the world, the Battery, of someone who had done this crime and would probably do it again to someone else” (444). But the hawk does not condone Treadway’s desire; instead, it reminds the trapper that he does not have the right to tamper with nature to the extent of removing another human being from it: “But the hawk did not recognize any of this. . . . It hovered in front of him and it reminded him of the same words over and over again . . . : Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (446). Treadway realizes that he cannot control nature and must step back so that Wayne can find his own home.

In this retreat, Treadway rises above protagonists such as Crummey’s Peyton and Johnston’s Smallwood, who cannot move past their desire and failure to mark the land with their stories. The final images of Treadway in *Annabel* find him walking “towards unnamed places” (457), content to live alongside the land rather than tame it or make it his. He realizes that his story is one of many that have played out and will play out on this landscape. He also realizes that his acceptance of the heterotopic nature of the land is the key not only to finding home in Labrador but also to loving his ever-evolving, ever-mysterious child. As Cheryl Lousley puts it, through “juxtaposing different knowledge registers,” novels such as *Annabel* “demonstrate that knowledge of causal relations across space and time is crucial for gaining perspective on environmental conditions and attributing ethical and political responsibility — but also that such knowledge is not necessarily achievable” (29). To echo Buell, to love a place and a person is to acquiesce to never knowing them entirely no matter how hard one tries.

“A Journey that Was Open-Ended”

Treadway’s evolution is pivotal to Wayne’s self-acceptance and becoming. As Neuhaus notes, “the possibility of [Wayne] achieving a liveable life also depends heavily on the transformation of others” (134). Treadway has been an authoritative, masculine, and masculinizing force in Wayne’s life, inadvertently but unavoidably leading to Wayne’s hatred of his multiple self, evident in his berating of himself as “[n]ot the son your dad wanted. Not a son who kept up family traditions. Not a Labrador trapper, strong mettled and well read, solitary but knowing how to lead a pack. Instead you were ambiguous, feminine, undecided”

(333). Treadway's constant reinforcement of Wayne's masculinity as the only choice that Wayne had, coupled with the practicality and singularity of purpose that the trapper has tried to pass on to his son, leads Wayne to misread much around him that would reinforce the naturalness of his ambiguous, undecided self — including his ambiguous father, the solitary, pack-leading, well-read trapper. One of Wayne's fundamental misreadings of the landscape occurs in a pivotal chapter entitled "Willow Ptarmigan," in which Wayne finally comprehends the complete truth of his body, learning from Thomasina that the emergency surgery that he underwent four years earlier when he was in grade eight was to release menstrual blood trapped in his body and, to the shock of the doctors and nurses in the operating room, to release a fetus that had been growing in a Fallopian tube. Wayne hears this story of himself while seated in the driver's seat of a parked pickup truck, watching a male and female ptarmigan work together to gather food for their unseen young. In their natural environment, though, the ptarmigan are in peril, with "their jerky little henlike movements, their fat bodies that made them so easy to shoot" (306). "But for now the couple was all right," Wayne notes. "The white on their bellies had already started to spread against their brown upper bodies. In winter they would be indistinguishable from the snow" (306). But he knows that such camouflage is temporary and that soon these ptarmigan will stand out against the background and once again become easy prey, unsafe in their own home. As Thomasina reveals to Wayne that his body is capable of impregnating itself and might do so again, "The ptarmigan cackled and shouted in short, angry barks, like a man shouting, 'Get out!' over and over again to the silent woods" (305). Wayne imagines that he hears this call again when he debates revealing his true nature to his girlfriend, Gracie, and decides rather to "take the ptarmigan's advice and get out of Labrador" (308).

Wayne reads himself through the landscape, but in deciding to get out of Labrador he misreads what it seems to be saying to him about his space in this world. Like the naturally occurring anomaly of male and female caribou antlers, the "male willows are the only kind of ptarmigan where the father looks after the young" (303). Also, these birds "stayed in pairs. They roosted on adjacent branches, and when one foraged, the other was always somewhere near" (305). As Wayne learns of his fully functional dual sexuality, he misses what these ptarmigans are saying

to him: multiplicity is key to survival, anomalies are natural, and he should not get out of Labrador but permit his feminine self to “get out” of the prison created for her by medical procedures and denial. Wayne does get out of Labrador and takes the first step to realization by weaning himself off the pills that have suppressed the female side of himself. Unfortunately, his misreading of nature’s love of multiplicity forces him to substitute one absolute for another and attempt to become female.

Within a week of reducing the pills, Wayne’s “body jumped at the chance to become less like a man and more like a woman” (355). Unsure of what he wants but certain that he “did not want to continue pretending to be a man” (403), Wayne heads to the Avalon Mall, purchases and wears women’s clothing, and has a makeup consultation at a drugstore. It is there, seated in the anonymity of the mall food court, that he is spotted by his old school principal, Victoria Huskins. A rather one-dimensional, Dickensian depiction of an educator, “Miss Huskins thought children could not hear her unless her voice pierced their layers of dull comprehension” (200). She uses the school PA system to interrogate the entire school, and, Wayne believes, she is responsible for Thomasina’s dismissal. Several years and several miles removed from her life as a principal, Huskins appears refreshed and revitalized, and surprisingly, for a tyrant who once boomed through speakers demanding confessions and promising punishments, she does not judge Wayne’s present appearance. Wayne sees in her face “that she had found a freedom he did not have. Somehow this inflexible woman had become flexible, and she was beautiful in a way that he could not attain, though she was old” (415). It is her multiplicity that he finds so beautiful, and he realizes at that moment that his attempt to privilege his female characteristics above his male ones has been a misstep: “The lip gloss felt gooey on his mouth. He took a napkin and wiped it off, and he thought about the other makeup that the artist had applied to his face and his eyes. He could feel it on his skin” (419). His former principal does “not linger on his hair or his clothing or his makeup” but instead focuses on his potential (417). Discovering that a bright former student of hers is selling meat from a van rather than being enrolled in college or university, Huskins judges not his current appearance but his refusal to live up to his natural potential: “What’s important now is why you aren’t at the university, or at college, or doing anything at all with your mind and your talents” (419). Listening to the transformed woman before him,

Wayne realizes that he must find the freedom that she possesses, that he does not want his body “to be confined in the new outer casing he had found for it at this mall” (420). Nor does he want to listen to this woman talk about his potential: “He did not want to hear this because he already knew it” (421). Wayne cannot find his potential in any familiar landscape or identity. He must take a leap into his own fantastic and frightening becoming. His passage into his potential begins with a visit to Wally Michelin in Boston.

Wayne is amazed by the university town. He sees Wally’s life as “limitless” and “full of movement” (452, 453). Moreover, he finds on the campus grounds the multitudinous, liberating landscape that inhabits and unfetters his father: “Wayne had a feeling . . . that he was in a kind of wilderness; it was similar in some ways to being in the bush with his father. . . . The students around him were beginning a journey that was open-ended, like his father’s journeys away from the curtains of his mother’s kitchen and into a vastness of territory that remained unnamed” (455). Here Wayne finds the same wellspring that his father finds in the wilderness of Labrador: a constant, multidirectional whirlpool of becoming and possibility. The students moving toward their potential are like Wayne, and in taking up and moving with them he finds the ever-migrating herd that he has been missing:

he did not feel out of place because of his body’s ambiguity, as he had felt on the streets of downtown St. John’s. Many of these students looked to Wayne as if they could be the same as him: either male or female. There was not the same striation of sexuality that there was in the ordinary world outside the campus. There were girls who looked like he did, and there were boys who did too, and there were certainly students who wore no makeup and had a plain beauty that was made of insight and intelligence and did not have a gender. He felt he was in some kind of world to which he wanted to belong, and he wondered if all campuses were like this. (455-56)

The indefinable, unpredictable natures of the students who compose this herd, this whirlpool, represent the unknowable at the core of ecophobia and ecophobic depictions of unsettled and unsettling landscapes. Yet Winter requests that her readers accept the unknowable as the happy ending of her tale. As Neuhaus puts it, as a boy in Croydon Harbour, Wayne is in constant self-denial and self-hatred: “What makes his body intelligible to the outside world denies his own personhood”

(128). Instead, readers must accept that they “will never learn how Wayne will fare” (130) and be content knowing that Wayne/Annabel has escaped the oppressive world of categorization for the wilderness of limitlessness.

At the beginning of *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment* (2003), Love tells his fellow ecocritics that “We have to keep finding out what it means to be human” (6). At the conclusion of “Ecocriticism’s Theoretical Discontents,” Serpil Oppermann challenges ecocritics to “collapse the artificial distinctions between nature and culture, experience and representation, knowledge and being, and discourse and the natural world” so that ecocriticism can “legitimately cross the threshold between discursivity and materiality, experience and representation” (166). Kathleen Winter’s *Annabel* takes up both of these challenges by depicting the multiple and contradictory presences that exist simultaneously in people and places.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

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NOTE

¹ This reading of *Annabel* owes much to Karen E. Macfarlane’s “Taking (on) Identities: Transvestite Texts in Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*.” In her examination of Selvadurai’s *Bildungsroman*, in which Arjie Chelvaratnam struggles with his burgeoning homosexuality during the racially and politically charged environment of pre-1983 Sri Lanka, Macfarlane contends that the cross-dressing Arjie is not strange but challenges the strangeness of sexual and cultural signification: “the transvestite body is not only doubly signified, but multiple: allowing for overlapping simultaneous readings that are constructed around and predicated on the fact that the signifiers they evoke are unstable. The cross-dressed body in this text, then, signals, as it performs, the emptiness of signs” (40).

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