

Ecological Ideologies of Modernity and Their Temporal-Spatial Representations in Canadian,  
Russian, and Polish Literatures of the Twentieth Century

by

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## Abstract

The dissertation focuses on the temporal-spatial representations of the ecological ideologies of modernity in the writings of Canadian authors Georges Bugnet, Sheila Watson, and Howard O'Hagan, Russian authors Andrei Bitov and Tatiana Tolstaia, and Polish author Czesław Miłosz. The concept of ecology is used in a broader sense, based on its etymology of “dwelling-saying,” whereby the ecological ideologies of modernity are examined as both explicitly stated and implied in the narratives and descriptions, reflections and beliefs regarding the proper dwelling place of humans, their ethos. Temporal-spatial unity, or “chronotope” in Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory, is posited as the main principle of artistic organization of the ecologically relevant narratives. Chronotope sustains the works’ ecological and ecomimetic field within its given ideological and artistic perspectives (optical, mythological, or philosophical) and points to a wide range of artistic representations. Some of these representations include the paradisiac chronotope of origin fantasies, the cyclic time of nature and of the mythologized construction of natural humans, the places of the meeting of pre-modernity and modernity, along with the symbolism of elements and landscape formations. The eco-ideological stances and perspectives assumed by particular characters, narrators, or by ekphrastic descriptions are unraveled in connection with identified effects of defamiliarization, inherent to the discussed writings that make ecology as human dwelling-saying their key inquiry. The underlying methodological tools for the interpretations of ecological ideologies and the strategies of their defamiliariation are philosophical concepts of Jacques Lacan (the Symbolic, *object petit a*, Borromean knot, *sinthome*, foreclosure) and Martin Heidegger (*Dasein*, *Ereignis*, concealedness-unconcealedness, *physis*). Posing the human subject as an entity of time, Miłosz in his poetry and prose (the novel *The Issa Valley*) is preoccupied with the ontic multiplicity and at the same time individuality of

beings. His poetic perception is grounded in the corporeal propinquity between subject and object, but he seeks the meaning beyond the earthly domain of Eros in the field of primordial time. Miłosz's efforts at laying bare the gap between the environment and our perceptions, necessarily subjected to systems of signification, as well as his longing for the mystery of the originary event that marks our transcendence into time, echo in Bitov's prose (the novellas "Man in a Landscape," "Birds" and "Dacha District," and the novel *Awaiting Monkeys*) as a systematic suspicion with regard to our capacities of unobstructed viewing of landscape, paired with a series of defamiliarizing techniques that, by estranging the environment as our home of being, paradoxically help make it closer and fuller. The origin fantasies, vital in the writings of Miłosz and Bitov, find their ideological counterparts in Georges Bugnet's novel *The Forest*, which breaks down the enlightenment colonialist and Romantic ideologies revolving around the idea of the virgin wilderness. The defamiliarization of ecological ideologies in Bugnet, as well as in Watson's short story "Rough Answer" and her novel *The Double Hook*, is enriched by genderly marked spatial elements of the environment that procure a peculiar distribution of ecomimetic characteristics of masculine and feminine chronotopes. Characteristic of *The Double Hook* and O'Hagan's novel *Tay John* trickster narratives, deprived of auctorial authority, help uncover the ideological aberrations by contrasting the Symbolic and the pre-Symbolic chronotopes and by demythologizing historically and philosophically significant stances of humans in their relations with environment. The originary event of its appropriation in the discourses of modernity, in which the cyclic time of myth changes to linear time of history and the immediate environment becomes a subject to ecology, rendering the environment as human's home of being estranged in the Symbolic order, is at the centre of the discussion of *Tay John* and Tolstaia's novel *The Slynx*. The ideologically marked environmental chronotopes, functioning as objects-causes-of-desire,

and the prevalence of origin fantasies are the main threads that tie together the selected authors and their works. The identification and problematization of ecological ideologies and their temporal-spatial representations in non-related national literatures open literary studies to the new field of interpretational capacities that ecocritique invests into the discipline of comparative literature.

## Preface

A part of Chapter 2 of this thesis, 2. 2.1. The Power of Silence: The Soundscape in “Rough Answer,” is a revised version of my article published as: Yakovenko, Sergiy. “The Power of Silence: The Genotext in Sheila Watson’s “Rough Answer.” *Sheila Watson: Essays on Her Works*. Ed. Joseph Pivato. Toronto: Guernica, 2015. 129-48. In Chapter 1, I also use some fragments from the following publication: Yakovenko, Sergiy. “Metafizychna Bioetyka Sensu u Tvorchosti Cheslava Milosha.” [= “Metaphysical Bioethics of Meaning in Czesław Miłosz’s Writings”] *Kyivs’ki Polonistychni Studii* [= *Kyiv Polish Studies*]. 17 (2011): 158-72.

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### **Note on Transliteration and Translation**

Throughout this dissertation, in the transliteration of Russian text, I have used, whenever possible, a modified Library of Congress Romanization table. The diacritics and ligatures have been omitted. The published English translation of Tatiana Tolstaia's novel *The Slynx* follows a different Romanization scheme. Therefore, when citing this publication, I have used its transliteration of the author's name: Tatyana Tolstaya. However, when referring to the Russian original and throughout the dissertation, I have followed the spelling that has been adopted in recent scholarship: Tatiana Tolstaia. I have used available English translations of works originally published in other languages. All English translations with parenthetical references to original works in Russian, Polish, French, and German are mine.

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## Introduction

### I. Statement of Problem

The ecological ideologies of modernity are first and foremost phenomenological systems that establish our attitude to the environment and find their expression in particular modes of knowledge and representation. For Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour, modernity is defined in terms of humanism—as an anthropocentric production of man that began in the Enlightenment and ends somewhere in the nearest future. The process of such a production of humanity “overlooks,” as Latour puts it, “the simultaneous birth of ‘nonhumanity’—things, or objects, or beasts—and the equally strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines” (13). In this view, modernity develops as an incessant succession of the ideologies of subject-object relations, the subsequent stages of which—marked by such philosophical edifices as Kantianism, Hegelianism, and phenomenology, to name just the most salient ones—underscore various modes of the discrepancy taking place between the subject (society) and the object (environment). This very type of subject-object relation sustains the core of any modern ideology, which, according to Paul de Man’s definition, “is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism” (*The Resistance to Theory* 11). The persistent attempt of ideology to bridge the gap between “verbal concepts and sensory intuitions” is doomed to break up on the “insidiously figural, rhetorical nature of discourse” (Eagleton 200), which for de Man is the ultimate environment for “ideological aberrations” (Warminski 16). This tropological nature of discourse fills in the gap between the subject and object as epistemological categories, but at the same time it represents the aesthetic kernel of ideology that nurtures the subject by means of “intuition,” which, according to de Man, “implies perception, consciousness, experience, and leads at once into the world of logic and understanding with all their

correlatives, among which aesthetics occupies a prominent place” (*The Resistance* 8).

Modernity’s inability to read its own discourse, which is the source of its ideological aberrations, bars it from understanding “reference as a function of language and not necessarily as an intuition” (*The Resistance* 8). It represses the very interstitial space between subject and object into what Latour calls “the unthinkable, the unconscious of the modern”: “here, on the left, are things themselves; there, on the right, is the free society of speaking, thinking subjects, values, and of signs. Everything happens in the middle, everything passes between the two, everything happens by way of mediation, translation and networks, but this space does not exist, it has no place” (*We Have Never Been Modern* 37).

While ideology in its classical understanding of “system of ideas” is usually easily recognizable and open for description and analysis, ideology as an object of cultural studies, associated with the work of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and Terry Eagleton, presents any researcher with a challenge and seduction of meta-language (speaking about culture in that culture’s language), though we know from Jacques Lacan that such a meta-language cannot exist because there is no “other of the other” (“The Subversion of the Subject” 688). However, while there may be quite discernible theoretical sources and cultural implications of such ideologies as deep ecology or ecofeminism, their traces in poetry and fiction give more opportunities to track down their “lived, habitual” aspects and social practices, which, as Eagleton maintains, “must then presumably encompass the unconscious, inarticulate dimension of social experience” (115). This unconscious space, which—for modern ecological ideologies—is the interstice between subject and object, comes into the open due to the work of the uncanny, or certain points of disturbance that defamiliarize the usual and epistemologically established order of things, thereby displacing a subject from his habitual place of dwelling in the symbolic system. While de

Man's "linguistics of literariness" may serve as one of the tools to uncover those "ideological aberrations" that permeate the ecological discourse in fiction and poetry, the uncanny presents itself as an unconcealedness of the open that discloses itself within the discourse and allows a speaker, narrator, or character—accordingly—to experience the discrepancy within the established order and render that experience to the reader by means of, as de Man would say, aesthetic intuition. In this sense, the effect of defamiliarization, associated with the uncanny, as a sign of an ideology's instability, lays bare the very existence of the modern unconscious and thus points to the ways of its interpretation.

As the ideologies of modernity are generally characterised by the problematic relationship between subject and object, mainly marked by the "linguistics of literariness," ecological ideologies reflect the ontological core of that issue. While the common meaning of "ecology" is a holistic way of seeing natural environment, in Martin Heidegger's terms (and applying his etymological method), *eco-logy* means *dwelling-saying*: *oikeo* and *oikos* mean "home" or "household," while *logos* means "saying" (Padrutt 18). Dwelling-saying in the world-our-home, as well as dwelling in language as our house of being (to use Heidegger's formulation), gives the uncanny its ecological justification: it puts a subject out of home by means of defamiliarizing the usual, homely order of the environment.

In uncovering the ways in which ecological ideologies of modernity and the effects of defamiliarization show themselves within the works of poetry and fiction, one aspect of interpretation comes to the fore as a central and most significant principle of artistic organization of the ecologically relevant discourses and narratives: the temporal-spatial dimension. Understood rather as a unified substance than separate notions, the temporal-spatial unity (in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory, *chronotope*) sustains the artistic ecological and ecomimetic field

within its given ideological perspective (optical, mythological, or philosophical). According to Bakhtin's definition:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (84)

Instead of the “generic significance” of chronotope, emphasized by the Russian theorist in his *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*, the ecological chronotope points to a broad range of artistic representations. Some of these include the paradisiac chronotope of origin fantasies, the belatedness of the originary event, the timelessness of *genius loci*, the cyclic time of nature and of the mythologized construction of natural human, the places of the meeting of pre-modernity and modernity, combined with the symbolism of the top and the bottom, along with the symbolism of elements and landscape formations. Ultimately, the ecological chronotope embodies the Heideggerian transcendence of *Dasein* into time and the origin of the very notion of time and space. The eco-ideological stances and perspectives assumed by particular characters, narrators, or simply by ekphrastic descriptions such as the Romantic sublime, beautiful soul, nature-merger, cyclic recurrence, invader and colonizer, pure landscape, acoustic and optic ecomimetic sensations, the symbolisms of light, shadow, elements, observer's points of view, and so on—all unfold in terms of the chronotope that underlies their artistic representations. The identification and problematization of ecological ideologies and their temporal-spatial imagery in non-related literatures open literary studies to a new field of

interpretational capacities that broadly understood ecocriticism invests into the discipline as a whole.

## II. Justification of the Problem's Pursuit and Its Place in the Discipline

The purpose of this dissertation is to foster the introduction of ecocriticism into the realm of comparative literature and to use the advantages of comparative methodology in opening up and broadening the discourse of ecological and environmental criticism. The ideological side of modernity's ecological stances as the focus of this project calls for a term that describes our field of interest with greater precision than the more general discipline of ecocriticism: Timothy Luke's notion of *ecocritique* (xi). In Timothy Morton's interpretation, the term *ecocritique* springs from the Frankfurt School's concept of *Kritik*, which proclaims a slogan of being "not afraid of non-identity" (*Ecology without Nature* 13). Morton sees the goals of *ecocritique* in criticising the approaches of the traditional ecocriticism, deconstructing its basic "ecologocentric" concepts such as "nature," which is described as "a transcendental term in a material mask" (14), and revolutionizing the language of ecological criticism in analyzing particular cases of *ecomimesis* (his new term for *nature writing*). The distinguished feature of *ecocritique* is its reflection of the common theoretical issues of the humanities that recently tend to practice comprehensive analyses of such areas as environment, race, class, and gender. One of the most celebrated founders of ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell, with whom we can associate the traditional ways of the discipline, admits the inability of the older ecological slogans to meet the demands of the broadened fields of the humanities with which ecocriticism has come to be deeply intertwined:

In particular, early ecocriticism's enthusiasm for restoring contact between modern humans and the natural world—and for preservationist initiatives

advocating this in the public sphere—has to a large extent given way to indictment of preservationism as an imposition of the privileged (white, affluent, Eurocentric) and of the conception of the ‘natural world’ itself *qua* space apart as a specious artifact of cultural nostalgia that seems all the more bogus and retrograde as accelerating anthropocentric environmental change and contemporary science force recognition of the always-already fusion of human with nonhuman in *natureculture* (Bruno Latour’s term).” (xiv)

Here Buell points out—although indirectly—to one more critique of modernity toward which this study is partially oriented: posthumanism, which seeks to subvert the foundations of the Enlightenment project with its “anthropocentric privileging of our own species” (Soper 22) and resulting from it distortion of our relations with the environment and our dominion over nonhuman nature.

The dissertation is first and foremost an array of interpretations that, on the one hand, continues the existing traditions of reading literary works of the nature writing genre (to mention just the immense edifice of Thoreau studies), and yet, on the other hand, seeks either to concentrate on the works that disrupt the ideological presuppositions of this genre or present more or less open cases of ecological ideologies in their most contemporary forms. From this perspective, this study follows, or is methodologically oriented toward, some particular achievements of ecocritique interpretations. Some of these include Morton’s analysis of the Hegelian “beautiful soul” in English romantic poetry (*Ecology without Nature*), Paul Outka’s discussion of the sublime in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (“Posthuman/Postnatural: Ecocriticism and Sublime in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*”), Lee Rozelle’s concept of the dystopian ecocide in J.G. Ballard’s novels (“‘I Am the Island’: Dystopia and Ecocidal Imagination in *Rushing to*

*Paradise, Super-Cannes, and Concrete Island*”), a number of Cary Wolfe’s interpretations of Jonathan Demme’s *The Silence of the Lambs* (in *Animal Rites*) or the concept of nature in Emerson (in *What Is Posthumanism?*), Natasha Dow Schull’s discussion of the modern fantasies of nature (“Oasis/Mirage: Fantasies of Nature in Las Vegas”), and Greg Garrard’s comparison of the modern ecocritical ideas with Darwinism in Margaret Atwood (“Reading as an Animal: Ecocriticism and Darwinism in Margaret Atwood and Ian McEwan”), to name a few. As a contribution to these approaches, this study examines the artistically presented environments as a chain of signifiers that make sense within the ideological order of a particular discourse. The national literatures and texts selected for comparative analysis are representative of some specific eco-ideological stances and their temporal-spatial artistic implementations that have been overlooked or underestimated in existing scholarship, such as an environmental object as a character’s libidinal investment or a cause of origin fantasy, the role of narrative modes in the production of environmental images, the various strategies of defamiliarization resulting in the estrangement of ambient objects, the role of the phenomenological reduction in ekphrasis, the genderly marked chronotopes, the ideological implications of wilderness, and others.

### **Methodology**

Ecological ideology inscribed in nature writing or thematically related texts is inevitably an *aesthetic* ideology, which, for de Man, is “the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenism” (*The Resistance to Theory* 11). De Man’s materiality of language, its thingness, which also sustains its point of resistance, is parallel to the resistance of things themselves, to their own materiality. Yet the materiality of language takes aim at the aesthetic ideology’s naturalization of the bond between the aesthetic dimensions of our empirical experience, which enroot us in reality, and linguistic structures, governed by other principles. In

so far as nature writing is inevitably tied with such empirical experience with its aesthetic characteristics (including perception, intuition, and consciousness), aesthetic analysis proves unavoidable in any interpretive or theoretical ecocritical discourse; however, de Man's linguistics of literariness with its irreducibility of reference should always accompany such analyses, as "a powerful and indispensable tool in the unmasking of ideological aberrations, as well as a determining factor in accounting for their occurrence" (*The Resistance to Theory* 11). That is why the general deconstructionist methodology of de Man appears to be the most fruitful and promising direction, the basic principle of this inquiry into the realm of ecological literary ideologies.

As a general methodological approach, this project adopts the linguistics of literariness *qua* controlling principle, which first and foremost is called upon to supervise our own analysis and those tools that we borrow from other scholars. For example, while I tend to use Morton's concept of *ambient poetics* of *ecomimesis* as a powerful and persuasive device of ecotextual analysis, we reserve the right to undermine—in accordance with the nonphenomenal character of the linguistics of literariness—his statement that such ambient poetics "interferes with attempts to set up a unified, transcendent nature that could become a symptomatic fantasy thing" (*Ecology without Nature* 77). The same goes for his identification of the terms *nature writing* and *ecomimesis*, where the latter appears to be, for Morton, much more precise and modern. Being a faithful disciple of Derrida's deconstruction and believing that the term *ecomimesis* will help to get rid of the logocentric and metaphysical character of *nature*, Morton seems to forget de Man's definition of mimesis as just "one trope among others"; moreover, the material aspect of the ambient poetics, informed by Julia Kristeva's genotext and its pre-symbolic aspirations, in the context of the anti-metaphysical perspectives of Morton's work, ignores de Man's precaution



that the materiality of language is legitimate only as literariness of literature, which “involves the voiding, rather than affirmation, of aesthetic categories....If literariness is not an aesthetic quality, it is also not primarily mimetic” (*The Resistance* 10).

Although de Man’s own ecocritical discussions of the symbolic landscape in Wordsworth and Yeats present a more traditional kind of critical analysis and seem to be interesting rather due to their content than methodology (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 125-43), his study of Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* and Hegel’s *Aesthetics* more closely resembles the aims of this project. De Man demonstrates how those texts become the other of themselves, how the way in which they argue their ideas turns against the argument and undoes “the aesthetic as a valid category” (*Aesthetic Ideology* 89) in both aesthetic systems. In Hegel, art as the phenomenalization of the Idea is always deferred by its inevitable materiality, which makes it the thing of the past; in Kant, the analytic of the sublime turns out to be a mere “material vision,” “devoid of any reflexive or intellectual complication” (*Aesthetic Ideology* 83). In the process of such a text’s self-deconstruction (texts deconstruct themselves, and the deconstructionist’s role is to be nothing but a diligent reader), the text encounters its absolute other, something that is totally unexpected and unanticipated, and that presents the only possible event of meaning, opposed to the imposed by any authority (that is, the power of the author or ideology), superior order of correspondence between the sign and its meaning. The uncanny is both the event and its effect, the occurrence of the unexpected putting of the *oiko-logical* writing out of its home (*oikos*) and the reaction to it.

Insofar as de Man’s deconstruction is a general methodological principle to which this analysis ideally strives to be oriented, the philosophical basis for our interpretations and close readings can be narrowed down to two major systems and their satellites: the phenomenology

and ontology of Heidegger and the psychoanalysis of Lacan. Any relationships between man and things are marked by the drama of meaning that, for modernity, starts from the Cartesian divisions between subject and object, spirit and matter. Phenomenology, which, to some extent, might point to the very essence of nature writing as a reflection on the environmental phenomena, takes the split between *res cogitans* (“thinking thing”), exclusively reserved for man, and *res extensa* (“material thing”), everything else, including the human body, as its main point of departure. Having refuted Descartes’ concept of the givenness of the subject-object relation, Edmund Husserl introduces *intentionality* to define our more originary relation to and experience of the world, in which our consciousness is originally the consciousness *of* something. The idea that any, including the initial, experience of the world is not pure but contaminated by our intentional activity and its horizon of expectations, and thus is the result of interpretation and repetition, significantly undermines the ecomimetic aspirations of nature writing that dreams of an unmediated contact of the human subject with objective reality. Nevertheless, Husserlian delimitation to his own theory made it vulnerable for the criticism of Derrida and—indirectly—of the Actor Network Theory and some adjacent systems (Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, Jakob von Uexkull and Agamben, James J. Gibson, et al.). In addition to his anthropocentric orientation of intentionality, Husserl’s logocentric division between the *expressive* and the *indicative* types of signification was called upon to grant an outlet for a possibility of self-present and pure intentions of human experience. In contrast to the indication-repetition, an expressive sign (also associated with representation) of an inner monologue preserves a virgin meaning of the words that—being encircled within one’s consciousness—remains alive and unmediated. Just as for the Actor Network Theory culture and nature are the by-products of dynamic network interactions, and not otherwise, Derrida

pinpoints—with respect to Husserlian expressions-representation—that “the presence-of-the-present is derived from repetition and not the reverse” (*Speech and Phenomena* 52).

Phenomenological ideas found their continuation in what we can call the first ecological philosophy *per se*, in Heidegger. His shifting from the objectifying subject, placed in the centre of the world, to *Dasein* meant refocusing on the mysteries of the world itself. From his early “The Environmental Experience” (1919) to “Bremen Lectures” (1949) and beyond, the world as a context of things becomes a key concept that describes how things meaningfully exist. Heidegger’s ontological concept of man as *Dasein*, or an entity that understands being, “presupposes the factual presence at hand of nature” and “the indebtedness of our understanding of being to an ontic ground from which it emerges” (Polt 76). Heidegger’s philosophy evolves from the notion of existential truth that is “relative to the being of *Dasein*—to the self-revealing and self-concealing truth of being itself” (Padrutt 28). The work of art is the arena of the constant strife (*Streit*) between concealedness and unconcealedness, world and earth (environment), where the earth is moved into the open of the world. Without suspending his earlier definition of *Dasein* as an existence that dwells, that is, finds its proper home in Being, in *Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger maintains that “the Being of beings” (that is, *Being*, or truth) occurs of its own accord and thus can be defined in one Greek word: *physis*, or “nature.” In a lecture on Hölderlin’s hymn “As When on a Holiday,” Heidegger states that the attitude toward *physis* will decide the fate of the West; in this paradigm, a special importance is attributed to art, and poetry in particular, and the poets’ “essence will be measured according to their adaptation to the essence of nature” (“As When on a Holiday...” 159). The very inception of time as the essence of *Dasein* is, for Heidegger, an appropriating poetic event; it signifies the moment of our entire being’s transcending into time, which in the wake of this event (*Ereignis*) can be qualified as

primordial, or originary, time. The role of poetry comes into sight more clearly when compared to the modern technological-scientific world and its essence—Ge-Stell, which mechanically removes distances and thereby devaluates the proximity that is achieved by the caring attitude to the world. This proximity is recuperated in the concept of *thing* (and its *thinging* in the fourfold), in whose relation with the world, “what phenomenally appears (earth) does so in a medium (sky) that fosters community (mortals) and communication with a beyond (divinities)” (A. Mitchell 216). The privilege that Heidegger grants to the concept of *harvesting*, or *gathering together* of language as the *ethos* of humanity, its proper dwelling place, is challenged by Giorgio Agamben’s critique (in *The Open: Man and Animal*) of the hierarchical relations between humans and animals that Heidegger builds in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Completely in Derrida’s spirit, Agamben sees the overcoming of metaphysics not in thinking being as Being but language as language, without a hierarchy of human speech and animal *phoné*, or writing and voice (Agamben, *Language and Death* 94).

The theory of Theodor Adorno, whose main problem becomes the non-identity of concept and object, is also important for this project. Ecology-wise, the key viewpoint that approximates him to Heidegger is the idea of the non-violent observation that does not assimilate the object and thus achieves the nearness to things in a caring farness of its relation to them (Guzzoni 130). Similarly to Heidegger’s opposition of the fourfold of thing and Ge-Stell of technology, Adorno transcends both Kant’s and Hegel’s opposing hierarchies of natural and artistic beauty by conceptualizing the commonality of the experiences of nature and art beyond the relations of exchange society. Nature, as the “primary placeholder for Otherness” (Cook 159) in late capitalist society and its identity thinking, can “start talking under the lingering eye” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 28) due to the mere corporal homogeneity between subject and

object, that is, the material preponderance of things that we experience in such qualities as smell, colour, taste, and so on.

Another aspect of materialism in service of the subject-object disillusionment can be found in the psychoanalytic Hegelians: Lacan and Žižek. The latter notes that reality can never be seen in its wholeness because it always contains “a blind spot, which indicates” the subject’s “inclusion in it” (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 17). Žižek conjures up a term “parallax object” (a displaced object that disturbs the usual order of things) and points to Lacan’s *objet petit a* as that which provides a clearest structure for such transformation. The object-cause-of-desire serves as an “unfathomable X” that transforms a usual object into the object of one’s desire: “the object that can never be pinned down to any of its particular properties” (*The Parallax View* 118). In his *Seminar Book VII*, Lacan states that those objects are the substitutes of the “lost object” (the Thing); they are *the other things* that we create in order to represent that mythical Thing (58). He maintains that those other things can only be the objects of artistic sublimation, which exclusively is capable of raising the substitute-object “to the dignity of the Thing” (112). A special case of that lost object’s artistic sublimation is *sinthome*, which occurs as a remedy for psychotic disruptions between the “rings” of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real; as a fourth ring to that triple “Borromean knot,” *sinthome* is able to offer interesting artistic solutions to fictional narratives in which the Symbolic, or the fatherly, element is “foreclosed.”

All perceptions of natural objects in ecological writing are necessarily predicated upon that “substitute-object,” which sustains origin fantasies, the fantasies of pure wilderness, and other ideological aberrations revealed by the linguistics of literariness. Thus boiled down to a general notion of “thing,” environment becomes much more interesting in works of poetry and fiction where it responds, counterposing the aesthetic efforts of appropriation, with a certain

resistance of things, and where the writer's reflection is zeroed in on that resistance. At that higher level of reflection, the notion of "thing" should be distinguished from both Kantian *das Ding* as the thing in itself and things that appear as *objects* of experience to the *subjects* that we are. "The thingly character of the thing," says Heidegger, "does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of the objectness, the over-againstness, of the object" ("The Thing" 167-8). The otherness of the thing with respect to the ways it becomes represented in the symbolic systems sustains that thing's resistance, its standing out of the symbolic, its uncanniness. But for the effect of the uncanny, or defamiliarization, to occur, thing should also appear as phenomenon, and thus, as Michael Lewis puts it, "thing cannot avoid being to some extent an object" (64). The work of thing, which Heidegger calls *thinging*, reveals itself in gathering the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities into a particular thing: the "mirror-play" of the four, thus gathered in the thing, makes of the totality of beings as meaningful, phenomenal world. The resistance of Heideggerian thing is predicated upon an attempt at suspension of the ontology of objective presence and the technological enclosure (*Gestell*) that makes things subservient to any human enterprise. The fourfold, instead, relies on the phenomenology of things that comes without their appropriation by the mathematical and technological, in other words, the practical, aspirations of modernity. Additionally, such an understanding of thing retrieves an indispensable role of things in organizing a space for human existence that experiences its spatiality only in the immediate ambience of material things.

The effect of defamiliarization in ecological writing can also be related to the Lacanian *Thing* (as described in his seventh seminar). The Thing symbolizes an originary act of representation—the Symbolic that begins to turn around the Real; called "prehistoric" by Lacan

(*Seminar Book VII* 56), it signifies the transition of nature into history. The Thing becomes “the first thing that separated itself from everything the subject began to name and articulate” (83). The uncanny moment of the Thing stems from its location beyond the pleasure principle: while the latter insures our safety by maintaining a barrier between us and the Real (by means of building the system of the signifiers), we still tend to desire the unattainable Thing, which is always lost and permanently transformed for us into the multitude of the objects. Those objects are not the Thing, but we pursue them to reach the Thing, which, in this scenario, appears as the gap, the lack in the centre of our desire. The Thing as the inauguration of the Symbolic may also signify the birth of nature as distinguished from culture; this nature immediately turns into the Thing—the ecological writing’s lost object that appears under the guise of its multifarious representations.

### **Corpus**

The dissertation centres upon twentieth-century texts from three national literatures: Canadian literature, represented by the Francophone author Georges Bugnet and Anglophone authors Sheila Watson and Howard O’Hagan; and two representative Slavic literatures: Russian, represented by Andrei Bitov and Tatiana Tolstaia, and Polish, represented by Czesław Miłosz. The authors selected for this study represent different ecological ideologies and traditions of Western modernity, and thus demonstrate the effectiveness of the chosen theoretical perspective and its applicability to similar types of research. The prevalence of the typological method in comparative literature, the one that allows and encourages the comparison of unrelated national literatures and traditions, makes it possible to tackle theoretical issues that are indiscernible against the background of genetically related national literatures. As Jonathan Culler explains:

Once upon a time, comparative literature focused on the study of sources and influence, bringing together works where there seemed to be a direct link of transmission that subtended and served to justify comparison. But then comparative literature liberated itself from the study of sources and influence and acceded to a broader regime of intertextual studies. ... Comparative literature was thus distinguished by its interest in addressing theoretical issues. (237)

As a theoretically-driven comparative research project, this dissertation focuses first on the author whose writings, represented by various genres, make ecology in its Heideggerian sense of dwelling-saying an issue in itself: Czesław Miłosz. Posing the human subject as an entity of time, in his poetry and prose (specifically, his novel *The Issa Valley*), Miłosz is preoccupied with the ontic multiplicity and at the same time individuality of beings. His poetic perception is grounded in the corporeal propinquity between subject and object, but he seeks the meaning beyond the earthly domain of Eros in the field of primordial time, or in the resurrection of all beings in the afterlife of human history. Miłosz's efforts at laying bare the gap between the environment and our perceptions, necessarily subjected to systems of signification, as well as his longing for the mystery of the originary event that marks our transcendence into time, echo in Bitov's prose (the novellas "Man in a Landscape," "Birds" and "Dacha District," and the novel *Awaiting Monkeys*) as a systematic suspicion with regard to our capacities of unobstructed viewing of landscape, paired with a series of defamiliarizing techniques that, by estranging the environment as our home of being, paradoxically help make it closer and fuller. The origin fantasies, vital in the writings of Miłosz and Bitov, find their ideological counterparts in Georges Bugnet's novella *The Forest*, which breaks down the enlightenment colonialist and Romantic ideologies revolving around the idea of the virgin wilderness. The defamiliarization of ecological



ideologies in Bugnet, as well as in Watson's short story "Rough Answer" and her novel *The Double Hook*, is enriched by genderly marked spatial elements of the environment that procure a peculiar distribution of ecomimetic characteristics of masculine and feminine chronotopes. *The Double Hook* further becomes an object of typological comparison with O'Hagan's novel *Tay John* on the basis of their foreclosed trickster narratives, deprived of auctorial authority. The sinthomatic effect, characteristic of this foreclosure, helps uncover the ideological aberrations by contrasting the Symbolic and the pre-Symbolic chronotopes and by demythologizing historically and philosophically significant stances of man in his relations with environment. The originary event of its appropriation in the discourses of modernity, in which the cyclic time of myth changes to linear time of history and the immediate environment becomes a subject to ecology, rendering the environment as human's home of being estranged in the Symbolic order, is at the centre of the discussion of *Tay John* and Tolstaia's novel *The Slynx*. The ideologically marked environmental chronotopes, functioning as objects-causes-of-desire, and the pre-eminence of origin fantasies are the main threads that tie together the selected authors and their works.

### **III. Chapter-by-Chapter Outline**

The *Ecological Ideologies of Modernity and Their Temporal-Spatial Representations* develops its argument from a more general philosophical suspicion in regard to the subject-object relations with the environment in the works of Miłosz and Bitov, toward more specified and localized eco-ideological chronotopes in the works of Bugnet, Watson, O'Hagan, and Tolstaia. At the same time, the thesis is framed by the encircling motif of origin fantasies, which begin with the personalized versions of Bitov and Miłosz and wrap up with the allegories of the originary event by Tolstaia and O'Hagan.

Chapter 1, “The Phenomenology of Environment and the Origin Fantasies,” discusses the meta-ecological writings of Miłosz and Bitov, for whom environment phenomenologically presents itself as always an intentional object and often, more significantly, as an object-cause-of-desire, embodied, first of all, in personalised origin fantasies. Section 1.1, “Czesław Miłosz: Temporality and the Hermeneutics of the Ontic,” establishes the relatedness of Miłosz’s reflecting subject that tries to make sense of the ambient world to Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein*, an entity whose essence is temporality. The dramatic dichotomy of Miłosz’s environmental philosophy unfolds in the sense of kinship with the ontic of the whole creation that *Dasein* experiences due to its subjugation to the power of Eros, discussed along the line of Adorno’s preponderance of the object and *Dasein*’s subjectedness to the Symbolic, which requires the transcendence of meaning beyond time and space, toward the preservation of all individual beings. Miłosz’s revolt against the unifying and petrifying forces of our systems of representation, especially language, is further compared with Bitov’s strategies of defamiliarization in Section 1.2, “The Estrangement of Natural Objects in Andrei Bitov and Czesław Miłosz.” Section 1.2.1, “The Landscape Fantasy and the Originary Gaze” zeroes in on the ideological implications of ekphrasis in Bitov’s novella “Man in a Landscape.” A special spot at the edge of Moscow becomes the protagonist’s object-cause-of-desire for the originary gaze, ostensibly able to snap out a piece of reality from the man-made environment. It always ends up, however, as a parallax view, with an indisposable remainder: a man himself, with the aberration of his optics, who is always present in the landscape. Section 1.2.2, “The Ecology of Negativity and Infancy,” brings a comparative analysis of Miłosz and Bitov’s techniques of defamiliarization, defying the symbolic simplification of the natural environment; for instance, an image of a dead bird. Childhood, as the most intense experience of defamiliarization for both

authors, is presented as a negative entering into the aberrations of the Symbolic order in Miłosz and as an exciting originary event (Heidegger's *Ereignis*), the appropriation of man's proper dwelling place in language, without its negativity, in Bitov.

Chapter 2, "Genuine Wilderness and Gendered Spaces," takes over the concept of the prelapsarian wilderness as the Lacanian "lost object," a variant of origin fantasies, discussed in the first chapter, and analyses it against the background of other ideological presuppositions and stances toward the environment such as the Romantic merger and "beautiful soul," the colonizer and escapist, the positivist and mystic. The main focus of the chapter is, however, on the gender markers of the ideologically presented ecological chronotopes. Section 2.1, "The Sword of the Cherubim: The Return to Nature in Georges Bugnet's *The Forest*" discusses the difference between the masculine and feminine ideological forms of coping with the challenges that the Canadian wild presents to a young French couple in Bugnet's novella. Roger and Louise fall prey not so much to the severe wilderness as to their own illusions in taking their *objet petit a* for the real object. One of such illusions, the femininity of wilderness, negatively marked in *The Forest* as one of Bugnet's points of disenchantment, finds a more fertile ground in Watson's writings, discussed in Section 2.2, "Sheila Watson's Environmental Genotext." Section 2.2.1, "The Power of Silence: The Soundscape in 'Rough Answer'" focuses on the pre-symbolic, apophetic core that sustains the feminine ecological chronotope, embodied in Margaret, able to dominate the masculine Imaginary of her husband and to expel the intruder who comes from the outer realm of the Symbolic, the city girl. The prevalence of the acoustic sensations in "Rough Answer" is offset by the optic ecomimetic perspective, explained in Section 2.2.2, "Light and Optics in *The Double Hook*." The interpretive focus of this study is the feminine personification

of the landscape that is differently viewed by predominantly male characters in the moon twilight and in the glory of the higher, divine light—*lumen*.

Chapter 3, “The Landscapes of the Trickster Narratives: Howard O’Hagan’s *Tay John* and Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook*,” explores the sinthomatic effects of the works with foreclosed authority of the narrator figures. In Section 3.1, “The Figure of Tay John as an Allegory of the Mountain Country,” the figure of Tay John in O’Hagan’s novel is interpreted as an epitome of the Shuswap mountain landscape with its interpenetration of the chthonic and the modern, horizontal and vertical perspectives, the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and the Heideggerian play of concealedness and unconcealedness. The silencing techniques, also used by Watson in “Rough Answer,” are fortified in *Tay John* by the meta-mythological character of the trickster narrative, which undermines all narratively structured representations of environment. The implications of the folded chronotope of the landscape subjected to the voyeuristic eye and the artistic touch of Coyote, a classic trickster, are in the centre of Section 3.2, “The Landscape of Coyote’s Tale: Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook*.” Coyote functions as a key to the encrypted ecology of the novel’s rural community; he is the figure that exercises an auctorial power over the landscape and the text itself, as though haunting the home of being, or the Heideggerian proper place of human dwelling, in the absence of its master.

Chapter 4, “The Void of Nature at the Crossroads of Myth and Modernity,” returns to the motif of origin fantasies, presented this time as parodies of the originary initiation. Section 4.1, “The Return of the Symbolic: The Identity Drama of a Natural Man in Tatiana Tolstaia’s *The Slynx*” takes as its point of departure Donna Haraway’s fantasy of the beginning of the new humankind that escapes the oppressive order of the Symbolic. The protagonist of Tolstaia’s postapocalyptic novel, however, undergoes a process of entering into the paradigm of modernity,

where his own identity as well as his image of environment can no longer remain in the state of natural hybridity and become subjected to the alienating forces of the Symbolic. In Section 4.2, “Howard O’Hagan’s *Tay John: An Initiation to Modernity*,” a similar effect of disenchanting the natural and the prelapsarian is demonstrated by drawing on the scene of Tay John’s initiation, which unfolds as a series of parodic misreadings of the environmental signs and translates the teleological mythology of the Shuswaps into the language of Western modernity.

## Chapter 1. The Phenomenology of Environment and the Origin Fantasies

Environmental writing, or, in Timothy Morton's terminology, ecomimesis (*Ecology without Nature* 31), presupposes a description of or any report on ambient appearances, and thus is always already a subject to the broadly understood phenomenology. In the context of phenomenology proper, Edmund Husserl's contribution to philosophy is the realization that there is no simple opposition of subject and object: since subject is not a pure consciousness but always a consciousness of something, any object appears to us as intentional and thus is a result of constantly changeable interpretive horizons. In *The Idea of Phenomenology*, Husserl points out that the word "phenomenon" contains "the essential correlation between *appearing* and *that which appears*" (69). In terms of Paul de Man's "linguistics of literariness" as a critique of the illusion of reference (*The Resistance to Theory* 11), the awareness of the mechanisms of "appearing" is even more significant for ecocriticism than "that which appears" as an ecomimesis, because the former inevitably explains the parameters and modes of the latter. For this reason, this chapter focuses on the works of two Slavic authors, the Polish Nobel Prize winner Czesław Miłosz and the prominent Russian author Andrei Bitov. Their writings betray the features of meta-ecology, in which both the environmental phenomena and their modes of perception and description are the objects of the authors' primary interest. Implicitly sharing Martin Heidegger's idea of subject as *Dasein*, or a world-forming entity whose essence is associated with an acute sense of temporality, Bitov and Miłosz seem also to present the environmental object as phenomenon in Heideggerian terms: "something that lies hidden, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself" (Figal 37). For both authors, the ontic of man's ambience does not only need interpretation but also requires estrangement to uncover the hidden mechanisms with which ideologies conceal themselves

behind the illusion of reference: in words, images, paintings, and even simple everyday reflection of environment. What is common for Bitov and Miłosz's writings is a paradoxical coexistence of two ideas: the impossibility of uninhibited perception of environment due to indispensable ideological aberrations, and the fantasy about the originary word or image that either conveys true meanings of phenomena or places the human subject in its original, proper home of being.

### 1.1 Czesław Miłosz: Temporality and the Hermeneutics of the Ontic

In his book of essays *Inne Abecadlo (An Alternative ABC Book)*, Miłosz offers an original formula of the time and space unity as a core of our humanity: time that is the very fabric of our being as humans and space that is a projection of time in the world organized by humans:

To think about time is to think about human life, and this topic is so immense that to take it up means to think in general. The differences that separate us, such as sex, race, skin colour, habits, faiths, views, are nothing compared to the fact that we all are woven with time, that we come to this world and die, ephemeral mayflies. Ungraspable “now” flees back or leans forward, being either a recollection or an aspiration. Speech, as our medium of communication, is a modulated time; the same with music. And don't painting and architecture just translate rhythm into space? (39)<sup>1</sup>

In Jacek Breczko's view, Miłosz sees time and space as an exclusively human thing, distinct from “absolute” notions of time and space in both Newtonian and Kantian versions.

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<sup>1</sup> “Myśleć o czasie znaczy myśleć o życiu ludzkim, a temat to tak obszerny, że zająć się nim równa się myśleć w ogóle. Niczym są różnice nas dzielące, płci, rasy, kolory skóry, obyczaju, wierzeń, poglądów, w porównaniu z faktem, że wszyscy jesteśmy utkani z czasu, że rodzimy się i umieramy, jętki-jednodniówki. Niemożliwe do uchwycenia „teraz” ucieka wstecz albo przechyla się w przód, albo wspomnianie, albo dążenie. Mowa, którą się porozumiewamy, jest modulowanym czasem, tak samo muzyka. A czyż malarstwo, architektura nie tłumaczy rytmu na przestrzeń?” (Miłosz, *Inne Abecadlo* 39). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Polish and Russian, referring directly to the original, are mine.

Breczko says that the so-called subjective time of Kant is the same temporal-spatial absolute of Newtonian space and time, only transferred to the core of the human mind, or transcendental self, and imposed there as a universal and similar for all human subjects form of time and space (114). For Miłosz, time is neither a linear sequence of events and facts that comprise the endless chronology of our lives, nor a mere projection of our transcendental self. His definition of humans as being woven, made of time, and of time as the very fabric of human beings, is very close to the Heideggerian notions of our relationship with the environment conceived not in the categories of our mind but in the ontological concepts of being. For both Heidegger and Miłosz, the ontological problems of our being-in-the-world are not ecological problems in their traditional sense of the relationship between human subjects and their environment as an object, but rather the matrix from which our very being stems. That is why both Heidegger and Miłosz share the intuition of a special responsibility that people, especially poets, bear toward the world in which they live. This subchapter explores how the ontologically defined human temporality, which in Heidegger serves for the unconcealment of the world, in Miłosz turns to the metaphysical goal of preservation of individual beings.

Miłosz's notion of time is different from that of the traditional ecological way of thinking about the ideal concord between humans and the natural cyclic time of the seasons, years, biological life, and the succession of generations. For Miłosz, as for Heidegger, temporality constitutes the structure of entities that make Being an issue for themselves (Heidegger's *Dasein*), which means that humans are not simply fitted within the natural, given, independent structure of the past, present, and future, but are made of time; temporality defines the sense of *Dasein*'s being. Temporality is also the foundation of transcendence as the mode of *Dasein*'s being, in which *Dasein* relates to itself as well as to the outside world (Woźniak 27). *Dasein* that



has temporality as its constitution means that this type of understanding entity is a being-to-death, a conscious “ephemeral mayfly”.<sup>2</sup> It is also a being-to-the-world, open to the ontic multiplicity of things.

In his essay “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” Heidegger clearly ties together the origin of *Dasein*’s timeliness with the emergence of history: “Ever since time arose and was brought to stand, since then we *are* historical” (122). Heidegger thinks of the initial moment of *Dasein*’s historicity as a founding, or originary, event “where ‘time-space’ would emerge” (Polt 78). Within this chronotopic unity, the temporality and historicity of *Dasein* arises when *Dasein* becomes “a creature of distance,” when it alienates from its own being in order to make its being an issue and to adopt a stance toward it. Richard Polt says in this regard that the “inception” of “meaningful time and space” takes place in “the event of estrangement,” “in which we are distanced from ourselves, so that we are then faced with the *task* of being ourselves” (78). The originary event of primordial time has been variously associated in Heidegger with his notion of *Ereignis* (“event”), which dramatizes the moment of abandonment by “Beyng” that triggers the discovery of beings: “This Da-sein is reciprocally appropriated to the *event* as the essence of Beyng, and only due to this origin as the founding of the temporal space (“temporality”) can it become capable of transforming the dire need of abandonment by Beyng into the necessity of creating as the retrieval of beings” (Heidegger, “*Ereignis*” 186).

Miłosz takes on the topic of the originary event in a form more traditional in Western culture: as the tragedy of eviction from the prelapsarian chronotope, variously alluded to as the unity of human and God, or human and nature. Miłosz’s *Ereignis* can be described as human’s being thrown out of a-historical meta-time into historical time and the individual time of existence and death, and from the meta-space of the Garden of Eden to the eternal displacement

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<sup>2</sup> “...jętki-jednodniówki” (Miłosz, *Inne Abecadło* 39)

and the nomadic restlessness of spirit. The cultural sources for Miłosz's notion of displacement are a complex amalgamation of traditional Catholicism with Gnosticism: the time and space that emerge from the original sin, in Brezko's view, take the form that was ascribed to it by Gnostics and Kabbalists: the form of human (115). In "Morning" (from the cycle entitled "Notes" in the collection *Hymn of the Pearl*), the event of appropriation, which is closer here to Heidegger and Gnostics rather than to Catholicism, is depicted as awakening—from eternity into time—that changes the meaning of the ambience:

We awoke from a sleep of I don't know how many thousand years.

An eagle flew in the sun again but it didn't mean the same.<sup>3</sup>

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 354)

Brezko significantly points to the origin of this image of the eagle, taken from Oskar Miłosz's poem "Les Arcanes," which is one of the most inexhaustible sources of Czesław Miłosz's poetic metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> The Old Testament Adam from "Les Arcanes," who, in the wake of the original sin, looks at the hovering eagle, was one of the images that attracted Czesław Miłosz to the problem of the Fall and acquisition of the "second nature" (Brezko 115). Miłosz's novel *The Issa Valley* (1955) can also be read as the story of a boy who acquires the second nature and falls out of the natural time(lessness) of childhood into the human time of history. The prelapsarian chronotope, marked by the "complete obliviousness of ...time," is a constantly recurrent theme in the novel, as, for example, in the serene description of Romuald and Barbarka's trip to the church right after the birth of their son Witold:

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<sup>3</sup> „Poranek

Obudziliśmy się ze snu nie wiem ilu tysięcy lat.

Znów orzeł leciał w słońcu ale znaczył nie to samo.” (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 711)

<sup>4</sup> Gnostic influences on Czesław Miłosz by Oskar Miłosz are discussed in Zbigniew Kaźmierczyk's *Dzieło Demiurga* and Mirosław Dzień's *Człowiek w Perspektywie Eschatologicznej w Poezji Czesława Miłosza i Tadeusza Różewicza*; Kris van Heuckelom zeroes in on the elements of the image of light in both Oskar and Czesław Miłosz (36-41).

They were travelling, naturally in complete obliviousness of that time designated not only by the return of spring and winter, the waving of ripening grain fields, and the migrations of birds. The earth under their green-lacquered sleigh was not volcanic, did not belch fire, nor was there any cause to think of those floods and conflagrations by which the history of mankind was made.<sup>5</sup> (Miłosz, *The Issa Valley* 282)

Włodzimierz Bolecki notes that the present tense, used in the prologue to the novel, places its fictional world in a symbolic “Now”; this special time does not make the work a chronicle of the past or a book of recollections, but instead takes it out of the current of time (43). Bolecki sees the symbolism of the novel not only in the passage from Nature to Culture, or from childhood to adulthood, of the protagonist, Tomasz, but also in the very idea of the valley as a spatial continuum (44). Bolecki maintains that in *The Issa Valley*, the spatial locus of the valley is an allegory of the place with a distinct ontological difference between nature and man: in the valley, “nature is only nature, an insect is an insect, and the human world is the human world” (44). Commenting on Miłosz’s reflections about time and human essence, Krzysztof Zajas points out that, initially, Miłosz was inclined to contrast the time of nature, embodied in the biological mechanics, with the time of human history; but later, the concept acquires further generalization and becomes the absolute, mythic time, beyond history and nature (90). The time of *The Issa Valley* seems to oscillate between those two perspectives, bearing witness to the complexity of human time, which Miłosz himself, in his interview with Renata Gorczynski, identifies as the only warranty of humans’ immortality as compared to nature (122).

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<sup>5</sup> „Jechali tak oczywiście w pełnej niewiedzy czasu, który nie jest tylkoznaczony powrotem wiosen i zim, chwianiem się dojrzewającego zboża, przylotem i odlotem ptaków. Ziemia, po której ślizgały się płozy malowanych na zielono sanek, nie była ziemią wulkaniczną, nie wydobywał się z niej ogień, nikt tu nie myślał o innych pożarach i potopach właściwych historii człowieka” (Miłosz, *Dolina Issy* 257).

The tragic passage from the Garden of Eden to the world governed by our usual physical rules and dimensions is a subject of an allegory that constitutes Miłosz's later prose poem "Christopher Robin," in the collection *Roadside Dog (Pieśń Przydrożny)*, 1998). The originality of that small piece lies in the reversed look of the narrator-speaker, who, due to his fictional placement in the timeless space of the children's book, does not look at the lost paradise as nostalgic writers usually do, but glances just for a moment unto our fallen world from the inside of the absolute time and space. The narrator is A.A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh, who relates his paradise-like experience as the only world he has ever known:

I must think suddenly of matters too difficult for a bear of little brain. I have never asked myself what lies beyond the place where we live, I and Rabbit, Piglet and Eeyore, with our friend Christopher Robin. That is, we continued to live here, and nothing changed, and I just ate my little something. Only Christopher Robin left for a moment.<sup>6</sup> (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 656)

As long as Winnie-the-Pooh haplessly tries to process the concept of space outside of his known cosmos, the notion of the perpetual paradisiac timelessness is vaguely outlined for us in his meaningful phrase, "nothing changed." If we use the language of Heidegger, Winnie-the-Pooh tries to appear as "poor in the world,"<sup>7</sup> which is the characteristic of any animal, opposed to the human Da-sein with its consciousness of time and the openness to the ontic multiplicity of being. Similar to A.A. Milne's version, though, Miłosz's "bear of little brain" can rather be qualified as an auto-ironic description. The very confession "I have never asked myself what lies

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<sup>6</sup> „Ja, Kubuś Puchatek, nagle muszę rozmyślać o sprawach za trudnych dla mego małego rozumku. Nigdy nie zastanawiałem się nad tym, co tam jest za naszym ogrodem, w którym zamieszkaliśmy ja, Prosiaczek, Królik, Kłapouchy z naszym przyjacielem Krzysiem. To znaczy my mieszkamy tutaj dalej i nic się nie zmieniło i właśnie zjadłem z baryłeczki miodu moje małe co nieco, tylko Krzyś odszedł na chwilę” (Miłosz, *Pieśń przydrożny*).

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger's notion of the animals' "poverty in the world" is extensively discussed in Agamben's *The Open: Man and Animal* (49-56).

beyond the place where we live” points to the fact that he asks himself about it, at least now, in the present time of speaking; the negative statement “nothing changed” proves, similarly to the rules of apophetic theology, that the concept of change, and thus of time, is not alien to Winnie-the-Pooh as the “bear of little brain.”

The human dimension of our everyday reality is described in “Christopher Robin” as situated outside of the paradisiac eternity, in the realm of time, and is associated with an abyss into which one “falls”: “Owl says that immediately beyond our garden Time begins, and that it is an awfully deep well. If you fall into it, you go down and down, and no one knows what happens to you next”<sup>8</sup> (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 656). Normal human life is presented symbolically as a reflection of the great original Fall that expelled all of humanity and the whole world from the timelessness of the primeval paradise.<sup>9</sup> In Miłosz’s poem, a human being still remains the only creature that has the ability to comprehend the Fall as the experience of *Dasein*. This is how Christopher Robin, the only inhabitant of the fictional paradise who “left for a moment,” describes his journey: “I was in it and I was falling and I was changing as I fell. My legs became long, I was a big person, I wore trousers down to the ground, I had a gray beard, then I grew old, hunched, and I walked with a cane, and then I died”<sup>10</sup> (656).

What was initially described as a “moment” turns to become a whole human life, which appears to be an evanescent blink against the background of the eternal paradise. Christopher Robin talking and sharing his experience of time from the point of view of eternity marks the superiority of the position of the “poor” world that lives without the notion of time, as compared

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<sup>8</sup> „Sowa Przemądrzała mówi, że zaraz za naszym ogrodem zaczyna się Czas, a to jest taka studnia strasznie głęboka, w którą kiedy tylko ktoś wpadnie, leci i leci w dół, aż nie wiadomo, co się z nim potem dzieje” (Miłosz, *Piesek przydrożny*).

<sup>9</sup> Interesting observations on this topic in connection with A.A. Milne can be found in Kim Jastremski’s “Home as Other in the Work of Czesław Miłosz” (27).

<sup>10</sup> „Puchatku – powiedział – byłem w niej i spadałem, i zmieniałem się spadając, nogi zrobiły mi się długie, byłem duży, nosiłem spodnie do ziemi i broda mi urosła, potem posiwiałem, zgarbiłem się, chodziłem o lasce i wreszcie umarłem” (Miłosz, *Piesek przydrożny*).

to the existence of *Dasein*, which lives in time and therefore is always oriented to death. The metaphysical pronouncement of the whole piece lies in the reversed perspective, in which a human being shares the same world—understood in Heideggerian terms—with animals and where the pre-life and after-life assume the features of the only truly existing reality beyond the earthly time, as opposed to the Fall into Time, beyond the boundaries of the fictional paradise. To be more precise, fiction becomes the only reality, and the reality of the Fall becomes fiction: “It was probably just a dream, it was quite unreal. The only real thing was you, old bear, and our shared fun. Now I won’t go anywhere, even if I am called for an afternoon snack”<sup>11</sup> (656).

The ontological value of Miłosz’s chronotopes lies in their constant oscillation between the two levels of being: this side and the other side. This side is mostly about phenomenological appearances, while the other side is about the ultimate meaning of those appearances, of the essence behind them. The two sides, however, do not enter into the relationship of correspondence, as is the case with Romantic and Symbolist poetry. For Miłosz, the question of meaning of the visible world is not resolved by its mere correspondence with the spiritual reality. He is, rather, a poet of disruption, of the crevice, and even of the wound between the two sides. The meaning of things bleeds from this open wound of disconnection, in which a material thing craves to see its spiritual counterpart, its ultimate meaning, but cannot achieve it in this world when still preserving its own material integrity. If the liminal experience of death is the only way to get to the other side of the temporal-spatial continuum and fathom the real meaning of things, Christopher Robin—as an inhabitant of eternity, along with his fictional friends—should be in the situation of possession of such an ultimate knowledge of all the things that fell down into the deep pit of time and space. Apart from the fairy-tale, however, this lack of connection between

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<sup>11</sup> „Pewnie to wszystko mi się tylko śniło, bo było jakieś nieprawdziwe. Zawsze dla mnie prawdziwy był tylko ty, Puchatku, i nasze wspólne zabawy. Teraz już nigdzie nie odejdę, nawet gdyby zawołali mnie na podwieczorek” (Miłosz, *Piesek przydrożny*).

the two worlds appears for Miłosz to be much more dramatic. In his poem “Meaning” (“Sens”), it is the ontological status of the speaker’s immediate natural phenomena that comes to the open as an object of his philosophical quest about the other side:

—When I die, I will see the lining of the world.  
 The other side, beyond bird, mountain, sunset.  
 The true meaning, ready to be decoded.  
 What never added up will add up,  
 What was incomprehensible will be comprehended.  
 —And if there is no lining to the world?  
 If a thrush on a branch is not a sign,  
 But just a thrush on the branch? If night and day  
 Make no sense following each other?  
 And on this earth there is nothing except this earth?  
 —Even if that is so, there will remain  
 A word wakened by lips that perish,  
 A tireless messenger who runs and runs  
 Through interstellar fields, through the revolving galaxies,  
 And calls out, protests, screams.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> - Kiedy umrę, zobaczę podszewkę świata.  
 Drugą stronę, za ptakiem, górą i zachodem słońca.  
 Wzywające odczytania prawdziwe znaczenie.  
 Co nie zgadzało się, będzie się zgadzało.  
 Co było niepojęte, będzie pojęte.

- A jeżeli nie ma podszewki świata?  
 Jeżeli drozd na gałęzi nie jest wcale znakiem  
 Tylko drozdem na gałęzi, jeżeli dzień i noc  
 Następują po sobie nie dbając o sens  
 I nie ma nic na ziemi, prócz tej ziemi?

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 569)

The English translation of the title is “Meaning,” which does not fully convey the underlying implication of the Polish “sens.” In Polish, to have sense (or to make sense) means not so much to be understandable and communicable as to be purposeful, to have *telos*. In the expression “sense of my life,” what is meant is some purpose, *telos*, which makes our life meaningful and, therefore, turns it into a sign that contains meaning. With this respect, the meaning of the sign places itself outside, in the sphere of transcendence. That is why when we are looking for the sense of “the thrush on the branch,” it means that we do not see any sense (purpose) in the thrush within its natural ambience just by itself. We are looking for the sense of things in the transcendent, eternal spheres, able to guarantee the meaning of the thrush, of its ambience (the branch), and of the very moment in time that endows us with the special occasion of seeing the thrush from a particular perspective, that is, in the realm of meaning independent from us. On the other hand, because of this particular perspective, is it the meaning *for us* or is it totally independent from us and our feelings? If the last is true, are we able to comprehend the meaning of anything at all? Hans-Georg Gadamer says that “a kind of anticipation of meaning guides the effort to understand from the very beginning” (101). Is understanding, then, a mere uncovering of the meaning that has existed already, or imparting a meaning to the thing? If it is the latter, what value does such meaning have? This question was one of the most disturbing for Miłosz.

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Gdyby tak było, to jednak zostanie  
Słowo raz obudzone przez nietrwale usta,  
Które biegnie i biegnie, poseł niestrudzony,  
Na międzygwiazdne pola, w kołowrót galaktyk  
I protestuje, woła, krzyczy. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 1036)



The problem of the other side of the time-space as the problem of meaning partially lies in etymology. The Polish “sens” stems directly from the Latin “sens,” which could be translated rather as “senses,” “feelings,” than “meaning.” In English, “sense” in terms of “idea” or “meaning” is not the primary meaning of the word; the primary meaning is Latin “senses,” “feelings.” “Meaning” should be translated into Polish as “*znaczenie*.” This word has the same root as “*znak*” (“sign”); “*znaczyć*” is translated as “to mean.” In its turn, etymological meaning has nothing in common with sign; nevertheless, in essence it fulfills a similar function, as it stems from the Old Latin “*medianus*”, that is, “something in-between,” “mediator”—the same as the sign, which, in its simplified understanding, is a mediator between a thing and its meaning. Then, if we claim to understand the meaning, what do we really understand: the sign, the thing, their relationship, or something else? If our understanding is pinned to our particular chronotope, how much meaning and how much sense (feelings) are there for us in our making sense of the world?

We comprehend by using our faculties of cognition such as our senses of smell, hearing, sight, taste, and touch, and maybe also the heart. “To understand” in Polish is *rozumieć*, which contains *rozum* ‘mind’; hence to understand is to use mind to perceive something. Hence we understand by using the mind, idea (old Slavic *mysl’*), not Latin and English sens(e). But when we compare the meaning of this old Slavic word *mysl* with the etymologically-related Polish word *zmysły* ‘senses, feelings’, we arrive at the same dilemma of inseparable unity of concepts and senses in our efforts of making sense of things. Russian philosopher Ievgenii Trubetskoi maintained, “to enquire about the meaning [in Russian—*smysl*] is to enquire about the unconditional meaning of something, that is, about a mental meaning independent from any subjective viewpoint, from the will of any individual thought” (9). The question that Miłosz

poses in his poem is whether a sense-meaning is possible without the sense-feeling. His answer is, not in the time-and-space world in which we live:

—When I die, I will see the lining of the world.  
 The other side, beyond bird, mountain, sunset.  
 The true meaning, ready to be decoded.  
 What never added up will add up,  
 What was incomprehensible will be comprehended.<sup>13</sup>

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 569)

Of course, the assumption of “the true meaning” is the assumption of the existence of divinity, as the only entity that by definition can guarantee the absolute meaning of things. Therefore, if the “bird, mountain, sunset” have their “beyond,” their “other side,” they are not just any random array of molecules but signs, which the transcendence revealed for us to decipher, and the whole material world is, therefore, God’s revelation. Otherwise, all those signs would not call for our interpretation. To translate this problem into the terms of Husserlian phenomenology, Miłosz’s inquiry is that whether “bird, mountain, sunset” are only indicative signs, which signify, but do not bear an intention to mean anything; or expressive signs, animated by a living intention to signify a genuine meaning. In Husserl’s words, “every sign is a sign for something, but not every sign has ‘meaning’, a ‘sense’ that the sign expresses” (*The Shorter Logical Investigations* 103). The world as a meaningful sign would then be animated by the absolute subject, the Creator, whose very creation would be an expressive sign of the genuine

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<sup>13</sup> Kiedy umrę, zobaczę podszewkę świata.  
 Drugą stronę, za ptakiem, górą i zachodem słońca.  
 Wzywające odczytania prawdziwe znaczenie.  
 Co nie zgadzało się, będzie się zgadzało.  
 Co było niepojęte, będzie pojęte. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 1036)

meaning behind every perceptible object of that world. If the world is God's revelation to people, that is, creatures rooted in their corporeality, then the meanings that are being uncovered by people on this side and not the other must take into account the peculiarities of the human mind in its inseparable unity of the spiritual and the sensual. In other words, Miłosz's subject must have a slightly bigger part in the materiality of the world than the Cartesian subject, whose essence may be conveyed by Trubetskoi's observations about God's revelation and humanity's innate capacity for reception:

Revelation presupposes, first of all, some objective appearance of the divine, and, second of all, some human mind able to fathom the essence of such appearance. If not for this possibility to penetrate into the essence of the mystery, it would not have been opened to people. That is why the very fact of the revelation is not the call for the passive submission of mind but for the active effort of recognition and penetration. (226-27)

In his successive collections of poems, Miłosz avidly studied environmental phenomena revealed notably in their material form, that is, in a form suitable for deciphering by the human mind, deeply steeped into the senses:

Innumerable and boundless substances of the Earth:  
Scent of thyme, hue of fir, white frost, dances of cranes.  
And everything simultaneous. And probably eternal.  
Unseen, unheard, yet it was.  
Unexpressed by strings or tongues, yet it will be.  
Raspberry ice cream, we melt in the sky.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Nieprzebrane, niepoliczone substancje ziemi.  
Zapach cząbrku, kolor jodły, szron, tańce żurawi.

*(Hymn of the Pearl; Miłosz, New and Collected Poems 345)*

The meaningful chronotope of this poem is located entirely on this side: there is no looking for the “true meaning” of things, as it is the case in the “Meaning.” In “Amazement” (“Podziw”), the “bird, mountain, and sunset” from the “Meaning” would have a permanent sense of their own, similarly to the “substances of the earth,” matter, the smell of the grass, hoarfrost, and the dance of the cranes. Moreover, contrary to the first intention of the “Meaning,” the poem challenges the concept of the absolute meaning, Plato’s universal ideas of things, guaranteed by the divine power. The titular amazement that the speaker feels for all the material things of his ambience is traditionally reserved for the miracle of creation as the work of God. In defiance of that invisible, non-sensual, conjectured spiritual world, the speaker glorifies and immortalizes the sensual one, which is, as he says, “probably, eternal.” This intuition hardly concurs with the Catholic understanding of the material world as evanescent and transient: only God-the-Creator is eternal, transcendent to the world of creation; those are His energies, not He Himself, that act in the created world (Siegfried, “Creation”). In “Amazement,” Miłosz immortalizes matter in the absence of God. This act of defiance is reinforced by a parody of the New Jerusalem, the Kingdom of Heaven, which, according to the Catholic teleology, should succeed the material space of this world and come after the end of times. The absence of the usual temporal-spatial dimensions of the Kingdom of Heaven is what Miłosz takes an issue with. The most vivid testimony of that future Kingdom is expressed in the rhapsodic words of Paul the Apostle, who was taken up to the third heaven as to the threshold of eternity:

“What no eye has seen, nor

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A wszystko równoczesne. I chyba wieczne.  
 Oko nie widziało, ucho nie słyszało, a to było.  
 Struny nie wygrają, język nie wypowie, a to będzie.  
 Lody malinowe, topniemy w niebie. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 699)

ear heard,  
 nor the human heart conceived,  
 what God has prepared for those who  
 love him”—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God... Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. (1 Corinthians 2: 9-12)

In his “Amazement,” Miłosz parodies the Apostle by applying his description (or, to be more precise, apophatic impression) of the future Kingdom to the speaker’s material ambience, thus mixing the Spirit from God with the spirit of the world that has all the features of “The Garden of Earthly Delights” (in *Unattainable Earth*, 1986):

Unseen, unheard, yet it was.  
 Unexpressed by strings or tongues, yet it will be.<sup>15</sup>  
 (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 345)

Not once in his poetry was Miłosz on the verge of recognizing and fixating the “true meaning” behind the sensual world with no metaphysics, redirecting the urge for the mystery to Eros, or mutual sympathy of the “earthly substances.” The conception of such truth is aptly illustrated in his poem “When the Moon”:

When the moon rises and women in flowery dresses are strolling,  
 I am struck by their eyes, eyelashes, and the whole arrangement of the world.  
 It seems to me that from such a strong mutual attraction

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<sup>15</sup> Oko nie widziało, ucho nie słyszało, a to było.  
 Struny nie wygrają, język nie wypowie, a to będzie. („Ogród Ziemskich Rozkoszy,” *Nieobjęta Ziemia*; Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 699)

The ultimate truth should issue at last.<sup>16</sup>

(*City without a Name* (1969); Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 222)

Combined with the ontological inquiry of the “Meaning,” this eliciting of the truth from the mutual attraction of things—the attraction that Miłosz calls “Eros”—goes along the line of the development of ideas in “Consciousness” (*Unattainable Earth*, 1986). Consciousness, which is constantly looking for the meaning of things, feels “alien and useless to the hot lands of the living”:

Leaves renew themselves, birds celebrate their nuptials

Without its help. And a couple on the bank of a river

Feel their bodies draw close right now, possessed by a nameless power.<sup>17</sup>

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 431)

Similarly to “When the Moon,” the “nameless power” of Eros pushes the reflecting, questioning, and troubled mind aside and creates a visibility of a rational harmony by dint of the sensual concord; that is, it makes sense of the world in terms of senses rather than of meaning. Nevertheless, the reflecting *I* of the poet cannot find its final peace in the simple feeling of being submerged and subsequently dissolved in the Eros. Unsure of the existence of the other side of time and space on the cosmic level, the poem’s speaker tries to turn his own consciousness into the ontological flipside of the material reality:

I think that I am here, on this earth,

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<sup>16</sup> Kiedy księżyc i spacerują kobiety w kwiciastych sukniach  
Zdumiewają mnie ich oczy, rzęsy i całe urządzenie świata.  
Wydaje mi się, że z tak wielkiej wzajemnej skłonności  
Mogłaby wreszcie wyniknąć prawda ostateczna. (“Kiedy księżyc,” *Miasto bez Imienia*. Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 562)

<sup>17</sup> Obca i niepotrzebna gorącej krainie żywych.  
Odnawiają się liście, ptaki odprawiają gody  
Bez jej pomocy. I dwoje na brzegu rzeki  
Zaraz połączy usta, bo ich trzyma bezimienna siła. („Świadomość”; Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 836)

To present a report on it, but to whom I don't know.

As if I were sent so that whatever takes place

Has meaning because it changes into memory.<sup>18</sup>

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 431)

Mnemosyne has a special place in Miłosz's oeuvre, both in poetry and prose, but rarely does she function as a real metaphysical goddess that guarantees meaning of things, that is, holds their essence beyond the detrimental effects of the temporal-spatial dimension. In

“Consciousness,” for example, the goddess's power does not last for long: the shelves of an individual memory in which all the people and the things of this world are stashed turns into the chaotic “corridors of an airport”:

And suddenly I feel it is impossible.

It is the reverse side of a Gobelin

And behind there is the other which explains everything.<sup>19</sup>

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 431)

The doubt in the power of his own personal memory, or consciousness, to guarantee absolute meaning returns Miłosz to the question posed in the verse from which we started this discussion: the question about “the lining of the world. The other side, beyond bird, mountain, sunset”<sup>20</sup> (“Meaning” 569). This thinking leads Miłosz to the most fundamental ontological mystery that preoccupies his work in its entirety: the one of “the incomprehensible borderline

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<sup>18</sup> Myślę, że jestem tutaj na tej ziemi,  
 Żeby złożyć o niej raport, ale nie wiem komu.  
 Jakbym został wysłany, żeby co się na niej wydarzy,  
 Miało sens tylko dlatego, że zmienia się w pamięć. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 836)

<sup>19</sup> I nagle czuję, że to niemożliwe,  
 Że to tylko zła strona jakiegoś gobelinu  
 I że za nią jest druga, wyjaśniająca wszystko. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 836)

<sup>20</sup> ... podszewkę świata.  
 Drugą stronę, za ptakiem, górą i zachodem słońca. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 1036)

between mind and flesh”<sup>21</sup> (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 434). In “Consciousness,” however, the poet complicates this ontological inquiry of materiality and spirituality even more by the question of sharing in both flesh and spirit: to what extent is my body personally mine, and if I share my biology and my chemical structure with other creatures and with the whole world, how much communication between two consciousnesses is possible?:

I—consciousness—originate in skin,  
 Smooth or covered with thickets of hair.  
 The stubby cheek, the pubes, and the groin  
 Are mine exclusively, though not only mine.  
 And at the same instant, he or she—consciousness—  
 Examines its body in a mirror,  
 Recognizing a familiar which is not quite its own.

Do I, when I touch one flesh in the mirror,  
 Touch every flesh, learn consciousness of the other?<sup>22</sup>

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 432-33)

Flesh, in its material temporal-spatial rootedness, plays a very important role in Miłosz’s philosophy of the spiritual. In the poem “One More Day,” his speaker says:

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<sup>21</sup> ... niepojęte granicy umysłu i ciała. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 839)

<sup>22</sup> Ja, świadomość, zaczynam się od skóry  
 Gładkiej czy też porosłej gajami włosów.  
 Szczeciniasty policzek, pagórek łonowy, pachwina,  
 Jedynie moje, choć nie tylko moje.  
 A w tej chwili inna, jego czy jej świadomość  
 Bada uważnie własne ciało w lustrze,  
 Rozumiejąc, że swoje, chociaż własne nie jest.

Czy, dotykając jednej cielesności w lustrze,  
 Dotykam każdej, znam cudzą świadomość? (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 838)



Comprehension of good and evil is given in the running of blood.  
 In child's nestling close to its mother, she is security and warmth,  
 In nights fears when we are small, in dread of the beast's fangs and in  
 The terror of dark rooms... <sup>23</sup>

(*Unattainable Earth*; Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 418)

The “comprehension of good and evil” with which the poem begins gives the impression of Kant's “moral law inside me,” only rationalized according to the natural principles of what is good and bad for a sensual flesh. This stress on human materiality as the main ground of sharing the world with other things, especially living creatures, has in Miłosz one more aspect that distances him from the Kantian subject of both ethical and aesthetic judgements. The intuition of looking for an objectification of subjective feeling makes Miłosz closer to the philosophy of Adorno, who, as Deborah Cook points out, emphasizes

the object's preponderance in a decidedly unKantian fashion when he states that the qualities we experience in things (colours, tastes, smells, etc.) are not entirely subjective. So-called secondary qualities are also objective because they are “borrowed from the objectivity of the *intentio recta*”, or from the subject's own corporeally mediated apprehension of objects. Since the subject has an affinity with objects by virtue of the fact that it is also something physical, the “subjective qualities of the object are all the more an objective moment” (Adorno, “On Subject and Object,” 1998). (38)

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<sup>23</sup> Poznanie dobra i zła jest nam dane w samym biegu krwi.  
 W tuleniu się dziecka do matki, bo w niej bezpieczeństwo i ciepło.  
 W strachach nocnych, kiedy byliśmy mali, w lęku przed kłami zwierząt  
 I ciemnym pokojem... („Poznanie Dobra i Zła”; Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 803)

In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno even writes about “the dignity of the corporeal” precisely because the latter “emerges as the ontical pole of cognition, at the core of that cognition” (193-94). If the basic concepts of good and evil are a consequence of an even more primitive consciousness that is a natural result of our totally corporeal struggle for survival, as Adorno would speculate, concurring on this with Karl Marx, then Miłosz asks about this kind of consciousness, “should we discredit the idea for its modest origins?”<sup>24</sup> (*New and Collected Poems* 418). Together with his co-author Max Horkheimer, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno contends that our human history merely reflects the natural history of us as biological species, and all the concepts of freedom and ethics of which we boast, along with our “ideas, prohibitions, religions, and political creeds,” are “the natural survival prospects of the human species on the earth” (222-23). This embeddedness of human language in our materiality is the problem that disturbs Miłosz and makes him reflect on the concepts of good and evil in the manner of Adorno’s preponderance of the object:

Good is brightness, evil darkness, good high, evil low,

According to the nature of our bodies, of our language.<sup>25</sup>

(“One More Day”; Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 418)

Adorno sees the individual’s inextricable bond with its body as a type of imprisonment in the forms of time and space as well as in the forms of our thought, the type of captivity that “has implanted” in us (“Subject and Object” 252). Adorno’s interpretation of Hegel’s fundamental master-slave dialectic is predicated upon this temporal-spatial captivity. In his *Negative Dialectic*, Adorno concurs with Hegel that the master-reason depends on the object, represented by the slave-intuition, because when the master attempts to emancipate “itself from reliance on

<sup>24</sup> „...czyż tak skromne początki obrócimy przeciwko idei?” (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 803).

<sup>25</sup> I dobro jest jasność, zło ciemność, dobro jest wysokość, zło niskość  
Wedle przyrody ciał naszych, naszego języka. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 803)

nature by mastering it,” its reasoning plunges into “misrecognition” (179-80). Comparing Adorno’s interpretation of the master and slave dichotomy with the Hegelian original, Cook observes, “In Adorno’s version of the master-slave dialectic, the slave will win her freedom, not by viewing herself as completely distinct from nature (as her male masters have done), but by gaining a fuller appreciation of the extent to which she depends on nature as an embodied being” (89). By describing such a dependence on nature in the master-slave allegory in negative terms, Adorno reiterates his principle of the negative dialectics, which, in its essence, “discloses the lack of identity between universal and particular, concept and object, even as it reveals their affinity” (Cook 158). Both of those paired oppositions—universal and particular as well as concept and object—are essential for the understanding of Miłosz’s work. The Adornian “preponderance of the object” begins Miłosz’s poem “One More Day,” which asserts the affinity between fundamental comprehension of good and evil—and our corporeality, represented by “blood.” On the scale of the proximity of our concepts to our nature as corporeal beings, however, beauty has much more natural justification than the notions of good and evil:

The voices of birds outside the window when they greet the morning  
 And iridescent stripes of light blazing on the floor,  
 Or the horizon with a wavy line where the peach-colored sky and the dark-blue  
 mountains meet.  
 Or the architecture of a tree, the slimness of a column crowned with green.<sup>26</sup>

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 418)

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<sup>26</sup> Ten wrzask ptaków za oknem, kiedy witają ranek,  
 I na podłodze jarzą się pręgi, tęczujące, światła,  
 Albo horyzont z linią falistą u styku brzoskwiniowego nieba  
 I ciemnoniebieskich gór... (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 803)

The visible and undisputable beauty of nature in this poem mirrors the more concise but also dense description in the poem “Meaning.” The speaker’s ambience, embodied in “the bird, mountain, sunset,” and “a thrush on the branch,” is a mysterious beauty that calls for a fundamental meaning, underlying essence, something that would justify it from “beyond,” from “the other side” (569). For just one stanza of “One More Day,” the speaker’s artistic quest about the riddle of beauty resembles the metaphysical longing of “Meaning”:

All that, hasn’t it been invoked for centuries  
 As a mystery which, in one instant, will be suddenly revealed?  
 And an old artist thinks that all his life he has only trained his hand.  
 One more day and he will enter the core as one enters a flower.<sup>27</sup>  
 (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 418)

Although this final line sounds very much like an artistic epiphany or a premonition of it, which can also be found in other Miłosz’s poems as “encrypted traces of presence” (Nycz 169), the condition for such a revelation is not any sudden act of enlightenment but, similarly to the “Meaning’s” “When I die, I will see the lining of the world”<sup>28</sup> (569), the other side of life. Yet, instead of the metaphysical expectations of “Meaning,” “One More Day” points to death as a contrast to beauty, thus making both concepts as though incarnate in the very deep, biological, corporeal matters of human experience. Therefore, when it comes to concepts and their material roots, the aesthetic opposition of beauty and ugliness appears to weigh much more than its moral counterpart, that of good and evil:

And though the good is weak, beauty is very strong.

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<sup>27</sup> Czyż nie było od wieków, tak jak jest dzisiaj, wzywane,  
 Niby tajemnica, która, jeszcze chwila, a nagle się odsłoni,  
 I stary artysta myśli, że całe życie tylko wprawiał rękę,  
 Dzień więcej, a wejdzie w sam środek jak do wnętrza kwiatu. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 803)

<sup>28</sup> Kiedy umrę, zobaczę podszewkę świata. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 1036)

Nonbeing sprawls, everywhere it turns into ash whole expanses of being,  
 It masquerades in shapes and colors that imitate existence  
 And no one would know it, if they did not know that it was ugly.<sup>29</sup>

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 418-9)

This primacy of the aesthetic judgement of the beautiful and the ugly over the moral—and metaphysical—categories of good and evil means also the prevalence of the material and sensual over the conceptual and speculative. Death masquerades to imitate life, but we know that life is beautiful not because we have a concept that death is ugly but because we can sense ugliness due to our aesthetic powers of judgement and then associate death with this sense of the ugly. With this pre-eminence of the sensual over the conceptual in our aesthetic judgement, Miłosz goes much further than Adorno, whose preponderance of the object does not seem to cover his aesthetic theory. For Adorno, both beauty and ugliness are “historical products,” devoid of the spell of “some pure beginning,” be it Platonic or Kantian transcendental sensitivity. If for Miłosz ugliness, along with beauty, is the only reliable means of differentiating between life and death, Adorno posits “the ambiguity of ugliness”—“the abstract and formal category” under which the subject subsumes “all that it has found wanting, from polymorphous sexuality to mutilating repression and death” (*Aesthetic Theory* 71). What for Miłosz stems from the very material nature of human beings, from something that, using the Kantian term, one could call “a common sensibility (*Gemeinsinn*)” (Kenny 947), for Adorno is a product of the second nature acquired by humans in society. Adorno uses the Kantian understanding of the natural beauty that reflects the quality of the purposiveness in nature; consequently, “the impression of ugliness

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<sup>29</sup> I dobro jest słabe, ale piękno silne.  
 Niebyt szerzy się i spopiela obszary bytu,  
 Strojąc się w barwy i kształty, które udają istnienie.  
 I nikt by go nie rozpoznał, gdyby nie jego brzydota. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 803)

stems from the principle of violent destruction that is at work when human purposes are posited in opposition to nature's own purposes" (*Aesthetic Theory* 70). According to the logic of this theory, death as a totally natural thing is able to produce "the impression of ugliness" only as a reflection of the subject's insecurity and its acquired cultural image of death. Miłosz, by contrast, posits the aesthetic ugliness of death as its eternal mark, which alone will enable people to discriminate between life and death, along with good and evil, even when the abstract concepts of morality vanish from human consciousness:

And when people cease to believe that there is good and evil  
 Only beauty will call to them and save them  
 So that they know how to say: this is true and that is false.<sup>30</sup>  
 (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 419)

And if we recall that "Good is brightness, evil darkness, good high, evil low, // According to the nature of our bodies, of our language"<sup>31</sup> (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 418), then we must conclude that even the language as the product of cultural history is relegated to the position inferior to that of the simple sensitivity toward beauty and ugliness. In this specific belief of the pre-eminence of the aesthetic and the natural over the conceptual and the historical, Miłosz stands a little closer to Kant than to Adorno. According to Kant, all our concepts should go through the verification of intuitions (*Critique of Judgement* 178), including the simplest categories of good and evil. In his *Critique of Judgement*, the philosopher puts the judgement of the beautiful above the sensual perception but at the same time does not underplay the role of intuition and its sensual roots in aesthetic judgement:

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<sup>30</sup> Kiedy ludzie przestaną wierzyć, że jest zło i jest dobro,  
 Tylko piękno przywoła ich do siebie i ocali.  
 Żeby umieli powiedzieć: to prawdziwe, a to nie prawdziwe. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 803)

<sup>31</sup> I dobro jest jasność, zło ciemność, dobro jest wysokość, zło niskość  
 Wedle przyrody ciał naszych, naszego języka. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 803)

[...] the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good, and only in this light (a point of view natural to everyone and one which everyone demands from others as a duty) does it give us pleasure with an attendant claim to the agreement of everyone else, whereupon the mind becomes conscious of a certain ennoblement and elevation above mere sensibility to pleasure from impressions of the senses.  
(180)

The congruence of our aesthetic intuition with the sensual character of our bodies, in other words, the corporeality of aesthetics, is both soothing and disturbing for Miłosz. “The nature of our bodies, of our language”<sup>32</sup> (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 418)—those two natures—are not accidentally placed so close to each other. When both mutually contribute to our understanding of the beautiful and the ugly, they also forever separate the material from the conceptual. And although some philosophical systems aspiring to overcome the metaphysics of the concept, such as Adorno’s negative dialectics, try to overcome the material ungraspability of concepts by positing the preponderance of the object and by pinning the concepts down to a specific place and historical time, Miłosz was never satisfied with this earthly outcome that he himself quite often offered as a wisdom opposed to that of the “sweet theologians”<sup>33</sup> (“Theodicy,” *New and Collected Poems* 445). As Miłosz’s speaker confesses in “The Hooks of a Corset” (*Unattainable Earth*), “I labored to transcend my place and time, searching for the Real”<sup>34</sup> (*New and Collected Poems* 412). Several times in the poem he reassures himself, as a counterpart of the biblical Adam and thus humankind as a whole, and his imagined friend, Eve, that he failed in his long pursuit. He failed first and foremost in his own self-identification, in

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<sup>32</sup> Wedle przyrody ciał naszych, naszego języka. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 803).

<sup>33</sup> “... szlachetni teologowie” (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* Teodzcea 878).

<sup>34</sup> ...trudziłem się, dążąc do wykroczenia poza moje miejsce i poza mój czas, szukając tego, co jest Rzeczywiste. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 791).

trying to understand his personality outside of the given time and space—his “meaning,” to use Miłosz’s own concept. Two things that seemed to safeguard his identity—his blood (his body, materiality) and his language—have lost their magic powers. Language as the tool used by man (Adam) as the master of the world buries the individuality of the subject in what de Man called “literariness” (*The Resistance to Theory* 11): “Now I appear to myself as one who was under the illusion of being his own while he was the subject of a style”<sup>35</sup> (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 412-3). Within the Hegelian master-slave mechanics, the master asserts his individuality by exercising his discursive power over the slave, who, being close to nature and materiality, plays the role of the only mediator between the master and the world of material things. When the master part of the subject acknowledges its defeat in naming the world, the slave counterpart alone necessarily fails as well:

What would I like to tell you? That I didn’t get what I looked for:

To gather all of us naked on the earthly pastures

Under the endless light of suspended time

Without that form which confines me as it once confined you.<sup>36</sup>

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 412)

What he looked for could be achieved only in apokatastasis, the return of all living things that ever existed on earth, in their true, dematerialized, uncontaminated form—not the one that “confines” us by the limitations of our bodies. The shadow of one of the Eastern Christian heresies, the Gnostic philosophy of apokatastasis, was haunting Miłosz all the way through his

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<sup>35</sup> I wtedy ukazuję się sobie jako ten, który łudził się, że jest swój własny, bo był tylko poddanym stylu. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 791)

<sup>36</sup> Co chciałbym wam powiedzieć? Że nie mam, czego szukałem:  
Spotkania się z wami nago na ziemskich pastwiskach  
Pod wiecznym światłem zatrzymanego czasu,  
Bez tej formy, która mnie więzi, tak jak was uwięziła. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 790)



long writing career; not accidentally in the poem, before the speaker utters his confession, “Barking dogs greet me there and the bell of an Orthodox church”<sup>37</sup> (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 412). “The Hooks of a Corset” begins with a reflection of the master-Adam, who explains his long-lasting illusion of himself as being incarnate in the endless body of humankind (the slave-bodies, to use the Hegelian terminology) without losing his individuality:

And I, breathing the air, enchanted because I am one of them, identifying my flesh with their flesh but at the same time aware of beings who might not have perished. I, replacing them, bearing a different name yet their own because the five senses are ours in common, I am walking here, now, before I am replaced in my turn. We are untouched by death and time, children, myself with Eve, in a kindergarten, in a sandbox...<sup>38</sup> (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 408)

Miłosz’s Adam as a consciousness of a transcendental human self that changes bodies with the same ease as a tree sheds and grows new leaves reflects on the failure of his illusion of immortality. His persistent apokatastatic image of the humanity as one body “under the endless light of suspended time / without that form which confines me”<sup>39</sup> (412) is contaminated by the unending process of birth, pain, and death that every individual body experiences inevitably. The idealized nakedness of human essence, stripped of all its temporary and bodily attires that make it akin to the instability of all the material and the living (“our dresses under heaven, tinfoil

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<sup>37</sup> Spotyka mnie psów szczekanie, dzwon cerkiewny. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 790)

<sup>38</sup> „I ja wdychający powietrze w upojeniu, dlatego że jestem jednym z nich, w utożsamieniu ich cielesności z moją cielesnością, a razem świadomy istnień, które mogły być nie przepaść. Ja w ich zastępstwie, noszący inne imię, ale ich własny, ponieważ pięć zmysłów jest wspólne nasze, idę teraz, tu, zanim sam będę zastąpiony. Jesteśmy nienaruszeni przez śmierć i czas, dzieci, ja z Ewą w przedszkolu, w piaskownicy...” (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 787).

<sup>39</sup> Pod wiecznym światłem zasztymanego czasu,  
Bez tej formy, która mnie więzi, tak jak was uwięziła. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 790)

crowns, tights, imitation animal hair, the scales of lizard-birds”<sup>40</sup> (408)), is conceivable only in the realm of aspiration to transcend the speaker’s space and time: it is the “nakedness in a garden beyond time”<sup>41</sup> (413), where Winnie-the-Pooh lives with his friends. The garden that the poet wants to take account of, however, is “the garden of earthly delights,” as described in the poem by the same title that begins the collection, *Unattainable Earth*.

Reflecting on the famous painting by Hieronymus Bosch, the speaker of the poem pictures an “astonished” Adam contemplating the world that hardly resembles the paradisiac eternity of pleasure for all the creatures:

...This, then, is the Fountain  
 Of life? Toothed, sharp-edged...  
 ...A lion mauls a deer.  
 A cat has a mouse, a three-headed lizard,  
 A three-headed ibis, their meaning unknown.  
 Or a two-legged dog, no doubt a bad omen.<sup>42</sup>

(“The Garden of Earthly Delights,” Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 403)

Even the delights themselves, this time without irony, are pictured as an incomprehensible lure that appeals to our earthly, material nature much more than to the elusive God’s image in us:

They are incomprehensible, the things of this earth.

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<sup>40</sup> ... stroje nasze pod niebem, cynfoliowe korony, rajstopy, imitowana sierść zwierząt, łuska jaszczuroptaków. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 787)

<sup>41</sup> ...nagość ta sama w pozaczasowym ogrodzie... (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 791)

<sup>42</sup> ... Tak więc jest

Fontanna życia. Zębata, ostra...

... lew rozdziera jelenia,

Kot niesie w pysku mysz. Trójgłowy jaszczur,

Trójgłowy ibis, co znaczą, nie wiadomo.

Albo pies dwunogi. Zły omen chyba. („Ogród Ziemskich Rozkoszy”; Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 782)

The lure of waters. The lure of fruits.

Lure of the two breasts and long hair of a maiden.<sup>43</sup>

(406)

The embodiment of all those mysteries for Adam is his other, Eve, “whom Adam contemplates, not comprehending”:

Who is she, and who will she be, the beloved

From the Song of Songs? This Wisdom-Sophia,

Seducer, the Mother and Ecclesia?<sup>44</sup>

(403)

Lured by the material mysteries of the fruit and of the woman, Adam learns the power of Eros and the bitter outcome of Thanatos. That is why, when at night he “sensed her pulse,” he also felt “her mortality”: “And we have searched for the real place ever since”<sup>45</sup> (Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 404). Wandering across this “bitter, bitter earth,” only on a rare occasion, when the speaker conjures up a picture of Lithuania that has been preserved by his memory in paradisiac colours, he allows the fairy-tale to occupy his mind again, although not for long:

And ungraspable multitudes swarm, come together

In the crinkles of tree bark, in the telescope’s eye,

For an endless wedding,

For the kindling of the eyes, for a sweet dance

In the elements of the air, sea, earth, and subterranean caves,

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<sup>43</sup> Niezrozumiałe są rzeczy tej ziemi.

Ponęta wód. Ponęta owoców.

Ponęta dwojga piersi i długich włosów dziewy. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 784)

<sup>44</sup> Kim jest i kim będzie ta umiłowana

Z Pieśni nad pieśniami? Ta Mądrość-Sofija,

Uwodzicielka, Matka i Ecclesia? (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 782)

<sup>45</sup> I szukaliśmy odtąd miejsca prawdziwego. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 783)

So that for a short moment there is no death  
 And time does not unreel like a skein of yarn  
 Thrown into an abyss.<sup>46</sup>

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 406)

Only during these evanescent epiphanic moments does Miłosz's speaker allow for the miracle of peace between him and the implacable laws of nature. Krzysztof Zajas suggests that in those cases, the poet, remaining still within the bounds of the Heideggerian *Weltzeit*, aspires toward an internal notion of time. This understanding of time, which can be expressed in the formula "time that is lifted by time above time" ("*czas wyniesiony ponad czas przez czas*"), occurs exactly when a small piece of environment is being seen in its ecstatic brightness in a moment purified from its temporal fleetingness, when the sense of Being is located somewhere along the axis of "thing-time-word" (Zajas 89). This insignificant at times but always indispensable element of the poet's environment, his ambience, is what never allows Miłosz's speaker to become a pure Heideggerian *Dasein*. *Dasein*, in Heidegger's theory, is contrasted both with the metaphysical understanding of man as a rational animal and with the living being (*das Lebewesen*). In Agamben's interpretation of Heidegger, plants and animals, the representatives of the living being, "are always already held in their environment [*Umgebung*], but never freely placed in the clearing [*Lichtung*] of Being—and this alone constitutes 'world'—for this reason, they lack language" (*Language and Death* 54-55). Agamben concludes that "inasmuch as the living being remains held in *Umgebung*, and never appears in the *Lichtung*, it never experiences

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<sup>46</sup> I mnogość nieobjęta mrowi się, spotyka  
 W załomach drzewnej kory, w oku teleskopu  
 Na pospólne w nagości godowanie,  
 Na roziskrzanie oczu, słodki taniec  
 W żywiole powietrza, lądu, morza i pieczar podziemnych,  
 Żeby przez krótką chwilę nie było śmierci  
 I czas nie rozwijał się jak nitka z kłębka rzuconego w przepaść. (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 784)

the *Da*, and this precludes the living being the word” (55). In his epiphanies, Miłosz does not so much defy the theory of that division as rebels against it. The speaker of his poems posits all-pervasiveness of the *Lichtung* as the final *telos* of creation. His individual immortality is simply not conceivable without *das Lebewesen* of his ambience, whose corporeality and whose Eros are inevitably intertwined with the poet’s philosophical Logos. This philosophical perspective necessitates that all creatures in their individuality be brought to the final apokatastasis, thus making human immortality inseparably bound with the immortality of its natural environment.

Disagreeing with the exclusion of the “living being’s” “poverty in world” from the final preservation, Miłosz seems to be more likely to accept the anthropogenic character of the Hegelian master-slave allegory when it describes the human-master attitude toward the voice of the animal-slave. According to Hegel, voice is the expression of “pain, desire, joy, satisfaction,” and “every animal finds a voice in its violent death; it expresses itself as removed-self” (Agamben, *Language and Death* 45). The animal finds its voice only in dying, says Agamben: “it expresses and preserves itself *as dead*. Thus, the animal voice is the *voice of death*” (45). By contrast, human language arrests and preserves the pure sound of the animal voice, endows it with meaning, and thus becomes the voice of consciousness. As the human language fills the empty voice of the animals, the language’s active role in preparing the apokatastasis becomes more apparent. This role of language in preserving the things of this world from eternal death echoes both in the Gnostic *Corpus Hermeticum*, profusely referenced by Miłosz, and, more interestingly, in the Eastern poetry, on which Miłosz reflects in a small volume of translations. In his poem “Reading the Japanese Poet Issa,” Miłosz writes:

What has been uttered strengthens.

What hasn't been uttered tends toward non-existence.<sup>47</sup>

Being a reflective consciousness that is always surrounded by natural ambience, Miłosz's speaker is constantly pitted against the impotence of language with regard to its ultimate goal: to preserve the world from eternal oblivion. Mnemosyne, the muse of memory, is one of Miłosz's most devoted assistants in this task, but her charms are nothing without the power of language to speak the code of things. And although the poet's reflective mirror is pointed toward himself, his eyes always look at the landscape, as in the poem "Przed Krajobrazem" ("Before the Landscape"):

Unable to find the words in the language  
 To name all that is ours—mine and the earth's,  
 I waited for a spirit, born from volcanic mutations,  
 To scream and charm away our true name.<sup>48</sup>

"The name exists as a language—this is the existing concept of consciousness," says Hegel, and "the idea of this existence of consciousness is *memory*, and its proper existence is language."<sup>49</sup> What Hegel writes further finds its most profound reflection in Miłosz's love for the language and at the same time his rebellion against its divine aspirations, limitations of expression, and treachery with respect to memory:

In the *name* its empirical being is removed from it, that is, it is no longer concrete, no longer a multiplicity in itself, no longer a living entity. Instead it is transformed

<sup>47</sup> Co jest wymówione wzmacnia się.

Co nie jest wymówione zmierza do nieistnienia. ("Czytając Japońskiego Poetę Issa"; Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 703)

<sup>48</sup> I czekałem, nie mając w języku wyrazów

Żeby nazwać to wszystko co moje i ziemi,

Aż duch jakiś, z wulkanicznych mutacji poczęty,

Krzyknie i odczaruje nasze prawdziwe imienie. („Przed Krajobrazem,” *Gdzie Wschodzi Słońce i Kędy Zapada*;

Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 612)

<sup>49</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *Jenenser Realphilosophie I: Die Vorlesungen von 1803-1804*. Ed. J. Hoffmeister. Leipzig, 1932, as quoted and cited in Agamben's *Language and Death* (42-3), trans. Giorgio Agamben.

into a pure and simple ideal. Adam's first mediating action in establishing his dominion over the animals consisted in his granting them names; thus he denied them as independent beings and transformed them into ideals."<sup>50</sup>

This "mediating action" was exactly what disturbed Miłosz—from his childhood exercises in Linnaeus's classification system to his mature poetry. It is not by far limited to his constant wonder at the miracle of the universals, when, for example, he tries to fathom the essence of "magpie-ness." Miłosz's problem with the universals is that he would always side with *principium individuationis*, with a concrete existence, a living being, in its particular time and space, and this is what turns him toward Gnosticism away from the selective speciesism of official Catholic doctrine:

From a limbo for unbaptized infants and for animal souls let a dead fox

Step out to testify against the language.

...

Not a general one, a plenipotentiary of the idea of the fox, in his cloak lined with the universals.

But he, from a coniferous forest near the village Żegary.<sup>51</sup>

("With Trumpets and Zithers," *City without a Name*; Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 228)

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<sup>50</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *Jenenser Realphilosophie I*, as quoted and cited in Agamben's *Language and Death* (43).

<sup>51</sup> Z otchłani dla nie ochrzczonych młodianków i dusz zwierzęcych  
Niech wyjdzie martwy lis i zaświadczy przeciw językowi.

...

Nie ogólny, pełnomocnik idei lisa w płaszczu podbitym uniwersaliami.

Ale on, mieszkaniec kamiennych jelników niedaleko wioski Żegary. ("Na trąbach i na cytrze," *Miasto bez Imienia*; Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 570)

In his poem “Encounter” (“Spotkanie”), Miłosz goes even farther to crave the preservation of every moment and every gesture that once occurred in time and is now gone forever:

We were riding through frozen fields in a wagon at dawn.

A red wing rose in the darkness.

And suddenly a hare ran across the road.

One of us pointed to it with his hand.

...

O my love, where are they, where are they going

The flash of a hand, streak of movement, rustle of pebbles.

I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder.<sup>52</sup>

(*Rescue*; Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 27)

This time the language, which in Hegel is the voice of consciousness and preservation, different from the animals’ voice of death, fails the poet. The universals that the language offers do not satisfy the material concreteness of the ambience; the Adornian preponderance of the object that is given in time and space and that alone constitutes the matter of a personal sensual experience:

I wanted to describe this, not that, basket of vegetables with a  
redheaded doll of a leek laid across it.

...

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<sup>52</sup> Jechaliśmy przed świtem po zamrzłych polach,  
Czerwone skrzydło wstawało, jeszcze noc.  
I zając przebiegł nagle tuż przed nami,  
A jeden z nas pokazał go ręką.

...  
Miłości moja, gdzież są, dokąd idą  
Błysk ręki, linia biegu, szelest grud –  
Nie z żalu pytam, ale z zamyślenia. („Spotkanie,” *Ocalenie*; Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 151)



In vain I tried because what remains is the ever-recurring basket.

And not she whose skin perhaps I, of all men, loved, but a  
grammatical form.<sup>53</sup>

(“With Trumpets and Zithers”; Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 227)

Probably that is why in his “Meaning,” Miłosz returns to the power of the voice, which—in spite of material vulnerability—is the only means of breaking through the de-individualizing, generalizing, alienating nature of language as a “grammatical form.” The “Meaning”’s “word,” uttered by perishable lips, is a voice, even a scream, which gives the speaker the only hope of wresting some meaning from the apathetic and irresponsible universe. This sudden significance of the voice in Miłosz brings us back to the originary *Dasein* story, which Heidegger called *Ereignis*. Extensively referring to this notion in his *Language and Death*, Agamben explains *Ereignis* as an inquiry into the “and” within Heidegger’s unity of Being *and* Time: “The co-belonging and the interweaving of Being and time have been expressed in terms of taking place of language in time, that is, as Voice” (101). However, Agamben reads *Ereignis* as the absolute Voice, “absolved from negativity” ascribed to it by the tradition of metaphysics, that is, as “the taking place of language (the pure fact that language is)” (102). Agamben explains that in metaphysics, this “taking place of language ... is obliterated in favour of that which is said in the instance of discourse; that is, this taking place (the Voice) is thought only as the foundation of the said...” (102). In Miłosz’s “Meaning,” there is definitely a yearning for the Voice, for the language that is sufficient in itself, in its own taking place—in spite of the abysmal

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<sup>53</sup> Opisywać chciałem ten, nie inny, kosz warzywa z położoną w poprzek rudowłosą lalką poru.

...

Nadaremnie próbowałem, bo zostaje wielokrotny kosz warzywa.

I nie ona, której skórę właśnie może ja kochałem, ale forma gramatyczna. (“Na trąbach i na cytrze”; Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 569)

meaninglessness of the cosmos. Miłosz’s concern, however, has always been the “said” content, the ontic foundations of the perishable human voice, its material propinquity with the whole creation.

In that sense, Miłosz would appear to Agamben as a metaphysical poet: his origin fantasy is directed not so much to the lost Eden of the past or the *Ereignis* qua the ontological originary event of *Dasein* appropriating Being, as to the future miracle of apokatastasis, whose essence is the preservation of the ontic—of everything that has ever existed, and especially of the seen and the said by the poet individual beings. The Heideggerian *Dasein* would not suffice for Miłosz, who craves for the guarantee of the absolute meaning of things: in *Ereignis*, *Dasein* always already transcends into time, and due to this operation of distancing from itself, the meaningful world opens its richness before it; this is not enough for Miłosz, who, after transcending *into* time, in apokatastasis wants to transcend time and space in order to contemplate the imperishable fullness of being when the materiality of his body, memory, and Voice fail.

## **1.2. The Estrangement of Natural Objects in Andrei Bitov and Czesław Miłosz**

### **1.2.1. The Landscape Fantasy and the Originary Gaze**

Within the rich Russian tradition of nature writing and ecological thinking, Andrei Bitov stands out as “a Russian writer whose concerns are also universal” (Chances, “Bitov, Life, and Literature” 376). In a monograph on his prose, Allen Chances broadly defines Bitov’s oeuvre as an “ecological prose”: “Ecology is the study, in biology, of interrelationships of organisms with other organisms and with their environment... [Bitov’s] focus is always on relationships and connections—of the human being to animals, to art, to society...” (*Andrei Bitov: The Ecology of Inspiration* 10-11). In addition to its ecological disposition, Bitov’s prose also possesses two narrative characteristics that make his writing malleable for a conceptual and worldview

analysis. On the one hand, it is a “thinking protagonist” and “clever conversationalist”; for example, Doctor Davin in “Is O a Number or a Letter,” Doctor D. in “Birds,” and Pavel Petrovich in “Man in a Landscape” and *Awaiting Monkeys* (Surat 71); and on the other, the usual appearances of the narrator in the first person, which “reveal the narrator’s presence and control of the narrative” (Bakich 131). This constant and insolent “invasion of the story by commentary” (Hirsch 466)—a postmodern characteristic of Bitov’s prose—challenges, in Nina Kolesnikoff’s words, “the hierarchical relationship between the narrator and the story” (408) and often tempts the interpreter of his works to ascribe to them a distinct ideological agenda. Therefore, with Bitov’s writing, it is easy to be carried away by its conceptuality, and attempt to build an all-encompassing edifice of his art, religious, or ecological worldviews. One of these potential interpretational enterprises, which assumes truth-seeking as his biggest philosophical credo, would exclude Bitov from the postmodernist tradition, with which the same researcher may associate his writings due to their narrative traits. For example, on two occasions Aleksandr Bol’shev states that in his prose, Bitov looks for “unusual incarnation-ness” and is attracted to “the real reality, the ‘things in themselves,’ without deception or substitution” (*Ispovedal’no-Avtobiograficheskoe Nachalo v Russkoi Proze Vtoroi Poloviny XX Veka* 238; “Apologiia Organichnosti v Tvorchestve A. Bitova” 492). In a similar spirit, Gabriele Leech-Anspach maintains that Bitov’s multiple portrayals of the forest are the “icons of the wholeness of life,” which are opposed to the “greatest evil of life”—that there is no “objective truth” or “true reality” (225). At the same time, Bol’shev points out a self-ironic and self-deconstructing propensity of Bitov’s writing, by dint of which even his most “unbridled apology inevitably longs for unmasking” (“Apologiia Organichnosti v Tvorchestve A. Bitova” 494). This last

thought informs my approach to Bitov's overtly ekphrastic text, the novella "Man in a Landscape (The Novice)." <sup>54</sup>

Both of the main readings of "Man in a Landscape"—those by Chances ("Cycles, Layers, Fragmentariness, Creation Myths, and Thread, or Why Is Bitov's Man in the Landscape?") and by Priscilla Meyer ("The Moose of the Apocalypse: Andrej Bitov's 'Čelovek v pejzaže'")—focus on Bitov's primary "concerns," which, according to Meyer, "are always religious", "the relationship between man and God" (378). While Chances zeroes in on the Gnostic standpoint represented by the narrator's interlocutor Pavel Petrovich, Meyer, by taking the opposing part, that of the first-person narrator himself, maintains that he ultimately overcomes his opponent's temptation, goes through the "inferno" of "his betrayal of God's intentions," yet at the end achieves "a resurrection from darkness and death" (Meyer 389). While the religious aspects of Bitov's writing are of paramount importance, this discussion focuses primarily on the ekphrastic implications of the landscape theme. The purpose of this analysis is to demonstrate that landscape in Bitov is the Lacanian *objet petit a* that serves as a representation of the desire for the originary gaze, aspiring to see the creation in its pure, uninhibited form.

On the surface, the plot of "A Man in a Landscape" resembles a pattern known in Russian literature since Venedikt Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* (1973): the intellectual journey of an alcoholic who combines drinking with discussions of various topics of art, literature, and politics. In 1979, the first-person narrator, a screenwriter, visits a new district at the edge of Moscow, and, rambling in the vicinity of an ancient Orthodox monastery under reconstruction, he is looking for an ideal spot from which a pure wilderness landscape—without the signs of

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<sup>54</sup> In the English translation by Susan Brownsberger, Bitov's novellas "Man in a Landscape" and "Birds," along with the novel *Awaiting Monkeys*, are put together to comprise the novel *The Monkey Link*. Considering the fact that these works, while sharing some key characters, have very loose plot connections with each other and were originally written as separate pieces, I follow the tradition evident in the scholarship on Bitov to refer to them and cite them as separate works.

civilization—can be seen. When he reaches that point, it appears that the spot is occupied by a landscape painter, Pavel Petrovich, who is an icon restorer, an amateur painter, and an alcoholic. Pavel Petrovich invites the narrator to the monastery refectory and talks him into sharing a drink, thereupon serving as “the narrator’s literal guide on a drunken journey of visits” (Chances, “Cycles, Layers, Fragmentariness...” 419) to his drinking companions, along with discussions on the essence of landscape, God’s and human’s roles as artists and their place in creation, and God’s relationship with man. Being arrested for drinking but managing to talk his way out of jail, the narrator wakes up early in the morning in the apartment of Pavel Petrovich and his pregnant wife, and stealthily leaves.

“Man in a Landscape” is both an ekphrasis and a reflection on it, and it is indeed about man in landscape. Landscape is an imaginary cultural picture, which from the times of Romanticism has been often associated with wilderness, as opposed to man-made, cultivated or spoiled landscapes. Wilderness as landscape can exist only within a Romantic chronotope, with its deeply individualized notion of time, which—as leisure—allows disinterested observation and reverie. Looking at the origins of landscape from the point of view of cultural and societal evolution, Mikhail Bakhtin notes:

When the immanent unity of time disintegrated, when individual life-sequences were separated out, lives in which the gross realities of communal life had become mere petty private matters; when collective labour and the struggle with nature had ceased to be the only arena for man’s encounter with nature and the world—then nature itself ceased to be a living participant in the events of life. Then nature became, by and large, a ‘setting for action’, its backdrop; it was turned into landscape, it was fragmented into metaphors and comparisons serving

to sublimate individual and private affairs and adventures not connected in any real or intrinsic way with nature itself. (217)

From this perspective, the beginning of Bitov's narrator's journey can be associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's stance in his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, taking refuge from the social life in places "wilder and more romantic" (79). Bitov's "I" in "Man in a Landscape" is probably looking not so much for "the sense of wild sublimity" (Holmes 166) as for the uncanniness of the place that "occurred," "unexpected[ly]," "within our visible life span"<sup>55</sup> (Bitov, "Man in a Landscape" 71). This is exactly how wilderness uncannily throws itself onto the narrator: against the backdrop of that man-made "place"—a new road that leads through the "dead-white multistory boxes" of a new city district. The desired landscape appears gradually, with a narrative preparation of the reader that aims at rendering the shared sense of surprise, with which the narrator wants to punctuate the awe of wilderness in juxtaposition with the boredom of the city road: "at the city limit, when the highway finally plunges back into the less developed space of Russia, you have to turn left, and your mind is so lulled by the monotony of the road that you are quite unprepared for perception"<sup>56</sup> (71). The perception for which he prepares the reader is an empathetic vibe, the Freudian "oceanic" feeling that grips a Romantic in wilderness: "For one thing, there are hills. For another, trees. As though the earth had started to breathe, its breast rising and falling. You, too, begin to breathe in rhythm with the crests and turns of the road..."<sup>57</sup> (71-72).

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<sup>55</sup> «Оно было внезапным, это место. ... За обозримую нашу жизнь это произошло» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 319).

<sup>56</sup> «...на пределе города, когда шоссе уже окончательно ныряло в не столь освоенное пространство России, надо свернуть налево, и усыпленное однообразием дороги сознание оказывается совершенно не готово к восприятию...» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 319-20).

<sup>57</sup> «Во-первых, холмы, во-вторых, деревья. Будто земля задышала, будто вздымается и опускается грудь – вы и дышать-то начинаете в такт взгорбам и поворотам дороги...» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 320).

The narrator thus demonstrates a preliminary stage of “close unity between mind and nature as a fundamental characteristic of romantic diction” (de Man, “Rhetoric of Temporality” 197) that is intended to prepare for a still deeper reading of the landscape. While approaching the originary, ideal landscape of the wild, Bitov’s narrator is using a mediator—a sacral cultural object that combines the earthly matter of which it was built with the spirituality of its architectural form—an ancient monastery:

Here, snaking along the hill, is the white stone wall of a citadel, and at last you come to its improbably thick and sturdy gates. Inside, on the grounds, everything is different. Level lawns, old, trees, a church of God... A museum and a nature preserve, a happy home for raven. Space. First cultured, later a culture park. There are also ancient wooden buildings here...<sup>58</sup> (72)

This description bears an uncanny resemblance to the famous “Heidegger’s evocation of a Greek temple”; in Mark Sinclair’s words, “the temple-work can bring to presence not only the nature of the stone, but it can manifest all that surrounds it” (141):

The luster and gleam of the stone...first brings to radiance the light of the day, the breath of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple’s firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come appear as they are. (Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” 42)

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<sup>58</sup> «И тут по холму змеей побежит белокаменная стена некоего кремля, и вы упретесь наконец в неправдоподобно прочные и толстые его ворота, а там, на территории, все другое: ровные газоны, старые деревья, храм божий... Музей и заповедник, воронье счастье. Пространство. Сначала культурное, а потом окультуренное. Несвойственно стоят здесь и старинные деревянные постройки...» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 320).

Bitov's narrator tries to imagine what the monastery must have looked like several centuries ago, when it had just been built. Along the line of the romantic historical apotheosis, the description of its former splendor, combined with the melancholy of its modern ruin, brings up the idea of grandeur that nature and spirit produce in their genuine and uninhibited alliance:

tall weeds, fallen crosses....the bank was just as steep, the river just as wide, and just as unexpectedly the bank receded, leaving below in the soft green lake of a flooded meadow, and in the distance it turned suddenly as if at a shout and froze in the far-off blue of the forest ... What lines there had been, if they still remained! Such lines that the abbot and the builder had sighed, deeply and in unison. Their doubts had vanished: Here!<sup>59</sup> ("Man in a Landscape" 73)

Not only does this description of the place point to the Heideggerian ecology of a Greek temple, but it also strives—with a genuinely romantic nostalgia for antiquity—to delve into the origin of the place's greatness, out of which the Heideggerian "thing"—the temple—emerged as though naturally. In the late 1940s, Heidegger "brings together all the poetic sensibility" of his Hölderlin readings to come up with "a new figure of thought: the thing," which is "now understood to be the gathering of the fourfold"—"the intersection of earth, sky, mortals and divinities" (A. Mitchell 208-09). In Bitov's description of that *genius loci*, the elements of nature—the sky and the earthly landscape, together with the allegories of the mortals (the builder) and the divinity (the abbot), contribute—in the narrator's imagination—to the creation of the "thinging of the thing" (A. Mitchell 210), where the river, the forest, and the sky, along with people and divinities, "all come to participate in the earthly opening of the world" (A.

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<sup>59</sup> «... бурьян, поваленные кресты ... так же крут был берег, так же широка река, так же внезапно отступал он, оставив под собой нежно-зеленое озеро пойменного луга, и вдали вдруг поворачивался как от окрика и замирал в далекой синеве леса ... Какова же была здесь линия, если она еще оставалась!.. А такова, что настоятель и строитель вздохнули дружно и глубоко, и сомнений у них не осталось: здесь!» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 321-2).



Mitchell 212). The “thinging of the thing” becomes a factor as though inevitably emerging out of the fourfold: “Nature could offer nothing greater. The perfection of her offering was plain to see. Such places call for a temple, a citadel, a city. Within a century or so, people had mastered this space, made themselves a part of it, and it had become *civilized*”<sup>60</sup> (Bitov, “Man in a Landscape” 73). Such a place is an ecological place in Heideggerian sense of the term—*oikology*, dwelling-saying, which also presents itself as *ethos*—a proper dwelling place. In his interpretation of Heidegger’s earth-thinking, Kenneth Maly defines “the place of our dwelling” as “the realm of the open, the wild, the sacred place,” which “occurs within the fourfold” and means connectedness and preserving, letting be (53). For Bitov’s narrator, this *ethos* is also a lost place; when the spirit of the fourfold evaporates, what is left is just the landscape and the ruins of the temple. As Maly explains, “dwelling is freeing as sparing and preserving. Therefore, it is letting something be, but returning it into a preserve of peace, or: as mortals on the earth, we *let* things be in such a way that they and we are preserved in what is own to our being...” (54). It is precisely of that lost paradise of mutual connectedness that Bitov asks: “Culture, nature... But who had destroyed all this? Time? History? Somehow the who and when eluded me. ... But who disliked all this, when we all loved it?”<sup>61</sup> (“Man in a Landscape” 75).

The “increased mythologizing of space” in “Man in a Landscape,” as German Ritz (346) puts it, proceeds from the romantic and Heideggerian ruins of the temple toward another temple of the Romantics: wilderness. In William Cronon’s words, “wilderness fulfills the old romantic project...to make a new cathedral not in some petty human building, but in God’s own creation, Nature itself” (80). Bitov dramatizes the ascent of his narrator to that point by pushing him

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<sup>60</sup> «Большого природа предложить не могла. Завершенность предложенного была очевидна. В такие места просится храм, кремль, город. За какой-нибудь век люди справились с этим пространством, в него вписавшись, и оно стало *культурным* (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 322).

<sup>61</sup> «Культура, природа... Кто же это все развалил? Время? История?... Как-то ускользает, кто и когда. ... Кто же это все не любит, когда мы все это любим?» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 323).

through the uncanniness of the frontier, which is called upon—by “a curious quantity of boundaries”<sup>62</sup> (“Man in a Landscape” 74)—to prepare the reader for the reception of the sublime. This is what that uncanny frontier of “wilderness bounded by a civilization returning to the wild”<sup>63</sup> (74) looks in Bitov’s description:

I scrambled up the precipice. Never will you see such abomination of desolation—not even in a tangled windfall—as in a ruined cultivated space! Oh, how much wilder than wilderness is incipient wilderness! The wind murmurs triumphantly in the garbage pit that was once a church and a graveyard. Wreaths toss, tin cans roll about, a newspaper gallops like tumbleweed. Heaps of bricks and filth grow up. Ravens take wings, circling over the past, not the present. And layer shows through layer, structure through structure.<sup>64</sup> (74)

A few moments before, the narrator’s perception captured this transitional uncanniness with even keener observation: “Oh, this imperceptible transition, from the life-affirming ugliness of construction to desolation and incipient wilderness! ... tin cans grow into the earth, turning rusty and red; the text in the scraps of newspaper fades; rags rot away, corpse-like, pining for the human body.... This is life taught by death”<sup>65</sup> (72). Yet this civilization wilderness is not the goal of the narrator’s search. In his “skidding and detouring from layer to layer”<sup>66</sup> (74), he wants to uncover nothing less than the origin situated somewhere in between the visible landscape and his

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<sup>62</sup> «Занятое количество границ!» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 322).

<sup>63</sup> «Дикой природы – с одичавшей культурой...» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 322).

<sup>64</sup> «Я вскарабкался по обрыву. Никогда, ни в каком буреломе не можете вы наблюдать той мерзости запустения, как в разоренном культурном пространстве! О, насколько одичание дичее дикости!.. И ветер победно шуршит в помойке, бывшей когда-то храмом и кладбищем. Раскачиваются венки, перекатываются банки, перекаати-полем скачет газета. Произрастают кирпичи и мерзкие кучки. Вспархивают вороны, кружась над былым, не над настоящим. И слой сквозит сквозь слой, как строй сквозь строй» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 322).

<sup>65</sup> «О этот незаметный переход из жизнеутверждающей некресоты стройки в запустение и одичание! ... Консервные банки прорастают в землю, ржавея и рыжая; в газетных клочках выгорает текст, тряпье дотлевет трупом, тоскуя по человеческому телу ... это жизнь, обученная смертью» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 320-1).

<sup>66</sup> «... из слоя в слой, оскальзывая и огибаая...» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 322).

own reflection, which together are able to generate an epiphanic mixture: “A sharp whistling breath (by no means a sigh of relief) penetrates your smoke-filled chest: you can see *all* from here! All as it used to be. My God! How does it always survive, this unique point of ... not of view, but of origin—where you wake up and recall, *yes, recall*, how the world used to be?”<sup>67</sup> (74). The landscape that generates the epiphany of the origin is the pure wilderness landscape, viewed from a special place, in oblivion of the city behind and the uncanny frontier of the civilization turning wild—or in sharp contrast to them. The sublimity of the narrator’s emotions is almost biological: “I lurched to a stop, too anxious, or shy, or timid, to take even a step. The unsteadiness of my pose could be attributed to the uniqueness of my viewing point”<sup>68</sup> (75). What the character feels at the moment is the Freudian “oceanic” feelings—“a sensation of eternity, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded, as it were—‘oceanic’ ... This feeling ... is a purely subjective fact, not an article of faith; it brings with it no assurance of personal immortality, but it is the source of the religious energy...” (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 11). The character finds himself within the very core of the romantic discourse of nature, where, as Cronon puts it, “agnostics or even atheists nonetheless express feelings tantamount to religious awe when in the presence of wilderness” (80).

The acme of the character’s ascent, however, is not the sublimity of the landscape but a sudden discovery of the perpetrator who ruined the virginity of the view: “And there he sat. The destroyer of the last point...”<sup>69</sup> (75). Since then, as the narrator witnesses the painting of the landscape that he used to consider his own, he in actuality begins to see what he has

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<sup>67</sup> «... острый, со свистом (отнюдь не облегчения...) вдох прервет тебе прокуренную грудь; отсюда *все* видно! Все как было. Каким образом всегда сохранится эта единственная точка, уже не зрения, а – луча, с которой вы очнетесь и вспомните, именно *вспомните*, как было?!» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 322-3).

<sup>68</sup> «Я стоял покачнувшись, опасаясь, или робея, или не смея сделать хоть шаг. Неустойчивость позы объяснялась единственностью точки зрения» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 323).

<sup>69</sup> «Там он и сидел. Разрушитель последней точки...» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 323).

unknowingly seen all along: not the view but the picture, the “landscape.” That place in the novella is the turning point at which the wilderness becomes a picture and the narrator’s reveries in the landscape become a dialogic meta-landscape, shaped in the vigorous discussion with his interlocutor, Pavel Petrovich. From that point on the story is purely ekphrastic in that it resembles Edward Hopper’s painting *Jo in Wyoming* (1946). In the painting, Hopper represents the mountain landscape and his wife—in the front—who is sketching that same landscape (Herzogenrath 84). This new perspective also helps to make sense of the narrator’s observations of the landscape that he made before the encounter with the amateur-painter.

First of all, what is the visual and cognitive basis for Bitov’s meta-landscape? A culturalist interpretation of visual experience suggests that all kinds of scenarios, styles, and postures of seeing are the result of historically shaped modes of perception of the optical content (Jay 5). Marx Wartofsky maintains that “human vision is itself an artifact, produced by other artifacts, namely pictures” (314). With this respect, the narrator’s vision of his ambience, combined with the vision of the painter, Pavel Petrovich, and with the belated ekphrasis of the narrative itself, brings to the fore the main chronotopic and ontological problem of “Man in a Landscape,” which Chances aptly phrases as follows: “man, an entity of time, wants to know how he fits into the landscape, an entity of space” (“Cycles, Layers, Fragmentariness...” 420). At some point, when Bitov’s narrator reaches the “oceanic” sensations of the “unique”<sup>70</sup> (75) view that opens to his eyes, he betrays a reflection that changes our understanding of his optic experience at the monastery. If in the fragment when he detours “from layer to layer” of space—the incipient wilderness of the ruins reclaimed by nature—he arrives at “a sudden overlook”<sup>71</sup> (74), a similar layering of time rejects the immediacy of the Freudian “oceanic” or the romantic

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<sup>70</sup> «...единственной» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 324).

<sup>71</sup> «из слоя в слой», «внезапную точку» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 322).

sublime by almost annulling the subject of perception. The narrator realizes that the belated time structure of ekphrasis and the whole narrative also annihilate the landscape as an objective substance in space. Susan Brownsberger's translation alleviates the radical nature of the character's remark: "Oh, if only I'd known that I wasn't seeing and understanding it the way I am writing it now. If only I'd taken to my heels!"<sup>72</sup> (75). The Russian original is more thoroughgoing, as this literal translation demonstrates: "Oh, if only I'd known that it was not I who was seeing and understanding this way, the way I am writing it now... I'd have taken to my heels!" (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 323; translation mine). The belated ekphrastic perception of the landscape makes it difficult for man to find himself in his ambience precisely because man's timeness obscures and confuses the landscape's spatiality: "I understand and see it this way now"<sup>73</sup> ("Man in a Landscape" 75). "Now" is the time that reflects the belatedness of reflection plus the time of the narrative. Time compromises the optics; the landscape turns from the object of visual perception to the cognitive and imaginary thing: "It is hard not to confuse past with future, right down to their sequence in the present, if space itself, which seems to us more objective, has confused them (the times) this badly"<sup>74</sup> (75). The layers of space, depicted in the previously quoted fragment as leading to the epiphany of "a sudden overlook"<sup>75</sup> (74), now have metamorphosed into the hybrid, mixed layers of time (the original wilderness, the temple as the thing of the fourfold, the decay, and the incipient wild); along with the belated construction of the ekphrasis, they compromise the narrator's vision of the landscape.

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<sup>72</sup> «О, знал бы я, что это не я так видел и понимал, как сейчас пишу... Дал бы я деру!» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 323).

<sup>73</sup> «Это я теперь так понимаю и вижу» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 323).

<sup>74</sup> «Трудно не перепутать прошедшее с будущим вплоть до их последовательности в настоящем, если само пространство, кажущееся нам более объективным, настолько их (времена) перепутало...» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 323).

<sup>75</sup> «внезапную точку» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 322).

Bitov's narrator, then, is looking for an originary landscape, but due to the belatedness of ekphrasis he can see it only in his imagination, as a recollection of something that he in actuality has never seen physically. This perspective sheds a new light on that "unique point" of the originary wilderness that he is looking at but seeing only afterwards, as a described painting, a narrated picture—an ekphrasis: "this unique point of ... not of view, but of origin—where you wake up and recall, yes, *recall*, how the world used to be?"<sup>76</sup> (74). The character's quest for the wild origin appears then to be the Lacanian "original phantasy," which, according to Slavoj Žižek:

is always the fantasy of the origins—that is to say, the elementary skeleton of the fantasy-scene is for the subject to be present as a pure gaze before its own conception or, more precisely, at the very act of its own conception. The Lacanian formula of fantasy ... denotes such a paradoxical conjunction of the subject and the object qua this impossible gaze: the 'object' of fantasy is not the fantasy-scene itself, its content... but the impossible gaze witnessing it. (*For They Know Not What They Do* 197)

Origin fantasy, which presents itself as a fantasy of landscape, is exactly what Bitov's narrator describes. He proclaims, "I was gazing from a unique point"<sup>77</sup> (75), but at the same time he admits, "if only I'd known that it wasn't I who was seeing and understanding in the way I'm writing it now"<sup>78</sup> (75) and "you wake up and recall, yes, *recall*, how the world used to be"<sup>79</sup> (74). The landscape as an object of his desire for origin is the Lacanian *objet petit a*, which, as Žižek explains, "is the 'sublime object of ideology': it serves as the fantasmatic support of ideological

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<sup>76</sup> «эта единственная точка, уже не зрения, а – луча, с которой вы очнетесь и вспомните, именно *вспомните*, как было?!» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 323).

<sup>77</sup> «Я смотрел из единственной точки» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 323).

<sup>78</sup> «...знал бы я, что это не я так видел и понимал, как сейчас пишу...» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 323).

<sup>79</sup> «...вы очнетесь и вспомните, именно *вспомните*, как было?!» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 323).

propositions” (*The Parallax View* 41). The “unique point” of gazing, with the gaze not seeing anything up until later, as an ekphrasis, is that impossibility of the gaze that constitutes the character’s desire. To keep the impossible gaze—the very gaze into the originary landscape—afloat, one must be mindful about the frames of that fantasized picture. As a landscape recalled for the purpose of ekphrasis, it appears to the narrator first as a painting: the narrator sees Pavel Petrovich paint the same landscape he found original himself at the same time as he arrives at the “unique point,” so the landscape that he claims to see is in reality the painter’s work, not the view that opened to his physical eyes—for we remember that the narrator admits it was not he who was “seeing and understanding”<sup>80</sup> (75). Žižek argues that, in modernist painting:

[t]he frame of the painting in front of us is not its true frame; there is another, invisible frame, the frame implied by the structure of the painting, the frame that enframes our perception of the painting, and these two frames by definition never overlap—an invisible gap separates them. The pivotal content of the painting is not communicated in its visible part, but located in this dis-location of the two frames, in the gap that separates them. (*The Parallax View* 29)

If this modernist painting is the origin landscape in Bitov’s novella, then the frame of the landscape is different from the frame of the actual view, which apparently is able to catch more than the landscape framed within the painting. As Pavel Petrovich explains to the narrator, there is a fundamental difference between landscape and view: “‘The view is what you, too, will see. The landscape is what I saw. The view, strictly speaking,’ and he looked at the painting and sighed, ‘can never be painted’”<sup>81</sup> (77). The landscape, not the view, is the narrator’s *objet petit a*

<sup>80</sup> «...видел и понимал» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 323).

<sup>81</sup> «Вид—это то, что и вы увидите. Пейзаж—это то, что увидел я. Вид, собственно, - и он взглянул на картину и вздохнул, - не может быть написан никогда...» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 325).

that he keeps focused on precisely because the view interferes and strives to ruin the landscape as the fantasy formation:

But don't attempt even one step to the side! If you should have the good fortune—no, the honor—of finding yourself at such a point, it will be unique. One step to the left and a flock of tower cranes has pecked apart the space on the horizon. One step to the right and you plunge down the cliff, into the garbage pit and dumping ground. One step back and you land on, or tear your trousers on, barbed wire.<sup>82</sup> (“Man in a Landscape” 74-75)

The landscape, as painting, which it always and only is, is not—in spite of the pronouncement—the content and the object of the painter's desire. This painting has two frames: the frame of the fantasized view, the landscape, and the view itself, which includes the landscape and the surrounding remainder, the abject. The viewer-painter is constantly conscious of that other frame, against the background of which he frames his origin fantasy, and because of that the “pivotal content,” as Žižek calls it, is located in the “gap,” “in this dis-location of the two frames” (*The Parallax View* 29). The real object of desire is the impossible gaze that craves to be one with the landscape, but whose impossibility is predicated upon its being captivated in the consciousness of the view, in that non-disposable remainder.

The uncanny double comes to the fore when the narrator identifies himself with the painter and his, the narrator's, landscape with the painting, while at the same time separating them from each other. His ekphrastic description is simultaneously the description of Pavel Petrovich's panting and his own fantasy landscape, but in the meaningful gap between the

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<sup>82</sup> «Но не попробуйте сделать и шага в сторону! Если уж посчастливилось, нет, сподобилось, оказаться в такой точке—она единственна. Шаг влево—и стадо подъемных кранов расклеивает пространство на горизонте; шаг вправо—и вы летите под кручу, в помойку и свалку; шаг назад—и либо наступите, либо порвете брюки о колючую проволоку...» (Битов, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 323).



frames are the figure of the painter (on the panting) and the narrator (in the landscape), infringing upon the purity of the fantasy and thus connecting the subject (narrator-painter) with his view (the landscape plus the abject remainder):

He was apparently proceeding on a diagonal from the upper left corner of the canvas to the lower right. The deep blue forest at the upper left, the silver horseshoe of the river bend in the middle; in the lower right corner, invisible to the painter and clinging like a stuck bristle, sat the painter himself. The upper right was blank for the sky, undepicted as yet, unshadowed by either cloud or cross of bird. In the lower left was dark blur. I glanced over my shoulder. This was uncalled for, as though he could paint something that was behind him, as though by glancing over my shoulder I could see my own self.”<sup>83</sup> (76)

In this ekphrastic fragment, there is a new element that obscures the origin fantasy. In addition to the gap between the frames of the landscape and the view, the narrator realizes that he cannot be a pure gaze: there is a blind spot on the landscape that contains the inscription of himself, his own spectre. The pure gaze at the original landscape as the object of the narrator’s desire can be compared with the phenomenological *epoché*, where, due to the reduction of senses, the objects appear as mere phenomena. They are intentional objects, but their epistemological value is based on the transcendence of the consciousness that projects them (Kenny 879-80). Bitov’s narrator comes to the realization that what he perceived as the product of his transcendent gaze—the landscape—has a blind spot, which contains himself as the partial

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<sup>83</sup> «Он шел из левого верхнего угла холста—по-видимому, по диагонали—в правый нижний. Синий лес слева вверху, серебряная подкова речной излуины посреди; в правом нижнем углу, невидимый себе, зацепившись, прилипшим волоском сидел уже сам живописец. Правый верхний угол пустел для неба, еще никак не прорисованного, ни облаком, ни крестом, ни птицей не осеянного. В левом нижнем темнело расплывчатое поле зрения. Я оглянулся через левое плечо. Это было неоправданно, будто он мог написать что-нибудь из того, что у него за спиной, будто, оглянувшись, я мог увидеть самого себя...» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 324).

remainder, the integral part of his landscape, which is invisible only to him. The realization establishes itself on the basis of iterability. The narrator sees Pavel Petrovich's painting, which is the mirror of his own landscape, and observes the painter's ignorance of his own figure as a part of the painted landscape. But the painting is his own landscape's double, so he glances over his shoulder in that "uncalled for," absurd gesture to see his "own self"<sup>84</sup> (76). The "stuck bristle," "clinging"<sup>85</sup> (76) to the corner of the painting, as the sign of the painter, is—to use Jacques Derrida's terminology—the "mark," which repeats itself in the gesture of the narrator to look for his own ghost that haunts the landscape. The drama of this iterable gesture consists in that the spectre of the subject has always been present there, in the purity of the originary landscape as the factor annihilating the original purity, "like the iterability or divisible repeatability which, for Derrida, always already inhabits the mark at its origin" (Wortham 193). The uncanniness of that experience—looking at one's own spectre—finds its confirmation in the monstrosity of the returned gaze of the spectre: when the narrator glanced over his shoulder to see his own self, "[t]here, growing up from a trash heap, was the terrifying, taunt phallus of the toothwort. I shuddered. That, too, was a stare"<sup>86</sup> ("Man in a Landscape" 76).

What the narrator finds out by dint of intuition is explained by Pavel Petrovich in their vehement discussion. The latter begins by contending that the psychological, romantic use of the landscape is its only possible mode: "no one painted the view! What they did succeed with, partially, wasn't the view but the mood"<sup>87</sup> (78). The landscape painter, says Pavel Petrovich,

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<sup>84</sup> «неоправдано», «самого себя» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 324).

<sup>85</sup> «...зацепившись прилипшим волоском» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 324).

<sup>86</sup> «Там из кучи мусора произрастал устрашающе напряженный фаллос петрова креста. Я содрогнулся. Это тоже был взгляд» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 324).

<sup>87</sup> «... вида никто не написал! То, что им удавалось в какой-то степени, есть не вид, а состояние» (Bitov, "Chelovek v Peizazhe" 326).

cannot mirror the view; “he can only be mirrored in it”<sup>88</sup> (79). A landscape thus appears to be a view haunted by the reflection of the gazer, like that in a mirror.

In other words, there is always a spectre of “man in a landscape.” The landscape itself, therefore, is an ideal “parallax object,” one of the allegories by means of which Žižek illustrates the Lacanian *objet petit a*: “the subject’s gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its ‘blind spot,’ that which is ‘in the object more than the object itself,’ the point at which the object itself returns the gaze” (*The Parallax View* 17). A view, then, cannot be the landscape by analogy with what Žižek explains about reality: “the reality I see is never ‘whole’—not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it” (17). Bitov’s narrator receives an interesting revelation when he finds himself in Pavel Petrovich’s apartment: he enters an empty room, in which on all of the walls hang paintings of the same landscape—all having a shadow in the corner, in which the narrator recognizes the painter’s nose.

Both Meyer and Chances contend that the shadow of Pavel Petrovich’s nose testifies to his inability “to paint a landscape without the human being’s presence in it” (Chances, “Cycles, Layers, Fragmentariness...” 419); or, it is “the sign of Pavel Petrovich’s failure to eliminate man from landscape, his inability to catch and fix the divine in its purest form” (Meyer 381). If Pavel Petrovich paints meta-landscapes instead of just landscapes, as is being argued here, his nose on the paintings is not so much a sign of his inability as it is an artistic message that landscapes without man in them do not exist. On the realistic level of the novella, it would be hard to imagine that the painter’s spectre, or his unconscious, always interjects with the nose while the artist struggles to paint pure landscape, the reflection of the divine. Pavel Petrovich’s argument demonstrates that he is conscious of what he is painting, that landscapes are the mirror of the

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<sup>88</sup> «... он способен лишь отразиться в нем» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 327).

artist, that Husserlian *epoché* is impossible because the artist cannot suspend himself to become a transcendental subject. If this is true, then one inexplicable moment persists: why the obsession; why does he need to paint the same landscape over and over? Ritz, who offers a postmodern reading of Bitov's text, proposes—regarding still other contradictions he finds—that the “inconsistency” of the philosophical theory of art arises from the “ongoing mixture” of older theological or mythological personalities of artist with his modern image (349). Upon establishing that man is always in the landscape on the epistemological level, Bitov's discussants turn to the hermeneutical and even ontological level of man's being there.

How realistic is the picture of man's ambience that landscape—the only way for man to express his “view”—presents? Pavel Petrovich says that there are two levels of individualization of the view in the landscape. The first one, as already discussed, is the personality of the artist; for example, his desire for the transcendent gaze on the original landscape as his *object petit a*. The second is a more generic level of man's alienation as a species, his radical difference from his surroundings. Man can fully understand only what is his own (what he does) and what is like him (other people). That is why landscape is totally different from portrait: it would be a poor taste to paint human emotions in a portrait because emotions would make for a character, not a portrait: “A portrait is a universalization, the essence—well, the inner state. A landscape cannot be universalized. Who are you to claim an understanding of the inner state of the sea or the mountains?”<sup>89</sup> (“Man in a Landscape” 79). Therefore a view, rendered as a landscape, is always “partial in relation to itself”<sup>90</sup> (79)—it has to be enriched with “expression,” such as “light, wind,

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<sup>89</sup> «Портрет—это обобщение, сущность, ну, внутреннее состояние. Пейзаж обобщенным быть не может. Кто вы, чтобы претендовать на понимание внутреннего состояния моря или горы?» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 328).

<sup>90</sup> «... частным по отношению к самому же себе» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 327).

other meteorological conditions”<sup>91</sup> (79) that emulate human emotions in order to make sense for us.

In “Birds (Catechesis),” a relation of the narrator’s stay at a biological research station, Bitov persistently repeats that same idea: “man is incapable of imagining anything that he hasn’t seen in some form or other”<sup>92</sup> (40). This explains why the artistic images of paradise are so boring, “meager and unattractive”<sup>93</sup> (40): we are not able to imagine a “passionless” landscape; hell, on the contrary, is well understood because it “is well populated...with ourselves and our acquaintances”: “What scares us in Bosch’s hell is its similarity to life. The Promised Hell...”<sup>94</sup> (40). In “Man in a Landscape” Bitov, through his Gnostic discussant Pavel Petrovich, ventures an interesting idea of man’s place in landscape: “Is man, perhaps, a sort of larva, vermin, a landscape moth?”<sup>95</sup> (101). Man can live only in the world, in the Heideggerian sense of the term, that he created for himself: “[t]hat’s where we live, in the oil-paint layer on which we were painted” (107). Man’s landscape is always his personal or generic interpretation of the world, his own mirror, which reflects at least his nose at the corner of the canvas. But who created the landscape that is not his own, of which man himself, not just his spectre, is an integral part, be it moth or vermin? Pavel Petrovich argues: “The world was completely ready when man appeared in it. Man created nothing in it. He didn’t make the landscape.... You’ll say that telegraph poles, rails, and airplanes became part of the landscape long ago. Precisely: *became!*”<sup>96</sup> (99). In the development of his argument, Pavel Petrovich prepares the narrator and the readers to conceive

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<sup>91</sup> «... выражение: освещение, ветер, прочие метеоусловия...» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 327).

<sup>92</sup> «... человек не способен вообразить себе то, чего он так или иначе не видел» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 290).

<sup>93</sup> «... бедно и непривлекательно» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 290).

<sup>94</sup> «... хорошо заселен нами и нашими знакомыми ... В аду Босха пугает именно сходство с жизнью... Ад обетованный» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 290).

<sup>95</sup> «Может, человек—это личинка такая, тля, моль пейзажа...» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 349).

<sup>96</sup> «Мир был окончательно готов, когда в нем появился человек. Человек в нем ничего не создал. Он не сотворил пейзажа. ... Вы скажете, что телеграфные столбы, рельсы и аэропланы давно стали частью пейзажа... Именно что *стали!*» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 347).

of the Modernist idea of man as a demiurge and of the Gnostic concept of an incomplete god: “Everything was finished by the time man arrived... Man arrived in a *ready-made* world... The world was created by an artist, to be contemplated and understood and loved by man. But why ‘in His image and likeness’? ... The artist needed another artist. An artist can’t exist alone”<sup>97</sup> (129). In this original way, Pavel Petrovich answers the main question posed by Miłosz in his poem “Meaning”: the world is truly an expressive sign, animated by the Creator’s intention, which invites another artist, man, to make sense of it as his own landscape. But if man’s landscape is always a parallax view, with a blind spot for the subject at the corner, then the Creator’s landscape is also a subject to the parallax: the creation has a blind spot, inaccessible for the Artist, who therefore needs another artist, man, who would see, in his own parallax landscape, the Creator. It is no accident then that Pavel Petrovich works at the monastery as an icon restorer; by analogy, his landscapes are also icons of God’s creation, and his fantasy—although unachievable—is to draw a prelapsarian landscape without man in it.

### 1.2.2. The Ecology of Negativity and Infancy

Bitov seems to share with his character, Pavel Petrovich, the greatest concern about man who has not lived up to the role intended for him by God: the world was created “to be contemplated and understood and loved by man,” “[b]ut man confused comprehending with possessing, with belonging to him!”<sup>98</sup> (129). The way this topic of landscape appropriation is discussed in Bitov is not only painting or optics, as in “Man in a Landscape,” but also word—ekphrasis, concept, literature, and other verbal representations of the world—which places the

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<sup>97</sup> «Все было закончено к приходу человека... Человек пришел в готовый мир. ... Мир был сотворен Художником для созерцания, и постижения, и любви человеком. Но для чего же «по образу и подобию?» ... Художник нуждался в другом художнике. Художник не может быть один» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 378).

<sup>98</sup> «для созерцания, и постижения, и любви человеком», «Но человек перепутал постижение с обладанием, с принадлежностью себе!» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 378).

Russian author in the philosophical context of Adorno, Heidegger, and Agamben, and in the artistic context of Czesław Miłosz. Agamben accuses metaphysics of positing language and death as factors defining man; in their turn, Bitov and Miłosz employ the both concepts for the effect of defamiliarization. Death is the best metaphor for what de Man calls the ideological aberration, or the inability to distinguish between names and references, because this metaphysical illusion displaces man from his proper dwelling place. The experience of childhood or infancy, by contrast, has a potential to offset the ecological negativity of language and death by bringing man back to his proper, pure but also conscious, dwelling in language without metaphysical aspirations. Neither of the authors, however, is able to avoid the metaphysical lures altogether.

In “Man in a Landscape,” Pavel Petrovich contends, “the Creator needed Adam even worse than Adam needed Eve”<sup>99</sup> (129). God Himself brought all the animals to the first man and encouraged him to name them, as though to endow them with essence that comes with a name, to define them, with the blessing of their Creator, to take over the creation as a meaningful world and to glorify it. However, the prelapsarian unity did not last very long, “for behind our ecstasy lurks a sense of doom: we will sell, betray, dissipate, violate, waste!”<sup>100</sup> (129). Name, or, more generally, word, instead of contemplating and comprehending, has become a means for violating and appropriating. Due to their overuse, human concepts as the reflection of creation have come to be limited by the same shortcoming as landscape with respect to the view: “Which do we see,” asks the narrator of “Birds,” “objects, or the words naming them?... Our knowledge merely

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<sup>99</sup> «Еще больше был нужен Адам Творцу, чем Адаму Ева» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 378).

<sup>100</sup> «... за любым нашим восторгом таится чувство обреченности: продадим, предадим, распylim, растлим, растратим!» (Bitov, “Chelovek v Peizazhe” 378).

reflects the world. But the world does not look in that mirror”<sup>101</sup> (50). A similar revelation comes to Miłosz’s autobiographical narrator in *Visions from San Francisco Bay* (1969). The natural world is presented there as a child’s *object petit a*, the desire for appropriation of the world by means of the Symbolic order. As in Bitov, language and optics play equally strong parts in that infatuation by the desire to possess:

What really fascinated me were the color illustrations in nature books and atlases, not the Juliet of nature but her portrait rendered by draftsmen or photographers. I suffered no less sincerely for that, a suffering caused by the excess which could not be possessed; I was an unrequited romantic lover, until I found the way to dispel that invasion of desires, *to make the desired object mine—by naming it*. I made columns in thick notebooks and filled them with my pedantic categories—family, species, genus—until the names, the noun signifying the species and the adjective the genus, became one with what they signified, so that *Emberiza citronella* did not live in thickets but in an ideal space outside of time.<sup>102</sup> (Miłosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay* 19; emphasis mine)

The result of these classification exercises is a radical reduction of the individual characteristics of plants and animals (“a sheaf of colors, an undifferentiated vibration of light”) to mere “statistics”: “...even my real birds became illustrations from an anatomical atlas covered

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<sup>101</sup> «Что мы видим: предметы или слова, называющие их? ... с нашим знанием. Даже если оно точно отражает мир. Оно его лишь отражает. Но мир не смотрится в это зеркало» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 300).

<sup>102</sup> “Fascynowały mnie przede wszystkim kolorowe ilustracje w przyrodniczych książkach i atlasach, a więc nie Julia-Natura, tylko jej portret przekazany przez rysownika czy fotografa. Tym nie mniej szczerze cierpiałem z powodu nadmiaru, którego nie można osiąść, byłem nienasyconym romantycznym kochankiem, aż znalazłem środek zażegnania inwazji pragnień, zdobycia pożądanego obiektu na własność: nazwę. W grubych zeszytach kreśliłem rubryki, wpisywałem pedantycznie rząd, rodzinę, gatunek, rodzaj, aż nazwa złożona z rzeczownika na oznaczenie gatunku i przymiotnika na oznaczenie rodzaju zrastała się w jedno z tym, do czego przynależała zawsze, i *Emberiza citrinella* zamieszkiwała nie zarośla ale idealną przestrzeń, poza czasem” (Miłosz, *Widzenia nad zatoką San Francisco* 24-5).



by an illusion of lovely feathers, and the fragrance of flowers ceased to be extravagant gifts, becoming part of an impersonally calculated plan, examples of a universal law” (18-19).<sup>103</sup>

Although the narrator confesses that the realization of this reduction meant the end of his childhood, both Miłosz and Bitov use the uniqueness of the childhood period in their search for the fantasy of the prelapsarian unity of word, image, and creation.

In his autobiographical novel *The Issa Valley*, which, according to Jan Bloński, is the key to the whole of Miłosz’s work, the protagonist Tomasz, a child, experiences the world “before” history and its organization of time (175). Miłosz’s usual “dichotomy between the physical world and the spiritual world” (Możejko 19) is suspended there due to the absence of the distance between the protagonist and his natural ambience, so characteristic of the aesthetic perception of landscape. As Bloński points out, the essence of the novel is not the relationship between man and nature, but “man in nature”: the novel is devoid of any aestheticism of description because Tomasz does not have the ability yet to marvel at nature—he is nature himself (176-77). The childish, a-historical chronotope in Miłosz’s “The World (A Naïve Poem)” has a similar function that makes up even for the brutality of nature and preconceives “some other unknown and inscrutable order” behind “the physical tangibility” (Możejko 19) of the ambience. Being naïve only on the surface, “The World” achieves its effect of the childish attitude to the environment due to the annihilation of the boundaries between subject and object (Fiut, “Poema nienaiwne” 49). Miłosz himself finds similarities between his poem and the Polish classic *Pan Tadeusz* by Adam Mickiewicz in that both describe “the world as it should be” (*Czesława Miłosza*

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<sup>103</sup> “...snopem barw, niezróżnicowanym wibrowaniem światła ... Tak i moje ptaki zmieniły się w ilustracje z anatomicznego atlasu pokryte złudą ślicznych piór, jaskrawość i zapach kwiatów przestały być rozrzutnym podarunkiem, zaczęły być zamysłem bezosobowej kalkulacji, przykładem powszechnego prawa” (Miłosz, *Widzenia nad zatoką San Francisco* 23).

Aleksander Fiut offers an extensive discussion of this motif in the chapter “Love Affair with Nature” (*The Eternal Moment: The Poetry of Czesław Miłosz* 37-39).

*autoportret przekorny* 120); and in his poem “To Robinson Jeffers,” Miłosz juxtaposes Slavic poets “who lived in childhood”<sup>104</sup> to the American poets’ aesthetization of nature and fascination with the sublime battle of elements (Fiut, “*Pan Tadeusz* na nowo odczytany” 77).

Similarly to Miłosz’s *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, in “Birds” Bitov shares the experience of discovering the discrepancy between the tangible empirical world of things and their petrified images in pictures, words, and classifications in the textbook:

For, after my grade school course in “non-living nature,” I would never again see the ideal ravines, hills, and steppes of those illustrations ... but would perpetually experience the torture of growing up, when everything proves to be not quite as portrayed: not so pure, not so exact, not so expressive of the word that names it—not a ravine but a type of ravine, not a forest but a type of forest ... neither the word “ravine” nor the word “grove.”<sup>105</sup> (6)

The same impression was made on the narrator by “poignant zoographical maps,” which he has remembered from his “early school years,” with those maps’ “catastrophic violation of scale”: “Belgium and Holland together would be covered by a bunny, with a scrap of Denmark fitted between his ears”<sup>106</sup> (29). The result of such a scaling on “a child’s consciousness” was a great exaggeration of “the place of wild animals in the modern world,” which mitigated “any anxiety about their fate”<sup>107</sup> (29).

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<sup>104</sup> “...żyli w dzieciństwie przedłużanym z wieku w wiek” (Miłosz, *Wiersze Wszystkie* 548).

<sup>105</sup> «Ибо после курса «неживой природы» начальной школы никогда мне было уже не видать тех идеальных оврагов, холмов и степей, как на тех картинках... а испытывать постоянно ту муку взросления, когда все оказывается не вполне так, как рисовалось: не так чисто, не так точно, не так выражающе само слово, которым обозначено,—не овраг, а род оврага, не лес, а род леса ... не слово «овраг», не слово «роща»...» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 254).

<sup>106</sup> «...трогательные зоографические карты», «В ранней школе», «к нарушению масштабов совершенно катастрофическому. Какой-нибудь зайчик покрывал собою Бельгию и Голландию, «вместе взятые», и кусочек Дании помещался между ушами» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 278).

<sup>107</sup> «... в детском сознании», «место зверей в современном мире», «беспокойство за их судьбу» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 279).

In Bitov's "Birds," the biological research station on the Kurish Spit acquires a similar ecological function to the unique point of view in his "Man in a Landscape," only without the parallax dubiousness. As a birds' kingdom—"what a unique place it is on this earth"<sup>108</sup> (5)—the spit is described as having a peculiar chronotope: the narrator feels himself to be "on the border of two habitats," and unlike fish, the inhabitants of the ocean, and birds, whose habitat is "the air-ocean," he is endowed with a special privilege of contradiction stemming from "the tension of the border"<sup>109</sup> (3-4). The fantasy of origin, which for the narrator of "Man in a Landscape" presents itself as the desire of the impossible gaze, in "Birds" seems to come to fruition in all its temporal discrepancy of the Freudian belatedness, characteristic of any origin fantasy: "This place recalls a homeland I have never seen," and yet the narrator flees there "as if to a foreign country"<sup>110</sup> (5). The magic effect of this chronotope subsists in the fact that the actual space acquires the same scale as the map: "the scale changed, the animal truly did cover the Spit from sea to sea"<sup>111</sup> (29), and the words of the dictionary, the concepts and images have returned to their original prelapsarian correspondence with things: "Sea, bay, dunes, shores, forest, grass, sky, and birds—not only were they present here, in very close proximity, but they also matched the secret images that we associate with the words when we pronounce them to ourselves with our eyes closed: 'bay,' 'forest,' birds"<sup>112</sup> (28).

The narrator's clever interlocutor Doctor D., resembling Pavel Petrovich from "Man in a Landscape," observes that in studying or just conceiving of the animal world, people make a

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<sup>108</sup> «...какое это единственное место на этой Земле» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 253).

<sup>109</sup> «...на границе двух сред», «воздушного океана», «напряжение границы» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 251-2).

<sup>110</sup> «Место это напоминает родину, которой никогда не видел...», «как за границу» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 253).

<sup>111</sup> «... масштабы смещались, зверь и впрямь почти перекрывал Косу от моря до моря» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 279).

<sup>112</sup> «... море, залив, дюны, берега, лес, травы, и небо, и птицы не только имелись здесь в самом близком соседстве, но и соответствовали тем самым сокровенным представлениям, связанным с произнесением про себя, закрыв глаза, слов: залив, лес, птицы...» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 277).

very common mistake: anthropomorphism. In the novella, birds are the main experimental material of everything that has gone wrong with our preconceptions of non-human nature. The narrator compares human understanding of birds with the image of “the heavenly canopy,” of which we know that it does not exist but still refer to it as to the visible reality. Likewise, “From Aristophanes to Hitchcock, it’s not birds that exist but the concepts to which they give rise”<sup>113</sup> (4-5). The uncanniness of real birds, taken out of the usual images and concepts with which we associate them, is also a repetitive motif in Miłosz. Fiut notes that in both *The Issa Valley* and the poems, birds, for Miłosz, represent nature from its dark, ungraspable side (“Wygnanie z raju” 312-13). Probably, his “Ode to a Bird” (from the collection *King Popiel and Other Poems*, 1962) stands in the closest proximity to Bitov’s amazement at the non-conceptual materiality of these creatures:

O not similar to anything, indifferent  
 To the sound *pta, pteron, fvgls, brd.*  
 Beyond name, without name,  
 An impeccable motion in an expanse of amber.  
 So that I comprehend, while your wings beat,  
 What divides me from things I name every day,  
 And from my vertical figure  
 Though it extends itself upward to the zenith.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> «...небесным сводом», «От Аристофана до Хичкока—нету птиц, а есть вызванные ими представления» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 252-3).

<sup>114</sup> O niczemu nie podobny, obojętny  
 Na dźwięk pta, pteron, fvgls, brd.  
 Poza nazwą, bez nazwy.  
 Ruch nienaganny w ogromnym bursztynie.  
 Abym pojął w bicu skrzydeł, co mnie dzieli  
 Od rzeczy, którym co dzień nadaję imiona,  
 I od mojej postaci pionowej,

(Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems* 159-60)

To take a closer look at birds, Bitov risks a narrative experiment and employs the effect of an unexpected—and utter—anthropomorphization. He begins the story with the description of the crush that the narrator develops on one of the female inhabitants of the station, Clara, proclaimed to be the heroine of the tale: “No, this wasn’t a commonplace, business-trip affair—it was tenderness, a kind of pure love... Clara was young, clever, and beautiful. She loved sparkly things and tobacco and could count to five. She loved another man. Valerian Innokentievich was elegant and young. She snuggled up to him like a cat”<sup>115</sup> (“Birds” 12-13). Although the reader would be a little surprised that a “clever” woman “could count to five,” and would start to suspect a trick, the narrator still continues his scheme and later also mentions “the secret of the feminine disposition” to love one but appreciate the constancy of another suitor: “her heart still belonged to another, but as a woman she found my devotion flattering”<sup>116</sup> (13). Only much later in the text does Bitov surprise us with an unexpected effect of defamiliarization, even estrangement, by announcing that Clara “was also a *crow*; that is, a creature wild and cautious, different, *not man*”<sup>117</sup> (14).

That birds are not men is a statement proclaiming not an unsurpassable abyss between humans and non-humans but rather a sober, however uncanny, diagnosis of the impotence of the symbolic system (concepts, words, theories, images, etc.) in facing up to its vocation or intended function. When we consider the artistic attempts at estrangement, or defamiliarization, in both

Choć przedłuża siebie do zenitu. (“Oda do ptaka,” *Król Popiel i inne wiersze*; Miłosz. *Wiersze wszystkie* 469).

<sup>115</sup> «Нет, это не была рядовая командировочная интрижка—это была нежность, род чистой влюбленности», «Клара была молода, умна и красива. Она любила блестящие вещи, табак и умела считать до пяти. Она любила другого. Валерьян Иннокентьевич был изящный молодой человек. Она ласкалась к нему, как кошка» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 261).

<sup>116</sup> «тайна женского расположения», «её сердце по-прежнему принадлежало другому, но ей, как женщине, льстила моя преданность» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 262).

<sup>117</sup> «но и *ворона*, то есть существо дикое и осторожное, другое, *не человек*» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 262).

Bitov and Miłosz, we need to recall again Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* with its credo of non-identity thinking. In her book *Adorno on Nature*, Cook points out, "as Adorno frequently observes, nature remains the primary placeholder for Otherness" (159), and Western societies are not tolerable for Otherness because the conceptual organization of thought rejects anything that does not fit its closed circuit of signification. His negative dialectics strives to be "suspicious of all identity. Its logic is one of disintegration: of disintegration of the prepared and objectified form of the concepts which the cognitive subject faces, primarily and directly" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 145). The subject-object identity thought may be quite inventive in its self-deception, contriving what Adorno calls "peep-hole metaphysics" and aspiring to fathom fully "the world that lies beyond our concepts" (Cook 35), so the anti-metaphysical strategy of defamiliarization, which both Bitov and Miłosz use in their writings, aims at pointing out the gap between the concept and the ineffable that it pretends to express.

When it comes to birds, which we are used to perceiving in their various aesthetically preconceived biological manifestations, death—the dead body of a bird—may become a factor that annihilates the familiar aesthetics and introduces into the uncanny otherness of the concept rendered upside down. With the image of a dead bird, Bitov creates an anti-universal to the universal category that the word "bird" presents to us in our system of representation:

With a mortal terror filling her crazed eye, this choking seagull stands before me as a generalized symbol, so to speak, all birds in one. This one-bird, if we were unused to their existing on earth at all, is a monster, a terrifyingly huge freak who cannot actually exist. She has just two spindly legs. Her feet are claws. Her coat isn't even fur but flat, coarse-haired bones, which cannot be called by any name we already know, and we invent the word "feather." She has a small, serpentine

head with unseeing eyes at the sides; she can't look at you with both eyes at once. Her mouth and nose are combined into a horn, which she opens with a loathsome sound. We can find no word for this and will label it conditionally a "beak."<sup>118</sup>

("Birds" 47-48)

In this making of a monstrous, almost unearthly, alien creature out of a simple dead seagull, Bitov vividly demonstrates how awkward and meagre are the concepts with which humans reduce the otherness that surrounds them. Bitov's uncanny, un-homely description of the dead bird goes against our usual practice of making the earth a more comfortable place of dwelling by means of classification and categorization—by taming it for our own household use, or, as Miłosz would put it, by possessing it. To deal with the immense amount of impressions and information that the protagonist of *The Issa Valley*, Thomas (*Tomasz*), has had from his nature trips, the boy begins compiling a scrapbook that has the title "Birds" on its cardboard cover. Categorizing birds with the use of the existing symbolic system, the Latinized "Linni" classification, he makes it a childish private business, "since confidentiality was the very heart and soul of the enterprise"<sup>119</sup> (*The Issa Valley* 150). He has "a series of headings, capitalized and underlined, followed by the ornithological descriptions in small-case letters"<sup>120</sup> (150). Each type of birds is caged in its respective description, which now is able to define safely each particular representative of a type, and the aesthetics of this reduction appeals to Thomas because of the

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<sup>118</sup> «Со своим бешеным, исполненным смертельного ужаса взглядом, не исполняющим никакого взгляда в нашем понимании, эта давящаяся чайка стоит перед моими глазами, представляя собою для меня как бы обобщенно *одну* птицу. Эта одна-птица, если бы мы не привыкли к их вообще существованию на земле, представляет собою *чудовище*, то есть устрашающе-огромное чудо, какого на самом деле быть не может. У нее только две тонкие ноги, на ногах когти; она покрыта даже не шерстью, а какими-то жестковолосыми плоскими костями, которые нельзя назвать никаким уже понятным нам словом, и мы изобретаем слово «перо»; у нее маленькая змеиная головка с невидящими глазами по бокам, она не посмотрит на вас одновременно двумя глазами; у нее совмещен рот и нос—вместо всего этого у нее рог, который она раскрывает с мерзким звуком, мы не найдем для этого слова и условно обозначим «клюв»» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 298).

<sup>119</sup> "...wartość dzieła polegała na jego sekretności" (Miłosz, *Dolina Issy* 136).

<sup>120</sup> "...tytuły, większe i podkreślone, a pod nimi, mniejszymi literami, opis" (Miłosz, *Dolina Issy* 136).

beauty of the Latin definitions, “their sonority,” and conspicuousness of some of the names “for their proliferation of letters”<sup>121</sup> (151). Yet this diligent exercise in appropriation is a necessary condition for the suspicion and ultimate rejection of its deceptive comfort:

To name a bird, to cage it in letters, was tantamount to owning it forever. The endless multiplicity of colors, shadings, mating calls, thrills, wing sounds... Turning the pages, he had them all before him, at his command, affecting and ordering the plenitude of things that were. In reality, everything about birds gave rise to unease. ... for many, they were little more than a mobile decoration, scarcely worthy of scrutiny, whereas, surrounded by such wonders on earth, people should have consecrated their whole lives to contemplating only one thing: felicity.<sup>122</sup> (151)

Just as for Bitov’s narrator, the turning point of the-other-animal’s uncanniness for Miłosz’s protagonist is a bird’s dead body, which the writer does not so much attempt to describe as object as rather tries to express the change in perception that marks the very moment of estrangement and further reflection:

It’s hard to explain to someone who’s never done it what it’s like to retrieve a duck killed by one’s own hand.... it’s the interval between seeing it up close and touching it that counts. In the beginning it’s no more than a floating object to which you’re drawn by curiosity. When touched, it becomes a dead bird. But at the moment it lies within reach, barely an arm’s length away, when its speckled

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<sup>121</sup> “...dźwięczność ... niebywałą ilością liter” (Miłosz, *Dolina Issy* 137).

<sup>122</sup> “Nazwać i zamknąć ptaka w piśmie to prawie to samo, co mieć go na zawsze. Nieskończona ilość barw, odcieni, świstów, gwizdów, trzepotów—przewracając karty miał je tutaj przed sobą, działał i porządkował jakoś nadmiar tego, co jest. W ptakach wszystko właściwie skłania do niepokoju ... I ludzie uważają ptaki za drobny szczegół, taką sobie ruchomą ozdobę, ledwo raczą ją zauważyć—kiedy powinni by byli całe życie poświęcić temu jednemu celowi, jeżeli znaleźli się razem z podobnymi dziwami na ziemi: rozpamiętywaniu szczęścia” (Miłosz, *Dolina Issy* 137).



belly lies bobbing up and down in the water, there is always the promise of a surprise. For we never know whom we may have killed—a duck-philosopher perhaps, or a duck-explorer...<sup>123</sup> (*The Issa Valley* 197-98)

In his novel *Awaiting Monkeys* (*Ozhydaniie obez'ian*), Bitov goes so far as to put into the mouth of one of his most controversial characters, Pavel Petrovich, the idea that “we exist in darkness as in death”<sup>124</sup> (213-14). As usual for Pavel Petrovich from “Man in a Landscape,” death is for the most part an optical metaphor: “We don’t see the objects—we see the way the light falls on them... And being dead is a more real state than being alive. Because the dead man doesn’t see the objects surrounding him: he himself is an object, merely illuminated from the outside”<sup>125</sup> (214). Within this complicated optics, “the bird is more dead” than man because “she is dead” even “when flying”<sup>126</sup> (214); her death means that she, as an object, lives in darkness, not her own, but ours; and therefore she is “death’s herald among all people”<sup>127</sup> (215).

Nevertheless, the complex image of death, in spite of its strength as an estrangement technique, sometimes recedes before a “childlike perception of reality in Bitov’s early prose,” which Sven Spieker directly links to the “resurgence of the Modernist device of defamiliarization” (34). To understand what the “childlike perception” in Bitov means, we need to look at the problem of death and language from Agamben’s perspective. However radical and contradictory the statements of Pavel Petrovich are, his position resembles what Agamben sees

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<sup>123</sup> “Jeżeli ktoś nie sięgał po zabita przez siebie kaczkę, trudno mu to wytłumaczyć. ... wszystko zawiera się pomiędzy zobaczeniem jej z bliska i dotknięciem. Jest najpierw przedmiotem na wodzie, do którego ciągnie nas ciekawość. Dotknięta, zmienia się w martwą kaczkę, nic więcej. Ale moment, kiedy już, w zasięgu ręki, kołysze się wypukłość jej dropatego brzuszka, kusi obietnicą niespodzianki. Bo nie wiemy, kogo zabiliśmy. Może kaczkę-filozofa, kaczkę-odkrywcę...” (Miłosz, *Dolina Issy* 179).

<sup>124</sup> «...что мы во тьме, как в смерти» (Bitov, “Ozhydaniie Obez’ian” 460).

<sup>125</sup> «Мы не видим предметов—мы видим освещение их. ... И мертвый есть более реальное состояние, чем живой. Потому что он не видит предметов, окруживших его: он сам—предмет, лишь освещенный снаружи» (Bitov, “Ozhydaniie Obez’ian” 460).

<sup>126</sup> «...птица более мертва. Она мертва в полете» (Bitov, “Ozhydaniie Obez’ian” 461).

<sup>127</sup> «...у всех народов она вестница смерти» (Bitov, “Ozhydaniie Obez’ian” 461).

as the negativity of Western metaphysics, which proposes language and death as the main faculties of man. Humans defined as speaking and mortal beings necessarily posit their ethos, the Heideggerian proper dwelling place, in the negativity of death, or nothingness, and Voice, whose “interstitial status between the animal *phoné* and signification ensures that it is the negative ground of man’s appearance in language, of his ontological grasping of the taking place of language” (Mills 17). In Bitov’s *Awaiting Monkeys*, Pavel Petrovich directly posits death as the dwelling place of man, his ambience and habitat:

In death we become a habitat, a homogenous one, like water or air... In life we are separated from one another by opacity, life is not homogenous, it is scattered like peas. Oh, if only life were a habitat! There would be no death. So our habitat is death, not life. ... And life doesn’t end with death, we live in it, in death. Death isn’t separate—it is the habitat of life.<sup>128</sup> (214)

Death in Bitov, similarly to Agamben, is associated with the darkness of man, who, being subject to language, places his aspirations beyond the language’s self-reference in the sphere of extra-linguistic empirical experience. In Miłosz’s “Meaning,” the final promise of the lyrical *I*’s word to run and run “through interstellar fields, through the revolving galaxies”<sup>129</sup> (*New and Collected Poems* 569) is a negative cry of rebellion rather than a positive program of overcoming the meaninglessness of the world. With his word, which “calls out, protests, screams”<sup>130</sup> (569), the poetic speaker is venturing a desperate attempt at reverting the Voice’s self-reference and lack of transcendence by sending it as messenger into the sublime chronotope of cosmos. We

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<sup>128</sup> «В смерти мы становимся средой, однородной, как вода или воздух ... в жизни мы отделены друг от друга непрозрачностью, жизнь неоднородна, она рассыпана как горох. О, если бы жизнь была средой! То и смерти бы не было. Так что смерть—это наша среда, а не жизнь. ... И не жизнь заканчивается смертью, а мы в ней живем, в смерти. Смерть не отдельна, она—среда жизни» (Bitov, “Ozhydaniie Obez’ian” 460-61).

<sup>129</sup> “Na międzygwiazdne pola, w kołowrót galaktyk” (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 1036).

<sup>130</sup> “I protestuje, woła, krzyczy” (Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie* 1036).

witness a similar scream of desperation in Miłosz's *The Issa Valley*. Baltazar, a character troubled by alcoholism and other “demons,” is utterly disappointed with the lack of transcendence both for his ambience and for himself. The narrator explains Baltazar's “savage howl” as “a cry protesting the fact that the earth was the earth; the sky, the sky. Against Nature's boundaries. Against the law which says every ‘I’ must be itself and nothing more”<sup>131</sup> (*The Issa Valley* 233). By contrast, Bitov, whose prose requires such intellectual tricksters as Pavel Petrovich to defy the comfort of metaphysical assumptions, is more inclined to think of a positive space for humanity's ethos. In this proclivity Bitov resembles Agamben's turn to the linguistics of infancy.

Borrowing the idea of an “originary infancy” from Hölderlin (Durantaye 91), Agamben posits the concept of infancy in its forgotten etymological meaning of “in-fancy” (Latin *infans*), “speechless” or “unable to speak.” Agamben says that “man is not... ‘the animal that has the language’ but instead the animal deprived of language and therefore obliged to receive it from elsewhere” (*Infancy and History* 57). When compared to animals, which have their own voices from birth, humans have to acquire or appropriate speech in order to become proper subjects. Infancy for Agamben means first of all potentiality: the only chance to return to the proper human experience. In his “Infancy and History: An Essay on the Destruction of Experience,” Agamben addresses Walter Benjamin's concern about the decline of experience in the modern world. After Kant's *Critiques*, with their clear differentiation between the transcendental subject and the empirical individual, human subjectivity has been constantly reduced to psychological consciousness where the subject of knowledge merges with the subject of experience (*Infancy and History* 32). Contrary to this metaphysical approach, Agamben sees a possibility of a pure

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<sup>131</sup> “...dziki skowyt ... Przeciwno temu, że ziemia jest ziemia, niebo jest niebo i nic więcej. Przeciwno granicom, jakie zakreśliła nam natura. Przeciwno konieczności, przez którą ja jest zawsze ja” (Miłosz, *Dolina Issy* 213).

experience involving language. Because language is humanity's ethos, or a proper dwelling place (Agamben follows Heidegger in his basic concepts), the experience of infancy appears to be humanity's only chance at returning to its originary experience of entering into its ethos—language—and thus acquiring its proper identity.

Infancy in Agamben does not signify the actual biological stage of human development, and therefore resembles other origin fantasies, marked by the law of belatedness, such as Freud's originary scene of the emergence of culture. In Bitov's novella "Dacha District," the recognition of infancy experience as "mute condition that necessarily precedes the human being's taking up the position of speaking subject" (Mills 24) opens to the adult protagonist, Sergei, who suspends his everyday activities to use his available leisure time to observe his baby son. Sergei's empathy with the baby helps him recognize his usual state of mind and experience of the environment as death: "Floundering in the ocean of time, he was longer and longer staying at home and was constantly seeing his son nearby—a creature so perfectly alive that he felt ashamed of everything dead in himself, and all the more of such a dead thing as the registration and reflection on all this dead stuff"<sup>132</sup> (Bitov, "Dachnaia Mestnost'" 12).

Upon establishing the vital opposition of his adult mindset and attitude to the environment as dead and his son's as truly alive, the narrator underlines the key role of the baby in the new connection with the world that Sergei has begun to experience. The character's descent into infancy has his son as a mediator: in that new bond with the child, Sergei "was rather subjected to his son, not otherwise; he saw through his son's eyes. Since yesterday, he has

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<sup>132</sup> «Барахтаясь в море времени, он все больше сидел дома и постоянно видел рядом сына, существо столь совершенно живое, что становилось стыдно всего неживого в себе, а тем более такой неживой вещи, как фиксация и переживание в себе этого неживого» (Bitov, "Dachnaia Mestnost'" 12).

seen everything clearer, but with his son, with his eyes, the vision has been even sharper”<sup>133</sup> (34). The experience of infancy, in Agamben’s understanding of it, takes place for Bitov’s protagonist when he undergoes the process of entering into the Symbolic order of the language together with the baby:

He carried his son along the village as though along a huge ABC book... They saw a river, and he was telling him, “See, river?”—and his son was looking at the river. Sergei was telling, “This is a river,” and it really was a river. He was telling his son, “This is a goat,” and it was really a goat. He was telling his son: this is a tree, this is a boy, this is a house—and all of them held true to their names. Sergei wouldn’t be able to express in words what the matter was and what exactly was happening. He sensed something genius in that denominative simplicity of things and words, and he had an impression that he found himself on some high-level threshold, beyond which everything finally begins, and that probably there had been few who had ever stood on that threshold of new logic, new thinking, new world.<sup>134</sup> (Bitov, “Dachnaia Mestnost” 34)

In Bitov’s later works, following “The Dacha District,” Agamben’s *experimentum linguae* of infancy becomes attainable also as a special attribute of his *genius loci*, such as the unique spot in “Man in a Landscape” or the Kurish Spit in “Birds.” In the latter novella, the narrator takes up the problem of the homogenous habitat, whose only real embodiment was

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<sup>133</sup> «Причем скорее в этой связи в подчинении находился он, а не сын, скорее он видел глазами сына. Со вчерашнего все виделось ему острее, но с сыном, с его глазами, вроде и еще обострялось» (Bitov, “Dachnaia Mestnost” 34).

<sup>134</sup> «Он возил сына по поселку, как по огромному букварю... Они видели речку, он говорил ему: «Видишь, речка?»—сын смотрел на речку. Сергей говорил: «Это речка», и это была действительно речка. Он говорил сыну: «Вот коза», и это была действительно коза. Он говорил сыну: вот дерево, вот мальчик, вот дом,—и все это было действительно так, как он это ему говорил. Сергей бы не мог сказать сейчас в словах, в чем дело и что с ним творится. Он ощущал нечто гениальное в этой назывной простоте вещей и слов, и ему казалось, он находится на каком-то высшем пороге, за которым-то все и начинается, и что на этом пороге новой логики, нового мышления, нового мира, наверно, редко кто стоял» (Bitov, “Dachnaia Mestnost” 34)

negatively defined by Pavel Petrovich in *Awaiting Monkeys* as death. The theme is initiated with an argument similar to de Man's, of Romantic self-deception in symbol ideology, which erroneously presupposes a special relationship of correspondences "between mind and nature, between subject and object" (de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" 191): "Romanticism is bound up with the idea of existence in a homogenous habitat, an existence inaccessible to us by nature"<sup>135</sup> (Bitov, "Birds" 36-37). Then "the only homogenous habitat accessible to man" is defined as "the realm of spirit"<sup>136</sup> (37). This is probably the mysterious X responsible for "the homogeneity of habitat that [the narrator] nearly experienced here"<sup>137</sup> (37) and represented by the place's "peculiar incorporeality"<sup>138</sup> (38), as "even ... the timelessness of sand, water, sky, and solitude [could not] have created this effect"<sup>139</sup> (37). Only in this paradoxical spiritual "incorporeality" do such Agambean oxymorons as death without negativity and language without Voice become possible. "Death," says the narrator of "Birds," "is somehow inherently characteristic of this place, though in every respect it's a true paradise"<sup>140</sup> (27). The experience that Bitov's narrator has in that magical *genius loci*, the Kurish Spit, is exactly what Agamben means in *Language and Death* when he writes about the possibility of returning to ethos: "To exist in language without being called there by any Voice, simply to die without being called by death, is...for man...his *ethos*, his dwelling, always already presented in the history of metaphysics as demonically divided into the living and language, nature and culture, ethics and logic, and therefore only attainable in the negative articulation of a Voice" (96). In Bitov's

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<sup>135</sup> «Романтизм связан с идеей существования в однородной среде, недоступного нам по природе» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 286).

<sup>136</sup> «Лишь сфера духа является для человека доступной однородной средой» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 287).

<sup>137</sup> «...однородности среды, в которой я здесь почти пребывал» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 287).

<sup>138</sup> «...особого бесплотного состояния» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 288).

<sup>139</sup> «Но и ... эта безвременность песка, воды, неба и безлюдья в сумме не могли бы дать того эффекта» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 287).

<sup>140</sup> «Этому месту как-то существенно присуща смерть, хотя со всех точек зрения тут суший рай» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 276).

unique place, there is no disparity or contradiction between “the living and language” because of “the extraordinary mix of soul and body peculiar to it”<sup>141</sup> (“Birds” 27). The narrator’s entering into infancy is an exercise in forgetting that the world is already irretrievably symbolized, and a chance to experience the world’s meaningfulness without the metaphysical baggage of name or logos:

What I saw had no name. I saw water, I saw fish, I saw sky, I saw a bird....

Words, at last, were empty as the weightless chitinous integuments mingled here with the sand. So they were empty after all. I had become separated from language, which keeps droning at me that the world exists, that it’s everywhere I go, it’s right here.<sup>142</sup> (Bitov, “Birds” 49)

Bitov’s experience of infancy marks the point at which his origin fantasy of language in “Dacha District” and “Birds” merges with a similar fantasy of the originary vision in “Man in a Landscape.” In this experience, his characters receive, however illusory, opportunities to find themselves—belatedly—in a place of origin where they have never been. That is why Bitov’s impossible “true landscape,” the originary one, should not contain man; it is man himself. However, it is not the man of metaphysics but the infant, as pure potentiality of entering his—non-occluded—world anew. The infant *is* the true landscape: “Oh, if only I could—the Child! ... No one has painted him yet. Because he’s not man, not beast, not God... Or maybe he *is* God...

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<sup>141</sup> «...о некоей чрезвычайной воплощенности, свойственной именно этому месту» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 276-7).

<sup>142</sup> «Не было имени у того, что я видел. Я увидел воду, я увидел рыбу, я увидел небо, я увидел птицу... Слова были наконец пусты, как легчайшие хитиновые покровы, смешавшиеся здесь с песком. Так ведь они и есть—пусты. Я отделился от языка, бубнящего мне, что мир есть, что он на каждом шагу, что—вот он» (Bitov, “Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka” 299-300).

His face is like great water, ever flowing, its meaning is not of our world. Have you seen a true landscape? Look into his face! You'll be blinded"<sup>143</sup> (Bitov, "Man in a Landscape" 134).

In conclusion, the representation and problematization of environmental appearances in Bitov and Miłosz have a similar ontological point of departure: for Miłosz, it is the "incomprehensible borderline between mind and flesh" (*New and Collected Poems* 434), while for Bitov it is the problem of compatibility between God's creation and the human capacities of reception. Both view man from the Heideggerian perspective as an entity of time, which opens Miłosz to the drama of the perishable ontic world, and Bitov to the problem of man's place in creation. Miłosz does not seem to share Heidegger's enthusiasm in regard to *Ereignis*, the primal event of estrangement, where *Dasein* forever loses its integrity to obtain the temporal-spatial world of the ontic beings. For the Polish author, the world is forever divided into this side and the other side: the prelapsarian unity of timelessness with the limited fairy-tale space and the thrownness of all beings into the hostility of the limitless space and the implacability of time that urges us on toward death. Temporality indeed opens the beauty of the world, whose aesthetics for Miłosz is unquestionably dominated by the pre-eminence of Eros, or mutual attraction of the material beings and substances. The shared corporeality brings the poet a true "amazement" at the marvels and the multiplicity of the ontic and gives him the key for the intimate comprehension of the pain of the living, but at the same time this sympathy makes him question the purposiveness of individual entities, doomed to disappear forever. That is why the tension between this side with its preponderance of materiality and evanescent beauty, and the other side with the ultimate meaning as *telos* for every individual being, is never resolved in Miłosz. His originary fantasy is, therefore, directed to the future of the heretic apokatastasis, the resurrection

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<sup>143</sup> «О, если бы я смог—младенца!.. Его еще никто не нарисовал. Потому что он не человек, не зверь, не Бог... А может, и Бог... У него лицо—как великая вода, всегда течет, ничего нашего не значит. Видел ли ты истинный пейзаж? Взгляни в его лицо!—ослепнешь» (Bitov, "Ptitsy ili Oglasheniie Cheloveka" 383).



of all up to the every little thing, to which the poet resorts in the view of his, however rebellious, distrust in the power of Voice and memory to preserve the uniqueness and purposefulness of the world.

Similarly to Miłosz, Bitov is suspicious of man's capacity of adequate representation of the created world, due to man's being subject to language with its desire to possess rather than comprehend. The experience of the gap between the name and the thing is of paramount importance for Bitov as well as for Miłosz; both of them employ similar strategies of defamiliarization, from the alienated image of a dead bird to the unique experience of the appropriation of the Symbolic in childhood. Unlike in Miłosz, though, in Bitov we witness sympathy toward the originary event of appropriation; that is, toward Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis*. That is why each uses the defamiliarization of childhood with a different purpose: for Miłosz's protagonist Tomasz (*The Issa Valley*), the entering into the historical time and the Symbolic means the loss of the prelapsarian unity; by contrast, Bitov sees in the experience of infancy a potential for man's return to his proper place of dwelling, which, for Agamben, is language without the negativity of the Voice, or the metaphysical illusion of reference. Those differences inevitably stem from the discrepancy in the authors' points of departure: while Miłosz is preoccupied with the purposiveness and preservation of the ontic, Bitov's concern is the possibility of humanity's return to its ethos, the Heideggerian proper dwelling place. Bitov's fantasy of origin is usually connected with unique places, *genius loci*, where his characters undergo sophisticated philosophical debates as well as penetrate through the cultural layers of time and space, only to arrive at the understanding of the impossibility of the Husserlian *epoché*, with its claim of the possibility of reduction of senses in the perception of ambience. That is why, in their yearning for the originary landscape devoid of any traces of man, Bitov's characters

go through successive cultural fantasies, such as the Freudian “oceanic” feeling and the Romantic sublimity of the wild as well as the uncanniness of the frontier, the Heideggerian thinging of the thing as an ancient temple, and the fourfold, to come to conclusion that, in spite of all the efforts, there is always an indispensable remainder, the spectre of man himself and the belatedness of perception that occlude the landscape as an object of the pure gaze. In fact, due to this obstruction, landscape in Bitov appears to be the Lacanian object-cause-of-desire—the desire for the pure gaze, or, in Žižek’s terminology, an ideal parallax object. In accord with the idea of the experience of infancy as a return to ethos, Bitov’s origin fantasy concludes with the imperceptible link between the inscrutability of a baby’s face and the impossibility of landscape.

## Chapter 2. Genuine Wilderness and Gendered Spaces

At least two of the terms from this chapter's title should be read as crossed out or suspended: "genuine" and "wilderness." Genuine wilderness as such is always an object of belief, or, speaking psychoanalytically, of desire; in Lacanian terms, it can be identified as the Thing, *das Ding*, which does not really exist and therefore means nothing because it resists symbolization (Homer 88). Yet because "*das Ding* is still attached to whatever is open, lacking, or gaping at the centre of our desire" (Lacan, *Seminar Book VII* 84), upon entering the signifier of the Symbolic order, the Thing becomes "represented by an individual signifier, an *object* of desire," and "thus the one real Thing which stirs our desire is refracted into a *series* of objects which our desire pursues" (Lewis 50). Individual places—or rather their images—become objects of a special investment of desire, and those objects, fortified by fantasy formations are individual *objects a*, or objects-causes-of-desire. One of the cultural examples of such places can be *genius loci*, mostly associated in Western tradition with artificial landscapes from the time of Roman antiquity until the Romantic period. From the Romantic period on, the sublimity of wilderness represents an array of concepts and images that become objects-causes of artists' desire.

In his Seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis, Lacan underscores that the Thing, or "the object as such," is a "lost" object, which "will never be found" (52). But Lacan also paradoxically says, "the object is by nature a refound object. That it was lost is a consequence of that—but after the fact. It is thus refound without our knowing, except through the refinding, that it was ever lost" (118). This convoluted explanation stands for the temporal inversion similar to the Freudian notion of belatedness, investigated in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (202-205) with respect to the origins of the consciousness of guilt. The Lacanian Thing is akin to any cultural

origin, which is unattainable, lost, precisely because it has to be constructed later, because of its absence, which also makes it possible for the fantasies of reconstruction to arise. As Berndt Herzogenrath elucidates, “the origin of a given culture can only be invented in retrospect, is a *belated effect* of that very culture which is said to be founded on it” (89). To rephrase Lacan, we can say that the Thing would not have been lost if it had not been constantly refound.

Undoubtedly, authors who look to reconstruct the *genius loci* of their lost childhood re-find it in the images that their memory and fantasy create for them in retrospect, making these unattainable places exist in the future-in-the-past tense, replacing the work of ideological signifiers for the lost object. A more interesting instance of such a work occurs when the temporal gap, accountable for the effect of belatedness, is fortified by a spatial barrier, as in émigré writers who turn to Mnemosyne to resurrect the beloved places of their childhood or youth; for example, Adam Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz* or Czesław Miłosz’s *The Issa Valley*. On a more global cultural scale, this phenomenon is very close to a special “feeling for time” which Mikhail Bakhtin called “a historical inversion”:

The essence of this inversion is found in the fact that mythological and artistic thinking locates such categories as purpose, ideal, justice, perfection, the harmonious condition of man and society and the like in the *past*. Myths about paradise, a Golden Age, a heroic age, an ancient truth, as well as the later concepts of a “state of nature,” of natural, innate rights and so on, are all expressions of this historical inversion. To put it in somewhat simplified terms, we might say that a thing that could and in fact must only be realized exclusively in the *future* is here portrayed as something out of the *past*, a thing that is in no

sense part of the past's reality, but a thing that is in its essence a purpose, an obligation. (147)

This chapter looks at works in which the lost object of wilderness unfolds in an interesting array of artistic and ideological representations revolving around the sense of original unity with nature. In Georges Bugnet's *The Forest* (1935), the protagonists, Roger and Louise, suffer a symbolical revenge of the Bakhtinian "historical inversion": they try to return to wilderness as to the lost paradise; however, the real wilderness that they come back to is not the wilderness as the constructed object of their desire. Their story is mostly interesting not because they fail to recognize that Eden is forever closed and become victims of the repeated expulsion, but because of the gender-marked distribution of the wilderness chronotope, which sustains the ideological core of wilderness as their object-cause-of-desire, viewed differently from their respective gender perspectives. The Lacanian *object a*, as Slavoj Žižek points out, "*exists—its presence can be discerned—only when a landscape is viewed from a certain perspective*. More precisely, *objet petit a...*, that unfathomable X which forever eludes the symbolic grasp... causes the multiplicity of symbolic perspectives" (*The Parallax View* 18). Gender-marked symbolic perspectives are among the most ideologically saturated types of ecological chronotope. The ecomimetic field and its imagery, organized around wilderness qua *objet petit a*, propels a female figure as a *genius loci* of wilderness's genuineness, projected in *The Forest* in a negative image of the earth as false Sophia-Wisdom, in Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* as the apparition of Mrs. Potter, the guardian spirit of the valley and at the same time its materially tangible body of the landscape, and in Watson's short story "Rough Answer" as an ecomimetic soundscape, associated with the female protagonist, Margaret.

## 2.1. The Sword of the Cherubim: The Return to Nature in Georges Bugnet's *The Forest*

Georges Bugnet's *The Forest* (1935) narrates a story of the pioneer settlers in the Canadian wilderness; specifically, a young couple from France who come to Northern Alberta in a hope of changing their future. Lured by the aesthetic and economic attractiveness of the northern wild, they hold on to the illusion of the "state of nature," which humankind had relinquished, as though voluntarily, but nevertheless can return to from the hardships of the civilized world. Bugnet shows, however, that the gates to the Garden of Eden are forever closed, and the Cherubim vigilantly guards it with his sword. David Carpenter draws a parallel between the French immigrant couple and the biblical Adam and Eve: "Like Adam and Eve they end up being driven from their garden of paradise into a world of death and defeat" (72). To be more precise, the French Adam and Eve come to the already cursed terrain, into the very heart of the natural struggle for survival, and they are expelled not from the Eden but from their illusion, from their own *objet a*. Glen Moulaison discusses the image of wilderness in *The Forest* in terms of its otherness in regard to the French culture and its traditional novel of the soil—the otherness that helps the Francophone settlers in the Canadian West, to whom Bugnet himself belonged, find their identity in the new country (142). The main focus of this discussion, however, is *the other's desire*, directed toward the rich imagery of wilderness, desire that governs the behaviours of the two protagonists and causes their reactions to the challenges of the wild. In accordance with Bakhtin's "historical inversion," they project to the future their images of the past, and with the series of failures that they suffer, Bugnet uncovers the ideological implications of their delusion.

The idea of wilderness as humankind's *Magna Mater* has been current approximately from the end of the eighteenth century. The original Adam and Eve were not evicted from wilderness as their home: in William Cronon's words, when they "were driven from that garden, the world they entered was a wilderness that only their labour and pain could redeem. Wilderness, in short, was a place to which one came only against one's will, and always in fear and trembling" (71). Up to the end of the eighteenth century, the notion "wilderness" was associated with such words as "deserted," "savage," "desolate," or "barren": "its connotations were anything but positive" (Cronon 70). In John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, impassable wilderness surrounds the Garden of Eden and thus denies the fallen people any access to it. Wilderness used to be a home for Satan, the cursed land (Nash 16). Exodus relates the story of Moses and his people who were chased by Pharaoh because they had left the civilized world for the desolate wilderness, which, for the ancient mind, meant that they chose to worship the demons who dwelt there. This attitude began to change at the turn of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries with the rise of Romanticism. As Max Oelschlaeger notes, "From the governing medieval Christian perspective, wild nature had to be tamed, and thereby civilized and brought into harmony with the Divine Order" (70). Step by step, by the end of the nineteenth century, in Cronon's words, "Satan's home had become God's own temple" (72). Among the main sources responsible for this important transformation, Cronon lists two major aesthetic attitudes: the sublime and the frontier (72). In the works of Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and William Gilpin, the grandeur of nature came to symbolize not the cursed wasteland but the most prominent sign of God's creation. For the Romantics,<sup>144</sup> the sublime landscape is thought to

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<sup>144</sup> Among the abundant scholarship on the Romantic sublime, Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* explores the phenomenon from an interesting ecocritical perspective.

evoke special emotions that fortify the feeling of the divine presence; in short, “sublimity suggested the association of God and wild nature” (Nash 46).

In *The Forest*, wilderness for the European settlers appears as both the frontier and the sublime. But at the same time, their initial intention is not so much aesthetic as it is almost purely economic. This entrepreneurial attitude is represented in the novella as a masculine spirit: only the young husband, Roger, breathes the crisp air of the modern man, the conqueror of nature. After the centuries of mutual apprehensive separation between man and wilderness, this spirit is a child of the “alchemy of modernism,” which, according to Oelschlaeger, began in the Renaissance and still continues today:

Modernism... effected an ideological conversion of the wilderness into material nature, both as an object of scientific inquiry and as the means to fuel economic progress. Modernism thus underlies the emergence of a profound homocentrism, still dominant in the world, which may be characterized as *the ideology of the man infinite* or the rise of *Lord Man*, that is, a radical change in humankind’s sense of relative proportions. (69)

The project of a remote farmstead was solely Roger’s entrepreneurial plan of squeezing profit from the uninhabited wilderness and in no time—in ten years they would be still so young—to return to their civilized way of life, to lead the elite life to which their French cultural upbringing had bound them, but that their financial status had not allowed. The husband’s idea was also to prove himself to be a viable Robinson, not the lonely protagonist of Daniel Defoe’s novel, but rather Johann Wyss’s *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812), as he, Roger, takes full responsibility for his wife, Louise. First of all, he thinks about her when dreaming about their future life as prosperous bourgeois back in France, and he looks at the Canadian wilderness



enterprise as a temporary several-year project. Roger is romantic and naïve, but nevertheless fully realizes that the place at which they arrived is not exactly the Garden of Eden, but the one they are going to make for themselves, because they are the Robinsons, the dominant species: “Without these bloodthirsty mosquitoes it would be a dream”<sup>145</sup> (Bugnet, *The Forest* 9). The novella begins with these words from Roger to his wife. This dream is far from the ideas of deep ecology or a primitive religious futurism: Roger’s first action on the new land is killing a bird—the triumphant act of the civilized successor of the wilderness, of the “Lord Man,” and not the one who yearns for the peaceful coexistence of lamb and lion in the ideal eternity under the God’s auspices.

The arrogance of his superficial civilized superiority, intent on conquering the wild lands of the North by means of a positivist spirit and quasi-educated approach, proves that Roger’s knowledge of wilderness is a perishable product of Romantic literature. He and his wife came to the place in spring, the time of hopes and awakening to life, so the mosquitoes could not possibly prevent him from viewing the whole adventure as still a dream, a sweet fruit of his youthfulness and literariness. Out of the same source proceeds Roger’s condescending remark about the Roys, their nearest neighbors, who have been humbly administering their plot of land for several years prior to Roger and Louise’s arrival: “they are good people, but without education. All they understand is the drudgery of farming. I’m going to show them how one can get full value out of the land. You’ll see”<sup>146</sup> (28). Roger’s entrepreneurial enthusiasm toward the wild stems from the Enlightenment belief in the unsurpassable power of an educated mind and from the “freedom from determination, the bedrock of capitalist ideology,” which, according to Timothy Morton,

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<sup>145</sup> “Sans ces enragés maringouis, ce serait le rêve” (25). Hereinafter we use the English translation of *The Forest* in the main text and provide the original French equivalents in the footnotes. The page numbers of the original text refer to: Bugnet, Georges. *La forêt: Roman*. Montréal: Typo, 1993.

<sup>146</sup> “... ce sont de braves gens, mais sans éducation. Et ils ne connaissent que la routine du métier. Je m’en vais leur montrer comment on s’y prend pour donner à une terre toute sa valeur. Tu verras ça” (46).

was one of the main attractions that wilderness presented to the Romantic consumerists (*Ecology without Nature* 113). The rest of the story, however, relates the penalty that Roger and his wife pay for those reckless and presumptuous words. Unlike his self-confident protagonist, the author's position is closer to American naturalism rather than to the Robinson novel or the novel of the soil. Bugnet's naturalistic perspective, in which, as Dick Harrison puts it, "man pits his will against nature's" (114), and the style of his descriptions rendering the sublimity of the wild are reminiscent of Jack London's northern stories, much more so than the naturalism of the latter's *The Valley of the Moon* (1913). Saxon Brown and Billy Roberts, the young couple from London's novel, have just come to the realization that "folks wasn't made to live in cities"; unlike Roger and Louise, they have found their "perfect plot of land" deep in the country and fulfilled themselves in recovering "their dignity and self-sufficiency" (Tandt 97-98). Bugnet's *The Forest* is an opposing counterpart of the urban naturalistic novel at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, whose chronotope also pushes its outcast protagonist to the margins of existence. Different only in the character of the immediate environment, both chronotopes easily deprive an individual of his private space and time, with the only difference that, in the urban novel, he is suffocated in the ambience of de-individualized masses of people and buildings, and in the wilderness novel, the character becomes an outcast, an artificial alien, lost among the trees, snow, and stillness. The protagonists of Bugnet's novella begin their journey and end it with almost the same, essentially unchangeable narrator's perspective, which has nothing in common with Roger's "Lord Man's" hubris: "Two human beings, scarcely visible in the vastness of this virgin land"<sup>147</sup> (9). This alienating force of wilderness, expressed so vividly in *The Forest*, came also as a shock for the French elites, who, as André Vanasse testifies, along

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<sup>147</sup> "À peine visibles dans l'immense contrée vierge, ces deux êtres humains" (25).

with the clergy, were confident that “life on earth was only able to give citizens peace, serenity at happiness” (17), exactly what the novel of the soil would suggest.

If we were to go a little more into Roger’s motivation behind his enterprise, we would discover a collusion of emotional and rational reasons that pushed him to bring his wife and himself to the brink of civilization. Basically, he sees the enterprise as a perilous journey that must bring his family wealth and happiness upon their return to the known world. The inherent perils, however, present a necessary challenge for a young man who seeks to show off his manhood by dint of both positive knowledge, guaranteed by good upbringing and education, and masculinity of a potent male. The social goal presupposes the traditional patriarchal problem of winning the bride’s family by proving his ability to provide for her by high standards: “In two or three years we’ll have a superb property. In ten years we’ll have made our fortune, and we’ll return to France. Your father will no longer be ashamed of me. He’ll welcome us back. I’ll be scarcely thirty-six years old and you hardly thirty. We’ll still have our youth with many years of comfortable living and good times ahead of us”<sup>148</sup> (12). In addition, this social plan has another, emotional component, which could be labelled as a romantic book-driven dream about life in the wilderness: “Hey, Louise. Now how do you like our Swiss-Family-Robinson life? Fascinating, isn’t it? Just the two of us, alone with nature”<sup>149</sup> (11). In response to the instinctual apprehension of his wife, he hurries to suppress the perils of this romantic journey through the rationality of his thought-out plan: “Game and fish are of primary importance to my project”<sup>150</sup> (10). To rationalize the project even further, the project, which, as becomes more and more evident,

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<sup>148</sup> “En deux ou trois ans nous aurons ici une propriété superbe. Dans dix ans nous aurons fait fortune et nous retournerons en France. Ton père n’aura plus honte de moi. Il nous rouvrira sa porte. Je n’aurai guère que trente-six ans, et toi à peine trente. Ce sera encore la jeunesse, avec de longues années d’aisance et de Bonheur devant nous” (28).

<sup>149</sup> “Eh bien, Louise, ne la trouves-tu pas intéressante, cette vie de Robinson? Rien que nous deux, seuls avec la nature” (27).

<sup>150</sup> “Chasse et pêche sont parmi les principaux articles de mon programme” (26).

belongs exceptionally to him and is by no means their shared assumption, Roger refers to the “advice of the agriculturalists,” who recommended that remote destination for its ostensibly “good soil, water, hay, and woods”<sup>151</sup> (12). In this manly and seemingly calculated-through project, the emotional component in Roger, however, prevails over the rational one. Louise, who presents herself as full of apprehension but nevertheless more rational and justifiable in her fear of the wilderness, is sure that her husband—with his education and his knowledge of English—would do better and would succeed much more quickly in the city, to which Roger replies with romantic indignation about the horrible dullness of “bureaucratic jobs”<sup>152</sup> (15). The narrator, who is not willing to trick and delude his readers for long, ends the first chapter with an important warning: the young couple “finished their supper in silent disagreement”<sup>153</sup> (13).

Disagreement would become a usual state of their relationship from now on. The one-sidedness of the decision to go to the wilderness in the end proved fatal for Roger’s project. His wife was not ready to share his enthusiasm; all she was able to offer was a promise of faith, although not blind, in the miraculous ability of her husband to overcome all the difficulties. From the outset, Louise’s concession to dwell in this wild country is strongly predicated upon her faith in the power of her husband and his masculine heroic attitude: “Instinctively, the young wife, still in her elegant city clothes, pressed close against the tall man, who put his arms around her”<sup>154</sup> (9). Even in the second half of the novella, when it becomes evident that the young couple is failing in their struggle with nature and Louise’s city clothes have regressed into squalid tatters, she remains the same innately unaltered French girl who would never swap the artificial lustre of civilization for the natural darkness of the forest. Her faith, however, is of little

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<sup>151</sup> “...les conseils des colons expérimentés: de la bonne terre, de l’eau, du foin, du bois” (28).

<sup>152</sup> “...le métier de bureaucrate” (32).

<sup>153</sup> “Ils terminèrent leur repas dans une silencieuse mésentente” (29).

<sup>154</sup> “Instinctivement, la jeune épouse, en élégante robe de ville, se serrait contre le grand jeune homme qui l’entourait de ses bras” (25).

support for Roger: “I must have faith in you, Roger; I left everything to follow you”<sup>155</sup> (13). Since Bugnet pictures Louise as only a follower and not a full-fledged partner, her faith becomes more of a burden or a source of guilt for her husband, who now bears the whole responsibility for her happiness and her life. Louise’s awakening the following morning, after their “silent disagreement,” in the tent, surrounded by the primeval forest, in the absence of Roger, will mark her state of mind until the rest of their wilderness story: “When she woke up the next morning, Louise found herself alone in the tent. She had not slept well and felt sullen”<sup>156</sup> (13). This negative charge of the female character in the novella makes her a figure of sacrifice, first with respect to herself and later extended toward her son. Bugnet seems to suggest, however, that the reluctance of this sacrifice brings them a rotten fruit.

Unlike Roger, Louise cannot separate her aesthetic appreciation for nature from her physical, instinctual fear of its innate hostility. For her, the nature of northern Alberta’s wilderness is “quite lovely, but it’s too savage a beauty”<sup>157</sup> (10). Her apprehensive distance from the natural surrounding is predicated upon the opposite force to that which drives her husband towards it: while Roger appears to be aesthetically-driven to the wilderness, Louise is naturally averse to it. In compliance with the patriarchal distribution of gender roles, which Bugnet follows throughout the novella, Roger’s male, contemplative attitude brings him closer to the dreamy image of nature, which he still sees from the point of view of the positivistic naturalist, adventurer, and entrepreneur; and Louise feels repulsion toward nature precisely because she is devoid of aesthetic contemplation due to her ostensible female naturalness. Because her femininity is constantly shown by the narrator as sharing the same structure with the natural

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<sup>155</sup> “Il me faut bien avoir confiance en toi, Roger, puisque j’ai tout quitté pour te suivre” (29).

<sup>156</sup> “Lorsqu’elle s’éveilla, le lendemain matin, Louise se trouva seule dans la tente. Elle avait mal dormi. Sa première humeur fut maussade” (30).

<sup>157</sup> “...assez beau, mais d’une beauté trop sauvage” (26).

wilderness, she sees nature as her competitor, her primary rival, which outnumbers her and thus gives no chance of winning the competition: “Instinct told her that this primeval forest was the legitimate proprietor of the earth, and that it would not cede its rights without stubborn resistance”<sup>158</sup> (11). Louise does not have anything from the positivist attitude of her husband. Instead of sharing his educated condescension toward nature as an object of man’s creative powers, she feels equality with it. But since she comes from the different ground, where she herself was the “proprietor,” Louise understands her encroachment on the wilderness as trespassing, done reluctantly as a sacrifice in the name of her love toward, and faith in, her husband.

Louise’s seclusion, regardless of her declaration of faith, becomes a sinister omen of the opposite—of the lack of faith and thus of a failure, among “the vast solitudes” that “she could not help interpreting” “as silent, ambiguous omens”<sup>159</sup> (14). In fact, Louise does not seem to be deprived of male contemplativeness altogether. Her natural, instinctual abhorrence toward the rival at times transforms into a cosmic fascination with the wilderness, stylistically not much different from American naturalists such as Jack London or Stephen Crane. In the heart of the forest, she feels not like the master and rightful proprietor of the land, but like a passenger in Crane’s “open boat”: in the midst of the ocean, thrown into the darkness of the indifferent elements, on the nebulous mercy of implacable and apathetic fate. That is why her almost existential drive toward freedom from the bourgeois vanity of the world is unfortunately mixed with the ontological lack of this freedom’s substantiation:

Here is peace. Human trials can no longer reach us. We are free.” But when her eyes rested on the edge of the immense forest, other thoughts crept into her heart.

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<sup>158</sup> “Un instinct lui disait que cette forêt millénaire était ici légitime propriétaire du sol et qu’elle ne céderait pas ses droits sans une opiniâtre résistance” (27-28).

<sup>159</sup> “...ces vastes solitudes, elle ne pouvait s’empêcher d’en interpreter les silencieux et divers avertissements” (30).

*What are we in the face of this gigantic impassiveness? Is it friendly? Or is it a treacherous, pitiless enemy? An instinctual fear made her shiver, as if something monstrous lay in wait for her in the nearby shadows.*<sup>160</sup> (14)

The narrator's comment, immediately following this uncovering of the character's mind, confirms the idea that the naturalist perspective, associated in *The Forest* with the female character, will dominate the male positivist attitude. The latter will eventually have to relinquish its enthusiasm in favour of the impassive entropy of nature, which man and his cultural activities are constantly pitted against, and against the backdrop of which man will always be belittled:

The great woods seemed neither menacing nor welcoming. In the warm sunlight they had a life of their own, full of imperceptible and incomprehensible movement. It had such force and abundance that it spread the whole world with a marvellous, living raiment, compared to which the works of man were but misshapen toys—dead, useless, soon reclaimed as fodder for the triumphant vegetation.<sup>161</sup> (14)

It is unclear if this narrator's remark is meant to be a continuation of Louise's inner monologue or his *objective-auctorial* point of view, but it sounds like a symbolic naturalistic pronouncement that will hover over the female character and ultimately will carve its way through the stubborn masculine ambition of Roger, toward his failure and retreat. The remote farmstead becomes a proverbial naturalistic frontier, where the civilized order of man clashes

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<sup>160</sup> "Ici, c'est la paix. Les agitations, les vexations humaines ne peuvent plus nous atteindre. Nous sommes les seuls maîtres de notre destin." Mais, lorsque ses regards se posaient sur la lisière de l'immense forêt, d'autres pensées s'infiltraient dans son cœur: "Que sommes-nous, en face de cette impassibilité géante? Est-elle amie? Ou serait-elle une ennemie perfide et sans pitié?" Une peur instinctive la faisait frissonner, comme si, là-bas cache dans l'ombre, un être inconnu la guettait" (30).

<sup>161</sup> "Les grands bois ne semblaient ni menaçants ni accueillants. Sous la chaude lumière, ils continuaient leur vie propre, pleine de ce mouvement imperceptible, incompréhensible, et cependant d'une telle puissance d'une telle ampleur, qu'il couvre incessamment le monde de vivantes et merveilleuses parures, auprès de quoi les œuvres de l'homme ne sont que jouets informes, morts, inutiles, bientôt repris en pâture par le végétal triomphant" (30-31).

against the apathetic powers of nature that by far surpass the evanescent—both on the temporal and spatial scales—moment of mankind’s history. The space of the frontier is, no doubt, a product of man’s activity: pitted against nature by the very fact of his birth and the inevitability of death, he tends to instigate a struggle with the omnipresent enemy by rushing toward the highest concentration of its powers and thus by ignoring the sense of conditional security, built up by the generations of civilization and culture.

As has been noted, if Louise has been chosen by Bugnet to share the narrator’s apprehension and naturalistic philosophy, Roger rushes to his enterprise with an optimistic ignorance, unaware that his cheerful spirit is a sign of his captivity from the very outset. The couple arrives at their destination in spring, and the spirit of awakening is the first act of serfdom and submission to the powers of the natural time that Roger so ardently showcases. His cheerful mood is his unconscious entrance into the natural cycle of Canadian wilderness.

Roger’s state of mind during the first days of their stay in the forest can be described as euphoria. The bourgeois spirit of a proprietor is mixed in him with the romantic challenge of the wilderness; this mix makes the farmstead a private lot of land that could be *explored* and *discovered*. Louise, who from the start feels the burden of all the household chores, understandably does not share her husband’s enthusiasm:

After breakfast, Roger proposed, “Would you like to come and explore my property with me a bit?”

“Yes, but first let me wash my dishes.”<sup>162</sup> (15)

The possessive pronoun “my” is highly characteristic here. This is not their mutual property; it is Roger’s. He feels that he is the one called upon to change the landscape of the

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<sup>162</sup> “Le repas fini, Roger proposa: - Veux-tu venir avec moi explorer un peu ma propriété? – Je veux bien, mais laisse-moi d’abord laver ma vaisselle” (32).



wilderness into the fertile and productive business. His interest in “his” property is moreover instigated by the virginity of the land, which makes it an even more valuable object for his excited masculinity: the object that ideally is not supposed to be shared with other males and to which his wife adopts the role of a maid, more by necessity than by choice. In this context, her answer, which narrows the circle of “her” own property to the dishes, ironically points to the primal spatial division that will govern the gendered—and highly patriarchal—chronotope of the novella: the outward openness of Roger’s masculinity and the inward closeness of Louise’s suppressed femininity.

Louise’s inward closeness is, once again, a product of imposed necessity rather than of her own free will. She understands that Roger’s invitation to share the joy of exploration is a fake gesture, or an unconscious residue of inertia, that her husband still keeps from the time of their mutual understanding. Louise instinctively recognizes that she is losing him to the virgin and thus more attractive contender. Her aside at the beginning of their wilderness story proves infallible until the end of it: “*Yes, out here Roger will gradually become less and less interested in me*”<sup>163</sup> (18). In his bedazzled excitement, blind to the irony that already makes its presence in his wife’s words (either intended by her or ascribed by the narrator), Roger invites her to share with him something that, by definition and by his own sexual caprice, can belong only to him: the aesthetic beauty of his virgin mistress, shaped in the pattern of his desire: “Look, over there, to the northwest. You can see all *my land*. Last month, when I came to visit it before registering it *in my name* at the homestead office in Edmonton, it was *this view alone* that convinced me...”<sup>164</sup> (18; emphasis mine).

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<sup>163</sup> “Oui, dans ce pays, je le crains, Roger peu à peu va prendre l’habitude de ne plus s’occuper de moi” (35).

<sup>164</sup> “Regarde là, au nord-ouest, on voit toute ma terre. Le mois dernier, quand je suis venu la visiter avant de la faire inscrire comme homestead à mon nom, à Edmonton, cette vue seule m’a convaincu” (35).

The fact that Roger was impatient to plunge into this *affair* with his landscape-mistress is further confirmed by the prolonged temporariness of their dwelling: the young couple continue to live in a tent—in the heart of the wild forest—for a time that by far surpasses the required period that would be needed for Roger to make the initial practical reconnaissance of the place. Louise several times reminds her husband of the necessity of a home, which, however, does not change the situation for the better. The home for Roger is just an extended tent, to which he returns for a short break to regain his energy and then to continue pursuing his passion: “she prepared dinner. Her husband ate hurriedly. As soon as he had finished, he picked up his rifle again and walked away...”<sup>165</sup> (22).

From their first mutual expedition over *his* property, it becomes apparent that Roger’s sublimation goes much further than the aesthetic contemplation of the pristine beauty of the landscape. He takes a special pleasure in forcing himself into the thick of the forest, discovering its secret inhabitants whose privacy he is eager to violate. He hunts and takes pride in getting the game home; later, he labours on his property to conquer its wildness and submit it to his power. In both cases, he proceeds, as during their first reconnaissance of the forest, “profaning the contemplative atmosphere of the sanctuary like an uncouth invader”<sup>166</sup> (18). Roger manages for a moment to get his wife carried away by the aesthetic appeal of the natural scenery, but even during this one journey, Roger is willing to leave Louise alone in the middle of the forest and chase some animal or bird. Aesthetic beauty does not last for long: Louise’s ruined dress and “delicate footwear”<sup>167</sup> (21), as well as the behaviour of her overly excited husband, quickly discourage her. The aesthetics of the wilderness move her only when she recognizes in it the

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<sup>165</sup> “...elle prépara le diner. Son mari avait hate de manger. Sitôt le repas fini, il reprit sa carabine et s’éloigna...” (39).

<sup>166</sup> “...profanant comme un rude envahisseur le recueillement du sanctuaire” (35).

<sup>167</sup> “...les minces chaussures” (38).

familiar features of the tamed, domesticated nature of her motherland, such as “big purple flowers” that resembled clematis. Yet, in the end:

Without being insensitive to the powerful beauty of these woods, Louise felt ill at ease with them. They had nothing in common with the polite grandeur, the gentleness, the security of European forests. In this wild place, where dead things lay everywhere, rotting and being devoured by insects and moss, where living offspring openly fed themselves on the corpses of their parents, she saw a fierce and lordly visage, expression of unrelenting cruelty which oppressed her.<sup>168</sup> (21)

Nature that appears red in tooth and claw is not something with which Louise is fascinated. Her initial instinct regarding the whole enterprise later finds its confirmation in the tragic turn of events—the death of their child—which will drive them out of the wilderness and back to the world to which they were born. It only makes the reader wonder if Bugnet wanted Louise’s repulsion toward the place to be a genuine premonition that predicted the inevitable, or the major cause of the failure, the result of her unwillingness to collaborate with her husband in fulfilling their mutual family project. While the latter might be partially true, it is quite clear that it was not exactly her fault. The former, however, seems to have more sense when considering that it reflects the irreconcilable discrepancy between culture and nature, or at least between the two different chronotopes.

Once the initial spring euphoria has passed, the temporal cycle of nature sucks Roger into its routinely chores and labour at what is meant to be his future farmstead. Because of his

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<sup>168</sup> “Sans être insensible à la puissante beauté de ces bois, Louise s’y sentait mal à l’aise. Cela n’avait rien de commun avec la grandeur polie, la douceur amiable, la sécurité des forêts d’Europe. À cette nature sauvage, où les morts gisaient partout, pourrissants, dévorés des insectes et des mousses, où les fils vivants se nourrissaient ouvertement des corps de leurs pères, elle trouvait une apparence farouche, altièrre, une expression d’impitoyable cruauté, qui lui serrait le cœur” (38).

outward inclination and the pioneer charge, he does not feel the contrast between the cultural space of his home or tent and the surrounding forest as acutely as his wife does. For Louise, however, her home is the last resort of appeasement, her last remedy for all the wrong with which she feels the whole project is about to end. Nevertheless, only radical invasions of nature into their dwelling, not his wife's feelings or state of mind, make Roger actually do something about their meagre circumstances:

But soon the rain that had seeped through the walls of the tent began to soak the trunks, so they had to set them on chunks of wood brought in from outside. The sodden floor began to numb their feet. They passed the afternoon under bedcovers, swatting at mosquitoes. Each time they thought they exterminated them, more appeared. Flies, spiders, and little caterpillars sometimes even crept up on their pillows. Finally, an enormous toad approached with cautious hops...<sup>169</sup>

(29)

While both are inexperienced in wilderness life, the probable consequences of this lack remain open only to Louise; Roger is driven by his masculine colonizing instinct and his aesthetic desire toward his property. When their neighbors, the Roys, come to help with the house, Roger's landscaping decisions strike them as utterly impractical: he wants to preserve the pines or put the cabin too close to the lake only because those things would "go so well with the landscape"<sup>170</sup> (34). By contrast, for Louise, the outer beauty of the property vanished absolutely. Her domain becomes the interior of the house, but more importantly, her landscape will be

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<sup>169</sup> "Puis il fallut placer, sur des morceaux de bois apportés du dehors, les malles et les caisses atteintes par l'eau qui s'infiltrait sous les parois de la tente. Le sol, devenu humide, glaçait leurs pieds. Ils durent passer l'après-midi sous les couvertures du lit, bataillant contre les moustiques dont il restait toujours des survivants quand ils croyaient les avoir exterminés. Des fourmis, des araignées, des chenilles même grimpaient parfois jusque sur leur oreiller. Un énorme crapaud s'avança, par sauts prudents..." (47).

<sup>170</sup> "Ils font très bien dans le paysage" (53).

narrowed down to the garden that she started to plant immediately as a source of consolation, as a piece of France in the Canadian wild. This garden is similar in its function to the one built up by Julie on the Wolmar estate in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Designed as a place of a cultural refuge, Julie's garden, as Paul de Man points out, "is in fact the result of extreme artifice," and in "this bower of bliss, contrary to the tradition of the *topos*, we are entirely in the realm of art and not that of nature" ("The Rhetoric of Temporality" 199). Bugnet's Louise, confronted by the inimical and uncontrollable multitudes of her contender, the surrounding wilderness, could totally concur with what, in de Man's words, "Rousseau has Julie say": "It is true that nature has made everything in this garden—but only under my direction, and there is nothing there that I have not ordered" ("The Rhetoric of Temporality" 199).

Everything that lies beyond the reach of Louise's garden labour, her vegetables and flowers, is full of apathetic animosity. Even when her husband and two hired Slavs make a serious step in cleaning the land of the forest, and vast space opens before her when she looks at the remote figures of men cutting the trees, Louise does not perceive it as a sign of victory. Although at some point she started to pity the trees, slain by the effort of the men and the inexorable toughness of their axes, the landscape does not appear more cultural, more human, or less ominous to her:

But the immense, venerable forest loomed behind the three men, so small at its feet. Bare, bordered by greenish grey, brightly etched against a luminous sky, its face was both transparent and inscrutable. The eye could penetrate through the first thick rows, but the obscure depths resisted any further probing. Louise could not defend herself from a sense of helplessness in the face of this tall barrier; it

looked to her like the sentinel of a mute and sinister force, crouched in the shade, lying in wait for its prey.<sup>171</sup> (49)

The paradise metaphor appears in the text of the novella only once, as a recession of the ominous imagery of the forest rather than as a constant meaningful reference: “You see, it’s a little like the Garden of Eden here. We don’t have any lions to lie down with our lambs, but we do have a rabbit who wants to fraternize with us”<sup>172</sup> (65-66). Notably, these words belong to Roger, who takes a break from hunting anything that moves on his property and makes the rabbit “hop off into the depths of the forest”<sup>173</sup> (65) by throwing a stick at it. This consoling, and somewhat humorous, episode is highly symbolic within the paradise metaphor: the multiple depictions of nature and landscape in the novella are always presented from the apprehensive Louise’s perspective, and just when her consternation cedes momentarily, she can partially sympathize with the environmental fairy-tale of her husband. During an interstitial December thaw, when Louise and Roger at last have what seems to be a mature conversation about their present and future, the forest loosens its grip for a short while:

With a quick look her eyes scoured the depths of the woods. But all was calm. The primeval forest seemed to be submitting, without any visible revolt, to its destruction at the hands of an ephemeral pygmy.

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<sup>171</sup> “Mais, derrière les trois homes, si petits à ses pieds, l’immense forêt millénaire se dressait. Défeuillée, avec une longue lisière d’un gris verdâtre, Claire, et gaie sous les reflets d’un ciel lumineux, elle avait un visage à la fois transparent et fermé. Le regard pouvait pénétrer à travers les premiers rangs serrés, puis il se perdait dans des profondeurs obscures qui ne laissaient rien deviner. Louise ne pouvait se défendre d’un sentiment d’impuissance en face de cette haute barrière qui lui paraissait veiller à la sécurité d’une muette et sinistre force, accroupie là-bas dans l’ombre, et qui attendait une proie” (69-70).

<sup>172</sup> “Tu vois, dit-il, ici c’est un peu comme au paradis terrestre. Jusqu’au lièvre qui voudrait fraterniser avec l’homme” (88).

<sup>173</sup> “...sauts dans les profondeurs de la forêt” (87).

The rest of the horizon was outlined by the grey ramparts of the forest. But there was nothing nearby in its presence that was threatening.<sup>174</sup> (64-65)

That brief thaw period manages to soothe her trepidation before the sublime of the forest and gives her some hope in her corroded relations with Roger. When both her husband and his new passion retreat for a little while, she is willing to step over her fear or prejudice of the Canadian landscape: “it’s very different from the landscapes we’re used to, but it’s not without beauty. I’ll try to understand it better”<sup>175</sup> (66). Louise proposes a bargain: she promises to take more interest in her husband’s work and the land itself, and in return she expects Roger to return to his books and his writing; that is, she wants to bring him back to the occupation that was known simultaneously to maintain Roger’s interest in her, Louise.

Trying honestly—or so it seems—to fulfill his part of the bargain, Roger manages to develop a philosophy that by its very substance safeguards him from the thinking-and-writing job. To Louise, the change that has already taken place in Roger must have seemed irreparable. What he finds by returning to the books is that books are useless and remote from reality; that is, from the philosophy propelled in the novel of the soil: “Damn it, Rousseau and his disciple Tolstoy were right. Humanity should simplify its tastes, return to nature and to elemental work. With its absurd civilization it’s become completely mad”<sup>176</sup> (68-69). Although Roger’s mind is invigorated by his last reading, the negative effect of this labour is not exactly what his wife expected from the enterprise. Being in a habit of discussing any reading with his wife, Roger is obviously exasperated by some fiction love drama. The piece that Roger recites to Louise turns

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<sup>174</sup> “Ses yeux fouillèrent d’un rapide regard la profondeur des bois. Tout y était calme. L’antique forêt semblait se soumettre sans révolte à la destruction qui lui venait aux mains d’un éphémère pygmée. La forêt encerclait tout le reste de l’horizon de sa muraille. Près d’eux cependant son aspect n’avait rien de redoutable” (86-87).

<sup>175</sup> “...admit-elle enfin, c’est bien différent de nos paysages d’autrefois, mais ce n’est pas sans beauté. J’essaierai de le mieux comprendre” (88).

<sup>176</sup> “Parbleu, c’est Rousseau, et son meilleur disciple, Tolstoï, qui ont raison. L’humanité devrait simplifier ses goûts, revenir à la nature et au travail. Avec leur absurde civilisation, ils deviennent complètement fous” (91-92).

highly symbolic in the context of their own relationships: “She felt that her entire vibrant being hung on a response from her lover. All the thoughts, all the actions of the forsaken girl strained toward this single goal—to regain the indifferent heart which had detached itself from her, and at any price”<sup>177</sup> (68). Louise seems to acknowledge—just to herself—the failure of her plan from the mere reaction of her husband to her confession that “the story of that poor woman”<sup>178</sup> from the novel has “*some meaning*”<sup>179</sup> (68). Roger’s tirade in response to her remark testifies to the opposite of what Louise had expected as a result of his return to books: “Is there any human being whose only reason for living is *amour*? Does this kind of puppet really exist? If there are any, send them out here. They’ll find something to keep them busy”<sup>180</sup> (68). The utterly tragic pronouncement of this passage is—for Louise—her husband’s egotistic blindness. There is no need to look for such a puppet far away: it is his wife, somebody who had been sent there, to the wilderness, which was supposed to have a therapeutic and pedagogical effect on her but apparently has not.

In this view, even the initial aesthetic attitude of Roger toward the environment, which he has come to conquer, mutates under the influence of his daily battle into the quasi-Hegelian philosophy of labour that is the one and only human activity that has a real contact with material reality. This material reality becomes for Roger the only source of beauty, of the aesthetic, that he is willing to acknowledge. His discussion with Louise on the subject of beauty acquires a strange shift in roles and worldview positions. The only stable thing that persists in time throughout the couple’s relationship is the domination of the husband over the wife, who is thus

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<sup>177</sup> “Elle sentait que tout son être vibrant était suspendu à la réponse de son amant. Toutes les pensées, toutes les actions de la pauvre délaissée avaient tendu à cet unique but: retenir à tout prix le cœur indifférent qui se déprenait d’elle” (91).

<sup>178</sup> “...l’histoire de cette pauvre âme” (91).

<sup>179</sup> “...pas sans intérêt” (91).

<sup>180</sup> “Y a-t-il un seul être humain pour qui l’amour soit l’unique raison de vivre? Ça existe-t-il ce genre de pantins? S’il y en a, qu’on les envoie donc par ici. Ils y trouveront de quoi s’occuper un peu plus utilement” (91).



forced to occupy positions that are, if not totally unnatural for her, then nevertheless involuntary.

In the end, she becomes deprived of any position of her own:

“But...”

“No buts. My forest, for example. Maybe civilized eyes wouldn’t find its beauty equal to the descriptions of ‘artistic’ writers. But it’s my forest, and it’s alive. Certainly I prefer it!”

“But from the artistic point of view one must maintain...”

“Art! Art! Whatever beauty human art creates will always be artificial...”<sup>181</sup> (72)

Contrary to what the traditional patriarchal notion of Mother Nature might suggest, where the woman-nature is always the one who deals with the base material reality of natural things,<sup>182</sup> the shift made in *The Forest* places a man into a position of double power: Roger both deals with the base materiality of nature and elicits his own aesthetics from his experience. In the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic, Roger succeeds in overcoming the duality that necessitates the co-dependence of the master and of the slave: the slave does not depend on the master to recognize his individuality, and the master does not need the slave to touch base with the material reality of things any more precisely because they have reunited in one person—Roger. But this seeming fullness of Roger’s posture comes into being only at the cost of depriving his wife of her place in the organism that is supposed to offset the natural duality of genders; that is, in family. Roger’s labour and its philosophy have dislodged his wife from her natural position and put her into

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<sup>181</sup> “-Pourtant...

-Il n’y a pas de pourtant. Ma forêt, par exemple, pour des yeux civilisés, peut ne pas égaler en beauté les descriptions des écrivains artistes, mais elle est ma forêt, et elle est vivante. Puis-je ne pas la préférer?

-Cependant, au point de vue artistique, ne peut-on soutenir...

-L’art! L’art!... L’art humain aura beau faire, il ne sera jamais qu’artificiel...” (95).

<sup>182</sup> In ecofeminist theory this approach is labelled as “feminine merger,” where self and nature are indistinguishable from each other (Plumwood 247).

something unnatural, into the position of pure aesthetics. The unnaturalness of this new position is further substantiated by the fact that Louise is willing to turn against her sexual satisfaction which her husband's new occupation and demeanour have brought to her<sup>183</sup>, and force herself into that unnatural aestheticism in fear of losing the Roger whom she used to know before.

Instead of putting her husband into the point where she would be able to find his former self, with her bargain Louise exacerbates the ever-growing void between them even further. Louise, who has not been welcomed outside of her limited household space, the domain of a hostile environment and her alienating husband, now loses her last asylum and becomes illegitimate even with her servicing functions. After finishing his daily outside chores, Roger hurries home to fulfill his part of the agreement which he suddenly has come to like again: thinking and writing. But when it comes to actual writing, everything seems to get in his way, especially his wife with her incessant and annoying housework, which she tries to do "like a nun in a sanctuary" (69).<sup>184</sup> With time Roger's fervour subsides; it becomes harder for him to overcome "the vulgarities of his milieu" (69),<sup>185</sup> and in the end he succumbs to his own newly-discovered philosophy of living a "real" life, unlike "that pack of Romantics,"<sup>186</sup> such as Bernardin, Rousseau, and Chateaubriand, who would "sooner appreciate nature dead on canvas or in the pages of a book than in living reality"<sup>187</sup> (71). With his impatience toward the "pack of Romantics," Roger once again confirms his total belonging to the Romantic beautiful soul syndrome: the irony of the beautiful soul is its ultimate hypocrisy, as "the evil it condemns is intrinsic to its existence" (Morton, *Ecology without Nature* 118).

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<sup>183</sup> "A month and a half of physical activity had already made him into a vigorous machine, unyielding, a muscled animal... She was fascinated by his new, somewhat brutal strength. Even if he had become less attractive, more forgetful as a husband, his lovemaking was more passionate" (Bugnet, *The Forest* 42).

<sup>184</sup> "...comme une nonne dans un sanctuaire" (92).

<sup>185</sup> "...vulgarités du milieu" (92).

<sup>186</sup> "...la bande des romantiques" (92).

<sup>187</sup> "...apprécions mieux la nature bien morte sur la toile d'un tableau ou dans les pages d'un livre que dans sa réalité vivante" (94).

Bugnet, however, obviously does not want to endorse Roger's philosophy. In terms of human environmental strategy, there is an alternative to Roger's position of a land-developer, labourer, and conqueror of the earth. Another couple, Tom Beaulieu and his wife, whom Louise and Roger host in their house for a while, cannot really brag about their intelligence, but do have some environmental awareness. They are free hunters who wander around the country and live off fur trade and hunting, promoting what Tom calls the Indian way of life. He contrasts his freedom and unsophisticated environmentalism to the self-imposed slavery of a pioneering farmer:

Today people jus' got d' one idea in d' 'ead. Get some lan', make d' building, dig d' well, put down d' fence to keep off d' neighbours away, an' ... an' ... jus' chop down all d' trees, an' pull out d' stumps, an' more stumps, an' more stumps, an' plow up d' eart', acres an' acres, an' plant it an' plant it again, an' get up at four in d' morning, an' work maybe 'til ten or eleven at night right up to wen d' pries' comes to take you away to d' grave, eh? Damn it! You call dat living?<sup>188</sup> (82)

Tom's observations concern not only their way of life but also the philosophy of it. He sees the extraneous motivator for this self-incurred slavery as money, which corrupts the very nature of man and distorts God's image in him: "You learned 'ow to live like a Indian, y'know? Dat didn' cos' you nutting. In dose days, men were men, by God. A guy could take care of hisself, eh, an' didn' 'ave to lay away a pile'a money, no sir"<sup>189</sup> (83).

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<sup>188</sup> "Aujourd'hui les gens n'ont plus qu'une idée dans la tête: prendre une terre, faire des bâtisses, et creuser des puits, et planter des clotures pour sortir le voisin, et je te fiche tout le bois par terre, et je t'arrache des souches, et puis des souches, et encore des souches, et je te casse de la terre neuve, des arpents et des arpents, et je te sème, et je travaille jusqu'à des dix, onze heures du soir, jusqu'au moment où le cure vous emmène au cimetière... Non! Mais c'est-y une vie? (107).

<sup>189</sup> "On savait vivre tout pareil comme les sauvages. Ça coûtait pas cher. Dans ces temps-là, les homes étaient des homes. Un chacun était capable de faire sa vie tout seul, et on pensait guère à empiler des piastres" (108).

Roger would never admit to having such a money-driven, careless attitude toward his owned piece of wilderness. During one of his arguments with his wife, he agrees that should nature have feelings, it would definitely detest man and all his doing on the Earth, but Roger himself, personally, has not “done much damage to it”<sup>190</sup> (127). Later he comes to realize, however, that neither has he ever really owned nor controlled the land that he claimed to possess. As the land slowly begins to reclaim its rights, an idea of his own powerlessness, as though passed on to him from Louise, crawls into Roger’s head and takes possession of him. When he revisits the site from which he had removed the trees the previous year, Roger discovers to his great surprise that all over the stumps new sprouts are springing up, covering the area with robust and persistent young trees—“strong, flexible, innumerable”<sup>191</sup> (132). From the second summer of their stay in the wilderness, when Roger first experienced the tenacity of nature that silently persisted despite his best efforts at destroying it, through all the subsequent spring and summer seasons, Roger seems to have gradually recognized what was obvious to his wife from the very beginning and what he misconstrued for her tacit opposition to his projects: “intense, silent, and subterranean warfare”<sup>192</sup> (154) is going on. The narrator’s comments, which rarely allow themselves to reflect more than the characters are aware of, become more and more naturalistic at the end of the novella, when even Roger understands who “the true sovereigns of this country”<sup>193</sup> are and who is qualified as “the invader”<sup>194</sup> (154).

The inscrutable impassiveness of nature in the face of human predicament—the American Naturalistic feature that *The Forest* seems ultimately to support—takes its most tragic turn, however, within the character of Louise rather than of her husband. Louise has come a long

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<sup>190</sup> “...pas fait jusqu’à present de bien considerable dégâts” (159).

<sup>191</sup> “...drues, flexibles, innombrables” (164).

<sup>192</sup> “...activité intense, souterraine et silencieuse” (188).

<sup>193</sup> “...les souverains légitimes de ces domains” (187).

<sup>194</sup> “...l’assiégeant” (187).

way from her initial apprehension, through denial and recurrent moments of appeasement, to the desperate final attempt at identification with the natural forces, and the ultimate sacrifice. Bugnet suggests that on her own, she would have never even tried to put up with the absurdity of the wilderness; Louise's painful struggle to come to terms with wild nature were always mediated by Roger and her desire or necessity to adhere to his wishes and projects. For the most part it seemed as though Louise failed to evict her husband's mistress from their family house, so she tried to like her a bit, just to be able to survive the unbearable plight. All her best efforts, nevertheless, are to no avail. All the meltdowns in Louise's relationships with the wilderness were due to the moments of relative peace in her family life; she gave her consent to try and appreciate the beauty of the country because the country seemed to provide a space for the temporary improvement in her relationship with Roger. The thaw in the middle of the winter and the rabbit at Christmas time represented beauty of a psychological more than an aesthetic nature. Ultimately, "In her aversion for this country Louise sought resolutely to ignore any beauty in these scenes. She preserved an air of superiority and sombre impassiveness"<sup>195</sup> (131). Louise's imprisonment within the house and its immediate vicinity is, on the one hand, her surrender to the patriarchal tradition of female inferiority, but, on the other hand, it also points to the only space continuum that is left for her cultural being. The immense absurdity of the landscape around her little personal space and the insufferable stillness of the wilderness are opposed to the trimmed garden of flowers and vegetables with which she occupies herself; "her little plot she breathed in the sweetness of France"<sup>196</sup> (117), the only thing that could speak to her in the language she was able to comprehend. The openness of the landscape has shut down the world

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<sup>195</sup> "Louise, dans son aversion pour cette contrée, ne lui voulait plus trouver aucune beauté. Elle lui prêtait un air de hautaine et sombre impassibilité" (163).

<sup>196</sup> "En d'autreselle savourait des parfums qu'elle n'avait jamais respire depuis qu'elle avait laissé, là-bas, la douceur du pays de France" (149).

for her. Louise's imprisonment in the house and the yard, as well as Roger's slavery to the land in summer and confinement to the house in winter, mean that both have become subjects to the limited space; the unbreakable cyclic returns of the seasons and their total dictatorship over the pioneers have made the couple also victims of the recurring and tedious time. The differences in their personal projects and fears aside, both Roger and Louise are overcome by boredom on a day-to-day basis, implacably and infallibly, leaving each in his/her own solitude: "Monotonous days, then monotonous weeks, then monotonous months went by, without apparent purpose. The work that had to be done was insufficient to fill the slow hours; in any case, work held little attraction for them now"<sup>197</sup> (146). Heidegger says that boredom is the domain of animals, which appear to be "poor in the world."<sup>198</sup> The world is gradually dwindling for both Roger and Louise, but it is the woman who feels this loss more severely because she is suffering for both herself and her husband, who denies his turning into a barbarian until the last moment.

The naturalistic point of the insensibility of nature would not be complete, however, without the desperate attempt at sympathy to the wild that Louise makes upon the birth of her child. Giving birth, initiating a new life, is possibly the most natural thing a civilized woman can do. Louise felt that she also took some part in nature's production, and this partaking in the secret ways of natural cycles, in this prodigious rejuvenation of life amid the desolate terrain of frost and snow fills her with a special sense of belonging and hope. This change is marked, again, by deluding, since evanescent, aesthetic appreciation for the beauty of her surrounding: "She sensed the vast scene before her, and she admired it peacefully, along with her infant"<sup>199</sup> (107). Not accidentally, it is spring again, and Louise's apprehension for the wilderness and the

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<sup>197</sup> "Les jours, les semaines, les mois s'écoulèrent, monotones, sans but. Les nécessaires occupations étaient insuffisantes à remplir les heures lentes et, pour eux maintenant, aucun travail ne présentait de l'attrait" (179).

<sup>198</sup> The problem of boredom in Heidegger is discussed at length in Giorgio Agamben's *The Open: Man and Animal* (Chapter "Poverty in World," pp. 49-56).

<sup>199</sup> "Paisiblement, ses yeux admiraient le vaste décor où elle était seule avec son enfant" (137).

resulting uncompromising denial are overridden now by a vague hope, coming this time not from her husband, but from what she herself has done and become: “Before her, behind her, all around her, rose the high silent living barrier, turning green again—the million guardians of the soil upon whose resistance or welcome their future depended”<sup>200</sup> (107). Those “guardians” do not come accidentally: in giving birth to her son, Louise begins to personify natural forces. Unlike her past agreement with a real person, her husband, this new relationship (or the new stage of it) with the wilderness resembles more a relationship with a divinity, to which Louise becomes—both voluntarily and out of necessity—a priestess.

Bugnet shows that the wilderness becomes for Louise the whole Earth, Gaia, the goddess, “She,” whose female nature must now guarantee the propinquity between them, the two females. Louise’s son should now be the bridge between her civilization and the Earth’s naturalness; Louise has subjected herself to the Earth by doing what pertains to Her, by giving birth to a creature mutually with the Earth, who thus does not come to it as her husband-invader but as a magical gift of appeasement, a bloodless sacrifice that is supposed to belong to both *mothers*, Louise and the Earth: “*He was born right here in the heart of this majestic land... This time the Earth and I have done almost the same thing together. With Her spring She has brought this land back to life again... and with Her spring I have given life to my baby... He was born here, on Canadian soil, in this savage, rude country*”<sup>201</sup> (107). Louise’s first call is to offer her son as a proof, as a leverage in her own struggle with the wilderness, as an argument that he belongs to both of them equally; and thus nature cannot but accept her for what she is: the mother and now also the priestess who has given birth to almost a demi-god in the temple of the goddess-Earth.

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<sup>200</sup> “...à l’ouest devant elle, et au nord, et derrière vivante, reverdissante, des millénaires gardiens du sol, desquels la résistance ou le bon accueil devait décider de leur avenir” (137).

<sup>201</sup> “Il est né ici, au sein même de cette auguste nature... Elle et moi, cette fois, avons ensemble accompli Presque même œuvre. Avec son printemps aussi, j’ai donné le jour à mon enfant... Et il est né ici, dans ce pays, sur cette terre du Canada” (138).

Louise's appeal has all the traits of a desperate pagan prayer: "*You, Savage Country, who made everything so hard for me, take a look at this one. He's one of Yours. Look, he's here with me and there's nothing I can do about it. ... If we must raise him together through the years, don't be my enemy. Let's do it together. Be kind. Give him your strength...*"<sup>202</sup> (107-8).

After that generous prayer of offering, Louise's second—and sobering—thought is pierced with fear again: "*What have I done? I've offered my child to the land without even knowing what it was thinking*"<sup>203</sup> (108). She personifies the moving waters of a forest stream, which suddenly looks to her like a "tentacle," "reaching out of the great forest in search for a prey"<sup>204</sup> (108). Although in the next moment her irrational fear subsides, her last intuition about the voracious stream is not misleading: it is ultimately the stream that takes the life of her boy, Paul, just a few years later, when the child can enjoy all the gifts of his other mother, nature, who in her apathetic generosity accidentally kills one of her numerous children. "How could this relentless land have the cruelty to murder an infant's joy?"<sup>205</sup> (153), both the desperate mother and the narrator seem to ask. What does the personified wilderness answer to this anguished appeal?

Everywhere she saw only august serenity. As if it were the first day of creation ... As in ancient days the myriad legions that guarded the earth silently went on with their own inflexible activity. Struck by this formidable and peaceful indifference, she was quite overwhelmed. She was simply there, with her anguish, as if she did not count.

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<sup>202</sup> "Celuici, rude contrée qui t'es faite si dure pour moi, celui-ci, mon petit enfant, c'est un des tiens. Déjà, avec moi, et sans que je puisse t'en empêcher... Si nous devons, pour des mois, pour des années, l'élever toutes deux, ne me sois pas une ennemie. Faisons ensemble le cher ouvrage. Sois bienfaitante, donne-lui ta force..." (138).

<sup>203</sup> "Qu'ai-je fait? J'offrais mon enfant à cette terre don't je ne sais pas la pensée" (138).

<sup>204</sup> "...une tentacule", "sortie de la grande forêt qui se cherchait une proie" (139).

<sup>205</sup> "Comment cette implacable terre pouvait-elle avoir la cruauté de tuer la joie d'un enfant?" (187).



This anguish grew into terror.<sup>206</sup> (159)

The landscape of apathetic serenity that overwhelms a suffering human being by its peaceful indifference is compared to the youth of the earth with an aesthetic reason. We can recall the returning imagery of the most naturalistic of Jack London's stories, with the multiple deaths of his characters at the hands of nature in the backdrop of the landscape, compared to that "when the world was young" (as the title of one his short stories sounds). That is also the feeling of Roger, who concurs with his wife only in consequence of the sacrifice of their son. When the narrative perspective shifts to Roger, his perception of the landscape concludes with a vivid naturalistic thinking. But prior to his philosophical generalization, the reader can follow Roger's look, "fearful, sad, full of aversion and rancour"<sup>207</sup> (164)—the look that jumps from the lake to the forest, the seemingly usual environment for the last years of their life in the wilderness, which now radiates nothing but resistance and indifference. From his beautiful property, the mere site for his entrepreneurial vigor, both the lake and the forest has turned into

[d]ivine forces, nearly eternal, created before the coming of man, whose appearance they had witnessed, whose disappearance they would witness. Forces whose tenacious activity would regain their frontier across the last bones of man, would weave a splendid funeral shroud upon the silence of those who had, for an instant, believed themselves the masters of the world.<sup>208</sup> (164)

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<sup>206</sup> Et, partout, il n'y avait que d'augustes serenities. Comme aux premiers jours du monde... Comme dans les temps anciens, les immenses legions des gardiens du sol poursuivaient silencieusement leur personnelle et inflexible activité. Saisie par ces formidables et paisibles indifferences, elle en fut comme anéantie. Elle était là, avec sa douleur, comme une chose qui ne compte pas.

Son angoisse grandit jusqu'à la terreur." (193-94)

<sup>207</sup> "...craintif, triste, plein d'aversion et de rancune" (199).

<sup>208</sup> "Il sonda les grands bois, splendeurs vivantes où, comme à l'aurore de la terre, les sèves robustes frémissaient au soleil du matin, forces divines, Presque éternelles – créées avant l'homme qu'elles avaient vu paraître, qu'elles verraient disparaître – et don't les tenaces activités, reprenant leur marche à travers les derniers ossements, tisseraient un somptueux linceul sur le silence de ceux qui s'étaient un instant crus les maîtres du monde" (199).

As with Louise's perspective, Roger's landscape-viewing precedes his far-going naturalistic conclusions. He does not see his everyday ambience—the lake and the forest—any more; what he sees is “a vast outer sanctuary before the mysterious temple of the forest”<sup>209</sup> (164). This cult-like picture corresponds with Louise's vision of “myriad legions that guarded the [ancient] earth”<sup>210</sup> (159). Those legions are what Louise blames for the death of her child when she says, “It's them, it's them...”<sup>211</sup> (159). Conspicuously enough, this pagan epiphany comes simultaneously with the realization that she has forgotten about the monotheistic God, the true power and creator, to whom she prefers the myriad vengeful creatures. Through her forgetfulness and lack of faith, she herself has made those legions (the biblical association of the word with the unclean spirits cannot be coincidental here) dominate her life: “*Oh God, You wouldn't permit that. I've forgotten You. Yes, I know I have. But You? No, You wouldn't avenge Yourself on him... No, it's them, it's them...*”<sup>212</sup> (159). However, this revelation does not alter her inner world; God remains far enough for Louise to make her turn to her personified fear again and vigorously persuade her husband that the land “would only stop when it had claimed [his] body and [hers]”<sup>213</sup> (165).

The differences in the perception of the same landscape illustrate the distinction that Heidegger makes between space and spatiality. Because human space is always intentional and exists between the history of a human's experience with his environment and its projections in the future, “spatiality is existentially possible only as temporality” (Buczyńska-Garewicz 124). Louise's and Roger's relationship with their wilderness environment undergoes a series of

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<sup>209</sup> “...un vaste parvis ouvert devant le temple mystérieux de la forêt” (199).

<sup>210</sup> “...les immenses legions des gardiens du sol” (193).

<sup>211</sup> “C'est ell.. c'est ell...” (194).

<sup>212</sup> “Oh! Mon Dieu, vous ne pouvez cependant pas permettre cela... Je vous ai oublié, oui, c'est vrai... Mais vous, non, vous ne pourriez pourtant pas vous venger sur lui... Non! C'est ell.. c'est ell...” (194).

<sup>213</sup> “...fini par avoir aussi ton cadaver et le mien” (200).

spatial-temporal changes. Roger first acquired the land as his “thing-in-hand”: before coming to develop his wilderness property, he had some abstract preconceptions about the *space* of the lot, but with the actual experience of life and labour, he gradually takes hold of the *spatiality*, made of the real things that composed his ambience, his immediate spatial vicinity. Louise’s imprisonment, both psychological and physical, in the limited space of the house and the yard has never allowed her to experience the spatiality of the wilderness; it has never become her neighborhood. For herself, she has created her own cultural space that replicates the one from the world already discovered and familiar: the man-made landscape of her motherland, France. Her son became the real possibility of a psychological break-through: she tried to perceive him as an extension of her own body and mind that crosses the border of apprehension and hostility and connects her with the other side, makes the remoteness of the formidable forest her comforting “tool-things.”<sup>214</sup> For both Louise and Roger, the adventure ends with the effect of the uncanny: with the death of their son, the acquired nearness of the things-tools returns to the abstract remoteness and unfathomable indifference; things that they seemingly had owned are suddenly alienating, unfamiliar, and even unrecognizable. Their quasi-pagan cult and personification of the untamed forces, their natural time cycles and spatial distribution supplanted the rational positivist thinking of both characters, especially Louise, who in her image of herself evolved from a well-brought-up daughter of a French bourgeois to the mother of a demi-god, intended to re-unite her with the great mother, goddess, nature, who does not, however, seem to care for little Paul more than for her other children.

To conclude, *The Forest* illustrates the impossibility of a return to the primeval paradise of the wild and to the prelapsarian unity of nature and man. In an attempt at such a reunion,

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<sup>214</sup> Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz discusses Heidegger’s spatial categories in *Miejsca, Strony, Okolice: Przyczynek do Fenomenologii Przestrzeni* (106-25).

Roger progresses from an arrogant colonizing invader and romantic dreamer to a pessimistic naturalist facing an ultimate failure of his both entrepreneurial and worldview enterprises. His wife, Louise, suffers from two tragedies: she has been banished from her cultural temporal-spatial continuum by her dominating husband, and she has been defeated by the wilderness, which from the outset was understood as her rival for Roger's heart. Her fear of wild nature sublimates first into a quasi-religious personalization of it, then into an attempt at reconciliation with it by giving birth to a baby, and ultimately by a useless sacrifice to the apathetic divinity. The final pronouncement of *The Forest* is man's powerlessness before the implacable forces of nature that, from the very beginning, drags the characters into the vortex of the impersonal time and space and would not loose its lethal grip until the end. Wilderness qua an object-cause-of-desire appears to the male protagonist as a legitimate mistress, made of cultural concepts, in whose virginity, as though in a mirror, he can see the reflection of his Romantic "beautiful soul." The female character, after a long period of apprehensive hostility prior to her motherhood, has come to desire wilderness as her bigger counterpart, the stereotypical patriarchal Mother Nature. Ecomimetically more successful instances of this archetypal feminine alliance are presented in Watson's "The Rough Answer" and *The Double Hook*.

## **2.2. Sheila Watson's Environmental Genotext**

### **2.2.1. The Power of Silence: The Soundscape in "Rough Answer"**

It is probably the timeness of speech (as Heideggerian anthropological trait), and also of a story, of a narrative, that pulls the human being out of non-existence, out of the *silent* timelessness. The chronotope of Watson's short story "Rough Answer," with its timeness measured by boredom and the spatiality of wilderness, extracts the existence of two human beings, Margaret and Joe, who emerge out of the silence if only for a fleeting moment of the

story and submerge back into the silence at the story's end. The plot of "Rough Answer" is that minimalistic account of rupture, of invasive intrusion made by noisy evanescent reality to the silent and timeless world. Unlike Roger and Louise from Bugnet's *The Forest*, who invade the primeval wilderness, Joe and Margaret, as autochthonic wilderness's counterparts, host an intruder from the civilized world.

Joe and Margaret's remote farm house, located somewhere in the Canadian wilderness, opens for a young girl from the city, a teacher, who light-heartedly decides to spend some time away from civilization. Her appearance has a wake-up effect on both hosts. They suddenly feel confused and agitated: Margaret is annoyed by the girl's city habits and jealous about "her man"; Joe is erotically excited but at the same time morally disturbed. However, it is Joe's "rough answer" to the direct seductive advances of the pretty teacher that makes the unnamed city girl flee back to her own world. Both Margaret and Joe agree that the whole episode was a mistake and decide not to host a "third person" ever again. After this short intrusion, their lives go back to undisturbed silence, their immediate ambience and internal state of being. This both explicit and underlying silence sustains Margaret and Joe's harmonious relationship, the core of which lies in their internal mutual understanding that takes place on the pre-symbolic level of communication. It is noteworthy that the guard and custodian of this relationship is a woman, Margaret, whose dominant point of view starts the narrative with a scene of the silence and secures the preservation of that state for her and her husband at the end. The interplay of the prevalent Margaret's perspective and the minimalist poetics of the narrative creates an ambient genotext (to use Julia Kristeva's term for the purpose of the poetics of ambience) as a dominant ecomimetic field featured with "semiotic," pre-linguistic relations with the environment.

In “Rough Answer,” silence functions both as natural and social ambience, the only reality possible and the means for reality’s suspension, in accordance with the double nature of the genotext that, according to Kristeva, is sustained by intimate relations of the body with “ecological and social systems” (86). Although the silence imagery pervades the narrative as a whole, two silence scenes—at the beginning and at the end of the story—bear magisterial symbolism that completes a Hegelian dialectical triad: the incomplete silence of the natural environment (Margaret’s perspective), longing for the harmony of the social silence (waiting for Joe to come back home); the violation of the silence with the intrusion of the “third person”; and the regaining of silence that now becomes absolute, without longing and without disruption, both socially mutual and environmentally immaculate.

The interpenetration of the social and ecological aspects of silence also works dialectically. Without the silence of the harmony in Joe and Margaret’s relationship, the silence of the surrounding feels incomplete. The story begins with Margaret standing at the door of their cabin and waiting for Joe to return home with a guest: a new school teacher. Margaret’s feelings are marked with duality of longing for her husband to come back (“Joe will be coming soon”) and a neutral note about the teacher (“The school lady will be tired” (Watson, “Rough Answer” 3)). The ecomimetic description of the scene that conveys Margaret’s perspective starts from the visual perception of the evening (“She watched the thin blue light of evening merge into the dark blue green of coming night” (3)) but immediately leads into acoustic imagery, which first works synesthetically (“She heard the plaintive honking of some geese as they passed overhead, an arrow of blackness in the translucent sky” (3)) and then, with the visual being dominated by the darkness of the night, prevails and becomes total (“Somewhere in the black hills coyote barked” (3)). Margaret, who is waiting for Joe to return home, continues to strain herself, this time

relying on just one sensation: “She strained forward into the darkening evening, listening” (3). Silence, as the only reply of the environment to her sensational quest, seems, on the one hand, a little sinister since it appears only as an outer silence, unconfirmed by sharing it with her husband and disturbed by the wail of the coyote. Yet, on the other hand, this first manifestation of silence gives a sense of the prevailing order of the heroine’s internal world, which, in collusion with her natural ambience, subdues Joe with its unremitting power. Margaret easily lets the external, ambient silence penetrate her inner state of mind: “The silence surged around her, cut off all contact with reality. The long drawn wail of the coyote wrenched her back to life” (3). Timothy Morton, the creator of the term *ambient poetics* as “a way of conjuring up a sense of a surrounding atmosphere or world” (*Ecology without Nature* 22), writes about such ecomimetic rhetorical device as *apophasis*, a negative imagery that sometimes is employed for rendering complex cases of ekphrasis, or vivid description: “Negative theology asserts that God is not big, small, white, black, here, there... Extreme negativity consists in ellipsis (...) or silence” (45). However, when the silence is not the result of the impossible ekphrasis but the aim thereof, something else ought to take over the negative, apophatic imagery, while at the same time marking the emotional component of the described object. In Margaret’s perception of the silence, the wail of the coyote becomes such a negative characteristic of the silence itself; its piercing, wake-up effect underlines the totality of the silence that precedes the wail and surpasses it, rendering the wail of the coyote a mere rhetorical device.

As Morton recounts, in “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger asserts that we cannot hear an abstract sound but only the way *things* sound: “We hear ‘the storm whistling in the chimney’, the sound of the wind *in* the door, the wail of the hound *across* the moor” (Morton, *Ecology without Nature* 40). As opposed to the ambient *soundscape*, where sounds have their

natural acoustic origins, the Aeolian (“acousmatic”) “has no obvious source” (41), and anxiety that it sometimes provokes is based on “a hesitation between an *obscure* source and *no* source at all” (43). This hesitation has also to do with the Derridean “re-mark” that, in ambient poetics, provides a mechanism for the switch between background and foreground, by means of which, as Morton argues, “re-mark flips an ‘objective’ image into a ‘subjective’ one” (49). Thus the silence in Margaret’s perception becomes the tone (or “rhapsody”) of the environment that emanates from the background but comes to the fore and resonates in the foreground. The *work* of Watson’s narrative aims at making the ambient, background silence feel in accord with the internal order that governs the lives of the cabin dwellers. In other words, if we consider the silence in “Rough Answer” the Aeolian, given both its ungraspable sensational nature and its manifestation through the negative of the other acoustic images, existing somewhere in the background, this merging of the external silence of the environment and the internal silence of the characters would do justice to Morton’s understanding of the Aeolian as something that “attempts to undo the difference between a perceptual event upon which we can focus, and one that appears to surround us and which cannot be directly brought ‘in front of’ the sense organs without losing its environing properties” (Morton, *Ecology without Nature* 47). The evolution of the silence in the story proves that its ecomimetic image ultimately gives up to the internal state of mind of the heroes. However, it does not lose—it rather regains its powers and gives up only its negative sensational characteristics. At the very end of the story, the silence is not sinister any more, since it neither means anxiety of Margaret’s waiting nor opposes to the intrusion of the city girl: “A coyote howled in the hills. The dog barked. They did not notice it. They sat each wrapped in his own thoughts, their silence unbroken” (Watson, “Rough Answer” 11). This framing of the narrative by the sound of the coyote’s wail is highly symbolic: when at the



beginning its function is to present an image of the silence through the negative acoustic sensation, at the end the internal silence becomes so empowered that it does not need environmental support any more. The silent harmony comes to be absolute.

This absolutization of the silence, achieved by the merging of its outer and inner characteristics, makes it the only real thing in the place, however temporarily disturbed by the “third person” intruder. The silence that first “cut[s] off all contact with reality” (Watson, “Rough Answer” 3) when Margaret is waiting for Joe, ultimately appears to be “the vibrant reality which was her only refuge, the tacit understanding she had with life” (7). The preponderance of silence as both an ontological category and a special code of communication seems at odds with the publisher’s note on Watson’s short stories that “Rough Answer” presents a case of “closely observed realism.” It has been noted by Margaret Morris, Gregory Betts, and Richard Cavell that in the early drafts of *The Double Hook*, Watson, in defiance of the realistic mode, “intentionally removed historically” relevant factors of media and technology, as though depriving her fictional world of the inevitable “McLuhanesque resonances” (Cavell 297). However, in the final draft of the novel, as well as in *Deep Hollow Creek*, the various mediating “technologies” play an important role in creating the sense of emerging society, “inspire communal codependency and care by challenging the isolationist and antisocial tendencies of individualism” (Betts 255). In “Rough Answer,” Watson’s very first short story, written years before her friendship with Marshall McLuhan and at the same time as *Deep Hollow Creek*, the author creates a totally different world that is neither communal, in terms of the emerging communities of the both novels, nor individual, since the object of depiction is a couple that hosts a stranger. And although the reader is given enough to realize that the cabin and its dwellers are a part of a bigger rural community (as long as their guest is a teacher who works at

the local school), the only apparent society consists of the triangle that inevitably develops in direction of ousting the intruder from the idyll of the two.

The “voice of the earth” that, according to Angela Bowering, sustains the Dog Creek community in *The Double Hook*, consists of the individual characters and their symbols that form the original patterns of cultural hybridization of the Aboriginal inhabitants and European settlers, as well as the organic unity of nature and people, which together accounts for “the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things” (59). Deprived of the broad communal liaisons and all the necessary McLuhanesque mediating technologies, the internal world of the characters of “Rough Answer” seems to make the unity of human and non-human nature even more pointed and as though secured by silence as the only real “voice of the earth.” Moreover, the girl, who comes from the outer world of civilization and its technologies, proves totally deaf to this voice of silence; her intrusion, as pointed out earlier, dialectically strengthens—by means of contrast—the kingdom of silence that unites the male and the female and resonates in the ambience. All the signs of the inevitable interaction between the Dog Creek community and the external world, between the marginalized periphery and its cultural centre—which in *Deep Hollow Creek* takes the form of the automotive communication, newspapers, and books—in “Rough Answer” is supplanted by their human representative, a perceiving subject that symbolizes the discourse of the city-dweller. This symbolic individual embodiment of the two opposed kinds of *habitus*—to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term that describes socialized subjectivity, or the array of disposition and preferences that makes the world readable and comprehensible for an individual—sustains the main social and psychological conflict of the story, one that makes the reader perceive the vocal appearance of the girl as *noise*, and the tacit groundedness of the couple as, however paradoxical, silent *voice*.

The reason why the young girl from the city came to teach classes in the marginalized wilderness community is not known. It is obvious, however, that she had realized the perils of such an endeavour for her but somehow had not given it a second thought. The first meeting with Margaret returned her to the reality of the decision she would think she made so recklessly. The girl noted to herself that Margaret was pretty: “Pretty enough but old looking. I suppose they grow old living here—like this” (Watson, “Rough Answer” 4). There is no elaboration on what “like this” means, other than silence, rendered in a vivid description in the first two paragraphs of the story. Returning the compliment in her thought and in conversation with Joe, Margaret perfectly feels the girl’s strangeness to the silence of the place: “‘She’s pretty,’ said Margaret, ‘but I think she’ll find it quiet here’” (6). Not even once do the characters of “Rough Answer” directly utter or think “silence” as a word; its frequent usage is limited to the narrator’s comments on the feelings of Joe and Margaret, in much the same way that “boredom” is the narrator’s word that characterizes the silence from the teacher’s point of view. At one point, “months of boredom” suddenly uncovered before the girl, and “she felt a little frightened” (4), “a little depressed, a long way from nowhere” (6). The girl’s habit of smoking cigarettes, as her way of coping with the implacable boredom of rural life, deepened the abyss between the two women, made Margaret realize that the girl’s “way’s not my ways” (7). “She yawned and stared out into the darkness” (6); this gesture becomes symbolic of the young teacher’s appreciation for the silence. *Amusement* became the only thing the girl was hoping would save her from those months of boredom, and, naturally, she directed all her attention and energy to Joe, since “he’d be much more amusing than Margaret” (5).

Cigarettes and the art of seduction are not the only things that this representative of civilization contributes to the life of the wilderness cabin. Her main input is the introduction of

what Jacques Lacan calls the Symbolic, the order of discourse, the language as the big Other, opposed to the order of the Real, or the holder of the Thing—something that resists symbolization absolutely, the only epitome of which could be the reigning *silence*. With the girl's appearance, the silence has become disturbed by "the deceptiveness of Speech" (Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject..." 683). Not surprisingly, her first strategy for amusement is a lie: she falsely claims she can ride, in hopes that Joe will take her out sometime. The teacher's habitus, or the matrix that structures her reality, begins to operate as a destructive force from the very outset, in the same way that the symbolic totalizes the subject and imposes its implacable power. The symbolic, which tries to become the only reality that exists, makes everything out of its reach look unreal; in its natural drive to make everything sayable, it behaves aggressively toward the ineffable. That is why sheer silence is impossible: it is always already filled with *speech*. Watson deliberately elaborates on the violence that the rural couple suffers as the result of the invasion of the symbolic, represented by the city girl: "Joe didn't talk much as a rule," but in order "to cheer the girl up" "he told several stories" (5). Margaret, "too, spoke more than was her want....A third person changed things somehow. Broke the contact. Silence seemed a little shameless, a little naked" (5). With the teacher, a new mode of knowledge invades the natural and silent agreement that existed between Margaret and her husband: "She and Joe didn't need to speak much. They knew" (5). This kind of knowledge that they have temporarily had to relinquish is *connaissance*, which, according to Lacan, is "required by nature of living beings so that they satisfy their needs ("The Subversion of the Subject" 680). Lacan opposes *connaissance* as a kind of experiential knowledge to *un savoir*, or knowledge that has become *articulated*. But in contrast to what the girl thought about the deathly tedium of the rural mode of life, the language itself—as Lacan interprets one aspect of the Freudian death drive—marks the

specifically human way of “the return to the inanimate” (“The Subversion of the Subject...” 680). Thus, silence, opposed to the Symbolic order, makes Joe and Margaret’s lives not only more natural but a-human or even animal-like, or—speaking in a more modern language—posthumanist.

Although it is obviously Margaret who has been chosen by the author to be the primary depository of silence in the story, Joe is represented as a more vividly natural, animal being. His character is not deprived of biological masculinity, but he is too far from the traditional image of man as the patriarchal and aggressive embodiment of the symbolic. That is why he becomes attracted to the new girl not due to her, as it were, proficiency in the symbolic order, but *in spite* of this proficiency, notwithstanding it. Comparing—in his mind—the two women, Joe notes that Margaret’s assets are “her long, unbroken silence and her quiet ways” (7), but the teacher’s appeal has nothing to do with her civilized noisiness. The girl’s attraction for Joe presents an animal appeal of sensual gratification covered with a primitive ekphrasis that never crosses the line of *natural* imagery: “Joe looked up. He saw the girl coming. ‘Slim and white like them lilies on the mountain’” (7). The girl presents an *aesthetic* image that, he believes, “a man” needs and that Margaret cannot offer to him: “but still, a man—he liked the flowers, didn’t he?—sort of made your throat ache to see them standing straight, their cups filled with sunlight” (7-8). Joe’s desire operates through the imagery borrowed not from the symbolic but from his ambience, with which he has established an intimate and mostly sensual relationship: “His hands ached to touch the soft skin at her throat. ‘Wonder what it would feel like,’ he thought, ‘soft and warm like a horse’s nostrils’” (8). And even when, overcome by the moral imperative, he decides to stop more and more unconcealed advances of the girl toward him, Joe’s thinking does not cross the border of *connaissance*, his experiential knowledge: “Joe knew what he should do—what

you did to mares when they get a little skittish” (9). His infatuation ends the same way as it began, with a totally a-symbolic, animal-like, sensual drive: first to be attracted to the visual and tactile images of the girl, tantamount to the imaginary ambient aesthetics of the flowers and the horses; and then to exert a preventive gesture, as the pack leader does toward an unbalanced animal. This gesture turns Joe himself back to the normal, to the state of indifference and harmony, in accord with the dominant ambient landscape: “He felt indifferent now. He looked out to where the blue sky and the yellow hills met. He felt the power of their silence” (10).

Joe’s gesture of repulsion (or the titular “rough answer”) makes a refreshing effect on the girl, who speaks to Margaret the same night and explains her decision to resign: “It’s lonesome here. I shouldn’t have come. I’m not made your way” (10). The theme of boredom, which again comes to the fore, at the end of the story takes the form of the conceptual opposition between two different modes of being: human-like, governed by the symbolic order, and the pre-symbolic, animal, imaginary. It is here, between Joe’s indifference and the girl’s loneliness, that lies the fascinating history of boredom from Pascal to Heidegger. In *Jacques le fataliste*, Diderot—following Helvetius—tells us, “boredom, never found in animals but only in man, was reputed to be the principle of human perfectibility” (O’Gorman 139). Heidegger, who discusses boredom in almost two hundred pages of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, sees in boredom, as the state of being captured by things that refuse themselves to us in their totality, the perfect revelation of *Dasein*. *Dasein*, which basically means *being that is conscious of itself*, in boredom is riveted to things that refuse themselves, and by the same mechanism *Dasein* is “delivered up to its own proper being,” “‘thrown’ and ‘lost’ in the world of its concern” (Agamben, *The Open* 65). Being the only creature with the *world*, man—in Heideggerian anthropology—is opposed to animals that are *poor in the world* and live their lives in captivity of

their immediate environment. Giorgio Agamben reads into this a paradoxical proximity of the animal and *Dasein*: “In becoming bored, *Dasein* is delivered over to something that refuses itself, exactly as the animal, in its captivity, is exposed in something unrevealed” (*The Open* 65). Now, in Watson’s short story, the teacher, who is the bored one, is obviously deprived of that Agamben kind of boredom. As the embodiment of the symbolic, as *un savoir*, as “the deceptiveness of Speech,” the girl seems to be the “lost” being, but not as “in the world of its concern.” Rather, she is presented as being lost like the subject in the order of the signifiers. This is Joe’s regained indifference, secured by his *captivation* in the ambient silence, that seems to approximate the self-consciousness of *Dasein*. The gift of boredom had been given to the girl, but she was not able to use it for her own good. Instead of listening to the silence (that is, to herself), she sought entertainment to cope with her loneliness. According to Pascal, engaging in diverting activities in fear of boredom is dangerous “because it allows people to neglect death and to arrive at the end of their lives unconsciously” (Nell 61). Margaret, who, for the most part, acts as a *porte-parole* of the author, shares the point of view with the narrator on how the girl wasted her chance: “She wanted desperately to think. Joe had wakened in her a feeling, a stirring of realization which she could not comprehend.... Yet she wanted to go. She wasn’t ready to meet herself yet” (Watson, “Rough Answer” 10). Thus, the tedium of the place, with the silence as its constitutive requisite, effects people differently, depending on what they are looking for when they face it: amusement or *self*. Both silence and boredom are forms of denial: things deny access to them when a person is bored, and the environment denies its active acoustic manifestation by means of silence. However, in their *concealedness*, speaking in the language of Heidegger, both silence and boredom offer profound *disclosure* for those who make themselves open to such a message. Profound boredom and silence (as an absence of speech), which is the

state of the animal that, according to Heidegger, is poor in the world, for humans open the possibility for struggle “between disconcealment and concealment”; this “internal struggle between man and animal” “defines the human world” (Agamben, *The Open* 69) and makes possible *alētheia*—the ontological intelligibility of things. This important aspect of the struggle, the concealedness, was something the teacher in Watson’s short story denied to herself through her blindness to the metaphysics of boredom and her deafness to the silence of the ambience.

Although the final scene of the story confirms that both Joe and Margaret regained the harmony of silence and only they as a couple sustained its social component, the reader feels that, among the two, the woman is the main guardian of silence: Margaret plays a role of the mediator between the ambient and the social. From her perspective we read the ekphrastic silence at the very beginning; hers is the last word (“no”) at the story’s end. And when Joe “felt the power of their silence,” we feel that “their” occupies not only the horizon where “the blue sky and the yellow hills met” (Watson, “Rough Answer” 10) but also “a mighty pleasant fact” of Margaret “with her long, unbroken silence and her quiet ways” (7). For Joe, the contrast between the two women comes to the teacher’s excitement and Margaret’s quietness. However, further comparison was to Margaret’s detriment: unlike the city girl, who sits “slim and helpless on the mare,” “Margaret sat a horse well. Rode like a man” (8-9). Margaret is too robust and grounded daughter of nature, and—as we remember—“still, a man—he liked the flowers, didn’t he” (8). Being rather a simple man, deprived of the influence of the symbolic and governed rather by the imaginary, Joe might be a perfect example of Kant’s moral imperative: infatuated with the girl, he just knows “he shouldn’t think that way” (8). In her turn, the city girl was attracted to Joe as her other, but this otherness was the product of the symbolic; his mysterious silence lured her, but, again, she only imposed some literary stereotypes upon it and was not able to fathom its



essence: “She thought of the stories she had read—silent men, strong and passionate. ... She was definitely bored but slightly excited” (8). By contrast, for Margaret, Joe presents an integral part of her world in which the ambience, labour, and the internal and external silence create a unified whole of the natural life. If Joe’s moral imperative, however natural, dictates to him only that “Margaret was his woman” (9), Margaret perceives him at the level of almost biological necessity: “Joe’s my man, she thought. He’s life. Like rain for plants or hay for critters” (10). Her communication with the darkness of the night, the wail of the coyote, the translucent sky, and her husband can be called pre-symbolic—without the influence of the media, and without, as Kierkegaard would say, the third party that would stand between her and the silent harmony of her environment. The essence of this relationship is *ambience*, which, in Morton’s words and following Kristeva’s terminology, “is the *genotext* to the *phenotext* of ecomimesis” (*Ecology without Nature* 77). The semiotic processes of the genotext, which is the basis and the advent of the Symbolic, are generated by drives and their disposition of the body and the surrounding it “ecological and social systems” (Kristeva 86); the genotext is also free of the relations that feature the Oedipal family with the patriarchal power of the Law (of the Father). Instead, the pre-symbolic power of silence would signify and embody Kristeva’s *chora*, a receptacle, associated with the maternal body and the feminine in general, everything that remains mysterious and ineffable. The pre-linguistic nature of communication, mysteriousness of the feminine, and intimate relations with the environment are features of silence as the complex image that sustains the ambient poetics of “Rough Answer” and is conveyed predominantly through the female character, Margaret.

Undoubtedly, Margaret is not just one more embodiment of “nature as woman,” which, as Margaret Atwood puts it, “keeps surfacing as a metaphor all over Canadian literature”

(*Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* 238). Watson's heroine is, rather, a guardian of a special bond between humans and their natural environment understood as ambience. Silence is the voice of this ambience and the apophatic mode of its communication with Margaret and Joe, executed at the pre-symbolic level of the genotext. Its presence is far from the traditional image in Canadian literature of nature governed by the "garrison mentality." It is the opposite of the mutual mistrust between nature and man that became the fate of another wilderness couple, the one that failed to build a harmonious relationships with its environment in Bugnet's *La forêt* (1935), "Rough Answer's" contemporary. It is also different from Watson's nature-as-woman images, depicted in *The Double Hook*: the sinister ghost of the old lady and her daughter, "the destructive barren ice-goddess" (Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* 241). This special intimacy between nature and woman, bound together in silence, is more akin to the timeless female world from the story's other contemporary to be discussed in this study, Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* (1939). As Ronald Granofsky pinpoints, the image of woman here, "aligned with stagnation and death" (113), is opposed to the aggressive, colonizing behaviour of man who conquers nature by naming it. Jack Robinson argues that in *Tay John*, the masculine principle of temporality and individual transcendence of nature struggles with the feminine (and also natural) principle of surrender and mortality ("Myths of Dominance versus Myths of Re-Creation in O'Hagan's *Tay John*" 172). It is noteworthy that in O'Hagan's novel the feminine symbol of stasis—snow (water)—which constitutes the timeless, peaceful relations with nature (Granofsky 112), is also epitomized by the synesthetic ekphrasis of silence: "It was early autumn, then, before the snow began to fly....I have observed them coming down, on a very cold day, near its end when the sky above me was

still blue, in flakes great and wide as the palm of my hand. They were like immense moths winging down in the twilight, making the silence about me visible” (O’Hagan 92).

Of course, neither Margaret nor any other character or object can be solely associated with the various facets and dimensions of silence in “Rough Answer.” Silence, as the *voice* of the earth, presupposes—besides itself—somebody who will listen to it, perceive it, and accept it, thereby making the silence rather a relationship than a substance. Margaret’s feminine perspective, which pervades the short story and secures the access to the silence’s mystery, works as a receiving receptacle (*chora*) for this voice of the earth, where the earth can also be read as a part of the Heideggerian *Streit* (controversy) between the *earth* and the *world*; Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art” of 1936 is also “Rough Answer’s” contemporary. The openness of the human world, for only humans can have the world in full, governed by the masculine principle of intelligibility and by the symbolic order of language, is opposed to the earth’s *Bergende* (concealing and preserving), which tends to capture the world and restrain it but also functions as the pre-symbolic emerging (*Hervorkommen*) of the concealed. In Watson’s story, the genotext of Margaret’s relation with the earth deprives Joe of any symbolic, subject-object implications of his drive toward the young teacher. Although the girl clearly represents the Symbolic, Joe’s temporary infatuation with her occurs within the limited field of, as Theodor Adorno would formulate it, the preponderance of the objects; her beauty is perceived by him just as the metonymic extension of his materially tangible and immediate surrounding: the robust slenderness of a flower or the softness of a horse’s nostrils. The feminine perspective of the pre-symbolic order, emerging from the earth and pervading the ambience of the wilderness cabin and its dwellers, captures and holds fast to everything that surrenders “the power of silence,” the same way as it expulses any symbolic mediator, any third party that might disturb this sacred

communication of humans and earth. It is very hard to read into or ascribe to the minimalist poetics of “Rough Answer” any specific and clear author’s concept (or program) of humanity’s relations with the environment. Yet, given some obvious, although rather perfunctory, biographical associations between Watson and the young teacher—the city girl who comes to the wilderness, the tone of the short story startles with its parsimonious sympathy toward the “boredom” of the portrayed characters and their ambience—the very boredom that proves able to unclothe its aesthetic appeal under the spell of the silence.

### **2.2.2. Light and Optics in *The Double Hook***

Profound boredom as an underlying condition of all the characters’ inner lives is also highly representative of the atmosphere of Watson’s novel *The Double Hook* (1959). Here, the concept of time, which sustains the Heideggerian boredom, is intensified in a much gloomier manner than in “Rough Answer,” with mystic—with Gnostic connotations—and symbolically impregnated environmental images of drought and dust, where the element of water underlies the deadly landscape not as a hope for salvation but rather as an apocalyptic punishment. The landscape of the valley of the Dog Creek community is a “folded” mountain country, as though munched by Coyote, who is the master of the landscape, who keeps the country and its inhabitants under his voyeuristic eye, and carries in his mouth dead Ma Potter—the haunting apparition of the place. Structuring the landscape, Coyote-the-trickster is also a meddler who orchestrates the man-woman relationships and the gendered perceptions of the environment, which appears for the most part as a cursed terrain, stigmatized by a matricide and an incest in the pale glory of the Coyote’s optic condition: the moonlight. If in “Rough Answer,” the main tool of ecomimetic description is the apophatic acoustic sensation, silence, the optic ecomimetic perspective prevails in *The Double Hook*; and when the Coyote’s dim moonlight—which aligns

with the inner state of the characters—changes to the “glory” of the higher, mystic, and mysterious light, the illuminated landscape undergoes a complex rejuvenation first of all in the male characters’ aesthetic perception of the country personified by the bodily, materially present spirit of an archetypal woman, Ma Potter.

Before the illumination, however, “under Coyote’s eye” (*The Double Hook* 3), James kills his mother, Mrs. Potter, which brings satisfaction to his sister, Greta, who with her incestuous love for her brother cannot wait to have him just for herself. There are also Ma Potter’s son William and his wife Ara, who first sees the ghost of her mother-in-law fishing in the creek; there is the Widow Wagner with her son Heinrich and daughter Lenchen, who is pregnant with James’s child; Felix Prosper’s wife Angel, who leaves her husband with all their children to live with apathetic Theophil; and there is Kip, who is one of Coyote’s eyes, blinded by James for “the probing insight” (Grube 76) into his moral predicament.

The desperate atmosphere of the deadly landscape’s boredom confirms itself not once with most of the novel’s characters, but with such a temporal-spatial generalization and at the same time precision, only with the quiet lamentation of the Widow Wagner, with which both Louise from Bugnet’s *The Forest* and Margaret from Watson’s “Rough Answer” at some point can sympathize: “The country. The wilderness. Nothing. Nothing but old women waiting” (*The Double Hook* 42); or earlier in the book, while looking from her kitchen “out to the hills”: “Dear God, she said, the country. Nothing but dust” (14). The outer dust constantly associates itself with the inner dust, human flesh, and the biblical Job’s question of human mortality, misery, and loneliness fills the pages of the novel along with the image of the folded Coyote’s landscape. On several occasions, Felix Prosper feels the heavy weight of his flesh while his eyes are looking

“out on an empty world” (60). He walks “barefoot out into the dust of the road” (61) or feels “the dust nagging the soles of his feet” (67).

Flesh and dust are not only the concepts of metaphysical struggle or ecological relations between body and its ambience. These notions are intensified by the role they play in the presentation of interpersonal relations and personal traits of the characters. As William is feeling the length of his bed, trying to imagine in this gesture the last underground bed, the final destination of every man, Prosper refuses to allow disturbing thoughts to occupy his sleepy mind. The appearance of Lenchen in his house, as well her stealthy departure, could make him realize something about his complicated relations with Angel, but instead of listening to the potentially tormenting “buzz” of thoughts, he sinks “back into the comfort of his flesh” (47). Conversely, at the end of the novel, with Lenchen giving birth to her and James’s son and naming him Felix, after Prosper, Prosper leaves the comfort of his seclusion and made-up peace and thinks at last of Angel and pain: “If he could only shed his flesh, moult and feather again, he might begin once more” (117). In his imagination, Felix Prosper manages to lift on the owl wings over his “old body” (117), and—even if for a moment—the reader may believe that he receives his chance for the new beginning in Lenchen’s baby Felix.

A similar attempt at altering the vicious circle of spousal relationship is undertaken by Ara, who struggles with the counterpart of flesh: dust. “There’s a sort of dryness settled on us like dust,” she says to her husband William. She feels the same stifled atmosphere at the house of Mrs. Potter, her mother-in-law, and wants to get away from the smell of “dust heavy with sage” (17-18). Instead, Ara is attracted to the landscape of natural life: “she had thought of going up the hill into the clump of jack pines to smell the smell of pine needles” (18). But the damned valley sucks her back in its internal drought and makes her return to her mother-in-law’s home

by “cut[ting] down through the sand and dust and patches of scorched grass” (18). Her possible way out, suggested by the narrator as an ostensible contemplation of the natural ambience, detached from Ara’s daily world of trouble and what is represented by the allegory of dust, is described under the stipulation of what “she might have seen”: “a porcupine rattling over the rock on business which had nothing to do with her; or a grouse rising and knotting itself to a branch, settling fork-angled so that the tree seemed to put out a branch before her eyes” (18).

The usual horizontal landscape of the valley, the hills, and the river have a, sometimes more, sometimes less, obvious vertical component that differentiates the hills and the valley, the smell of dry grass and of pine needles, dust and water, flesh and spirit. The deadly weight of flesh is juxtaposed to the moonlight, Coyote’s, dark-sided epiphanies of glory, which, in its turn, goes from the reflected light of the moon further to the light of the sun, the one that can either burn one down with its truth, or enlighten. The one with the power of spiritual enlightenment is neither the light of the moon nor the sun, which both, in terms of the Greek optics philosophy, adopted by Western thought, can be defined as a reflected, physical light—*lux*. By contrast, *lumen*, which allegorically is associated with the sunlight, is that higher divine light that can be conquered neither by *lux* nor by the dark, deadly matter of the earth (Jay 29-30). This complicated dialectic of light and darkness, with an interstitial layer of *lux*, the reflected light of the moon and the symbol of a partial, earthly epiphany, is what unravels along the spiritual journey of *The Double Hook*’s characters. The only character who escapes the influence of the moonlight and its revelations is Heinrich, the Widow’s son, and he is the one whose experience of the high light, *lumen*, places the novel on a new symbolic level.

This different kind of light, which is not usually seen every day, comes to Heinrich suddenly and from an unexpected place: on the day Coyote claims the old lady and plays tricks

with her apparition, the same moment that Kip, Coyote's servant, leaves together with his master, the boy notices the light, "caught in the hide of the beast which picked its way along, its eyes on the dust of the road" (13). The light he caught is as though from the other side of Coyote (darkness), unseen for Coyote himself, whose eyes are on the dust, but visible for Heinrich. The boy's epiphany is this unusual light that is nothing he has ever known, and which obviously disturbs him and makes him apprehensive. His recollection of the "light he'd known" distinguishes it from any physical light associated with either natural illumination or contemplation. This light he has known, however, also exceeds the limits of the natural phenomena and perception and borders on the allegorical:

He stood thinking of the light he's known. Of pitch fires lit on the hills. Of leaning out of the black wind into the light of a small flame. Stood thinking how a horse can stand in sunlight and know nothing but the saddle and the sting of sweat on hide and the salt line forming under the saddle's edge. Stood thinking of sweat and heat and pain of living, the pain of fire in the middle of a haystack. Stood thinking of light burning free on the hills and flashing like the glory against the hides of things. (13)

The light that Heinrich has known is the light that every living being perceives according to its natural capacity. The natural light of the sun shines and illuminates the hills; it is also recognizable in its counterpart, the pitch fires, and it reflects in elementary bodily perception, which becomes more meaningful for the boy than for the horse. Then it goes deeper, to the allegorical "pain of fire in the middle of a haystack," symbolizing the "pain of living," and ends up uncovering the secret side, the meaning of things, their forms or ideas, "glory," reflected in the understanding existence of a human being. The boy is struck by this unusual appearance of



light and is afraid of it, but the epiphany, “the hides of things,” can come only momentarily; the next moment he feels like any other living being, like an object, the one who only reflects the earthly light, *lux*, and who becomes like a horse: “The sun beat down on him as it beat down on Kip’s horse. I’m afraid, thought the boy, and even the light won’t tell me what to do” (13).

Due to the skill and metaphorical power of Watson’s description, the metaphysical light is inseparably interwoven into the bodily sensations of the characters and into the ambient landscape, where physical and spiritual light merge and where environmental metaphors can easily become allegories on the metaphysical level. As the second chapter of the book goes under the sign of the night after the matricide and the dubious illumination of the moonlight, the first chapter presents an expectation of the rain storm and the storm itself, also expressing, on the one hand, the long sought-for reviving water at the time of the deadly drought, and on the other, the sinister darkness of the valley, the hearts of its characters, and the Coyote’s spirit. The inner light that has planted itself and developed inside the boy is even more conspicuous when shown as an unflinchingly tenacious light of God’s creation that dwells in Heinrich even in spite of his own bodily will; this light springs to play with its indestructible glory on the various facets of the created world:

In the sky above darkness had overlaid light. But the boy knew as well as he knew anything that until the hills fell on him or the ground sucked him in the light would come again. He had tried to hold darkness to him, but it grew thin and formless and took shape as something else. He could keep his eyes shut after the night, but it would be light he knew. Light would be flaming off the bay mare’s coat. Light would be kindling on the fish in the dark pools. (30)

The light that plays on the fish is the earthly light that Heinrich “knew”; but a premonition of its higher meaning, equal to the light of the sun yet at the same time shining from beyond, from an invisible but important source, overpowers the boy when he wants to share his feeling with his sister, Lenchen, and to make her aware of its existence. As Lenchen is leaving, following the call of love and resistance, the boy, in the spirit of forewarning, says that he “should have been able to tell her what to do. How would you know? his mother asked. You’ve not loved” (70). Answering this question with a simple “no,” Heinrich is thinking about the unutterable knowledge that he has obtained due to the double—both visible, natural, and invisible, spiritual—essence of light. This double light is the light that heats the earth, scorches his foot and burns Greta inside her house; that is, the light of punishment, temptation, and apocalypse, and the light of hope, redemption, and resurrection: “But he thought of light blazed into a branch of fire. How could he say that the earth scorched his foot. That he must become ash and be born into a light which burned but did not destroy” (70). These last words unequivocally point to the only source of love that surpasses any earthly love of which Lenchen could ever be capable, and distinguish the boy as the only character for whom the inexpressible essence of the highest light, *lumen*, has opened as an epiphany.

The sensation of this special light and the ability to distinguish it from the earthly light is what, according to the boy, distinguishes humans from animals and things. People can be susceptible to the earthly light that warms all creation, like Theophil, who, according to William, “spends all his day lying round like a dog in a strip of sunlight taking warmth where he finds it” (121). Heinrich, in response, points to the difference in the meaning of this simple act, stemming from the dissimilarity in the meaning of light that both dog and man receive equally but interpret differently: “The thing about a dog lying in the sunlight is it just lies in the sunlight. Perhaps no

living man can do just that” (121). For humans, ambience should be a sign of the spiritual reality that underlies the visible created world; like the Lacanian creature of deficiency, human beings are simply not able to enjoy the physical pleasure of life in its fullness—their longing is always pointed beyond the visible creation to the realm of meaning—as though beyond the pleasure principle.

James’s spiritual evolution is one example of how light can transform a man and how the direct light of the sun, not the reflected moonlight, illuminates the ambience in a way that creates symbolical correspondences in the human heart. While James’s horse is bringing him out of all the dangers of his journey, the night is gradually shrinking into its allegorical counterpart, the shadows of trees, grass, and birds: “Light defined the world” (117). As James used to perceive the light of the sun only in terms of its physical capacity to illuminate the environment, the things of the world, he is still not able to believe that now “daylight call[s] on him to look” deeper—“to say what he had done” (117). He is telling himself that what he is able to see is the world how it appears before him, in its true shape, because of the power of the daylight: “only as far as his eyes looked. Only as far as the land lay flat before him. Only up to the earth-tethered clouds. He could too, he knew, look into his own heart as he could look into the guts of a deer when he slit the white underbelly” (117).

It seems that at some point all the characters of *The Double Hook* can feel at least once the power and the meaning of the metaphysical light of the day. Ara is definitely one of those characters: at least “for a minute she saw the light” (21). In general, Ara sees much in the novel, and her visions are often expository to the metaphysical allegories of the environment and to other characters in the book. She is the one who has an apocalyptic vision of water breaking from out of the earth’s belly and engulfing all the living in its lethal grip. Water, very much sought

after by all the inhabitants of the valley scorched by the sun and tormented by the drought, appears simultaneously as the source of death or punishment, and thus becomes a symbolic environmental counterpart of light. Light and water are the underlying sources of the landscape that feed and illuminate it according to the hidden symbolic mechanisms. The Widow's boy Heinrich experiences the result of their magical interaction after seeing the light in a way he has never noticed before: "The water caught the light and drew it into itself. Dragonflies floated over the surface as if the water had not been stirred since the beginning of time" (14). Similarly to the light that starts with the scorching fire of the punishing sun, goes through the cool glory of the moonlight, and ends with the enlightening epiphany, the water undergoes an allegorical circle of apocalypse and redemption. From Ara's perspective, it is evident that water is connected with the old lady Potter: it seeps through the cracks in the dried earth and floods the valley in its deadly apocalyptic ferocity; it pours as a rain storm out of the opposite darkness—not the earth this time but the clouded sky; and it also makes Ara's vision into a sign of life and hope: "[Ara] remembered how she's thought of water as death which might seep through the dry shell of the world. Now her tired eyes saw water issuing from under the burned threshold. Welling up and flowing down to fill the dry creek. Until dry lips drank. Until the trees stood knee deep in water" (104-05).

This vision of rejuvenation, ended by the personification of the trees with their knees deep in water, coincides with the image that Felix Prosper reports to Angel, in which the old Mrs. Potter (her apparition, to be precise) clearly appears as a tree: "I saw James Potter's old mother standing by my brown pool... Just standing like a tree with its roots reaching out to water" (108). As the figure of the mother-earth, the old lady, who is also a demigoddess of the underworld, reappears in a highly symbolic manner: as a tree, she fits perfectly into indigenous

mythology and Christianity alike. Reaching the underworld, or the dark earth, her roots are now absolved from the dryness that metaphorically marked the landscape of the valley as well as the spiritual degradation of its dwellers; the waters of the apocalypse have now become the waters of life. The top of the tree, in its turn, longs for the light of the sun, which for *The Double Hook's* characters becomes the light of a non-physical nature, the one to which Heinrich approaches first. This tree, so aptly associated with a female figure, is also the tree on which Father Thomas Rorty from O'Hagan's *Tay John* decided to try the pain and joy of crucifixion.

It is noteworthy that such a rich symbol as tree with its roots stemming from the depths of the earth and the crown longing for the upper light is associated with a female figure. As Angela Bowering notes:

The female figures in the curved space and ruptured syntax of this novel, which is a site for mother-murder, do battle precisely with the light that shines as a shaft of glory (like Zeus's light that overwhelms Leda), as they struggle to release the light that shines in them. The broken features of the many planes of its surface also baffle the incandescent light that shines against the configurations of the ultimate mother: the earth. In that battle, things are born: a baby, for instance; this book. (106)

Ma Potter, "the ultimate mother," appearing as a tree is not a detached symbol: the material, bodily characteristics of the metamorphosis that she undergoes, and the dependence of its perception on the optic perspectives of the viewers point to the Imaginary, pre-symbolic nature of the depicted landscape that she personifies. She is not a made-up goddess-the-earth but a body through which the dwellers of the valley can get in touch with the materiality of their ambience with the help of light that also resists symbolization. That is why Heinrich could not

explain to Greta the type of knowledge he had acquired; it is the non-symbolizable and non-articulated knowledge, *connaissance* (Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject” 680), which sustained the ecomimetic genotext in “Rough Answer.” The way it can be expressed is through the bodily image of the tree-woman that combines the illusory apparition with the elements of the earth—dust and water. To some extent, this image resembles the Rabelaisian chronotope of the body, which, according to Bakhtin, “uncover[s] a new meaning, a new place for human corporeality in the real spatial-temporal world”:

In the process of accommodating this concrete human corporeality, the entire remaining world also takes on a new meaning and concrete reality, a new materiality; it enters into a contact with human beings that is not longer symbolic but material. Here the human body becomes a concrete measuring rod for the world, the measurer of the world’s weight and its value for the individual. (170-71)

The old lady alone—after her death—is the personification of the landscape; she is the link between the people of the valley and their environment. The reader witnesses the male figures of the novel growing and augmenting their spiritual and moral capacities. Some of them, like James, undergo significant spiritual changes; to some, like Heinrich, acute sensation of light is innate ability. But only the ghost of the old lady Potter, kidnapped by Coyote, hovers over all those inner achievements and ties them with the natural life of the valley’s landscape. Her role in this can be seen, though vaguely, from the very beginning, in one of Ara’s reflections on her own vision:

the old lady, lost like Jonah perhaps  
in the cleft belly of the rock

the water washing over her. (19)

In this Old-Testament simile, Mrs. Potter's placement in the folded landscape of the country is compared to Jonah's stay within the big fish. Does it mean the old lady has been chosen by God to fulfil some similar function: to save the dwellers of the valley, like the sinners of Nineveh, from imminent apocalyptic death? Greta, who shares with her mother the role of sacrifice on the ground of which the valley and its dwellers receive the hope of salvation, reveals that the old lady was looking for something nobody else could see even in the daylight:

I've seen Ma standing with the lamp by the fence... holding it up in broad daylight. I've seen her standing looking for something even the birds couldn't see. Something hid from every living thing. I've seen her defying. I've seen her take her hat off in the sun at noon, baring her head and asking for the sun to strike her. Holding the lamp and looking where there's nothing to be found. Nothing but dust. (16)

It is important that Mrs. Potter, the personification of the natural landscape, is using the artificial light of the lamp to look for something hidden "from every living thing," and that before her arduous quest there was nothing to be found but dust. Under that dust are buried grass, cows, roads, the folded hills of the country, and the human feelings and relationships; and "in the hollows of the earth" (A. Bowering 61). Kip sees James laying his girl, Lenchen. The birth of their son Felix could signify God's mercy over the valley and the happy end of the laborious quest of the old lady-the-mother-earth. Felix's birth seems to be a success in the enterprise at which Louise from Bugnet's *The Forest* failed: to achieve an ecological balance, come to agreement with the earth and empathize with its natural cycles of life and death. Coyote, a cunning trickster, is still the master of the landscape, and he claims the newborn as his subject,

too, but at least for a short while, the higher light, *lumen*, allows the inhabitants of the valley to view the mountain country personified in a metamorphosed female body, where the elements of dust and water are combined to create the tree of life instead of the flood or drought of condemnation.

To sum up, the intruders into the wilderness in the *The Forest* (Roger and Louise) and “Rough Answer” (the city girl) create a special effect of contrast that alienates the wilderness imagery to make it more visible as a separate non-human protagonist. The main emphasis of “Rough Answer” is not so much on the invader as on the ecological relations of the naturalized, autochthonic couple, and that is why the ecomimetic descriptions in the story are imbued with tangible, bodily connections between the human and non-human. The young teacher from the city deals with wilderness not directly but through human mediators, and that keeps the development of the conflict within cultural boundaries and renders her function in the story more subservient to the primary frontier of the male, the female, and the wild. In Watson, the Imaginary dominates the relationships of both the male and the female protagonists with their natural ambience, making the non-discursive, apophatic ecomimesis function as genotext, where the pre-symbolic wilderness imagery finds its proper expression in the allegory of silence. By contrast, in Bugnet’s *The Forest*, the preponderance of the Symbolic in both Roger’s and Louise’s perspectives keeps the characters at distance from the Lacanian Real of the wilderness; that is, from its simplest yet ungraspable, non-discursive, apathetic core that avoids symbolization. With their different male and female symbolic perspectives, Roger and Louise present the readers with a realistic gendered division of the Romantic wilderness frontier, where the masculine spirit engages in a self-deluding intercourse with the wilderness as his object-cause-of-desire, while the feminine apprehension closes itself in the semblance of the tamed,



cultivated nature of the garden and as a result generates a magnificent, awe-inspiring, sublime portrait of the wild qua her fatal rival for her husband's heart. The fatality of these relations is magnified when Louise adopts a merging attitude, but instead of finding in the wilderness her bigger counterpart in motherhood and fertility, she faces the horror of the Real event of death that will stay with her forever as a non-symbolizable emptiness of the non-human. The feminine-natural merger concept acquires a more promising image in *The Double Hook*, where under the influence of the spiritual light, *lumen*, the figure of Mrs. Potter's apparition grows to represent—even if for a moment—the vital translucency of God's creation on the folded mountain land cursed by human affairs, such as matricide and incest, and curved in the dim moonlight under Coyote's eye. The eye-opening effect of *lumen*, peculiar first of all to the male perceptions of the ambience, salvages the feminine personification of the landscape from Coyote's mouth.

### Chapter 3. The Landscapes of the Trickster Narratives:

#### Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* and Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*

##### 3.1. The Figure of Tay John as an Allegory of the Mountain Country

In the previous chapter we ascertained that among the literary ekphrases, or vivid descriptions, of the environment, gender-marked spaces, or topoi, often dominate the landscape images in works that make wilderness a meaningful element of their structure. If allowed to use the language of Jacques Lacan rather freely, we could say that landscape makes sense between the Imaginary of painting and photography and the Symbolic of language. Nothing can better attest to the efficacy of this alliance than the discourses of the tourist-invader, which magnifies the symbolic provenance of the landscape to the grotesque extent; and genotext, which attempts to minimize the effects of the Symbolic by approaching the landscape from a pre-symbolic perspective. Nevertheless, among such apophatic strategies is one that implies ecomimetic silencing as merely one of the tools, and rather relies on the effect that undermines the Symbolic by depriving the narrative of its fatherly authority. In late Lacanian theory this shift was marked by the rethinking—in opposition to Freud—of the Freudian notion of the uncanny, which for Lacan has come to signify the pleasure beyond meaning. If meaning is forged somewhere between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, the uncanny persists as a surplus of this alliance, a “confirmation of how the Real persists in the very heart of the Imaginary” (Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!* 126). What brings this uncanny enjoyment to a text that uses environmental imagery as a prevailing element of its poetics?

If we make a transdisciplinary shift from the ideological environmental topoi discussed in the previous chapter to Lacan's topology, we can see that each ideological space is organized around a meaningful knot of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, which for the purpose of

describing psychosis, Lacan called the Borromean knot. A case of the disentangled knot is a symptom of psychosis and “can be read,” as Lacan maintained, because symptoms “themselves are already inscribed in a writing process” (“Psychoanalysis and Its Teaching” 371). In O’Hagan’s *Tay John* and Watson’s *The Double Hook*, where various ideological spaces can easily be identified and broken down, the symptom is a lack of an authoritative fatherly figure that would bring the environmental topoi together to form a meaningful concept that shapes other structural elements of the novels. In thereby “foreclosed” narratives, to use the Lacanian term for the lack of the symbolic Name-of-the-Father, the uncanny apparition haunts the text as its double, so that at some point the reader feels that behind the lack of the authoritative “Father of Logos,” as Derrida would put it (“Plato’s Pharmacy” 75), there is a figure of the trickster, who tricks with all the indeterminacy of the foreclosed narrative and is tricked back by the orphaned text. The special pleasure that both the reader and the author receive from this enterprise can be called *sinthome*, which, according to Lacan, is a meaningless and thus uninterpretable “idiotic enjoyment” (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 132) that, as Morton points out, “sustains the otherwise discursive ideological field” (*Ecology without Nature* 67). *Sinthome*, as the fourth ring that Lacan adds to the Borromean knot, is supposed to cure the psychotic writing in which any meaningful alliance of the Imaginary and the Symbolic is disentangled. *Sinthome*, although to the same aesthetic end, yields different crops for O’Hagan and Watson: in *The Double Hook*, it functions as a coyote apparition, which is the figure of the foreclosed author, and in *Tay John* it is the ambiguity of the story that is told by unreliable, also foreclosed, narrators to produce a trickster hero, Tay John.

The *sinthomatic*, trickster figure of Tay John hovers as an apparition above the various accounts of him from different narrators precisely because the novel is deprived of the

meaningful unifying glue: the logos, which would make sense of those accounts or crush them with its fatherly authority. On the contrary, the metafictional character of the text resists the interpretation of the story as the text's meaning and renders the character of Tay John himself the figure of that "Lacanian opposition between the dream of undocumented existence and the textual scrap that precipitates history" (Thurston 20). This is the very same opposition that for Lacan amounted to the concept of *sinthome*, as seen in the writing of James Joyce (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XXIII: Joyce and the Sinthome*). After Michael Ondaatje's essay "O'Hagan's Rough-Edged Chronicle" (1974), O'Hagan's novel has been widely established by critics as—to put it in one word—meta-mythological. As Margery Fee aptly summarizes this common presupposition, "O'Hagan wants to show readers how myth is made, and how it rules us, even though we make it" (20). The *sinthomatic* core of the novel naturally stems from this anti-mythological assumption: comprised of nothing else but myths, *Tay John* denies power or authority to any of them, thus symbolically as though committing a parricide on the Derridean Father of Logos, or on the authority that guarantees for the text its meaning.

How the authority of the logos is consistently suppressed in the novel on both the structural and allegorical levels is very well shown in Arnold Davidson's essay "Silencing the Word in Howard O'Hagan's 'Tay John'" (1986). Davidson points out that the very titles of the three parts—"Legend," "Hearsay," and "Evidence—without a finding"—suggest that the novel does not provide any definitive conclusion but trails off into uncertainty and indeterminacy. Mere hearsay succeeds and subverts the legend of the protagonist with which the book begins, while such evidence as is set forth in the last section — and throughout the entire work — conduces to no final finding. Words, in short, do not lead to any truths in or of the novel, and the text marks out a space of

misnaming and misunderstanding. It is this space that Jack Denham, O'Hagan's Irish Canadian version of Joseph Conrad's Captain Marlow, would occupy with his "Tale," his "gospel" of Tay John. (30)

With the characteristics that Denham's reliability as a narrator receives in Davidson's article, one can assume that the version of Tay John's story told by Denham (responsible for the bulk of the tale) is rather an apocrypha than a gospel. However, the whole point for O'Hagan is to present, with unmistakable "numerous references" to the "gospel" throughout the novel, Denham's narrative as a gospel, not an apocrypha—for the purpose of "compromis[ing] the very story he constructs by telling it in terms of a much larger legend or story in the western world" (Davidson 31). On the aesthetic level, as Fee maintains, *Tay John* is full of allegorical analogies aligned along one of its characters, Father Rorty's, philosophy of the unity of beauty and violence, and among those analogies, "the two that receive the most development are the religious and the sexual" (21). As the latter was, to some extent, discussed in the second chapter, this one will focus on the religious aesthetic analogies and their ecological imagery.

As in Watson's short story "Rough Answer," silence in *Tay John* is one of the most meaningful ecomimetic elements. The exigence of the "Rough Answer," which triggers the story itself, is a perturbed silence; the return of silence at the end of the story means first of all the regaining of balance in Joe and Margaret's relationship and between the couple and their natural ambience. In creating silence as an aesthetic image, the authors of the both works make a point in following Joseph Conrad's credo, expressed in his preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*: "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see" (3). Being a negative acoustic image, silence in *Tay John* is described by means of apophetic synesthesia that reflects the environmental impressions of the main narrator, Denham.

Snow, which, in one of Denham's vivid descriptions, "mak[es] the silence about me visible," is in Ronald Granofsky's words an element of stasis in the novel; snow can "cover, as if for ever, the landscape" (O'Hagan, *Tay John* 92; Granofsky 112). As in Watson's "Rough Answer," in *Tay John* silence, or what it stands for—stasis, is a feminine element. As a genotextual representation, governed by the feminine Imaginary, it is paradoxically achieved by verbal description, which is a domain of the masculine, fatherly Symbolic; and that ensures the sinthomatic effect of the novel, where the Imaginary persists in the absence of the narrative authority, as though parasitizing on the Symbolic and using it for its own purposes—silencing the Word. The biblical teleology presupposes a changing world that moves toward its end—transcendence; "stagnation and death" (Granofsky 113), proposed by the allegories of stasis in the novel, confirm the "cyclical quest" of *Tay John*, its drifting from the historical modernity toward the cyclical mythology, the idea on which Ella Tanner grounds her research, largely based on Mircea Eliade's *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Whereas the Word of God, or Logos, is the essence of the gospels, supplanting Tay John for Jesus, or cyclical stasis for historical teleology, means using the Word and its power against itself. Sinthome is what is left of the Word deprived of transcendence and thus grounded on the void. The subverting effect of these pastiche stories, if we can so categorize the gospel-like stories of *Tay John*'s narrators, is succinctly described by Davidson as follows:

From beginning to end, then, *Tay John* turns on Biblical parallels but it employs those parallels to undo the model on which it is based. With such erasure of the original Book, *Tay John* is finally grounded in nothing. The result is a work that denies transcendence; that translates "In the beginning was the Word" into the

opposing dictum "In the end was silence" and then translates that ending into a new beginning. (35)

As the Word symbolizes abstract transcendence, silence is a result of the concrete ecomimetic imagery, which uses the environmental allegories of the Word to subvert their ideological filling. In this fashion, the tree in *Tay John* becomes an agent of silencing the transcendent Word by making it a place of violent death for the false prophets, precisely because it has been said to be the symbol of salvation. The contrast between the immediate ambient imagery and its mythological or ideological load, implicated by the traditional Christian symbolism, creates an impression of false epiphanies that befall every biblical analogy of the environmental description. An important feature of O'Hagan's poetics is that these ecomimetic implications annihilate the epiphanies parallel to the effect of the foreclosed narrative that annihilates myth as such. This trait becomes more evident when compared to the background in which epiphany presents itself in Bugnet's novel *The Forest*. In Bugnet, the motif of Christian epiphany appears only once; it allows for Louise's momentary enlightenment by an undisputable, transcendent power that hovers over her life and the lives of her loved ones—a power that, noticeably, does not find any analogy in the natural ambience. In *Tay John*, Christian motifs are devoid of transcendence by their inclusion in the chronotope of the narrative, its ecological substance, as well as by their entwinement into the native mythology of the land and the psychology of the characters. Moreover, the bearers of the Christian Word, the bothers Rorty, are repeatedly silenced in the novel, not so much for the sake of the alternative local mythologies but rather for the non-discursive nature of the land itself, which prefers the silence of the cyclic stasis over the voice of the teleological history. The pine tree and the fir tree, that is, local everytrees of the Canadian Rockies, are the elements of the land where the Word dies, together

with its bearers, Red Rorty and his brother Reverend Thomas. As Patricia Morley observes, their “deaths are most obviously modelled upon the crucifixion” (vii), and their bodies are tied closely to the tree, which does not, however, promise resurrection.

Even prior to his ministry, Red Rorty is described in non-sympathetic terms. As Davidson relates: “Red Rorty, crude, drunk, and loud, down from the mountains to sell his furs and carouse away the proceeds in an 1880 Edmonton as elemental as the man himself, is on his way to the whorehouse when he is stopped by the sound of singing from a nearby church. Soon he is loudly proclaiming the tenets of this church” (31). Interestingly, his brother Thomas also went on his last religious trial to the mountains trying to escape his sinful passion for the “mountain whore,” Ardith Aeriola. In the Evangelical Church doctrine, Red Rorty’s crude mind finds just another source of energy: he embarks on a mission to proclaim the word of God to the aboriginals. To this end, he looks for an innocent people, which is not yet corrupted by the activity of other missionaries. We learn that three indigenous tribes came to him, and among them Crees and Stoneys already had had their missionary priests, “so were able to curse in the white men way. They use rifles, too” (20). This is why Red Rorty chooses the third, the Shuswaps, who were the most pure children of nature, uncontaminated by the damaging influence of the white men and living the ways of their forefathers. The Shuswaps’ own mythology—accidentally or by the will of the Providence—facilitates his reception and integration into the tribe’s society. The Shuswaps have preserved a variant of the universal anthropological memory of the primeval paradise, or the golden age: they “had once been a strong people, living in houses wide and long as rivers, with great feasts and dances” (O’Hagan, *Tay John* 23). They also hold a belief in a leader with yellow hair, the messiah, who one day will come and “take them back over the mountains to a land full of game, fish in all the rivers, and



berries growing at each man's door" (23). Red Rorty's physical appearance, his great voice, and the leadership that he assumed as a preacher made the Shuswaps believe that he was the expected messiah, and many of them were disappointed when proclaimed himself to be just a forerunner of the real one, Jesus, who was just about to come in some indistinct future. The narrator, however, takes care to present Red Rorty unequivocally as a false Saul of Tarsus, later Paul the Apostle, or John the Baptist, given Rorty's proclivity to religious behaviour like that in the Old Testament, as he defends his spiritual purity and righteousness with a rifle, assuming a position of an Old Testament prophet or even God before his fellow Christians: "Then his hand fell back to his rifle and he filled his lungs and shouted, and his voice roamed wild in the valley: 'Get out of here and leave me! Go home and clean your houses!—for you, and all like you, are God-forsaken and damned!'" (19). The Shuswaps were also amazed by his great voice: "He threw his voice up against the rock cliffs beyond them, and it stayed there and murmured till they heard him speaking to them from above and behind, while they beheld him standing..." (24-25). Morley aptly states that Red Rorty "is aping God" (x), and his punishment goes along the line of the Latin proverb "Quod licet Iovi, non licet bovi" ("What is permitted for Jupiter, is not permitted for the ox").

The end of Red Rorty's life, along with his wild Christianity, comes when he recklessly succumbs to the call of his flesh. The Shuswaps' hospitality and tolerance appear to be limited to the point where their own traditions and beliefs remain undisturbed: "for among them a woman had one man and a man one woman and no other" (27). A pine tree seems to play some symbolic role in both disgraceful events that fall upon the preacher: Hanni, the wife of Swamas, was standing beneath a pine tree when she caught the lascivious eye of Red Rorty, and the trunk of a pine tree was the pillory which he was tied to as a part of his punishment for rape. Allegorically,

those trees can be construed as a cross, which for Red Rorty becomes, of course, the ironic cross. Even if he had been lured to the power of the cross, due to his pride, wildness, and ignorance he was unable to live up to that call. So, ironically, the cross (or the tree) becomes the place of his disgraceful suffering. His death appears to be an act of aping God—this time the God-Son dying on the cross—just as his voice was an aping of God-the-Father’s power. Red Rorty was bound to the trunk with his hands and legs not touching the ground; the Shuswap women tore his clothes and flesh with their nails, and children shot arrows into him; finally, when he was set on fire, Red Rorty opened his mouth “to shout but no sound came from it. Yaada took a round small stone and shoved it between his jaws, and it stayed there, as a word he tried to utter” (28). The word as a sign of change turns to stone: the symbol of stasis, death, and the revenge of the feminine, the cyclical, and the earthly-chthonic.

The Word of his brother, Father Thomas Rorty, is silenced in a similar manner. Both brothers fall prey to the irrepressible call of earthly love; ironically, both die on a tree, an allegorical parody of the Cross. Thomas’s fall was, as it were, more profound philosophically; it was not a momentary call of the flesh but a continuous war within him that led him through doubt to his final failure. According to his own philosophical theology, we can say that he has become a victim of beauty, which, in his own theory, is always accompanied by violence:<sup>215</sup> “Beauty affronts the world by its violence. Its violence draws man and affrights him. Without the Cross our Saviour’s life would not be beautiful” (188). Father Rorty considers violence and what goes with it—agony and pain—much more powerful than words; that is why the power of the

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<sup>215</sup> Father Rorty’s masochistic theology, and especially the pleasure that he takes at the idea of putting himself on the improvised cross of the school-marm tree, can possibly find some justification in some Catholic authors such as Thomas à Kempis or Francis Assisi, but would likely be criticised by the Eastern fathers of the Church. For example, as Demetrios Bathrellos explains, Maximus the Confessor “argues that ‘practically every sin is committed for pleasure’ (*Car. 2.41*)”: “the Fall bequeathed to all human beings the passions of pleasure, sadness, desire, and fear....it is precisely through these passions, through this ‘passible’ element, that human beings are tempted, led to sin, and eventually to death” (288).

Cross also stems from “His agony, not from His words” (188). Thomas describes his brother, Red Rorty, as a violent man, who “out there in the mountains...learned something of the spirit’s agony” (188). His own death was shadowed by the silencing violence of nature that deprived him, similarly to his brother in the final moments of his life, of the last shout: “He opened his mouth to shout and snow fingered the back of his throat. Wind took his breath and hurled it from him. He sobbed. Froth flew from his mouth, white in the night” (220-21). When we add to these two the third death, of Ardith Aeriola, pregnant, presumably, with Tay John’s child, the preponderance of silence over the word and the landscape covered with snow over the living vertical of the tree becomes unequivocal. Davidson considers this analogy as one of the meaningful trilogies that sustain the symbolism of *Tay John*: “in contrast to ‘In the beginning was the Word’, we have, in *Tay John*, three (incongruous trilogies pervade the novel) emblematic endings in silence—a ‘skull’ with a ‘stone...still between its jaws’ [Red Rorty]; a corpse, its lips sealed with frozen froth [Father Thomas]; a pregnant woman, dead, her open ‘mouth...chock-full of snow’” (31) [Ardith Aeriola].

The deadly violence of nature is mirrored by its beauty, making the fate of Father Rorty, as well as his brother’s, subject to romantic irony. Thomas’s suffering, immediately preceding his death, occurs against the background of a beautiful sunset, the time of the day and the image of nature in which he reveled the most. Father Rorty was an escapist; he left “his family of brawling brothers” under the pretext of looking for the lost one, Red Rorty; and “now in a quiet place he liked to come out and walk in the sunsets. He was moved by sunsets” (187). He was in a habit of contemplating sunsets across the lake, where Ardith Aeriola, his *femme fatale*, “a mountain whore” (187), stopped with her companions and their tents for some business. The source of his peace, his consolation in the landscape, and the source of disturbance, the shore

where “his enemy, woman, was camped” (188), both lay across the lake. It is no coincidence that his reflection of beauty and violence comes in the wake of the growing shadows of men paddling toward the other side, against the backdrop of sunset and towards the fatal woman; that aesthetic intuition will be confirmed later, on the mountain, with the cross-shaped shadow of a school-marm tree, on which Thomas has found his violent death.

In both cases the narrator, Denham, tries to see the landscape through the eyes of Father Rorty, as though sharing or conjecturing his deep view of the details and the symbolic magnificence of the whole picture. The pronoun *we* that the narrator uses for the first description suggests the sharing, but the reader senses that the intended subject of that extended reception is the Father alone:

We watched the canoe go from us. The sun, low over the black rim of the western mountains, slanted on the lake waters until they became a carpet of creeping flame, failing as it advanced towards us, until at our feet only black water lapped, cold and spent and sobbing in the sandy runnel where the canoe's prow had rested. ... The shape of the paddler in the stern rose above them, paddle flashing sword-like from the water and streams of water, blood-reddened against the sinking sun, running from its blade. For a long time we heard the tinkle of those falling paddle streams and the widening wake as a sigh upon the flaming waters. ...As our vision faltered, the paddle flashed again, the lake's red bosom rose and swelled, and on in the black speck diminished to a quivering point of dissolution, hesitating one final moment at the fire-guarded gate of the world's end.” (187-88)

This extended portrayal demonstrates how close the connections are between Thomas's philosophy and his perception of the landscape. Father Rorty savours the sunsets, not the

sunrises, and this may suggest that “the world’s end” means the end not only in terms of space but also in terms of time. Every night he contemplates the end of the world, marked by the infernal “fire-guarded gate,” that is occurring just across the lake and over the mountains. The purifying flames occupy the space where his enemy, the woman, is camping, as well as the men, the paddlers, because “Father Rorty knew where those men were going” (188). The “red carpet” advances also to the spot where the Father himself and his companion stand, not reaching them, however; but what this failure suggests in terms of the imagery and symbolism may be even bleaker than the flames of purgatory: at their feet only “black water” remains, “cold and spent and sobbing,” the harbinger of the snow that will soon cover his own dead lips. The dark shadows of the paddlers as well as the gory imagery of their “sword-like” and “blood-reddened” paddles predict the tree shadows and the tragic crop of Thomas’s last sunset, at the opposite side of the lake, on the mountain above Ardith Aeriola’s camp. This time the narrator restores the events relying on his own aesthetics, as though inviting the readers to base their trust on the ekphrastic empathy that Denham felt toward the Father in the paddlers’ fragment.

The motivation for Thomas’s unusual trip to the top of the mountain, to spend several days in solitude, and the report of his initial steps are given by Thomas himself, in his letter addressed to Ardith Aeriola, a letter that refuses repentance and proclaims incorrigible love. From the beginning of this document, it becomes clear that hierarchical distribution of time and space components has a significant role in Father Rorty’s subliminal motivation. Being on different sides but at the same horizontal level of the lake, reddened every evening by the sinking sun, is the position that Thomas strives to escape: his plan is to elevate himself over the lake and over the woman, to break the fatal sequence of the tempting sunsets above Ardith’s camp. From the light of the sinking sun, Father Rorty wants to advance himself to a different, higher, more

spiritual light, the one that will make it possible for him to view his shadow, his inner self, similarly to the shadows cast by the paddlers: “Up there alone on the mountain I may see a light, so awful, so stupendous, never before seen by man, that standing before it my shadow will make a trough in the ground behind me. It is not the possibility of that light I question. It is I who am before it” (212). Viewing his own shadow produced by such a sublime light, however, is not the only spatial perspective Thomas is pursuing on the mountain. His goal is to find himself above the lake, above its dark waters of temptation and sin, He wants to look down from above, and what he expects to see as a result of his expedition is the darkness below from the perspective of the upper light: “I will be able to look down on Yellowhead Lake. I will be able to see your camp-fire to-morrow night far below me in the darkness. I wonder how it will look so far away—or if perhaps I will be able to see it at all?” (210). He chooses the upper position to gain control of his enemy, the woman and, adjacent to her, his own self, so prone to temptation: “It is in the victory over temptation that salvation lies. I see my salvation on the mountain side above” (214), he writes in his letter to Ardith. Thomas seeks a superior position; along the vertical line of the landscape—from the darkest bottom of the lake to the highest top of the mountain—he places his spiritual manhood and priesthood over the carnal womanhood as the only means to achieve a victory: “That lake, so deep, so sure, is you—I will leave my mark upon it” (216). Yet, earlier in the letter, Father Rorty displays a doubt that makes his victorious vertical a wishful thinking. He admits to a fear of both the height and the bottom:

I fear the mountains—great waves of rock, tipped with foam, waiting to break upon me who walk in their valleys. I fear this cabin where I write to-night, my hand, shadowed by the candle, moving great upon the wall. Above me, the clock

face, that exultant visage of forever. I fear the rat that gnaws beneath my feet.

More than that, my bones—I can feel his yellow teeth upon them. (214-15)

This confession shows that Father Rorty is trapped between his faith in the higher light, symbolized by the mountains, and his lack of belief in his ability to live up to this ideal. He is afraid of those heights that he fears can throw him down, where ugly death with her yellow teeth awaits for his bones. The shadow of his hand—and the shadow is the novel's allegory of death—represents the arrow of “the clock face” that gives the whole spatial dichotomy a vivid temporal dimension. Because of Father Rorty's doubt, the “exultant visage of forever” turns its direction back from eternal life to eternal death and from the heights of the mountain to the bottom of the earth and to the dark waters of the lake: an allegory of death, stasis, and cycle.

Thomas's letter ends with his testimony that he puts “a little crucifix of silver” (216) into the envelope; from now on, the events on the mountain are construed by Denham, who finds the letter and shares his conjectures regarding the feelings and actions of Thomas. The interpretive and sympathetic capacities of the narrator are the only sources that the author offers to the reader of what happened during the last hours of Father Rorty's life. Because Denham tries to relate the events that happened after the letter was written, the narrative observes this chronological order and leads the reader from the image of the silver crucifix at the letter's end to the image of the wooden cross, the tree that, as was mentioned earlier, links both trees of death: the pine tree on which Red Rorty was tortured and burned and the school-marm pine tree where Thomas Rorty allegedly—through the eyes of Denham—saw the sign of the Cross. That tree was the first meaningful landscape discovery of the narrator on the mountain: “It was not the place itself so much. It was the tree that was the thing” (216).

That association of the tree with the Cross is not revealed to the readers at once: the narrator takes time to prepare them for this majestic symbolism. The general background for the central object of the scene, the school-marm tree, is the western side of the visible landscape; a certain gradation of the western side becomes noticeable when other objects unfold in the overall picture, especially taking into account that Father Rorty's meaningful view was constantly oriented toward the west, where the sun sets. The cabin where Thomas spent that fatal night is situated in the clearing that is lined on three sides by the spruce-trees. The cabin is at the western limit of the clearing, but still from the cabin the narrator "faces the west where the shafts of a sinking sun rolled the golden spokes of an ever-revolving wagon wheel across the sky....At its western edge the clearing fell away, and there, raised against the heavens, was this tree. It was a pine" (217). The spruce-trees that form the clearing are definitely juxtaposed with the pine: they present the natural and healthy power of the landscape "lifting its point against the sky, each tree bearing upon its crest the image of its perfect growth" (217). The mutilated pine, on the other hand, "stood sturdy, rather than tall, stark and black against the sunset" (217). The narrator reveals that at the moment—to him—it did not seem to have a phallic form, but the very fact he mentions the phallic shape of the tree where the priest found his death suggests—to Denham—what kind of forces Thomas fell victim to: the forces of nature, passion, and paganism. It was that pine, not the spruces, that was the tree—the forbidden tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, the tree that appears in man's likeness to the evangelist (Mark 8, 24), and the tree of the Cross: "It was a figure, arms upflung," as Denham characterizes the pine tree (217). The doubling shape of the school-marm tree also suggests its ramified double meaning: it is the prim schoolmarm, Thomas's celibate Catholic ideal, to whom Father Rorty escapes when trying to flee from "the mountain whore," Ardith Aeriola; at the same time, the tree is a subliminally



phallic, Dionysian symbol, on which he, in his pride, crucifies himself, aping Christ—as his brother was aping Yahweh of the Old Testament—and ironically mistaking its phallic shape for the form of the Cross.

Standing against the pine, the narrator is trying to restore Father Rorty's feelings and thoughts, but first he shares what the reader is supposed to construe as the universal symbolism of a tree, its human-like upright posture and the vertical allegories of its top and bottom: "The branches above me sighed, the roots below me stirred in dark soil" (218). The dichotomy of the tree's top and bottom, which reflects the universal Christian concept of the spiritual and the carnal, of heaven and hell, finds a similarity in Christian Orthodox philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century. In his *Sense of Life* (1922), Ievgenii Trubetskoi describes how the very structure of the tree reflects its dual, nightly and daily, nature: with its foliage, the tree strives to light, to the openness of the divine truth; its nightly face, however, is "represented by its curvy, serpentine, and ugly root that sticks into dark earthly depth" (168). Yet from a pagan point of view, on the contrary, the earth sustains the tree with its concealed force and resurrects it each spring in the life cycle: it makes the tree a symbol of its fertility and expresses it in its upright, tough phallic form. This is the view that represents what Denham himself feels beside the pine; this pagan sensation of natural vitality, and not the symbol of the Cross, makes him experience and empathize with the vertically oriented sublime of both its earthly fertility and its yearning toward the awe-inspiring cosmos:

There in that tree, against my body, pulsed the strength beyond all strength. I felt the earth, caught in the noose of time, lurch beneath me. The hum of stars was out beyond my finger-tips, for the arms of the tree in those moments were my arms,

and its movements mine. I felt I was being lifted, my feet pulled from the ground.

Our fathers worshipped trees. I understand. (218)

Is it likely that this pagan confession was something that Father Rorty could share with the narrator? Denham seems to suggest that it is; he has been preparing for such a reading through a series of shared reception of the landscape. And yet this tree could fulfil its mission only when paired with the Christian symbol: “In that tree, raised against the sky, he, a priest, had seen yet another symbol—the symbol of the Cross” (219). Father Thomas Rorty, a faithful follower of another Thomas—à Kempis, the author of *De Imitatione Christi*, decides to take this heavy cross of doubt that was tearing him apart between the higher light of the mountain and the dark waters of the lake, and place himself on it. From the very outset of his journey, Thomas has been trying to resolve his spiritual and psychological predicament by elevating himself higher, putting himself above Ardith Aeriola on the one hand and above the lake of his dark passion on the other. This is why his cross is meant to be his double victory but appears to become a punishment for a double pride: to elevate himself above the landscape and above all people by playing God—the same mistake that had led his brother Red Rorty to perdition. Thomas’s pride, therefore, encompasses both the spiritual and the material sublime: “I will lift myself higher than any man before, except Christ himself, has been lifted. I will know the secret of the Cross. I will gaze out upon the world, secure in my suffering above it” (219).

In this treatment of himself with respect to his environment, including other people, Father Rorty displays a syndrome of what Friedrich Jacobi and later Georg Hegel called “the beautiful soul,” typified in Romanticism. As Morton explains, “the Beautiful Soul suffers from seeing reality as an evil thing ‘over yonder’” (“Thinking Ecology” 287). As Hegel describes it: “To preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with actuality, and steadfastly preserves

in a state of self-willed impotence to renounce a self which is pared away to the last point of abstraction, and to give itself substantial existence, or, in other words, to transform its thought into being, and commit itself to absolute distinction” (*The Phenomenology of Spirit* 299).

Ironically, “the beautiful soul” is, in Morton’s words, “the ultimate hypocrite” because it “cannot see that the evil it condemns is intrinsic to its existence—indeed, its very form as pure subjectivity *is* this evil. The chasm cannot be fully bridged; not, at any rate, without compromising the beauty of the soul itself” (*Ecology without Nature* 118). The aesthetic effect of his false passion, as a reflection of his beautiful soul paired with abstract violence, was not something Father Rorty was willing to compromise.

As the actual self-crucifixion is proceeding—in Denham’s account, as mostly the work of his imagination—the spatial-temporal imagery of the shadow is back with a new strength. Thomas has to be different from the wicked shadows that he contemplated earlier: the deplorable shadows of the sinful paddlers as well as the scary shadow of his own hand on the cabin’s wall, the arrow on the clock of his finitude. The shadow of the school marm-tree, and his own shadow on that improvised cross, needs to be his victory over both his sinful passion and death. This time, when his favourite time of the day, sunset, comes, he places himself on the tree facing east, to see the double shadow of his victory over the doubt, passion, and death. “Perhaps he was happy then,” Denham relates, “when he saw his shadow and the tree’s shadow, spreading over the clearing to the forest edge. Immense it went beyond. The shadow of the Cross was all over the world, and men bent beneath it” (219-20). The beauty of that scene and his own magnitude must have fascinated the priest, but, as we remember, beauty for him is inseparable from violence. Darkness comes first as an enemy, as an omen of death that is about to violate the majesty of his salvation. It also plays along with the vertical symbolism of the tree and the spatial

allegory of the landscape: “Under the tree roots, the ground sucked in shadows and spewed up darkness. Night rolled in a wall over the continent and behind it, people caught in a slow violence of sleep” (220). Although darkness comes from the earth, which saturates the roots of the tree with the forces that Denham would associate with the pagan and the phallic, Father Rorty is still adamant in his victorious deed that by necessity allows violence to be introduced into its beauty: “wind would blow in darkness—but behind him he felt a light. If he could turn his face he would see it” (220). However, the rain, “cool and fresh as salvation” (220), ironically turns the saving beauty of violence into the merciless grip of death. His swollen wrists and “the rope about them, shrunk with the rain, cut into his flesh” and impaled him “upon the tree like time upon the hour. He opened his mouth to shout and snow fingered the back of his throat. Wind took his breath and hurled it from him” (220). The elemental forces that Thomas thought he was conquering by the power of his faith have taken their revenge, depriving him of his last shout, and thereby also of the Word, and crucifying him on their meaningless, fatal temporality, and not on the eternity of the Cross. The storm lasted for three days, and then “the sun came out,” but Father Rorty did not resurrect. The light of the sun did not enlighten Thomas or purified him; instead, the men who came to check on the priest saw “his sun-scorched forehead” (221). The whole scene looks like the landscape from the other side: from the sunset, beautiful as a natural object, separate from Father Rorty’s spirituality, comes revenge for the chasm that his beautiful soul does not cease to generate. Wilderness and its elemental forces remain an object “over yonder.” As Morton proposes, developing the Hegelian concept: “The landscape on the other side of the chasm between subject and object turns out to the beautiful soul in an inverted form. We could call it ‘beautiful Nature’. It suffers from the same ailments as the beautiful soul: it is opaque, exclusionary, absolutely right and proper” (*Ecology without Nature* 119).

Answering his own question about the last vision of Father Rorty—was it of the shape of the Cross, his faith, or the image of the woman?—Denham conjectures a totally dehumanized, silenced picture that contains only the sounds of the wilderness and excludes any meaningful expression of the Word: “Or up there, so high above the earth, was there only the sound of the wind blowing, and far away the sound of running water...?” (222). From this point of view, his end was very similar to his brother’s, whose last experience was the roaring of the flames and the stone between his open jaws.

The questions posed by the narrator with respect to the end of Father Rorty’s life reflect what seems to be the general inquiry in the novel about the nature of man: is it spirit, passion, or just physiology? A point that might make the third option outweigh the first two is the notion of illusion, which imbues the novel as a whole on both anthropological and ecological levels: things of human passion and spirit likewise, as well as the Western natural background of mountains and forests, make it a “country of illusion” (163). Illusion and vanity appear to be governing the motivation of almost all the characters in *Tay John*, and of course both strike the faulty Christianity of the Rorty brothers along with Western spiritual influence on that wild land in general. At some point the narrator confesses: “I was embarrassed—affronted by the utter invincibility of the man’s illusions, by his vanity. Vanity, vanity... the fat upon the spirit” (228).

“The fat upon the spirit” is especially evident in the more sophisticated and hypocritical “beautiful soul” of Father Rorty and the reified in its abstract beauty landscape that it creates for its own use. As Hegel states:

The hollow object, which it [the self] produces, now fills it, therefore, with the feeling of emptiness. Its activity consists in yearning, which merely loses itself in becoming an unsubstantial shadowy object, and, rising above this loss and falling

back on itself, finds itself merely at lost. In this transparent purity of its moments it becomes a sorrow-laden “beautiful soul,” as it is called; its light dims and dies within it, and it vanishes as a shapeless vapour dissolving into thin air. (299)

Either the petrified or frozen word—the allegory of that invading spirit—that was not able to escape the mouths of the Rorty brothers means the silencing of the whole civilization of men. In *Tay John*, when humans and their culture are silenced, non-human nature begins to talk: “‘Ah,’ said the forest. ‘Oh,’ said the wind. ‘I’ll blow,’ said the wind, ‘till I loosen your roots in the ground... After me winter comes, to lay its snow and silence in the land..., on the paltry buildings man has built” (231). The alternative to the silenced and humiliated Word is the chthonic philosophy of the earth, and in this regard Tay John—the son of the earth, born out of its womb—is opposed to the Rorty brothers as ideological invaders.

Although the figure of Tay John, as an embodiment of the sinthomatic, trickster essence of the narrative in one character, reaches far beyond his chthonic descent, the chthonic spirit that he at least partially represents serves as a meaningful opposition to the ideology of the Word, and thus is worth exploration. To fathom the extent to which this aspect is also essential for the overall ecological imagery of the novel, we will compare the religious-ideological significance of the figures of Tay John and the little Paul (in Bugnet’s *The Forest*), whose chthonic birth is one main thing that they have in common. In Bugnet’s novel, Louise, Paul’s mother, who for an instant realizes that in her pursuit of at least a partial reconnection with the mother earth she totally forgets about God, suffers tragedy precisely because she tries to personalize natural powers and impose a sense of sympathy upon the impersonal and implacable elemental forces of the forest, the river, and the earth. This epiphany, however, does not persist as a theme or an author’s answer to the questions of the metaphysical causes of Louise’s failure. The

importance—on the scale of the novel’s general philosophical or ecological message—of that momentary revelation experienced by the mother, distraught for her unbearable loss, remains unclear. The supreme Christian God, before whom Louise feels guilt, is remote, and the reason for His remoteness does not seem essential to the ecological philosophy of the novel. The earth, however, and its psychological personification by the characters, especially by the female protagonist, is given much space and importance. Projected by Louise as a covenant between her and the chthonic goddess-the-earth, her son, Paul, was simply claimed by the earth’s darkness, which did not show any sympathy or care for the woman’s desire for reunion.

The little Paul appears—at a certain point that reflects the work of his mother’s religious conscience—as a sinful collusion between her and the earth, executed in oblivion of the Christian God. Louise’s concept of the personified Earth resembles that of the paganised or gnosticised Christian personification of Sophia, the Wisdom: a concept that survived until the first half of the twentieth century in the works of Orthodox Russian theologians such as Pavel Florenskii and early Sergei Bulgakov. Sophia is nothing less but the biblical beginning, in which God created the universe, or else the Earth—not as mere matter but the Earth that “brought forth” plants and animals at God’s command (*Genesis* 1.24). Bulgakov writes:

This “earth” is therefore something like the cosmic Sophia, the earth’s face in the world’s creation, in its feminine element, which has the power to produce, to give birth to creatures out of herself... She is the Great Mother, who had been worshiped by the ancients from of old: Demeter, Isis, Cybele, and Ishtar. And this earth is in her potentialities Goddess-the-Earth; this mother conceals in herself the future Theotokos... (239-40; my translation)

Louise craves the reunion with this earth as though it is still the originary Earth-Sophia, somebody who will embrace readily Her prodigal daughter, who wants to return to the appreciation of Sophia's divine beauty. Only the death of Louise's child—like the sacrificial lamb of her reunion with the earth—confirms that the earth is no longer Sophia, but inscrutable and senseless force, which claims lives as easily as producing them. Louise's epiphany, which brings the awareness of her forgetting about God, only attests to her other forgetfulness, that in the wake of the original sin, the earth "became matter... Death entered into the world..." (Bulgakov 266). This revelation of the heroine explains that, during that minute of reflection, Earth-the-Goddess is turning in Louise's mind into the multiplied enemy that represents the de-personified matter of the river, the forest, and the earth: "*Oh God, You wouldn't permit that. I've forgotten You. Yes, I know I have. But You? No, You wouldn't avenge Yourself on him... No, it's them, it's them...*"<sup>216</sup> (Bugnet 159). In her forgetfulness, Louise had offered her son, Paul, not to God but to the corrupted earth, and as a result she received death instead of salvation and reunion.

In *Tay John*, the main character emerges out of the grave of his mother (Hanni, a Shuswap woman, raped by Red Rorty); that is, from the womb of the earth, descending to Her depths at the end of the tale; and thus he emulates the symbolic birth and death of the little Paul. The imaginative chthonic provenance of Paul is a result of his mother's weakness resulting in the sinful oblivion of the Christian God; the legendary ("Legend" is the title of the novel's chapter that narrates the story of Tay John's appearance) birth of Tay John signifies a chthonic alternative to the modern spirit of the invaders, governed by the ideology of change and the religion of the Word. The most vivid historical and philosophical analogy could be drawn

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<sup>216</sup> "Oh! Mon Dieu, vous ne pouvez cependant pas permettre cela... Je vous ai oublié, oui, c'est vrai... Mais vous, non, vous ne pourriez pourtant pas vous venger sur lui... Non! C'est eux.. c'est eux..." (Bugnet, *La forêt* 194).



between this juxtaposition of primitive and Western culture and worldview, or of chthonic mythology and the religion of the Word—and the opposition of the ratiocinative logos and the Heraclitean-Sophoclean logos in the Greek thought. The subterranean origin of Tay John and the higher, mountain-top aspirations of Father Thomas and his brother Red Rorty, supported by the imagery of the naturally vertical orientation of the mountain country, suggest a spatial implication that reaches far beyond its visual landscape meaning. To fathom the universal subtext of this opposition, it will be worthwhile to turn to its ancient Greek prototype in Heidegger and Walter F. Otto's interpretation. In *The Gods of Greece* (1929), as Charles R. Bambach relates, "Otto will argue that the enlightened Olympian religion of Homeric Greece covers over and occludes the elemental subterranean dimension of Greek chthonic deities, ushering in a rational-metaphysical epoch of Olympian enlightenment" (xxi). Furthermore, Otto underlines a hereditary relation between "the West as the descendant of the Olympian culture of rational enlightenment" and that loss of "chthonic depth-dimension of culture," which notably brings "culture out of touch with the originary mythic sources of divine revelation" (Bambach xxi-xxii). This opposition corresponds with the Heideggerian rethinking of "the originary Greek myth of struggle between the chthonic and Olympian gods as ontological strife between *physis* and *techne*" (xxi). It is out of this confrontation that *aletheia*, the truth, emerges. Tay John and what he represents—a chthonic natural deity—encounters a humanly constructed worldview of the West with its ideology and religion; the subterranean, concealed in the depth of the earth, *physis* appears on one vertical paradigm with the elevated, lofty position of what we can call in the context of this comparison Olympian gods—the Rorty brothers. It seems that both Heidegger and O'Hagan expected some truth about the human being and his environment (for Heidegger, *aletheia*) to be revealed as an outcome of such a conflict.

If we follow Heidegger's direction of thought, something that is being revealed in this opposition is what arises or *grows* out of the strife: that is, *physis*, which, as he states, literally means *growth* and thus rather is falsified by the traditional translation of the word as *nature*, "natura" (Heidegger, "As When on a Holiday" 159). First unfolded as an Aristotelian concept in Heidegger's treatise "On the Essence and Concept in Aristotle's *Physics*" (included in his *Pathmarks*), the notion of *physis* takes on a further explication in his essay on Hölderlin's hymn "As When on a Holiday..." (1939), in which Heidegger attributes a great importance to *physis* and states that the attitude toward it will decide the fate of the West. As in Hölderlin, the concept of *physis* is concealed under the word "nature" (despite the etymological discrepancy), Heidegger goes so far as to say that the "essence" of the poets "will be measured according to their adaptation of the essence of 'nature'" (159).

How the notion of *physis* as growth is related to earth as *chthonos* and to the profound meaning with which the early Greeks endowed it is best revealed in Heidegger's earlier essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935):

The Greeks early called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things *physis*. It clears and illuminates at the same time that upon and in which the human being grounds its dwelling. We call this ground the earth. What this word says is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere or with a merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises as such. In the things that arise, earth holds sway essentially as that which shelters. (42)

The earth as the ground on which humans base their dwelling gives birth to the rising of *physis*, nature, that, in its "self-opening...at the same time turns back into the emergence and thus

fuses with it, giving each present thing its presence” (“As When on a Holiday...” 160). This cyclic unconcealment-concealment of physis, its coming to the light of the day and returning to the earth, as though to its chthonic origin, is replicated in the figure of Tay John, who literally emerges out of the earth’s womb—the grave of his ostensible mother—and disappears “into the ground” at the story’s end. The end of the story in this respect means exactly that he disappears from the radar of the witnesses that supply the narrative about him with their observations; indeed, nobody witnesses either the birth of Tay John or the end of his life. His story ends for this particular narrative, which does not necessarily mean his end as such. This fact, undoubtedly, mythologizes Tay John’s figure, and—if we continue our ancient Greek parallels—makes it similar to Dionysus. Thus, Tay John is inscribed into the Nietzschean paradigm of anti-Christianity and the Nietzschean-Heideggerian opposition between the Dionysian origins of tragedy and its degeneration in the wake of the Socratic philosophy on the one hand, and the chthonic origins of the Greek mythology and its rationalization in the Olympic system of gods, on the other.

Dionysus is the only Greek god to have a mortal parent, Semele, to whom Zeus comes invisible, at night. Tay John is also a child with an odd origin: although there is no evidence of how he was born, he emerges out of the grave of a native woman who was raped at night by the white stranger, Red Rorty, who, as we remember, was aping God, thus bringing the Olympian enlightenment to the chthonic Shuswaps. Both Semele and Hanni had died before giving birth to the child; Zeus rescues Dionysus, thereby endowing him with immortality, and—in *Tay John*—the earth (which is also the grave as the womb of a pregnant woman) carries the child and gives birth to him. Dionysus undergoes dismemberment by the Titans, and likewise Tay John mutilates himself by chopping off his hand; also both symbolically die, disappear from the eyes of people,

and resurrect again, thus following or initiating the sequence of the natural seasons and cycles (*Classical Mythology* 274-97).

On the other side of this mythological analogy, where Tay John appears as a chthonic Dionysus, there is of course a Canadian indigenous myth that keeps with the Shuswap chthonic, subterranean way of spending winters in dugouts. As Robinson finds out, O'Hagan borrows the Tsimshian folk tale and adapts it to his fictional image of the chthonic Shuswaps; thus O'Hagan's "Shuswap legend declares that the infant has miraculously walked out of his mother's grave" ("Dismantling Sexual Dualities in O'Hagan's *Tay John*" 103). The indigenous provenance of the legend is also confirmed later when "an owl, the soul of a departed woman" speaks to Tay John, whose ears are "tender to its message" (O'Hagan, *Tay John* 152). The soul of the woman, in whom Robinson sees Tay John's deceased mother, notably appears in the critical for the Shuswaps moments, when Kumkleseem "repudiate[es] his Shuswap identity" by such symbolic acts as leaving the tribe over a woman and killing the female grizzly (Robinson, "Dismantling Sexual Dualities" 98).

As the figure of physis, Tay John has a chthonic provenance in the native woman and the earth; his yellow hair, inherited from his purported father, may symbolize the light of the sun; and this dialectic duality of the bottom and the top, of the darkness and the light, completes the vertical of the novel's mountain landscape in the figure of its protagonist. Tay John is also the centre of the worldview opposition between nature and culture, native mythology and Western Christianity, earth and heaven—if one were to look for an embodiment of those dualities in one person.

Unlike the Rorty brothers, whose movement is directed from the darkness of the bottom toward the light of the top but who are not able to live up to the light that they—in their pride—

see they belong to, Tay John does not have such high aspirations. His movement is back and forth: he comes out of the earth's womb to the light of day, but he returns into the mountain, as though into his grave, at the end; he is able to become a real leader among his people, but he chooses to come back to his solitude; he is vulnerable because of his man's pride, but at the same time he is an independent hunter and traveller who does not care about conventions. Similarly to the demigod Dionysus, who is ontologically situated between gods and humans, who dies and resurrects in concord with the cycles of nature, Tay John does not really belong to either the indigenous Shuswaps or white colonizers, but often plays the role of an independent mediator; he is more than anyone else a son of nature, and because of this non-belonging to things conventionally human and because of an occasional childish attachments to some of them (such as horses, rifles, and women), he becomes the last embodiment of spirit in the Nietzschean metamorphosis: "Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea" (Nietzsche 31).

As the chthonic figure of nature, understood first of all in its opposition to Western modernity, Tay John's character concentrates in himself the ecological time and space of the novel in their fullness. Since he never becomes a narrative point of view but always remains an object of witnessing, an object where points of view of different storytellers collide, his temporal-spatial continuum and what it represents—the chronotope of physis and the earth—remains concealed as well, or at least contains incompleteness and uncertainty, concealment-unconcealment of myth, narrative, and word. But even in order to become an object of a written narrative, Tay John has to go out of the domain of an oral myth; that is, to descend from the realm of gods to the world of humans. Although Tay John was lured from his grave-womb by the Shuswaps, he not immediately—and never fully—became one of them. "He wants the full, free

life of a man—not the half-life he had in the grave” (39), says an “old wise woman” from another tribe that was invited to cure the child of his constant weeping. The Shuswaps noticed that the boy had no shadow: they thought that his shadow had been left in the grave, and they were afraid “that if the grave were opened the boy might go down into it and not come up again” (41). The shadow as a sign of belonging to the world of humans under the sun is important not only in the Shuswap mythology. The shadow is the image of a man on earth, where he lives under the sun, moves and associates himself with other objects: the shadow of paddlers in the evening glow, or also the shadow of Father Rorty on the school marm-tree in the setting sun, or the shadow of his hand in the light of the candle in the cabin up in the mountains. A shadow in the Shuswap mythology appears to be the proof that somebody actually exists, is a body—not a spirit or a god, and Tay John, as the old woman says, “was not born as other children between the ground and the sun where his shadow could find him” (41). And even when he, following the old woman to the east, finally found his shadow, Tay John has remained forever the source of awe for his tribesmen, who had to be always alert not to step on his shadow. Years later, after his initiation, his tribesmen were still afraid that Kumklesem, as the Shuswaps called Tay John, might “leave them, fearing that the darkness of the earth, where he lived before they knew him, had stained his spirit” (51).

The symbol of shadow in *Tay John* is highly ambiguous: its vital importance and magic powers reflect the philosophy of light and darkness, day and night, known and unknown, life and death. On the one hand, everything that belongs to the human world should have its shadow—the sign of presence in the light of the day, when things appear to us in their true shape and posture. On the other, though, shadow is a dark image of things—it is an ambassador of darkness, of the underworld, of death, and of the unknown that all things and men carry along in their world:

Men walk upon the earth in light, trailing their shadows that are the day's memories of the night. For each man his shadow is his dark garment, formed to the image of his end, sombre and obscure as his own beginning. It is his shroud, awaiting him by his mother's womb lest he forget what, with his first breath of life, he no longer remembers. (O'Hagan, *Tay John* 162)

In a sense, Tay John himself is a shadow in the world of men: he comes from the darkness, from the depths of the earth, from the womb of death which at the same time is the womb giving birth to new life; that is why he represents death among the living and ostensibly is allowed—being still alive—back into the darkness of the unknown. He is a deity that is not strange to the mysteries of death and still a full man, that is, half-man and half-god: O'Hagan's *ecce homo*, a counterpart to the God of the Rorty brothers.

The ambiguity stems, however, from the fact that O'Hagan's narrators underscore several times throughout the story: the country that is the object of description in the novel and, accordingly, the things and characters playing in it, is the country of illusion, where everybody is free to create his or her own vision of people, landscapes, and events. The last narrator, Denham, in whom the author seems to put more artistic trust than in the others, is quite sensitive to the ecological part of that illusiveness that hides in the very landscape of the country:

Remember that I speak to you in the country of illusion, where a chain of mountains in the distance seems no more than a dog might leap across, or where on a clear winter's day a mountain thirty miles away seems so close that you might stretch out your hand and lean against it. Remember the cold silence that is a hum in your ears, and the river murmur that is a sort of silence.

But illusion may be more than that; it may become the power to believe...

(163)

Against the background of and within this landscape, the dialectic of light and darkness assumes unexpected temporal-spatial patterns that seem to be also the key to the mystery of Tay John's character and of the novel in general. The ever-evasive figure of Tay John, from the dark bottom of his descent to the lightness of his hair, is a product of the trickster narrative, the Lacanian *sinthome*, which bears witness to his existence and at the same time hides its track by its unreliability. Tay John himself is the *sinthomatic* protagonist, who simultaneously is a legend and a living man, dead and alive, with shadow or without it, the Shuswap and the white, the messiah and the anti-messiah. His personal time and space are aligned with the hybrid *chronotope* of the narrative, in which the dynamic modernity of the horizontal railway is parallel to the mythic direction of the Shuswaps' exodus, and the vertical chthonic ascent as well the final descent of Tay John are aped by the ostensible spiritual elevation of Thomas Rorty at the top of the mountain and his ironic fall to the abysmal sin. Both the problematic shadow of Tay John and the shadows interpreted by Father Rorty, including his own on the improvised cross of the school marm-tree, are "a reminder in the daylight world of the darkness of night, and, because it is featureless, it emphasizes the border between those two worlds" (Granofsky 113). This interchangeability of light and darkness is akin to the constant interpenetration of the new and the old, one of the metaphors of which in the novel is the railway that moves "into the mountains" (161). With this innovation that the new world brings to the old one, the "heritage of his yellow hair" prompts Tay John to leave the order of the Shuswaps, the people among whom he was brought up, for the new order of the white colonizers. "He had fled from the old. He looked for the new," says the narrator (161). This quest for the new, however, is misleading



because there is “nothing really new” (161). The modern time of progress turns to the cyclic time of the Shuswap mythology, as the direction of the railway is the direction of their yearning to the lost past. As the narrator at the beginning of O’Hagan’s short story “The Black Ghost” says: “For the North American Indian tomorrow was but the promise of another yesterday” (“Wilderness Men” 9). Even “an odd meteor” that brings to the earth its light and its dust only seems something that has never been seen before but in reality presents the matter that comprises the earth. All of these display a special philosophical perspective of meta-temporal and meta-spatial dimensions of the “country of illusion,” where the difference between the night and the day, the past and the future, the known and the unknown vanishes or assumes only temporary, nebulous, illusory contours:

To-day was implicit in time’s beginning. All that is, was. Somewhere light glowed in the first vast and awful darkness, and darkness is the hub of light. Imprisoned in its fires which brighten and make visible the universe, and shine upon man’s face, is the core, the centre, the hard unity of the sun, and it is dark.  
(O’Hagan, *Tay John* 161)

This almost Manichean duality becomes clearer when all its metaphoricity is applied to the phenomenology of the human world; that is, to the specific part of the universe that is formed by the mind and intentionality and to the scope of perception of which a human being is capable: “All that is not seen is dark. Light lives only in man’s vision. Past our stars, we think, is darkness. But here, we say, is light. Here is light where once was darkness, and beyond it, farther than our eyes can see, than our greatest telescope can pierce, is darkness still” (161-62).

The themes of the telescope and, earlier, of the railway suggest that the narrator keeps his inside perspective: he meditates on the dialectical dichotomy of light and darkness from the point

of view of the Westerner, as though reflecting Tay John's turn from the chthonic background of his upbringing to the "heritage of his yellow hair" (161). This rite of passage of Kumkleseem-Tay John and his people to modernity is the subject of the next chapter. Summing up our current observations, we can conclude that the passage is also closed in the cyclic time and space of the legend, of the foreclosed, fatherless narrative, whose embodiment is the protagonist, Tay John, and whose ambience is the hybrid and ambiguous chronotope of the mountains with their interpenetration of light and darkness, stasis and change, the height and the bottom, the chthonic and the modern. As O'Hagan writes in "The Black Ghost": "Mountains are loneliness and mystery. To them, throughout the ages, man has gone, humbly and afoot, to dream his dreams and seek his God" (*Wilderness Men* 10-11).

As Red Rorty becomes a victim of his pride and a false missionary vocation, Father Thomas becomes a victim of his passion and the magnitude of his image on the improvised cross, and the Shuswaps become victims of their natural materiality and the belief that Tay John is the messiah. Yet the mountains remain, until the end of the narrative, "a country of illusion," where people of both indigenous and foreign descent alike chase false goals and fall prey to small passions. The character of Kumleseeem-Tay John, in this context, grows into an evasive, trickster-like figure that dodges all the ideologies imposed upon him by various worldviews, ecological, and cultural perspectives, from whose points of view his story is narrated in the novel. The unreliability of these narratives and narrators is justified only by the figure of Tay John, whose trickster character marks the tale as making sense only as a *sinthome*, the enjoyment of illusion, trick, and ambiguity. Tay John is the chthonic deity of the country of illusion, a real symbol of the place, who first of all is a man absolutely belonging to his land—coming out of it and returning to it—and resistant to any form of great religious or mythological narratives with

which others try to load him down. As a deity, though, he remains a mythological figure, which places him between the depths of his native tradition, like in the depths of the earth from which he comes out to light, and modernity, of which he unwillingly becomes an integral part. Due to this interstitial status, Tay John belongs both to the past and to the future, outgrows temporal restrictions, and is placed in the cycle of constant returns. His spatial continuum is also much richer than that of any other character of the novel. He combines elusiveness and omnipresence: on the horizontal level, Tay John is both a hunter who can stay invisible in the woods for many days and mediator between the aboriginals and the colonizers who can appear any moment as though out of nowhere either to help or to make business. Due to his name, Tay John could be traced to Ontario and even the US, and he is also the messiah who leads his people to the promised land across the mountains. On the vertical level, he comes out of the earth to the light of the day; he falls prey to silly passions such as love for women, arms, and horses, but he also knows moments of spiritual ascent such as compassion to animals, human dignity, and true love. Tay John's space is both in the earth's depths and high in the mountains; he simultaneously is with his people and with the white invaders, but at all times he belongs only to himself and follows his own desires that are always possible to achieve precisely because he owns the landscape: that country of illusion is his home.

### **3.2. The Landscape of Coyote's Tale: Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook***

In her poetic novel *The Double Hook* (1959), Sheila Watson uses an environmental setting similar to O'Hagan's *Tay John*: the mountain landscape of the Shuswap country, which becomes a host to a tale that unfolds under the auspices of a traditional trickster, Coyote. The spatial dimension of the novel presents a place with distinct landscape characteristics ideal for concealing, insinuating, darkening, and separating: the country "in the folds of the hills under

Coyote's eye" (Watson *The Double Hook* 3). If Bugnet's *The Forest* leads its male protagonist to the realization that what he had perceived as paradise turned out to be a cursed land, *The Double Hook* describes an anti-paradise from the very beginning: this is an alternative land, designated to look like, not exactly hell, but—in the etymological meaning of *anti*, *instead of* paradise, the land specifically God-forsaken and thereupon being under the vigilant control of the Coyote's eye. Being an indigenous mythological figure, Coyote, as though defending his land from the invading European ideologies and mythologies, miraculously manages to survive and to exert control over his land and his people, dodging the traps of the domineering colonizing systems of religion and worldview. Coyote first presents itself to the isolated mountain community as "the spreading fear"; in Joseph Pivato's words, "This malevolent figure moves about counselling despair, division and darkness" (185). As in *Tay John*, the defiance toward the world that ostensibly belongs to the biblical God, who otherwise also represents the discourse the colonizing invader, is not explicit but nevertheless readable; it is rather an alternative place, steeped into an alternative mythology, where Coyote's eye—to express it in terms of the European theological thought—exercises control not exactly diabolic but rather Manichean. "In the folds of the hills" (3), time also is able to stop, become fragmented, suspended, and even go backwards; together with the space, the deviations in time are secured by the fragmented syntax<sup>217</sup> highly saturated with images that function both as allegories and in their direct meaning.

The novel begins with a strong defiance of the biblical God in the land that, from the outset, and maybe from the beginning of the world, has been declared to be under Coyote's eye.

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<sup>217</sup> There is a substantial scholarship on *The Double Hook*'s poetic language. Among the most interesting analyses are the essays "Transitivity, Indirection, and Redemption" by Yinglin Ji and Dan Shen, "Poetic Structures in the Prose Fiction of Sheila Watson" by Jan Marta, "'Between One Cliché and Another': Language in *The Double Hook*" by Barbara Godard, and "Message and Messengers in *The Double Hook*" by Dawn Rae Downton.

The first scene of *The Double Hook* is a prologue to what appears to be—in the second paragraph already—a haunted place: James kills his mother, and his sister Greta is excited that now nobody would prevent her from living with her brother and lover in one person. Against the background of matricide and incest, a fishing ghost of James and Greta Potter's mother, "the old lady" (3), is vividly seen as a living person by all the inhabitants of the village. She provokes the neighbors by fishing in their pools of the creek, fishing, in her daughter-in-law Ara's words, "shamelessly": "The old lady fished on with a concentrated ferocity as if she were fishing for something she'd never found" (5). What she is fishing for remains an allegorical riddle of the novel, since, as Ara says, "we've not eaten fish of hers in this house" (17). A rhetorical question of the Widow represents the general feeling of the villagers toward old Mrs. Potter: "Dear God...what does she want? So old, so wicked, fishing the fish of others" (10). The apparition, however, is rather not the old lady's doing: behind her, and at the background of the village's evil, stands the spirit of Coyote. Mrs. Potter is both a representative of that spirit and its first victim: "Kip seen Coyote carry her [Old Mrs. Potter] away like a rabbit in his mouth. There's no one he hasn't got his eye on" (44). Coyote is seen not only by Kip; all the witnesses of the (ghost of the) old lady fishing notice some traces of Coyote at the backdrop. For example, Ara, returning to the creek where she, just minutes before, saw the old lady, found nothing but "the padded imprint of a coyote's foot at the far edge of the moving water" (21).

Thus, "in the folds of the hills," under the voyeuristic Coyote's eye, hides a damned and forsaken country, where the biblical God's power and will do not seem to reach. The folded, fragmented, tricky landscape of that country exists in defiance of the omnipresent and omnipotent biblical God, as though notwithstanding of him. Mrs. Potter's apparition that is

fishing “the fish of others” is, by Coyote’s doing and by a paranoid persistence of the spirit, the initial epitome of this defiance:

If God had come into the valley, come holding out the long finger of salvation, moaning in the darkness, thundering down the gap at the lake head, skimming across the water, drying up the blue signature like blotting-paper, asking where, asking why, defying an answer, she would have thrown her line against the rebuke; she would have caught a piece of mud and looked it over; she would have drawn a line with the barb when the fire of righteousness baked the bottom. (4)

A number of scholars read the image of the old lady as an archaic figure of the Great Mother, an occult female of the pagan pantheons.<sup>218</sup> In the novel, from the outset she appears already as a dead person, a ghost, although seen as a living person to all the tenants of the village. One of the embodiments of the Great Mother in the world mythology, for example, in the Aegean Pantheon, she was “mistress of life” and at the same time “mistress of the underworld” (A. Bowering 63). Placed into the allegorical narrative of the novel, the old lady points to the a-historical, untimely origin, and the key to the landscape, of the cursed country, and also functions as an introduction to the events and the characters. As a divine female, mysteriously fishing for something with what we know from the title as “the double hook,” Mrs. Potter “is the glyph of origin, cut into origin itself; the earth, searching for origin. Her marking of the baked lake bottom is the signature of the beginning of all that is made or created...” (A. Bowering 105).

The old lady as a figure of the Great Mother is obviously not the birth-giving Sophia—the female God’s wisdom—of the early Christian heresies. She is the divine female who opens

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<sup>218</sup> For example, Steven Scobie in *Sheila Watson and Her Works*, Angela Bowering in *Figures Cut in Sacred Ground*, and Margaret Atwood in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*.

herself for life to come out of her and for death to harvest the crop and in turn reproduce life in different forms. That lethal, malicious part of her is what makes Mrs. Potter a pantheistic pagan deity, rather than the Gnostic Sophia. That is why Angela Bowering notes that, as “hieroglyph (*hieros*: holy, sacred),” the old lady “is the darkness that measures the relationship of all the other figures. She is, then, the thing against which all other things shine. She is the darkness that allows the glory” (62). She is dark as the depths of earth, and Coyote, who keeps the whole country under his eye, makes this darkness omnipresent. He uses the ghost of the “wicked” woman, whose darkness is empowered by her herself being a victim of matricide reinforced by incest, to imbue the earth and the landscape with his own spirit. He, as it were, encodes the landscape using the dead energy of the old lady and imposing this seat of sin and death over the living. His doing turns the light of the sun into the moonlight and saturates the water with deadly powers: instead of coming as salvation from the continuous drought, the water takes on apocalyptic features and comes as though from the dark bottom of the earth, as Mrs. Potter. This is why “as she watched the old lady, Ara felt death leaking through from the centre of the earth. Death rising to the knee. Death rising to the loin,” when at the same time “No such thing could happen. The water was drying away. It lay only in the deep pools” (5).

Placed in *The Double Hook* within the biblical context, Coyote as trickster who introduces death into the world stems, of course, first of all from the indigenous cosmology. As Gary Snyder recounts, “Earthmaker, the creator figure for California, he made the world so that people wouldn’t get old, wouldn’t die... Nobody died, and there was always plenty of food” (“The Incredible Survival of Coyote” 257). Death comes in the wake of Coyote’s agitation for it; he lures people to get curious about life where something happens: “Now, you folks, don’t

you think this is kind of a dull life, there ought to be something happening here, maybe people ought to die.” In consequence, “it’s Coyote’s fault that there’s death in the world” (Snyder 257).

In defiance of Earthmaker’s creation, Coyote—now within the bilical paradigm—distorts the created landscape by remodelling the water of salvation and the birth-giving female body into the flood of the apocalypse and the voluptuous belly of the earth, respectively. He essentially re-codes the blessed simplicity of creation into a new Coyote’s hieroglyph, a puzzle, a book that craves deciphering. As Angela Bowering aptly puts it, “‘in the folds of the hills’, we are drawn to notice both that this place is female body and that this body is layered, has undergone catastrophic shifts, and requires archē-ology” (105). The corporal impression of the water and its deadly energy that stems from the apparition of the old lady (“Death rising to the knee. Death rising to the loin”) confirms the overall intuition of an intentional propinquity between the human, especially female, body and the landscape, as well as of the elements and corporeality. The ecology of the place, as Angela Bowering notes, “progressively makes of the terrain a generative body. The figures [of the characters] in turn regard ‘the arms of the hills’, ‘the shoulders of the hills’, the brow of the hill’, ‘the foot of the slope’, ‘the arms of the river’, ‘the backs of the hills,’ and ‘the mouth of the valley’” (105-106). The landscape of this country is vividly and constantly compared with a human body; most often, this body is specifically ascribed to the old lady, who in her reported wickedness and pride embodies the remoteness and outcast status of the land. If we place the ecological image of the country within the system of the Christian theology, which also makes sense given multiple references to the Bible in the novel, the land is cursed here because of man, and nature suffers man’s fate not because it was created imperfect: “for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it,” says Paul the Apostle (*Romans* 8:20). The body of the country’s



landscape is the outcast of creation, in the same way that Mrs. Potter or her spirit is alienated from the environment: “She was fishing upstream in the source. That way she’d come to the bones of the hills and the flats between where the herd cows ranged. They’d turn their tails to her and stretch their hides tight. They’d turn their living flesh from her as she’s turned hers from others” (*The Double Hook* 5). The totality of the ecological homogeneity of the land and Mrs. Potter’s body and spirit is further confirmed by the witnesses of the fishing ghost, Kip and Ara: “The old lady was there in every fold of the country” (29).

As the epitome of the earth after original sin, the country of the “folded hills” is not the same, however, as the rest of the changed world. Its allegorical power, represented by the characteristic features of the landscape, distinguishes it from the rest of the world in the same way that the Garden of Eden was separated by God from the rest of creation. It exists as though parallel to the world, irrespective of God, without His knowledge, and that seems to be the reason for the parallel, or indigenous, ruler, Coyote, taking this place under his control. The place gives the impression of running simultaneously to the created world from the very beginning of time, thereby presenting itself as equal to Eden in status. This impression is sustained by insignificant details of observation, which, in its totality, create the whole effect of the ecological system of that place. For example, when the Coyote-driven apparition of the old lady dissipates from “the stems of the cottonwood” above the creek, the Widow’s boy notices that “Dragonflies floated over the surface as if the water had not been stirred since the beginning of time” (14). In Gnostic terms, Coyote becomes the Manichean God’s double, who translates as a deputy-god where God is absent, and as such he is a natural product of the land and its original ruler, an anti-God in the etymological meaning of *being instead*. As F.T. Flahiff notes, Watson herself wrote about the Shuswap characteristics of Coyote’s image:

his place in her book is *here* and his time is *now*. He answers to a people's need to account for their world: he is their tyrant and their 'thing', his role as trickster and demigod and buffoon embodying the motley nature of existence itself. He is as wily as Ulysses, as elusive as Proteus, as malicious as Satan, as ingenious as Prometheus (for Coyote, too, is a stealer of fire). He is the father of the Shuswap, wiser than Raven, master of the elements. Like Jehovah, he brings down the proud. (136)

The Widow is the only person in the novel who speaks to the biblical God, at least in rhetorical supplications. A common conception, shared by most of the inhabitants of the land, is that the country is God-forsaken, unseen or ignored. A leading role here is played by the landscape, whose peculiarity hides this piece of land from its divine creator: "The earth fell away in hills and clefts as if it had been dropped carelessly wrinkled on the bare floor of the world" (*The Double Hook* 7). The Coyote's country is the surplus of the biblical God's creation; it has been discarded as a remainder, a waste product, and therefore animals and people alike here are hidden from God due to the shortcomings of the landscape. The point of view Ara shares in this regard is a primitive theology of the fallen Adam who thought he could hide from Jehovah under the bush: "Even God's eye could not spy out the men lost here already, Ara thought. He had looked mercifully on the people of Nineveh though they did not know their right hand and their left. But there were not enough people here to attract his attention. The cattle were scrub cattle. The men lay like sift in the cracks of the earth" (7).

All that has made it possible for Coyote to regain his original power over the land: "Coyote made the land his pastime. He stretched out his paw. He breathed on the grass. His spittle eyes it with prickly pear" (6). But Coyote does not only keep his voyeuristic eye on the

country, stolen from the created world or God's protection. He plays God on this land, and from time to time—as though mocking Jehovah and parodying Him, like Red Rorty in *Tay John*—

Coyote rises his voice over the hills:

Above on the hills

Coyote's voice rose among the rocks... (14)

Nobody in the novel openly turns to Coyote with fervour or supplication to provide answers or grant wishes; he establishes himself with his words, parodying Jehovah's style from the *The Book of Job*:

In my mouth is the east wind.

Those who cling to the rocks I will bring down

I will set my paw on the eagle's nest. (9)

Like Jehovah, Coyote appoints his “servants” who eye his land on his behalf:

And in a loud voice

Coyote cried:

Kip, my servant Kip. (21)

Kip is one of the tenants of this forsaken land; he is attracted to the people and their lives, yet the bad smell of this attraction—the hint of Coyote's voyeuristic eye—drives all the others away from him. “Wherever you are there's trouble” (12), says the Widow's boy to Kip. Kip was also left out by Ara, who listed all the inhabitants of the land, a very few, compared with “sixscore thousand persons in Nineveh” (19), but did not think about Kip.

Kip, as Coyote's servant, also sees things that others would like to keep in secret. He pays for this ability, or excessive curiosity, when James blinds him. Theophil says that sometimes “it's better for the eyes to close,” but Kip says that “sometimes...when the eye's

open the thing walks right in a sets down” (42). If for Theophil it is best to shoo things out through the back door, Kip, leaning “against the closed door,” “forced out by Theophil under the white lick of the moon, thought: “All the time... people go shutting their doors. Tying things up. Fencing them in. Shutting out what they never rightly know” (45).

Since most of the inhabitants of the country tend to see nothing, the voyeuristic Coyote and “his servant” Kip share their advanced knowledge with others, showing them, for instance, the old lady’s spirit at the backdrop of the folded landscape and the curvy creek. What the characters see or confess to have seen in the novel happens afterwards, after they saw Mrs. Potter fishing, all at the same time, and only Kip reveals that what he saw was “your old lady climb down through the split rock with Coyote” (33). The lady fishing appears to be the only viewing experience all the characters can share, especially those like Greta, who deliberately shut herself away from her mother and the environment inside her private perverted world.

The concept of seeing things in the novel plays an important role in the phenomenological unfolding of the relations between people and their environment, mirroring the relations among people themselves, their worldview, and spiritual struggle. The key substance for the ability to see is light; its shining and its reflection shape things in the novel, and endow them—otherwise nonexistent—with meaning. Paradoxically, the brightest light of the day brings in *The Double Hook* the false vision of the apparition. But this fake serves as an introduction to the sights that unveil before the characters in the reflected light of the moon, when—as though in the reflection of a mirror—the characters see themselves and reveal their secret thoughts. The first night after the day of the matricide and—in the wake of it—the haunted landscape become the turning point in the novel’s chronotope that changes the

phenomenological perspective of things, and in the seeing, reflecting, and meditating reveals the moonlight side of both the country and its inhabitants.

The first who “open[s] the front door” to the night is Ara; she leaves William with his night chores and sees the land “humped against the sky. Noisy and restless in its silence” (40). And as she was returning to the house, “an owl passing in the dark called out to her Weep-for-yourself. Weep-for-yourself” (40). Together with the boy and Angel, she was waiting by James’s house for some explanations of the events, but then she and Angel left the boy alone. The Widow’s boy is waiting for James, and the Widow in her house is waiting for the boy’s return. The ecomimetic descriptions of their waiting overlap at some point when the boy is returning from his post. But prior to that, the readers witness the boy sitting by the edge of the lake, when, “Ply on ply, night bound the floating images of things” (40). As he is waiting, “silent as an osprey on a snag” (41), the moonlight is not yet present, and probably because of that, his poor eco-vision is balanced mostly by eco-hearing: “Watching only the images which he could shatter with a stone or bend with his hand. He heard a fish break water. He did not stir. He heard a bird’s wing cut the air. He heard a mouse turn in the hollow of a log” (41). Wild nature is being recorded in the boy’s mind as a part of the waiting process; it is the object of contemplation, not action. His practical mind wakes up when he sees William in his barn feeding the cows. The thought of his own animals waiting in the barn makes Heinrich change his plans and turn his horse back home. The reason for his sudden return cannot be boiled down to the economic pride of a farm owner (“A man could take pride in his own gates...” (41)); a special connection with his animals is fortified here by the mutual state of waiting and is expressed in the biological—also mutual—function of breathing: “All about him as he rode into the yard he could hear the breathing of his animals. Close to the house waiting” (41).

The animals' waiting connects also the waiting of the boy with the waiting of his mother, the Widow. Her waiting introduces the moonlight and is paired with her rhetorical sigh for God and a general spatial scenery that those two concepts evoke in her mind: "Dear God. The Widow waited too. The country. And the moonlight. And the animals breathing close to the house. The horses in the stable. Pawing. Whinnying. The cow moaning in the darkness" (41). The country landscape, the moonlight, and the animals provoke in the Widow melancholic thoughts, quite different from those of her son. A man is inseparably linked to animals by their biological affinity, such as the need for food, by their economic interdependence, and by the final outcome of their meaningless lives: death. All of those components share brutal biological and underlying spiritual dimensions, as the sweat of labour and death are the result of the original sin and the fall of the whole world:

A man came when food was cooked. He came unless he'd been gored by a bull. Or fallen into a slough. Or shot for a deer. A man had to come. The horses waited for him. The cow. The pigs. A man was servant to his servants until death tore up the bargain. Until a man lay like Wagner in the big bed under the starched sheets his body full and heavy in death...

Dear God, she said. The country. The wilderness. Nothing. (41-42).

Death and nothingness, wilderness and stillness—the mutual destiny of humans and animals alike—are what goes through William's mind as he is sitting in his house, with the silent corpse of his mother, and through the mind of the murderer, James, for whom Greta and Lenchen—both the objects of his sin—along with his mother, and even Angel, are now becoming the source of existential angst:

Like Greta. Like Angel sitting now in the kitchen. Waiting to catch you in the pits and snares of silence. Mist rising from the land and pressing in. Twigs cracking like bone. The loose boulder and the dropdown. The fear of dying somewhere alone, caught against a tree or knocked over in an inch of water. (28)

The ambient wilderness, embodied in the sketched and emotionally conceived objects such as the mist, the cracking twigs, and the boulder, is a preliminary image of the deadly stillness, inanimate wild emptiness that are now the essence of James's soul. Just as for the Widow, the wilderness for James is the epitome of nothingness, which, as it seems to him, is in collusion with his women. His perception of the country's landscape is the reflection of their relationships. For Greta, it is a silent and morose conspiracy against their mother: "This is the way they lived. Suspended in silence" (29). Similarly, "all around the hollow where he's taken the girl [Lenchen] there was nothing but the stems of trees so close packed... So still you could hear the frost working in the bark" (28). The ambient silence of the wilderness is an environmental counterpart of the existential angst of dying alone; it is fearful because it hints at the presence of death when one is still alive. An easy possibility of sudden death, felt by James, corresponds with the Widow's meditation on man's condition; man's proximity to animals and the wilderness makes him a part of nothingness while still alive. The possibility of being "shot for a deer" (41) in the Widow's reflection on man is complemented by the comparison of Mrs. Potter with the deer, right before the murder. James and Greta were "moving their lips... as hunters talk smelling the deer... And when they'd raised their eyes their mother was watching as the deer watches" (29). There is a similar correspondence among the allegories of biological corporeity, embodied in the images of food and death that link together William, the Widow, and her son Heinrich's waiting. William thinks about digging the grave for his mother, because

“in summer a man can’t wait,” and “the ground is soft enough for digging” (39). A moment later Ara sets before him a plate of food; he takes a knife and fork and begins to eat. At night his “forking straw into the stalls” (41) makes Heinrich think about his own animals waiting in the barn. When the narrative switches to the Widow, waiting for her son to come back (the boy being the prototype of man of whose condition she was musing), the animals, the food, the fork and the knife appear again to round up the array of the corporal imagery:

Heinrich, she called, Heinrich.

All round the animals waited. The plate on the table. The knife. The fork. (42)

The concept of human mortality, brought about by dint of this subtle imagery associating the biological need for food and necrotic subtext, is expressed in an allegory of piercing and cutting objects: the fork and the knife. Although uttered in regard to Heinrich, this array of images brings the said association only in the mind of the Widow and does not correspond with the feelings of her son about himself. Heinrich seems to be the only person during that night who thinks, acts, and exists, as it were, by himself, irrespective of other figures. Carnal or mortal implications usually come together with the nearness of another person: the Widow thinks about her son; William thinks about death with respect to his recently deceased mother; Prosper is anxious about the presence of Lenchen; Theophil is exasperated with Angel and Prosper’s children sleeping by his side; Kip is curious about James and Coyote. During the moonlit night, William cannot fall asleep. He is preoccupied with a disturbing curiosity, and his body, trying to be sympathetic toward the concept of death, feels unrest in accordance with his mind: “His body filled the length of the bed. He rolled over, kicking the covers loose... It’s curious, he thought, how a man lies down in the ground at last” (47). As though corroborating Freud’s theory, William’s death drive comes along with the sexual



excitement: “Ara, he called. What’s keeping you? A man doesn’t expect to lie waiting for his wife half the night” (47). Prosper was also perturbed by the appearance of Lenchen; the girl’s “coming had stirred thoughts which buzzed about waiting to torment him.” But after Lenchen had left, “he sank back into the comfort of his flesh” (47). Theophil is also preoccupied with the comfort of his flesh, while sleeping with Angel, grinding his teeth and shoving Felix and Angel’s children to the wall. Likewise, “Angel stirred restlessly under the weight of Theophil’s arm” (47).

The mystic and necrotic energy of Watson’s night description is intensified by the various facets of the moonlight, shed differently upon particular characters. It is interesting, though, that Heinrich is the only one whose experience of that night is devoid of the moonlight’s influence. Both the night and the moonlight introduce temporal-spatial dimension of the landscape to the internal world of the characters, underlining a special nearness between macro- and microcosms. Lenchen, who bears James Potter’s child, is leaving Prosper and headed toward James’s house: “Fear rising. Fear flooding her body as the moonlight flooded the hills. Exposed in the white light like a hawk pulled out and pinned up on a barn door for all to see” (46). Also, the moonlight, Coyote’s evil tool, brings her not to James, but to Kip, the meddler Coyote’s servant. The valley’s landscape, lit with the moonlight, intensifies and symbolizes all that disturbs its dwellers. Most of them try to hide from that light, as they want to escape existential angst along with their daily problems. For example, the Widow, whose daughter Lenchen “chose to go” and whose son Heinrich is “heavy in sleep,” pulls “the covers up over her eyes to shut out the moonlight” (47-48).

The moonlight, however, is an equivocal concept and image. The characters of *The Double Hook* seemingly want to escape its shining, but at the same time are passionately

attracted to it. Kip, who is referred to as Coyote's servant, is not only the one who craves the glory of the moonlight, but also the one who understands its nature and provenance. "Forced out by Theophil under the white lick of the moon," Kip—unlike other characters—finds himself alone and out of attachment to any particular human soul. Stepping aside from his natural curiosity, while still being a servant to the voyeuristic Coyote's eye, Kip experiences a moment of revelation. His ambience, which basically consists of his outdoor feelings in the moonlit valley, works as a facilitator and indicator of his emotional and mental state. First, evicted by Theophil, Kip "stood on the doorstep looking at the moon. Stood roped to the ground by his weight of flesh" (45). This bodily metaphor sets him initially in concord with the emotional state of other victims of the moon: Theophil, William, Angel, Prosper, the Widow, and others. However, Kip demonstrates an open aspiration for the white and cool glory of the moon, this reflected light of the sun, of which he feels still unworthy because of the weight of his flesh, his materiality: "Reaching out to the white tongue of moonlight so that he might swing up to the cool mouth. Raising his hand to the white glory for which he thirsted" (45). Yet, all of a sudden, Kip remembers, "Coyote got the old lady at last" (45). This abrupt recollection works as an epiphany that probably does not change him internally but brings about some valuable understanding about himself and his neighbours. Kip's thoughts are now about those who, like him, maybe unconsciously, crave the cool glory of the moon: first of all, Mrs. Potter, and—after her death even more so—her son James: "He's like his old lady, Kip thought. There's a thing he doesn't know. He doesn't know you can't catch the glory on a hook and hold on to it. That when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. That if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear" (48).

The glory of the white light he desired a minute ago turns into a fearful object due to the acute awareness that this is also what Coyote is after, what he is attracted to, and to what he desperately tries to turn all the others. Nowhere in the book does Coyote resemble a trickster figure with such an allegorical clarity as in this explication of Kip's epiphany: "That Coyote plotting to catch the glory for himself is fooled and every day fools others. He [James] doesn't know, Kip thought, how much mischief Coyote can make"<sup>219</sup> (48). Next comes the definition of that glory, which makes it clear that the glory they all desire is not real, not genuine: the moonlight is the light of darkness, a reflected light of the sun, so everybody is fooled by the fake, Coyote's, glory: "Coyote reaching out reflected glory" (48). Light, reflected from the surface of the earth, as well as from the surface of the moon, is earthly light, which belongs not to the realm of God but Coyote; that light lit the valley as well as its inhabitants: the spirit of the valley, dead Mrs. Potter, Coyote's prey, Kip, William, the Widow, Theophil, and others. To fathom the sense of the moonlight, Kip has to detach his mind from the moonlit landscape, to stop being preoccupied by it, as though becoming out of reach for Coyote's power and his estate, the folded hills of the country: "His mind awake floated on the tide of objects about him" (48). Kip's mind is just registering the ambience; the moonlit landscape has triggered his epiphany, but for his mind to free itself, Kip needs to focus not on the fake glory of the moon but on the random things of creation that his eye is able to catch spontaneously in the reflected light: "Bird's eye. The veins of leaves dark in the moonlight. A beetle caught blue on a shelved stone" (48). That night and that moment, Kip was the only person who managed to notice the simple ambience, an epitome of creation; when all the others fell victim to Coyote-inspired fear, or tried to escape the moonlight and their neighbours by receding to the comfort of their flesh,

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<sup>219</sup> This same quotation, read from the point of view of the biblical associations and in the Old Testament ideological and symbolic context, shows Coyote as an allegory of Satan. Both Leslie Monkman ("Coyote as Trickster in *The Double Hook*") and Beverly Mitchell ("Association and Allusion in *The Double Hook*") point to such a perspective.

when Heinrich was peacefully asleep, Kip “was alone under the moon in the white shed of the world” (45). Blinded by the furious James’s whip, Kip will no longer be able to serve as Coyote’s voyeuristic eye. But in spite of such a cruel mutilation, no trace of the glory is left in him, only humility and contrition: “...I had it coming. There’s no time a bug won’t get its wings frayed in the end” (107). He accounts for the metaphysical provenance of his deeds, by repentance separating himself from the power of the dark: “Tell the girl, Kip said, that I didn’t mean nothing. The old white moon had me by the hair” (107). Like the criminal crucified by the right hand of Jesus, the one who repented and acknowledged the equity of his horrible punishment, Kip is the first character of *The Double Hook* to obtain a chance for salvation, or liberation, from the tenacious Coyote’s grip. By sacrificing his sight, Kip brings to repentance also the fallen girl, Lenchen, who utters the words as though on behalf of the biblical Eve: “It was me, she said. All because of me the whole world’s wrecked...” (107). Kip’s sacrifice is even more invaluable in that he used to be the only one who could see in the novel—regarding this time not the sins of others but the natural ambience, the simple facts of creation. With this respect, Lenchen’s observation comes as symbolic after Kip compares himself to a bug: “Who’ll see things now, she said. The bugs. The flowers. The bits of striped stone” (107).

Kip’s sacrifice is not in vain for James either. Having murdered his mother, having blinded Kip and whipped Lenchen, leaving his suicidal sister Greta, who died in the fire, James comes out to the hills to vent his frustration. In despair and remorse, James went out to “let the world see [him] now if it cares,” but “the world didn’t seem to care” (81). He passes all his neighbours—the world in which he used to live. The only thing he wants is to get out of the valley’s God-forsaken landscape, out of its rhythm, out of carelessness to reach a place either of punishment or salvation—Nineveh: “To get away. To bolt noisily and violently out of the

present. To leave the valley” (81). All that James finds, though, is the time and space of his ambient landscape. And when his world does not care to look at James, Coyote does. The ghost of the old lady, Coyote’s victim and at the same time the voice of James’s conscience, haunts him everywhere: “the dark figure of his mother playing her line out into the full flood” (83) appears everywhere along the river bank—Coyote’s estate—which seduces James by its “hills bent to the river,” its “sinuous curves,” “the shadows of the clouds passing over the water,” “its thousand pools and eddies alive beneath its silver skin” (89). The natural beauty surrounding James on his escape is equivocal in its essence, like “the brown figure” of his mother from whom he was fleeing: the spirit of the old lady has become the epitome of the valley, which entices James with its hills and floods but at the same time lures him into self-oblivion. James wants “to go down to the river. To throw himself into its long arms” (89). The figure of Mrs. Potter drifts “sling the shore like night-watch” (89); it both prevents James from suicide and makes him long for it. Coyote speaks on behalf of that luring landscape and confesses that his shadow stands behind all James’s evildoings. It is Coyote who answers James’s question, addressed to himself: what did he really mean by defying his mother back then, on the stairs of their house?

To gather briars and thorns,

said Coyote.

To go down into the holes of the rock

and into the caves of the earth.

In my fear is peace. (89)

Coyote is the evil spirit of incest, matricide, and suicide; and Coyote is the owner of that God-forsaken country. The ghost of James’s mother—his own conscience and the luring beauty

of the landscape—is a great bait for James, who is about to become another Coyote’s victim. But as the master of human souls and lives, Coyote appears under the guise of a saviour, yet rather of a Buddhist shape:

In my mouth is forgetting  
In my darkness is rest. (14)

The beauty of the landscape, appropriated by Coyote, becomes a perfect grave of oblivion, peace, and refuge from the unbearable weight of life and sin. Apparently, however, the very concept and feeling of sin meddles with Coyote’s offer of oblivion. That is why when James was standing at the river’s bank, “his heart cried out against the thought: “This bed is too short for a man stretch himself in. The covering’s too narrow for a man to wrap himself in” (89). “Under the moonlight among the clumps of stiff sage,” James decides that “the seams and pockets of the earth” (100) that Coyote is offering him will not exhaust the nature of man, which James indeed is, in spite of all his wrongdoings.

In the city, James inflicts a sort of punishment on himself by letting a wicked couple steal all his savings. The stealthy watching of them count his money from his wallet is the point at which James leaves the white glory of the moon, at which he is looking “back over his shoulder”: “There where the moonlight slid down the walls Traff and Lilly swam in the pool of silver they had stolen” (111). A “simple hope” that he suddenly saw in the image of Lenchen and their child made him “kiss away escape in the mud by the river” (111). His despair has not yet left him definitively. James saddles the horse and lets it go of its own accord, and when the horse carries him over the bridge, “fear unwound itself again like the line from his mother’s reel” (112). Coyote’s voice is being heard again in the soothing rhythms of a verse:

Better go down to the bars of the pit

Better rest in the dust

Justice is swifter than water. (112)

But the horse, to whose will James has entrusted his life, carries him “up a path unto the shoulders of the hills” (112). As though having felt the desperate state of James’s mind, the horse “raced from the ridge through a meadow of wild hay watered by some hidden spring” (112-13). What the reader sees next is the moving picture of the great unity of man, horse, and their natural ambience. James suspends his own human will and lets the animal decide his fate. The narrator gives a vivid description of the physical unity of the man and the horse; a description of James’s feeling of self-resignation and bodily trust toward the animal, which now represents the whole valley, its creeks, meadows, and bushes: “James could feel the pull of the horse’s shoulders as it stepped its way up through the rocks and bushes. He could feel the muscles contract tighten as the horse began its descent on the other side” (113). The perils that the landscape of the country presents on the way of the man and the animal still have the potential to fulfil Coyote’s aspirations to claim one more soul, to suck it into the crevices of the folded hills or into the cool waters of the river. Yet, James’s will to suspend his own will and become one with the horse takes his soul out of Coyote’s reach. This is not James but the horse stepping down to the river’s water: “James could hear the horse’s feet parting the water. He could hear the flow of water on stones, but in this skyless slit the water was opaque and formless” (113). For James, who used to see the banks of the river occupied by the apparition of his mother fishing, this unity with the animal brings a chance of oblivion without suicide, of humility of his sinful humanity before the purifying forces of nature. This time Coyote cannot employ his usual ghost-weapon because it works only with the human soul: “[James] shut his eyes and fastened his free hand in his horse’s mane” (113). At one moment in this description,

the horse's laying its way through the twists and turns of the hilled country becomes an allegory of James's both spiritual and physical condition: "As they climbed again, the horse seemed to draw life with every breath. It climbed. It rounded ledges. It held close to the rock where nothing but the feel of stone marked the fall below" (113). Like the horse, James's spirit is also climbing from the bottom of the spiritual pit where he put himself to the hope of a new life, and yet still he is fragile enough to fall off if he stops trusting the natural forces that are guiding him.

Through the twists and turns of the perilous path, the horse takes James to Lenchen, to their mutual child, and to his new life. The fact that James resigns his human will and freedom to the animal's instinct and becomes saved sheds some light on *The Double Hook's* philosophy of the human condition. Earlier in the book, a discussion between William and Ara about horses ends with major generalizations about God, man, and power. Reflecting on a statement that man "can't hold and shape the world," Ara envies horses, "standing tail to head and head to rump flicking off each other's flies" (65). William replies that horses also bite each other from time to time and kick with their heels, not being so different from men after all; the real difference between beasts and humans is that the former have much less freedom. Retorting to Ara's remark that a horse can easily defy any man or break out, William maintains that horses are too dependent on humans and too fearful of loneliness and the difficulties of the weather to stay by themselves for long. Unlike William's picture of man, James ends up by relinquishing his freedom that, ultimately, was about to kill him both physically and spiritually. The thought of the girl, Lenchen, and their child, "freed James from freedom" (111), and the horse is the one by whose natural instinct James returns safe and sound from his perilous journey. Yet if William's musing on the subject of man and freedom and James's lesson of losing and



recovering his own self are two opposed philosophical or religious concepts, the book does not yet give any positive answer as to which one outweighs the other.

Upon James's return to the village, the narrator introduces the reader to a new spatial object on the map of the novel: the "blank smoldering space" (122) of James and Greta's burnt house. The emptiness of that place, secluded additionally by the fenced plot, is the main characteristic that makes it, for James, the point of a new beginning, a new earth. Regardless of William and Heinrich, who occupied the space that "should have been empty," and whom James spotted first as beckoning to him figures and then only as "bodies," "he could see only the seared and smouldering earth, the bare hot cinder of a still unpeopled world" (122). The site of the burnt house appears before James as a generous gift of Providence, which executed "the destruction of what his heart had wished destroyed," and by this miraculous gesture he has been allowed to retry his life, to enter "into the first pasture of things" (122). James feels speechless and rather reluctant to explain to William and the boy where he was and what he was doing during his absence from the village: "of beating up Kip and running off because Kip had been playing round with the glory of the world" (123). Engulfed by the surge of emotions, James does not know yet that the burnt house is not God's miracle but Coyote's doing, that Greta burned the house and herself in a successful suicidal attempt, and Lenchen, who is pregnant with his child, has disappeared. Coyote was there when Greta emptied the tin and lit a match:

And Coyote cried in the hills:

I've taken where she stood

my left hand is on her head

my right hand embraces her. (75)

The explanation James deemed relevant to give to the two was that, although he ran away because he had been lost, he made a circle and ended up at the new beginning. James's quiet exaltation and the epiphany that opened up before him during the trials of his journey are the reason why the only thing he can think of at the moment is "the light that had made him want to drink fire into his darkness" (123). Probably that is why William's remark "that a person only escapes in circles no matter how far the rope spins" (123) goes unnoticed. Watson does not develop this specific idea further and never takes the chance to conclude if this pessimistic notion replaces William's formerly existential view on man's freedom as compared to beasts' serfdom and dependency, but the very ending of *The Double Hook* seems to reinforce the concept of the vicious circle by implanting it into the very environment and the whole temporal-spatial dimension of the novel. As Lenchen introduces James to their newborn baby at Felix Prosper's house, as though to his newly-beginning life, Ara escapes outside and receives a testimony from Coyote, the master of the landscape, about the newborn. Unbeknownst to both James and Lenchen, Coyote reclaims the baby and reasserts eternal return:

Above her sky stretched like a tent pegged to the broken rock. And from  
a cleft of the rock she heard the voice of Coyote crying down through the  
boulders:

I have set his feet on soft ground;  
I have set his feet on the sloping shoulders  
of the world. (125)

Although Coyote does not claim the creation of the new man, he unequivocally points to himself as the master of the baby's life and the ruler of both his immediate environment and the whole world. With a complicated distribution of the divine power in *The Double Hook*, God's

mercy and punishing Old-Testament providence are irrevocably interwoven with Coyote's cunning and dubious care for humans and their environment. These murky Manichean boundaries of the divine roles confuse most of the valley dwellers and mark the general concept of the human condition, inscribed in the book. Ara and William's aforementioned discussion of freedom with respect to horses and men ends with a portrait of divinity that corroborates the prevalence of the Manichean assumption, suggested by the very texture of the novel's imagery. The allegory of the ropes, or the vicious circle of eternal return and serfdom, from William's remark to James at the burnt site first comes up there, in his conversation with Ara. As there are men who follow horses with their ropes ready to put on the animals, God's face, in Ara's view, is also "shaded by his hat." So understood, Jehovah comes "after you with a whip until you stand and face him in the end," to which allegory William replies that he does not know about God, but "your God sounds only a step from the Indian's Coyote" (66).

The "soft ground," prepared by Coyote for the feet of the baby Felix, is nothing more than dust, of which *Genesis* says, "from dust you are and to dust you will return" (3:19). In these hills and valleys, Felix is "under Coyote's eye"; by the very fact of his birth, the rope is already coiled for him. Mrs. Potter and Greta have already finished the circle; Felix starts the circle over again. This is why Angel is rather pessimistic about the future of her children, attributing all the evil of the vicious circle to the valley and its environment—Coyote's country: "And what's for them... except rocks and ground and wild beasts to play with—or themselves—in the empty spaces. I thought sometimes it would be better to take them down below out of the loneliness" (75). This is also why it is rather hard to agree with those interpreters of the novel who, like Margaret Morris in "The Short Cuts," believe in rejuvenation that the birth of the little Felix brings to the landscape and to all of Coyote's country: "The story that begins with the

death of the Old Lady in a hostile and menacing landscape ends with the birth of the baby who signals the transformation of that landscape and its inhabitants” (96). The transformation of the characters, made possible by the penetration of the higher light, *lumen*, into their inner lives and their reflection of the surrounding, was indeed evident on the level of individual epiphanies, discussed in the second chapter. The influence of the mystic *lumen* at times was so miraculous that it could change the quality of the elements, such as water, which from the Old-Testament cataclysmic paradigm between drought and flood turned to the life-sustaining liquid of the triple symbolism of the earth, the tree, and the woman. But does all that really change the landscape, which, in Coyote’s words—and also the last words of the novel—remain “the sloping shoulders / of the world” (125), that is, still his, Coyote’s, country?

There is no sufficient evidence of such a change. One can be carried away by the biblical symbolism of *The Double Hook* and see the New-Testament hope of redemption that the birth of the baby-saviour introduces into the world, or just the characters of one isolated community, which “may be identified with the rebellious and stiff-necked Chosen People of the Old Testament” (B. Mitchell 107). The association of the baby Felix with the messiah in this context can only be relevant under the premise that Coyote himself is a figure of Jehovah—not Satan, as Monkman maintains—and that the landscape of the country is in the hands of the ultimate, not the secondary, creator. As Beverly Mitchell explains:

the reactions of the characters in the novel to Coyote are consonant with the reaction of the Chosen People to God, for initially He was feared as the God of vengeance rather than loved as the God of mercy... Just as the God of the Chosen People is revealed fully only in the New Testament as a loving and forgiving Father who had punished, rewarded, and jealously watched over His people until

the ‘fullness of time’ when He sent them a Redeemer, so, too, Coyote is fully revealed only at the end of the novel... (110)

This intuition may be supported by the researchers, such as Barbara Godard, who deny Watson’s Coyote the limited role of the local trickster of the Salishan people and make him a figure of a universal mythology beyond regionalism (165). But this fact does not necessarily entail the direct association of Coyote’s voyeuristic gaze with Jehovah’s watching over his people; and therefore, in Monkman’s view, Coyote can also represent the meddler eye that defies God’s eye, with reference to indigenous myths that by no means contradict the biblical story: “that the world was originally created as an Eden until Coyote released from a sack the spirits of fatigue, hunger and disease” (Monkman 68). The sort of nirvanic consolation that Coyote offers to the very much battered soul of James, the moonlight, with which he operates to distort the reception of the landscape and lures the souls of the other characters by the glimmering of his nightly moonlit glory. As well, the way he becomes duped by the moments of the characters’ epiphanies under the light of *lumen* demonstrates that Coyote never offers clear visions of phenomena, and so far as the characters remain captives to his “folded country,” the little Felix may turn out to be a false redeemer, similar to Paul in Bugnet’s *The Forest*, or a false messiah, like Tay John.

Coyote is invisible to the readers as well as to all the characters of the novel, except for Kip, Coyote’s servant. Nevertheless, Coyote sustains the ecology of the mountain community and its landscape. He exists as a voice, visibly organized in the text of the novel in poetic stanzas, interspersed throughout the tale, but—more importantly—framing the tale, appearing at the beginning and the end of the narrative. For the work where poetic language is responsible for all the innumerable and inscrutable implications of that “forest of symbols,” which, in

Pivato's words, both *The Double Hook* and *Tay John* are (181), then Coyote is, evidently, not only the spirit but also the bard of the country, as a voice, as well as its hieroglyph, as a written text. George Bowering simply proposes that Coyote is the figure of the author herself (194-95). The narrative appears to be not so much "under Coyote's eye" as "under Coyote's mouth": "from his mouth he breathes cactus into the grassland," "he boasts that the drought-bringing east wind is in his mouth, "he announces several times that if one will enter his mouth one will enter darkness and rest" (G. Bowering 194). Kip claims to have seen Coyote carry Mrs. Potter in his mouth: what she is as an apparition that haunts the country and as the symbol of the rejuvenated earth is his, Coyote's, doing. Finally, George Bowering traces the etymology of the word "myth"—from the Greek meaning "mouth" and "speech" to the Old Slavic meaning "to think imaginatively" and Lithuanian "to yearn for," "to desire" (194). Bowering suggests that "myth is not a story about desire (for salvation, *e.g.*), but is the expression, the body of desire itself. The desire of the author is in the text itself, and if it is to mean anything, the reader too must experience his own" (194). The text of *The Double Hook* as a Lacanian object-cause-of-desire (the object of the small *a*, or the small other of a particular text as a representation of the big Other of language, or the Symbolic), which is destined to revolve around the Real, or the Thing, without being ever able to penetrate into its meaning, is then the myth of the Heideggerian "strife" between the world and the earth, which sustains the notion of oiko-logy, "dwelling-saying" (Padrutt 18) as the economy of human dwelling on earth: "The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there" (Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" 49). Inviting this endless array of interpretations, to which all the scholarship on the *Double Hook* is the best testimony, the novel

encrypts the landscape with a special code, and Coyote's is but the only plausible figure of the key to that crypt: where the Imaginary and the Symbolic fail to tie themselves into one meaningful knot, *sinthome* saves such a psychotic, orphaned narrative from disintegration.

Why, then, do both O'Hagan and Watson need their tales to be ambiguous products of the trickster narrators, whose allegories in the novels are Tay John and Coyote? Probably, this is because the landscape becomes visible at all only at the crossroads of the horizontal and the vertical, stone and tree, change and stasis, moonlight and sunlight, silence and voice, and the visible authority of one auctorial perspective would obscure the truth that, in Heraclitus' words, "*physis kryptesthai philei*," translated by Michael Lewis as "nature loves to hide itself": nature "is that which will have been there before the dichotomies that comprise man's symbolic world, and will survive their final extinction" (121). In both works, the Word, which is the epitome of "man's symbolic world," is deliberately silenced and as though paralyzed by means of its mere overuse; *sinthome* is what ties together those imploded from within discourses, ideologies, and myths. If the landscape can only be reflected in a foreclosed, orphaned narrative, deprived of the fatherly authoritative figure that guarantees meaning, tricksters are the way to suggest this concept; in them, the readers are free to find their "desired" author, whose authority with respect to the text is just like the nature of the trickster: to dupe and be duped itself.

## Chapter 4. The Void of Nature at the Crossroads of Myth and Modernity

### 4.1. The Return of the Symbolic: The Identity Drama of a Natural Man in Tatiana

#### Tolstaia's *The Slynx*

The controversy around the notions of modernity, myth, and ideology has been a noticeable discourse over the past decades. Under the premise of associating modernity with a number of oppressive orders, such as patriarchy and colonialism, rooted in the bourgeois ideology, Roland Barthes “equates ‘myth’ with *doxa*,” understood as an unexamined assumption based on the bourgeois ideology (Hart 194). Adorno and Horkheimer read Homer’s *The Odyssey* as a *story*—in Northrop Frye’s understanding of the term “myth”—*mythos*, narrative (Frye 3)—of the first bourgeois, Odysseus, who establishes—throughout his journey—the Enlightenment attitude toward the environment (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*). In her turn, Donna Haraway, by introducing the term “Western mythology,” eliminates any meaningful boundary between myth, ideology, and modernity. In this context, it would be interesting to look at a text that assumes the demise of the ideological world that we know and makes an attempt at imagining new relationships of conscious beings with their environment.

In Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto,” Western mythology of the beginnings of culture—which might also be called, to use Giorgio Agamben’s words, “anthropological machine”—culminates in the image of a cyborg, which is aimed at transgressing rigid boundaries among human, animal, and machine. The cyborg is not a creature of science fiction; rather, it is an idealized allegory of what might become of a modern human with its prosthetic body and digital mind—the post-human who, as Bruno Latour underlines, has been turned into a hybrid under the pressure of science and technology (1). For Haraway, the cyborgs, or hybrids, are the creatures of Western mythology and at the same time some hope for overcoming, transcending the



traditions of “Western science and politics—the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the production of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other”; the cyborg “has no truck with bisexuality, pre-Oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to the organic wholeness”; it is independent from “the plot of original unity out of which difference must be produced and enlisted in a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature” (150). It is worth noting that Haraway’s manifesto is a special project for fiction, which is expected to “subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture” precisely by “retelling origin stories” with “the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control” (175).

Critiquing Western culture and its suppressing narratives, Haraway says: “We have all been colonized by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfillment in apocalypse” (175). In this sense of ideological colonization, Tatiana Tolstaia’s novel *The Slynx* (2000) can be called a “postcolonial” novel, as it tries to narrate what is left of the world after those myths had already collapsed into the apocalypse. Alla Latynina describes the postmodern genre versatility of the novel as “an expertly blended cocktail of dystopia, satire, and the clichés of science fiction, reconceptualised in parody, spiced with refined language play, and generously seasoned with Tolstaya’s patent misanthropy” (71). Being first of all a post-apocalyptic novel that depicts Russia after a global catastrophe, it also is a version of the scene that retells origin stories of a new human-like species, on whom Haraway’s term “cyborgs” can be projected at least hypothetically. In *The Slynx*, the ecological apocalypse provokes a radical change in the world that we know: all biological life has mutated, and humans have given way to newly-emerged human-like creatures, who call themselves the Golubchiks. The Golubchiks are portrayed in

terms of a primitive society that has taken over the very idea and function of civilization, and this fact makes it conceivable to interpret the process of their emergence as an allegory of the anthropological story, or mythos, of humankind itself and its relationship with the environment. Considering this mythos against the background of Haraway's project for literature, we may pose a question: does Tolstaia's "origin story" subvert the myth of culture origins in a Western, phallogocentric sense, or, in other words, does it comply with Haraway's hopes for a new type of cyborg fiction, opposed to "the highest product" of the "West"—"the one who is not animal, barbarian, or woman; i.e., man, the author of a cosmos called history" (156)? I will argue that, on the one hand, the humanoids from *The Slynx* seem to be a perfect implementation of Haraway's cyborg ideal: their initial ontology stems from the "boundary breakdowns" between man and animal, human and machine; they are not separated from nature, and their subjectivity is not contaminated by the morality of the oedipal family. On the other hand, since the new species, the Golubchiks, are not presented as a final product of apocalypse, but as in the process of their emergence and evolution, and are caught in the unfolding of the originary event, they necessarily acquire the anthropological features of a modernist man with his drama of alienation, repression, and recuperation in the Symbolic order. The modes of the Golubchiks' communication with their natural environment serve as a sign of underlying resistance to the surface discourses and ideologies of the Golubchiks, represented by the main character, Benedikt.

The post-apocalyptic world that the Golubchiks receive as their given habitat is the result of our—the author's contemporaries'—misuse, specifically, "the games" with weapons, presumably an atomic blast ("the Blast" as an originary event is a constant point of reference among the novel's characters). This premise, quite common in dystopian fiction, demonstrates a crash of the Enlightenment confidence, expressed in, among others, the works of Francis Bacon,

in the ability of science and human reason to conquer nature and in no time build civilized happiness and prosperity on its tamed savage body. In *The Slynx*, humans have mutated along with all other biological forms of life, and all the ugly consequences that they receive as a result of these environmental changes place them on the same scale with funny and horrible creatures such as black inedible flying hares or the titular monster (“Slynx”). The narrator’s ironic and slightly condescending attitude features the descriptions of the various mutations that strike the post-apocalyptic generations of Russians. The majority of the new population, the Golubchiks, have different “consequences” that make each of them unique marginal cases of humanoids, often with some animal elements: “Some have got hands that look like they broke out in green flour, like they’d been rolling in greencorn, some have gills, another might have a cockscomb or something else”<sup>220</sup> (Tolstaya 13). The mutations of human and non-human forms of life run parallel to one another, thus erasing the differences that resulted from what Latour calls “the modern Constitution,” which causes an unconscious “proliferation of hybrids” (1-14) on the repressed and rejected margins of modern culture. In its rendering mutations and hybridity the norm, the Golubchiks’ society betrays the features of the premoderns in opposition to westerners with all their ideologies of dominance and oppression. The Golubchiks-cyborgs would then be an ideal society for Haraway’s project of unification that runs contrary to all the oppressive divisions of the moderns. As Latour explains, “the more we [the moderns, or the westerners] forbid ourselves to conceive of hybrids, the more possible their interbreeding becomes—such is the paradox of the moderns” (12). His hypothesis about the premoderns, or “the other types of culture,” “is that by devoting themselves to conceiving of hybrids, the other cultures have excluded their proliferation” (12). How do these premodern features unfold within the society of

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<sup>220</sup> «У кого руки словно зеленой мукой обметаны, будто он в хлебеде рылся, у кого жабры; у иного гребень петушиный али еще что» (25. Hereinafter all footnote references to the original refer to: Tolstaia, Tatiana. *Kys’ Zverotur. Rasskazy*. Moskva: EKSMO, 2009).

the Golubchiks, and what are its ecological implications, that is, the type of relationship this society builds with its environment?

The irony necessarily links the fictional world of *The Slynx* with our pre-apocalyptic reality and its established systems of signification and representation, while also revealing the true target of the dystopian metaphors: the societies and ideologies of the author's contemporaries. The breakdown of the Enlightenment project of achieving happiness and wellbeing by means of science, which has been proceeding, in Latour's words, through the work of "purification," radical differentiation between humans and nonhumans, has resulted in the opposite: the "proliferation of hybrids," allegorically represented by the Golubchiks in Tolstaia's novel. This purifying "Constitution" of modernity, as Latour calls it, manages to explain everything but leaves out what is in the middle, the residue, which, unseen, understated, tends to multiply and ultimately threaten. "Now hybrids, monsters—what Donna Haraway calls 'cyborgs' and 'tricksters' whose explanations it [Constitution] abandons—are just about everything..." (Latour 47).

The work of purification, deliberately discriminating between humans and nonhumans on the level of the official ideology (Constitution) and thereby causing the unconscious proliferation of hybrids, has developed various forms of psychological repression, which more and more often has returned the repressed content and has made the ideological machine amplify the ways of deception. In *The Slynx*, narrated from the alien (for us) perspective of one of the Golubchiks, Benedikt, the work of the pre-apocalyptic ideologies is showcased parabolically, as imprinted on the societal structure and relations of the post-catastrophic world. Interpreted as an allegory of the contemporary society and its ideology, Tolstaia's novel reveals an amplified version of a hybrid Russian mentality that combines folkloric superstitions, Western modernity, and the

traditional imperial-soviet tyranny. Inscribed in this complex schema of the ideological relations, the modern process of purification, generically displayed as the human/nonhuman division, is subsumed under the clear social-class categorization. The satirical effect of such a metaphor is augmented infinitely when, in the reversed fictional world of the novel, hybrids—the margins of modernity—play the role of the modern (human) *purifiers* who, accordingly, and as though in a distorting mirror, make hybridity a *norm* (or a *pure* form) and work from the same hierarchy of class, gender, and race. *The Slynx* supplies many examples of such a work of purification.

Along with the Oldeners, who were born before the Blast and whose consequence was a seemingly eternal life, there are Degenerators, a lowest-class population employed as serfs (or slaves): “They are strange ones, and you can’t figure out if they’re people or not. Their faces look human, but their bodies are all furry and they run on all fours. With a felt boot on each leg”<sup>221</sup> (Tolstaya 4). Later in the novel it becomes apparent that what Golubchiks take for a humanlike monster is just another survivor from the distant Russian past: just an ordinary post-Soviet philistine, who boasts having had “a mirrored buffet,” and “a color TV with an Italian tube”<sup>222</sup> (160). The visual distortion that Benedikt perceives of the Degenerator’s image is the best illustration of Tolstaia’s irony in regard to her postapocalyptic premoderns, whose putatively prelapsarian hybrid unity with environment appears to be nothing more than the modern ideology of dominance turned upside down. Therefore, being a parabolical tale about the author’s contemporaries, *The Slynx* parodies in the Golubchiks the new standard of (post)humanity, which so much resembles our own: in their distorting view of “others”—animals, fairy-tale creatures, and marginal entities (such as the Oldeners, the Degenerators, or the

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<sup>221</sup> «Страшные они, и не поймешь, то ли они люди, то ли нет: лицо вроде как у человека, туловище шерстью покрыто и на четвереньках бегают. И на каждой ноге по валенку» (16).

<sup>222</sup> «...сервант был зеркальный... Телевизор Рубин—трубка итальянская...» (167).

Slynx)—the dominant humanlike species of the Golubchiks bear witness to the problem of the precarious human identity, dependent on the prevailing ideology and cultural politics.

Tolstaia's point in these shifting statuses of humans, animals, and hybrids can be best seen through the glasses of the Actor Network Theory, according to which we are, and deal with, not ontological entities but actors or agents, who “take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities” (Law 4). Rephrasing Latour, Adrian Ivakhiv says, “the distribution of ‘actantial roles’ and ‘competences’ between humans and nonhumans, in these networks, remains open. ‘Natures’ and ‘societies’, rather than being fixed and inherent, are ‘secreted as by-products’ of these interactions” (20). With this undermining of the anthropological subject, Tolstaia, undoubtedly, seeks to put into question the purported universality of our civilization and its values as well.

It is not surprising that, variously alluding to modernity as an ideological apparatus, the author gives much attention to the matter of language. Instead of futurizing the language in a science-fiction fashion, Tolstaia—unexpectedly—pushes it out into the future-in-the-past tense, into the folkloric, pre-modern state, thus giving a picture of the (premodern) world of the post-apocalyptic Russia in a totally recognizable, although anachronic, language. In *The Slynx*, the linguistic system of representation as we know it, with all its etymological and idiomatic connotations, has been crushed by the new “actor network” system in which the units of our contemporary language mean either something different or quite opposite, or return to their etymological directness. This is especially the case with the fairy-tale characters, which regain, or retain, their fearful meaning for a humanity miraculously immersed into childhood. Goblins, mermaids, Blue Fin, Old Man Frost, and other imagined creatures come back from their seemingly stable position as fictional fairy-tale heroes to the living beliefs of the Golubchiks.

This return to etymological directness is coupled with the loss of value and any meaning of abstract notions and metaphors, which is evident especially in the way the Golubchiks adapt the legacy of the culture of the pre-apocalyptic time. For the protagonist of the novel, Benedikt, this resistance toward abstract concepts has been pushed to its grotesque extreme.

Ironically portrayed as a scribe, and then both a chief librarian and an archivist, Benedikt strikes us with a total ignorance of the meanings that are inscribed in literary texts on the basis of the connotative capacities of language. Read denotatively, books and other signs of our—alien for Benedikt—culture are miraculously reorganized into an immense one-dimensional edifice of trash, where “schopenhauer” means something between a book’s title and a convoluted genre of writing, “the pushkin” refers to a general name of sculpture or a certain type of a pagan idol, and the only correct and meaningful way of book cataloging places in one section such volumes as “*A Partisan’s Handbook*, Petrarch, *The Plague*, *The Plague of Domestic Animals: Fleas and Ticks*, Popescu, *Popka-the-Fool—Paint It Yourself...*”<sup>223</sup> (Tolstaya 189).

The older lumpen proletariats and philistines, such as Terentiy (the Degenerator Teterya), are more than willing to betray whatever is left in them of the pre-apocalyptic culture to merge and establish themselves in the new order of the mutants, so the only reliable force in retaining the remnants of culture and the connotative capacities of language are the Oldeners—the noble Russian intelligentsia. They protectively gather and cherish all the smallest scraps related to the vanished world of the late Soviet Union, and the list of that material evidence of their former life—“party cards, Komsomol or trade union ID,” “state lottery tickets,” “domestic loan bonds,” “gas or telephone bills,” “receipts for overpayment”—creates a comic effect due to the ritualistic solemnity with which it is pronounced.

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<sup>223</sup> «Петрарка, Попов, другой Попов, Попцов, Попеску, «Попка-дурак. Раскрась сам...» (195).

The death of language, accomplished both in the way of natural production of anachronisms designating obsolete artifacts and by means of degeneration of its connotative powers, is so meaningful in the new world order because of its crucial role in the very construction and constitution of the former “actor network.” The same issue with the role of language in the constructing of reality is developed in Margaret Atwood’s dystopia *Oryx and Crake* (2003), a novel that in many aspects stands very close to *The Slynx*. With all her genetically modified pigeons, wolvogs, rakunks, bobkittens, and, ultimately, the humanoid Crakers, Atwood, in Sharon Wilson’s words, “overturns the hierarchy of human over both animal and vegetable worlds” (50). Greg Garrard aptly notes that in *Oryx and Crake*, “Atwood develops a sustained satirical homology in which whatever happens to nature happens to language and vice versa” (238). *Oryx and Crake*’s counterpart of the Oldener Nikita Ivanich, Jimmy-the-Snowman, appears not only as a “words man,” opposed to Crake as a “numbers man,” but also as a “wordserf” who, as J. Brooks Bouson notes, “often resorts to the borrowed phrases and clichéd speech that clutter his mind” (105). It appears that, barely coping with the difficulties of communication in the dystopian “actor network,” Jimmy discovers that all his previous—and now dissipating—experience of the civilized life was compiled merely from the commercial slogans having little in common with *reality*, whatever one would understand by it. The very sense of reality seems to be maintained by the continuity of generations and the efficient system of the inheritance of the means of communication. That is why Crake, aware of the way things seem real to us, is sure about the success of his bold project: “break the link in time between one generation and the next, and it’s game over forever” (219). As with the Oldeners in *The Slynx*, the evanescent reality of Jimmy’s former life loses its tangibility with the loss of communicative space for the *abstract words*. They tend to evade the mind of Snowman,



who constantly tries but fails to grasp their meaning: “Rag ends of language are floating in his head: *mephitic, metronome, mastitis, metatarsal, maudlin*....What are all those things he once thought he knew, and where have they gone?” (181). In the same fashion, the Oldeners’ words such as “*ejucayshin*”<sup>224</sup> (14), “*runnysaunce*”<sup>225</sup> (24), “*feelosophy*”<sup>226</sup> (47) for the Golubchiks are nothing else but meaningless sounds. The abstract notions that lose their meaning, their attachment to any tangible idea or reality, as well as the books that function on a completely different level of reception, point not only to the rupture, “the separation between past and present,” as Giuseppina Botta puts it with respect to the role of language in *Oryx and Crake* (247), but also to the precarious status of reality designated by a language even in an era in which it thrives in its full capacity. Not surprisingly, according to Crake’s design, in the world of the Crakers there would no longer be any words without direct reference to tangible reality, a premise that has already come true in the language of the Golubchiks. When the scribe Benedikt copies various compositions by Fyodor Kuzmich (in reality—the “olden” books by different authors), he marks as making sense the descriptions of environment that contain the images of its material representation:

The mountain crest  
 Slumbers in the night;  
 Quiet valleys  
 Are filled with fresh dark mist;  
 The road is free of dust,  
 And the leaves are still...  
 Just wait a bit,

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<sup>224</sup> «абразавание» (26).

<sup>225</sup> «РИНИСАНСА» (36).

<sup>226</sup> «ФЕЛЮСОФИЯ» (58).

And you too will rest.

Any idiot could understand that one. But:

Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails.

I've read the list of ships halfway:

That long brood, that train of cranes,

That once arose over Hellas...

You could only squawk and scratch your beard.<sup>227</sup> (Tolstaya 19)

Given the incompatibility of the communicative systems, Snowman's tale about "Oryx and Crake" (in its first draft, *Oryx and Crake* was created by Atwood as a first-person narrative (Howells 171))—functions, within the future reality, as a message without an adequate receiver and thereby can serve as a conceptual continuation of the ideas of Tolstaia's novel: read "denotatively," this tale would not find any referential, just as all the old books, for Benedikt, have lost their "olden" meaning altogether and have become "free-floating signifiers without signified" (Mundler 96). The very fact that a language can be devoured and adapted to serve a completely different system of signification testifies to its essential hybridity, where *adequate* meaning is undistinguishable from *inadequate*.

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<sup>227</sup> «Горные вершины  
Спят во тьме ночной;  
Тихие долины  
Полны свежей мглой;  
Не пылит дорога,  
Не дрожат листья...  
Подожди немного,  
Отдохнешь и ты.  
Тут все и дураку ясно. А вот:  
Бессонница. Гомер. Тугие паруса.  
Я список кораблей прочел до середины:  
Сей длинный выводок, сей поезд журавлиный,  
Что над Элладю когда-то поднялся...  
—здесь только крякнешь и в бороде почешешь» (31).

In Daria Kabanova's view, "in the world of *The Slynx*," language as such "is seriously discredited in its ability to account for changed reality" (225). She notes that this special function imposed upon language in Tolstaia's novel parallels the linguistic reason proposed by Aleksei Yurchak for "the collapse of the Soviet narrative of nation" (Kabanova 225). Yurchak maintains that in the late Soviet Union, the reproduction of an authoritative discourse facilitated the awareness of the constructed nature of human consciousness. The language, owned and controlled by the state, lost its constative function, whereby—under normal conditions of development—signifiers correspond with real things and notions, and became "a pure performance" (Kabanova 225). Kabanova, however, goes much further to read *The Slynx* not only as a historical or political text of its time, but also as a posthumanist novel, in which language fails as a marker of humanity and of the human subject in its modernity's opposition to animality and its lack of language, or subjectivity. Speaking Degenerators, considered draught animals by the Golubchiks, and the normal attitude of the Golubchiks to this fact, as well as the latter's own utterly primitive usage of language, prompt Kabanova to conclude, "in the world of *The Slynx* language is not necessarily the marker of humanity" (226). In the established world order in which the boundaries between men and animals are blurry, language, which normally secures a succession of generations and the hereditary character of human culture, fails to perform its function and becomes a black hole of printed letters and words: "in the reader's conceptual framework, no human in the novel is 'really' human" (Kabanova 227). In this situation of the constant lack for which human language cannot compensate, Benedikt craves communication with a non-human Slynx, who "seems to possess the ability to communicate with Benedikt" (227) through what Lippit calls 'pathic communication', "a communicational tissue

through which information passes amongst animals, moving toward the constitution of energetic ontologies” (Lippit 166).

Following Lippit’s definition of pathic communication, we can assert that many of the features of the fictional world in *The Slynx* are organized around intuitions different from *a priori* categories that, according to Kant, organize our experience. One of these, which Kabanova defines as “problematization of temporality,” stems from the “extratemporal position of the animal” (228), which sheds some light on the Golubchiks’ self-identification: “What flows from the animal touches language without entering it, dissolving memory, like the unconscious, into a timeless present” (Lippit 166). This timelessness of the Golubchiks’ experience, which obviously contradicts the Heideggerian definition of human *Da-sein*, or being oriented to death through time, is best represented by their cyclic temporal organization, which follows the primitive pattern of seasons rather than any chronology of social events: “Who counts time?” asks Benedikt. “Do we know? Winter, summer, winter, summer, but how many times? You’d lose count just thinking about it”<sup>228</sup> (21). The ahistorical perception of time is coupled with a primeval understanding of space, which together form a folkloric chronotope of the Golubchiks’ environment. In this framework, the succession of years, for example, can be manifested only as a measure of distance, pertinent to the mythological, cosmogonic imagination rather than any real awareness of time and space. The lack of traditional modernity’s linguistic boundaries between humans and animals in such mythological tales confirms Lippit’s intuition about the existing connection between human language and the category of temporality, as can be seen in “the Chechens” myth about the cyclic change of day and night, along with the organization of cosmos:

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<sup>228</sup> «Кто время подсчитает? Разве мы знаем? Зима-лето, зима-лето, а сколько раз?—ведь собьешься, думавши» (33).

There's a great river, *three years' walk* from here. In that river there's a fish—Blue Fin. *It talks with a human voice, cries and laughs*, and swims back and forth across the river. When it swims to one side and laughs, the dawn starts playing, the sun rises up in the sky, and the day comes. When it goes back, it cries, drags the darkness with it, and hauls the moon by its tail. All the stars in the sky are Blue Fin's scales.” (Tolstaya 7; emphasis mine)

The floating signifiers of the unstable linguistic system of communication allow for developing the most incredible temporal-spatial fantasies, which, nevertheless, reflect the immense openness of the accessible environment to all thinkable forms of hybridity. For example, to explain the change of the seasons, while accounting for the heights from which snow falls, the Golubchiks would resort to a complex image of a northern tree “that grows right up to the clouds”<sup>229</sup> (8) and bears white tiny flowers. When winter comes, Old Man Frost, who lives in the tree, becomes restless, jumps from branch to branch and claps his hands, whistling and blowing off the flowers, and that is how snow comes down. Mirroring the cyclic circle of time with no projection toward a progressive chronology, the space of the Golubchiks is also limited and highly mythologized. The town on the seven hills is surrounded by “boundless fields” and “unknown lands”<sup>230</sup> (Tolstaya 5). The natural environmental restrictions are augmented by ethnic and tribal stereotypes that both divide the space by the homely “hills” of the town along with the only propitious direction, the east (“The woods there are bright, the grass is long and shiny. In the grasses there are sweet little blue flowers...”<sup>231</sup> (Tolstaya 11)), and all the other directions out of the town—unhomely, with various degrees of uncanniness or hostility: “You can't go south. The Chechens live there. First it's all steppe, steppe, and more steppe—your eyes could fall out

<sup>229</sup> «...вышиной до самых туч» (20).

<sup>230</sup> «...поля необозримые, земли неведомые» (17).

<sup>231</sup> «Там леса светлые, травы длинные, муравчатые. В травах—цветики лазоревые, ласковые...» (23).

from staring. Then beyond the steppe—the Chechens”<sup>232</sup> (6)<sup>233</sup>. The southern direction is characterized by an “invisible” path that lures you to “walk and walk” until “all of a sudden” something prompts you to stop and feel an acute attack of nostalgia: “it’s like a worrum got at your heart, and he’s gnawing a hole in it... You turn back. Sometimes you run”<sup>234</sup> (6). Finally, the most uncanny direction is the north, whose environmental characteristics (“deep forests, full of storm-felled trees, the limbs so twisted you can’t get through, prickly bushes catch at your britches, branches pull your cap off your head”<sup>235</sup> (5)) make it the most appropriate ambience for such a monster as the Slynx. The uncanniness of that creature consists of its limited accessibility for the senses (“no one ever sees”—just hears her “wild, sad howl”<sup>236</sup> (5)), which gives an unlimited space for visual imagination, and the effect of its attack, which renders a person deprived of individuality: “It grabs your spine in its teeth—*crunch*—and picks out the big vein with its claw and breaks it. All the reason runs out of you. If you come back, you’re never the same again, your eyes are different... like when people walk in their sleep under the moon”<sup>237</sup> (5).

Kabanova proposes that the onomatopoeic provenance of the word “slynx” testifies to the impossibility of human language to name it, and, taking into account a strong association of the mythical beast with the anxiety of self-identification that seizes Benedikt when he imagines the

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<sup>232</sup> The myth of the Chechen demonizing otherness as one of the major Russian ethnic stereotypes is very interestingly discussed in Edith Clowes’s essay “Demonizing the Post-Soviet Other: The Chechens and the Muslim South” in *Russia on the Edge* (140-65).

<sup>233</sup> «На юг нельзя. Там чеченцы. Сначала все степи, степи—глаза вывалятся смотреть,—а за степями чеченцы» (18).

<sup>234</sup> «...невидная... Идешь-идешь... и вдруг... будто червь сердце точит, точит... и назад пойдешь. А иной раз и побежишь» (17-18).

<sup>235</sup> «...дремучие леса, бурелом, ветви переплелись и пройти не пускают, колючие кусты за порты цепляют, сучья шапку с головы рвут» (17).

<sup>236</sup> «Сидит она на темных ветвях и кричит так дико и жалобно: кы-ысь! кы-ысь!—а видеть ее никто не может» (17).

<sup>237</sup> «...она ему на шею-то сзади: хлоп! и хребтину зубами: хрусь!—а когтем главную-то жилочку нащупает и перервет, и весь разум из человека и выйдет. Вернется такой назад, а он уж не тот, и глаза не те... как бывает, к примеру, когда люди ходят во сне под луной» (17).

Slynx, Kabanova concludes that this linguistic ungraspability of the Slynx and a purported Benedikt's self-identification with the monster "questions the very validity of the Symbolic (i.e., language) for the construction of subjectivity" (232). Because human language (in terms of its epitome, books) fails to define Benedikt, the Slynx becomes the only source of the "ideal Other," necessary to sustain the protagonist's subjectivity, and, being an animal, "unrestrained by the Symbolic system of language," the Slynx thereby provides a perfect ground "for the construction of an alternative, non-symbolic subjectivity" (Kabanova 232). What such an alternative can suggest may be going as far as the subversion of the Symbolic order of modernity, which is based on Freudian oedipality and the Lacanian Name-of-the-(Dead)-Father. This type of subjectivity is exactly what Haraway was looking for in cyborg literature, devoid of the male-dominant patriarchal order and its system of repressions; it is the production of subjectivity that "subverts command and control" (Haraway 175).

To accept this hypothesis, we need to confirm that the Slynx actually performs the function of the big Other, i.e. the Symbolic, or language, and because of its extra- or non-linguistic nature implodes the Symbolic—with its ways of producing subjectivity—from within. In order to open the space for the Slynx to assume the function of the Symbolic order, Kabanova dwells on what she calls the "mock-logocentrism" (227) of the novel. She points to the obsession with books in that future Russia as a parody of the traditional Russian reverence of the written or printed word, which for Benedikt turns to the absurd, somewhat postmodern, eclectic and highly avaricious reading of sundry literary and subliterate productions. The chapter titles of *The Slynx* follow the Old Russian alphabet, *Kyrillitsa*, which makes it possible to read the novel "as a *bildungsroman* of a sort, narrating the story of acquisition of knowledge and ending, predictably, in a transcendental encounter, as Benedikt's spiritual guide, the Oldener Nikita Ivanich, ascends

to the heavens” (226). According to Kabanova, this whole Bildungsroman agenda should be abandoned because of the initial paradox of the logocentrism that is a parody of itself. The role of the Slynx for Benedikt’s psychological and spiritual development, through the type of non-linguistic communication that it offers, begins where the books (extended to the field of the Symbolic at large) fail to provide the protagonist with their intended guidance during his crisis of identity.

The Slynx is a mysterious beast, a mutant of an unclear provenance and a character of the Golubchiks’ mythology; in the Russian original it sounds “kys” and can be derived from “rys” (lynx) and “kiss-kiss” (equivalent for “puss-puss”). For Kabanova, this image perfectly matches Lippit’s “figure of the animal” that “has come to occupy... a negative space—one that language can point to without naming, subsume without securing” (Lippit 162). The Slynx as the Other shapes Benedikt’s identity through the imaginary power of its gaze:

[You] start thinking... listening to the scuttering and scurrying under the floor, the crackle in the stove, the wail just outside the window, begging to be let in; something white, heavy, cold, unseen. You suddenly imagine your izba far off and tiny, like you’re looking down at it from a treetop... You imagine the northern forests, deserted, dark, impassable; the branches rock in the northern trees, and on the branches, swaying up and down, is the invisible Slynx... [it] presses its invisible ears back against its flat invisible head, and it cries in a hungry cry, and reaches, reaches... for the warm blood pounding in the people’s necks:

SSSLYYYNXXX!



Fear touches your heart like a cold draft or a small paw, and you shudder...as if you don't know who or where you are. Who am I?<sup>238</sup> (Tolstaya 50)

In his works on the imaginary, from “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I” to the *Seminar I*, Jacques Lacan underlines the crucial importance of the “gaze” of the Other for the formation of human identity, as the persistent presence of that Other with the subject. The formative function of that gaze is the work of objectification that the subject performs on itself, using the imaginary gaze that comes from the field of authority able to issue legitimate judgements, and thus endows the subject with some significance (in Lacanian terms, the authority of the Master-Signifier). The work of Benedikt's imaginary, demonstrated in the above-quoted passage, and especially the fleeting moment when Benedikt is able to see through the Slynx's eyes, combined with his obvious anxiety of identification (“Who am I?”), proves that the Slynx can be construed as a non-verbal discourse that helps the character in his self-objectification.

A similar uncanny turn of such an objectification under the gaze of an animal as the other, or the animal “other-to-follow,” is described in Jacques Derrida's “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)”: “What animal? The other. I often ask myself, just to see, *who I am*—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment” (3-4). Derrida poses the question that can be asked about the work and predicament of Benedikt's self-identification, when he goes to the northern forest to follow the

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<sup>238</sup> «...задумаешься ... слушая, как шуршит под полом, как трещит в печи, как воет, подступает, жалуется за окном, просится в дом что-то белое, тяжелое, холодное, незримое; и представится тебе вдруг твоя изба далекой и малой, словно с дерева смотришь ... и северные леса представляются, пустынные, темные, непроходимые, и качаются ветки северных деревьев, и качается на ветках,—вверх-вниз—незримая кысь ... прижимает невидимые уши к плоской невидимой голове, и плачет, голодная, и тянется, вся тянется ... к теплой крови, постукивающей в человеческой шее: кы-ысь! кы-ысь! И тревога холодком, маленькой лапкой тронет сердце, и вздрогнешь ... словно ты сам себе чужой: что это? Кто я?» (60-1).

Slynx (who is also of a lynx-like or cat-liken nature): “the question of what ‘to follow’ or ‘to pursue’ means.” The answer will point to the search of the sources for an identity alternative to the restraints of speciesism, when the human subject fills in the void of its innate deficiency, or lack, in itself by resorting to the order that seems different from the Symbolic: “I move from ‘the ends of man’, that is the confines of man, to ‘the crossing of borders’ between man and animal. Passing across borders or the ends of man I come or surrender to the animal, to the animal in itself, to the animal in me and the animal at unease with itself” (Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* 3). As Kabanova contends, the compromised markers of “humanity/animality” (230) in Tolstaia’s novel facilitate the further amalgamation of Benedikt and the Slynx, when not only the human follows the animal, but also the beast acquires, in his imagination, some human features; the propinquity of their, the character and the Slynx’s, predicament is expressed in these words: “its invisible face grimaces, its claws quiver. It’s hungry, famished. It’s tormented, tormented! Slyyyynnnxxx!”<sup>239</sup> (Tolstaya 90). Kabanova points to the duality of Benedikt’s attitude toward the Slynx: he is terrified by the beast but at the same time attracted to it (231). Its sexual appeal is sublimated in his love for Olga Kudeiarov, whom he marries, and who (along with the other Kudeiarov family members) possesses claws like the Slynx. Benedikt himself becomes a counterpart of the Slynx when he receives a hook in the form of a claw to serve as a member of the secret police and to expropriate books from the Golubchiks. Yet if we assume that the identity of Benedikt is finally shaped by his identification with the Slynx as a non-linguistic, non-human Other, as Kabanova proposes in her essay, then we should see how the protagonist reaches peace with himself or at least some kind of fulfillment when the “internalization” of the Slynx becomes final. The novel, however, denies any evidence of such fulfillment.

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<sup>239</sup> «...кривится невидимое лицо ее, и дрожат когти,—голодно ей, голодно! Мука уй, мука! Кы-ы-ысь! Кы-ы-ысь!» (99).

Irrespective of his grotesque portrait, Benedikt is not a parody but a real novel protagonist, who undergoes significant changes throughout the course of the plot. This type of character can be easily located in Russian tradition from folk stories to the classic novels; as Marta Deyrup writes, “The novel charts the rise in fortunes of a young man who resembles both the folkloric Russian ‘Ivan’ and Goncharov’s Oblomov” (126). If the drama of identity is what the novel is about, then—following Kabanova’s interpretation—we should conclude that Benedikt progresses from an undecided hybridity of a mutated human toward the bestiality of the Slynx because the Symbolic order fails him, and the beast appears to become the only possible partner for communication. His cruel betrayal of his friends, the murder that he commits, as though being one body with the Slynx, with the Sanituration’s claw, and his book madness are all redeemed by the character’s attraction to the animal Other. In this case, Benedikt ends up as a character who gives every promise of growing as a protagonist, but becomes an antagonist who finds consolation for his tormented conscience and psychological fulfillment in ontological identification with a non-human.

The drama of self-identification that includes objectification under the gaze of the Other progresses differently for Benedikt if we follow the Lacanian theory more painstakingly. In the light of this theory, Benedikt, instead of finding his purported fulfillment in the non-human Slynx, is a psychotic who reaches the depth of his illness. In the Book III of his *The Seminar* (on *The Psychoses*), Lacan brings up the Freudian case of Judge Schreber, a psychotic who believed in his mission to save the world after first having been transformed from a man into a woman (29-43). Lacan explains Schreber’s folly by the mechanism of “foreclosure” resulting from the bankruptcy of the “paternal metaphor” (Laplanche and Pontalis 166-68). The paternal metaphor is a system of correlations in which a subject finds itself by its introduction to the principle of

law (mainly, the law of the language system), supplied by a paternal signifier called the name-of-the-father. Foreclosure occurs when, on its way from the imaginary relationship with the mother toward the acquirement of the constitution of the subject, an individual suffers from an exclusion of the name-of-the-father from the Symbolic order because, for whatever reason, “the father forfeits his symbolic right” (Sarup 107). This happened to Schreber as well as to Benedikt.

The paternal figure in Tolstaia’s novel is Nikita Ivanich, the Oldener, who persistently, and seemingly to no avail, tries to introduce Benedikt to the Symbolic—the culture of the pre-apocalyptic Russia. The epitome of culture and, by the same token, of the Symbolic is books, which we know to be an empty signifier for Benedikt: he reads as though without reading, thereby sliding on the surface of the Symbolic without ever subjecting himself to its law. Unable to find his identity in (or to identify himself with) the fatherly order, Benedikt, like Schreber, turns to his mother instead. Similarly to Nikita Ivanich, who is not Benedikt’s real father but, as it were, the father’s symbolic name, the character’s motherly figure is *nature*, the post-apocalyptic natural order, from and in which he was born and to which he turns when unable to associate himself with the Symbolic. However, in this case, the place of the father, according to Lacan, “[does] not disappear but simply remain[s] vacant” (Sarup 107). In fact, this empty signifier haunts Benedikt throughout the whole story, and the torture of this void is represented by the persistent hallucinatory presence of the Slynx.

The Slynx is not an alternative signifier that appears in place of the name-of-the-father: it is a figure of anxiety and angst that holds sway over Benedikt in the face of the “foreclosure.” In the above passage, when the character seems to identify himself with the Slynx and for a split second looks through its eyes, the question “Who am I?” emerges not as an unconscious desire to become one with the beast, but as a result of Benedikt’s angst over the possibility of such an

identification. The Slynx appears “suddenly,” like a fit of illness: “Fear touches your heart like a cold draft or a small paw, and you shudder, shake yourself and look around, as if you don’t know who or where you are. Who am I?”<sup>240</sup> (Tolstaya 50). This is Benedikt’s unconscious fear of what he is becoming when drifting out of the Symbolic toward the imaginary, motherly, natural, non-subject order in which he finds himself at the moment. Thus the Slynx assumes the features of the Lacanian concept of the Real. The Real is the always-already-lost object of the subject’s desire. It belongs to the sphere of the pre-symbolic, at the same time existing only in the future-in-the-past tense, being, due to the law of belatedness, the result of the work of the Symbolic. The Real as such escapes symbolization absolutely and manifests itself only in the objects of the (small) other (*objet petit a*)—the objects of the subject’s desire that revolve around the void of the Real. The Slynx as a concrete image is one of these objects: it emerges out of the folkloric beliefs, that is, out of the nascent symbolic order, and along the way produces its smaller counterpart in the guise of similar objects, such as Benedikt’s clawed wife and his new family, together with his Sanituration’s claw. In the situation of the deficiency of the paternal metaphor, all the objects-substitutes of the Real serve as an example of “how the fantasy-formation just masks, fills out a certain void, lack, empty place in the Other” (Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 74).

Only on the surface does the gaze of the Slynx resemble that of Derrida’s cat. Derrida’s identification with the animal’s otherness is also far from the kind of fulfillment that Kabanova proposes for Benedikt’s subject. “The animal that therefore I am” is an “animal at unease with itself” (Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* 3). The question that Derrida poses for his subject reflects the main predicament of Tolstaya’s protagonist, who is tormented by his

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<sup>240</sup> «И тревога холодком, маленькой лапкой тронет сердце, и вздрогнешь, передернешься, глянешь вокруг зорко, словно ты сам себе чужой: что это? Кто я?» (61).

unconscious struggle between the Symbolic and the beast: “Before the cat that looks at me naked, would I be ashamed *like* a beast that no longer has the sense of its nudity? Or, on the contrary, *like* a man who retains the sense of his nudity? Who am I, therefore? Who is it that I am (following)?” (Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* 5-6).

The gaze of the Slynx is not so much the gaze of the Other as the gaze of the void in the traumatic absence of the Symbolic. The real gaze of the Other comes from its proper direction: the fatherly figure of Nikita Ivanich. Benedikt’s imaginary indeed develops through a mirror stage, but the mirror is presented by the Symbolic of Nikita Ivanich rather than by the Slynx. The Oldener is the one who induces in Benedikt the feeling of shame, which Derrida identifies with the “subject” because “there is no nudity in ‘nature’” (5). As the real child of nature, initially Benedikt has nothing to be ashamed of: “Benedikt didn’t have any consequences, his face was clear, he had ruddy cheeks, a strong torso, you could marry him off any time you liked”<sup>241</sup> (Tolstaya 27). The fact that he possesses a tail does not seem to be anything unusual: in his imaginary unity with his mother-nature, all the elements of his body that could be exposed were out of the notion of nudity. It is Nikita Ivanich who coaxes Benedikt through the psychologically painful process of acquiring the feeling of shame and subsequently of cutting his tail off: “Nikita Ivanich said...the tail is an original characteristic of primates. Long, long ago, when humans had not yet fully evolved, tails were normal phenomena and surprised no one...”<sup>242</sup> (127). With this procedure, Benedikt passes the mirror stage that orients him toward the imaginary governed by the Symbolic, not by the Slynx. The cutting off of the tail is precisely what Lacan would call the symbolic castration of the mother, where the tail is the representation of the power that his

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<sup>241</sup> «У Бенедикта вот никаких Последствий и отродясь не было, лицо чистое, румянец здоровый, тулово крепкое, хоть сейчас женись» (39).

<sup>242</sup> «Никита Иваныч рассуждает ... хвост свойствен приматам; в глубоком прошлом, когда еще люди не вышли из животного состояния, хвост был нормальным явлением и никого не удивлял...» (135).

mother-nature exercises over him in the absence of the name-of-the-father, or the Other. Lacan explains the very possibility of such identification in “The Signification of the Phallus”: “The fact that the phallus is a signifier means that it is in the place of the Other that the subject has access to it” (288). Naturally, upon his introduction to the Symbolic order through the tool of shame, the deficiency of the paternal metaphor from which Benedikt suffers due to his book folly magnifies immensely and is reshaped in a number of signifiers organized around the image of the Slynx.

The Slynx, Benedikt’s clawed family, and his Saniturion’s hook are nothing else but the signifiers of his psychosis that stems from his inability to fulfil the process of subjugation triggered by the castration of the mother (his cutting off his tail). The monster grows in the interstitial void between his lost forever (natural) object of desire and the not-fully-attained sphere of the Symbolic. “For the psychosis to be triggered off,” says Lacan in “On a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” “the Name-of-the-Father, *verworfen*, foreclosed, that is to say, never having attained the place of the Other, must be called into symbolic opposition to the subject” (217). This opposition grows, together with the Slynx in Benedikt’s imagination, as he integrates deeper into the Slynx-like family of his wife, who in her turn transforms into a monster, and performs the acts of expropriation and murder that drastically contradict the moral code of values inscribed in the Symbolic that he unconsciously defies. In defiance of the Symbolic, Benedikt finds his identity in the Slynx, as Kabanova would contend, then how would we explain his remorse after the murder and his ever-growing dissatisfaction with himself and his position, paralleled by more and more frequent association with the Slynx? “What to do now?” asks the character. “What to live for? Once again, he had a feeling of alarm, as if he’s lost himself, but where and when—he hadn’t noticed. It was frightening....the Slynx

has already sensed you, the Slynx knows you are there”<sup>243</sup> (Tolstaya 195-96). His encounters with the Slynx as with his alter-ego resemble not the non-linguistic “communication,” but a meeting with nothingness, similar to the one that he experiences while looking at the picture of what apparently is Kazimir Malevich’s “The Black Square”: “He turned some more pages and there was this picture: nothing on it, just a white page, and in the middle, a squire-shaped black hole. Nothing else. Kind of like the end of everything. He looked and looked at the hole—and suddenly got scared, like in a dream” (Tolstaya 176). And in his dreams or hallucinatory visions, Benedikt is scared of the one thing in its various forms: the Slynx. Its emergence often resembles a nightmare:

Closer and closer—its invisible face grimaces, its claws quiver. It’s hungry, famished! It’s tormented, tormented! *Slyyyynnnxxx!*

Now it creeps up to the dwelling, closes its eyes, the better to hear, now it will pounce on the rickety roof, on the chilled chimney; now it has tensed its muscles...

There was a sudden knocking and rapping at the door.<sup>244</sup> (Tolstaya 90)

As the Slynx, first totally invisible and shapeless, like the Real, attains more and more tangible characteristics, multiplied by all the other objects with a claw, including Benedikt himself, it acquires the more obvious features of a psychotic hallucination. As Lacan puts it:

It is the lack of the Name-of-the-Father in that place which, by the hole that it opens up in the signified, sets off the cascade of reshapings of the signifier from

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<sup>243</sup> «Что ж теперь делать-то. И чем жить. Опять—словно тревога; словно бы себя потерял, а где, когда—не заметил. И как-то страшно ... а она уже почуяла, кысь-то,—она почуяла» (200).

<sup>244</sup> «Ближе и ближе—и кривится невидимое лицо ее, и дрожат когти,—голодно ей, голодно! Мука ей, мука! Кы-ы-ысь! Кы-ы-ысь!

Вот она подкрадывается к жилью, вот глазыньки-то закрыла, чтоб лучше слышать, вот сейчас прыгнет на ветхую крышу-то, на остывшую трубу-то; вот напрягла ноги...

...В дверь стукнули: тук-тук-тук» (99-100).



which the increasing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, to the point at which the level is reached at which signifier and signified are stabilized in the delusional metaphor. (“On a Question Preliminary...” 217)

The psychosis reaches its highest point when, as Kabanova rightly observes, the character commits a crime, “because Benedikt *has committed an act as the slynx and consistent with the ‘expectations’ of the slynx*” (231). She considers the final stage of his becoming “the slynx when he is labeled as such *within human language* by his father-in-law” (232). What happens in that scene of “labelling” is that Benedikt ultimately comes to the point of equating whatever he has become by his actions with the beast, and the scene ends with his resolute denial of the image that he finally feels is not what he truly is. Kabanova, pursuing the goal of establishing the character’s identity by dint of the non-linguistic Other, proposes that “his denial of being the slynx signals repression of his understanding” (232). According to the scheme of psychosis described above, Benedikt’s radical repudiation can only mean the beginning of his recuperation in the Symbolic order. No other interpretation can explain how and why, in disgust, he leaves his clawed family and his high position as a clawed Saniturion, returns to his former way of life, and finally becomes a witness—or is endowed with a vision—of the resurrection and ascension of the burnt-down Nikita Ivanich.

It is not in the Slynx but in that reunion with the Symbolic, the realm of the Oldeners, that Benedikt ultimately finds his identity. It is also highly significant that the reunion occurs along the line of the divine imagery as well as of the etymological meaning of the word “religion,” which is derived from the Latin *re-ligare* ‘to reconnect’, to reunite the separated entities that were initially joined. In this light, many of the scenes of Benedikt’s hallucinatory encounters with the Slynx become clearer as the fragments of the puzzle that finally projects itself on the

screen of the novel's message. If the core of the Symbolic revolves around a religious ideology, in this particular case with a clear taint of Christianity, the image of the Slynx should strongly be associated with satanic powers, as when Benedikt directly accuses the beast of instigating him to commit the murder. And if our hypothesis is correct, the consequences of the Slynx's power over a human soul should go beyond the earthly realm to the sphere of eternal condemnation. The confirmation of this idea comes from the meditations of Benedikt himself, who considers the Slynx much scarier than death:

And why is the Slynx scarier than dying? Because if you die, well, that's it—you are dead. You're gone. But if the Slynx *spoils you*—you have to go on living with it. But how? What do they think about, *the Spoiled Ones*? *What do they feel inside*? Huh? ...

*They must feel a fierce, frightful, unknown anguish. A gloom that's blacker than black, with poisoned tears pouring down! ... And there's no way back. It's like you're walking through empty valleys, terrible ones...*<sup>245</sup> (93; emphasis mine)

What we have in this vivid description is the portrait of the hell in which the souls corrupted by the Slynx are condemned to eternal “anguish.” The whole picture is complete only with the figure of the saviour, Nikita Ivanich, who dies, although not on the cross, but resurrects and ascends in a Christ fashion. Tolstaia meticulously prepares her reader for this interpretation by impregnating the narrative with hints suggesting Christian discourse, such as the praying Degenerator Joahim or Benedikt's attempt at drawing an icon and sticking it in the hands of his deceased mother: “He drew a bent head. Around the head—curls: scritch scratch, scritch scratch.

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<sup>245</sup> «А почему она страшней смерти: потому что уж ежели ты помер, так все—помер. Нету. А ежели эта тварь тебя спортит—так с этим еще жить! А как это? Как они себя мыслят, каково им, испорченным? Вот что им там внутри чувствуется? А?..

...А должно быть, чувствуется им тоска страшная, лютая, небывалая! Мрак черный-черный, слезы ядовитые, жидкие, бегучие! ... А назад ходу нету! А идешь будто по долинам пустым, нехорошим...» (102).

Kind of like the letter S, technically, ‘Slovo’ [that is, “Logos”]”<sup>246</sup> (233). Finally, in the above-quoted episode of the Slynx’s coming to Benedikt as a nightmare, when “a sudden knocking” wakes him up, the uncannily expected visitor is not the Slynx but Nikita Ivanich, who saves Benedikt from his nightmare, providing relief by his “wonderfully familiar voice from behind the door: Nikita Ivanich. The Lord sent him... the Lord sent him!”<sup>247</sup> (Tolstaya 91).

In his *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud re-creates an originary scene of the emergence of the historical society out of a primal horde. At the dawn of human culture, a group of jealous sons kills their patriarchal father who appropriated all the women of the tribe; thenceforth, paradoxically, the figure of the dead father becomes even stronger in the minds of his guilty sons, in whom The-Name-of-the (Dead) Father, as Lacan rephrases it later, transfers into the Law and cultural restrictions as the remorse and guilt of the patricidal brothers grow. A similar drama of the birth of culture, parallel to the emergence of the subject of the signifier, which always is both cultural and religious, arises from Tolstaya’s novel. The origin of culture placed somewhere in the postapocalyptic future only emphasizes the allegorical structure of *The Slynx* and remarkably reflects the Freudian law of belatedness of culture, whose myth of origin is possible only in the future in the past tense—as a result of culture itself. The cultural myth of origin is in itself a symbolic event that historically never occurred and, as Paweł Dybel explains the Lacanian interpretation, its preliminary state was a permanent “outrageous Void in the place of the Other” (26-27). The dead father who becomes the Name-of-the-Father in the Symbolic order, and thus appears as an externalized Other, serves as a constant return of the repressed event of the murder, while the “event” itself precipitates as an outer remainder of the Symbolic.

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<sup>246</sup> «...Головку вывел ссутуленную. Вокруг головки – кудерьки: ляп, ляп, ляп. Вроде буквы «С», а по-научному: «слово» (235).

<sup>247</sup> «...голос такой знакомый: Никита Иваныч. Господь послал!.. Господь послал!..» (100).

The Symbolic nature of culture and the external status of the originary event can be explained, according to Lacan, not as the memory of the past in its “archaeological purity” but—as Shepherdson puts it—“rather a trait that emerges from the Symbolic order, and yet presents itself as the remnant of a past that has been lost” (46-47) or the Real that *will have been* as the remainder of the Symbolic order.

In fiction, the allegories of the originary scene look especially convincing when exercised in the future-in-the-past tense, showing the emergence of the Symbolic out of the reloaded after an ecological catastrophe in the natural environment, in the future that could as well be our past. Tolstaia in *The Slynx* and Atwood in *Oryx and Crake*, as we saw, have similar insights regarding the function of language and its place in the Symbolic order: if both dystopias reveal equally similar patterns of the emergence of the Symbolic itself, unfolded as a nascent religion, we would be able to reconfirm our interpretation of Tolstaia’s novel as a drama of the emerging subject.

Similarly to the Golubchiks, the Crakers in Atwood’s novel are “cyborgs” of a hybrid genetic and behavioural identity. It is worth noting that the Crakers’ way to the Symbolic is represented as a *natural* process, some kind of a biological choice that they make; an inevitable step on the Darwinian scale of evolution. Genetically insured by their creator, Crake, against the developing of culture and civilization, they remarkably leave their handmade origins behind as soon as they enter the natural environment. The Crakers do follow the biological program imposed on them by their “father”: they defend, procreate, nurture, and nourish themselves in a way that would not trigger any sort of an internal group conflict or any kind of a psychological complex. But very soon they begin to develop their own, unforeseen in Crake’s genetic program, Symbolic order, which starts as a quite primitive version of an “Adam and Eve” (that is, “Oryx

and Crake”) religion and progresses towards prayers for their gods, supposedly transmitted by their “medium” Jimmy the Snowman, as well as toward a zealous building of the narrative body of their origin.

The Crakers’ culture develops not according to but against the design of their creator. Crake appears to share Ghelen’s concept of *Mangelwesen*, or Lacan’s idea of the human as the creature of deficiency, and, therefore, he plans to eliminate even a meager possibility of repression that only culture with its oedipality and the system of signification can bring upon the purely natural beings, the Crakers. Arguing about one of these exclusively human repressive concepts detested by Crake, *freedom* (as opposed to natural determinism), Jimmy accuses him of depriving the Crakers of “free choice” by denying them “*courtship behaviour*” and making them “hormone robots” (Atwood 203). Crake’s reply evinces that he perfectly understands the Freudian idea of the origins of culture out of human deficiency, of the gaping void that needs the Symbolic substitutes (guilt, abstract notions, religion) to feed its rapacity; that is why he knows exactly what to fight with: “‘There’s courtship behaviour in my plan,’ said Crake, ‘except that it would always succeed. And we’re hormone robots anyway, only we’re faulty ones’” (Atwood 203).

Initially, Crake’s plan seems to work, and the Crakers are the ideal images of Haraway’s cyborgs, without the oedipal family, patriarchy, and other conditions of the production of man. Sexual mystery, shame, competition, along with father-son relationships, which are located at the core of the Oedipus complex and the Symbolic, are the very features that the genetic genius of Crake is intent on overriding: “It no longer matters who the father of the inevitable child may be, since there’s no more property to inherit, no father-son loyalty required for war. Sex is no longer

a mysterious rite, viewed with ambivalence or downright loathing, conducted in the dark and inspiring suicides and murders” (Atwood 202).

The Symbolic and its manifestation, which Crake considers an unhealthy by-product of human deficiency, a leftover of nature (quite concurring with Lacan in this matter), acquire in the novel a very characteristic name—“ossified shit”: “When any civilization is dust and ashes,’ [Jimmy] said, ‘art is all that’s *left over*. Images, words, music. Imaginative structures. Meaning—human meaning, that is—is defined by them” (Atwood 204). Maybe that is why, in response to this “ossified shit” of civilization, the Crakers have been created as the creatures that consume their own excrements and thereby produce no leftovers, in both literal and symbolic sense.

Crake’s design, however, does not appear to be approved by the author. In the same fashion that Tolstaia denies the Slynx the power over the protagonist, Atwood rejects Crake’s diabolic aspirations and chooses the humanized world of Jimmy and his version of the development of humanity, embodied in the “children of Crake.” That is why Jimmy-the-Snowman, like Tolstaia’s Oldener Nikita Ivanich, takes responsibility for nurturing and defending the Crakers and leading them, evidently, through the “imaginative structures” of words and music towards the inevitable “dust and ashes” of civilization: “At first they’ll say giants and gods, but sooner or later they’ll want to know the truth. Like him, they’ll have the curious monkey brain” (Atwood 268-69). Maybe this promise of the Enlightenment for the Crakers seems a stretch or at least a very remote perspective, but what is undeniable is their craving to learn their origins—first in the guise of the fairy-tales that the demigod Jimmy narrates for them, adjusting the content to their primitive understanding. Posited by Jimmy as the Crakers’ forefathers, Oryx and Crake very soon attain the status of gods, and, as though

confirming the etymological meaning of *re-ligion* as *re-connection* with the lost paradise, the Crakers send to Crake and Oryx—through their mediator Jimmy—their first prayer to bring back their already lost unity with nature: “‘You must tell him about the bobkitten,’ says Empress Josephine. ‘The one that bit’” (Atwood 195). In the paradise that Crake designed for his ideal humanity, a bobkitten biting children is a deviation that appears to be sufficient to initiate a religious discourse.

All in all, despite portraying the world as though after human, both *The Slynx* and *Oryx and Crake* fail to fulfil the expectations of a posthumanist novel. They obviously are critical toward the radical Enlightenment with its presumptuous certainty of bringing happiness by means of sheer science: science ends with the atomic blast (*The Slynx*) or a man-made plague (*Oryx and Crake*). The fictional dystopian world of *The Slynx* gives its author a wide variety of opportunities to undermine the philosophical ground of the central human position: biologically, human dominance appears to be provisional, and in the changed environmental conditions it demises to the rule of other, more adapted, species. Man here is certainly not moulded along the image of the modern conqueror of nature, but rather appears subject to it. Socially, man is a cyborg, also subject to various forces of technology, ideology, and discourse. His identity is precarious, and disruption of just one link in the chain of generations is enough to break off the whole cultural body which has been built up over the centuries. Between the pre-apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic worlds, there is a cultural abyss which prevents any optimistic attempt at recognizing—in the Golubchiks—the human “essence” developed by the discourse of modernity. Nevertheless, Tolstaia chooses to recreate the originary scene of emergence of the new “humanity” by perpetuating the anthropological universals and describing the process of the separation of the human from the animal world due to the Symbolic order. The nascent religion,

spreading its influence over the mutants, bears witness to the repetition of the exact same model that posthumanist thought seems to be opposed to: the emerging type of humanity, not unlike the modern one, is “achieved,” in Cary Wolfe’s words, “by escaping or repressing not just its animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary, but more generally by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether” (xv). As those repressions are exerted by means of the oedipal, in the Lacanian sense, forces that essentially contribute to the formation of the modern subject, the novel also thwarts Haraway’s project for the cyborg literature that has been called upon—“in retelling origin stories”—to “subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture” (Haraway 175). The Golubchiks, notwithstanding their mutant nature, are not the “real” cyborgs who would skip the steps of the organic whole and thereby subvert the phallogocentric myths of the Fall and repression. They are depicted as organic and primitive, but their “origin stories” are not complete at that stage: they are inevitably doomed to suffer from the psychotic subject that seeks recuperation in the Symbolic order and thus invites modernity to close its vicious circle.

#### **4.2. Howard O’Hagan’s *Tay John*: An Initiation to Modernity**

In order to portray an originary event of the otherwise ungraspable passage from a pre-modern mythological state to modernity, one does not necessarily have to use the future-in-the-past tense of a post-apocalyptic allegory. If in *The Slynx*, Tolstaia needed the coherence of the omniscient and ironic narrator under the disguise of Benedikt’s primitive perspective, Howard O’Hagan, in his novel *Tay John* (1939), mixes the narrators and their versions of the events, thereby concealing the ungraspable passage in a similarly convoluted time-and-space continuum. Jack Denham, the main narrator of the novel, vividly marks that hybrid chronotope on the visual level of perception as “the country of illusion,” and on the sonic level of “a hum,” which is



nothing else but a variation of the profound “silence”: “Remember that I speak to you in the country of illusion, where a chain of mountains in the distance seems no more than a dog might leap across... Remember the cold silence that is a hum in your ears, and the river murmur that is a sort of silence” (O’Hagan 163). The blurred vision and uncertain hearing to which the reader of the novel is subjected are fortified by a mosaic of time patterns, which features modernity’s straightforward thread interwoven into the multilayered mythical substance like a railroad penetrating a mountain country. As Ronald Granofsky notes, “Vision is so problematic in this borderland country because different versions of time are operative in the various worlds adjacent to it and among the various inhabitants” (110). Articulated as an ambience of any story that unfolds in the novel along the lines of myth, this illusory environmental chronotope is not a mere background, but the very fabric of the narrated reality. It renders most of the story “untold,” to the effect of arriving at the mode of fiction that Michael Ondaatje labels as “mythic realism” (“Afterword” 265). Its essence is poetically yet clearly outlined in *Tay John*’s passage that Margery Fee considers “the author’s own manifesto on the relation of myth and reality” (8) in the novel:

Every story—the rough-edged chronicle of a personal destiny — having its source in a past we cannot see, and its reverberations in a future still un-lived—man, the child of darkness, walking for a few short moments in unaccustomed light—every story only waits, like a mountain in an untravelled land, for someone to come close, to gaze upon its contours, lay a name on it and relate it to the known world. Indeed, to tell a story is to leave most of it untold. You mine it, as you take ore from the mountain. You carry the compass around it. You dig down—and when you have finished, the story remains, something beyond your touch, resistant to

your siege; unfathomable, like the heart of the mountain. You have the feeling that you have not reached the story itself, but have merely assaulted the surrounding solitude. (O'Hagan 166-67)

In his “making the point that no story is complete,” O'Hagan, as Fee argues, creates “new world myth” by also “undermin[ing] to varying degrees several dominant and interconnected Western ideologies” (9), which Jack Robinson describes as “the Christian division of spirit and flesh, the egocentric self, the use of language and story as means of subduing nature, the process of knowing through intellectual dominance, the myth of the world-dominating male, the centralist and imperialist concepts of culture, and ideology as *teleos*” (“Myths of Dominance Versus Myths of Re-Creation in O'Hagan's *Tay John*” 173-74). Quite paradoxically, the aboriginal mythology by itself, which one would expect to be employed by O'Hagan as the basis for the dismantling of the Western myth, is devoid in the novel of all its supposed redeeming characteristics; it works only on the level of the story, which, as we remember, remains “beyond your touch, resistant to your siege” (O'Hagan 167). This all-penetrating suspicion of existing mythologies makes it possible for O'Hagan to wield what Ondaatje calls “that raw power of myth” (“O'Hagan's Rough-Edged Chronicle” 24) precisely by means of exploiting the mechanics of its creation, and of exhibiting this mechanics in a postmodernist manner. Only O'Hagan's disengagement both from mythologies per se and from ideologies in mythological disguise, along with his superior meta-narrative stance that is fortified by the illusory chronotope and multiple unreliable narrators, allows him to mythologize the process of the country's becoming the field of interwoven pre-modern and modern myths. That is why, among the novel's various “stories” that, however told, read, or interpreted, will remain “unfathomable, like the heart of the mountain” (O'Hagan 167), the one that interests us in this chapter is a story of

the originary event that—through its inscription in myth (the myth of exodus) and rite (the rite of passage) introduces the Shuswap people into modernity, represented by white men, their values, capitalist relations, and colonial enterprise. The paradigm of the originary event runs contrary to the circular, insular mythology of the natural cycles. The very event represents a breakthrough from that closed chronotope of natural religiosity toward historical time, and, as usual with O'Hagan, “dismantles” both pre-modern and historically-modern mythologies alike.

In O'Hagan's *Tay John*, the protagonist, who comes out of the earth's darkness and returns into its depths at the end, resembles the little Paul from George Bugnet's *The Forest* and his fate, but—as discussed earlier—bears a much deeper religious and cultural symbolism. In *The Forest*, Christian epiphany bursts into the matrix of human-nature relationship but does not alter it, therefore remaining transcendent and practically absent from the ecological chronotope of the novella. By contrast, in *Tay John*, the novel's multiple narratives are organically entwined into the spatial-temporal fibre; there, they coexist with the chthonic myths and thus contribute to the ecological layout of the land and the time of the main character's life. The mythical narrative of the novel allows for a more literal articulation of the motifs that in *The Forest* unfold only as a psychological and philosophical reflection.

At his most symbolic and mythological level, Tay John might be construed as a personification of a chthonic pagan demigod who cyclically emerges out of the earth and returns into its bowels, waiting for his new resurrection. On the level of poetics, this intuition is supported by the circular structure of the novel, which starts with the legend of Tay John's birth, then goes through twists and turns of the earthly narrative, filled with different perspectives, individual characters' implications, and gossip, and finally returns to its mythical ending. From the point of view of theological or mythological chronotopes, the story of Tay John takes over

the story of little Paul from Bugnet's novella and, as it were, pulls it into its own distribution of pagan and monotheistic discourses, which deconstruct each other by reflecting their mutual origins and the ironic failure of their realization.

The way Tay John appears among the Shuswap people suggests that he has two mothers: the Earth and an aboriginal woman who was raped by the Christian missionary Red Rorty (similarly, in *The Forest*, Louise and the Earth-Sophia are the mothers to Paul). Probably because of his putative father, Tay John is whiter than his tribesmen, and his hair is yellow. The child appears from the grave of the pregnant woman; in ancient cultures, the grave itself symbolizes the womb—the pregnant belly of the Earth that is supposed to bring back to life—yet in the other world—the souls of those She devoured. O'Hagan plays with that vertical chronotope of the life-and-death cycle by making the hero emerge out of the earth's womb at the beginning and sending him back there at the end. The self-deconstructing mythological hybridity of the chthonic and Christian paradigms acquire its final shape at the very end of the novel, where the last witness sees Tay John in the middle of a "God-forsaken lake," looking for "a Church over there behind the mountain" (261-62). As Blackie, the witness, relates, and the author symbolically places these words at the end of the story, "He had the feeling, he said, looking down at the tracks, that Tay John hadn't gone over the pass at all. He just walked down, the toboggan behind him, under the snow and into the ground" (264). Although the readers should not forget that in "the country of illusion" the witnesses' relations of the events are not necessarily trustworthy, that final sketch wraps up the individual cycle of Tay John-demigod, who ultimately belongs to Earth's womb, irrespective of other mythological discourses in which he might be entangled due to his human passions. The mountain ambience of his final—as recorded—descent structurally encloses the vertical, or indigenous, temporal-spatial layer of the

protagonist, who otherwise is also entwined in the emergence of the horizontal, or modern, layer, by becoming a part of the very myth of its origin.

Concisely summing up the temporal-spatial dichotomy of the novel, Granofsky points out, “[t]he vertically thrusting mountains are the most obvious image in *Tay John* of a stasis that challenges man’s ability to alter the existing environment; the railroad cutting across them horizontally is the most prominent image of man-made change” (111). As Granofsky also notes, “O’Hagan does not seem to favour either stasis or change per se; he records their conflict” (111). That very conflict, which stealthily introduces the drama of the historical time to the chthonic stability of the mountain country, takes place within Tay John himself. Unlike a classic protagonist, however, Tay John is not an active subject who intentionally changes his environment, but rather a passive object of the author’s romantic irony, which makes the consequences of individual aspirations reverberate in the tragic fate of the whole people and turns this people’s hopes for the Promised Land to the misery of bondage.

As though following the hybrid chronotope of the novel, Tay John’s personal legend becomes inextricably interlaced with his people, the Shuswaps, who take him for the presaged white-haired “Messiah, destined to guide the tribe back to its cousins, the coastal Salish” (Robinson, “Myths of Dominance Versus Myths of Re-Creation 168), but—in the irony of O’Hagan’s “dismantled” myth—brings them to the disaster of colonialism and degeneration. As any origin story, this one can also be shown to be governed by the Freudian law of belatedness, by the future-in-the-past tense: the future toward which the Shuswap people progress has, unbeknownst to them, already been there; naturally, the future and the past of the myth do not coincide when they enter the domain of history, as the desired—and lost in the past—object is

never the same as the real one. In O'Hagan's strife with myth as such, this law of belatedness in *Tay John* is valid both ways:

The Shuswaps await their promised leader who will guide them to an earthly heaven but they await him in a land already transgressed by fur traders and prospectors and soon to be penetrated by the railroads too. In a very real sense, the whites, in history, seeking their lost Eden in the New World, are busily destroying all possibilities of paradise through the very rigour of their search.  
(Davidson 36)

The historical aspirations and mythology of the Shuswaps are oriented toward the West, which is beyond the mountains, as toward a space of their former home, and their messianic expectations are directed to the past rather than to the future; that is, to the primeval paradise that they had at some point lost. In contrast, the white Westerner looks in the direction of the future; he is not interested in the lost past: he craves everything new because the new becomes the old very quickly for him. His philosophy and worldview represent the pure spirit of modernity: "Give us new earth, we cry; new places, that we may see our shadows shaped in forms that man has never seen before" (162-63). Opposed to the chronotope of the chthonic cultures with their localized, rather restricted territorially oikoumene and the cyclic, never-ending but always returning time, this spirit of modernity dictates a new sense of time, which now becomes short as a glimpse and which substitutes today and now for the cyclic eternity of the chthonic: "our brief eternity, our to-day is but the twilight between our yesterday and our to-morrow" (162). This new sense of time, of its quickness and evanescence, comes, of course, along with the new perception of space, which now does not suffice as a permanent place of dwelling but is measured by constant restlessness, movement, and swallowing of new territories. Shadow, as an

image that connects human being with its earthly provenance and thus functions as a reflection of its substance, symbolically acquires new “forms” in line with the changed, hectic chronotope of human existence: “Let us travel on so quickly, let us go so far that our shadows, like ourselves, grow lean with our journeys. Let to-morrow become yesterday, now, this instant, while we speak. Let us go on so quickly that we see the future as the past” (163). What shapes the shadow of the man who becomes a subject of such a leap in time and space is temporal-spatial transgression, which acquires even more dramatic form in the character that defies the traditional order by a number of equivocalities, including race, culture, the sacral-profane, and the human-natural.

One of the earliest occasions in which the two chronotopes collide within Tay John-Kumkleseem, and between the two souls that he owes to his double nature, takes place at the time of his initiation. The collision occurs not between the two psychological and social realities from before and from after the initiation, which traditionally is supposed to give birth to a man, hunter, and warrior—the psychological reality of a boy before the trial and the one of an adult afterwards, but between two different interpretations of the material evidence of initiation: sacral and profane, chthonic and modern. The unusual character of Kumkleseem’s initiation is confirmed by a temporal-spatial transgression even if we consider a chthonic level alone.

O’Hagan presents initiation as a mystery in which the personal world of a boy dies to give birth to the collective world of his tribe. The child’s spirit lives in “the world of his own creating” (44), governed by its own chronotope to the extent that adults—including himself as an adult man—cannot enter “the places” he goes and occupies prior to his initiation. With the Shuswaps, the trick played by Anrdei Bitov’s protagonist Sergei from the novella *Dacha District* (discussed earlier) is not possible: the young father can, or pretends to, see through the eyes of

his baby son, and as a result receives a picture of the renewed world, purer, more vivid, and more authentic (Bitov 34). With the initiation, the boy enters into the symbolic order that rules the collective life of the tribe, the order that imposes its own established vision of things; that is, performs the function of the Lacanian gaze of the Other, “the vision of his eyes” (44). Thus, the initiation forever closes the door on the free vision and free personal interpretation that the child enjoyed on his own. The world that belonged to the child is forever lost, and from now on, he succumbs irrevocably to the symbolic world of the community, “the world that other men have made” (44). The tribal mythology seems to disregard completely the participation of a child in the symbolic order of community: the world the child lives in prior to his initiation is meaningless, because the meaning exists only as a shared meaning and thus is opposed to private interpretations of the environment. That is why the change that takes place during the initiation is a drastic change; it occurs due to the magic powers of the ritual that changes the very personality of the man, and is therefore the main event in the life of every man: “The boy says ‘I’. The man says ‘We’—and this word that the man speaks is the word of his greatest magic” (44).

In the case of Kumkleseem, however, because of his unusual birth and descent, the magic impact of his initiation is expected to influence the fate of the whole tribe rather than his personal life only. That is why the chronotope of his initiation moves from the personal sphere to the sacral collective sphere and merges with the mythical, chthonic chronotope of his tribe. The essence of initiation itself is an environmental, temporal-spatial experience: a boy should go away from people into the wilderness and spend several days there without food until he sees a vision that shows him “the spirit that would guide him” (45). In their expectations for Kumkleseem’s initiation, the Shuswaps waited for a specific place that he would choose, and that very space would serve as a sign for them; accordingly, his prospective vision would be an



indication of the path before them. The fact that Kumkleseem-Tay John chooses for his initiation a taboo place testifies to a special role that he himself ascribes to his personality, and becomes an omen for his tribesmen: if someone breaches the taboo and encroaches into the prohibited area, spirits should punish him; or if he is a great man, the life of the whole tribe should drastically change.

The taboo place where Kumkleseem went for his trial had all the appearances of the valley of evil. It was:

a valley into which no man went. The water that came down from that valley was turgid, dark, and flowed silently, with no rapids. It was said that if a man drank of that water he would lose his voice and go from the sight of his fellows, roaming the hills at night to bark at the moon like a coyote. The coyote men saw by day was not the same they heard by night, for the coyote they hear by night was the voice of a man whose hands had become claws and whose teeth had grown long and tusk-like, who sat on his haunches, lifted his head to the sky and lamented the human speech gone from him. (45-46)

The archetype of the werewolf vividly shown in this description points to the greatest threat, felt by the Shuswaps, that man can encounter in his life: the loss of the human essence connected with the preponderance of his dark, night, evil side, and, moreover, with his utter desperation on the account of this loss, the loss of human speech as a symbol of humanity. This fear of the loss of human qualities is tightly linked to the fear of eviction, estrangement, alienation from fellow tribesmen, or, more generally from the community of humans, and thus to the unbearable tragedy of the loss of one's self-identity. Similar fears of pre-modern consciousness are described in Tolstaiia's *The Slynx*, where the horrifying mythic creature is said

to deprive the Golubchiks of their soul the very moment it breaks the big vein of its victim: “All the reason runs out of you. If you come back, you’re never the same again, your eyes are different... like when people walk in their sleep under the moon”<sup>248</sup> (5). The mythical spatial dimensions of this threat are evident in both *The Slynx* and *Tay John*. In O’Hagan’s novel, the taboo space is marked by the mystic quality of the environment of the evil valley that casts a spell and thus distorts the natural creation within its boundaries. In *The Slynx*, the taboo place is more justifiable because of its natural environmental characteristics: “To the north are deep forests, full of storm-felled trees, the limbs so twisted you can’t get through, prickly bushes catch at your britches, branches pull your cap off your head. Old people say the Slynx lives in those forests”<sup>249</sup> (5).

But the real fear that the valley provokes in the Shuswaps is the threat that the evil spirit of the place presents for the whole community: “The spirit of the valley was cruel. Men feared that one night, taking the form of a great white bear, it would come down upon them in their sleep and leave them with a coyote’s howl for voice and only a coyote’s claws for hands, and each man would be for ever a stranger to his neighbour” (46). This threat comes true for the inhabitants of the post-apocalyptic Moscow in Tolstaia’s novel, where the Sanituriion’s claw—a metonymy of the Slynx’s claws—becomes a symbol of the society’s degradation and the insanity of the world with its values turned upside down.

As the expectations of Kumkleseem’s initiation vision were so high that his tribesmen hoped to obtain a vision for the fate of the whole tribe, their fear of his going to the evil valley becomes even more understandable: the spatial transgression could be interpreted as an

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<sup>248</sup> «...она ему на шею-то сзади: хлоп! и хребтину зубами: хрусь!—а когтем главную-то жилочку нащупает и перервет, и весь разум из человека и выйдет. Вернется такой назад, а он уж не тот, и глаза не те... как бывает, к примеру, когда люди ходят во сне под луной» (17).

<sup>249</sup> “На севере—дремучие леса, бурелом, ветви переплелись и пройти не пускают, колючие кусты за порты цепляют, сучья шапку с головы рвут. В тех лесах, старые люди сказывают, живет кысь” (17).

apocalyptic prophecy, as a prediction that the evil spirit would overpower all men and thereby ruin the whole community forever. In spite of the predictable experience that Kumkleseem had during his journey and his fasting in the wilderness, the hidden fruit of his initiation could really be construed as a bad omen for the Shuswaps.

In general, his enterprise is a journey of a man who respects nature, who goes to listen to it, not to conquer it or to be heard by it, and to interpret its signs according to the mythology of his people and his own senses. In this regard, we can say that the natural environment speaks to Kumkleseem, and the whole environmental experience of his trip serves as an open book for him and for his tribesmen through his relation of the journey. Although he already goes to the taboo land, he nevertheless has to set some temporal-spatial limitations for himself. He was going along the valley for four days until he could “go no farther,” then he listened for four days more, and on the ninth day, he turned back. It is not clear if the limitations to Kumkleseem’s journey were due to his physical exhaustion (because of the fasting and the long trip) or due to some temporal-spatial initiation regulations. At some point it seems that the landscape and its indiscreet physical signs—the beginning of the river or the high mountain ridge—served as postmarks for his journey: “On the end of the fourth day my eyes told me I could go no farther. I had come to where the river is born and where a man could step across it. Rock wall were before me. Ice hung upon them—white, and cold as an old woman’s breast. One place there was where man might still go on, but I knew I had come to the end of my journey” (48). The secret symbolism of those limitations comes to the open only after Kumkleseem returns to his people and tells them his story.

The narrator—along with Kumkleseem as a story-teller who relates his adventure to his tribesmen—is pushing the reader to the understanding of the importance of those limitations

gradually, developing the environmental experience of the hero from the personal significance of his initiation toward the collective meaning with metaphysical, and even apocalyptic, implications. The personal dimension of his initiation experience unfolds in the field of sensual environmental perception, which deploys along the temporal axis of the day-and-night cycle with prevailing visual experience during the day and hearing experience during the night accordingly. The completely passive, contemplative mode of this experience is definitive of the principal existential attitude toward the natural environment that the Shuswaps represent in all the aspects of their life. This chthonic mode is a striking opposition to what the modernizing spirit of the colonizers has to offer: accepting instead of imposing, patiently looking upon instead of restlessly changing, reading instead of dictating, and just diligently noting instead of actively interpreting:

Against a spruce-tree, withered by lightning long ago on some sand the river had fallen away from, I sat and waited and my ears listened. Close to me I saw in the green coarse grass a place where a cow moose had borne her calf three days before. Closer to me still, so that I could see the broken tips of the willows in the sun, an old moose had browsed. Earlier, when the snow had just left the ground, a she-bear and her two cubs had crossed on the sand past my feet, for the marks were there before me. On the ledges above my head goats came when the day was warm and lay down in the sun. The rest I saw was grass trembling in the wind, and the roof of the forest bending when the mountains breathed, and sun shining on running water. (48-49)

This description is worth special attention because it is not an auctorial, poetic landscape portrayal, crafted in accordance with the romantic or any other tradition of nature-writing; rather,

Kumkleseem presents this description as a relation of the story of his initiation. At some point in that story, when the temporal-spatial limitations are all set, the active role of the subject ceases and what follows is his all-encompassing as well as all-respecting position of a receptive organ that records the environment with minimal interpretation, and later relates everything without discrimination or selectivity. “Grass trembling in the wind” has much more active and acting power and energy than Kumkleseem himself, whose perceptive organs organize the surrounding environment into the world first in his mind and later—as a confirmation of his sanity—in making sense of it through the narrative. A natural change reflected in the capacity of his receptive organs uncovers still different aspects of the environment and calls for new personification metaphors that employ his keen sense of touch and hearing against the backdrop of the weakened nightly vision:

At night in the darkness I felt the mountains come closer so that they were against my elbows, and my bones that could not move were sore and aching. At night the river spoke loudly. An owl, the soul of a departed woman, was in the tree above me, and my ears, become lonely, were tender to its message. Mice ran over my toes. (49)

It then becomes clear that the narrative acquires a mythical pattern and through a gradation of animals—from the smallest to the biggest—which fulfils the number of days Kumkleseem spent in a receptive position, he leads the story to the conclusion that his tribesmen expect from him. After the mice, the first morning he realizes that a marten was beside him under the spruce-tree; the second morning he had a visit from a lynx; a “great black wolf” came on the third morning; and, ultimately, the fourth morning brought him an old bear, who made his bed beyond Kumkleseem’s feet and stayed there the whole night to watch him. As the climax of

Kumkleseem's story matches what his people expect from it, the oldest and the wisest of the tribesmen, Squeleken, rose and said: "It is well. You have spoken with the words of a man. The bear spirit will be your guardian spirit" (49).

Squeleken's concluding remark nicely wraps up the conventional part of the initiation story, which results in determining the guiding spirit of a newly-baked man or warrior, thereby securing for him a double connection, necessary for both present and after-life: a special personal connection with an animal, with a piece of a non-human natural environment in which he lives, and with a divine entity that this animal symbolically represents. Of course, Tay John's connection with the bear spirit does not appear accidentally. First of all, Kumkleseem resembles a bear physically and psychologically: he is strong, sometimes violent, independent, persistent, and lonely. But in the story the bear spirit plays an even more philosophical and environmental function, which ties Kumkleseem-Yellow Head to Tay John in one person, in the same way the Canadian Rockies in the novel tie together non-human nature, the indigenous peoples, and the newcomers.

The bear spirit was suggested for Kumkleseem as the right choice before the trial, as an opportunity to choose the moral instead of the immoral, the collective instead of the individual. When the time of Kumkleseem's initiation came, people were saddened because he was constantly "sitting on a ridge and gazing up" the horrible valley, whose "cruel spirit" is able to induce irrevocable transformations in human souls. To fathom the dubious character of the bear spirit with regard to Kumkleseem and the Shuswaps, we need to remember the shape that the cruel spirit of the valley takes for them: "Men feared that one night, taking the form of a great white bear, it ["the spirit of that valley"] would come is down upon them in their sleep and leave them with a coyote's howl for voice and only a coyote's claws for hands, and each man would be

for ever a stranger to his neighbour” (46). Probably, upon seeing the boy aspire to the bear spirit, old Smutuksen decided to present him with an alternate bear spirit. The night before Kumkleseem’s trial, the old man takes him outside the village and in a forest clearing shows him the Big Dipper: “That is The Bear. You see him, and he sees you” (46). The Bear that sees Kumkleseem is a primitive concept of the omnipresent God, to whom Smutuksen introduces the boy, full of pride in his desire for transgression, invading the taboo area, and disturbing the “great white bear.” This white bear, like the Slynx in Tolstaia’s novel, has its spatial limitations: it dwells in the horrible valley; his spatial localization makes it possible to evade him, to avoid the horror by simply not encroaching into the cursed land. The Bear, by contrast, cannot be disregarded: “he sees you” anywhere, even in the land of the “white bear,” which is what the old man seems to be trying to convey to Kumkleseem. The bottom line of that warning is a matter of conscience, etymologically *co-knowledge*, shared between the two participants of the intimate connection that excludes the third party: “You see him, and he sees you” (46).

An ambiguous philosophical implication of the bear image develops gradually throughout the novel and ultimately acquires a polar metaphysical meaning of both dark and light, predator and victim, power and weakness. The Bear is going to watch what kind of a bear Kumkleseem is becoming himself during his initiation. Additionally, there is a fear, a helplessness before the eyes of a bear that charges “out of the dark” (243): a fear of the unknown. There is also the imagery of the dark compared to the inside of the bear, and the bear as an allegory of wilderness that constantly struggles with man. “An epic battle: man against the wilderness” (86) was a generalizing characteristic of the narrator John Denham’s first meeting with Tay John. In the battle scene, Denham is merely an onlooker, whose position at the opposite side of the river gives him a passive, contemplative, and philosophizing capacity to generalize the battle as an

object, but never to approach it from the point of view of Tay John himself. Tay John's victory over the she-bear thus becomes Man's victory over darkness, which Denham immediately associates with the wilderness, yet does Kumkleseem endow the episode with the same meaning? He himself comes from the darkness of the earth and disappears—at least for the white onlooker—into the womb of the earth at the end; wilderness is the home where he lives; and the bear is his guiding spirit, obtained during the initiation trial. Ultimately, there is also a bear whom Tay John kills out of mercy: the bear cub, mutilated by a European woman, Ardith Aeriola. The cub is also a small piece of wilderness, taken as a pet by a civilized woman, who out of ignorance cuts the cub's nails off so that the creature cannot walk. All these bear episodes point to the fact that Tay John is not only closely tied with the bear image, but also shares its collective fate: as the she-bear, he also impersonates the wilderness, killed by Man; he mutilates himself when he falls prey to the horse passion; and he symbolizes the darkness, the unknown, the unfathomable that lures and scares the Europeans.

“His mark will be upon you, and your mark upon him” (50), says the old Squeleken to Kumkleseem about the bear-spirit. While Squeleken is satisfied with the expected outcome of the initiation, Smutuksen, who had shown to Tay John—before the trial—The Bear who was going to watch him from above, suspects that there is more to Kumkleseem's story. And, urged by this suspicion, Kumkleseem tells his tribesmen about a temptation that he struggled with far away in the mountains: “There was a word. There was a voice. I heard speech in the trees. It called me farther than I had gone. Still I returned my face from it for I had gone as far as my return would let me” (50). This is the second part of the story, the one that fulfills not the collective, tribal expectations of the initiation, but Tay John's personal quest for self-identification.



The result of this quest, however, is as ambiguous as the image of Tay John at large. The whole of Kumkleseem's initiation enterprise was based on breaching the taboo of the evil valley. His tribesmen were very concerned about his intent because the spirit Kumkleseem could bring upon them would be the spirit of the white bear, the one that annihilates human identity. As a remedy to this potential threat, the one that could be caused by Kumkleseem's unbridled pride, Smutuksen introduces him to the image of the other Bear, the Big Dipper, an allegory of the overseeing God. Which bear—the white bear or The Bear—becomes Tay John's guiding spirit remains an open question until the end of the book. A spatial restriction that Kumkleseem imposes upon himself in spite of all the luring voices seems to suggest that The Bear overpowers Tay John's urge toward transgression: when reaching the point of no return, he stops himself and does not cross the Rubicon that would separate him from his tribesmen and probably call down afflictions upon them. But the reaction of his people to his story proves that separation has already taken place. Some of them were wondering, "if the valley had cast its spell upon Kumkleseem so that he no longer spoke to them wholly with a man's tongue, for these were words they did not understand. Others, remembering his birth, were afraid that he might still go from them and leave them, fearing that the darkness of the earth, where he lived before they knew him, had stained his spirit" (50-51).

Although, at least this time, Kumkleseem curbs his desire for transgression, his frightened tribesmen in their apprehension are not far from the truth: the evil spirit of the valley has already been unleashed, and Yellowhead unknowingly brings it to their lives. As proof of his unusual journey, Kumkleseem brings a bag with sand from the bank of the river where he was fasting. Mirroring the dichotomy of Kumkleseem-Yellowhead, who comes out of the dark of the earth but has remarkably light hair, this sand combines the qualities of darkness and lightness. "It

is the dark sand where the dark waters come from” (51), says Kumkleseem as he presents his trophy. “It is dark, yet the light of the sun has entered into it so that it shines even now at night” (51). However, his tribesmen, who lay their tongues upon the heavy sand, associate its bitter taste with “a mountain goat long dead” and suspect some dark magic in it (51). Along the line of that dichotomy, during the celebration of the happy outcome of Kumkleseem’s initiation, three white men arrive; they surprise Tzalas with a map showing geographical knowledge of the Shuswaps’ country, and reveal that their final destination is the same taboo dark valley. The clash of civilizations happens at that point. The white men are not at all discouraged by Tzalas’s admonition that it is an evil place with bad water or by Kumkleseem’s affirmation that “there is nothing up the valley” (54). A dichotomy also hides in white men’s representation of themselves —“We are peace-lovers, and no harm rides with us” (53)—and their actual threat to the Shuswap community, apparent in their reaction to the gold sand, is produced by Kumkleseem as material evidence from the evil place: “They laughed. They hit each other upon the shoulders until the people thought they were fighting. Tzalas stood close and wondered at the magic of the sand” (54). They steal Kumkleseem from his people and hire him as their guide to the evil valley, promising him “a rifle that would kill a moose with its voice...and a coat to wear, read as bear’s blood” (54).

Not the Bear’s spirit but the coat of “bear’s blood” becomes the real, ultimate initiation of Kumkleseem. That is why “when Kumkleseem returned he was no longer Kumkleseem” (55). White people called him “Tête Jaune” (accommodated to the local pronunciation as “Tay John”), Yellowhead, mimicking the nickname of the historical Pierre Bostonais, an Iroquois-Métis fur-trader and trapper who at the beginning of the nineteenth century crossed the Rocky Mountains

through the pass known later as Yellowhead.<sup>250</sup> As this name, uttered by the white men in relation to Kumkleseem, was combined with praise for his good eye and knowledge of the mountains, the Shuswaps decided that the name has been given to him for his good qualities and deeds. Thus the whole figure of Tay John, following the above array of misinterpretations, becomes a product of deception, of internal, essential falsity that undermines him as a chthonic demigod and thereby also weakens the temporal-spatial ecological integrity of his land. Together with Tay John, the Shuswaps unwillingly and unknowingly become involved in an alien symbolic system, which, as though in a curved mirror, distorts and contaminates their mythical, pristine world of harmony between the human and non-human and of the direct ontological correspondence between the name and the thing.

The fake name “Tay John,” mimicking the name of another person, depersonalizes Kumkleseem and brings upon the name the functional, not mythical, meaning that it has with people of a different cultural system. This clandestine enemy, deception, ruins the long-established homeostasis of the Shuswaps’ life and corrupts the people’s morals. The hunters become traders and hunt only for animals that can be sold profitably to the white buyers: “Days came when the young men, following Tay John, failed to hunt meat and hides for the village. They began now to hunt other animals than the moose, caribou, goat and deer—smaller animals deep in the timber; the martin, the lynx, the mink and the fox, and to pack the fur on their backs to traders across the mountain” (56-57).

The young Shuswaps come back to their village with rifles and other perks of civilization, but the ecological balance of their land has already changed: the game retreated into

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<sup>250</sup> Jack Robinson explains in his essay “Myths of Dominance Versus Myths of Re-Creation in O’Hagan’s *Tay John*,” “The historical Shuswap had no Messiah myth, and Tête Jaune, who gave his name to Yellowhead Pass and Tête Jaune Cache, is an Iroquois. John Grierson MacGregor, in *Overland by the Yellowhead* (Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1974) 26-27, tells how ‘Tête Jaune’, an Iroquois, went west with the fur trade, discovered ‘Yellowhead’ pass in 1832, and was finally murdered by local natives” (174).

the mountains, famine crawled into the life of the village, and “black sickness” (58) took many Shuswaps’ lives. A medicine man, Kwakala, mentions “new shadows” that are cast upon their land: “Your fathers lived where you live for many, many winters. They were friends with the place where they lived. They were gentle. They spoke to a deer before they killed it that its spirit might not be offended. They did not boast... Their women sang songs to the berry spirit” (59).

With the advent of capitalist relations, the ecological equilibrium of the land changes drastically: “The young men shake their rifles and boast. Still young bellies are empty. The women have become lazy and do not sing. Their berry baskets are empty” (59). In the face of this apocalyptic picture, Kwakala tries to resuscitate an old Shuswap myth of the Promised Land across the mountains, where their cousins still live and wait for them to come back, and where there are game and berries in abundance. It is a common belief among his tribesmen that Kumklesem is the prophesized messiah, who will lead his people to that paradise. If the spatial dimension of this mythical land lies somewhere across the mountains (“south, yet more to the west than the dark river” (60)), its temporal dimension is directed not toward the future but toward the past, for this is the modernity that the Shuswaps are fleeing in their journey, and this is their pristine, prelapsarian past that they are pursuing in their flight.

The Shuswaps’ journey to the Promised Land resembles, in its main shape, the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. The people are first encouraged by the abundance of food just days away from their village. Later, the exodus becomes more challenging: the Shuswaps are facing tribulations, hunger, diseases; many of them die, and the rest start to doubt. Tay John, who becomes a figure of Moses, has to deal with small riots and complaints similar to those the historical Moses faced: “Have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Were there not graves enough where we were?” (61). The road to perdition is embellished, though, with improvised

miracles that the nature of the land offers to the travellers. From time to time they find spots full of game and berries, and one of these stops becomes an ultimate challenge that the people cannot take and forget about their spiritual goal: “They stayed there, and forgot that they had been on their way to their cousins across the mountains, for now game was around them and the bushes bent with their summer berries... It had come about as Kwakala said, and Tay John was the leader who had led them... Smutuksen smiled to have seen this before he died” (63). But this was a false Promised Land, and Tay John was a fake Moses. There is no way to run from modernity and colonization; the return to the modus of life of their forefathers is temporary.

Things more cunning and more profound than a tribal belief occupy Kumkleseem’s spirit. He becomes involved in a fight for the only available girl in the tribe. Irrespective of the outcome, the Shuswaps deprive him of the right to marry because, as the leader, he should remain devoted entirely to his people. As Robinson conjectures, in their interpretation of Tay John’s initiation report, his tribesmen “neglect another ‘sign’”:

“An owl, the soul of a departed woman, was in the tree above me, and my ears, become lonely, were tender to its message” (O’Hagan 49). The owl, symbol of woman, will re-appear above his deserted cabin after he has left the tribe and will cry after he has killed the bear, his putative guiding spirit. He will leave the tribe because of a dispute over a woman spoken for by another brave and, from then on, will stalk the fringes of white society in pursuit of woman. (Robinson, “Myths of Dominance Versus Myths of Re-Creation” 169)

The fact that Tay John, the false messiah, leaves his tribe after this incident, evicted by his people’s denial to treat him as one of them, as the one who deserves a normal life of a man, becomes—along with the Rorty brothers’ story—one more evidence of the failure of the biblical

messianic project in the novel. Together with other ideological constructions presented in *Tay John*, the failure of that Western-indigenous hybrid mythological paradigm, as well as the deep-running irony that underlies the process of its realization, completes O'Hagan's strategy of dismantling myth as a superficial layer on the more profound and universal stratum of the Symbolic order, which produces and at the same time cures the void of the natural in man by organizing it around the chthonic laws of eros, thanatos, and their cycle.

In his various attempts at making sense of the notions of modernity and "the modern Constitution," Latour notes, "modernity is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of 'man' or as a way of announcing his death" (13). Modernity's origin stories—the myths of man's birth, death, and rebirth—suffer from the "asymmetry" stemming from the modern provenance of those stories: they neglect "the simultaneous birth of 'non-humanity'—things, or objects, or beasts—and an equally strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines" (Latour 13). This relegated, neglected, and repressed content of Western anthropological mythology has prompted philosophers such as Haraway to seek remedy in retelling origin stories from the point of view of the hybrid, the feminine, and the cyborg, to avoid all the manifestations of the Symbolic with its patriarchal odour of the Name-of-the-(Dead)-Father. All three origin narratives, addressed in this chapter, more or less feature hybridity as their point of departure, yet, notwithstanding its attractiveness for a new, liberated mythology of beginnings, they steer a steady course toward the restoration of what Latour calls "the double separation"—"between humans and nonhumans on the one hand, and between what happens 'above' and what happens 'below' on the other" (13). Both Tolstaia's *The Slynx* and Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* relate the story of an imaginary rebirth of humanity in a reloaded ecological order, where the humanoid species—*primus inter pares*—inevitably develop the

Symbolic and thus reconfirm their “double separation” from the nonhuman. In *Tay John*, O’Hagan employs dark irony by recoding the scene of the Shuswaps’ initiation to their Promised Land onto their accelerated passage to modernity, represented by the white westerners and their mythologies of human dominance. The mythological hybridity of *Tay John*, as well as of *The Slynx*, downplays the natural as a seemingly logical point of departure for modern man either by placing the origin story in the future-in-the-past tense (where it is always already a subject to the Symbolic) or by turning the ostensible tangibility of the landscape into the country of illusion, in which an intricate network of the myths and the narratives webs the void of the barred nature.

## Conclusions

This study of the ecological ideologies of modernity and their temporal-spatial representations, as reflected in fiction and poetry, was governed by several theoretical assumptions. Bakhtin's notion of "literary artistic chronotope" (84) as a temporal-spatial unity was fortified by the phenomenological premise of a relative, not absolute, character of time and space, which comprise chronotopes directly experienced in life rather than outlined by given scientific principles. The main aspect of this assumption is what we can call the Heideggerian chronotope, Heidegger's temporality of space, according to which "spatiality is existentially possible only through temporality" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 336). By transcending into time, humans (*Daseins*) include space into their world of experience, where space becomes not just an independent physical object, psychologically marked by human emotions, but an ontological continuum of the space-time that speaks the language of Being. Therefore, we have adopted the notion of "ecology" in its etymological, also Heideggerian, meaning as "dwelling-saying," whereby the ecological ideologies of modernity in the works of Czesław Miłosz, Georges Bugnet, Sheila Watson, Howard O'Hagan, Andrei Bitov, and Tatiana Tolstaia were examined as both explicitly stated and implied in the narratives and descriptions, reflections and beliefs regarding the proper dwelling place of humans, their ethos. As twentieth-century literary discourses, these ideologies constitute themselves after the patterns created by the lasting tradition of modernity's philosophy, poetry, and fiction, especially so-called nature writing, which have pre-eminently been formed under the premises of the subject-object and human-nonhuman oppositions through the figures of the conqueror, escapist, nature-merger, collector, scientist, worshipper, and/or "beautiful soul," within the epistemes of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Modernism. Any ecological ideology is sustained by discursive elements that



prove oblivious of their own tropological nature and interpretive character of their experience, which by definition presents itself as always partial and incomplete, marked by the spectres of absence, loss, and death. That is why, in this selection of authors and works, I have tried to make sure that the ideological aspects of the environmental chronotopes are not only represented artistically but also reflected upon, made an issue both in themselves and for other aspects of literary works, such as the development of characters, their worldviews and perceptions of themselves in their ambience, narrative, tropology, and so on. One of the main features of this self-reflectivity, or the meta-ecological function, is the various use of defamiliarization, which aims at deconstructing the petrified ecological images, stances, and stereotypes by rendering them unfamiliar, estranged, and even uncanny. Two most significant results of such defamiliarizing strategies can be theoretically subsumed under the Lacanian concept of *objet petit a*, which, according to Žižek, is “the ‘sublime object of ideology’” that causes the multiplicity of symbolic perspectives and “serves as the fantasmatic support of ideological propositions” (*The Parallax View* 41), with the most archetypal and culturally well-represented object-cause-of-desire: the origin fantasy.

Ontologically meaningful relationships of humans with their environment can be boiled down to the more profound and general relations between human and thing, which, when made a philosophical issue, becomes the ungraspable Lacanian “Thing.” The “Thing” resists any symbolization (image, language, etc.) but can be represented by an individual signifier, the *objet petit a*. The origin fantasies always revolve around this ungraspable “Real” “Thing,” such as an originary gaze, a return to the prelapsarian space marked by timelessness, or an attainment of ontological unity with the materiality of the world, represented by such objects-causes-of-desire as an ideal landscape, wilderness, apokatastasis, or the originary event that excludes

human's subjugation to the Symbolic order. The multiplicity of such representations analyzed in this dissertation is predicated upon the dramatic core, described by the philosophical systems of Husserl, Heidegger, Lacan, Adorno, Agamben and others, that can be described in terms of the unbridgeable gap yawning between human and thing. The effect of this is the realization that every attempt at symbolizing the Thing leaves an indisposible and indivisible remainder that causes all the anxieties of estrangement, uncanniness, angst of existence, and other unsettling conditions of humanity's relations with the environment that displace humans from their proper dwelling place, his home of being.

For Miłosz and Bitov, this ecological drama stems from the painful realization of human's being subject to language, with its dominant desire not to comprehend or empathize but to divide, classify, and possess. That is why the speaker of Miłosz's poems, as well as the protagonist of his novel *The Issa Valley*, is divided between the material power of his Voice, originating in Eros, or a special propinquity and mutual attraction of the corporeal entities and substances, and the desire for the absolute meaning of things, which the author expects to find on the other side, with not the earthly and perishable but rather a transcendent and absolute subject. For this reason, Miłosz's constant attempts at comprehending and reflecting on the environment as the Heideggerian ontic are always undermined by the lack or the gap that craves the ontological, the preservation of all material things comprising the meaningful world, in the heretic event of apokatastasis. Apokatastasis as the purpose of all creation is a projection of Miłosz's teleology unto the concept of historicity, which presupposes a purpose, or *telos*, of every individual being, and which is mirrored in the fantasy of origin that resembles the Heideggerian notion of *Ereignis*, the event of *Dasein*'s acquiring a chronotope, or entering into its proper dwelling place by transcending into time.

Although Miłosz, similarly to Bitov, places his originary *Ereignis* (which can be translated simply as “event”) in the sacral time of childhood and the sacral space of motherland, as his poem “Christopher Robin” and the coming-of-age novel *The Issa Valley* suggest, the process of entering into the symbolic chronotope of history in his work is filled with the negativity of alienation. By contrast, Bitov, more sympathetic toward the Heideggerian originary fantasies, finds in the special chronotope of childhood man’s proper dwelling place, his ethos, identified as dwelling in language without the negativity of the Voice, or the metaphysical illusion of reference. Labelled by Agamben as the experience of infancy, this entrance of Bitov’s characters into the domain of childish perception of ambience through the language that is not yet contaminated by the long history of the ideological aberrations (de Man) makes a possibility for epiphanies, characteristic also of Miłosz, where an individual transcends or temporarily suspends the Symbolic to contemplate the Creator’s design. Being rather exceptional occasions, epiphanies in both Bitov and Miłosz become conspicuous against the pre-eminent background of a profound suspicion with regard to the possibility of adequate representation. In this context, the experience of infancy should be read as one of the strategies for defamiliarization of environmental objects and their visual and verbal representations. For both authors, defamiliarization is mostly a result of the uncanny contrasts that defy the stereotypical images of natural objects, such as birds, either by means of a grotesque anthropomorphization or by fixating and scrutinizing a bird in its most natural, though unusual for symbolic representation, state of death. Sharing with Miłosz an assumption about the world as an expressive rather than indicative sign, to use the language of the Husserlian phenomenology, Bitov—through his intellectual characters—tries to read the ambience as the Creator’s intentional object, which requires another artist, human, to appreciate the Demiurge’s work. Within this complex schema

of intentional artistic projections and hermeneutical efforts, in “Man in a Landscape,” Bitov’s origin fantasy of a pure landscape without the traces of human takes shape as a fantasy of the originary gaze, annihilated by the effect of the parallax: landscape, in both implications of its intentionality as painting and ekphrasis, its verbal description, and as Demiurge’s primary design of creation, is unavoidably subjected to “the parallax view” (Žižek), where the indisposable presence of the artist in the landscape’s blind spot turns all the landscapes as origin fantasies into the *objet petit a*. The experience of infancy as a chance at transcendence culminates in the direct correspondence between a child’s face and a pure landscape, the Lacanian “Real,” unattainable objects, both of which are marked by the impossibility of symbolization.

Bitov’s attachment to the originary magic of special places, *genius loci* (“Birds,” “Man in a Landscape”), with their array of ideological implications such as the sublime of wilderness or frontier, finds a similar response in the spatial images of Bugnet’s wilderness, Watson’s Coyote country, and O’Hagan’s mountain “country of illusion.” Environmental objects as objects-causes of the characters’ desire become subjected in these authors to still other strategies of defamiliarization, such as gender-labelled distributions of the ambient space as well as what I call trickster narratives, which become a harbor for apparitions in the absence of an authoritative narrative figure. Bugnet’s protagonists Roger and Louise (in *The Forest*) resemble Bitov’s and Miłosz’s characters in their attempt at a Bakhtinian “historical inversion” when trying to refind the state of nature. As the Lacanian “lost object” that is being constantly refound qua *objet petit a*, the wilderness farmstead becomes for them an individual object-place of a special investment of desire with gender-marked ideological manifestations. Wilderness in *The Forest* is first of all an object of a masculine libidinal investment, legitimized by the successive stances that Roger takes with regard to it: a colonizing invader, romantic dreamer, bourgeois positivist, Hegelian

“beautiful soul,” or pessimist naturalist. The sublime of the wild and the masculine spirit of appropriation and possession appear as clear markers of Roger’s erotic desire toward the wilderness as his *objet petit a*, masked by culturally-acceptable male roles along with the images of the wilderness’s virginity and passivity. The libidinal interpretation of wilderness is confirmed by Louise’s attitude toward the wild as a rival for her husband’s heart. First she tries to seek refuge in seclusion by isolating herself within a cultivated garden, a cultural asylum of the ordered nature that stands up to the uncontrollable powers of the ambient wilderness; but, inevitably losing to her husband’s mistress, she ultimately succumbs and adopts the role of a pagan priestess of the goddess Earth. Louise’s initial apprehension toward the wild sublimates into an origin fantasy in which she craves for a reunion with her more powerful rival by dint of shared motherhood; Paul, an ostensibly mutual son of Louise and the wilderness *qua* the goddess Earth, is his mother’s object-cause-of-desire, whose death, however, ends both Louise and Roger’s origin fantasies by delivering them back to the naturalist vision of wilderness as an apathetic and implacable force pitted against man and his aspirations.

In Watson, the feminine figure of wilderness is embodied in Margaret, the heroine of “Rough Answer,” and the bodily apparition of Ma Potter, along with other female characters of *The Double Hook*. Unlike Bugnet’s Louise, Watson’s female figures successfully implement the natural merger role that defies the Symbolic either by the preponderance of the Imaginary, non-discursive, apophetic ecomimesis of “Rough Answer,” or by the fragmentary, disruptive trickster narrative of *The Double Hook*, capable of sustaining the spectral and at the same time corporeal image of Mrs. Potter. The pre-eminently optic ecomimesis of *The Double Hook* is supplemented and even surpassed by the pre-symbolic soundscape of “Rough Answer” with its apophetic “power of silence” as the voice of the earth and the female figure as “chora” (Kristeva), a

receptacle that is able to accept, contain, and preserve its purity by expelling any third party, any symbolic mediator between herself, her husband, and the genotext of their natural environment. Watson's short story presents a terrain in which the Heideggerian *Streit*, or strife, between the earth and the world ends in the defeat of the masculine perspective of the world's openness and the preponderance of the feminine *Bergende* as concealing and preserving, of the domination of the Imaginary over the Symbolic, even capable of rendering the objects of the masculine Joe's libido into mere extensions of his natural ambience. In *The Double Hook*, the more masculine optic perception of the landscape presents Coyote's country, folded according to his obscure design and governed by the "glory" of his dim moonlight optics. With metaphysical rather than ecomimetic implications, contrary to "Rough Answer," the strife between the Heideggerian concealedness and unconcealedness in *The Double Hook* occurs mostly because of the competing perspectives of illumination: those of Coyote's obscure moonlight, imbued with the spectres of transgression, death, and apocalypse (incest, matricide, and the drought), and of the higher divine light, *lumen*, which originates the epiphanies of the spiritual atonement, the landscape rejuvenation, and the bliss of parenthood. The change in illumination influences first of all the aesthetic perception of the country by the male characters, while the female characters remain mostly passive allegories of the country's landscape, either withering in the Coyote's mouth or prospering like a robust tree in the anti-apocalyptic waters of *lumen*.

The strife between concealedness and unconcealedness in *The Double Hook*, however, is far from the simplified struggle of good and evil. In spite of the epiphanies, the folded landscape never truly ceases to be Coyote's country, under Coyote's eyes and in his mouth; and Coyote as the master of the landscape never offers a clear vision of phenomena. The Coyote figure is an invisible yet omnipresent designer of the country's chonotope; his poetic stanzas enframe the

narrative, whose symptom he, the indigenous Coyote, becomes in the absence of an authorial and authoritative fatherly, biblical, European, colonizing figure, which would be capable of securing an unequivocal meaning of the text. The resulting psychotic, or, in Lacanian terms, foreclosed narrative successfully obscures all ideological manifestations, instead allowing the text to be haunted by apparition as its uncanny double, which, as the ghost of Ma Potter or the evasive spectre of Coyote himself, never resolves the ambiguity of its meaning. A special pleasure of such trickster narratives stems not from the absence of ideological markers, but from the Lacanian *sinthome* as a pre-symbolic enjoyment that is offered in place of an ideological discourse. *Sinthome* is echoed in the nirvanic sort of consolation that Coyote provides for the *Double Hook* characters. As a figure of the foreclosed author, in his narrative, Coyote-trickster silences the Word, sharing this feature with O'Hagan's *Tay John*, and presents himself as a hieroglyph rather than an image, being at the same time a mysterious key to the encrypted country by exercising his dualistic, Manichean control over its landscape and its people.

Similarly to *The Double Hook*, the Shuswap mountain country in *Tay John* is presented in a *sinthomatic* narrative that consists of the relations of unreliable, foreclosed narrators to the effect of producing a spectral, trickster figure of Tay John. The silencing of the Word in *Tay John* acquires more readable characteristics due to the unobscured narrative authorship of each of the tales and an intentional meta-mythological perspective assumed by O'Hagan with respect to the multiple accounts of his Tay John story. These word-silencing and meta-mythological effects are attained by a sophisticated ecological contamination of the religion of the Word, represented in the novel by the Rorty brothers, by pitting them against an array of objects-causes-of-desire that lead the brothers to their ultimate self-destruction. The environmental chronotope, with its ideological dichotomies of the lake and the mountain, water and stone, the earth's depths

and the surface, the light of the sunset and the rich motif of shadow, the erotic allegory of the school-marm tree and the religious pronouncement of tree as such and the tree that is shaped as a cross, prepares the ground for the perception of the true hero of the landscape, the trickster Tay John, for whom “the country of illusion” is his proper place of dwelling. The figure of Tay John combines in itself two chronotopes: that of the Shuswaps with their cyclic natural time and periodical subterranean descents to spend the winters in dugouts, and that of modernity’s linear time of progress, spatially embodied in the railway protruding the mountains. He is also a man of flesh and blood, attracted to women, fame, and horses, and a chthonic demigod emerging out of his mother’s womb (an allegory of the pregnant belly of the Earth) and mysteriously descending back.

The symbolic significance of Tay John, a trickster who combines elusiveness and omnipresence, is even more complicated by the interstitial status of his people, the Shuswaps, from whom, unbeknownst, Tay John appears as both a Dionysus-like cyclic demigod and a messiah of a teleological historical paradigm, more pertinent to modernity than to a chthonic chronotope. The collision of the two chronotopes marks the failure of the Shuswap origin fantasy: on the way to their “historical inversion” (Bakhtin), or return to the past paradisiac proper place of dwelling, the Shuswaps ironically meet their future of bondage and demise, and arrive at the waste land instead of the promised Eden. Their voyage toward the object of the origin fantasy turns into an originary event of their entering into the linear time of modernity. This ironic substitution is mirrored in Tay John’s initiation resulting in a series of misinterpretations in the wake of which the Shuswaps fall prey to their own fantasies: the taboo valley becomes the colonizers’ entrepreneurial investment object, and the messiah becomes a trickster who dodges all ideologies and mythological projects.



A similar failure of an origin fantasy is in the centre of Tolstaia's novel *The Slynx*. Projected onto Haraway's initiative of retelling origin stories without the repression of the Symbolic order, with its vicious circle of the patriarchy, oedipal family, and human-nonhuman division, *The Slynx* seems at first to take on the idea of an all-pervasive hybridity presupposing the birth of a new humankind without the boundaries and oppressions of the "Modern Constitution" (Latour) in the post-apocalyptic ecological order. Ultimately, however, it shows how the Symbolic, with its whole package of the originary content of the foreclosed father, the identity drama, and the insipient religion, creeps back to take over the anguished protagonist, Benedikt. The Slynx as a mythologized beast becomes an allegory of environment that reflects the symbolic projections of a human psyche, and a mirror in which the "beautiful soul" sees its distorted self.

On a larger scale, the findings of this project widen the outlook of ecological criticism's subject and methodology by including them into the orbit of the history of ideas and ideologies approached from a broad range of philosophical, psychoanalytic, and literary-studies perspectives. The application of these different approaches, which sometimes present themselves as opposite or unrelated philosophical worldviews, such as those of Heidegger and Lacan, demonstrates the effectiveness of literary analysis where the layers of meaning can be uncovered only as a result of the implementation of different tools, and where the researcher avoids the tendency to simplify and pin a work down to a singular interpretation. The traces of similar modern ideologies found in unrelated national literatures point to the typology of the findings, also suggesting the all-pervasiveness of ecological thinking and intuition in twentieth-century poetry and fiction.

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