Strangers at Home: Imperial Landscape and Contested Places in Literature about Nova Scotia

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Abstract

Nova Scotia has for many years been constructed by state and commercial interests as "Canada's Ocean Playground," a rugged and relaxing natural retreat removed from the concerns of modernity. This picture, developed in the early 20th century as the province was undergoing large-scale deindustrialization and reorienting its economy to focus on tourism, intentionally obscures the violence and displacement suffered by marginalized groups throughout Nova Scotia's history. This study seeks to trace how Gaelic, Black, Acadian, and Mi'kmaw authors have sought to challenge their communities' erasure from or assimilation into the landscape of Nova Scotia by engaging in acts of place-making in literature. The study brings together works across a variety of genres, focusing on *No Great Mischief* by Alistair MacLeod (fiction), *And I alone escaped to tell you* by Sylvia D. Hamilton (poetry), *Whylah Falls* by George Elliott Clarke (long poem), *L'isle Haute: en marge de Grand-Pré* by Serge Patrice Thibodeau (creative non-fiction), and *Elapultiek* by shalan joudry (drama). Drawing on theories of place and landscape set forth by Doreen Massey, Tim Cresswell, and W. J. T. Mitchell, this study argues that each of the aforementioned authors articulates a unique relationship to Nova Scotia informed by their history and cultural background.

Depuis de nombreuses années, la Nouvelle-Écosse est caractérisée comme le "Paradis maritime du Canada" par des intérêts commerciaux et d'État; ceux-ci en font une retraite naturelle à l'abri de toute inquiétude générée par le monde moderne. Cette image, développée au début du 20e siècle alors que la province subissait une période significative de désindustrialisation et réorientait son économie envers le tourisme, obscurcit de façon intentionnelle la violence et les déplacements forcés dont ont été victimes plusieurs groupes marginalisés au cours de l'histoire de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Cette étude vise à retracer comment des auteurs et autrices issues des communautés gaélique, noire, acadienne et mi'kmaw résistent à leur répression ou à leur assimilation au sein du paysage de la Nouvelle-Écosse en développant une connexion au lieu en littérature. L'étude rassemble des œuvres issues d'une variété de genres, abordant *No Great Mischief* par Alistair MacLeod (roman), *And I alone escaped to tell you* par Sylvia D. Hamilton (poésie), *Whylah Falls* par George Elliott Clarke (long poème), *L'isle Haute : en marge de Grand-Pré* par Serge Patrice Thibodeau (non-fiction narrative) et *Elapultiek* par shalan joudry (théâtre). Se fondant sur des théories du lieu et du paysage mises de l'avant par Doreen Massey, Tim Cresswell et W. J. T. Mitchell, elle soutient que chacune et chacun de ces auteurs articule une relation unique à la Nouvelle-Écosse informée par leur histoire et leurs contextes culturels.

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Introduction

Strangers at Home

"You can go home again […] so long as you understand
that home is a place where you have never been."
—Ursula K. Le Guin

The tide was low on the Gaspereau River when I last visited Horton Landing, Nova Scotia, in July 2021. The cross commemorating the Deportation of the Acadians—also known as the *Grand Dérangement*—is difficult to find, even when you are looking for it. A much larger National Historic Site in the nearby village of Grand-Pré hosts more detailed exhibitions on Acadian culture and history, but the cross and its manicured lawn mark the location where the Acadians who lived at Grand-Pré were loaded onto ships by British forces in 1755. Several interpretive panels provide historical context, inluding one erected by Parks Canada, which proclaims: "The natural beauty of this location gives no hint of the human dramas the site once witnessed. It was here that the histories of two peoples—the Acadians and the New England Planters—came together. Once the scene of arrivals and departures, in times of hope and despair, this spot is now a place that inspires reflection" (see Figure 1 in Appendix). From this panel alone, an uninformed visitor would have no idea that these red mudflats and green pastures were once the site of the first ethnic cleansing perpetrated in North America—nor that Horton Landing was known to the Mi'kmaq as Qalipu'jue'katik (little caribou place) long before any European had ever set foot there (*Ta'n Wejis-sqalia'tiek*). The panel is correct about one thing, however: land alone cannot tell us a story. It can only re-tell us ones we have told each other. This thesis is about the stories we tell about the land many call Nova Scotia; it is about what hegemonic stories have concealed or suppressed, and about those working to tell different stories.

W. J. T. Mitchell argues that landscape, as both a concept and a representational practice, often serves to conceal or obfuscate colonial or imperial violence beneath a carefully crafted symbolic order which is presented as natural. As Tim Cresswell notes, there is an important difference between the conceptualization of land as landscape and as place: "In most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it. This is the primary way in which it differs from place. Places are very much things to be inside of" (17). Landscape's single, external perspective (see Cosgrove) and its bold claim upon that which is "real" or "natural" make it an excellent tool of empire:

> These semiotic features of landscape, and the historical narratives they generate, are tailor-made for the discourse of imperialism, which conceives of itself precisely (and simultaneously) as an expansion of the landscape understood as an inevitable, progressive development in history, an expansion of 'culture' and 'civilization' into a 'natural' space in a progress that is itself narrated as "natural" (Mitchell 17)

I am using the term "imperial landscape" to encompass all representations of or discourse about Nova Scotia which, like the Parks Canada interpretive panel, legitimize empire as natural by omitting the violence it entails.

In Nova Scotia, one of the major weapons in landscape's arsenal of concealment is the idea of the Folk, as defined by Ian McKay in his seminal book *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*. The idea of the Folk is of course not unique to Nova Scotia: it emerged in eighteenth-century Europe, notably in the writings of Johan Gottfried Herder, who "self-consciously turn[ed] to the 'barbaric' and the 'primitive' as ways of countering the stresses of modernity, positioning tradition and custom as almost sacred elements of collective identity" (*Quest* 11). Nominally a certain category of noble

peasants, the Folk were in reality "less people in their own right and more incarnations of a certain philosophy of history," which maintained "an entropic sense of historial decline and cultural loss" (*Quest* 14). The idea of the Folk constantly looks back to an imagined golden age free from class, racial, or gendered divisions, and envisions the Folk as the custodians of this sacred past. As such, the Folk became in many instances an important component of nationalism: "As the 'Folk' became ever more essential to the Nation and their 'culture' became identified as its cultural core, those who were unmistakably not of the Folk came, within nationalism, to be defined more and more as 'unnatural,' cosmopolitan, uprooted, and unwholesome" (*Quest* 13). The culture attributed to the Folk was for the most part a "collection of decontextualized artifacts […] whose value lay not in the functions they performed for those who employed them, but in their status as isolated relics of an older and better time" (*Quest* 22).

McKay notes that while this essentialist, entropic view of history and culture has evident "reactionary implications" (*Quest* 13), the framework has been utilized by both the right and the left. However, in Nova Scotia, the emergence of the idea of the Folk was almost exclusively tied to conservative antimodernism. The construction of the Folk by 20th century cultural producers, which McKay characterizes as "part of a much bigger movement of aesthetic colonization of the country by the city" (*Quest* 9), was part of the reaction to the province's deindustrialization—a broader movement which led to the development of Nova Scotia's powerful tourism industry. At the turn of the century, Nova Scotia had perhaps an even more tenuous claim to a supposed past golden age than the eighteenth-century European societies where the Folk were first constructed: "the early nineteenth-century province seethed with tensions and rivalries, ethnic, religious, and ideological" (*Quest* 26), to say nothing of the dispossession of the Indigenous Mi'kmaq people and the brutal expulsion of the Acadians. This same nineteenth century saw Nova Scotia become

an important nexus of the world shipping, fishing, and mining industries (*Quest* 26). "Then," writes Ian McKay, "came the 1920s, and an immense change in economic and political life. The Nova Scotia coalfields were thrown into chaos by layoffs and labour wars; across the province, secondary manufacturing and resource industries declined; and tens of thousands of young Maritimers and Nova Scotians left home for the United States and central Canada" (*Quest* 27).

Into the vacuum left by the collapse of previous conceptions of Nova Scotia emerged a "local variant of antimodernism" which McKay calls "Innocence" (*Quest* 30):

> Innocence was both the imposition of externally derived categories on Nova Scotian social realities—through tourism, for example, Nova Scotia came to be defined more and more unequivocally as a 'therapeutic space' removed from the stresses and difficulties of modern life—and an internally generated set of ideas about Nova Scotia which local cultural producers considered to be self-evidently true. In fact, Innocence blurred the distinction between 'internal' and 'external' objectifying stereotypes […] Innocence was a way of seeing and thinking through which the pre-modern 'Otherness' of Nova Scotia was 'naturalized' (that is, made to appear an obvious and common sense interpretation). (*Quest* 31)

As I will discuss further in chapter one, this twentieth-century process of naturalization often entailed the characterization of Nova Scotia as an essentially Scottish space, leading both to an erasure of the violent repression of other cultures present in the province, and to a sidelining of the concerns of actual Scottish Nova Scotians in favour of selling a romanticized version of their culture to tourists.

Twenty-first century iterations of imperial landscape have attempted to assimilate previously-erased cultures into the framework of the Folk. Today, the Tourism Nova Scotia

website tells visitors that "[t]he traditions of our Mi'kmaq, Acadian, African Nova Scotian and Gaelic influences live strong in our everyday" ("Discover Our Culture"). This rosy advertisement neatly obscures any history of conflict, including the fact that all four of these groups have experienced forced displacement at the hands of the British Empire and have faced repression on the part of the provincial or federal governments. Whether through erasure or romanticization, imperial landscape enacts at the symbolic level the displacement that empire perpetrates physically. This is a form of displacement that strips people and cultures of their access to a sense of place. While many critics, such as Serenella Iovino, define place in opposition to space (where place is a space which has been imbued with meaning), in this context it is more useful to look to the opposition drawn by Tim Cresswell between place and landscape. As Chris Morash and Shaun Richards note, many theorists have come to question the notion that there is such a thing as "empty" space (7). I suggest that, at least in the context of Nova Scotia, there is no such thing as a space void of meaning; even when space is constructed as "empty," this is done to further colonial projects. Herb Wyile argues that the idea of the Folk has been used to this end: "the construction of the Folk as timeless, rooted to the land, and so on, evokes a sense of original belonging that is, of course, historically spurious […] the Folk paradigm is complicit in the colonial tactic of constructing the land as unoccupied territory" (107). When imperial landscape displaces marginalized groups, it does so not by stripping away any meaning associated with a given space, but rather by reifying landscape as the supposed true meaning of a space. Landscape is presented as an object to be passively consumed from an individual perspective, whereas place is much closer to an epistemology: "[it] is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world" (Cresswell 18). By impeding this way of understanding, imperial landscape effectively renders marginalized groups strangers in their own home.

In this thesis, I will explore how Gaelic, Black, Acadian, and Mi'kmaq writers challenge, subvert, and resist their figurative and literal erasure from or assimilation into the imperial landscape of Nova Scotia by engaging in varied practices of place-making. Where landscapes are individual, isolated, and essentialist, Doreen Massey argues that places are instead constructed in relation to each other, and represent "articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings" (154). For Iovino, "[a] place is a space where one can imagine living, a home to which values, in ethical and aesthetic terms, are attached" (102). Place is not a constant, and each of the writers I will address constructs it slightly differently; each act of place-making is contingent on the writer's particular cultural and literary background. As such, I am not seeking to establish a singular or all-encompassing concept of place in literature about Nova Scotia. Such generalizations are the purview of landscape. Rather, I am looking to demonstrate that place enables us to think of one location in many different ways, and that therein lies its richness.

My first chapter will focus on Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief*. I will situate the novel within the context of what Ian McKay and Robin Bates call "tartanism"—the reification of Nova Scotia as Scottish. Critics such as Miasol Eguíbar-Holgado have written that *No Great Mischief* perpetuates this romantic and essentialist notion. I will argue that the novel instead engages in a more complex act of place-making. MacLeod situates supposedly authentic connection to place in the past in a way that could be construed as reactionary, were it not that this past is a constantly receding horizon. In addition, *No Great Mischief*'s Nova Scotia never stands on its own: stories about it are always told from other places or in relation to other places. The novel suggests that the romantic sense of place for which many of its characters look to the past is an illusion, but that the sense of place they do have in the present can offer solace.

My second chapter will address two works by Black Nova Scotian authors: *And I alone escaped to tell you* by Sylvia D. Hamilton; and *Whylah Falls* by George Elliott Clarke. I contend that both these works portray how the transatlantic slave trade, white supremacy, and the concomitant erasure of Black Nova Scotians from the landscape impede connection to place. In *And I alone escaped to tell you*, Hamilton demonstrates that for enslaved people, even the notion of home can come to have a negative connotation. In response, the collection portrays Africa as an emancipatory home. *Whylah Falls*, in contrast, claims Nova Scotia as home despite the difficulties and pain such a claim entails. The book does so by subversively applying a pastoral aesthetic reminiscent of the Folk to Black Nova Scotians. The female characters of *Whylah Falls*, I argue, are instrumental to fostering a connection to place even in such a context of pain and violence.

My third chapter will focus on *L'isle Haute: en marge de Grand-Pré*, by Acadian author Serge Patrice Thibodeau. In this poetic homecoming, Thibodeau confronts the cultural myths which have overdetermined the landscape of Acadie for over a century. I will argue that the speaker of *L'isle Haute* is able to move beyond landscape and develop a sense of place by connecting his collective and personal histories. While grieving his mother, the speaker also seeks to uncover details about the area surrounding Grand-Pré, from which the Acadian population was expelled in the 1755. His poetic crisis, sparked both by the death of his mother and by environmental destruction, pushes him to deconstruct all his received ideas about the landscape, leaving room for new concepts of place to grow.

My fourth and final chapter will address *Elapultiek*, by Mi'kmaw poet, playwright, and ecologist shalan joudry. joudry's play, I contend, is based on the premise that for many people, attachment to Nova Scotia's imperial landscape—though misguided—is based on feelings of

genuine care. *Elapultiek* explores how such attachment might be rid of its prejudices in order to grow into a more reciprocal relationship to place. As a play, *Elapultiek* also engages in a distinct form of place-making when performed, by directly engaging the audience and inviting them to form their own connections to place.

In their book *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, Ian McKay and Robin Bates outline how literature has been instrumental in shaping the imperial landscape and the imagined past of Nova Scotia. But literature, like all art, is neither inherently reactionary nor inherently progressive; it is a way of relating to the world and to each other, and this relationship can take many forms. If the land can only repeat to us the stories we have told each other, then we must take great care with the stories we tell. In my thesis, I hope to demonstrate that Alistair MacLeod, Sylvia D. Hamilton, George Elliott Clarke, Serge Patrice Thibodeau, and shalan joudry are engaging in mindful storytelling, inviting readers to build a nuanced, reciprocal, and compassionate relationship with the land and people of Nova Scotia.

Chapter One

What's the Weather in Cape Breton? *No Great Mischief* and the Past as Place

Cape Breton is first mentioned in Alistair MacLeod's novel *No Great Mischief* when the narrator, Alexander MacDonald, describes the decrepit room in which his brother Calum lives: "I go to the cupboard and look for the shot glass […] It is a souvenir of Cape Breton with an outline of the island on it and some of the place names" (MacLeod 10). The presence of a kitschy, mass-produced souvenir in Calum's room signals the way in which capitalism has commodified places and reduced them to souvenirs and "experiences" which can be bought and sold. As Herb Wyile notes, "in many respects Atlantic Canada has been turned into a kind of park, as the region's continuing economic challenges […] have made it highly reliant on tourism and thus on the characterization of itself as recreational space" (2). That Calum is forced to live in a poorly maintained rooming house in Toronto where the only vestige of the place he calls home is a commodity indicates a certain forcible disconnect from place. Yet it is also a marker of a fact which is true no matter how connected one is to place: places do not exist alone, and are always constructed in relation to others (Massey). *No Great Mischief* locates some of the sources of disconnect from place in modernity; I argue, however, that the novel resists the pull of reactionary nostalgia by constantly constructing places in relation to each other, by characterizing place as ever-changing, and by situating place ever further in the past.

While much of the scholarly criticism of *No Great Mischief* focuses almost solely on its portrayal of Cape Breton, significant portions of the novel are set in Ontario: Alexander recounts his summer working in the mines near Sudbury in some detail, and, crucially, the present of the novel takes place in southern Ontario. MacLeod's Cape Breton must therefore always be read as constructed in memory by someone in Ontario. Doreen Massey has noted that place is often

conceptualized as an essentialist, bounded notion and associated with stasis, memory, and traditionalist or even reactionary nostalgia (119). While not discounting the influence of such ideas, Massey argues that spaces ought instead to be seen as "the articulation of social relations which necessarily have a spatial form" and places as "particular moments in such intersecting social relations" (120). Thinking of place in terms of social relations "implies that their 'identities' are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than by counterposition to them" (Massey 121). Massey also contests the oft-asserted binary between space and time, arguing that they must always be understood together, since space is not "some absolute independent dimension, but [rather] constructed out of social relations" (2), which are themselves in constant flux. Massey's theorization of place helps shed light on the way Cape Breton is portrayed in *No Great Mischief*: it is the remembered past which is constructed as place in relation to the present of Ontario.

A conversation with Calum first pulls Alexander into the recollections of the past which make up the majority of the novel: Calum's mention of the mythical ancestor *Calum Ruadh* prompts Alexander to recall the story of his arrival from Scotland. Alexander notes of the tale that "[t]here are some facts and perhaps some fantasies that change with our own perceptions and interests" (MacLeod 20). Thus the Cape Breton of the novel is situated between the past forced displacement, which brought many Scottish Highlanders to Nova Scotia, and the present economic displacement, which brought Cape Bretoners to Ontario in search of work. Calum himself is very aware of the fact that the place he looks back to is distant not only spatially but also temporally: when he brings up *Calum Ruadh*'s point to Alexander, he muses: "I wonder if his grave is still there?" (MacLeod 11). Alexander, who possesses greater spatial mobility than Calum, is able to answer the question: "Yes, but it is very near to the cliff's edge now. The point

of land is wearing away. Some years faster than others, depending on the storms" (MacLeod 12). Both brothers are acutely aware that the place they remember is situated in the past, and that both the space and its constitutive social relations have been irrevocably changed.

Notwithstanding this acceptance of change, Calum, Alexander, and others often find solace in the memory of Cape Breton. Alexander's detailed description of the Northern Ontario mine where he and his brothers worked is punctuated by mentions of home, which serves as his primary reference point. The mine represents what Serenella Iovino might call a "necroregion" (102), stripped of the patterns of life and place to make space for growth, in the industrial and capitalist sense. Alexander compares the decaying trees pulled up to build the road to "diseased and badly pulled teeth" (MacLeod 133); waste in the form of old cars litters the rest of the roadside. The mineshaft itself is a space where "the weather was always the same. The sun never shone and there was no reflection from the moon" (MacLeod 141). Upon exiting the mineshaft and seeing the moon, Alexander thinks not of the moon over this placeless necroregion, but rather over his home: "In the country of the *clann Chalum Ruaidh* the moon governed the weather and the planting of potatoes and the butchering of animals and, perhaps, the conception and birth of children" (MacLeod 140). Alexander feels nostalgic for an existence which is more connected to the changing aspects of the land, rather than defined by the static rock he is paid to blow up with dynamite. Though he and his fellow miners do consider place to be in many ways tied to tradition, they are also deeply aware that tradition does not entail permanence:

> When we were not working or sleeping we played the records of the Cape Breton violin which accompanied my brothers everywhere […] And when we talked, often in Gaelic, it was mostly of the past and of the distant landscape which was our home. The future was uncertain and, for us, it did not have to do with where we were. The death of the red-

> haired Alexander MacDonald hung heavily on all of us, emphasizing the danger and transience of our lives. (MacLeod 146)

Place, though situated in the past, is not regarded as somewhere or something static to return to; rather, it is a source of comfort and community. In this climate of economic precarity, past places provide the stability that the future cannot.

Calum continues find solace in the thought of Cape Breton throughout his life. In Toronto, in the novel's present, he tells Alexander:

> It's a nice day on the *Calum Ruadh*'s Point today […] I listen to the national weather forecast every morning to check on the Cape Breton weather. I did it even when I was in Kingston [in prison]. Even when we were in the mine and the actual weather didn't matter for our work, it was still an interest. I guess we were so close to it for so long, always thinking of tides and storms and weather for hay and the winds that might damage the boat or bring the mackerel or herring. (MacLeod 186)

Like his question about *Calum Ruadh*'s gravestone, Calum's focus on weather signals an awareness that places undergo constant change. He does not advocate for a return to the way things once were, but draws solace from knowing how they are now.

Alexander, on the other hand, thinks more of the past than of Cape Breton's current state. As he himself states, the memories of his childhood imbue his every day: "they [Grandma and Grandpa] drift into my mind in the midst of the quiet affluence of my office, where there is never supposed to be any pain" (MacLeod 39). Readers can see his connection to place in the figurative language he uses to describe this moment of memory: "They drift in like the fine snow in the old *Calum Ruadh* house in which my brothers used to live; sifting in and around the window casings or under the doors, driven by the insistent and unseen wind, so that in spite of

primitive weather stripping or the stuffing with old rags, it continued to persist, forming lines of quiet whiteness to be greeted with surprise" (MacLeod 39). The very thought of this metaphor prompts Alexander to become caught up in the memory and to go on at length about the snow of his childhood. For both Alexander and Calum, place shapes the way they interact with the world on a daily basis, but they both know they cannot return to the Cape Breton they remember.

While *No Great Mischief* makes it clear that the past cannot be resurrected, the nostalgia with which the novel is imbued suggests that certain aspects of the past are desirable or admirable. In his chapter "Realism and the Contemporary Novel," Raymond Williams argues that most contemporary realist novels can be divided into two subcategories: the personal and the social. This division is symptomatic of a change in social relations: "The realist novel needs, obviously, a genuine community: a community of persons linked not merely by one kind of relationship—work or friendship or family—but by many, interlocking kinds […] the links between persons in most contemporary novels are relatively single, temporary, discontinuous" (286). While Williams is of the opinion that realism ought to incorporate both the personal and the social, he does not advocate for a return to the old, "static" style of realism, which he says "is merely a hardened convention" (288). The new realism which Williams deems necessary is one which recognizes that "[r]eality is continually established, by common effort, and art is one of the highest forms of this process" (288). Realism, therefore, must seek to describe and create our reality by achieving a careful balance between the personal and the social, without falling into only one or the other.

No Great Mischief's non-linear narration brings attention to the change in social relations that Williams identifies. The scenes set during Alexander's childhood in Cape Breton reveal a community where people are linked together by multiple kinds of relationships. Alexander's

paternal grandparents, for example, are not only tied to his maternal grandfather through the marriage of their children, but also through work: his mother's father taught his father's father how to maintain the hospital, setting him up for the career that would allow him to move into town and eventually send two of his grandchildren to university. When Alexander's parents die in a tragic accident, the community—both family and friends—come together to give the older brothers livestock and fishing gear, so that they might subsist off the land. The brothers' labour then forges the close connection to place which Calum later maintains by listening to the national weather forecast. This communal life, in which social relations are plural and more heavily concentrated in one geographical area, is nonetheless difficult: Alexander's three older brothers as well as many other members of the community live in poverty. Williams himself is not idealizing past configurations of social relations; he is simply remarking on the sort of realism to which they might give rise. *No Great Mischief* can be read as symptomatic of a shift in the configuration of social relations—and therefore of space, of place, and of representational practices.

In the present of the novel, MacLeod searches for the new face of realism by representing an array of social relations; the disjointed character of these scenes reveals, as Williams points out, that in the present day people are more likely to be connected by only one kind of social relation. As Doreen Massey would put it, the social relations which compose any given place are now "stretched out" over a greater space, and more of the relations which make up a place are situated outside the place itself. Alexander is only related to Calum by family ties, and so can only see him by making the trip to Toronto during his time off from work, while at work, Alexander interacts with patients and colleagues who know little to nothing about him, such as

the man at an orthodontists' conference who assumes Alexander's surname is Irish in origin and tries to convince him to move to the United States (MacLeod 59-60).

Perhaps the clearest indication of the "stretched out" nature of contemporary social relations is the recurrence of the temporary foreign workers in *No Great Mischief*. As agricultural workers, they are the people with the closest physical relation to the land over which Alexander drives to get to Toronto. Yet they are also strangers to the political entities which govern it; as Alexander mentions, "[s]ome are on 'nine-month' contracts allowing them to stay in Canada for a maximum of nine consecutive months. If they stay longer they become eligible for Canada's social assistance and health programs. No one wishes them to become eligible for such programs except themselves" (MacLeod 169). The only social relation these temporary foreign workers have to Canadians and to the Canadian state is one of employment. Alexander speculates that these workers' communities are far away, usually across several borders. He supposes that they may have trouble crossing some of the borders along their homeward journey: "They will be asked to take a number and later to answer the complicated question of exactly who they are" (MacLeod 197). The social relations which make up southern Ontario stretch back to these workers' home countries, and these countries also become linked to southern Ontario.

Alexander's consideration of the temporary foreign workers is not simply a collection of off-hand comments to demonstrate the disconnect from place and community caused by capitalist modernity—it stems from his own experience as a temporary mine worker. Though Alexander and his brothers, as highly sought after and well-paid employees of Renco Development, were not in such a precarious situation as Ontario's agricultural workers, they were nonetheless forced to leave their home to find work. As I previously outlined, during his employment as a miner, Alexander began to reflect on his memories of his childhood in Cape

Breton; he began to construct his past as the place that he looks back to when he drives along Highway 401 to visit Calum in Toronto. Over the course of the novel, the Cape Breton of Alexander's formative years is unfolded before readers' eyes, but it never stands alone; it is always presented in relation to other times, other places, and other configurations of social relations. Just as the changes in social relations over the course of Alexander's life gave rise to his particular relationship to place expressed in *No Great Mischief*, so, presumably, the temporary foreign workers are forming their own relationship to Ontario in relation to their home countries; they are telling their own stories about the place.

Reality, Raymond Williams has suggested, is constantly in the process of being established collectively, often through art. The same is true of the past. Ian McKay and Robin Bates detail how Nova Scotia's past has been selectively reconstructed to further certain cultural and economic agendas. Tourism is one motivating factor for the province's dogged romanticization of its violent colonial history, but debates over Nova Scotia's true nature have always been bound up in questions of race. Angus L. Macdonald, who served as premier of the province from 1933 to 1940 and from 1945 to 1954 (McKay & Bates 257), was a driving force behind the recharacterization of Nova Scotia as Scottish, a process McKay and Bates call "tartanism":

> The public history that Macdonald championed was, in large part, an exercise in ethno-racial re-description. Tartanism—a matrix of ideas about and images of nature, history, and race, all testifying to the Scottishness of Nova Scotia—stands out as the most visible and obvious element of a more general antimodern dispensation in which history became a function of racial and ethnic identity. (254)

Despite what official provincial accounts and tourism brochures might lead the public to believe, Nova Scotia's population has never been mainly ethnically Scottish. Indeed, "by most estimates Scots have never constituted more than a third of the populace" (McKay & Bates 257). And Scots, many of whom were forced to migrate for economic reasons or due to the Highland Clearances, were not always given a warm welcome upon their arrival: "Some looked at Scots, especially those who had arrived quite recently, as backward castoffs of civilization" (McKay & Bates 261). As Michael Kennedy noted in a 2002 study, Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia faced pressure to assimilate into Anglophone society; Gaelic was derided as a language fit for folklore but not for business or politics, and the Nova Scotian government did very little to fund or promote Gaelic-language education. Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the province gradually industrialized, and with it came urbanization, a harbinger of a rapid decline of the language, as "the urban environment proved particularly hostile to the socialization of children in Gaelic" (Kennedy 73).

No Great Mischief must therefore be situated in a very particular context. Many Scottish Canadians were forced to migrate due to British policy, only to find that the colonies were not much friendlier to their culture and language than the homeland. Years later, the now-independent province of Nova Scotia sought to resuscitate an airbrushed and romanticized vision of Scottish history in order to attract tourists and to "subsume rational protest against fiscal imbalances and injustices suffered by the province within Confederation into a politically aimless exercise in recreational nationalism" (McKay & Bates 255). This is precisely the sort of ideological exercise that W. J. T. Mitchell dubs "imperial landscape." As part of the effort to naturalize the Scottishness of the Nova Scotian landscape, Angus L. Macdonald's government imported heather and advocated for the establishment of the Cape Breton Highlands National

Park (McKay & Bates). The park's creation involved the expropriation of the Acadian village of Cap-Rouge, as well as some homes around Ingonish (MacEachern 59). As Alan MacEachern has noted, "[t]he Parks Branch could tolerate the associations with people but not the people themselves. It did not wish to preserve the cultural remnants of the people being expropriated, but sought to introduce idealized versions of their culture for the amusement of tourists" (71); the "tide of tartanism" ensured that the bulk of these cultural ideals were to be Scottish rather than Acadian.

Alistair MacLeod situates the characters of *No Great Mischief* within this history. We learn as early as the second chapter that the *clann Chalum Ruaidh* is descended from a family forced to vacate the Highlands: "Anyone who knows the history of Scotland, particularly that of the Highlands and the Western Isles in the period around 1779, is not hard-pressed to understand the reasons for their leaving" (MacLeod 20). Alexander, himself a speaker of Scottish Gaelic, recalls a time when learning the language was actively discouraged: "we were of the generation who were no longer beaten because we uttered Gaelic" (MacLeod 19). The novel undoubtedly portrays Cape Breton as a homeland, but it is always an ambiguous one, mediated by characters' differing perspectives on history. As Miasol Eguíbar-Holgado puts it in her theorization of the "settled diasporas" of Nova Scotia, "settled diasporans have seen the 'homing desire' (Brah 1996, p. 180) fulfilled, by creating new homelands to which they problematically belong, while maintaining at the same time tokens and traces of their former homeland" ("The Location of Settled Diasporas").

Eguíbar-Holgado perceptively criticizes the fact that the creation of these "new homelands" involved the naturalization of the "Anglo-Celtic" character of Nova Scotia, which resulted in the erasure and removal of Indigenous populations, both literally and symbolically.

Yet in her reading of *No Great Mischief*, she falls prey to certain cultural myths propounded by tartanism as well as by earlier opponents of the Gaelic language. She claims that the novel "deals with the struggle to maintain alive a set of traditions and values (of Scottish origin) which do not seem to belong in the contemporary world, because their ontological space is shrinking with each new generation" ("The Location of Settled Diasporas"). But Gaelic language and culture are not intrinsically archaic or folkloristic: they have been constructed as such by decades of government policy, by myths, and by stereotypes:

> The paradox of [Angus L.] Macdonald's cultural legacy lies in this mystic racialization of Gaelic. He loved it as the storied tongue of a distant time, but as both a liberal and an antimodern romantic, he felt indisposed to do much to help it survive. The *Gàidhealtachd* had sustained itself as a major Nova Scotia language community when Macdonald came to power in 1933. His inaction left its future far more uncertain at the time of his death in 1954. The problem with Macdonald's relationship with Gaelic went beyond his awkwardness in the language. He cherished it as he did history, as a changeless treasure handed down from the romantic Scottish past. He cared much less about it as a living language expressive of the modern world, whose speakers would need words for 'telephone' and 'electricity' as well as 'sporran' and 'sword.'" (McKay & Bates 297)

While *No Great Mischief* does romanticize certain elements of Scottish culture, by consistently situating the home-place in the past, and by continuously questioning mythologies about this past, it nevertheless resists the reactionary tartanism which is sometimes ascribed to it.

The most romantic episodes, interestingly, are second-hand stories told to Alexander by his twin sister Catherine. The most striking of these is when Catherine recounts her trip to Moidart, ancestral home of the *clann Chalum Ruaidh*. On the beach, she encounters a local

woman who tells her: “You are from here” (MacLeod 160). When Catherine replies that she is from Canada, the woman objects: “That may be […] But you are really from here. You have just been away a while” (MacLeod 160). This interaction, while drawing on certain tropes of Scotland as a mythic and magical homeland, also reinforces the ambivalence around Cape Breton as home which permeates the novel. Yet as Wyile notes, the romantic sense of clan solidarity this scene shores up is later entirely shattered when, at the mine near Sudbury, the red-haired Alexander MacDonald absconds with money belonging to Fern Picard, precipitating the fight which gets Calum convicted for murder. Taken alone, Catherine’s story does seem to show characters struggling to maintain archaic traditions whose romanticization goes unquestioned. The red-haired Alexander MacDonald’s betrayal, however, casts the shadow of irony on Catherine’s story and shows that MacLeod does question the romanticism of the Folk, even when his characters do not.

As Catherine does, Alexander’s paternal grandfather, Grandpa, is inclined to portray Scotland and Scottish Canadian history in a romantic light, glorifying their battles and their long voyages across the ocean. However, Herb Wyile points out that Grandpa’s patriotic tirades are almost always tempered by Grandfather’s dogged reminders about the grimmer realities of history. During a discussion on the battle of the Plains of Abraham, Grandpa boasts: “I think of them [the Highlanders who fought there] as winning Canada for *us*. They learned that at Culloden.” But Grandfather is frustrated by this inaccurate account: “At Culloden they were on the *other side* […] MacDonald fought *against* Wolfe” (MacLeod 108). While Grandpa accepts the colonial mythology handed down by the British, Grandfather contests it, asserting that “[Wolfe] was just using [the Highlanders] against the French” (MacLeod 108). It is from this historical moment that the novel borrows its title: Grandfather discovers that Wolfe thought of

the Highlanders as his "secret enemy" and wrote that it was "No great mischief if they fall" (MacLeod 109). That MacLeod chose this phrase as his title signals a certain position-taking vis-à-vis history. Eguíbar-Holgado argues that "Scottish diasporans naturally participate in this creative process of imaginary selection of memories, which results in an ideal homeland, detached from reality to some extent. It is important to analyze which elements are preserved and which discarded and also for what purposes and with what consequences" ("The Shifting Scottish Diaspora" 121). This analysis rests on an erroneous naturalization of the process of historical memory. As multiple conversations between Alexander's two grandfathers show, *No Great Mischief* is interested precisely in the making of collective historical memory, and in how this process is always contested. MacLeod's title places him firmly on Grandfather's side of the argument, calling out how the imperial landscape of the British Empire has been constructed to the disadvantage even of those whose cultures it has appropriated rather than erased.

Eguíbar-Holgado also argues that "Calum […] embodies the epitome of a Nova Scotian working class whose existence is threatened and marginalized by the capital practices and modern society which Alexander and Catherine inhabit" ("The Location of Settled Diasporas"). This incomplete reading of the class dynamics in *No Great Mischief* demonstrates yet again how pernicious certain aspects of tartanism have become. Calum is forced into exodus from Cape Breton by economic forces, but his poverty at the end of the novel stems not from his work as a miner, where he makes an excellent wage, but rather from his incarceration for the murder of Fern Picard. While it is Cape Breton's rural regions which are represented in *No Great Mischief*, in the twentieth century, a large portion of the island's population had migrated to the city of Sydney to work in the coal and steel industries (Kennedy 73). Nova Scotian workers staged many strikes in the early twentieth century, and sources indicate that many of these workers were

likely of Scottish Canadian origin (see Kennedy; McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes"). McKay and Bates note that "Nova Scotian Scots often insisted they were a progressive people" (264). In setting his novel partially in rural Cape Breton, MacLeod does not pretend to represent the "epitome" of the working class. Indeed, Alexander states that when his father was awarded the position of lighthouse-keeper, "[h]e and my mother were overjoyed because it meant they would not have to go away" (MacLeod 44). Alexander's paternal grandparents, "always short on money" in their younger days, also "considered going to San Francisco, where Grandma's sister, who had married Grandpa's brother, had already gone" (MacLeod 35). Calum represents the working class through his departure from a rural community, not his living in one. The fact that his rurality and his supposed absence from "modern society" is characterized as typical demonstrates how the tartanist myth of Scottish Nova Scotians as quaint, rural, and antimodern has wound its way even into the thinking of some scholars.

With respect to the presence or lack of tartanist characteristics in *No Great Mischief*, Herb Wyile argues that:

> While MacLeod's portrayal of Gaelic culture suggests a belief in, and longing for, a numinous, essential, and transhistorical sense of cultural identity, that impression is mitigated by his acute sense of the nuances and impact of historical developments. […] If, in short, MacLeod seems to be striving for an ahistorical, anti-modernist sense of *location*, what his fiction chronicles is a very historical and contemporary process of *dislocation*. (66)

I would suggest that it is not so much MacLeod who strives for this "anti-modernist sense of *location*"—which we might also call imperial landscape, or a reactionary sense of place—but some of his characters, such as Grandpa and Catherine. Others, like Grandfather and Alexander,

attempt to construct a sense of place imbued with more nuance, one which might represent a multiplicity of social relations and accept that places are always interconnected. Always, though, this sense of place is firmly located in the past.

The situation of any sense of place in the past is exemplified by a recurring story about Grandpa, in which he claims that as a young man, he would get an erection whenever he returned to Cape Breton. The story is told for the first time by Grandpa himself, on the drive back from Alexander's graduation from university in Halifax: "when we would come home from working in the woods, I would get a hard-on as soon as my feet touched the ground of Cape Breton. Yes sir, it would snap right up to attention at the front of my pants. I couldn't hold it down. We had buttons on our trousers then […] It was before they began to use zippers" (MacLeod 116). The story of Alexander's graduation is already located in the past, and Grandpa's specification that his anecdote occurred before the widespread adoption of zippers situates the story at an even further removal from the novel's present. The graduation party's arrival in Cape Breton is a joyful occasion, but it remains tinged with a certain nostalgia: Grandpa's story implies that there have been times when the joy of homecoming was greater. As the car approaches the island, they begin to sing, "shouting out the names of places as far as we could see them strung out along the coast; trying to change what was perhaps intended as a lament into a song of happiness and joy at our own homecoming" (MacLeod 115). Even on a day of celebration, the songs they sing of home speak of loss.

The second time this story is mentioned is when Alexander drives his brother to Cape Breton so that Calum can die at home. After crossing the Canso Causeway in a dramatic storm, Alexander recalls the crossing on the day of his graduation: "Grandpa used to say that when he was a young man he would get an erection as soon as his feet hit Cape Breton. That was in the

time, he said, when men had buttons on the front of their trousers. We, his middle-aged grandchildren, do not manifest any such signs of hopeful enthusiasm. But we are nonetheless here" (MacLeod 282). If, on the day of Alexander's graduation, the joy of homecoming was tinged with nostalgia, then on the day of Calum's death homecoming is only bittersweet. The stories of uncomplicated joy and simple senses of place, though they offer solace, are always contested, and always retreating further into the past. Despite all this, Calum and Alexander drive hours though a winter storm to be home, even if they know home is no longer, and perhaps never was, as it is imagined in the stories they tell.

Chapter Two

"Beauty is not a fact but a struggle": Sylvia D. Hamilton, George Elliott Clarke, and the Fight for Place

While Nova Scotian institutions have a long history of romanticizing both Acadian and Scottish cultures to further colonial projects or attract tourists, it is only recently that attempts have been made to subsume Black Nova Scotian history and culture under the tide of commodification. Previously, Black people were often instead entirely erased from the imperial landscape of Nova Scotia. Ian McKay's paradigm of the Folk, as he himself notes, is therefore not as applicable to an analysis of the ways in which Black Nova Scotians exist within and resist the landscape (*Quest* 230). Yet the current rhetoric of tourism agencies about Black Nova Scotians seems to be inspired by certain aspects of the construction of the Folk. Tourism Nova Scotia's website, for example, proudly proclaims:

> Many African Nova Scotians made a home in the community of Africville, on the edge of the Halifax Harbour. The thriving community stood for over a century, until it was displaced to make room for Halifax's industrial expansion in the 1960s. Although the physical community no longer stands, its spirit – and the story of all Blacks who called Nova Scotia home – lives on. ("African Nova Scotian")

In a tone reminiscent of tartanism, this paragraph both situates Black Nova Scotian sites of belonging in the past (they "call*ed*" Nova Scotia home) and glosses over the violence and racism of the destruction of Africville (see Moynagh). As in the case of Scottish Nova Scotians, this romantic story becomes nuanced and complicated when Black Nova Scotians lay out, in literature, their multifaceted relationship to place. Black Nova Scotians have called and continue to call Nova Scotia home, but the unimaginable violence and displacement of the transatlantic

slave trade which brought many of them there has troubled the very notion of "home" as a place of solace and respite. Poets Sylvia D. Hamilton and George Elliott Clarke portray varying responses to this displacement and to the question of whether the notion of home is worth claiming—even when it is difficult to do so.

Nova Scotia is home to some of North America's oldest free Black communities. In 1775, as the American War of Independence was beginning, John Murray, fourth earl of Dunmore and then-governor of Virginia, released a proclamation offering liberty to any enslaved person who took up arms for the British (Whitehead 65-68). After the Americans' victory, the British evacuated these Black Loyalists to what is today Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. There, they were met with lack of supplies and extremely poor conditions, with many in the settlement of Birchtown, in Nova Scotia's Shelburne County, enduring the winter in "pit houses"—literally pits dug into the ground with rooves placed overtop (Whitehead 159-160). In addition to famine and race riots, Black Loyalists faced predatory practices of indentured servitude, as well as the danger of being captured and re-enslaved. In the eighteenth century, under the laws first of the French and then of the British Empires, slavery was legal and practiced in Nova Scotia; some of the white Loyalists evacuated from the newly formed United States at the end of the war had brought indentured or enslaved people with them (Whitehead 160). Today, many of the settlements founded by Black Loyalists and by formerly enslaved people who arrived in Nova Scotia during the War of 1812 still exist, though their descendants are in some cases still fighting to gain legal title to land they were promised over 200 years ago ("No Land Titles in North Preston").

Sylvia D. Hamilton's poetry collection *And I alone escaped to tell you* (2014) dramatizes the lives of Black Nova Scotians from the late-eighteenth century to the present day, with many

of her portrayals of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black life informed by archival and historical sources. Home is a word and a notion that haunts this collection; it is both a trap and something which is lost and unattainable. The collection's first section, which focuses on enslaved people and Black Loyalists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reveals the profound and wrenching effects of the transatlantic slave trade on any sense of place or home, and on any relationship with the land.

As in *No Great Mischief*, place in *And I alone escaped to tell you* is situated temporally as well as spatially. The collection's first poem, "The Passage," recounts the dislocation of capture into slavery in temporal terms. Before the arrival of European slave traders, "We had our own names / a past and a present" (Hamilton 9). The normal progression of time is interrupted when Africans are violently abducted from their home; the "terrors" which take them are represented as both Biblical and counter to nature: "terrors, like the buzz of locusts / invaded our sleep, night terrors, / not chased away by the morning sun" (Hamilton 9). The poem's closing line asserts that "The sons of darkness stole our children's tomorrow" (Hamilton 9). Home, here, is portrayed as security: the security of belonging and the security of a future, both of which are made impossible by capture into slavery.

The poem "Tracadie" depicts Nova Scotia as a site of difficult labour. The second stanza reads:

> This land does not forgive. We cut our way
> in tangled forests. Backs ache, hands, feet bruised
> bodies broken. Ma name me Manuel. He call me John.
> Write my name on his death paper with his bed,
> pinchbeck watch, gold seal, silver spectacles—one glass missing.

He pass on my body to his son, not my spirit.

It already sleep with the ancestors. (Hamilton 13)

As "The Passage" predicted, in slavery Black people are denied even their own names. bell hooks writes that "in conditions where the body was regarded solely as a tool (as in slavery), a profound estrangement occurred between mind and body" (38). This is the case for Manuel, whose spiritual death happened long before his body was bequeathed by his enslaver. For Manuel, the land some call home is but another living subject which, like himself, has been mercilessly exploited. Karl Marx argues that when, under capitalism, labourers work independently from each other to produce commodities for exchange, the result is not "direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather […] material [*dinglich*] relations between persons and social relations between things" (166). In a similar fashion, in "Tracadie," Manuel has only a material relation to the land: he clears the forests, and in turn, the land is the source of his physical pain. There is no reward to be had from his labour because it belongs wholly to his enslaver, no solace or home to be found in nature because he is prevented from having any form of social or spiritual relation to it.

Some of the characters in this first section of *And I alone escaped to tell you* do call Nova Scotia home, but it is not the secure home of "The Passage"; rather, it seems to be a home that is only named as such out of habit or resignation. "Melville Island" recounts the arrival of Black prisoners-of-war during the War of 1812, who were housed on Melville Island, in the Halifax Harbour (see Cuthbertson 56-57):

home a stone prison

temporary officials say

we used to temporary

come in from the fields one day

to find out we been up and sold

we invented temporary (Hamilton 22)

In these stanzas, home is explicitly named as a prison, troubling the notion that a home is always a place of comfort, solace, and rest. The poem also reveals how slavery and war wrench from people the ability to form lasting, meaningful connections to place. As we have seen with *No Great Mischief*, a positive sense of home does not necessarily imply permanence, but it does require the time and freedom to construct a sense of place. The enslaved persons, later to become prisoners, in "Melville Island" are moved from one location to another against their will, and any connection they are able to form is tinged by their lack of agency. In a similar fashion, in the poem "Martha," the protagonist Martha reflects on the escape from slavery of her companion Joshua, and "hopes he'll never come home" (Hamilton 24). Slavery incontrovertibly entails displacement and dislocation, but it also transforms the very idea of home into a prison, precluding any amount of joy in, or any desire for, homecoming.

Two of the collection's most poignant descriptions of nature are found in "By Some Other Name" and "Thursday of Gull Island,"[1] both poems recounting escape from slavery. In "By Some Other Name," the speaker "creep[s] / into the forest bowels" (Hamilton 21) under cover of darkness. The land is still the strong, hostile thing it was in "Tracadie," with "bog sucking swollen feet" and "bloody fingers claw[ing] moss" (Hamilton 21), but this time the tone is anticipatory, perhaps even desperately hopeful, because the speaker labours not for someone else but for their own freedom. In "Thursday of Gull Island," Thursday, a woman enslaved through

[1] Thursday is a historical name, taken by Hamilton from a newspaper advertisement placed by Thursday's enslaver; Hamilton's more recent collection *Tender* focuses more heavily on Thursday (Manfredi).

indentured servitude, takes advantage of the low tide to escape to Gull Island, a small rock off the south shore of Nova Scotia. In the first stanza, Thursday, unlike the speaker of "By Some Other Name," works with the land to survive her escape and maintain secrecy: "the blueberries and sea kelp / her food. The evergreen boughs, her bed" (Hamilton 15), the incoming tide erasing her footprints. In the second stanza, Thursday becomes an indistinguishable part of Gull Island: "Some say she fly with the gulls […] Some say she that wave that smash high, high / hugging hard rock face trying not to return to sea" (Hamilton 15). bell hooks notes that "[a]gain and again in slave narratives we read about black folks taking to the hills in search of freedom, moving into deep wilderness to share sorrow with the natural habitat. We read about ways they found solace in wild things" (48). According to hooks, connection to nature and to place can serve as an antidote to the psychological damage inflicted by white supremacy: "Nature was there to teach the limitations of humankind, white and black. Nature was there to show us god, to give us the mystery and the promise" (42). In "Thursday of Gull Island," the spiritual, mystical dimension of this resistance is emphasized as Thursday becomes one with the land. Thursday's transformation is also tragic, since it entails the loss of herself. When compared with "Tracadie," however, this loss through assimilation into nature appears less wrenching than Manuel's spiritual death through disconnect and enslavement. Both "Thursday of Gull Island" and "By Some Other Name" show that when people escape slavery, they are able to form new types of relationships with land and place.

The second and third sections of *And I alone escaped to tell you*, which are set in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, contain far fewer explicit references to Nova Scotia, or to any connection to place. The speaker of the second section's first poem, "Excavation," announces they are "Longing for that which is not / for what could have been, / for that imagined

place" (Hamilton 41). And indeed many of the speakers of these poems do not seem to be located geographically; readers are faced with the dispiriting fact that white supremacy is so pervasive that the racism depicted in these poems—be it in schools, museums, or stores—could be coming from anywhere in the global North.

The third section opens with an epigraph from Pablo Neruda: "The poet is not a rolling stone. He has two sacred obligations: to leave and to return" (Hamilton 58). The idea of return quietly haunts this section, particularly in the series of poems "Postcards Home." The speaker of these poems, by writing home about her travels, is clearly seeking to foster a positive connection to place, but it remains unclear where the home she writes to is located, as some of the poems—which, according to the section title, were written while away from home—are clearly set in Atlantic Canada. The second postcard-poem, titled "After Juan," offers a melancholy reflection on the destruction left in the wake of Hurricane Juan, which in 2003 made landfall in Nova Scotia as a category 2 storm (MacDonald):

> At my feet, a mass of sea wrack
> like a forgotten animal, defeated
> in a desperate attempt to survive
> more powerful predators.
>
> The sea could not sing. (Hamilton 68)

For the speaker of "After Juan," there is no solace to be found in the natural environment of Nova Scotia. Unlike bell hooks, this speaker sees in nature not a reminder that white supremacy is not all-encompassing, but rather a metaphor for oppression and marginalization.

The final poem of the collection, "Solongone," situates home not in Nova Scotia but in Africa. The speaker has "[b]een away from home longer than my memory / my mother's memory / my grandmother's memory" but still recalls "the pulsing tam tam, surging like an electric current / across centuries" (Hamilton 90). As in the opening poem, "The Passage," home is situated not only in Africa but also in the past—a past nearly inaccessible even in memory, much of this memory having been dislocated by physical displacement and violence. *And I alone escaped to tell you* considers the effects of the terrible dislocation enacted by the transatlantic slave trade, when home is both a prison and a fleeting, intangible thing. It also reflects on the dislocation caused by racism, which can make Black Nova Scotians feel unwelcome at home. Though the collection offers some moments of solace in nature, by and large, it presents any positive connection to place as a feature of the past, brutally ripped away by imperial and colonial forces[2].

Though published nearly twenty-five years previously, George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls* (1990) seems in many ways to be a response to the sentiment of dislocation ascribed to Black Nova Scotians in *And I alone escaped to tell you*. Through what Robert David Stacey characterizes as a pastiche of the pastoral, Clarke stakes a claim for the right of Black Nova Scotians to live in Nova Scotia and to form a profound connection to this place. *Whylah Falls* is also about the idea of return, this time the return of poet Xavier Zachary, or X, to Whylah Falls, a fictionalized representation of the historic Black settlement of Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia (see Wyile 125; *Cultural Assets* 37). X's journey is unambiguously one of homecoming, with his time spent away from Whylah Falls characterized as "exile." Adopting stylistic and thematic elements

[2] Significantly, however, *And I alone escaped to tell you* was published by Gaspereau Press, a small, independent publisher located in Kentville, Nova Scotia. Though the speakers of its poems struggle to form relationships with place, this detail suggests that perhaps Hamilton herself has created one.

inspired by the pastoral, Clarke deploys romantic language to describe the region and its denizens: "A butterfly, fuzzed rainbow, emerges from its chrysalis. Shelley awakes to sunlight. She unpins her hyacinthine hair, the livingroom preens with scents of bergamot and peach. Her skin is gold leaf; her bones—illuminated scrolls. Her face shimmers with a light as diffuse as that glimpsed through bees' wings" (31). Shelley, X's lover, is here associated with the non-human nature around her in ways that can be reminiscent of the romanticism of the Folk. We might initially see such language as counterproductive; after all, the pastoral and the Folk have been criticized for decades, not only as romantic, but also as obscuring the violence of certain landscapes or erasing the labour that has gone into their making. But in the context of the description of Black Nova Scotians, who have been consistently completely erased by the paradigm of the Folk, this romanticism becomes oppositional, becomes the revolutionary claim that, as Clarke puts it in his introduction to the third edition of *Whylah Falls*, "*Poetry* could refer to Three Mile Plains, Nova Scotia [another historic Black community]" (9). Writing about Africville, Maureen Moynagh argues that its representation by Black Nova Scotian authors adopts elements of the Folk in order to "articulate an Africadian nationalism" (18).
And as I will endeavour to demonstrate, while the Folk-inspired language Tourism Nova Scotia uses to describe Africville conceals the violence of Nova Scotia's imperial landscape, *Whylah Falls*, instead fosters a dialectic between landscape and pastoral-style beauty that allows its characters to construct a sense of place and a connection to their home.

Robert David Stacey argues that even as Clarke adopts many elements of the pastoral, he subverts some of its most central tenets, turning *Whylah Falls* into a metatextual critique of the formation of pastoral myths. The first section of the book, "The Adoration of Shelley," is perhaps the closest of all to representing a Black Nova Scotian version of the Folk, but even then, that

descriptor is inaccurate, as both characters and writing style are far from insular. *Whylah Falls* is noted for its rich multiplicity of literary and cultural references; in this first section alone, references to the Bible and the First World War rub shoulders with mentions of Ezra Pound, Henri Rousseau, and Montreal métro stations. As I outlined in the previous chapter, Doreen Massey argues that places are always constructed in relation to each other. In this case, I contend, the place called Whylah Falls is also constructed in relation to other cultures, often through allusion to their artistic traditions. bell hooks notes that Black art has been "seen as intrinsically serving a political function […] it was regarded as testimony, bearing witness, challenging racist thinking which suggested that black folks were not fully human" (123). In Sylvia D. Hamilton's poem "Tracadie," Manuel is unable to have a social relationship with the land because his entire being has been dehumanized and commodified through enslavement. By asserting his characters' and his own right, in their art, to refer to, modify, be inspired by, and pastiche cultural works both by other Black artists and of the traditional white Western canon, Clarke humanizes Black Nova Scotians and reinforces their role as stewards of a sense of place.

The simple act of setting *Whylah Falls* in rural Nova Scotia also participates in an important process of reclaiming Black agrarian history. Writing about the United States, bell hooks reminds us that until the dawn of the twentieth century, a vast majority of Black people lived in rural areas:

> There is so little written about agrarian black folks and the culture of belonging they created […] We have forgotten the black farmer, both the farmer of the past, and those last remaining invisible farmers who work the land. It has been in the interest of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy to hide and erase their story. For they are the ancestors who gave to black folk from slavery on into reconstruction an

> oppositional consciousness, ways to think about life that could enable one to have positive self-esteem even in the midst of harsh and brutal circumstances." (43)

hooks, who was herself from rural Kentucky, maintains that the sense of place created by agrarian Black communities was an important oppositional force to white supremacy: "experiencing the divine through union with nature was a way to transcend the imposed belief that skin color and race was the most important aspect of one's identity" (62). In *Whylah Falls*, Cora, Shelley's mother, builds her connection to place through gardening and cooking; she "brings rural nobility to making food" (Clarke 48). Cora's cooking, showcased in the prose poem "How to Live in the Garden," is deeply anchored in southwestern Nova Scotia, "gumboing the salty recipes of Fundy Acadians, the starchy diets of South Shore Loyalists, and the fishy tastes of Coloured Refugees" (Clarke 48). Her dandelion wine is described in both global and particular terms: "It tastes like Russian literature, sunlight shining through birch leaves" (Clarke 49). Cooking connects Cora to the place she lives, to other places, to her culture, and to other cultures; place-making serves as a profound humanizing and dissenting force, emphasizing the "connection between our capacity to engage in critical resistance and our ability to experience pleasure and beauty" (hooks 132).

Clarke subverts the ideological core of the pastoral not only by applying it to Black Nova Scotians, but also by demonstrating how such an application renders the passive and apolitical qualities of the pastoral untenable. Robert David Stacey traces how, throughout *Whylah Falls*, X's original romantic view of Whylah Falls changes, "checked by the sober realism of his lover Shelley and her mother Cora" (101). The event which shatters this vision for good is the murder of Shelley's brother Othello by a white man, who is later acquitted. Stacey argues that this exposes "the [nationalist] pastoral's manifest inability to sufficiently generalize race. Race

remains stubbornly particular, and in relation to nationalism, political" (106). Clarke demonstrates the political impetus behind the near-total erasure of Black Nova Scotians from the imperial landscape of Nova Scotia: they are erased because when they are integrated it becomes impossible to ignore the violence visited upon them by the white supremacy which fashioned the province. The very act of writing a pastoral work about Black Nova Scotians implies a subversion or transformation of the genre's conventions.

Stacey further argues that, though X's romantic vision of Whylah Falls is shattered, he and the other characters still choose to see beauty in the place, and the reader is guided to the realization that "a change in landscape, despite the rhetoric of 'pastoral nationalism,' does not necessarily save one the hatred and violence that often transcends nationalist borders; and that Beauty may survive despite this, not via an acquiescence to the pastoral ideal, but by way of exposing its principles so that Beauty is not a fact, nor a delusion, but a struggle" (106). Expanding on Stacey's perceptive claim, I contend that the women of *Whylah Falls*, who have not, as X has, developed in exile a romantic, static picture of their home, offer this perspective from the very beginning of the book. In the *dramatis personae*, Shelley is said to be a student of X, but he is the one who learns from her how to see beauty and place in a sustainable way.

One of the reader's first encounters with Shelley is in the poem "Rose Vinegar." X, "deluded by his quixotic romanticism" (Clarke 29), sends her a bouquet of roses. Shelley regards the gesture as touching, but inexperienced: "though she admires the blossoms for their truthfulness to themselves, she does not hesitate to distill a delicate and immortal vinegar from what she considers the ephemeral petals of X's desire. An ornament becomes an investment" (Clarke 29). Shelley's decision is pragmatic, but it also shows a deeper engagement with the roses, beyond their static, decorative function. She knows that change is inevitable, that roses

will wilt and rot eventually if left without care. She therefore chooses to prolong their life and usefulness by making rose vinegar, which is "especially good on salads" (Clarke 29), thereby connecting the roses to her mother Cora's cooking, which, as I have argued, represents an important act of place-making. That "Rose Vinegar" occurs so early on in *Whylah Falls* demonstrates that, while X represents many of the pastoral elements which Clarke seeks to pastiche, his worldview is challenged from the very beginning of the book.

In the second section of *Whylah Falls*, "The Trial of Saul," the pastoral picture is challenged further, as readers learn that Saul Clemence, Cora's ex-husband, was violent towards her and ran off with his stepdaughter, Cora's daughter Missy. Saul, a gypsum miner by trade, is quite the opposite of a pastoral personality: "his lungs are silver-coated with sickness and his heart dries now to bone and his conscience is rusted metal" (Clarke 47). Yet Cora, despite a life marked by Saul's violence and by threatened sexual violence on the part of family members (Clarke 55), chooses to see beauty in nature and find joy in cooking. Indeed, "How to Live in the Garden" is found in this second section. On its own, this poem might seem somewhat romantic, though it constructs an inter-related and unbounded sense of place. However, when juxtaposed with disturbing accounts of Cora's life, it becomes clear that it represents her way of finding solace through connection to place, as bell hooks has described. Through her cooking, Cora becomes not only a victim of a misogynistic and racist world, but also a creator of beauty and joy, and a steward of place. As the "concrete poet of food" (Clarke 48), she reminds both herself and others that there are larger forces in this world than those of oppression and marginalization.

Shelley's sister Amarantha displays a similar attitude to Cora's. The fourth section of *Whylah Falls*, "The Passion of Pablo and Amarantha," focuses on Amarantha and her suitor, Pablo Gabriel. Amarantha's work at a local fish plant is described in a prose poem aptly titled

"Class Struggle." Reciting the steps of her morning routine, Clarke lists every brand of food eaten by Amarantha for breakfast and lunch: "she plucks a pear from a pine Wilfruit basket, fills a bowl with Windsor wheat puffs (which she then sweetens with Lantic sugar and drowns in Farmers' milk and Avon apple sauce)" (90). Though a majority of the products Amarantha consumes are from Nova Scotia, the use of brand names secures their status as commodities. Unlike Cora's cooking, which is rooted in place both physical and cultural, the description of Amarantha's diet emphasizes her alienation from those who produced her food. The end of "Class Struggle" sees Jack Thomson drive by in his "rancid truck" (Clarke 90) to pick up Amarantha for her shift at the Maritime Fish Company plant. Here, too, the use of the company name reminds us that the fish Amarantha spends her days gutting at a rate of one cent per pound are not for her own consumption, but to be sold to others, just as she herself purchases Lantic sugar and Farmers' milk. As the title indicates, Amarantha and countless other Nova Scotian labourers are alienated from the fruits of their labour and, by extension, from each other. If places, as Doreen Massey argues, are made up of webs of social relations, then alienation from other people necessarily impedes the formation of a sense of place.

In addition to the alienation she experiences, Amarantha faces demeaning conditions at work. The lift Jack Thomson provides her to the fish plant is conditional on her acceptance of unwanted propaganda and harassment: "So long as she takes the Liberal Party leaflet that her [*sic*] hands her with a smile (always, always smiles), she can wriggle her way into the covered back of the truck" (Clarke 90). It is later revealed that Thomson is the cause of Othello's death: angry at Othello for threatening him after he physically assaulted Amarantha (Clarke 102), Thomson lies to Scratch Seville, Othello's murderer, telling him that Othello has been seducing Scratch's wife (Clarke 115). Like Cora, Amarantha faces what bell hooks calls "imperialist white

supremacist capitalist patriarchy" and turns to place and craft for solace. In the poem "Quilt," narrated by Amarantha herself, she reveals her concern with news of Mussolini and the Spanish Civil War. She also relates how "Yesterday, I saw—puzzled by railroad tracks—a horse's bleached bones. / Roses garlanded the ribs and a garter snake rippled greenly through the skull" (Clarke 100). This macabre yet beautiful image serves as a reminder that the forces of fascism are not all-powerful. As bell hooks puts it: "That is the great democratic gift nature offers us—that sweet death to which we all inevitably go—into that final communion. No race, no class, no gender, nothing can keep any of us from dying into that death where we are made one. To tend to the earth is always then to tend to our destiny, our freedom and our hope" (117). As another way to tend to her freedom, Amarantha sews the poem's titular quilt: "I quilt, planting sunflower patches in a pleasance of thick cotton. / I weave a blanket to spite this world's freezing cruelty" (Clarke 100). hooks calls quilting a "culture of place" (168), arguing it is heavily linked to more traditionally accepted physical methods of place-making, such as gardening or working the land. Writing about her grandmother's quilting practice, hooks relates how each quilt tells a particular story about how, where, and why it was made. Amarantha's quilt connects her both to the products of her labour and to the place where she produces them.

When it is seen from X's perspective, Othello's murder is indeed a world-shattering event that forces him to re-evaluate his perspective completely; for such a tragedy to occur in the place Stacey calls his "Tintern Abbey" (100) is unthinkable. But when we take into account the stories of the women of Whylah Falls, the murder, while no less heart-rending, enraging, and unjust, can be seen for what it is: part of a framework of white supremacist violence that has existed for a very long time. X—and, in Stacey's argument, the reader—come to the slow realization that the ideals of beauty, place, and home are worth choosing despite heartbreak and violence, but

Shelley, Cora, and Amarantha do not have to come to this realization; they have already made their choice. Othello's death devastates them, and they turn to place for solace, comfort, and revitalization, having already developed the skills and relationships to do so. The penultimate section of *Whylah Falls*, "The Adoration of Shelley," opens as follows: "Up, sun! Ten months have passed. All things pass away. Snow vanishes into sudden, fresh green. There is everything to be done. Shelley dresses and goes downstairs to prepare the garden. *There is a time to mourn and a time to cease from mourning*" (Clarke 161, emphasis in original). Connection to place has not rendered Shelley's grief lesser, but it does serve as a reminder, as bell hooks has argued, of the cycle of death and renewal, and of the fact that there are forces in this world more powerful than white supremacy. The garden, which Shelley and her family had tended before Othello's death, provides rewarding labour at a difficult time. Later in this section, Shelley writes in a letter to X that "Ma's stewing turnip, cabbage, carrots, cat-tail roots, and chicken in a delicious pot"' (Clarke 167). As she has done earlier, Cora turns to cooking to create comfort and connection in the midst of pain. Through their pre-existing relationship to place, the women of Whylah Falls are able to recover from the grief of Othello's death.

Doreen Massey argues that reactionary conceptions of place are often gendered, associating women with the local or the static, and men with the global and the itinerant (9-10). At a glance, *Whylah Falls* might seem to be falling into such gendered, harmful stereotypes, since two of the central male characters, X and Pablo, are travellers, while Shelley, Cora, Amarantha, and Selah stay put. But X, as Stacey notes, has a very unchanging vision of Whylah Falls; he is stuck perceiving it as local, as removed, and as good. Meanwhile, as I have shown, the women of Whylah Falls, though they are less travelled, are aware of the interconnections inherent to place, of its changing nature, and of its moral complexity. In the opening poem of

"The Adoration of Shelley," while Shelley tends to the garden, the speaker reveals that "X, self-exiled to States Country, does not see any of this Beauty" (Clarke 161). By changing locations, X has missed the changes operating in the community of Whylah Falls itself. It is Shelley who imparts this knowledge to him, writing in her letter: "The river's beauty / glints // and is lost // yet remains / beautiful" (Clarke 167). In the following poem, X declares he is returning home, writing: "I am lonesome for […] The river swafting upon stones, / In Jarvis County" (Clarke 168). It is Shelley's letter that prompts X to question his reactionary view of place, and see that it is changing and beautiful despite the pain it also holds.

While many minority cultures in Nova Scotia have a history of being romanticized and co-opted by the province's tourism industry and by its tenacious paradigm of the Folk, the same cannot be said for the Black Nova Scotian community. Though in recent times, entities such as Tourism Nova Scotia have begun to recognize their historical presence in the province, Black Nova Scotians were for many years simply erased from the landscape. In her poetry collection *And I alone escaped to tell you*, Sylvia D. Hamilton poignantly demonstrates how such continued erasure, coupled with the displacement and violence of slavery and white supremacy, can lead one's very home to be seen as a prison and as a site of insecurity. For Hamilton, positive place-making is contingent on the act of escape. While Hamilton troubles the notion of home, in *Whylah Falls*, George Elliott Clarke seeks to reassert its importance—not despite, but because of displacement and violence. Clarke's characters, each in their own way, choose to foster connections to Whylah Falls, its environment, and its residents to find solace from the structures of patriarchy and white supremacy. Both authors reject romanticized portrayals of Nova Scotia's imperial landscape, but where Hamilton's characters almost entirely reject the province as home, Clarke's contend that it can be made into one. Robert David Stacey argues that *Whylah Falls*

shows that “Beauty is not a fact, nor a delusion, but a struggle” (106); in the same way, place is not inherent, nor given, but rather made and fought for.

Chapter Three

"Beaucoup d'*ailleurs* mènent à Grand-Pré": Serge Patrice Thibodeau's Politics of Homecoming

Ever since the *Grand Dérangement*, the Acadian cultural imaginary has been shaped around this primary dislocation, which sociologist Jean-Paul Hautecoeur calls the "year one" of the Acadian people (qtd. in Chiasson 147). Between 1755 and 1763, at least seven thousand Acadians were deported by the British, while between ten and twelve thousand fled as refugees (Faragher xviii). According to Herménégilde Chiasson, "[à] partir de cette date fatidique, l'Acadie disparaît des manifestations matérielles et géographiques" (147). The writings of Serge Patrice Thibodeau are in many ways symptomatic of the resultant complex relationship to place. Many critics speak of Thibodeau's work as not tied to place: writing in 1998, Jean Morency argues that "[à] première vue, il n'y a rien d'acadien dans l'univers imaginaire des principaux recueils de Thibodeau […] et pourtant l'Acadie y est partout, mais elle s'y trouve comme décentrée" (47). In light of such previous work, Thibodeau's 2017 collection *L'isle Haute : en marge de Grand-Pré* is a significant shift. Through eight sections of prose poetry and one of creative translation, Thibodeau returns home. *L'isle Haute* gets its title from an uninhabited island in the Bay of Fundy (Thibodeau 13) which serves as leitmotif and obsession for the speaker—who refers to himself in the third person as "l'homme"—throughout the collection. This speaker's homecoming journey is an ambivalent one, yet he has no choice but to make it; Acadie and the *Grand Dérangement* haunt him personally as they have haunted Acadians collectively for 250 years. The cultural myths surrounding these events, which have allowed them to become enmeshed in the framework of imperial landscape, loom large but unspoken in *L'isle Haute*. Carlo Lavoie argues that the collection breaks free from the cultural enclosure of these myths through a "dé-spatialisation" (594) of Acadie. I contend that it instead accomplishes

this break through "re-spatialization": by anchoring himself, with his personal and communal grief and desires, in a space that has never belonged to him alone, the speaker creates an unbounded, democratic sense of place.

The Acadians were some of the earliest European settlers in what is today Canada, arriving from France during the first half of the 17th century. The French imperial forces had been hoping to institute a feudal system of *seigneuries*, but their plan failed as the settlers intermarried with the Mi'kmaq Indigenous people and rapidly developed their own customs and identity, pioneering a communally managed diking system that allowed them to reclaim fertile salt marshes for agriculture (Faragher 48-49). Between 1654 and 1670, Acadie was controlled by the British; settlers were offered the opportunity to leave in 1654, but chose to stay. According to John Mack Faragher, this period, in which British rule was mostly nominal, being in practice delegated to the Acadians themselves through an "inhabitants' council," was when "a distinctive Acadian ethnic culture" (69) took shape. The French returned in 1670 to find—to their annoyance—a relatively democratic and egalitarian society. In 1713, the Treaty of Utrecht handed Acadie back to the British. For the next four decades, the British would attempt to get the Acadians to swear an unconditional oath of allegiance to the Crown, while the Acadians insisted they be exempted from bearing arms. For many years, the Acadians had the advantage that the British depended on them for provisions, but this eventually became a problem of its own, as "[s]o long as the [Catholic] Acadians remained in possession of the best lands, and were supported by the Míkmaq [*sic*], effective Protestant settlement was impossible" (Faragher 282). Under the governorship of Charles Lawrence, the decision was made to remove them. The Deportation, or *Grand Dérangement*, which Faragher sees as a precursor to other North American instances of ethnic cleansing such as the Trail of Tears (xix), began in the fall of 1755,

when the first ships loaded with their human cargo set sail. Today, Acadians form a large diaspora. Of those who still reside in Acadie—whether because they managed to escape deportation or because they returned—the majority live in New Brunswick. Around 230,000 New Brunswickers are native French speakers ("Les communautés francophones du Canada"). In Nova Scotia, "[a]fter the war ended in 1764, small numbers of Acadians were allowed to return […] With their homes and farmlands taken over, they resettled in areas along the coast." In 2011, just under 35,000 Nova Scotians—3.8% of the province's population—declared French as their first language ("Our Community").

Modern representations of Acadians are still largely influenced by what remains the most well-known artistic work about the Deportation: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1847 long poem *Evangeline*. According to Ian McKay and Robin Bates, "the publication of Longfellow's masterwork ushered in a wholesale reorganization of an actual landscape in order to make it conform to a bestselling historical romance" (72), as Grand-Pré and the surrounding Annapolis Valley became popular tourist sites. *Evangeline* also led to a shift in racial perceptions, "enshrin[ing] the Acadians, often condemned for intermarrying with the Mi'kmaq, among the prestigious white races of Nova Scotia" (McKay & Bates 94). Of course, this did not halt discrimination against Acadians, but their appropriation of Evangeline for their own ends allowed them to, if not "*dismantle* the master's house with his own tools […] use them to carve out a habitable apartment in his basement" (McKay & Bates 96). Thus one literary work, written by an American who had never set foot in Acadie, changed both the physical landscape of Nova Scotia and prevalent ideas about who belonged there.

Consequently, *Evangeline* has haunted Acadian literature ever since there emerged works that could be classified under that name. The first Acadian author to achieve widespread renown,

Antonine Maillet, explicitly opposed to Evangeline a host of female characters who are anything but meek and submissive. Subsequent authors contested Maillet's depiction of Acadie, characterizing it as a "représentation folklorique de l'Acadie qui se conforme aux projections imaginaires du centre sur la périphérie" (Boudreau 334). Throughout this process, *Evangeline* remained, for better or worse, the foundation of Acadian literature—and of much of its contemporary culture. In his aptly titled essay "Oublier Évangéline," Herménégilde Chiasson criticizes what McKay and Bates call the "Evangeline Phenomenon":

> Cette Acadie combative nous l'avons perdue au contact d'une œuvre littéraire de fiction qui marquera notre imaginaire autrement que notre histoire. Le poème *Évangéline* de l'Américain Henry Wadsworth Longfellow deviendra la référence historique dont l'Église avait besoin pour son œuvre de propagande et confirmer l'efficacité de son slogan, foi et culture. Notre histoire devint une fiction. Dans cette œuvre nous sommes les vaincus nobles et sans défense qui montent dans les bateaux en chantant des cantiques." (Chiasson 149)

Chiasson connects shallow, folkloric experiences of Acadian heritage to its commodification by the tourism industry. The officially accepted version of Acadian history becomes one of "tragédie transformée en joie de vivre" (154), neglecting "la lutte des Acadiens, […] leur sens de l'anarchie […] leur courage aussi, car la Nouvelle-Acadie est en fait le fruit de fuyards qui ont refusé le sort qui leur était fait" (155). For Chiasson, Acadians have, with other actors, participated in the creation of this romanticized history, which is part and parcel of the imperial landscape I have been outlining. Acadians find themselves "la résultante d'une histoire que nous ne connaissons pas et […] la fiction d'une littérature que nous ne pouvons admettre […] coincés

entre mythe et amnésie" (156). It is myth and amnesia that Serge Patrice Thibodeau seeks to deconstruct in *L'isle Haute: en marge de Grand-Pré.*

As Jean Morency notes, significant portions of Thibodeau's early work are set outside Acadie. But, he argues, even as Montreal, Vienna or Prague seem to be "des conditions d'énonciation de son écriture poétique" (Morency 48), Acadie remains present in his work, "profondément intégrée dans la conscience du poète et dans le regard qu'il porte sur l'ailleurs" (Morency 47). In *L'isle Haute*, the Acadie which has been quietly haunting Thibodeau for decades pulls him home. The book's first section, "Histoire de vignes: *Une feuille, un crocodile, non, un orignal*" traces the speaker's return to Acadie and the beginning of his obsession with Isle Haute and with Grand-Pré. If Acadie was "decentred" in Thibodeau's previous work, here the speaker seeks to explicitly recentre it, calling the island "[u]n centre autour duquel gravitent les organes vitaux, dans la marge" (15). The mention of the margins reminds us that though Isle Haute might be recentred for the speaker, he remains conscious of its position in the global margin. As such, the Acadie he brings into focus is not the one which exists in the imperial landscape. The speaker plans to "Retrouver / refaire / reconstruire le paysage" (Thibodeau 15), strip it of layers of accumulated meaning to create new ones.

Despite the seeming inevitability of homecoming, the speaker, watching Isle Haute from an airplane window, wonders whether return could lead him to lose his way: "Les marges, lieux de l'égarement. Avec de la fumée tout autour. Il entend frapper la foudre sans plier l'échine, le front à plat contre le hublot embué" (Thibodeau 16). The recurrent motif of obscuring fog or smoke is introduced here, but instead of causing ambiguity, this veil produces an excess of certainty: "la terre à nouveau faite chair, et sang, et glace. Et désir, aussi. Clichés. Manque de vide. Trop de certitude, pénurie de questions" (Thibodeau 19). For Jean Morency, the Acadian

writer is “surdéterminé par sa propre appartenance collective, fondée justement sur le sentiment d’une marginalité qui lui est constitutive” (48). Grand-Pré, I suggest, is overdetermined in a similar fashion, fossilized into an imperial landscape that leaves no room for change or questions.

The speaker nevertheless feels a profound pull from the land underneath these myths, an urge to discover those facts about it which have been forgotten. He links environmental destruction to the myths and amnesia against which he struggles: “Rêves cassés, fracassés par des murs de pluie verglaçante, par l’érosion des falaises qui s’entrechoquent. Une époque sans voix: pas de narrateur, pas d’orateur, ni locuteur ni personnage. Rien de tout ça dans le présent de la destruction” (Thibodeau 22). Place is not only reified as landscape by persistent myths but also destroyed outright. This is very dangerous for a writer such as the speaker, who, after years of *errance*, seems now to have tied his creative practice to the land of Acadie, both metaphorically—“Pour que surgisse du tout rien, des tréfonds de la terre, la parole métamorphique” (Thibodeau 21)—and physically: “la pointe d’un stylo parle à mi-voix contre la texture du papier […] L’écriture biologique, ça existe aussi – articulations, ligaments, cartilages, tout le monde s’y met […] Il déconstruit le chaos, allègrement, à s’en donner des courbattures. *Wild is the Wind*. À l’ombre d’une mine de charbon” (Thibodeau 21). The speaker places his hopes in the fact that “L’érosion n’a pas toujours raison d’un récit” (Thibodeau 24), reaching for the past as a method of stripping away layers of solidified myth to then rebuild something new.

The following sections provide a more precise picture of just how Acadie haunts the speaker at both the collective and the personal levels. The third section, “Yankee Go Home: *Journaux, inventaires de pilleurs armés, de voleurs et autres ivrognes*,” bills itself as a collage of free translations of the journals of two New England soldiers involved in the expulsion of

Acadians. The translations relate, in a matter-of-fact tone, the daily mundanities of organizing an ethnic cleansing: disciplining soldiers; marching from one location to another; burning Acadian homes; the cold; the rain. By turning to journals as his source for information about the past, Thibodeau's speaker effectively counters both the myths and the amnesia instituted by imperial landscape, connecting readers to the actual minutiae of the *Grand Dérangement*. He reappropriates the soldiers' words—and therefore some measure of authority over the events they describe—both by translating them into Acadian French and by mixing two journals together. The two soldiers, Jeremiah Bancroft and Abijah Willard, become confused within the text, much in the same way Acadians themselves must not have seen much difference between the individual soldiers burning and looting their homes. Thibodeau thus uses existing documentary sources to do what he can to reconstruct the nonexistent account of the Acadians' experience.

In this section, the speaker often repeats the English sentence "*Nothing more remarkable*" (Thibodeau 57), taken from one of the journals. Only once do either of the soldiers show any contrition: "Vers 3 heures de l'après-midi j'ai donné l'ordre à tout le monde de se mettre en rang et j'ai ordonné aux hommes de se mettre en marche. J'ai fait mettre le feu à tous leurs bâtiments et abandonné les femmes et les enfants à leur propre sort, *with grate Lementation which I must Confess itt seemed to me sumthing shoking*" (Thibodeau 64). These two English phrases, particularly the second one, so clearly situated in the past through its spelling, serve as a reminder that these are accounts of true historical events. The effort required to conduct archival research and translation, combined with the repetitive, list-like style of this section as a whole, reinforces the sense that this is a piece of history which has been haunting the speaker for years—generations, even.

On the personal level, the speaker's own exile from Acadie also haunts him. *L'isle Haute*'s fourth section, "Le tour de l'isle: *Histoires de cendres*," opens with excerpts from letters sent by the speaker's mother. She asks him "As-tu fixé une date de retour?" (Thibodeau 79) and reminds him of the routines of home he is missing: "As-tu pensé que c'est le temps des sucreries?" (Thibodeau 79). Following these excerpts, the speaker reveals that his mother has since died. As he did in the case of environmental destruction, the speaker ties her death to a loss of meaning which hinders his capacity to write: "On dit: le *second* cri primal. Parce qu'il n'y en aura jamais trois. Le second, on le huche[3] à la mort de sa mère. Jusqu'à en perdre la voix" (Thibodeau 86). By juxtaposing the death of his mother and accounts of the *Grand Dérangement*, the speaker blurs the boundaries between personal and collective grief; for example, the subtitle of the fourth section, "*Histoires de cendres*," can be read as a reference to the burning of Acadian homes in 1755. The speaker's voluntary exile becomes linked to the forced exile endured by those Acadians who survived the journey in the holds of British ships. Returning home therefore entails finding a way to live with his mother's death and with the death of a community and a way of life; it entails coming to terms with "le *je* du mot dérangement" (Thibodeau 89).

In order to transcend his multiple forms of grief, the speaker must pass through them, and through the crisis in meaning and place they engender. He is pressed ever further into his original goal of deconstructing the landscape. His mother's death seems to have precipitated an inevitable reckoning not only with the past, but also with modernity:

> Le voyage ne semble plus possible ; seules les escales suffisent comme motifs à / de l'errance. Entre deux escales, que les espaces éminemment sinistres des banlieues. Celles-

[3] *Hucher*: Acadian French, to yell/call out to someone (Cormier 345).

> ci ne font que s'éparer dans la laideur. Parce qu'elle est bien *là*, parce qu'elle s'est mise à l'œuvre, la dictature du polymère, maquillée de l'apparat des monarchies moribondes, ornée d'affreuses cravates nouées au cou de la scélératesse […] Autant refaire le tour de l'isle / jouer sa dernière carte / lire la géographie à sa façon. (Thibodeau 95)

The speaker's previous lifestyle of *errance* has lost its luster, as he looks around and takes in the sameness of the placeless suburbs which now dot the globe, propped up by the same monarchies responsible for the expulsion of the Acadians. In this paragraph, the nameless "elle" is no longer the speaker's mother, but the "dictature du polymère"; as the speaker questions meaning and has his voice stolen by grief, his speech is replaced by that of "[d]es politiciens fortunés [qui] s'expriment avec l'éloquence d'une fosse sceptique" (Thibodeau 96). In the absence of his mother, who "départageait le vrai du faux, le peut-être du certainement […] Elle lisait / écoutait juste" (Thibodeau 97), the speaker's world becomes flooded not only with environmental destruction, but also with the duplicitous rhetoric of those who would have us ignore it: "Ils parlent d'avenir en se bouchant les oreilles alors qu'à l'horizon se profile un glissement de terrain / l'effondrement d'un glacier […] Ils ont la langue recouverte d'asphalte, les faux prophètes, ils s'abreuvent, se désaltèrent de charbon liquéfié. C'est pour mieux mentir, pour mieux caviarder leur trahison" (Thibodeau 96-97). Given his conscience of the climate crisis, the speaker's growing distaste for an errant lifestyle can perhaps also be attributed to the environmental destruction it causes. Faced with this crisis of narrative and of lifestyle, the speaker turns towards home, to "lire la géographie à sa façon" and create new stories and connections to place.

This is of course easier said than done. *L'isle Haute*'s fifth section presents a further descent into grief: "Chemin brisé: plus de communication téléphonique avec la mère […] Des

pas perdus, des mots dépourvus du *sens* de l'orientation – des mots falaises" (Thibodeau 113). The speaker's mother's death wrenches a hole in the familiarity of place; his words are eroded like the red cliffs of the Bay of Fundy. Even Isle Haute itself is no longer a solid referent: "L'isle n'a plus de centre" (Thibodeau 108). The speaker, no longer travelling, is now looking to "dé-parcourir le monde" (Thibodeau 109). Nonetheless, there persists in him an urge to find meaning and language in the space around him: "Quelque chose incite à scruter le blizzard ; à le voir, à l'observer dans ses rebondissements / soubresauts / façons de raconter une histoire / un récit terrifiant […] Et dans la tête ces mots nouveaux: vortex polaire et bombe météo" (Thibodeau 108-109).

In the sixth section of *L'isle Haute*, "Cosmogonie du charbon: *La méthode de Dawson*," the speaker begins to find his ground, both literally and figuratively: "*Atopos*. L'homme sans chien est *atopique* […] L'homme *est*, et cela lui suffit, dans la marge, sans bruit, chez lui" (Thibodeau 121). The use of the word "atopos" is perhaps one of the things that prompted critic Carlo Lavoie to claim that *L'isle Haute* "de-spatializes" Acadie (594). I contend that this state of *atopie* is a temporary one, occurring at the delicate moment when the speaker has deconstructed the myths that shrouded the landscape and cast off the chains of collective amnesia, but has yet to reconstruct anything in their place. For a moment, he simply is, as the italicized word emphasizes, but this state of being is immediately situated in the margins, which are then claimed as home. As Doreen Massey reminds us, "[t]here is a need to face up to—rather than simply deny—people's need for attachment of some sort, whether through place or anything else" (151). A permanent state of despatialization is, then, perhaps not possible, and definitely not desirable. For the speaker of *L'isle Haute*, placelessness is a stepping stone towards a state where "sa voix est imperméable à toute érosion" (Thibodeau 121).

Over the course of the rest of the sixth section, the speaker begins re-making place in an alternate manner, employing a more wide-ranging conception of its history than that permitted by the imperial landscape he has now stripped away. He does not forgo myth entirely: as Doreen Massey says of tradition, it is not myth itself that serves empire or capital, but rather their contents and the way they are used. The speaker thus seeks to establish an alternative mythology of Acadie. In this section, geological history and Indigenous legends rub shoulders with *faits divers* about Isle Haute's lighthouse keeper, about Alfred Nobel's invention of dynamite, about the speaker's mother's illness. The speaker explicitly turns away from the Western canon: "Le mythe d'Orphée n'empêche pas le fils de retourner dans son village et de le quitter en marchant à reculons, le dos tourné à l'horizon, à la grande ville, au déni. Le fils ne craint pas de poser son regard sur l'ombre de sa mère" (Thibodeau 125). Instead, he focuses on the history and legends of the land he walks, hearkening back to a time when "avant même qu'Orphée ne jouât sa lyre dans les Entrailles de la Terre, bien avant lui, *Hylonomus lyelli* était un petit animal capable de courir au sol et de se dresser sur ses pattes de derrière" (Thibodeau 126). The speaker also weaves Mi'kmaw words and legends into his acts of place-making: "Il fut un temps où les castors, *ko'bit*, abondaient en Nouvelle-Écosse, mais ils se sont transformés en canards noirs, *a'ptcitekamutc*" (Thibodeau 129). By choosing to engage critically with many forms of knowledge about the place that is both Acadie and Mi'kma'ki, rather than solely with its imperial landscape, the speaker realigns himself with the margins. Instead of using texts such as *Evangeline* to portray Acadians as a bastion of Old Europe and thus try to glean some protections from a society that does not truly value them nor the land where they fought so hard to stay, *L'isle Haute: en marge de Grand-Pré* asserts the need for a different kind of relationship with history, with myth, with place, and with the other communities with whom we share these. This

relationship, while of a new kind, is one that draws judiciously from a non-idealized past, for "[tradition] does not always only work for capital; we have our own traditions, too, and they are not simply to be sentimentalized, they are also to be built on" (Massey 140).

The following two sections, "Vues d'en haut: *De baies en caps*" and "Le retour de l'isle: *Du centre à la périphérie en passant par le sommet*" pursue this process of reconstructing new meanings after pre-existing ones have been torn down. The speaker now exists in a world where "Tout a changé: la dimension des objets et leur substance, leur texture, les volumes [de certains endroits du corps déjà nommés] augmentent alors que le temps se rétracte. La perspective de vivre / de survivre à ses morts, l'improbable retour à la terre où il naquit comme l'herbe ou un arbre, rien de moins ni de plus *signifiant*" (Thibodeau 143). Where the speaker struggled so much to find meaning, return seems to have opened up new avenues of significance. Anchored in place, he seems able to be present across eras, as time retracts and he survives death. The line "survivre à ses morts" also gestures towards community-level survival; the individual and the collective are further assimilated into one.

Moved by "l'envie urgente de nommer le pays" (Thibodeau 149), the speaker begins to list Nova Scotian and New Brunswick place names. Very few names are those that would be found on a contemporary map, as he privileges names in Mi'kmaq and in French for places that have since been renamed in English. This naming process goes hand in hand with a recognition of "Tout ce qui n'a jamais été écrit dans une lettre à la famille. Ce dont il n'a jamais été question à l'école: la cosmogonie du charbon et le dépeçage du littoral, à coups de hache pendant l'orage. Tout ce qui n'intéresse absolument personne" (Thibodeau 150-151). The speaker wonders: "Qui joue aux cartes géographiques? Pour quel délire collectif?" (Thibodeau 152). Throughout the collection, he has been aware of how powerful imperial actors can use maps and stories to

marginalize, to erase, to strip places like Isle Haute and Grand-Pré of meaning. Here, he enters the game himself, "Prêt pour le témoignage et le souvenir" (Thibodeau 152), taking a position against the erasure enacted by empire: "non au déportement de *sens*" (Thibodeau 153). While the architects of imperial landscape name in order to conquer and conceal, the speaker of *L'isle Haute* clearly contrasts his own pratice of naming by positioning it as one rooted in care, conscious of the change and vitality central to place. He writes of a list of place names that "Tout le monde semble être là. Bien en chair. Bien en vie" (Thibodeau 149); by personifying these places, the speaker imbues them with life and mutability. In the same way as his earlier struggle to write was tied to displacement and environmental destruction, so now the speaker's newfound voice is tied to place-making and to the will to remain: "Refuser de quitter le bateau, comme on refuse de quitter sa terre, refuser de se taire, une pétition à la fois, le seul genre littéraire qu'il connût" (Thibodeau 154). Prior hesitation to return to a home fogged over by reified myths and by amnesia has been transformed into a steadfast commitment to a new relationship to place.

The final pages of the eighth section, "Le retour de l'isle," make clear that the speaker's new commitment to place has come with a transcendance of his grief for his mother. Reminding himself that his mother "méprisait les discours misérabilistes" (Thibodeau 170)—a remark which could very well be addressed to both the speaker in his grief but also to certain collective Acadian discourses about the *Grand Dérangement*—the speaker sets his mind to the difficult task of writing about her:

> Épreuve / éprouver. L'amour face à la mère, l'amour de la mère face à l'épreuve. S'éprouver dans l'amour pour / envers la mère. Épreuve dans l'étrangeté d'écrire la mère. Relire les mots: Écris-moi. Éprouver la mort de la mère. Le retour du *rien que*, ce n'est qu'une chanson, ce n'est que Janis, ce n'est que la mère, ce n'est que la mort. C'est

rinque ça, quand ça se contracte, l'épreuve de la douleur, au creux du ventre. Rien que pour la très, la toute petite, l'infiniment petite bactérie de l'Histoire. (Thibodeau 170).

By metaphorically rendering history as small as bacteria, the speaker personalizes it, locating his grief for it in the same place as his grief for his mother. By once again emphasizing the "rien que," the things that, as he repeats elsewhere, "n'intéressent absolument personne," he elevates them, focusing on the forgotten people, the forgotten histories, the margins.

That the speaker is now able to write about his mother does not mean he has suppressed or circumvented his pain; as in the case of his relationship to place and of his grief over the *Grand Dérangement*, he has plumbed the depths of history and emotion, deconstructing preconceived notions so that his poetic voice could be reborn. Thanks to these processes, he is now able to relate to the past in a much more personal way. He writes of his mother: "Elle rendait hommage à ses ancêtres qui lui avaient épargné / évité un séjour au cap d'Espérance de la Miramichi où 400 des siens allaient crever de faim, de froid et de misère à l'hiver 1756" (Thibodeau 172). The speaker began writing about the past by searching through the archives and translating journals composed by soldiers who didn't even know the names of the people they were displacing. Now, he situates himself within a lineage that has passed down an oral tradition detailing its survival. I argued earlier that the speaker was extending his poetic presence and place-making across time periods; this notion is concretized as he engages with his mother's relationship to place and with his own family history. He speaks about the past in his own voice now.

In the ninth and final section of *L'isle Haute*, "La brume se lève: *Histoires de bateaux fantômes*," the speaker, for perhaps the first time in the collection, is joyful:

> Elle [his mother] aurait eu 84 ans un soir de nouvelle lune; en y pensant il a retrouvé l'élan de la danse. L'étranger / le gringo / l'ajnabî, aucune caméra de surveillance n'avait réussi à l'identifier au faciès. La danse le protégeait des regards, il n'aurait pas à subir un interrogatoire avant de traverser la frontière. L'air se déplace autour de ses gestes et ça sent la vanille d'une tropique à l'autre. Après le calcul, l'étranger se dit qu'il suffit de 84 mois pour atteindre l'âge de la raison, et du coup son propre nom s'est effacé de lui-même dans son passeport. Il n'en avait plus besoin, il s'accommodait de son statut d'apatride. La lune se levait à l'horizon après avoir parcouru le Monde en 84 jours. (Thibodeau 180)

The speaker's memory of his mother, which previously enabled a more authentic relationship to place, now pushes that relationship to expand into an unbounded one. This unbounded notion of place allows him to nurture all the various stories, myths, and histories which make up the land on which he walks, as all the ghosts which have haunted the collection converge on Isle Haute. Characters from stories and legends which have been peppered throughout *L'isle Haute* reappear, among others: the "Femme Mi'kmaq," who is said to have died on Isle Haute after escaping there with Acadian friends during the *Grand Dérangement*; the island's former lighthouse keeper and his wife; victims of the 1917 Halifax Explosion; and Fred Harding, who, on his 20th birthday, fell to his death from the Fundy cliffs while collecting seagull eggs. Interspersed throughout this section is a list of ships which sailed the Bay of Fundy during the *Grand Dérangement* and the number Acadians they carried in their holds: "le sloop *Endeavour*, John Stone, commandant, avec 166 passagers dans la cale; le sloop *Industry*, George Goodwin, commandant, avec 177 passagers dans la cale; le sloop *Mary*, Andrew Dunning, commandant, avec 182 passagers dans la cale" (Thibodeau 189), and so on. The ghosts of these Acadians join the others on Isle Haute

as one story among many. One of the final ghosts to be named is the ghost of the speaker's mother. This final section closes on a passage in which, as a pyre burns on Isle Haute, the fog lifts and all the ghosts, after bidding adieu, rise and dissipate with the smoke: "Brume, spectres et fantômes se dissipèrent dans la fumée blanche […] Les feux brûlèrent toute la nuit, la fumée blanche s'en éleva jusqu'à l'aube. À partir de ce moment et pour sept ans, sur l'isle Haute, tout s'est figé. Il pleut" (Thibodeau 195). Fire, which for much of the collection represented the destruction wrought by British forces on the Acadian community, now symbolizes renewal. The speaker's return to Grand-Pré has allowed him to deconstruct the layers of imperial landscape surrounding the place, forming a real relationship with it and finally making peace with its ghosts.

> Carlo Lavoie argues of *L'isle Haute: en marge de Grand-Pré* that:
>
> L'Histoire chez Thibodeau devient multiple et propose à l'Acadien, non seulement de revoir les frontières de son territoire puisque ce dernier n'en a plus, mais aussi sa propre conception du temps. Ainsi, l'isle Haute fait éclater la notion de territoire refermé sur lui-même et entouré de frontières au profit de celle d'un lieu ouvert sur l'Autre. Elle contribue à dé-spatialiser l'Acadie et à laisser passer le temps […] Le décalage horaire d'une Acadie folklorique centrée autour de son quotidien et constamment en retard sur le monde s'efface au profit d'une histoire multiple qui se superpose à l'histoire acadienne sans pour autant l'oblitérer. (594)

Lavoie's reading identifies the way Thibodeau brings many histories and cultures into dialogue with Acadie, allowing ideas to flow unbounded across borders. However, in his opposition of time and space, he falls prey to the false binary between these concepts, as identified by Doreen Massey. Massey notes that the widespread association of place with reactionary nostalgia "rests

in part on the view of space as stasis" (5). Within this framework, time comes to stand in for any sort of progress or history. Massey argues that we ought instead to conceptualize of time and space together, and of "social phenomena and space as constituted by social relations" (2), themselves ever-changing through time.

As Chiasson, McKay, and Bates argue, the "Acadie folklorique" from which Thibodeau seeks to be free is not a remnant of an authentic past, but rather a present construction of the past meant to serve specific aims. Nor was the past as insular as folklore would have us believe: "The assumption which runs through much of the literature is that this openness, this penetrability of boundaries is a recent phenomenon […] To say that 'Time and distance *no longer* mediate the encounter with 'other' cultures' is to see only the present form of that encounter, and implicitly to read the history from a First World/colonizing country perspective" (Massey 165). The Acadians have a relationship with the Mi'kmaq stretching back to the early 17th century, and had, as John Mack Faragher highlights, complex and important commercial relationships with New England before the *Grand Dérangement*. For example, English words are recorded appearing in Acadian French as early as the 1680s or 1690s (Faragher 79). In situating insularity in the past and openness in the present, Lavoie unwittingly reinforces the framework of imperial landscape.

I contend that conceptualizing of Thibodeau's political project as one opposing itself to present constructions of the past rather than to the past itself allows us to see that he is not de-spatializing Acadie, but rather privileging an unbounded, polyphonic sense of place over one that is reactionary and nostalgic. In the final section of *L'isle Haute*, the speaker refers to himself as "apatride," which might seem to reinforce Lavoie's argument about an Acadie that is borderless and therefore placeless. However, it is crucial to note that Thibodeau uses the word "apatride"—stateless—rather than "atopique"—placeless—which he does employ earlier in the collection.

The speaker is not renouncing his commitment to Acadie, because Acadie has never been a state; it has always been an idea, or, in Massey's terms, a particular articulation in a network of social relations. Rejoicing in his statelessness, he rejects the Acadian bourgeoisie's alignment with the Canadian state and comes down firmly on the side of the dispossessed[4]. In *Space, Place, and Gender*, Massey paints a poignant portrait of Kilburn High Road in London, emphasizing all the ways it is connected to various other places around the world, through the stores and people who find themselves there. She writes: "Kilburn is a place for which I have a great affection […] it certainly has a 'character of its own'. But it is possible to feel all this without subscribing to any of the static and defensive – and in that sense reactionary – notions of 'place' […] If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places" (153). This is the sort of place-making in which *L'isle Haute* engages in its final section: articulating an affection for Acadie while recognizing its connections to the rest of the world and the multiple groups and cultures which all attribute different identities to the same place. The speaker is able to find rest from his ghosts because it is clear that Acadie is big enough to contain all of them.

Lavoie is not the first scholar to argue that Serge Patrice Thibodeau's work transcends or forgoes a relationship to place. This may be an argument undertaken out of a desire to elevate his writing into the canon in a world marked by the proliferation of a "mindset that an attachment to place is disadvantageous, inconvenient, even retrograde" (Wyile 244). But as Herb Wyile argues, "While the attachment of Atlantic Canadians to their region is often seen as a recalcitrant rootedness, or some kind of romantic, numinous bonding (whether to be admired or lamented as

[4] It is important to note, of course, that while Acadians, after being deported, were indeed stateless and suffered accordingly, Thibodeau himself is a Canadian citizen, a fact which makes a lifestyle of *errance* much easier. As his earlier rejection of borders (p. 180) implies, he seems to be dreaming of a stateless world, rather than claiming the condition of a stateless person.

anachronistic), the work of [Atlantic Canadian] writers prompts us to see that attachment in all its historical, economic, political, and cultural complexity" (245). In *L'isle Haute: en marge de Grand-Pré*, Thibodeau challenges de-spatialized and de-personalized readings of his work by critically engaging with place, with the personal, and with the particular. Confronted by reactionary ideas of Acadie, the speaker of *L'isle Haute* nonetheless finds himself compelled to return home. The speaker's creative crisis, precipitated by environmental destruction and by the death of his mother, propels him towards a deconstruction of these ideas, which Chiasson calls myths and amnesia and which I am calling imperial landscape. Once the fog of empire has lifted, the speaker is able to relate to his individual and collective past, to his grief about the *Grand Dérangement* and about his mother, and to place. In building these relationships, he comes to conceptualize of Acadie as a place which contains multitudes and which is part of a network of places and of relationships to places. Though ghosts abound in the collection, the final phrase of *L'isle Haute*, "Il pleut" (Thibodeau 198), suggests a material, embodied relationship to place, and a presence reminiscent of the moment when the speaker finally feels himself at home: "L'homme *est*, et cela lui suffit, dans la marge, sans bruit, chez lui" (Thibodeau 121). Exile did not liberate the speaker from the past which overdetermined him: homecoming did.

Chapter Four

Walking in Two Worlds: *Elapultiek*'s Paths to Future Places

All the texts I have included in this thesis are engaged in the disruption of mainstream conceptions of the place called Nova Scotia. Most of them do so by engaging heavily with the past, pulling back the curtain of landscape to reveal that history is much more complex—and often much more painful—than tourism brochures might suggest. In this context, Mi'kmaw writer and ecologist shalan joudry's play *Elapultiek (We Are Looking Towards)* stands out as unusually forward-looking. *Elapultiek* is set on the contested boundary of an unnamed reserve and follows the burgeoning friendship between Nat, a young Mi'kmaw woman, and Bill, a white biologist, who come together to protect endangered chimney swifts (kaktukopnji'jk). At first, Nat and Bill are at odds, with Bill disregarding Mi'kmaw traditions and epistemology. Slowly, however, Bill begins to listen to what Nat has to say, and to respect perspectives other than his own. The past is not absent from the play, but it is quieter; it is not an event to be relived, but a story to rely on to construct a future. In her essay "A'tukwewinu'k (storytellers)," joudry writes: "Some days it feels as though we are already in the slow shifting of our demise. I recognize that many of our Indigenous ancestors already experienced the end of their world as they knew it. We must, as humans, find our own vision forward so that we have something to steady us each day" (51). joudry's philosophy allows her to imagine place not only as an idealized past or a complex present, but also as a possible future. In both text and performance, *Elapultiek* is conscious of the ways in which place can be weaponized in a reactionary manner, but also of the fact that even such reactionary views are often rooted in true attachment to place. As Doreen Massey has argued, and as *Elapultiek* shows, it is not the attachment itself that must be transformed, but the concept of place from which it grows.

The Mi'kmaq, or L'nu, and their ancestors have lived in Mi'kma'ki[5] for over eleven thousand years ("Sa'qewe'l kmitkinal"). In the early sixteenth century, they were some of the first Indigenous people of northern Turtle Island to come into "major" contact with Europeans, as the latter began establishing summer fishing communities (Paul 44). By the time Champlain's more explicitly settler-colonial expedition arrived in 1604, the Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous people of the region "had mastered the art of sailing small European craft" and knew some words of French and Basque (Faragher 6-7). Grand Chief Membertou welcomed Champlain and "invit[ed] the French to establish themselves at Port Royal, [seeking] to institutionalize his connections with them and thereby guarantee his access to those powerful [European] trade goods." This move elicited controversy among the Mi'kmaq, as Europeans had already introduced increased violence, alcohol, and disease into their midst (Faragher 14). Despite these justified grievances, the Mi'kmaq became allies of the French, and would largely remain so until the French left North America in 1763. As Mi'kmaw historian Daniel N. Paul reminds us, this alliance does not erase the fact that the French mission to Turtle Island was a colonial one, motivated by greed, that laid claim to land which the Mi'kmaq believed "could not be owned or sold by human beings" (50), and which, accordingly, they never ceded.

After gaining control of mainland Nova Scotia in 1713, the British faced armed resistance, punctuated by treaty negotiations, from the Mi'kmaq. In 1749 as well as 1756, they issued scalping proclamations offering monetary reward for the murder of Mi'kmaw people. According to Paul, as of 2005, the 1756 proclamation had never been rescinded (156). By the dawn of the nineteenth century, with the Mi'kmaq decimated by centuries of disease, war, and betrayal, the British had begun a campaign of systematic dispossession, assimilation, and

[5] Mi'kma'ki encompasses the territories colonially known as Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, eastern New Brunswick, and parts of eastern Québec and northern Maine (Paul 10-11).

elimination. As they did across Canada, they set aside paltry amounts of inhospitable land as reserves (Paul 192-193). Taking inspiration from the tactics they had used to crush the 1740s Jacobite rebellion, they burned lands and villages to destroy food sources (Paul 196). In the poor conditions of the reserves to which the Mi'kmaq were displaced, disease festered (Paul 199). Paul estimates that at the time of first contact with Europeans, no less than 200,000 Mi'kmaq resided in Mi'kma'ki (45). In 1838, a study put their population in Nova Scotia at just 1,425 (Paul 201). It was only in 1950 that the province's Mi'kmaw population began to increase steadily, reaching 11,000 in 1999 (Paul 292). Also in the 1950s, the federal government began to utilize the 1876 Indian Act to prohibit the Mi'kmaq from moving to different communities, requiring them to first apply for permission (Paul 224). As was the case in other Indigenous communities across the country, Mi'kmaq children were taken from their families and sent to abusive and assimilationist residential schools (Paul 283-4). They thus faced—and, too often, continue to face—a cruel combination of enclosure, forced displacement, dispossession, and repression which Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission concluded amounted to "cultural genocide" (*Honouring the Truth* 1).

Central to *Elapultiek* is the Mi'kmaw concept of "Etuaptmumk" ("two-eyed seeing"). Two-eyed seeing is an ecological approach, developed by Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall, which involves bringing both Mi'kmaq and Western knowledge to bear, so that "[w]e are guided to see from both perspectives without one eye overpowering the other" (*Elapultiek* 76). As both an ecologist and writer, shalan joudry applies the principles of two-eyed seeing in all aspects of her work. In an interview published in *The Dalhousie Review*, she notes that for her, storytelling and ecology are not separate: "i would actually say that i study ecosystems and that i write and tell stories in order to teach or convey what i have learned" (Huebert 311). *Elapultiek*, as a story

which introduces the audience to the principles of two-eyed seeing, exemplifies this practice. Connection to place, I will argue, is central to *Elapultiek*'s effectiveness; the play presumes that its audience already cares, in some capacity, about place, and seeks only to expand and enrich our ways of caring.

The change in Bill and Nat's relationship over the course of *Elapultiek* is perhaps best exemplified by their recurrent debate over the ownership of the very land on which they stand. In the play's first scene, Bill accidentally interrupts the beginning of Nat's ceremonial fast when he arrives to count the swifts coming to roost in the chimney of a nearby cabin. After Bill explains his work, Nat questions him:

> NAT: What are you going to do with the papers [of data on the swifts]?
>
> BILL: Save the originals and copy them to send to the aerial insectivore specialists at Maritimes SwiftWatch. They coordinate the count nights.
>
> NAT: Do you give the data back to the community here?
>
> BILL: Other biologists do the stewardship part.
>
> NAT: Then why are you at this spot, instead of just asking us in our community to do this? This is Mi'kmaw reserve land.
>
> BILL: Actually, this is private land. The reserve boundary is right over there. This is where I come to monitor them. I speak with the landowner each spring to let him know I'll be here by his old cabin.
>
> NAT: I was always told this was reserve until the river. My grandparents used to bring me here. We always camp –
>
> BILL: The property boundary is over there. They're almost ready to dive in. I have to pay attention now. (*Elapultiek* 14-15)

J. B. Harley notes that maps, along with the ideas of boundaries and property they create, have often reinforced existing power relations, "[b]oth in the selectivity of their content and in their signs and styles of representation" (278). They are seen as scientific and empirical, which renders it difficult to trace "[d]ialectical relationships between image and power" (280). In *Elapultiek*, the principal issue ostensibly revolves around the best ways to assist the endangered chimney swifts. However, the argument over the reserve boundary comes to stand in as a proxy for more complex questions of conservation. In this first scene, Bill subscribes completely to a Western, empirical framework: he has seen the reserve boundary on a map, and he trusts the map completely, going as far as magnanimously telling Nat "You can stay" (*Elapultiek* 13). He also unquestioningly accepts the notion of private property, which, as Daniel N. Paul notes, is antithetical to the Mi'kmaw worldview. Nat, on the other hand, has received her information about the boundary from oral traditions. As she argues back against Bill, Nat begins to trouble the implicit trustworthiness we are expected to find in maps; she begins to trouble set ideas of landscape. Yet even Nat's remarks reveal the prevalence of cartographic thought and how it has managed to legitimize empire: no matter whether the land on which Bill and Nat stand is reserve land or not, it is Mi'kmaw territory, which was never ceded by any treaty. Yet Nat clearly feels she has no choice but to challenge Bill using the "socially conservative vocabulary" (Harley 294) of maps, since it is the only one he might understand.

In Scene 4, as Nat and Bill meet for a fourth time to count swifts, the issue of the boundary comes up again:

> NAT: I'm going to sing a welcome song first to the best of the drum, remind us of our heartbeat. And then we'll smudge our gear. Don't worry, I'll help you.

> BILL: No thank you. (*Nat hands him an item.*) Actually, I don't really appreciate you forcing me into this ceremony. (*Nat begins drumming.*) If you need to do something like this, I suggest you do it at home or before you come up the path.
>
> NAT: I'm sorry, Bill, this is Mi'kmaw reserve land here and I feel that a ceremony is needed. If you don't like it, then you can remove yourself until I'm done.
>
> BILL: No. Al Johnson [the landowner] and I just made an agreement. This is going to be my land.
>
> NAT: What?
>
> BILL: Al's agreed to sell it to me.
>
> NAT: This is our community land.
>
> BILL: In a few weeks it will be mine. And I will protect the roost and the trees. It's a good thing. (*Elapultiek* 35)

So far, his meetings with Nat have not succeeded in shaking the foundations of Bill's beliefs. He remains strongly convinced that the land is private property, and that the best method of conservation is one that excludes human beings, and more particularly, Indigenous people. He even refers to Nat as a guest on the land when he asks her not to perform a ceremony (*Elapultiek* 36) and accuses her of forcing Mi'kmaw traditions on him. As Nat herself points out in Scene 2, it is rather the Mi'kmaq who have had European culture, science, and society thrust upon them and been forced to learn its ways (*Elapultiek* 24).

The scene shifts when Bill and Nat notice a raccoon on the swifts' chimney. Suddenly, Nat and Bill are both united in their concern that the swifts will not be able to get to their roost or will be killed by the raccoon. Despite their efforts to scare away the raccoon, the animal enters the chimney after the swifts, and Bill and Nat rush to count:

BILL: How many are left in the chimney? You got the outs and I have (*Checks tally*) fifty-seven in.

NAT: Forty-seven came out.

BILL: Twelve still in there.

(*Silence*.)

BILL: I'll come back tomorrow night just to check and see if the raccoon comes back.

NAT: I'll come too. Maybe I'll bring something louder.

BILL: I'm not sure being louder will distract this one.

NAT: We have to try something.

BILL: I know. (*Elapultiek* 38)

The threat of the raccoon allows Bill and Nat to come together and work towards a common goal. For the first time, they don't argue over the count. Nat refers to them together as "we" and Bill agrees. Their sudden unity is possible because Bill, though biased against Mi'kmaw ways of knowing, does feel a genuine attachment to place, and to the swifts. Compared to the texts highlighted in previous chapters, *Elapultiek* does not spend nearly as much time exploring the construction of Nova Scotia's imperial landscape. Instead, through Bill, it demonstrates how this hegemonic idea of landscape clouds and biases the thinking of well-intentioned individuals. *Elapultiek* argues that this attachment to place, while reactionary, can offer a starting point to foster more inclusive visions of place.

Bill's mind slowly begins to change over the course of the following scenes. Nat and Bill host a community meeting about the swifts, and when Nat receives a racist note in the questions box, he expresses sorrow, though he reiterates the belief that his purchase of the land is the best road to conservation:

NAT: Usually conservation means non-Indigenous people draw a boundary around an area and say no people allowed. Is that what you mean?

BILL: I guess it depends on what it's for. Right now I'm just thinking about the chimney swifts.

NAT: Can't you think about the people too?

BILL: I'm just a biologist. (*Elapultiek* 48)

Bill still subscribes to a Western perspective that views humanity as separate from nature. His statement that he is "just a biologist," is an acknowledgment of his shortcomings, but this is in itself a modicum of progress, since it implies a certain recognition on his part that the perspective of Western biology is insufficient to account for the situation.

As the following scene opens, Bill is still at odds with Nat: when she says that the chimney is "on stolen land," he accuses her of being "anti-science" (*Elapultiek* 50). In response to Bill's comment that "Stories aren't science," (*Elapultiek* 51), Nat bets that she can teach an astronomy lesson by telling a story about a bear. Bill agrees that if she succeeds, he will sing a Mi'kmaw chant with her. Nat tells the story of Muin, the bear, which can be tracked through the movement of the Big Dipper across the sky. At the end, Bill is forced to admit that the story does indeed teach the listener about the location of the North Star, Tatapn. Nat explains: "Our ancestors had to teach the young to know the signals of land and light. People remember better through story so you turn everything into characters and plot, imbedding the science in there" (*Elapultiek* 53). As Nat teaches Bill about the North Star through the story of Muin, so *Elapultiek*, through its own story, teaches readers and audiences about Mi'kmaw epistemology.

The issues of both the swifts and the reserve boundary come to a head in the final scenes of *Elapultiek*. In Scene 9, Bill and Nat discover that Al Johnson's cabin has been burned down

and the swifts' chimney knocked over in an apparent act of arson. Nat and Bill, both devastated, speculate over who might be at fault:

> NAT: You don't think [Al] burned it because of the attention, do you?
>
> BILL: Probably not, seeing as I was going to buy the place.
>
> NAT: Bill.
>
> BILL: I know, I know, it's reserve land anyway. I just meant I don't think Al would want to see the place ruined.
>
> NAT: Did you just say it's reserve land?
>
> BILL: Yes.
>
> NAT: You believe me?
>
> BILL: Yes.
>
> NAT: Good. Finally you side with oral tradition instead of data.
>
> BILL: Actually, I found data.
>
> NAT: What do you mean?
>
> BILL: I looked into it at the lands registry and found that about a hundred years ago someone took the liberty to survey off this part of the reserve and make a private sale. (*Elapultiek* 56-57)

This is an excellent example of two-eyed seeing: Nat provides the oral story without which it would have been impossible to know that the map was incorrect, and Bill, inclined to lend credence to oral knowledge after hearing the story of Muin, is prompted to check Western records. The combined sources of information provide a fuller picture than either could on their own.

Despite this development, Bill remains convinced that "[t]here's nothing we can do" (*Elapultiek* 56), while Nat is hurt and angry that he kept the information from her for months. In the emotionally charged atmosphere of the destruction of the cabin, the conversation devolves into an argument where Bill claims Nat is "selfish" and "just trying to destabilize anything that's not Mi'kmaw" (*Elapultiek* 59) before storming off. But Bill's outburst, though unacceptable, is rooted in his grief for the swifts: "I can't handle more than one cause right now. Look at this rubble and what I now have to deal with. I've dedicated my life to species at risk" (*Elapultiek* 59). When Bill returns to take photos of the damage and finds Nat still on site, he comforts her:

> BILL: Are you okay?
>
> NAT: What do you care? It doesn't matter. I give up. Happy now? You can do whatever science you want and watch it do nothing.
>
> BILL: Nat.
>
> NAT: The world is already in ruins. Humans are destroying everything around us. I'm done.
>
> BILL: You're just a kid.
>
> NAT: You don't know how much I've already fought. Sometimes that broken, pushed-down tree can only fight for so long until fungus finally takes its toll and the tree goes back to soil. You don't know what it's like to be part of the least favourable statistic category in the country. Young Indigenous woman.
>
> BILL: You're not a statistic.
>
> NAT: I am a statistic. Just when you think there's hope, another storm comes and pushes the tree further. Maybe some things are just meant to disappear.

> BILL: Even after a storm devastates a forest, the trees keep growing. Even bent over, a tree will use a branch as the new top. (*Elapultiek* 62)

This moment is another important step in the development of Bill's character as he recognizes his and Nat's shared distress and comforts her. Perhaps more significantly, he adopts her metaphor of a fallen tree in order to do so. This is notable since Bill has spent most of the play maintaining the Western cognitive divide between humans and nature, whether by saying that he cannot focus on social problems because he is "just a biologist" (*Elapultiek* 48), or cautioning Nat against anthropomorphizing the chimney swifts (*Elapultiek* 21). Bill's adoption of the metaphor of the tree is an admission that, as humans, we can learn things from our environment not only for its sake, but also for our own—that we are perhaps not so separate as the "objective" science that Bill championed in the first scenes would have us believe.

The following day, Bill returns again to the site to check on Nat. Finding her unwilling to converse, he speaks instead to the fire—a practice he previously derided. He speaks of his discouragement with regards to the current situation: "Hi, fire. I'm not sure what to say. I work on species at risk. It's challenging, almost hopeless, just watching species disappear […] And now Nat. I can't answer these things either. How am I supposed to make up for what my ancestors did to her ancestors?" (*Elapultiek* 64). After hearing Bill bare his soul in this way, Nat is moved: "*She raises* [*sic*] *up, collects her drum, and sings a healing song*" (*Elapultiek* 65). The song over, Nat and Bill are startled when they hear the swifts. Absent a chimney, the birds are able to find a roost in a nearby tree trunk. Nat asks: "That wasn't that many of them, twenty-ish. Bill, do we have to count?" To which Bill replies: "No" (*Elapultiek* 65). In this crucial moment, both characters are practicing two-eyed seeing: Nat estimates the number of birds, and Bill, in a significant reversal of his earlier remarks, asserts there is no need to count. He recognizes that

this time, it is enough to know that the swifts returned when they were thought lost, and to watch them and allow their presence to foster hope. Fittingly, Bill then gives Nat the records he found about reserve land being surveyed off. As they have done all along, his remarks about the reserve boundary act as a indicator of his broader opinions about Mi'kmaw rights and epistemology. By giving Nat the records, he demonstrates he is ready to acknowledge both Western and Indigenous perspectives; he is ready to begin looking with both eyes.

Due to its nature as a play, place is less overtly present in *Elapultiek*'s text than in other works. However, as I argued earlier, care for and attachment to place underlie the whole plot. Bill's character arc would not be plausible or satisfying if the audience did not accept that Bill cares about the chimney swifts, about species at risk, and about Nova Scotia, and that this care, though sometimes misguided, is nevertheless genuine. Additionally, *Elapultiek* is not just a text, and though place is important to the text on its own, it becomes central when this text is performed as theatre. In "A'tukwewinu'k," shalan joudry writes:

> Through the teachings of Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall about Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing) in Mi'kma'ki, we are meant to continue our work in today's world with at least two world views woven together for the benefit of all. Usually, in ecological conversations we mean to weave the mainstream science perspective and our cultural perspective. In my arts work as a storyteller, writer and playwright, i mean to weave and practice in both the literary and the oral. (52-53)

I suggest that in order to heed joudry's invitation for all to practice two-eyed seeing, *Elapultiek* must be considered as both text and performance.

Elapultiek was originally commissioned by Two Planks and a Passion Theatre Company in 2018, and had a first run of one week at Ross Creek Centre for the Arts, near Canning, Nova

Scotia, before going on to tour in four Mi'kmaw communities (Smith). In summer 2019, the play was staged once per week at Kejimkujik National Park and National Historic Site, in southwestern Nova Scotia ("Kejimkujik National Park opens for its 50th season"). I was fortunate to see one of these performances. joudry writes that "[e]ven in the future, therefore, there will be some stories that you can only listen to in that space around the fire, huddled together by the smoke" ("A'tukwewinu'k" 54). And though *Elapultiek* can be told in more than one way, hearing it around a fire in woods that have been home to the Mi'kmaq for thousands of years, under the stars where the story of Muin unfolds, is a wholly different experience than reading.

As Chris Morash and Shaun Richards note, space is the fundamental medium of theatre. Theatre is also characterized by its immediacy:

> Unlike copies of a newspaper, or a radio broadcast, a play in performance takes place in a clearly demarcated space at a clearly defined time. The audience for any given performance is limited to those people who are in the same place at the same time. Members of an audience are not, in [Benedict] Anderson's phrase, an 'imagined community': they are a real, albeit temporary, community whose members' relationship to one another is bounded by the temporal and spatial parameters of the performance as event […] there will always be a disjunction between the perceived space of performance and the conceived space of the nation. In terms of perceived space, theatre is not national at all; it is local. (Morash & Richards 18)

Sitting around the fire at Kejimkujik, the audience cannot avoid having our feet on the ground, breathing the cool evening air, hearing the wind in the trees and the crackling of logs. Morash and Richards remind us that "To see one's own spaces staged appropriately, in accordance with one's own sense of worth, was thus a profoundly political act" (30): to stage a Mi'kmaw space in

a province so fraught with imperial constructions of landscape is itself politically significant. It becomes more so because, as Morash and Richards argue, nationalist discourse or sentiment does not mesh well with the theatre form. joudry expresses the hope that *Elapultiek*'s audiences "would share [Bill's] desire to let down their guards, agree to be friends, and help lift each other up […] It is a story about the building of trust and the work of deep listening, which is what I'm hoping for in fellow Canadians" (Huebert 319). Theatre is an ideal medium with which to foster such trust, since the space taken up by the imagined communities of "Canada" or "Nova Scotia" is lesser. Audience members are left with each other's temporary, but tangible, community, and invited by the play to engage together in forward-looking place-making.

In addition to being more subtly mentioned, place in *Elapultiek* is unspecific: though a chimney, trees, and a river are mentioned, the reserve on whose boundary Bill and Nat meet remains unnamed. If, in the text, this creates an impression of vagueness, in performance, it creates concreteness; if the boundary is not a particular place, then it can be any place. At Kejimkujik, the play was performed in a clearing at night. By the sole light of the fire, it was too dark to see whether a cabin and its dilapidated chimney were lurking in the forest. But it was clear as day that the conversation fostered by *Elapultiek* was necessary across the province, and that the play was helping it happen in that place to which, when the performance ended, we all felt a bit closer.

Just as *Elapultiek*'s plot rests on the assumption that Bill does feel genuine attachment to place, so too does its effectiveness as a performance rely on the audience also caring about place; it extends us this grace. The play acknowledges that the framework of imperial landscape and the paradigm of the Folk have erased Black and Indigenous inhabitants, and pushed outsiders and Nova Scotians alike to think of the colonial status quo as natural and to envision the province's

white inhabitants as the intrinsic heirs to the land and as guardians of antimodern and static ideas of landscape. *Elapultiek* suggests that for those not directly involved in its elaboration, imperial landscape is more than an empty system of signs thrust upon them: it is the only available avenue through which to channel real care for place. Through Bill's character, joudry explicitly seeks to open up new avenues for place-making. The motif of the reserve boundary is central in providing a concrete example of how settlers can, through two-eyed seeing, expand their attachment to place to take into account other human communities and the history of violence that has marked the land. In this sense, *Elapultiek* is not only a story about how we have related to place in the past, but also about how we might relate to it in the future.

Conclusion

Home is a Political Notion

Contemporary sentiments of placelessness are often blamed on modernity: "It is commonplace in Western societies in the twenty-first century to bemoan a loss of a sense of place as the forces of globalization have eroded local cultures and produced homogenized global spaces" (Cresswell 14). However, as I have shown, displacement and marginalization have, throughout history, prevented or impeded attachment to place. Too often, complaints about modernity's lack of connection to place are based on romanticized conceptions of the past that attribute a static, essentialist idea of place to an imagined "Folk." Such a way of seeing is not only false, but can also be dangerous and reactionary; it solidifies the acceptance of imperial landscape, thereby concealing the very histories of violence which prove that placelessness is not a new sentiment.

Yet it would be equally dangerous to simply ignore the ways in which capitalist modernity does make people feel disconnected from place and from each other. As Doreen Massey notes, we cannot do away with the fact that humans do strive for identification and belonging, and that this often manifests as a desire for a sense of place. To discount place as altogether reactionary is both ahistorical and a disservice to ourselves. The literature and history of marginalized groups not only demonstrate that placelessness is not a new phenomenon—they can also inform the way we approach placelessness caused by modernity. By recognizing that place and home have always been deeply political notions and sites of struggle, we can come to a better understanding of how we might effectively nurture relationships to place in today's context of climate crisis. In this thesis, I have attempted to showcase the different ways in which marginalized groups engage in politically and historically informed acts of place-making in Nova

Scotia. In the context of imperial landscape, it becomes a political act for the province's Gaelic, Black, Acadian, and Mi'kmaw communities to claim it as home.

In chapter one, I argued that Alistair MacLeod's novel *No Great Mischief*, while sometimes accused of perpetuating tartanist ideas about Nova Scotia, instead offers a much more complex view of place. In the novel, any "authentic," essentialist notion of place is a constantly receding horizon, always situated further and further in the past, whether in Cape Breton or in Scotland. Nevertheless, characters are constantly shown to rely on their connection to place as a referent or as solace. Through the characters' many discussions about history, *No Great Mischief* also dramatizes the process of historical selection that informs any act of place-making. The novel suggests that whether one looks to the past with unquestioning romanticism or with scepticism, it remains an incredibly important force in shaping any relationship to place.

My second chapter focused on *And I alone escaped to tell you* by Sylvia D. Hamilton and *Whylah Falls* by George Elliott Clarke. I argued that *And I alone escaped to tell you* demonstrates that the profound and violent dislocation wrought by the transatlantic slave trade transformed even home into a notion with negative connotations. Enslavement renders Hamilton's speakers unable to form any sort of reciprocal relationship to place; it is only when they escape that they portray the land in a positive light. *Whylah Falls*, in contrast, reasserts the importance of the notion of Nova Scotia as home. Clarke cleverly subverts the pastoral aesthetic to expose how the violence Black Nova Scotians face has been integrated into Nova Scotia's imperial landscape. He also depicts characters who, in order to resist this violence, choose to foster a sense of place.

In chapter three, I turned to Serge Patrice Thibodeau's *L'isle Haute: en marge de Grand-Pré*. Thibodeau, like Alistair MacLeod, faces an imperial landscape which has assimilated—

rather than erased—his culture. Acadians have long been defined in hegemonic discourse by the cultural myth of Evangeline, and this is exactly what *L'isle Haute* seeks to deconstruct. The collection's speaker faces a creative crisis precipitated by the death of his mother, by environmental crisis, and by the imperial landscape which overdetermines Acadian culture. I argued that the speaker overcomes this crisis by deconstructing received ideas of landscape and engaging in an open-ended, unbounded practice of place-making. Such a practice allows him to confront both his collective and his personal grief, while remaining conscious that the place about which he writes contains more than a single meaning.

My fourth and final chapter focused on shalan joudry's play *Elapultiek*. I argued that *Elapultiek* nuances our understanding of imperial landscape, since Bill's character arc is based on the assumption that in some cases, attachment to imperial landscape can be based in genuine feelings of care for place. joudry, in a forward-looking move, suggests that this attachment can expand into a healthier, reciprocal relationship to place. I also argued that *Elapultiek*'s nature as a play enables it to reach out to the audience and encourage us to engage in place-making collectively.

As the great variety of works I have included in this thesis shows, there is no prescriptive panacea for resisting imperial landscape through literature. It is precisely the variety of genre, topic, and style that makes these works so effective: they complicate, they nuance, they provide no easy solution. Like the ghosts in the final section of *L'isle Haute: en marge de Grand-Pré*, each text provides its own story, and when they are considered all together, they allow readers to see that Nova Scotia has space for all these stories, for all these versions of place. Imperial landscape is singular; the beauty and wonder of place lie in its plurality.

Nevertheless, there are certain commonalities between the many methods of place-making I have identified. Perhaps the most important one is that place is never static; it is constantly being made and re-made. In our era of climate crisis, this lack of certainty can be a source of anxiety; placelessness can make us crave the perceived stability of imperial landscape. But as is apparent in any sustained exploration of landscape or of the Folk, this stability is only that: perceived. It obscures histories of displacement and prevents many people, particularly from marginalized groups, from forming any sort of connection to place.

In his account of a Mi'kmaw creation story, Stephen J. Augustine writes that "Mi'kmaq generally understand that our world is a cyclical motion of events, we have been created, we are being created; in the future, if we wake up in the morning and see our world before us, then we are continuing to be created" (19). These words echo those of Doreen Massey: "One of the great one-liners in Marxist exchanges has for long been, 'Ah, but capital is not a thing, it's a process.' Perhaps this should be said also about places; that places are processes, too" (155). Such an understanding of place—and of ourselves—allows our attachment to place to provide not only solace but also hope. In the final scene of *Elapultiek*, Nat says: "Wela'lioq to the kaktukopnji'jk, the swifts, like us Mi'kmaq who are struggling to survive the changing world. Thank you for giving us a reason" (69). In a tremendously important reversal of Western conceptions of nature and conservation, joudry positions the chimney swifts not only as creatures to be cared for, but also as actors able to provide hope and motivation in return. This reciprocal relationship is only possible because Nat sees place as ever-changing. Without change, process, and re-creation, there would be no space for the swifts to recover; no space to hope for a world in which they are not threatened. If places can fall apart and be ripped away, they must also be able to be restored and re-made.

The day of my visit to the cross commemorating the *Grand Dérangement* was overcast and blustery, and we were the only ones at the site. At the foot of the cross, we found a small bouquet of wildflowers, placed by a previous visitor (see Figure 2 in Appendix). I will never know who was behind this touching action, but I imagine it to be someone who, like me, has spent years listening to and telling stories about the place. Likewise, my ability to be touched by this bouquet of wildflowers rests on the stories I have grown up hearing about Nova Scotia: stories like *No Great Mischief*, like *And I alone escaped to tell you*, like *Whylah Falls*, like *L'isle Haute: en marge de Grand-Pré*, like *Elapultiek*. Stories that allow us to see beyond what is written on the interpretive panels. If home is a political notion, then this was a politics of home in action.

Appendix

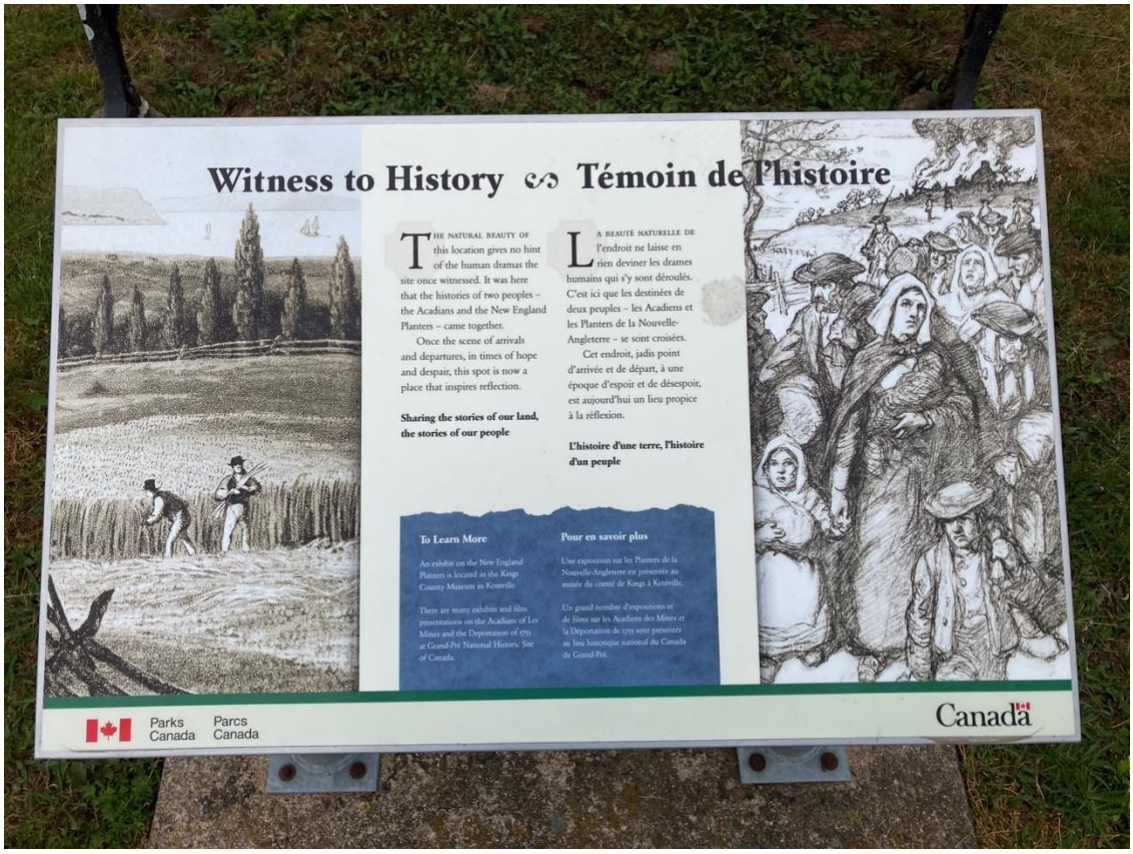

Figure 1: Interpretive panel at the cross commemorating the Acadian Deportation. Horton Landing, Nova Scotia, 3 July 2021. Photo by Violette Drouin.

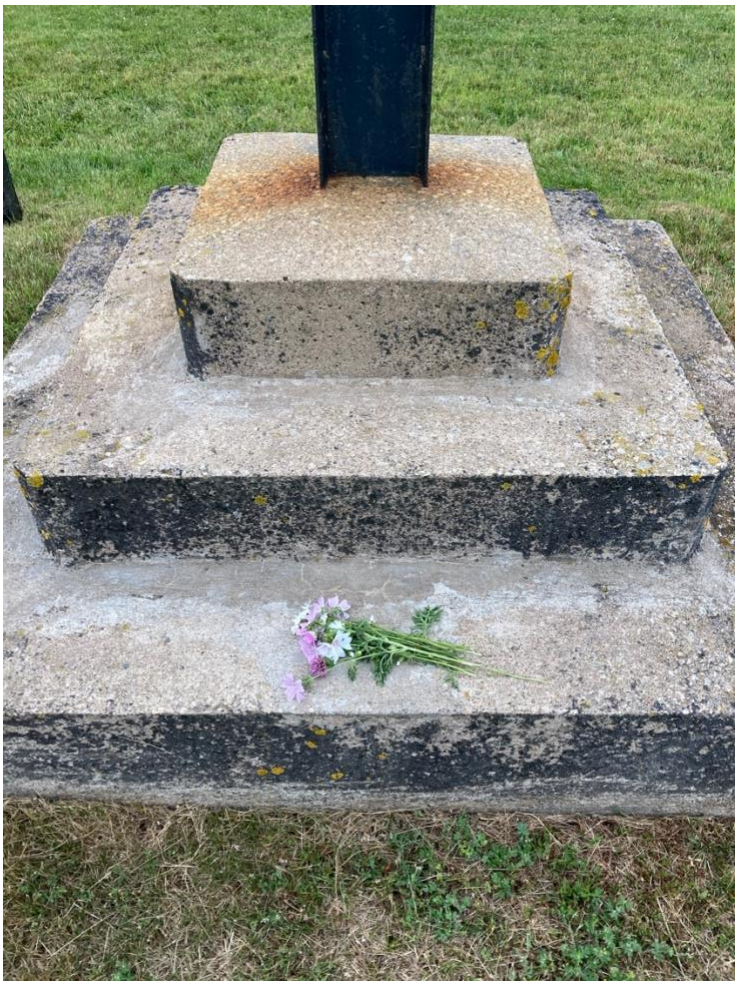

Figure 2: Wildflowers at the cross commemorating the Acadian Deportation. Horton Landing, Nova Scotia, 3 July 2021. Photo by Violette Drouin.

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