

SUSANNE MARSHALL

## **MOOSE STEAKS ON STYROFOAM: MICHAEL WINTER REIMAGINES NEWFOUNDLAND WILDERNESS AND IDENTITY**

MOOSE, THOSE ICONS OF CANADIAN, Newfoundland, and northern identities, amble through Michael Winter's novels and stories. Appearing on the side of the road, on the hood of a car, or as steaks wrapped in cellophane, they function as transitional figures that demonstrate the mutability of wild and urban space, and are broadly representative of Winter's interrogation of wilderness and regional identity. Winter's works—particularly *One Last Good Look*, *This All Happened*, and *The Architects Are Here*<sup>1</sup>—reframe the Atlantic region and reimagine Newfoundland by drawing attention to the constant transformation of its culture. These books repeatedly query assumptions of belonging and cultural authenticity and “explode the category of ‘the natural.’”<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, Winter's representations of that most “natural” thing of all, the wilderness, challenge established regional tropes, recontextualizing them in a way that compromises their symbolic associations and calls into question the assumed relation of a geography and its inhabitants by probing broader categories of native and imported. Through his representations of protagonist Gabriel English, his “wild” brother Junior, and wilderness icons such as the moose mentioned above, Winter shows us how wilderness can expose paradoxes and inadequacies in our constructions of the world. He reminds us that the natural is always enculturated, and asks us to reconsider both the natural world and regional culture as entities constantly in process, affected by everyday, individual actions.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Winter, *One Last Good Look* (Toronto: Anansi, 1999); *This All Happened* (Toronto: Anansi, 2000); *The Architects Are Here* (Toronto: Viking, 2007). Where feasible, page references to these works will appear in parentheses within the text.

<sup>2</sup> Graeme Turner, *Introduction to British Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1990), 6.

Challenging established relationships between land and regional identity requires considerable effort because of the strength of these associations. Most immediately and simply, regions are defined by geography: the space they inhabit and the land they encompass. This leads to an implicit connection of the geography and its inhabitants, a link of the physical and cultural geography: Newfoundlanders call their home “the Rock,” while Cape Breton’s unofficial anthem, “The Island,” proclaims, “we are an island, a rock in a stream.”<sup>3</sup> This association of communal identity and geography becomes a kind of shorthand that expresses the practices and ideologies constituting the culture as a whole. As Eva Mackey points out, “In nationalist mythology the nation is often represented as if embodied in the landscape itself.”<sup>4</sup> The same can be said for regionalist mythologies. And so, where the geography and topography of a given place are the basis for complex metaphorical systems that elucidate aspects of a culture, reading a text that concerns itself with regional identity can help us to identify the ways in which the natural environment is “made to mean.”

To understand Winter’s play with ideas and images of wilderness, and its implications for regional redefinition, it is necessary to understand the history of the term. As William Cronon argues, the meaning of wilderness has changed with the movement of Western culture into what we consider to be modernity. Centuries ago, according to Christian tradition, wilderness was a desolate place of sin and error; by the nineteenth century, however, the term had, with the help of the Romantic movement, come to signify spirituality and authenticity. Wilderness became an outward manifestation of the essential being of the individual or collective soul, and an escape from corrupt civilization.<sup>5</sup> This was complicated in North America, as Jackson Lears argues, by the development of a frontier culture that demanded dominance over the wilderness and stressed radical individualism.<sup>6</sup> In what became Canada, the idea of the “frontier” was far less pronounced. However, ideas of wilderness nevertheless contributed to definitions of the national psyche by bolstering various Canadian mythologies that link national identity and

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<sup>3</sup> Kenzie MacNeil, “The Island (Cape Breton Anthem),” 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Eva Mackey, “Death by Landscape: Race, Nature, and Gender in Canadian Nationalist Mythology,” *Canadian Woman Studies* 20.2 (Summer 2000): 125.

<sup>5</sup> William Cronon, “Introduction: In Search of Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: Norton, 1996), 23–56.

<sup>6</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

character with a hostile and unknowable land—most famously as Northrop Frye’s “garrison mentality,”<sup>7</sup> but also in mythopoeic readings such as Warren Tallman’s “Wolf in the Snow”<sup>8</sup> and Margaret Atwood’s *Survival*.<sup>9</sup> Rob Shields has pointed out the continued utility of the reconfigured wilderness myth of the “True North Strong and Free” as a way of distancing the nation from its own increasing urbanization, and, specifically, from the “continentalism projected by the United States.”<sup>10</sup>

While regional mythologies of land and wilderness in the Atlantic region draw upon these national associations, they also modify them. In the Maritimes, the threat and hostility of wilderness is counterbalanced by its ability to be tamed: there is a longstanding tradition of “A(r)cadian” writing that draws on European associations of land with status, class, and power to configure the land as paradisaical resource. (Consider, for example, the poetry of Goldsmith and Howe, and the prose of Haliburton and McCulloch.) Major twentieth-century works such as Frank Parker Day’s *Rockbound*, Thomas H. Raddall’s *The Nymph and the Lamp*, Charles Bruce’s *The Channel Shore*, and Ernest Buckler’s *The Mountain and the Valley* maintain this strong association of land with use, rather than escape or threat. Such characterizations emphasize the ability of land to sustain independent living, thus bolstering the mythology of the self-reliant Maritimer and obscuring ties to national and international movements of capital and culture. Newfoundland’s geographical mythologies draw heavily upon similar metaphorical ground, proudly emphasizing the barren land’s ability to sustain the simplicity of outpost life. Today, many popular works preserve and perpetuate these geographical mythologies, striving to define a feeling of place that associates Newfoundland’s terrain with antimodernism and establishes a definition of authentic culture, as cultural critics like James Overton observe.<sup>11</sup> While this is important in that it gives voice to individuals and communities who define themselves similarly, such associations are polarizing: they thwart exchanges with larger national, regional and global cultural trends and influences, and they contribute to

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<sup>7</sup> Northrop Frye, “Conclusion,” in *The Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, ed. Carl Klinck (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1965).

<sup>8</sup> Warren Tallman, “Wolf in the Snow. Part One: Four Windows onto Landscapes,” *Canadian Literature* 5 (1960): 7–20.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).

<sup>10</sup> In *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), 196.

<sup>11</sup> James Overton, *Making A World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland* (St. John’s: ISER, 1996).

a museumization of regional culture that is increasingly at odds with the ordinary cultural practices and increasing cultural diversity of the region.

Michael Winter rejects such essentializing or mythopoeic representations of Newfoundland's wilderness in his contemporary works, instead investigating the place of wilderness in a changing culture and a changing symbolic framework. He carefully juxtaposes wilderness with the technology and rhythms of contemporary life, drawing attention to the exchange between the two. At the same time, and particularly in *This All Happened*, Winter conversely explores the ways in which wilderness, in both its physical and symbolic aspects, suffuses urban space and urban life.

This relation of wilderness to technology and the increasingly urbanized culture of contemporary life is personalized through the contrast of Gabriel English (the protagonist of all three of Winter's contemporary works) and his older brother, Junior, who is described as "pure Newfoundlander."<sup>12</sup> In the stories "The Ground That Owns You," "Archibald the Arctic," "Second Heart," and "Deep in My Brother," Winter stresses that Junior's ability to identify with the wild is made possible by the very trappings of contemporary life that Junior wishes to escape. The ways in which he wishes to engage with the wilderness tie him to a larger technological and legal framework of which he is not fully conscious. Junior desires what he sees as the simplicity, independence and excitement of a life spent in close contact with the woods of Newfoundland. After spending years working in Florida, Atlantic City, Fort McMurray and other destinations typical of the unemployment-induced Atlantic diaspora, he visits home and declares to Gabriel his intention to build a cabin in the relatively uninhabited interior of the province:

Eventually I want to build a little cabin with twelve-volt lighting in Mount Moriah. I want to occupy the land and I don't care what happens. I'm gonna keep the land the way I like it and have a son who can take it over.... Look up the rules on building codes and old Newfoundland laws on occupying land. If you could get some books on it or show me where it's to. (102)

Throughout the stories, Junior racks up speeding tickets and bad loans, poaches, and dreams of robbing a bank. As such, it is not surprising that he conceives of his cabin as a place beyond the law, a place he can build with

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<sup>12</sup> Winter, *One Last Good Look*, 47.

stolen lumber and gravel. And yet, Winter stresses that Junior still requires the building codes and provisions for squatting that Gabriel is able to access, presumably because of his education and residence in Newfoundland.

The construction of the cabin, and Junior's access to it, also demonstrates the close but ambivalent relationship of wilderness and technology that Junior embodies. On the one hand, Junior articulates a romantic antimodernism:

I got a cabin now in the Yellow Marsh and the train is gone, so I walk in. A lot of people are on all-terrain vehicles, Gabe. Well, I'll walk, thank you very much. That's what Old Phonse did before the Bullet [train] and that's what I'll do. Train used to kill five hundred moose a year, Gabe. I got no time for trikes—what I wouldn't mind getting is a pony. Though I'd have to grow hay then. But yes, next year it might be a pony, a brown one. (179)

This repudiation of modern technology is qualified by Junior's use of the remnants of earlier technologies: although the train tracks are torn up, their path remains to allow easy travel to the interior; as well, the pony, though animal itself, is an earlier version of the "trikes" Junior so dislikes. Further, Junior is more than inconsistent in this romantic antimodernism, as he is closely associated with mechanical things: he is, by trade, a mechanic, and in fact builds the cabin "with a garage door and a stone floor so I can drive my [truck] Pocahontas right to the centre, under the beam" (184). The cabin is actually configured like a suburban tract home, all garage on the first floor, purpose-built to accommodate vehicles in a way that emphasizes their centrality. Far from being out of place, the mechanical meets the wild within Junior's physical and cultural territory.

What is interesting is that technology is not conceived of as contaminating the wilderness but is selectively imported into it: his preferred tools become "naturalized" and vice versa, as when he refers to the woods as "the warehouse" (180) or considers that his car "was terminally ill" (154). In a particularly comic episode, Junior's weather forecasting demonstrates his blend of the timeless and the current:

The best way to know what weather's coming is to dart outside just as it's getting dark and look west or whichever way the wind is, take a good look at the cloud formation and then at 8:20 on the Weather Network you get the satellite picture.

Ignore what buddy is telling you, just stare at the pattern of cloud ... and you can figure out weather for the next three days. (185)

Here, Winter plays with our expectations, as we successively expect to read authentic “old-timer” advice, then read its reversal as Junior suggests it is best just to turn on the television, and finally see Junior’s method as a selective integration of information from both spheres. Junior’s version of “back to nature” may be a repudiation of urban life, but it is not a repudiation of contemporary life—quite the opposite, in fact.

In contrast with Junior, Gabriel has a limited relationship to wilderness. Though Gabriel has grown up hunting and camping with his father and brothers, his “ties” to the land are not grasped. Junior remembers:

Like when we took you in on the train in summer. Me, Dad, Bruce, and you, picking berries and shooting grouse and bagging a caribou. Thought you were too good for all that. Your little hands giving out from carrying. Had to tie your wrists to the meat. I can tell you exactly where there’s a moose right now, Gabe. On the Yellow Marsh. I could lead you right to him. (179)

Gabriel does not get very far in the woods; instead, he likes tamer boat excursions, picnics, and canoe trips, and even then shelters in cabins rather than camping (159). Taking a few steps from a friend’s cabin he thinks, “I do love solitude. I am a simple man when it comes to being satisfied by the natural world. The sun poking through in patches, lighting up a knoll here, a dip there.... I can still see the roof of the house” (22). As this passage indicates, it is the mental encounter with wilderness, the idea of it, that draws him. He is wryly aware that he remains wholly within civilization—within sight of the house – even as he enjoys the illusion of being momentarily outside it. While he does not wish to be other than he is, he mourns the practical ability and approach of his father, who introduced him to the wilderness:

He understands the physical world: electricity, plumbing, capillary action. He has built all the furniture in the house, and the copper ornaments contain his planishing. He has opinion and decisive comment whereas I am hampered by the acceptance of multiple views. I have learned no trail through the world. If I could show him batts of insulation. (214)

Here, Gabriel connects his in/capacity with his loss of certainty, and mourns this distance from his father. Wilderness, for Gabriel, is both physically and conceptually unknowable, “unnatural” in its incommensurability, not a known other but one with a thousand unexpected faces.

Throughout all three texts, Winter examines the truth of received wisdom, testing out all sorts of axioms—of relationships, etiquette, weather—and presenting several instances where ties to the land, connections to the earth, are, quite literally, disturbed, such as Gabriel’s description of Nan Brennan, his girlfriend’s grandmother, who insists that her bones be returned to the earth (63). Gabriel’s eye takes in the unnaturalness of the burial process, the very thing Nan had wished to avoid in her insistence that she not be cremated: he describes the “strips of yellowed, torn plastic ... put down to keep the frost out. Under a clear tarp is a pneumatic drill and a generator. The backhoe can’t get it. Needs to have its wheels on grass” (69–70). The series of machines needed to deliver Nan to her desired ground rebuts any semblance of the “natural,” as does the plastic that encases her. Further, the ground itself seems alien in the immensity of its geologic time: “The hole cuts through three feet of dense shale, through several ages of accumulation. It is as if they are putting Nan back into her own time,” Gabriel thinks (70). Nan rests not in familiarity, as she expected, but in an unknowable element. Her certainty that she belonged there is, Winter suggests, equally incomprehensible.

Such integrations and dis-integrations of the wild and human worlds recur often in Winter’s texts, usually as the instruments of civilization move into the wilderness. During an ill-fated camping trip Gabriel notices the wildlife all around them: “a moose and her calf cross the river. A horned owl blends into bark. A rabbit hunched in the undergrowth. And finally, Max’s car shining by the embankment” (162). Here, Winter considers the contemporary condition of the “machine in the garden,” as Leo Marx has termed it. While Marx delineates the history of industrialization as a “counterforce” to an American pastoral ideal,<sup>13</sup> Winter’s passage questions the possibility of separating the categories. Animals and machines are both at home in the wild here; human intrusion into the wild is constant and ordinary. To emphasize such juxtaposition, Winter follows it with Gabriel’s observation that the mangoes they eat in celebration of the end of their trip are cut “like

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<sup>13</sup> Leo Marx, “The Machine in the Garden,” in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 105.

city blocks” (162). Yet the relativity of the machine and nature is not always, of course, so benign; it is often a process of mutual dependence and destruction, as Winter illustrates: “[we] discovered the [gyrfalcon’s] claw on the stone beach, tangled in a gill net laid out to dry. The claw looked vicious in its protracted clutch. The bird had seen a fish in the net, had plunged from a thousand metres, had been caught” (120). Here, the majesty and threat of such a “natural” predator is entangled and destroyed by a net symbolic of the Newfoundland fishing industry—an industry whose rapid technological advances ultimately exhausted the resource entirely and drained the outports and the province itself of life. Gabriel mulls on this as his own Toyota Tercel, named after just such a hawk, does his bidding.

The gyres of history and progress, the evidence of wilderness reclaiming outdated technology, come up again in the torn-up railroad tracks that used to cross the province and the vacant outports:

We pass the whaling station on Merasheen.... Abandoned in the forties. A pasture to the south where the whaler’s quarters were, now caribou graze there. Rusting boilers, a vat, and the sticks of a wharf. On the ocean floor we see the outline of a sunken whaler, its hull arcing through the green depths.<sup>14</sup>

Winter reminds us of the indifference of wilderness to human desires, with sometimes fatal results, in a scene from *The Architects are Here*: a boat flips over in the force of the wind, its passengers thrown into the water, and one man drowns, eventually submerged by the weight of the anchor chain entangled around his leg (8).

If there is evidence of wilderness reclaiming what was once “civilized,” there is much more evidence for the reverse in these texts, and none more so than Winter’s treatment of what is perhaps the totem of the Newfoundland wilderness, the moose. These towering, unpredictable animals have come, through sheer size and the threat of collision, to embody the resistant power of wilderness in Newfoundland. As Jane Desmond argues, humans tend to see animals, and particularly mammals, as literal embodiments of wilderness: their otherness, their “physical difference from humans”<sup>15</sup> encourages us to understand them as “exemplars” of wilderness who represent the “idea of nature as one of the last bastions of idealized authenticity” in our postmod-

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<sup>14</sup> *This All Happened*, 182.

<sup>15</sup> Jane C. Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago Press, 1999), 149.



ern era.<sup>16</sup> That the moose, never a native of Newfoundland, was imported there from New Brunswick at the turn of the twentieth century<sup>17</sup> certainly suggests its use to satisfy human desires for an amplified idea of wilderness.

Winter's representation of moose is ambivalent, acknowledging their symbolic power but often challenging it, so as to emphasize that moose in Newfoundland were born under, and have adapted to, increasing human intrusion—that they are a part of civilization, instead of separate from it. Thus, Winter traces how attitudes toward them have changed. For example, in *This All Happened* Gabriel stops on the highway to allow a moose to pass:

There is a moose on the highway. I wake up [the dog] and a youthful transformation slips over his frame. He sniffs at the lip of the window. The cow stares at me in the snow, waiting, patient. And then a grown calf emerges from the woods. They trot off together, wedge open the spruce, and are gone. (12)

Here, the moose have the power to “transform” the dog, to awaken his instincts; the mystery and inaccessibility of the moose, the distance between themselves and the realm of the human, is accentuated by their imperviousness to the highway's compulsion to movement and the ease with which they “are gone” into the wall of the trees. Yet Winter's use of the same scene in *One Last Good Look* reverses the way we think about the moose:

There is a moose on the highway.... It stares at me from the slush, tall like a camel, waiting, patient. Then a grown calf emerges from the woods, they talk for a moment, catch up, and trot off together behind a corrugated building. I stop into a Foodland and find red peppers at a dollar ninety a pound. (139)

In this version of the scene the moose are aligned with the amenities of modern life and are anthropomorphized, apparently adapting to the neighbourly rhythms of small-town life. Two pages later, to emphasize this connection to the domestic sphere, Gabriel telephones Lydia and “tell[s] her about the moose, of roasting ten red peppers” (141). Winter's decision to use the same scene twice gives even greater significance to the importance of the details

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<sup>16</sup> Desmond, *Staging Tourism*, 148.

<sup>17</sup> “Moose,” Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Environment and Conservation. Salmonier Nature Park. June 20, 2009. <http://www.env.gov.nl.ca/snp/Animals/moose.htm>.

framing the encounter, showing how meaning is created and altered. A few lines later, a neighbouring teenager in Heart's Desire brings over some moose steaks for Gabriel, "Plastic-wrapped, frozen, on styrofoam trays" (141). The moose are consumed in the same manner as the peppers: both are exotic, cellophane-wrapped commodities.

The moose's swing from wilderness god to domestic commodity recurs throughout the text: in one comic moment within *This All Happened*, Gabriel's friend Max has a bodiless leg of moose plunge, "deus ex moosina," through his windshield; the moose was blown apart by its encounter with a passing transport truck (101). Winter reprises the scene in *The Architects Are Here*: the moose appears suddenly as disembodied parts, a "set of legs," a "body," before Gabriel reverts to fittingly peripatetic comparisons: "it was like someone had thrown a bunch of heavy luggage on us" (61). The abundance of moose in the province contributes to this dual fascination and ordinariness, as Winter outlines in a passage that seems like a farcical version of Alden Nowlan's poem "The Bull Moose." In Nowlan's poem the mysterious and inaccessible power of the animal reasserts itself despite human attempts to tame, ridicule, or control it; the human response to this power is to interpret it as a threat, and destroy it:

But just as the sun dropped in the river  
the bull moose gathered his strength  
like a scaffolded king, straightened and lifted his horns  
so that even the wardens backed away as they raised their rifles.  
When he roared, people ran to their cars. All the young men  
leaned on their automobile horns as he toppled.<sup>18</sup>

In Winter's passage, the excitement of confrontation is deflated; while the moose thwarts human attempts to use it for pleasure or entertainment, it does not need to be destroyed because it has become normalized:

While they are gone [to look at the moose trapped in the snow outside of town] Max calls to say there's a bull moose standing in Bannerman Park. I drive over. The moose is gobbling the pussy willows and frozen ruffage. Helmut returns disappointed. Iris: The moose got free before we arrived. I tell them about the moose they missed in the park. (93)

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<sup>18</sup> Alden Nowlan, "The Bull Moose," in *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English*, ed. Margaret Atwood (Toronto: Oxford U Press, 1983), 29–34.

More oppressive is Winter's presentation of the moose hunt in "Second Heart," where the symbolic association of animal and wilderness is suppressed by the hunt's relentless mechanization. The excursion seems less a hunt than a domestic slaughter that happens to occur in the woods: the land on which Gabriel, Junior, and their father hunt is not a trackless area, but just off "Lady Slipper Road," and "they hunt with the truck, cab lifting over potholes. Because the father's feet are bad."<sup>19</sup> Later, the butchery of the animal itself is paralleled with the engine repair of the truck, as they "haul out the works" (101). The moose meat is juxtaposed with the excess of food packed by their mother: meat pie, sausage rolls, and roast chicken. They hardly even move from the place they park the truck before seeing and killing a moose, and while waiting for the animal's blood to drain they contemplate not its life but the quality of the logging road that is their connection with the town. The animal's dismemberment is particularly notable: "The scrotum to identify the sex. You keep that in the freezer for if the police come. The jawbone for Wildlife" (99). This is the legal animal, so to speak, dis-embodied by human frameworks of meaning: "Wildlife" here is a government department, not the animal world. If the hunters' power is extended by their modern technologies and methods, it is exacerbated and tainted by Junior's success in poaching another moose: he subverts even the mechanisms of legal control and betrays not only his father's good intentions, within this legal system, but also the ethical imperative against waste, which has already been violated by the excessive consumption catalogued in the processes of the hunt itself. Here, the model of stewardship of the wilderness fails thoroughly.

Winter's consideration of the danger, and ultimately the impossibility, of controlling the wilderness is often voiced outright, as Gabriel subjects the laws of nature to interrogation. He works to demonstrate that there is nothing "natural," meaning nothing obvious and unchanging, about nature; rather, as "wilderness" it subverts those expectations. For instance, Gabriel mocks efforts at categorization: "There is one weed beside us, and I guess it. Plantain. I had found it in my wildflower book: seaside plantain. And here I am, beside the sea. This is how the world is ordered. The categories were working" (206). Gabriel's wry tone here suggests the fiction of order is somewhat ridiculous, dependent upon fortuitous circumstance. Often, Winter highlights issues of semantics and interpretation, as when Gabriel and Femke, his girlfriend, differ over the designation of a stream:

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<sup>19</sup> Winter, *One Last Good Look*, 93.

You caught that fish in a ditch, she says.  
 It was a river.  
 You could jump across it.  
 It's called Virginia River.<sup>20</sup>

The differing terms here depend upon conflicting methods of evaluation: authority, habit, use, or physical comparison. These have consequences, as their definitions of the stream influence their reactions to the fish: Femke is revolted by the prospect of eating a fish “caught in a ditch.” The struggle over terminology draws attention to the act of perception itself, both its inevitable confinement and the larger truth in its acknowledgement of limitation, its space for fissure and uncertainty.

Through this focus on the unreliability of the “natural” paradigms within which we structure the world, Winter also underscores the continuity between an urban world and wilderness. The question of the “proper” location, the space, of wilderness is an important one. While the city is tremendously important to these texts, the question of what the city *is* remains central. In an essay comparing the aims and parallels of ecocritical and postcolonial criticism, Susie O’Brien suggests why this is:

As a synthetic creation, both in the sense of its artificiality, and of its simultaneous promise of community and heterogeneity, the city... refuses the kind of claims to “natural” belonging that are seen to smack dangerously of colonialist forms of essentialism... [Postcolonialism] emphasize[s] the provisionality and the constructedness of our relations to place.<sup>21</sup>

As O’Brien argues, the “artificiality” of urban space accompanies its heterogeneity and diversity, and is itself an indicator of anti-essentialism. Yet while urban space can be considered more artificial than rural and wild spaces, it is by no means completely so. Michael Winter’s presentation of “what a city is” emphasizes the participation of wilderness in its sphere (the bull moose standing in Bannerman Park) and it dismantles the dualisms within which wilderness is too often conceived. William Cronon speaks to the importance of doing so when he argues that:

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<sup>20</sup> *One Last Good Look*, 78.

<sup>21</sup> Susie O’Brien, “‘Articulating a World of Difference’: Ecocriticism, Postcolonialism, and Globalization,” *Canadian Literature* 170.1 (2001): 142.

Our challenge is to stop thinking of such things according to a set of bipolar moral scales in which the human and the non-human, the unnatural and the natural, the fallen and the unfallen, serve as our conceptual map for understanding and valuing the world. Instead, we need to embrace the full continuum of a natural landscape that is also cultural, in which the city, the suburb, the pastoral, and the wild each has its proper place.<sup>22</sup>

Winter investigates the working of this “continuum” and dwells upon the interpenetration of these spaces: *This All Happened* is replete with close observation of the workings of wilderness, usually in the form of wildlife, within the urban space of downtown St. John’s. Winter’s detailed consideration of the minute and the quotidian assists in providing this focus, but the objects of his attention are particularly revealing. For example, Gabriel observes:

A wasp crawls over my bare foot as I’m on the phone. It’s a yellowjacket. They are licking up the aphids off my chilli-pepper plants. I watch one bite chunks out of the flesh of a cantaloupe rind in the compost heap. Black currants are still ripe on the bushes.<sup>23</sup>

The insects remind us that there are worlds within worlds, small ecosystems functioning in the billions which are usually invisible. The wasps exist in Gabriel’s bushes and his waste-heap, thriving on what he discards. Additionally, Winter highlights their adaptability to the more exotic offerings of the city: they are as happy with imported pepper plants and cantaloupe as native berry bushes. Birds, too, perform this same function in the text; in fact, they recur so constantly that they function as an urban analogue to the ubiquitous presence of moose in Newfoundland’s wilder spaces. The birds are everywhere, adapting to the conditions of the city: gulls in the harbour, flocking to the warmth of the raw sewage (30); crows on telephone poles (70); sparrows and robins in the yards and trees (120; 240); blue jays sharing the trees with cats (265); ducks in the parks (235); “a kingfisher on the phone line in the rain” (223). Birds are so much a part of everyday experience that,

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<sup>22</sup> William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: Norton, 1996), 89.

<sup>23</sup> *This All Happened*, 220.

as Gabriel's friend Max remarks, "Daphne told me you can find pheasant in Sobeys and I imagined them hiding in behind the boxes of Cheerios, wild pheasant nesting in the rafters" (272).

Gabriel frames the existence of wild elements in urban space with the symbolic continuities he sees between the past and present of such elements. In October, he forages for berries in the middle of the city:

I pick partridgeberries and blueberries above Shawnadithit's monument and below the Irving oil-tank farm. But I end up collecting colours. Alders, berry bushes. The sun is lower and the leaves are like tiny red ears aflame. I segregate patches of colour by looking through my curled hand. How Helmut used to direct his camera lens at the small areas of caribou moss and rock pools. Looking for the particular. (235–36)

Here, Gabriel's implicit comparison of himself with Shawnadithit, the last known Beothuk, highlights how he finds himself simultaneously in two worlds—foraging on a barrens yet in the midst of growing industrial infrastructure. His quest for "the particular" might aestheticize the berry bushes, but his focus includes these representative reminders of the violence and exploitation that helped to create, and still maintain, the city. In a similar manner, when Gabriel studies the telephone pole in his yard, he sees "twenty-two wires converge and disrupt the hill in a random graph of thin crescents of colour. This pole is leaning a little, carrying the weight of electricity and communication. A thirty-foot timber cut from the Gander region" (231–32). The pole "disrupts" the hill, symbolizing the city's change of the landscape as well as literally and symbolically carrying the weight of contemporary infrastructure. The alteration it stands for, however, remains insistently connected in Winter's text to its history, its former existence as a tree.

Winter's insistence on bringing together city and wilderness, nature and contemporary life, does not merely draw attention to the mutability of the two categories. His emphasis on the ways in which urban consciousness and urban living increasingly permeate even the most rural or remote aspects of existence in twenty-first century Newfoundland is underscored by decidedly ethical and political imperatives. Winter's careful observation and celebration of the particular, and his insistence on a heterogenous truth to be gained through a dialogue of numerous, limited ways of knowing – that "something is lost in seeing it whole" (191)—combine to produce a vision of the world that cultivates an awareness of wilderness in our lives and constantly

reminds us of our responsibility toward it. To paraphrase William Cronon, he gets us back to the “right” wilderness, one that is connected to the human instead of being separate from it. In this sense, his work contains an ecocritical consciousness, returning us to a material consideration of our actions in the world, observing the effects of small actions on a small planet. Likewise, Winter’s use of wilderness is a metaphorical consideration, and negation, of the possibility of constructing and maintaining a Newfoundland culture that is pure, set apart from the continual cultural shifts of global postmodernity. Winter’s work reminds us that cultural “authenticity” is performed and continually reconstructed rather than formed in the past, and that culture is produced in relations with a larger world, not in representations of an idealized or a lost one.

