

Rethinking Maritime Literary Regionalism:  
Place, Identity, and Belonging in the Works of  
Elizabeth Bishop, Maxine Tynes, and Rita Joe

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A thesis  
presented to the University of Waterloo  
in fulfillment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
English

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2014

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## Abstract

In this dissertation I argue that the dominant concept of Maritime literary regionalism is informed by a Euro-settler definition of belonging, one that prescribes an author's long-term residency and family history in a single place as prerequisites for an "authentic" regional identity. This dominant concept of regionalism represents a narrow framework that excludes the voices of many writers, and results in the loss of important and diverse explorations of place, identity, and belonging in Maritime writing. I begin the dissertation with a chapter that surveys twentieth-century Maritime regional literature and criticism in order to establish how Euro-settler critics like Fred Cogswell and authors such as Frank Parker Day, Charles Bruce, and Ernest Buckler construct and circulate the idea of an "authentic" claim to the land. Engaging with feminist theory, theories of regionalism and globalism, African diaspora studies, and postcolonial Indigenous thought, the subsequent chapters challenge this Euro-settler model of literary regionalism through detailed examination of the *oeuvres* of three important twentieth-century female poets, Elizabeth Bishop, Maxine Tynes, and Rita Joe.

Through analysis and exploration of spatial perspectives and surrealism in Bishop's poems and memoirs, the chapter focused on Bishop argues that regionalism does emerge in her writing even though she has lived in, and writes about, many places throughout the Americas. Bishop's regionalism makes as its defining feature not a particular place, but the speaker's perspective on place from an ever-changing position between a local community and the globe. In the next chapter, I draw a comparison between the work of Tynes and that of George Elliott Clarke in order to show that a land-claiming regionalism does not have to be an exclusionary discourse that favours only one race, since African descendants have also had long histories on Maritime land. At the same time, Tynes's work challenges the idea that regional identity should

rely on a single area of land, since that identity must also take into account the history of people in the many places they and their ancestors have lived. In the final chapter, I argue that Joe's poems about Mi'kmaq territory depart from an anthropocentric version of regionalism that situates human beings at the top of a hierarchy of living things as their masters. Joe's poems demonstrate relationships to land that extend beyond possession, control, and occupation, and emphasize a collaborative, interconnected, and ongoing relationship between all living things on the land. In engaging with Bishop, Tynes, and Joe as a variety of diverse voices that explore relationships to the region, my dissertation attempts to open the discursive space of Maritime literary regionalism to allow for multiple and inclusive possibilities for belonging.

## **Acknowledgements**

My supervisor Dr. Shelley Hulan is a keen editor whose incisive comments on the drafts of this thesis challenged my thinking and helped me become a better scholar.

I was inspired to pursue the topics in this dissertation by several researchers I was fortunate enough to have as instructors along the way, especially Anne Compton, David Creelman, Jeanette Lynes, Kevin McGuirk, Maureen Moynagh, and Linda Warley. Organizers of the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference in 2009, the Association for Canadian College and University Teachers of English in 2010, and the Elizabeth Bishop Centenary Conference in 2011 provided me with venues to present my work among supportive and intellectually invigorating groups of academics. The comments and questions I garnered at those conferences have shaped this dissertation in important ways. The Elizabeth Bishop Society and Sandra Barry gave me a writing residency in the Elizabeth Bishop House in 2010, allowing space and time for unique and insightful encounters with Bishop's writing about her childhood home.

I could not have completed this degree without the support of my family especially my parents Andrea and Chuck Bowers, the MacNeils, the Lukemans, and Mary DeCoste. My husband DJ offered unlimited patience and persistent faith in the completion of this work. In the final stages of my writing, our sons Caleb and Thomas gave me the most urgent and practical incentive to complete this project well.

I would also like to acknowledge the financial support of a Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship, and the University of Waterloo.

## **Dedication**

For Caleb and Thomas

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	v
Dedication.....	vi
<b>Chapter One:</b> Introduction .....	1
<b>Chapter Two:</b> “We like to think we belong somewhere”: “Authentic” Belonging in Twentieth Century Maritime Literature.....	41
<b>Chapter Three:</b> Elizabeth Bishop’s Simultaneous Regional and Global Perspectives .....	94
<b>Chapter Four:</b> Regionalism and Black Identity in the Maritimes in the Works of George Elliott Clarke and Maxine Tynes.....	144
<b>Chapter Five:</b> Region as Ecology in the Works of Rita Joe .....	215
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	264
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	271

...*the worldwide does not abolish the local.* (Lefebvre 86)

...geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even. (Bishop, *One Art* 249)

## Chapter One

### Introduction

I don't think I'm a regional writer. I love this place and wouldn't want to be in any other place, but I travel a lot. The themes of my work are not confined to this place. There's an attachment to place that is not in this very narrow sense of regionalism. [...] Not every writer can fit into the regional category. (Welch, "Liliane" 112)

I love it here, but I could write other places; I like to be flexible, and I like to leave for awhile too. (L. Davies 190)

The dominant concept of regionalism in the contemporary Maritime ethos represents a dated and narrow framework that excludes the voices of many writers who consider themselves closely connected to the Maritime region. This exclusion results in the loss of important and diverse explorations of place, identity, and belonging in Maritime writing. The time has come for a rethinking of contemporary Maritime regionalism.

Emerging in the mid-twentieth century and informed by a masculinist Euro-settler definition of belonging, the prevailing concept of Maritime literary regionalism grants an author authority within regional discourse only if he possesses, or has possessed, land, long-term residency, and family history in a single place. In meeting these requirements he can then

construct descriptions of actual settings and locales that readers will recognize and to which they will relate. But why must possession of and control over land be the defining set of criteria for regional identity and “authentic” belonging for authors and their characters in Maritime literature? To maintain this framework is to distort many other possible explorations of what it means to belong to a region. In this study, I aim to counter the dominant model of literary regionalism through a detailed examination of the *oeuvres* of three important twentieth-century female poets who conceive of and relate to the region in ways very different from those contained in regional identity as defined by Euro-settler experience. Their works call those exclusionary ideas of regional belonging into question.

“Regional” literature typically refers to literary works that focus on one particular geographical area or “region” of a larger whole, most often a nation. In the Canadian context, regional literature corresponds to one of the areas of the country’s geography that is considered topographically distinct from the other areas. The Maritimes, Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, the Prairies, the West, and the North make up the commonly named regions of Canada. These areas may be represented as hinterlands to the nation, politically or culturally subordinate to Ontario or Central Canada. Literary “regionalism” in Canada typically refers to literature and criticism that attempts to delineate that region’s unique culture, history, and material environment from other regions. A “regional” writer, by implication, is one who maintains an affiliation with a region, and who focuses mainly, sometimes exclusively, on one place.

There are important distinctions between the two related terms “regional” and “regionalist” to consider because there is sometimes a slippage between the two. In my discussion and analysis of texts, unless I am summarizing the research of others, I use the term

“regional” when referring to literary works of the region because it removes some subtle restrictions on the notion of place-based writing that interest me. The difference is in the intention. Whereas “regional” refers to literature written in or about the region, with a Maritime setting as a backdrop, “regionalist” signals a deliberate decision to write about and characterize the region, often in contrast to some other category such as the nation. The latter term reflects a more self-conscious espousal of the region and regional identity, and an assertion of its uniqueness and significance as the most important qualities of the literary work. Many women writers in the Maritimes tend to embrace a concept closer to the “regional” end of this spectrum rather than “regionalist,” and their work often interrogates the kinds of essentialist notions of place and identity that “regionalist” implies. For these reasons, I use the term “regional” when describing the literature of the Maritime provinces; “regional” takes up related notions of place, home, belonging, and identity from a number of possible perspectives without affirming that one kind of identity is more “Maritime” than others. That way, the label I assign to the literature at hand will not implicitly exclude writing by women who seldom connect an idea of place to an exclusionary notion of identity.

By Maritime literature, I mean literature concerning the Canadian provinces of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Like other Maritime critics before me, I leave out the Atlantic province of Newfoundland and Labrador for the reasons that it has a significantly different history, culture, landscape, and body of literature (Creelman, *Setting* 3; Kulyk Keefer 3). Given its further distance from the national centre of Ontario, and its much later entry into Canadian Confederation in 1949, Newfoundland has a unique relationship to the nation of Canada in the timeframe under consideration. Indeed, some Newfoundland writers and critics feel that the province’s links with the Maritimes in such studies as this are simply

“untenable” (Mathews 119).

My dissertation is structured in three parts: an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. To identify the dominant voices in Maritime regional literature and criticism, I begin with a chapter that surveys selected Maritime regional works of the middle decades of the twentieth century and their reception in scholarship. This survey of works by Frank Parker Day, Ernest Buckler, Charles Bruce, and editors of *The Fiddlehead* literary journal establishes how canonical Maritime literary works and their critics have circulated the idea of an “authentic” claim to the land, a claim typically put forward on the basis of a central male character’s (or his forefather’s) long-term residency in the place claimed as ancestral inheritance. Critics who give these works a positive reception and keep them before the public eye portray Maritime literature as a body of work that somehow naturally arises from the landscape and communicates itself to the writer. These critics’ construction of land as a stable source of identity is problematic because, as I argue, it appears that only Euro-settler men have this particular kind of access to the land and its meanings, and thus also to the writing of place in Maritime literature. These critics, like the writers they celebrate, construct the land as a stable source of identity that excludes all but a very small group belonging to a certain race, ethnicity, and sex.

I challenge the dominant theory of Maritime literary regionalism as “authentic,” settler-based, and environmentally determined. This understanding of regional writing fails to recognize the correlation of region and subject as multiple, and excludes any divergent voices from the conversations surrounding regional literature. While my dissertation focuses on poetry by women as counter examples to established forms of Maritime regionalism, it does not aim to replace one claim of “authentic” regionalism with another. On the contrary, I intend to open the

discourse of literary regionalism to a variety of diverse voices that engage in new discussions of relationships and belonging to the Maritime region. To offset the discourse and conventions of realist prose fiction that I explore in the first chapter, then, the subsequent chapters of the dissertation examine the *oeuvres* of three poets who foreground different perspectives on relationships between identity and place, Elizabeth Bishop, Maxine Tynes, and Rita Joe. The multiple perspectives in their work form the basis of regionalisms that are not limited to one geographic space, or one perspective, and therefore cannot be controlled by a governing view on the region.

In Chapter Three, I turn to Bishop, an American citizen and worldly figure writing in the mid-twentieth century. Bishop expresses a personal allegiance to a Nova Scotian identity combined with intense allegiances to other local places throughout the world. She is a nexus figure for regionalism and globalization, a figure who locates some of her writing in the Maritimes and who also, paradoxically, expresses a commitment to the Maritimes through representations of places outside the Maritimes. The multiple geographic identities evoked in Bishop's body of work can serve to critique twentieth-century definitions of Canadian literary regionalism that define regional identity mainly either in contrast to an allegedly singular, unified national identity, or as an expression of regional residents' supposedly authentic connection to local land that excludes writing such as Bishop's from the category of "Maritime regionalism" altogether. Through analysis and exploration of spatial perspectives in Bishop's poems and memoirs, I argue that Bishop's "regionalism" makes its defining feature not a particular place, but the speaker's perspective on place from an ever-changing position between a local community and the wider world. When read as "regional," Bishop's writing provides an opportunity to challenge traditional models of mid-twentieth century Maritime regionalism

because it provides an important alternative to the masculinist model of Maritime literary regionalism outlined in Chapter Two, an idea of Maritime regionalism that has privileged Euro-descended male authors and patriarchal perspectives. Bishop's representation of the Maritime region challenges the longstanding model of regions in Canada as limited to the topography of a particular geographic place and as a marginal place tied to a national centre. Reconsidering regionalism through Bishop's *oeuvre* therefore opens a door for postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist readings of the region that invite readers to see "region" and regional identity as products of relations between people and places across national borders. Binary definitions of region as the nation's other have heretofore made this view of the region difficult, if not impossible.

In Chapter Four, "Regionalism and Black Identity in the Works of George Elliott Clarke and Maxine Tynes," I explore the poetic philosophies of Maxine Tynes and George Elliott Clarke, Black Nova Scotian poets who engage each other in debate about the relationships between regionalism and Black identity through their literary and critical work. Tynes is an African Nova Scotian poet whose works often explore places in Africa, the United States, and Canada. Many critics place Tynes in opposition to the most well-known and well-established Black Nova Scotian writer Clarke, pointing out the differences in the way they portray Black identity in the region. However, I draw a comparison between these two writers in order to bring to the fore a deep shared engagement with dispossession as a part of regional identity that takes different forms. Clarke therefore has an important role in this dissertation as a writer who unfolds the virtues of a land-claiming regionalism, showing that it does not have to be an exclusionary discourse that favours only one race, since people of many racial backgrounds have had long histories on Maritime land.

Both Clarke and Tynes suggest that the migration of multiple groups over a long period of time should change definitions of what it means to be a “Maritimer.” Both demonstrate ways that visible differences are erased from the dominant idea of who belongs to the region, and both suggest that visible difference does, and indeed should, mark the region. Tynes’s espousal of multiple simultaneous identities—Black, feminine, disabled, African, Nova Scotian—makes her writing an appropriate and rich object of inquiry for an exploration of regionalisms that do not rely on a single area of land. Her placement of the dispossessed Nova Scotian community of Africville in a context of global African diaspora calls for a regional identity that takes into account global geographic and historical contexts. While Clarke tends to define the region in terms of the people who inhabit (or who have inhabited) it, Tynes defines it as the people who inhabit all the regions they simultaneously inhabit through the colour of their skin, their sex, and their personal and familial histories.

Chapter Five, “Region as Ecology in the Works of Rita Joe” turns to a Mi’kmaq writer of the Maritimes who offers an account of dispossession and disorientation that extends back hundreds of years in the Maritimes. While the works of Tynes and Bishop demonstrate ways that speakers experience connection to land from a distance outside the Maritimes, Joe’s poetry demonstrates ways that colonizing Europeans and present-day Canadians attempt to create a sense of distance between her speakers and the land on which they live, and where their ancestors lived for ages. In many of her poems, Joe asserts the longer-term presence of Mi’kmaq people in the Maritimes, correcting the colonial narratives that have distorted or attempted to erase that history. Joe’s poetry about petroglyphs, ancient Mi’kmaq legends, and local geographic formations demonstrates a connection to the land that began long prior to European exploration and colonization. By depicting ancestors and present-day Mi’kmaq

people in relationship with local land, some of Joe's poems demonstrate that a relationship with a place necessitates a direct experience with the land as well as the plants, animals, humans, and spirits of that land. These poems resignify Maritime space as continually inhabited from past to present by Mi'kmaq people, challenging settler narratives of the region that depict it as empty. Moreover, they also depart from an anthropocentric version of regionalism that situates human beings at the top of a hierarchy of living things by demonstrating relationships to land that extend beyond possession, control, and occupation, and by emphasizing a collaborative, interconnected, and ongoing relationship between all living things on the land that belies European notions of belonging.

Poetry by Tynes, Bishop, and Joe draws attention to a need to address race, gender, and ethnicity within discussions of literary regionalism because all these categories are crucial to a sense of belonging; my readings of their work affirm a more pluralistic view of the region that is not based solely on the possession or control of geographical territory. Because the local and the personal are instruments of resistance for feminist writers that make reference to a larger world as well as a local one, the work of Bishop, Tynes, and Joe presents an opportunity to reclaim feminist literary regionalisms of the Maritimes and the multiple, contradictory identities that they assert and explore.

Regionalism in any form tends to define itself in contrast to national boundaries; however, in the writing I discuss in Chapters Three, Four and Five national borders are not part of a defining feature of the region. Instead, writing by Bishop, Tynes, and Joe reconfigures the region in a global context rather than a national one. "Region" has been understood as tributary to the nation; however, I propose that "region" be used to denote the region's context within a global society. In this dissertation, "global" will refer to the broader geography of the world

directly covered in the *oeuvres* of Bishop, Tynes, and Joe. Tynes concerns herself with places in Africa, Bishop with places throughout the Americas, and Joe with Mi'kmaq territory, an area of land that overlaps with Canada but does not share its geo-political boundaries. The idea of the literary region that this dissertation endorses, then, does not define "region" in exclusive relation to the nation but in relation to the globe.

In the following pages of this introductory chapter, I outline wider contexts and discourses from which I have drawn the questions fueling my dissertation. First, I broadly outline literary regionalism in the Canadian context and discuss its relationship with literary realism. I discuss how realism and regionalism in Canada have a parallel history and often appear to be inextricably linked. The association between these two types of literature has most benefited Euro-settler male writers who have a vested interest in claiming an authentic relationship to the land to the exclusion of other claims. Using postmodern conceptions of space and place, I then challenge discourses of regionalism that privilege the search for a stable identification with possession of and control over the land. From the postmodern perspective, truth is always already in a state of flux; therefore, it is pointless to claim one regional framework as the only framework from which to understand identity, place, or belonging. Far from being fixed, the nature of these concepts are open to many possible interpretations. Postmodern conceptions of space and place challenge the inherent assumptions in the dominant concept of Maritime regionalism and provide a rationale for a critique of "authentic" and exclusionary claims to the land. I conclude the introduction with a review of the predecessors of this dissertation, those works that influence and inform my discussion by addressing writing by women in the Maritime region.

## **Literary Regionalism and Literary Realism: Art Grounded in a Single Place**

In defining the difference between regions, a scholar risks essentializing very complex relationships between people and place. Regionalism has significant political, economic, and cultural implications in a country like Canada, which is still often treated as a group of regions bounded within a larger nation. Questions of regional identity should be articulated rather than avoided, especially in a country covering such a vast area with distinct topographies, geographies, and histories, a country that continues to attract description in regional terms. In his entry on “Regionalism” in W.H. New’s *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (2002), Laurie Ricou supports the notion that, paradoxically, regional writers and critics who explore the relationship between the environment, community, and literary form simultaneously interrogate as well as construct “the fallacy of environmental determinism” (951-52). No approach is without fault or limitations.

The regional critic, as Ricou contends, explores how different ideas and practices of regionalism come into place. He or she does not necessarily support any of them but endeavours to learn more about the ways they function. I tend to agree with regional critics in Canada like George Woodcock, whose note that “regionalism is not limiting” (*Meeting* 37) goes hand in hand with Margaret Atwood’s notion that “[L]iterature is made [...] by people living in a particular space at a particular time” (*Survival* 15), and Kulyk Keefer’s view that “all art is, in a sense, regional” (30) because it must arise from a particular time and place, and it is influenced to an extent by a historical context situated in a geographical locale.

In the field of Canadian literature, twentieth-century critics often turn to the subject of Canadian identity, and they link that identity with some aspect of Canadian landscape. Cultural nationalism in the early and mid-twentieth century in Canada included various topocentric

attempts to define the nation. In the visual arts, revered artists such as Tom Thomson and The Group of Seven depicted Canada's unique topography and wilderness. The Canadian government adopted the maple leaf flag as a representation of the nation in 1965. The image of the maple leaf and the areas depicted in the Group of Seven paintings are not taken to represent any specific local place, but a single national place. Similarly, literary critics seeking a unifying symbol or theme for Canadian literature in 1967 and during the post-centennial years found consensus in the idea that Canadian literature portrays a relationship between characters and Canada's physical environment. Critical works such as Margaret Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* and John Moss's *Patterns of Isolation in English-Canadian Fiction*, for example, attribute the inclusion of descriptions of nature and wilderness as a uniquely Canadian literary preoccupation.

While many critics agree that writing about landscape, wilderness, and the environment is distinct to twentieth-century Canadian writing, not all critics see these themes as successful. Interpreting topocentric writing as "regionalism," Northrop Frye and E.K. Brown offer pointed criticism toward the practice. In his review of A.J.M. Smith's *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943), for example, Frye criticizes regional writing in Canada, calling the region "a vestigial curiosity to be written up by some nostalgic tourist" (*Bush Garden* 135). This charge of sentimentality and lack of depth dismisses representations of an area written by those who live there. In the same review, Frye asserts that "culture seems to flourish best in national units, which implies that the empire is too big and the province too small for a major literature" (*Bush Garden* 135). Both the imperial and the regional, Frye contends, are "inherently anti-poetic environments" (*Bush Garden* 135) that promote a "conventional or commonplace expression of an idea" rather than an original, poetic one (*Bush Garden* 136). E.K. Brown echoes Frye's

concern that regionalism threatens a Canadian national literature “because it stresses the superficial and peculiar at the expense, at least, if not to the exclusion, of the fundamental and universal” (24). Brown argues that

It would help us toward cultural maturity if we had a set of novels, or sketches, or memoirs that described the life of Canadian towns and cities as it really is, works in which nothing would be presented that the author had not encountered in his own experience. [...] The advent of regionalism may be welcomed with reservations as a stage through which it may be well for us to pass... (23-4)

Brown’s reservations, together with Frye’s argument that the region is too small to develop a major literature, as well as perhaps too trivial a subject to be taken seriously by those who are not “nostalgic tourist[s]” (*Bush Garden* 135), inform midcentury perspectives on regionalism in Canada as unworthy of serious study, or at best, an approach about which critics should be tentative.

At the same time, many scholars of Canadian literature have been preoccupied by the effects and influences on Canadian literature that stem from Frye’s method of defining the region as a subset of the nation. Frye’s “Conclusion” to *The Literary History of Canada* suggests that Canadian writers are gripped by place, and that they need to overcome their environment before they can produce a worthy body of literature that is not obsessed with the question of place: “Where is here?” Frye’s claim that Canadian literature “has not quite done it” (“Conclusion” 341)—that is, has not quite produced a body of classic literature—stems from what he calls the “garrison mentality” of Canadian writers that keeps them separated from their landscape and unable to know it. Frye believed that focusing on the physical environment kept Canadian writers from reaching their potential on the world literary stage. Even though he is

not talking about the region specifically, Frye's notion of the "garrison mentality" is a good starting point for a preliminary discussion of literary regionalism. The garrison mentality he describes stems from the colonial past and settler history of Canada; a "garrison" is an enclosed space that needs to be defended, like the actual garrisons and fortresses built by the first settlers. In the maintenance of what lies inside the boundaries of a garrison, inhabitants fear the unknown that lies outside them. Analogously, the topocentric regional writer wishes to focus attention solely on his or her own community and avoid what lies beyond it.

Certainly, many definitions of literary regionalism also reproduce the analogy of regions as autonomous and clearly-demarcated fortresses like the garrisons that Frye discusses. David Jordan defines regionalism in the Americas as "[beginning] with an author's privileged access to a community that has evolved through generations of interaction with a local environment, and whose identity is defined in opposition to a larger world beyond regional borders" (8-9). Writers with such a connection to local place could thus impart, as Eric Sundquist puts it, an "accurate, [...] unromanticized observation of life and nature" (502) of that place to the outside world. Jordan claims that this treatment of place in regional literature therefore "seeks to empower literature with the truth claim of the natural sciences" (52). Writing in the early twentieth century, John Crowe Ransom claimed that regionalism is a "reasonable" position, "for it is [...] natural, and whatever is natural is persistent" (47). However, there are consequences to seeing topography as the source of a culture's character and as the basis of an opposition to the rest of the world. As Roberto Dainotto argues, "To claim that culture springs from a place means, after all, to naturalize a process of historical formation" (2) which thereby tries to substitute one "tool of analysis—history—with an allegedly natural one—place" (2). These definitions of regionalism as objectively descriptive

writing about one particular place that notes its distinctions from other places conceive regions as clearly-bounded spaces detached from history.

Understanding regions as single units of geography that differ in some vital way from what lies outside of them can lead to the conflation of regionalism with environmental determinism and the problematic assumption that “specific landscapes determine particular imaginative responses rather than themselves being constructed by stories, myths, tourism, and political discourse” (Fiamengo 245). Lisa Chalykoff notes near the beginning of her important article “Overcoming the Two Solitudes of Canadian Literary Regionalism” that in approaches to regionalism informed by this idea of space as natural and determining, “spatial divisions are not believed to be produced at all, but are rather thought to be “‘found’ in ‘nature.’” Chalykoff names Henry Kreisel as an example of a Canadian writer who works under this assumption, and quotes his statement that there is a regional “state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of the prairie” (Kreisel qtd. in Chalykoff, “Overcoming”). A similar position on the relationship between regional writers and landscape appears in reviews of Maritime literature in the 1950s, such as a review of Charles Bruce’s novel in which the reviewer asserts that “characters [...] grow naturally from their soil” (Bennett 319), and it persists through the late twentieth century to Janice Kulyk Keefer’s monograph on Maritime fiction, in which she claims to be “revealing the eyes a region gives to a writer” (5).

In distinguishing one region from another by writing about its topographical features, writers acting as quasi-naturalists or ethnographers depict places in vivid realistic detail that treats the “here and now” in a seemingly objective manner. Such conceptions of writing place lead inevitably to the corresponding perception of geography as a natural object, one available for scientific observation. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin note about the

map as a colonizing tool, “The movement of European society through the world, the ‘discovery’ and occupation of remote regions, was the necessary basis for the creation of what could be called ‘empty space.’ Cartography and the creation of universal maps established space as a measurable, abstract concept independent of any particular place or region” (179). Topocentrically-defined regional literature bears a strong resemblance to the mapping practices of the colonizer as Tiffin et al. describe them.

### **Regionalism as Realism**

These assumptions about topocentric regional literature as representational of an actual place are most prevalent in realist fiction and its criticism. Laurie Ricou, Jordan, and many other critics have observed that regional literature lends itself well to the separation of subject and object as well as to the third-person omniscient narration of literary realism. Jordan affirms that the genre of realism has always supported regionalism as a concept because it “introduced the importance of regional difference by emphasizing the geographic borders that isolate a region from the world around it” (52). Ricou notes in an online encyclopedia entry for “Regionalism in Literature” that regional literature “is tied to the conventions of realism because it attempts to distinguish accurately the features of a clearly definable region, either rural or closely linked to the land.”

Dainotto, Jordan, and Eric Sundquist all link realist regional writing to the late nineteenth-century American movement of realist “local color” writing. In that period, the work of influential American critic, magazine editor, and writer William Dean Howells led to the “proliferation” of “regionalist” fiction (Jordan 43) in response to the pleas for distinctly American texts that he made in his compilation of essays *Criticism and Fiction* (1891). Howells valued writing the “truth” (99-100) through “the faithful portrayal of life in fiction”

(187), especially via the depiction of distinct and local elements. Howells argues that in producing literature that describes a place accurately, writers from the different parts of North America will each contribute to a larger picture of the American nation, and show people living in different parts of the nation that they “are more like than unlike one another [...] [and] that they may be all humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity” (188). In Howells’s view, a variety of texts with local settings would, as Jordan puts it, “gradually fill in a unified portrait of a distinct American culture” (43).

Of course, problems arise with this idea of place as “natural,” which seems to involve the assumption that one may impart accurate ethnographic information simply by describing the geographical features of a place. After all, who has the power to decide what is natural, true, or authentic? As influential Canadian historian Ian McKay contends, many regional texts on the East Coast of Canada have been created by middle class urban producers who are interested in depicting a version of East Coast people and places as “folk.” McKay’s influential text *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* outlines the tradition of folklore in the Maritime region, explaining how the folklore movement of the 1920s and 1930s establishes a method of coping with the modern world by selectively rendering people who are removed from industrial technologies and who live more “authentic” lives in affinity with the land and sea. According to McKay, “the folk” was an antimodernist construction contemporary with Howells’s writing on regionalism that idealized a lifestyle free of cars, radios, and other modern inventions. “The folk” also appeared to take on an essential, unified identity. While McKay points out that very few Nova Scotians would actually qualify as “folk” if they had ever worked in a mine, or for a company, or had even read a book or newspaper, the idea of “the folk” was a comforting one to all those who did live in

the industrialized world and who glorified the imagined virtues of a pre-industrialized society. During the boom and bust economy of early twentieth-century forestry, fishery, and other industries, Nova Scotia turned to tourism as a viable means of sustaining the economy, and antimodernist depictions of the folk proved highly attractive to tourists and those who sought their business. Urban cultural producers including musicians, writers, and artists depicted “the folk” in order to attract visitors; while “the folk” was largely a myth, it became the main way that Nova Scotia presented itself to the rest of the world, as well as to itself.

### **Regions as Margins**

As my analysis above suggests, regionalism can be a limiting approach to literary study if taken as environmentally determined. Further, if conceived as marginal literature to the more powerful literary centre, a regional approach lacks power. In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams remarks on the ways that the term “region” implies inferiority and subordination to a more powerful centre (265). Conceived as smaller components of a larger national entity, regions can thus be relegated to the margins of the perceived sources of political and social power. Williams notes that this perception gives power to the centre to define the regions. W. H. New also comments on the implications of power in the use of the term “region” by those within regions as opposed to the centre. He notes that portraying regions as tributaries to a national identity is a way of staking claims over the regions as peripheral to national life. “Region” conceived as a margin, then, offers a method of defining the region from the centre of control and power. Ironically, this definition of the region often comes from the region and not the centre, all the while promoting the centre’s importance. New describes how this power structure works in *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing*:

Curiously, the notion of centrality is a regional presumption—for ‘centrality’ is the consequence of [...] declaring that one region’s own form of economic or social behaviour has political precedence. This power manifests itself in a particular definition of the word *region* itself. For a ‘centre,’ the rest of the country constitutes a set of regions grouped around it, there to serve its needs and listen to its standards; [...] Real differences in social power [...] make the former definition more economically effective, which in practice tends to turn ‘regions’ into marginal entities and which makes the very definition of region a political act. (146)

The definition is political, New suggests, because the term “region” seems to imply its own inferiority.

So why do writers or critics bother trying to delineate regionalisms? Ursula Kelly focuses on the idea that contrary to New’s contention that the residents of particular regions define themselves in self-defeating ways, regions have too often been defined by those from the outside, and she would rather see individuals within regions defining their own parameters rather than have those parameters placed on them. In her monograph on regionalism in Newfoundland, she argues that regionalism consists of a set of assumptions produced and reproduced within capitalist and patriarchal frameworks. “Region” is a term she sees as mainly applied to writers by critics and readers who write from a supposed centre. Regionalism must be reclaimed, according to Kelly, because subjectivity is contingent on how citizens understand their own relationships to the place they live. Readers in Newfoundland, she argues, did not have access to texts about Newfoundland or by Newfoundland writers until Breakwater Press opened in 1973. Instead, the texts to which Newfoundlanders had access provided narratives

from outside perspectives that offer accounts of characters in Newfoundland, or of characters in other places altogether. Such texts, Kelly argues, do not provide a sufficient model for building subjectivity for Newfoundlanders who did not have access to stories about the place where they live. Kelly believes that regionalism as a discourse practiced by writers located outside the region, from a centre, “accommodates differences of culture, language, identity, economics, history, and struggle in the interests of maintaining national control which is always in some ways threatened by these differences” (43). Therefore, readers in a region must “reclaim” regionalism from these nationalist biases by producing and reading regional texts. In this way, “reading can be viewed as a practice aimed at cultural recovery” (43) that ensures that readers do not fall prey to very narrow ways of seeing the self in the particular place.

In the models of topocentric regionalism I have described, regional writers are linked closely to one particular place in the sense that they are expected to describe only one place in their literary works, and to reflect that place with verisimilitude. The corresponding associations that these same critics make between regional writers and writing, national identity and literary realism persist as pervasive elements of the discourse of literary regionalism long after their emergence in the nineteenth-century American context. I have paid more attention to a nineteenth-century American literary context rather than a Canadian one because the trends that come to dominate the idea of regional writing link more closely to the American realist tradition than nineteenth-century Canadian and Maritime literature. The association between realism and regionalism has benefited male Euro-settler writers who have stakes in claiming an authentic relationship to the land. Using “authenticity” as a way to claim belonging may appear to override other connections to place as inauthentic and therefore invalid. Because “authenticity” is a construction and not a given, a selection and not a cross section, only those

in power are able to define its parameters, and thus to make claims about who belongs and who does not.

### **Toward Multiple Regionalisms: Postmodern and Global Frameworks**

Contemporary contexts of globalization and postmodernism offer understandings of place and space that inevitably affect the way scholars think about regionalism. For instance, critics that belong to the movement of postmodern geography theory suggest that scholars reconsider place as something more than a static physical area, and move toward considerations of it as layered, fluid, and socially constructed. These ideas seem to render obsolete the assumption behind literary realism that literature can accurately and truly reflect the nature of a place. Jean-Francois Lyotard's foundational postmodern text *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) provides a good starting point for a working definition of the term "postmodern." Lyotard explains that "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as an incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). By "metanarratives" Lyotard refers to any unifying narratives, shared stories that members of a group hold in common. According to this understanding of postmodernism, metanarratives attempt to falsely amalgamate disparate experiences, and should be brought to light and interrogated.

Thinkers in the postmodern movement "critical regionalism" encourage researchers to take a global perspective on local phenomena. The field of critical regionalism originates in architectural theory of the twentieth century that examines the intersections between global and local influences on architecture. It has branched out to other disciplines including philosophy, geography, art history, and literary studies. In an article on the aesthetics of critical regionalism, philosopher Warwick Mules contends that it is time to reimagine the region beyond its hinterland relationship to a more powerful centre. Mules believes that in discourses of

globalization, regions should no longer define themselves in relation to a centre. Indeed, he contends that “[t]he advent of globalization favouring local/global interconnections has the potential to disrupt and redefine the relation between the centre and its regions, where local sites previously subordinated to the power of the metro-centres can now find empowerment in their global interconnections.” Applying these notions to understandings of Maritime regionalisms in a global context rather than a national one can help to disrupt the one-way power relationship between the Maritime provinces and the “centre” of Canada in certain definitions of Maritime regionalism that have dominated most of the twentieth century. Moreover, it can help to redefine concepts of regionalism for our concepts of national literatures.

Discourses of globalization often focus on what Mules calls “technological dematerialization,” or the use of contemporary technologies such as the internet (which he claims exists everywhere or anywhere) to detach information from any particular place. Even so, globalization does not necessarily erase the relevance of regional writing, or the significance of specific literary location. Instead, it creates more urgency around finding ways to read the globalizing identities as they form and develop within specific communities, and even as writers come and go from one place. An essay on regional identity from Herb Wylie’s online resource *Waterfront Views: Contemporary Writing of Atlantic Canada* remarks on what Wylie and his collaborators call a “cosmopolitan sensibility” developing on the East Coast. They note that writers are now more mobile and tend to “inhabit more than one place” (“Regional Identity”). Rather than obviate the need for attention to literary regionalism, “belonging to more than one place” revises our understanding of it within a global framework, and this notion invites further revision to regional studies in contemporary contexts.

As Canada's population continues to grow in diversity and welcomes recent immigrants who write about places "other" than Canada, questions of the "worlding" of Canadian literature have arisen. Roy Miki's "Globalization, (Canadian) Culture, and Critical Pedagogy: A Primer" considers such questions of globalization in Canadian literature and cultures in the wake of 9/11. Miki's idea of the dynamic process of negotiations between local and global identities illustrates the contemporary need to position the citizen on these two scales simultaneously:

the uncertain and uneven interactions between the near and the far, the immediate and the distant—hence the local and the global—are themselves implicated in conditions of compromise that make positioning, for critical thought, less the arrival at stability and much more a dynamic process of negotiations with subject formations that vary in relation to specific conditions.

(92-3)

In Miki's view, citizens of the twenty-first century must understand their relationships to place in a "much more dynamic process" than in the twentieth century. Such dramatic shifts of perspective from local to global rarely occur in regional literature of the mid-twentieth century because Canadian authors are mainly interested in representing local places. As Miki suggests, such a process is not about "arriving at stability," but instead about the dynamic process which gives rise to multiple possible subject formations.

By considering regionalisms within a global network rather than within a national one, scholars may decolonize regions from national authority. The outmoded centre-margin model of Canadian nationalism and regionalism mirrors the centre-margin model of empires during New World colonization. In her discussion of Canada's position in "postcolonial space" Cynthia Sugars notes the continuing influence on Canadian letters that A.J.M. Smith's

discussion of “cosmopolitan” versus “native” writers from his influential anthology *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943) has had. She argues that Smith’s dichotomy of the two terms is colonial, for the discussion of “[U]niversal’ merit versus ‘local’ expression” (121) helped to colonize Canada’s regions and marginalize their literatures as parochial. Smith noted that whereas Canada’s central and cosmopolitan poets could access worldly and “universal” truths and write more complicated work, “native” or “regional” writers focused on their environment, sometimes to the detriment of their poetry.

However, in taking a perspective on regions as local places set in a network of other sites within a global framework, regional literatures may become empowered as they are freed from their tributary relationship to the centre of national authority. One of the multiple identities that regional citizens espouse may still be a national identity, but national identity is not necessarily ranked as significant. Alison Calder agrees that location is still important in our global age. In a special issue of *Canadian Literature* dedicated to examining the future of the field of Canadian literature in 2010, Calder responds to Wyile’s argument found in the same issue that globalization and neoliberalism are leading to a post-national literary environment that is altering regionalism. Wyile argues that “the current global market and the digitization of texts leads to a crucial future question [of] what Canadian literature will there be to study?” (“Neoliberalism” 108). He questions whether place-based literature will have any relevance in the future, given increasing globalization. Calder’s call for maintaining interest in and attention to regionalism within larger and shifting contexts of globalization and neoliberalism is worth quoting at length as it emphasizes the significance of postmodern thought to regionalism in the early twenty-first century Canadian context, and it reinforces the relevance of regionalism as a critical approach in a globalizing field of study:

One of the things that neoliberalism seeks to do is to iron out nuance, to insist that the world is the same for everybody. Specific places introduce nuance, because of their unique makeup. Places—regions or otherwise defined—are both porous and unique. A place is not stable; it is always in flux. Postmodern conceptions of place suggest that it is composed of simultaneously intersecting complementary and competing forces that shift constantly depending on an individual's relation to them. That relation to place, what place means, is determined by race, class, gender, and a host of other factors. These factors combine uniquely in particular locations. (113)

Calder's most compelling point in relation to my argument is that postmodern conceptions of space and place create a significant need for more study of regionalism in Canadian literature. As a way to theorize regions, postmodern thought can be useful in suggesting alternatives to thinking of place through the lens of essentialist regionalisms, and as composed of tangible and stable elements that can be communicated through realist literature. Calder points out that postmodern theories of space and place allow for the notion that there may be several simultaneous, conflicting, and overlapping ways of reading the region, its space, its history, and its inhabitants' ways of relating to all three.

Of course, Calder is not the first theorist to point out the importance of rethinking literary relationships to place in Canadian literature. In their introduction to a special issue of *Studies of Canadian Literature* entitled "Writing Canadian Space," (1998) John Ball and Linda Warley comment on new directions in Canadian literary theory. They note that critics are less interested in "defining a singular Canadian identity" and more interested in "articulating the complexities of Canadian representation of spaces." Faye Hammill believes that scholars in

Canadian literature in general have begun to “question the earlier assumption that a sense of national or personal identity, in countries such as Canada, is fundamentally connected to a sense of place, pointing instead to contemporary writers’ emphasis on placelessness and their dislocations of identity” (67). She is careful, however, to emphasize that “[t]his does not mean that the significance of place has been negated in Canadian writing; rather, literary texts now reveal an increased consciousness of the complex processes by which meanings are inscribed onto—or emptied out of—landscapes” (67). As Hammill, Ball and Warley, and Calder all point out, the changing role of nation and nationalism in our contemporary literary world does not correlate to a sense that specific place is becoming irrelevant. Rather, the intricacies of relationships to specific place are changing as well, and while a single unified sense of place that restricts regional identity to those writers who live and work in a region is no longer relevant, the “porous and unique” (Calder 113) elements of relationships to place nonetheless demand attention.

Many twentieth and twenty-first century thinkers who apply postmodern theories to conceptions of place try to escape the idea of an “ordered, binary, categorical power” (Soja and Hooper 194) that keeps the regions at the periphery of the more powerful centre in such binary categories as “colonizer-colonized, elite-subaltern, global-local, centre-periphery, First World-Third World” (Soja and Hooper 195). Despite the potential of a disruption of the centre-periphery binary, explorations of Canadian literary postmodernism in the twentieth century often overlook this potential by maintaining that binary between regionalism and nationalism. In his essay “Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy” (1989), Robert Kroetsch echoes Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism in his claim that “the writing of particular narratives, within a culture, is dependent on [shared] meta-narratives” (61). He points to ongoing debates

among Canadian literary critics on the question “whether our nation is made up of regions, or whether it is a unified nation” (61). Kroetsch argues that, paradoxically, this question and these debates offer an example of a metanarrative that Canadians can share, despite their inability “to agree on what their meta-narrative is” (61). According to him, then, regionalism—or at least debates about it—is a key element of Canada’s national postmodernism. Similarly, Linda Hutcheon sees regional writing and Canadian postmodern literature as inextricably linked. In her influential text, *The Canadian Postmodern* (1988), Hutcheon defines the postmodern as follows: “To render the particular concrete, to glory in (defining) local ex-centricity—this is the Canadian postmodern” (19). By ex-centricity, Hutcheon refers not only to “eccentricities” or literary deviation from convention, but also to the de-centering of Canadian identity and literature from a national centre to the “margins” of the country, the regions. She suggests that “The postmodern has [...] translated the existing Canadian emphasis on regionalism and literature [...] into a concern for the different, the local, the particular—in opposition to the uniform, the universal, the centralized” (19). The shift in emphasis from the centre to the margin that Hutcheon identifies again gives the region a central place in postmodern Canadian literature.

Hutcheon further elaborates on the idea of the margins as de facto centres of the questioning and resistance activities at postmodernism’s heart in an essay on the relationships between postmodernism and postcolonialism, pointing out that postmodern and postcolonial critics understand writers as critiquing the centre from a position on the so-called margins of literary production:

...it is not just the relation to history that brings the two *posts* together [—postmodern and postcolonial—] there is also a strong shared concern with the

notion of marginalization, with the state of what we could call ex-centricity. In granting value to (what the centre calls) the margin or the Other, the post-modern challenges any hegemonic force that presumes centrality, even as it acknowledges that it cannot privilege the margin without acknowledging the power of the centre. (“Circling” 74)

The type of postmodern regionalism that my dissertation explores, however, is unlike the regionalism that Hutcheon defines as Canadian postmodern because Hutcheon’s model still considers the region as marginal to a national centre. Hutcheon’s model still defines the nation as a collection of regions but revalues both to privilege the region over the nation because the region is the site of the ex-centric, heterogeneous values that the nation lacks. Structurally, it’s the same model of the region as tributary to the nation, with only the values attached to region and nation altering. In contrast to Hutcheon’s model, I will argue that the regional perspective ought to be defined not in terms of its resistance (no matter how creative and resilient) to a centre, but in terms of the mobile perspective that characterizes regional writing. That perspective may shift or locate and relocate between two distinct places very distant from one another. Postmodern conceptions of spaces suggest that places are multiplicitous instead of unified and that places may be layered with different meanings, as different groups use the same spaces for different means, or produce meaning in them in different ways.

Certainly, critics in many disciplines point to a “spatial turn” in twentieth and twenty-first century critical theory that involves theorists’ new interrogations of the concepts of space and place, and the ways that meanings are produced in relation to spaces. New explains in his influential work *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* that geographers have been among the first scholars across the disciplines to start thinking

about the way they “read” the land, foregrounding the act of interpretation in their attempts to define or cordon off certain areas: “Only in the latter decades of the twentieth century have geographers begun to examine the way they read the land. [...] To the degree that ‘landscape’ becomes a *text*, runs the argument, it can be ‘read,’ turning the exercise of geographical observation—metaphorically at least—into a theatrical activity” (9-10). In turning away from an examination of supposedly objective, quantitative, and tangible elements of the land, and toward the act of “reading” the collectively-produced meaning of that land, geographers have begun to study the various social and political discourses involved in naming aspects of space.

Other influential postmodern geographers such as Edward Soja and Henri Lefebvre provide useful terminology for various conceptions of space and place. My assumptions about the term “space” are informed by Soja’s coinage of the “thirdspace” from *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined-Places* (1996), which suggests that “space” may refer to both a “real” or empirical space as well as an imagined space that corresponds to it. Soja’s term “firstspace” refers to the material topography and geography of a place, the “secondspace” to a wholly imagined or ideal place associated with the same geographical or topographical coordinates, and the “thirdspace” to the intersection of the first two (*Thirdspace* 75-82). David Harvey offers a useful summary of a similarly multifaceted understanding of the term “place” in his study *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (1996). He defines places as “constructed and experienced as material [...] artifacts and intricate networks of social relations. They are the focus of the imaginary, of beliefs, longings, and desires (most particularly with respect to the pull and push of the idea of ‘home’). They are an intense focus of discursive activity, filled with symbolic and representational meanings” (316). Lefebvre’s influential work on postmodern spatial theory, *The Production of Space*, also emphasizes that

space is shaped by its inhabitants and is not a stable entity. It is rather a “(social) product” (26) that shapes the various ways humans view their world. Harvey, Lefebvre, and Soja’s definitions suggest that both concepts of “space” and “place” operate on a spectrum between a purely empirical conception of space as tangible and material, and a purely imaginative conception that exists only in the mind but that may also be shared among social groups. All three indicate that the region, as a grouping of places within a bounded space, also operates in topographical (but not topocentric) as well as imaginative realms.

### **“Multiple Space” and Feminism**

Feminist and post-structuralist spatial theorists add insight to a more focused definition of space for this dissertation’s aims. Gillian Rose’s foundational geographical study *Feminism and Geography* (1991) explores what she calls the “masculinization” of the discourse of geography theories that focus on a governing perspective on a space. She concludes her study with a definition of space, landscape, and place as “insecure, precarious and fluctuating. They are destabilized by the internal contradictions of the geographical desire to know [...] [.] And other possibilities, other sorts of geographies, with different compulsions, desires, and effects, complement and contest one another” (160). Rose challenges “the desire to know,” which she sees as a masculinist quest for empirical knowledge: a privileged perspective in geography over other “possibilities,” especially women’s varied ways of experiencing space. Like Rose’s attempts to find alternatives to masculinist geographical perspectives, I attempt to locate depictions of Maritime space and place that counter the masculinist perspectives of Maritime regionalism that assert Maritime space consists of “a stable, objective, and knowable world” (Creelman 20). Because the masculine voice has been favoured for so long in Maritime literary discourses, ways that women represent the space are too often left out of definitions of the

region and its literature. In effect, Maritime regional discourse has largely focused on the universal masculine subject that Kelly describes as “a stable, coherent, unified subject” (42). The multiple geographic identities I examine in later chapters highlight Rose’s assertion that geographers should “[think] about geography through a different spatiality: a multiple space” (160).

“Multiple space” may be more clearly understood through Michel Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia. In his essay “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault describes heterotopias as “capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible” (25). Sugars has described the heterotopia as “a set of overlapping, conflicting sites determined by a multiplicity of social relations” (“Can the Canadian” 143). Foucault’s heterotopia imagines that a space can contain many possibly contrasting layers; heterotopias are similar to Soja’s thirdspace in that they consist of a combination of an actual physical place and several imagined places that seem to exist within them. Lefebvre also believes in the possibility of space as layered; he states that “We are confronted not by one social space but by many—indeed, by an unlimited multiplicity or uncountable set of social spaces which we refer to generically as ‘social space.’ No space disappears in the course of growth and development: *the worldwide does not abolish the local*” (86). Foucault’s heterotopia and Rose’s “multiple space” are concepts that underpin my position that Maritime literature cannot be described in a homogenous way as having a single, unifying thematic such as the one Kulyk Keefer suggests in the introduction to her 1987 study *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction*.

The adoption of multiple perspectives on place highlights a type of regionalism that may be connected to an understanding of feminism that Ella Shohat defines as “a non-finalized

and conjunctural definition of feminism as a polysemic site of contradictory positionalities” (40). By combining theories of space and place with theories of feminism, Shohat’s work envisions a “permeable, interwoven relationality” (40). In her analysis of Middle Eastern politics and cultures, she asserts that “It is fundamental to deploy a multiperspectival approach to the movement of feminist ideas across borders. We must worry about a globalist feminism that spreads its programs around the world as the universal gospel, just as we have to be concerned about a localist feminism that surrenders all dialogue to the deadend of overpowering relativism” (42). Shohat’s thoughts on local and global feminisms in the Middle East nuance the concept of regionalism and relate feminist activism to regionalism without dismissing the latter. Just as there is no single feminist view, there is no single way for writers to relate to any place; neither purely local nor purely global perspective is enough.

If the globalized world makes up a network of local places that depend on one another for meaning and definition, perhaps critics can view Canada as a set of local places within that network. Scholars need not define Canada as having a centre and margins that replicate or even relate to that centre. Breaking away from the view that the regions of Canada are part of a centre-periphery model helps critics to diffuse any real power the “centre” has over the region. The region need not rely on the centre to dictate its history and significance because what is significant to the nation about the region’s history excludes many histories in the region that are not necessarily relevant to nationalism, and so do not become part of the discourse. The nation may continue to consist of, in Benedict Anderson’s conception, an imagined community, or a grouping of them, not a centralizing hegemonic force but a part of a network of many local places all over the world. The main implication for the nation in this model is that it loses its centralizing governing authority.

A single postmodern view of a region is not possible, nor would it offer a satisfying end for the present work. Instead, as I have explained in this section, my goal is to reconsider Maritime regionalism within contemporary contexts of globalization and postmodern notions of space in favour of the dynamic, the many, and the simultaneous. This will free interpretations of regional writing by women that have tended to limit their work's significance to only one geographical place. It will help to acknowledge social difference within regions, while at the same time reclaiming their power from central and canonical Canada. Further, the global connections and perspectives present in the writing I examine in later chapters encourage a new set of metaphors to work from that may dislodge the centre-periphery relationship of the Maritimes and central Canada.

### **Writing by Women in the Maritime Provinces**

In the early nineteenth century, Nova Scotia premier Joseph Howe noted the lack of writing by women in the Maritime region and made a public statement to “[his] fair countrywomen,” imploring them to write more in order to “enrich their literature and adorn their age” (*Western* 69-70). Pre-Confederation writing by women in the Maritimes consists of letters, essays, poetry, and short fiction, although a handful of full-length nonfiction works also appeared during this time, such as Mrs. F. Beaven’s *Life in the Backwoods* (1845), a treatise on early colonial life similar to Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852). Women have been writing in and of the region since before Confederation; however, much of that writing is hard to find, and by extension to characterize, due to its ephemeral nature. As Carole Gerson notes, “these provincial [pre-Confederation] women writers were often destined to disappear from the eye of posterity by the brief availability of the periodicals and private editions in which they published. As a result, their writing has rarely been anthologized, analyzed, or

consciously preserved” (62). Despite the efforts of figures like Howe and critics like Gerson, and even though attention to writing by women has increased over the last few decades, women writers in the Maritime region continue to receive less critical attention than men.

In a review article in a 1981 issue of *The Dalhousie Review*, Ann Munton evaluates four poetry books and an anniversary issue of *The Fiddlehead* that she believes “as a group should allow for some generalizations about the state of poetry in Atlantic Canada” (569). Only three out of the sixteen contemporary poets she names are women. Even though that is a small margin, critics do begin to put forth more effort to acknowledge writing by women in this period. For instance, Fred Cogswell writes that he knows he should include “a more generous selection from the work of female poets” (9) in his 1984 *Atlantic Anthology: Volume 2*; however, what he ultimately chooses to include are selections from a mere thirteen women writers of the forty-nine who appear in the collection. In her monograph *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* (1987), Janice Kulyk Keefer offers an important examination of the literary tropes in twentieth-century Maritime fiction that “have traditionally represented [women] as merely gossipy, or else silent, or, worst of all, implacably hostile to the written word” (239). While she outlines possible reasons that women are rarely treated in Maritime literary criticism, her justification for the study of Maritime literature holds steadfast to the literary preoccupations that I find problematic. Specifically, she notes and accepts “the perception that some quality inherent in the history and conditions of Maritime life makes possible an authentic vision and expression of human experience continues to empower the region’s literature” (18).

Some critics in the 1990s such as Gwendolyn Davies make a special effort to study works by women in individual essays, such as her exploration of pre-Confederation writing by

women; yet, many other critics in that decade continue to neglect work by women in their scholarship. The 1996 collection of essays edited by Wolfgang Hochbruck and James Taylor entitled *Down East: Critical Essays on Contemporary Maritime Canadian Literature* only features two essays devoted to female authors of the twenty-one that appear in the volume. When Hochbruck points out that “the editors have tried to make sure the diversity of what is and has been written in the Maritimes in this century is properly pointed out” (9), he is possibly referring to literary form, as the essays cover fiction, poetry, theatre, and drama. He could also be referring to the ethnic groups that are acknowledged in essays on Africadian, Acadian, and First Nations literature, which broadens significantly the representation of ethnic groups in Maritime regional criticism. Hochbruck also argues for postcolonial readings of Maritime literature, contending that “cultural margins and borderlines are on the move” in English literatures around the world (17). Thus, the contemporary Maritime writing that he discusses has “a quality that is both regional in its connectedness to the space, and postcolonial in its move away from the apologetic/defiant modes of past literary periods and towards a form of cultural activity that is pragmatic in outlook and diverse and multicultural in form” (17). Hochbruck and the critics he and Taylor include in their collection of essays thus represent a significant shift in treatments of Maritime regionalism; nevertheless, there remains in these works a leaning toward Euro-settler literary activity, and a very significant lack of attention toward writing by women.

The twenty-first century saw more publications by women in the Maritime region, yet critics continued to focus on mid to late twentieth century writing by male Euro-settlers. Creelman’s study, *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (2003), analyzes Maritime realist fiction from a Marxist perspective, paying attention to ways that changes in industry and

economy become forces that shape a Maritime regional ideology. He is careful to note that common characteristics of the Maritimes too often “become the centre of attention, to the detriment of a more complex view of the region” (6). Importantly, Creelman notes that even though the region has had “a diverse, and in some areas, multicultural population, commentators have more often dwelt on the seeming stability, consistency, and even homogeneity of the region” (6). He resists such critical attempts at a seeming stability or common essentialist regional identity by noting the ethnic diversity of the Maritime provinces and recalling how well the region adjusted to the first and second waves of feminism (7-8). Creelman’s monograph supplies a nuanced exploration of the ideology of regional identity, and finds significant alternatives to essentialist notions of regionalism through considering that “[t]he ideologies that structure individuals and their perceptions are ‘multiple’ in their sources” (15). He also believes that “[t]he individual subject is [...] aware of and embedded in their main assumptions of time and place, but within that position particular persons [...] can develop their own particular range of responses to social and economic environments” (15). That is, writers may respond in various ways to their immediate environments. Yet at the same time that Creelman delivers an important departure from ideas of environmental determinism that pervade mid-century notions of regionalism, the authors he has chosen to study in depth do not offer a sense of the diverse ethnic backgrounds that he notes exist in the region. Further, his decision to restrict his study to realist prose fiction ensures that the study ignores or marginalizes the versions of regionalism offered by women writers contemporary with the male authors he studies, most of whom do not write in the realist tradition. While the chapter “Breaking Silence” features several contemporary women writers, Creelman only considers them to the extent that they can be understood through the masculine models of regionalism as

represented in realist fiction developed through the study. Whereas he examines writing by women in just a single chapter, he gives several male writers chapters of their own.

Danielle Fuller's study *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* is the first monograph devoted entirely to writing by women in the region. It is a particularly significant predecessor to my dissertation because she argues that Atlantic Canadian women's writing "challenges the conservative and exclusive notion of home place that has traditionally been associated with Maritime literary culture" (30), and because she makes this case by contrasting Maritime women's writing to male Euro-settler Maritime literary culture and criticism. I agree with her argument that region-based approaches to literary culture (30) are sometimes conservative and exclusive, and that contemporary women's writing in the Atlantic region challenges ideas and constructions of literary regionalism because it "demands that [regionalism] include multiple perspectives that frequently refer to (and sometimes [prefer]) non-regional communities" (31) such as communities of feminists, the African Diaspora, First Nations, and the urban working class. My argument echoes Fuller's assertion that writing by women includes multiple affiliations, regional and otherwise. Literary critics with an interest in Atlantic Canadian literature are prompted, Fuller suggests, to "reject old-style literary regionalism altogether and to reconfigure the Atlantic region as a cultural space that is open to articulations of difference" (30). Fuller's monograph makes room in contemporary discourse for an examination and a further critical study of "articulations of difference" (30) in the Atlantic region as these are made available through the narratives of the communities I have mentioned, with their recognitions of hybrid identities and hybrid communities. Fuller focuses on the literary activities of women writers in the region, and she includes analyses of poetry performances and regional presses in a materialist study of the

influences of regional literary production and reception. I take up some strands of Fuller's discussion, especially the notion that writing by women challenges essentialist regionalisms in the Maritimes. I add to her assertions by interrogating the fundamental assumption about the regional subject accepted by many critics of the mid-to-late twentieth century: the notion of land ownership, in particular land ownership by individuals and preferably over a long period of time, as a requisite to regional belonging. Fuller does not take up ideas surrounding land possession in her study.

Another important predecessor to this dissertation, one I mentioned briefly above, is Kelly's study *Marketing Place: Cultural Politics, Regionalism, and Reading*. Like Fuller, Kelly also considers literary production, specifically in Newfoundland, and the ways in which small presses have influenced literary output there. The main assertion that I take up from Kelly is that regionalism must be "reclaimed" because subjectivity is contingent on how people understand the discourses that affect their relationships to the places they inhabit.

The need to reclaim specifically feminist regionalisms may be further illustrated by the interviews in Jeanette Lynes's work *Words Out There: Women Poets in Atlantic Canada* (1999), a regional anthology of poetry that includes interviews she conducted with the poets whose work appears in the collection. In nearly every interview, Lynes asks the poet whether she considers herself or her work to be "regional," and fascinatingly, every writer asked rejects the term. A possible reason for their refusal to describe themselves or their work as "regional" lies in the cursory definition that Liliane Welch and Lynn Davies, two of the poets interviewed in the collection, provide in the epigraphs to this chapter: in this definition, the designation "regional writing" "confines" that writing to that one single geographic place. The poets see regionalism as too limiting to interpretations of their work, which may explore and represent

many places rather than only one. Other writers, such as Lesley-Anne Bourne, respond to the question of whether or not they consider their work “regional” by first saying “no,” but then subsequently claiming an affinity with the particular landscape of the region and interest in depicting it. Often, their work engages with the local geography, culture, and social environments of the Atlantic provinces. While many of the poets claim that they are not “regional” writers, they nonetheless emphasize the importance of place to their writing, raising questions for readers and critics about the term “regional,” specifically whether the problem is not with the term but with a definition that inadequately describes their particular engagements with local places. The development of the term “regional” and its use has historically denied and continues to deny the nature of writers’ identities, identities that are diverse, multiple, and contradictory, and they ignore the interactions between those identities and particular geographical regions. Even though some women who write in and of the Canadian Maritime region may resist the label “regional writer,” their writing implicitly demands a revised configuration of regionalism that reflects these different identities.

Writing by women in the Maritime region is often concerned with a multiplicity of identities and allegiances that resist exclusionary versions of literary regionalism that tie affiliation to only one place. Because dominant definitions of regionalism are largely indifferent to the concerns at work in writing by women, the time has come for a reassessment of regionalism and for an inquiry into the definition of regionalism relevant to regional writing by women who do not write in the realist genres, and whose writing does not share the concerns of nationalism and national identity. Bishop’s poetry and prose, to borrow Creelman’s words, do not assert “the existence of a stable, knowable, and objective world” (*Setting* 20) as Creelman suggests Maritime realism does, nor does it “presume that there is a split between the

subject and the object” (*Setting* 20). Rather, in Bishop’s poetry, frequent shifts in proximity to objects or spaces produce a disorienting effect so that the speaker’s relationship to the world is constantly negotiated and redefined. The term “geography” in her book *Geography III* (1971) and the term “travel” in *Questions of Travel* (1952) refer not only to cartographically fixed maps of the world, but more importantly to the process of locating oneself in a relationship of shifting spaces and distances. Bishop, Tynes, and Joe all maintain a literary interest in the topography of the Maritime region, but they do not draw on the canonical realist conventions for portraying it.

The Eurocentric versions of regionalism that I outline above, and in more detail in the next chapter, have resulted in an exclusionary definition and perception of regional belonging. Critics’ choices of which writers to study have limited the representation of “Maritime” writers to male Euro-settlers. As Virginia Woolf observed in her influential treatise on women’s literary tradition *A Room of One’s Own*, “it is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex [...][, and] it is the masculine values that prevail” (88). If critics use only predominantly male-authored texts in literary studies, they then assign literary value only to those texts that fit the models and, by default, devalue writing by women. The time has come to reassess writing by women in the Maritimes, and to ask what definitions of “regional” are relevant to writers whose work does not often express concerns with nationalism, or with only one geographic place.

## **Conclusion**

Rather than supply an overarching theory or prescription of what regional literature is, this dissertation challenges the view that a singular definition of regionalism is possible. By identifying and interrogating the scholarship on Maritime regionalism that presents an allegedly

natural and singular connection to place, my dissertation argues that such ideas of belonging exclude many groups and attempt to maintain an outmoded settler mentality. Regionalism is a vital area of study in Canadian literature because, as I demonstrate throughout the dissertation, it is a concept inextricably linked to identity and belonging. Examining poetry by women who declare allegiances to different identities, and sometimes several place-based allegiances, enables this study to demonstrate that “regionalism” refers to many varying and sometimes conflicting narratives of belonging or not belonging to a place. If places are comprised of dynamic and complex social, topographical, and imaginative elements, then scholars should abandon the notion of a singular natural connection to place and contemplate simultaneously “porous and unique” (Calder 113) ways of relating to places. In doing so, we will find ways to describe the discursive space that allow for multiple and inclusive possibilities for belonging.

## Chapter Two

### “We like to think we belong somewhere”: “Authentic” Belonging

#### in Twentieth Century Maritime Literature

The aim of this chapter is to query the critical apparatus by which Euro-settler scholars have canonized narratives of Maritime regionalism in the twentieth century. Dominant concepts of Maritime regionalism are informed by a Euro-settler definition of belonging, a definition that prescribes long-term residency in a single place and a history of familial belonging on a given piece of land through generations of forefathers. Settler notions of belonging tend to treat land as a stable source of identification because they construe land as an unchanging entity that determines the lives of its residents. Critics who focus on settler groups claim that there are “authentic,” that is, true, natural, and therefore preferred, ways of writing place; these ways implicitly accept occupancy as the only authentic form of ownership and legitimate basis of possessive feelings over land. This type of “authenticity,” however, can never be used as an unassailable argument for regional distinctiveness because the very same desire to argue and believe that literature somehow directly reflects an inherent reality within the land is in turn co-opted by nationalist critics in their claims that the very same literature is a tributary to the nation and a national literature. Moreover, this notion of authenticity that critics use to canonize certain authors as distinctively regional implicitly tends to privilege white males.

Gwendolyn Davies’s explication of the image of a “Home Place” provides an example of ways that scholarship of Maritime literature in the late twentieth century valorizes a settler notion of belonging. The “home place” is a motif that she notes in the work of several writers including “Clive Doucet of Grand Etang in Cape Breton [who] calls [the “Home Place”] ‘the

village of my father and his father... a hometown of the mind and heart” (Davies, *Studies* 193). In arguing that an image of the paternal home defines “Maritime writers from the eighteenth century onward [who] began to define themselves in relation to the region” (*Studies* 11), Davies seeks to draw attention to ways that writers “[f]rom the 1920s onward” used “the ‘home place’ [...] as a symbol of cultural continuity and psychological identification in the face of social fragmentation, outmigration, and a continuing hardscrabble economy” (*Studies* 194). She defines the “home place” as the tried and true source of cultural identity that derives directly from the land. While critics like historian Ian McKay may argue that such images of “authentic” “origins” are in fact very rigid constructions (*Quest* 14), Davies insists that “there is nothing forced about a sense of tradition—nothing ‘invented’—when in MacLeod’s ‘The Closing Down of Summer,’ the Cape Breton miners travel worldwide in search of their profession but carry with them always sprigs of Island spruce” (*Studies* 198). Davies asserts that her analysis of the home place, like the home place itself, is true and real. If this were the case, there would be no need of further critical examination of the literature she reviews. Despite her claims of the self-evident reality in the image of the home place, there are a number of shortcomings to such an all-encompassing theory, limitations that this chapter attempts to outline through more detailed explication of Maritime literary “authenticity.” All of the writers Davies cites in her article are men who depict male characters who hold a common sense of home and identity in the lands of their forefathers, and all but one are European descendants. This is a strictly paternal and unilateral connection to place, one that implicitly excludes groups based on gender.

In order to best understand the ways that writing by women counters the dominant regional tropes of authentic belonging, it is important to establish how canonical Maritime

literary works and their critics have circulated the idea of an “authentic” claim to the land, a claim typically put forward by a central male character’s (or his forefather’s) long-term residency in the place claimed. To this end, this chapter surveys selected Maritime regional works of the middle decades of the twentieth century (1928-1985). My selection is determined by the amount of critical attention each text received from Maritime critics and scholars who took them up as part of a concerted effort to establish Maritime regional literature as a distinct regional literature about a place with unique features. First, it examines the treatment of regional poetry, prose, and criticism as it appears in issues of *The Fiddlehead* literary journal from its inception in 1945 through the late twentieth century. It then turns to the scholarship on the following prominent canonical Maritime works of prose fiction of the mid-twentieth century: Frank Parker Day’s *Rockbound* (1928), Ernest Buckler’s *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952), and Charles Bruce’s *The Channel Shore* (1954). The critical apparatus that developed around the texts I explore allows me to discuss the most important elements of “authentic” settler belonging: environmental determinism, the attempt to identify authenticity with patrilineal inheritance, and the conflation of regional writing and ethnography. I argue that these critics’ invention, through their criticism, of the authentic Maritime regionalism they claim exists can just as easily be co-opted by nationalist critics who claim that regional writing is a tributary to national literature. If that were the case, there would be little difference between regional writing and national writing; and the efforts of those writers who produce intensely local writing explicitly to resist national identity and to assert regional distinction would simply be working toward the very nationalism they say they wish to avoid. Therefore, criticism that defends the regional “authenticity” of Euro-settler writers over others can never stake the claim over regional difference that it intends to, and this type of regionalism will forever be

associated with nationalism and national identity.

The scholarship I examine in this chapter presents a common treatment of place and common notions of place-based identity's necessary component of long-term residency in the place claimed. That treatment and those notions enjoyed a very positive reception in the many reviews and discussions of certain Maritime literary works such as *Rockbound* at the time they were published and since, assuring for them a prominent place in the Maritime literary canon. The literary reviews, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Canada Reads contest, and criticism that I explore in relation to the texts suggest that readers and critics long to trust descriptions of place in literature as truthful, and thus believe that an author's allegedly authentic knowledge of a place lends his description of that place an authority. Critics who give these works a positive reception and keep them before the public eye portray Maritime literature as something that somehow naturally arises from the landscape for the writer who truly "belongs." These critics, like the writers they celebrate, construct the land as a stable source of identity that excludes all but a very small group belonging to a certain race, ethnicity, and sex, and their work disseminates the same point of view. In their work it appears that only Euro-settler men have access to the land, and this identity, thus to the writing of place in Maritime literature.

### ***The Fiddlehead Literary Journal: a "Cultural Metaphor" for Settler Experience***

I begin my exploration of the idea of authentic belonging as the editors of *The Fiddlehead* establish it in their editorial decisions, arguments, and columns, making a brief study of the literary journal from its inception in 1945 to the mid 1980s. Editorials and reviews from the journal during this period offer an opportunity to examine the critical attitudes toward regionalism that these editors and contributors disseminate. As a long-running literary journal

based in New Brunswick, *The Fiddlehead* offers an important body of literary criticism in this period in the region rivaled only by *The Dalhousie Review* and *The Antigonish Review*. Unlike these other publications, *The Fiddlehead* consists of critical and popular conversation on poetry and prose in the Maritime region from 1945 to the present day. *The Dalhousie Review*'s larger breadth of focus on topics other than literature and *The Antigonish Review*'s later entrance to the critical conversation about the literature of the region in 1972, nearly three decades after *The Fiddlehead*'s first issue, make *The Fiddlehead* the most suitable choice for my inquiry.

*The Fiddlehead* was first printed in Fredericton, New Brunswick by the Bliss Carman Society of Fredericton, a poetry group associated with the University of New Brunswick. The journal was produced for the purpose of sharing poems among a coterie. In the first editorial of the first issue, printed in 1945, Alfred G. Bailey explains that "The poems contained herein are not 'published,' but are brought together in this form as a record largely for private circulation among members of the Society and their friends" ("Fiddlehead" 1). *The Fiddlehead*'s only content in the first several issues was poetry by this select group of five women and eight men who included Bailey, Elizabeth Brewster, Robert Gibbs, and Fred Cogswell, all of whom lived in Fredericton and referred to themselves as "The Poetry Club." The journal continued in this mode for seven years, producing mimeographed journals of about ten poems each to be circulated among the group and their associates for a total circulation of thirty-one copies (Cogswell, "Editorial 1955" 1). The journal included no editorials other than the first one, and no book reviews, articles, or advertising of any kind.

Even though the journal allegedly began as an exclusive and semi-private publication, its founders and editors saw themselves as literary tastemakers who held significant cultural influence. Within its first few years in print, editors of the journal proclaimed *The Fiddlehead*'s

role as a national literary publication, notwithstanding Bailey's statement that it circulated to a very small audience. In 1947, the editors used an entire issue of the journal to reproduce a radio broadcast about *The Fiddlehead* that amounts to a mission statement. In the broadcast, they claim that "[f]rom the activities of such organizations as the Poetry Club of U.N.B., and from such writings as these, may there come some day a rebirth of poetic expression in this country. A nation that has produced great poets will be a great nation" (Rogers and Cogswell 8). The mission statement emphasizes the importance of the journal to national literary culture. When Cogswell took over as editor in the early 1950s he simultaneously founded a small press focusing on poetry that he named Fiddlehead Poetry Books, a label that clearly associated the press with the journal. The journal began to print book reviews, starting with a review of Cogswell's own Fiddlehead Poetry chapbook *The Stunted Strong*. This self-promoting move was paired with a standing call for submissions from outside the group, again affirming a specific taste-making mission for the journal.

As *The Fiddlehead* welcomed submissions from "poets anywhere in the English-speaking world" (Trueman 2), its circulation increased. At the same time, many other literary journals in Canada were closing down. A.W. Trueman notes in one issue's foreword that "There is not only room in Canada for a magazine of this type; there is need of it" (2). He saw *The Fiddlehead's* intention to publish poetry from North America and abroad as filling a void in the Canadian literary scene. During the 1950s many literary journals in Canada found it difficult to continue publishing for financial reasons. The editor of *The Tamarack Review* notes his own doubt as to whether that publication could continue into the future in a 1958 editorial: "...at the beginning of our third year we might as well confess that we think the most astonishing news we have to offer our readers is that we're still alive. [...] There are no literary quarterlies in the

English-speaking world that are practicable in the long run” (Dobbs 3). As many journals closed, *The Fiddlehead* remained in print. In 1955 Cogswell announced that “At this juncture, *Contemporary Verse*, Canada’s most respected poetry magazine, stopped publishing. We decided, quite modestly of course, to fill the vacuum caused by its demise” (“Reinstatement” 1). Cogswell suggests that *The Fiddlehead* will take over from *Contemporary Verse* as a national magazine of high order, one that plays a significant role in shaping the Canadian literary canon. *The Fiddlehead*’s efforts in this area did not go unnoticed; George Woodcock mentions in *The Literary History of Canada* that *The Fiddlehead* and *The Canadian Forum* “effectively sustained the publication of poetry” during the fifties in Canada (“Poetry” 290).

According to its founders, the journal therefore did not initially set out to be a regional publication *per se*; rather, it began as a national, even international organ with roots in New Brunswick and a love of poetry. Yet an exclusionary view of what regional Maritime writing is supposed to be comes to dominate the journal long before contributors and editors articulate it directly. Many members of the original group of founders—Robert Rogers, Fred Cogswell, Alfred Bailey, and Robert Gibbs—ended up taking the role of editor at some point during the first thirty years of the journal. While *The Fiddlehead*’s location in New Brunswick alone does not make it “regional,” it implicitly privileges New Brunswick area writers by publishing their work and reviewing their books more than the work of any other group in any other location. Its first book reviews in 1953 addressed works by the writers who appear in the pioneering issues of the journal, writers who reside in the Maritimes and whose works address regional themes. In these reviews, critics celebrate the connection between speakers and land that I attribute to a settler definition of belonging. A settler definition of “authentic” Maritime regional writing prescribes that regional writers of the Maritimes emphasize rural settings,

affection for one's home, and a sense of true and natural belonging to that home affirmed by references to long term residency, familial history, and expressions of loyalty to that history. In their relatively rare *Fiddlehead* editorials, which often appear at multi-year intervals, editors directly address the kind of regional writing that they support, greeting every other type of place-based writing with silence even as they choose to include it.

In a review of Earle Birney's 1953 anthology *Twentieth Century Canadian Poetry*, Desmond Pacey indirectly voices a belief that *The Fiddlehead* editors consistently expressed in editorials—indeed, Pacey would become editor of the journal within a few years—that outsiders to the Maritimes possess little knowledge of local literature or poets. Pacey's review complains that Birney's editorial choices exclude many Maritime poets such as Charles Bruce, Elizabeth Brewster, Fred Cogswell, and Robert Gibbs. He also takes pains to correct inaccurate details in authors' notes about Theodore Goodrich Roberts, George Whaley, and Kay Smith, details that he apparently knows because of his residency in the Maritimes and intimate knowledge of the circle of poets there (19).

While Ralph Gustafson is an outsider to the Maritimes, his 1955 review of Fred Cogswell's aforementioned chapbook *The Stunted Strong* offers an example of the central prescription of Maritime regionalism put forth by the journal from its first issue onward.

Gustafson contends that Cogswell's sonnets

are a fine contribution to the rich store of poetry which the Maritimes have given us. [...] Mr. Cogswell has written a sequence that gives a picture of a group of valley-folk and the character of the lives lived in the district of the St. John River in New Brunswick. [...] [T]he majority [of the poems] come quickly alive, with an ease of apt colloquialism, with an impact of drama, and through

the whole sequence one is constantly aware of the deep affection, the understanding and strong loyalty which the poet feels for the simple lives and the people of the St. John River valley, ‘whose beauty is their stubborn strength,’ and amongst whom the writer himself grew up. It is good to have poetry which springs simply and validly from such sources—the landscape that is not only downtown Toronto or midtown Montreal, small areas that are well but that are over-expressed in present Canadian poetry. (21)

As I mention above, *The Stunted Strong* is the first Fiddlehead Poetry Book, one written and published by Cogswell; the issue in which the review appears is one of the first to be edited by Cogswell, suggesting that he may have approved of Gustafson’s assessment of the poetry and the sentiments about place he articulates. Certainly, this venue and timing establishes Cogswell’s considerable power of influence as an arbiter of literary taste by putting forth his own work as a model for good regional writing. In the review, Gustafson offers an evaluation of the Maritime region as “not [...] Toronto or [...] Montreal” (21), opposing it to the political and population centres of Canada. Indeed, he believes that Cogswell’s poetry offers a soothing antidote to those overrated locales. He suggests that regional writing “springs simply and validly from [...] the landscape” (21), as if literature arises organically, and that regional literature reveals rather than invents. Further, Gustafson presents the landscape itself as playing a role in the writing process, allowing writing to “spring” up in the mind of the writer who may document it. According to Gustafson, Cogswell can record these elements of the region because he grew up in the place, lived there for a long period, and therefore possesses authentic knowledge of which he can then speak, Gustafson believes, as a cultural insider.

*The Fiddlehead* genders these criteria for regional Maritime writing by frequently emphasizing male writers' connections to Maritime places while neglecting those same connections where they exist for the women writers whose work appears or is reviewed in the journal's pages. An examination of more book reviews in *The Fiddlehead* illustrates this bias. In issue number 18 published in 1953—the first issue in which reviews appear—Desmond Pacey reviews Elizabeth Brewster's chapbook *East Coast*. *East Coast* is Brewster's first collection, the one that begins her influential and prolific career. Pacey's review treats Brewster as an inferior writer and omits all mention of her links to the Maritimes. He spends two thirds of the review summarizing her biographical details, describing her education, and listing her publications. Although he notes that Northrop Frye mentioned the chapbook in his well-known "Letters in Canada" series, and validates her as "a genuine poet and no mere polite versifier" (11) as if to recognize Brewster as a promising new writer, he undermines that promise by neglecting to discuss the poetry in any detail. Only one of the review's three brief paragraphs pays attention to the work in the chapbook, and the commentary is superficial at best. Pacey suggests that Brewster "has two poetic manners[;] [...] [t]he first [...] is the more immediately attractive, but the second perhaps gives greater scope for further development" (12). No other review in *The Fiddlehead* in the next decade includes biographical details or attempts at validation. Pacey's comment that Brewster's writing warrants "further development" is a patronizing one. She is the only writer to receive such a remark, suggesting that gender is a factor in his reception of her poetry. Further, Pacey ignores Brewster and her poetry's attention to land despite her decidedly place-based title *East Coast*.

*The Fiddlehead*'s review of Brewster's subsequent chapbook *Lillooet* (1952) similarly suggests that the book-length piece about a small New Brunswick town is poorly constructed,

and not necessarily accurately reflective of a specific place. The reviewer notes that “It is of no matter that [the poem] is never heightened by subtle or convulsing wit and is often marred with atrocious line-endings. [...] What is important to me is that Miss Brewster contrives to convince me that, sometime, I have been in Lillooet . . . or was it in Bathurst? . . . or in Sioux Lookout?” (Crawley 10-11). As Sioux Lookout is a community in Northern Ontario, the reviewer suggests that while Brewster may be attempting to write about a specific place, “the lumbering settlement of Lillooet in the province of New Brunswick” (Crawley 10), her writing could actually be descriptive of any place. These rhetorical questions are posed with contempt for the writer, and they reaffirm that literary description of the Maritime region must be recognized as the region, and not mistaken for another place.

By way of comparison, the other review included in the same issue as the review of Brewster’s *East Coast* does not query the author’s credentials, biography, or reception elsewhere; indeed it focuses, as reviews should, on the poetry—of Alfred Bailey’s *Border River*—which is “significant” because “[i]ts settings are our landscapes, and its subjects are often our people” and the poems “movingly blend thought and content” (Lucas 11). The review recognizes the representations of land as distinctly Maritime; there is no attempt to clarify Bailey’s origins or place of residence. Instead, the landscapes his poetry depicts are “our[s].”

Brewster’s work receives another review in the journal when it is included in a Fiddlehead Poetry Book entitled *Five New Brunswick Poets*; the five poets are Brewster, Cogswell, Robert Gibbs, Alden Nowlan, and Kay Smith. This review comes from a scholar outside the region who offers a view of regionalism that differs from the settler-defined notions of belonging so prevalent in the journal. Perhaps the editors wished to avoid the appearance of

a conflict of interest if *The Fiddlehead* found a local reviewer to sing the praises of the New-Brunswick-produced collection of New Brunswick poets; perhaps they felt that someone outside of the province would have to review the work if it were to be taken seriously by the journal's national and international readers. Editors sought Eli Mandel, a Canadian scholar of literary regionalism, to write the review.

Mandel is not sympathetic to the type of regionalism that the journal endorses, and his review represents an anomaly among *The Fiddlehead's* articles, which usually identify regionalism with settler experience and history. In his scholarship on Canadian prairie literature he rejects the notion of topocentric regionalism, or regionalism that focuses on the features of the landscape as marking the place as separate and distinct. Instead he argues that the land is “a sort of complex conceptual framework[,] [...] a mental construct, a region of the human mind” (*Another* 47). His view opposes that of editors of *The Fiddlehead*. Instead of suggesting that the land determines writing, he argues that writers may impose “their shapes on a world” (*Another* 74). In his review, Mandel wrestles with the term “regional” and offers what he believes to be a workable definition:

The word about these five poets, four of whom have been published before in separate volumes, is that they are ‘regional’ poets developing a distinctive, particularized experience of a peculiar environment. One temptation the reviewer then faces is perversely to stress at once the individuality of each poet. But since the five have been grouped together in one volume and are called New Brunswick poets, I find it impossible to resist the obvious invitation to generalize (probably unfairly) about their common vision. (65)

Mandel draws attention to the label “New Brunswick poet” as the primary criterion for inclusion in the volume, a criterion that in his view severely limits the significance of the poetry and the reach of its potential audience. He works from a view that sees “regional” as a limiting label, one that identifies a writer’s ability to describe incidental physical attributes of a place. By contrast, he believes that a regional writer is “regional” because he or she takes an interest in a place as only a backdrop or setting to their work. If “authentic” means a primary focus on the distinguishing physical features of a given place, Mandel implies that a writer need not have an “authentic” connection to a place to be called “regional,” a position that separates him from the editors of *The Fiddlehead* who believe that one is a regional writer by virtue of having grown up in the region. For Mandel, it seems that there is no such authenticity that stems from being physically rooted in any place. He concludes his review by noting that the collection is not a ground-shifting work of literature, but “within its limits, in its own quiet way it does say that the dreams which trouble the Maritimes are the same as those which disturb the long nights of Albertans and that nightmare is not *simply* a province named New Brunswick” (68).

According to Mandel’s definition, regionalism is not a description of a landscape but a way to access a writer’s “internal world” (68), which he or she may set in any locale. Confining the text to a specific place may limit it because poets in one place are not really that different from poets located elsewhere. By this logic, western Canada would produce poets with the same types of concerns about place as eastern Canada, despite the different history, sensibility, politics, culture, and physical landscape of the two places. According to Mandel’s pan-regionalism, regionalism is the same anywhere. Otherwise, he contends, writers all work from similar sets of internal motivations. He is a minority in the journal, and his definition was met

with silence from the editors, reviewers and contributors of *The Fiddlehead*. His notion that anyone writing in the province of New Brunswick could be called a New Brunswick poet, and his implication that such a title is meaningless at best, and confining at worst, is refreshing. Such a view is more inclusive because it has no residency requirement for “regional” writers.

The definition of regional belonging in *The Fiddlehead* is much more exclusive than Mandel’s vision. In the 1970s editors like Robert Gibbs, one of the founding members of “The Poetry Club” and *The Fiddlehead*, continued to foster the sense of exclusivity that the journal’s earliest editors had associated with it by asserting some writers’ organic belonging to land. In his bold 1971 editorial, Gibbs contends that poets attempt to “[make] their own place habitable by giving it imaginative articulation[,]” an effort that is “not a gift to appease the cravings of the gods of nationalism” (1). While Gibbs’s choice of poems to include in the issue could be interpreted as an attempt to represent the whole country of Canada—he chooses a poem from each province—he explicitly discourages that interpretation: “for each [province represented] there was at least one poem responding strongly to place [...] [T]hese poems [...] have not been singled out to foster nationalism” (1). The so-called “gods” may refer to those critics who actively seek out symbols, themes, or indications of an over-arching nationalism in Canadian literature. Instead of appealing to such critics, Gibbs focuses on specific literary location. The issue he is talking about features a selection of poetry from across the country; however, Gibbs takes the opportunity to reinforce his notion of authentic regional writing. While this issue is focused on regional writers and responses to place in Canada, it supports the idea of regionalism that *The Fiddlehead* editors have aligned with Maritime regionalism. He notes that “we Maritimers seem to be obsessed with locality. We like to think we belong somewhere” (1). In explicating the belonging Maritimers supposedly seek, Gibbs contends that “[t]he land

doesn't belong to us until we belong to it" (1), suggesting that a reciprocal belonging between land and writer is fostered through the writer's imagination, long-term residency, and intimate knowledge of a place. He believes that the land chooses its inhabitants, chooses those who may consider themselves to belong. In that sense, belonging figures as both esoteric and exclusive. If the land is what "chooses," as Gibbs suggests, then some writers will be chosen and others left out. If the land "chooses" its true residents, and persons do not choose, then there is a sense of naturalness to belonging, an authenticity that only exists for those chosen writers. Gibbs also implies that there is a length of time that must pass in order for this reciprocal belonging between land and inhabitant to assert itself. The claim attempts to mask the responsibility of the editors in staking a claim about what may be considered the region's "authentic" literature.

In the early 1980s, *The Fiddlehead* editors began to focus more and more exclusively on literature of the Maritime region in its editorial decisions, columns, and reviews. Editor Peter Thomas happily took on the role of cultural arbiter for the Maritimes. In his inaugural 1981 editorial he explains his belief that the time has come for "a more positive assertion of our Atlantic origin" (3). The way to achieve this goal, he believes, is to "[ensure] that each *Fiddlehead* goes out with a distinct flavor of place, of the culture of Atlantic Canada. Our doors are still open [to writers from outside the region], though a little less wide" (3). His next editorial in 1982 arrives at the pinnacle of the journal's increasingly exclusive regional expression. In it, Thomas offers his articulation of regional writing, delineating what aspects of the local literary tradition he values in the journal's legacy:

Locale, not the local: it's the imagination of our place we seek to reflect, not its mirror-image. The very continuity of *The Fiddlehead* and its centrality for writers in this part of Canada have not been unmixed blessings. Some people simply

distrust traditions, deny the validity of historical associations. We can't. They are here—in three hundred years and more of settler experience—and the nature and persistence of *The Fiddlehead* is itself a cultural metaphor. [...] [W]hile other Canadian literary magazines either disappeared or went through 'latent' phases, *The Fiddlehead* became a 'national' magazine by default, whereupon its own merits became obscured by the anguish of commentators who looked for something metropolitan, cosmopolitan, alert to the avant-garde. [...] *The Fiddlehead* continues to receive submissions from any source in the absolute conviction that loyalty to our own special literary culture also means that we must put our writers in the best possible company. (1)

Thomas marks many significant components of the journal's relationship with regional writing. He declares that the journal seeks to publish writers from the Atlantic provinces; writers from elsewhere are welcome, but mainly as "company" for this region's writers. Earlier, the journal accepted writers from "anywhere in the English-speaking world," a group that obviously includes English-speaking writers regardless of their geographic location. He notes first and foremost that the area's literary tradition is steeped in a settler history and culture. The other content and editorial decisions that I have been exploring suggest that what Thomas means in practice by "settlers" is actually a very small group, not of all settlers, but of male and European settlers specifically. He privileges the ownership of territory in phrases like "our place" and "our own special literary culture," and fails to identify the possessive collective "our" with any precise group of subjects. And despite his insistence that the journal's editors avoid the simple "mirror image" of a place, he nonetheless refers to the journal's ability to

“reflect” the region’s imagination and literary tradition, as if these were natural, inevitable, and available simply to be recorded.

In order to more directly acknowledge *The Fiddlehead*’s identity as “a Canadian literary magazine edited, published, [and] founded [...] in the Atlantic provinces” (Thomas, “Editorial” 1) Thomas initiated two regular columns: “Atlantic Soundings” and “Out of Place.” These columns were meant to emphasize the aspects of regional writing that the journal had privileged from the 1950s through the 1970s in its selection of literary works by Maritime writers whose regionalism featured pastoral settings, affection for one’s home, and a sense of authentic belonging that derived its authority from the writers’ Euro-settler origins. “Atlantic Soundings” consisted of community news relevant to writers and literature in the four Atlantic provinces. Acting as a newsletter or bulletin, the series was meant to keep readers updated about book publications by writers in each province, awards won by these writers, as well as opportunities for grants, workshops, or gatherings (Thomas, “Editorial” 1). Thomas describes the other column, significantly entitled “Out of Place,” as a “series of short, personal essays by writers of this region” (“Editorial” 1). For the first four years, the column’s header also included an epigraph from Wallace Stevens’s poem “Yellow Afternoon”: “Everything comes to him / From the middle of his field. The odour / Of earth penetrates more deeply than any word. There he touches his being. There as he is / He is.” The passage describes a solitary man in a pastoral landscape, where the world arrives to, and for, him. The masculine pronoun emphasizes a corresponding masculine hold on the place the epigraph describes. The gendering of the figure in the landscape suits the column, as men wrote all but one of these essays during Thomas’s tenure as editor. Echoing Gibbs’s editorial, Thomas also conveys a sense of reciprocal belonging in the premise of the column and its epigraph: of land and man in a

symbiotic relationship. Thomas explains that “the only requirement” for essays in the “Out of Place” series “is a strong sense of locale and a measure of self-reflection” (“Editorial” 1); ostensibly, no specific place need be the writer’s focus. Yet there is an explicit requirement for contributors to write about Maritime or Atlantic place since, as Thomas explains, the column was initiated in order to celebrate in a self-conscious way “the English-language literary culture of Atlantic Canada” (“Editorial” 1).

Indeed, Thomas initiated “Out of Place,” and the column continued when co-editor Don Conway joined Thomas at the helm of *The Fiddlehead* in 1983. Thomas then left the journal, and Conway continued to print the series of essays for a few more years. In those years of Thomas’s tenure as editor and co-editor, 1981-4, the “Out of Place” column’s subject matter consistently divides along gender lines: men write about Atlantic Canada, and women write about places elsewhere. The column implicitly privileges male belonging to the region by publishing essays about the region written by men, and essays about places outside the region written by women. For example, Douglas Lochhead writes about the Tantramar marshes near Sackville, New Brunswick (“Hearse” 42-6), and David Adams Richards writes about the Miramichi River in New Brunswick (“La Roche” 47-50). Réshard Gool writes about growing up in P.E.I (“Fetal” 29-35), and Alden Nowlan writes about moving from Hartland, New Brunswick to Nova Scotia as a child (“By Celestial” 17-21). Fascinatingly, not only do women writers not write about local places, but they also express views not in line with the journal’s dominant understanding of regionalism: Elizabeth Jones writes about South Africa in her piece “Kranskop,” Lilianne Welch writes about mountain climbing in Europe, and Karen Braun’s essay focuses on her love of her childhood home, Peace River, Alberta (“One Side” 82-6).

What are readers to make of these gender divisions? Why, in this series of essays about place by writers of the Maritime region, do men write about their origins in or connections to the region, and women write about places outside of it while they are residents of the Maritimes? In their choice to write about places other than the Maritimes in the works they submitted to *The Fiddlehead*, Jones, Welch, and Braun place themselves outside of the region, outside of the place they inhabit. In these memoir essays, they imagine themselves far from where they are. Readers of the journal may conclude, given Gibbs's statement above that "The land doesn't belong to us until we belong to it" (1), that Jones, Welch, and Braun do not yet belong to the local land. If readers agree with the characterization of authentic connection to place put forward by the editors, they may conclude that women are alienated from local land and need not write about it.

Welch offers an insight into the difference, writing in her essay that she only became acquainted with her New Brunswick home by leaving it for a vertical mountaintop in Europe, not by communing with local landscape. She writes,

Climbing with the reserved, simple mountain man quickened my love of New Brunswick, the distant Canadian province where my life hangs each morning from a thin word—a rope that ties me to a horizontal people and terrain. Sackville, the remote small town trapped between Tantramar's vast marshes and New Brunswick's imponderable woods, became for me on the mountain a manuscript which I was called to read, in some sense even to write. (25-6)

Isolation and juxtaposition help Welch inscribe her connection to New Brunswick, a locale that she describes as remote, "imponderable," and "distant." Placing her speaker outside of the region in this way, Welch seemingly marginalizes herself from the regional literary tradition of

the Maritimes as outlined by *The Fiddlehead* editors and reviewers over the last several decades. In fact, women do not fit the set of exclusive criteria for belonging “authentically” to local land as put forth by the journal’s writers and editors.

I have briefly outlined the implicit criteria for regional belonging in *The Fiddlehead* from the mid-to-late twentieth century. The Maritimes’ “three hundred years and more of settler experience” (“Editorial” 1) that Thomas describes in his 1982 editorial influences the prevailing notion, which several *Fiddlehead* editors reiterated, of a long-term relationship with local land as key to regional belonging. The land has so much power that it can choose who belongs to it (Gibbs 1), and given the proper “source” (Gustafson 21)—a person who belongs—writing may indeed “spring simply and validly” (Gustafson 21), organically emerging from the local earth through the conduit of the truly regional writer. Similar criteria appear in prose fiction and the scholarship that defined regionalism during the same period, reinforcing the notions of exclusive Maritime regional belonging that I have summarized here. I analyze that scholarship below.

### **Frank Parker Day’s *Rockbound* (1928): Regionalism as Authenticity**

In criticism and discussions of Frank Parker Day’s novel *Rockbound* (1928), there are scholars and general readers who believe that Day is a cultural insider able to speak about Nova Scotia because he originates from that province and resided there for a long period. Day’s advanced degrees, Rhodes scholarship, and position as a professor of literature are the components of his identity that these critics use to assert that his writing has credibility as an authoritative embodiment of the province and its people. Ideas of Day’s authentic belonging to the Maritimes are infused with his influence as a literary and cultural expert, which paradoxically align him with literary standards developed outside the region as they secure his

position as authority. Critics' explications of the text connect the novel with Day's research on Ironbound Island, suggesting that they believe that this work of regional literature faithfully represents an actual place. Indeed, folk researcher Nancy Watson argues in a 1982 article, "*Rockbound*, by Frank Parker Day: Novel and Ethnography," that Day resembles a folk collector, and that the novel is an ethnography, the product of scientific research. Implicitly also treating the novel as ethnography, Alan Bevan and Gwendolyn Davies both suggest that a regional text reflects and preserves a group of people and way of life. Treating a regional literary work as ethnography allows critics to take the same position on Maritime regional literature that I discuss in relation to the editors and contributors to *The Fiddlehead*: it affirms that truly regional texts portray something natural, not creative, and unconscious, not deliberate, and by extension that only people who fit exclusive criteria may achieve critical approval for their supposedly authentic texts.

*Rockbound* was originally published in 1928. In 1958, many years after it went out of print, Alan Bevan wrote an article in *The Dalhousie Review* celebrating the novel and claiming that the text should be made available for current readers. In 1973, Bevan's recuperation of the novel was complete when the University of Toronto Press picked up the book for its Literature of Canada: Poetry and Prose in Reprint Series, and Bevan supplied an introduction for the novel he helped to bring back to public attention. Interestingly, the aim of the series was to make "the documents of the country's heritage accessible" to a wide, national readership (Lochhead v). In the choice of the words "documents" and "heritage," editors of the series present their choices of texts as an archive of history rather than a collection of works of fiction or art. The subsequent 1989 edition features a critical introduction by Gwendolyn Davies; this edition was nominated and defended by Donna Morrissey for CBC's 2005 Canada Reads

contest. Winning the contest brought the text beyond its academic audience and to the attention of a wider public in yet another generation.

*Rockbound* focuses on protagonist David Jung, whom the reader meets when he is eighteen years of age. When David, “the disguised prince” (Day 3), learns that he owns one tenth of the land on Rockbound Island through inheritance, he travels by dory from an outpost on the mainland to claim it. After reaching an agreement with Uriah Jung, the “rich king” (1) of Rockbound, David becomes a sharesman, a member of Uriah’s fishing crew, and moves into the house where his mother died years earlier. He agrees to first prove himself and earn his keep before taking ownership of his land. David works for Uriah as a fisherman, and befriends young Gershom Born whose father runs the lighthouse on nearby Barren Island.

A complicated love triangle ensues. David and young Gershom both fall in love with Mary, Rockbound’s only school teacher. David is in mourning for his wife Tamar, who has died giving birth to their son Ralph, so he holds back showing his interest in Mary for the morally appropriate amount of time, lest the community react with disapproval. Meanwhile, Mary begins a relationship with Gershom. The villain, Uriah “the king,” devises a plan to separate Mary and Gershom so that his own son Casper can wed Mary. Casper and Mary’s nuptials take place while Gershom is tending the lighthouse; and when he returns to the mainland, Gershom takes his revenge by tricking Casper and Uriah to travel with him in a boat, where he leads them into a dangerous area of the water, and they all drown. Mary and David unite at the end of the narrative on Barren Island, along with David’s young son Ralph. The novel ends in a scene wherein Mary, David, and the child “turn toward the light” (Day 292) ahead of them. Although Mary, David, and Ralph are isolated on the island at the end, David has spent two years planting a garden, removing the destructive birds, and making the island

livable, changing the negative sense of the island's name of Barren Island to an "Edenic" one (Creelman, *Setting* 32). When David takes his place at the helm of the lighthouse in the land he has modified and claimed as a settler, the narrator refers to *him* now as a king, and Barren Island becomes his kingdom.

The novel is, as Janice Kulyk Keefer quite rightly points out, a "fairy-tale" (72) about a prince, a King, a fight for land, and a fight to win the princess. It also contains elements of a stereotypical regionalism that exaggerates the simplicity of illiterate characters dressed in oilskins, speaking in dialect, and fishing all day. The characters resemble "the folk" of the Maritimes as theorized by Ian McKay: they are separated from modern technologies as they live off the land and sea. Despite the novel's use of fairy and folk tale conventions, however, critics have treated it as an extension of the ethnographic record, readable through the conventions of literary realism. One way that scholars have argued for authenticity in the novel is through its apparently accurate portrayal of a particular place. Critics believe that Day's depiction of the island of *Rockbound* is based on the island of Ironbound on Nova Scotia's south shore. Bevan's 1973 introduction to the text contends that "the place [of *Rockbound*] is set clearly, exactly, and realistically. [...] There has never been any doubt that *Rockbound* is Ironbound, and that the outpost islands are the Tancook Islands, all located off the southern Nova Scotia coast. It is also true that the names of actual Ironbounders were soon attached to Day's fictitious Rockbounders" (Bevan, Introduction xv). In Andrew Seaman's 1976 survey of twentieth-century Atlantic fiction, he too affirms the novel's setting as more real than imagined. Seaman claims that the novel is "set on Ironbound island and among the Tancooks," and that it "sketches vividly the way of life in the little Nova Scotia fishing empires of the last days of sail" (35). Sustaining this view in the twenty-first century, David Creelman argues that

Day's time on Ironbound was part of his "attempt to anchor the text in local folkways" and to "preserve the atmosphere of cultural innocence" (*Setting* 29) that he found there, continuing these earlier critics' view that the novel is based on a tangible reality.

Day's near-contemporary Maritime writer Thomas Raddall also believed that *Rockbound* was a representation of Ironbound. In his memoir, he noted the story of Day and *Rockbound* as a cautionary tale for any writer wishing to borrow "real" material from "real lives" for their work:

In the mid-1920s a literary professor named Frank Parker Day had spent two or three summers on Tancook's small neighbour, Ironbound Island, whose people are all close blood relations of the Tancookers. In 1928 he published a pseudo-novel called *Rockbound*, portraying the Ironbounders as a backward folk, the result of generations of intermarriage, speaking English with a thick Old German accent, and lusty in their quarrels and amours. According to the [local] doctor, Day never returned to Ironbound. The Tancookers and Ironbounders would have hanged him if he did. (255-6)

Raddall's description of Day's portrayal of Ironbound and its inhabitants is closely aligned with his own portrayal of those people in the same passage. While Raddall seems to condemn Day for portraying the Islanders as "backward" and intermarried, he simultaneously characterizes the citizens of Ironbound as inbred and vengeful. His description draws a parallel between Day and the "folk" of Tancook and Ironbound. Raddall's scathing story about him perpetuates the myth that Day set out to portray a specific group of people.

Davies uses Raddall's observation to support her argument that *Rockbound* is an account in which the writer researches the details of the setting and local culture of Ironbound

to make them as historically accurate as possible. To the same end, she and Bevan both refer to a letter printed in a Lunenburg newspaper shortly after the novel's publication by the "Offended Citizens of Ironbound." According to this letter, people living on Ironbound Island took offence to Day's novel because they read the story as an attempt at a straightforward portrayal of themselves. These "Offended Citizens" complain that they feel "betrayed" that the man who befriended them would depict them in such a manner. They write:

In his ridiculous book he depicts us humble inhabitants of our little island, as ignorant, immoral and superstitious, which is very unjust, not alone to the county of Lunenburg, but to his native province as well. Our Island can boast of three school teachers, and there isn't a child who cannot read and write. We earn our livelihood by honest toil, from Father Neptune and Old Mother Earth. Why Mr. Day put such a ridiculous book on the market, belittling the inhabitants of his native province, and those who befriended him, is beyond the power of our conception. Anyone who reads his book can see that we are the chief actors in his notorious drama. (qtd. in Bevan, Introduction xvii)

By protesting the representation of Ironbound in such a way, the "Offended Citizens of Rockbound" put forward their belief that the novel is not a construction or creation, but a portrayal of an already existing reality. The letter treats Day as a failed ethnographer, one who succeeds only in misleading the public about Ironbound, of which they are fiercely proud. Apparently, Day did not report accurately enough that the islanders work with "honest toil from Father Neptune and Old Mother Earth," a phrase that ironically underlines the same kind of folk characterization of pure honest people working in harmony with their natural environment as the "Offended Citizens" apparently wish to avoid. The letter is wrought with the same

misguided assumptions about the novel that Raddall, Bevan, and Davies all make: that it is a study of natural history meant to preserve, not to invent.

McKay observes that Day participates in creating a world that envisions the essential, unified identity and classless society of the “folk” (*Quest* 32; 216); however, scholars must be careful not to translate this claim into the idea that Day is a folk collector. Davies, Bevan, and Watson, along with the “Offended Citizens of Rockbound” and Raddall, treat Day as an archivist who travels to small rural places to gather material which he then simply recorded for consumption by the urban masses. While these critics and readers believe and endorse the idea of Day’s regional novel as an authentic depiction of authentic people, Day’s declaration at the beginning of his text says otherwise. In his author’s note, he contends that “No reference is intended in this book to any actual character or definite district,” underlining the fact that his novel is an artful construction; he does not claim the “authentic” portrait that readers and critics attribute to him.

Attempts at reading a literary text for authenticity entwine the text and its reception in a complex system of what theorist Pierre Bourdieu calls symbolic power. Symbolic power refers to the power “of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world” (Bourdieu 170), that is exercised through “a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it” (170). Symbolic power is based on an unspoken agreement between parties that some have authority, and others are subject to that authority. In the case of *Rockbound* and its criticism, critics who publish and claim an authority grant Day—a writer with so-called authentic knowledge as well as advanced degrees and a Rhodes scholarship—the authority to name and define people and place. The more authentic critics claim he is, and the

more often they affirm that authenticity through their published discussions of his work, the more authoritative Day's position becomes.

Critics like Davies and Kulyk Keefer endorse Day's authority based on their estimations of his ability to conduct high-quality and trustworthy research. According to Davies's research of Day's fonds, Day composed much of the dialogue of *Rockbound* in Standard English before later editing it into dialect, or what she calls "heavily localized [...] speech patterns" ("Revisiting" 25). She notes that

Day's self-conscious effort to make a record of expressions, pronunciations, and names when he visited the islands in the summer of 1926 and his integration of that research into [some scenes of the novel] reveal the painstaking diligence with which he revised the manuscript to make it as dramatic and authentic as possible. (Afterword 313)

Evidently, Davies fully supports Day's use of dialect because she believes that it adds a "rich [...] vernacular of the islanders" (Davies, "Revisiting" 5) rather than a dialect that he invented himself. She uses her own authority as an educated expert to declare the authenticity of the dialect and by extension the accuracy of Day's representation of "the folk." Kulyk Keefer similarly approves of Day's "skillful use of dialect and descriptive prose" (72).

Day holds a special position as an educated insider as he is knowledgeable in local dialect and Standard English. Consider the contrast between the authoritative narrating voice and the voices of the characters. Readers of the 1973 and 1989 editions are guided by Bevan's introduction or Davies's afterword; these educated experts steer the reader toward seeing the text through the eyes of its knowledgeable and therefore trustworthy author. As Bourdieu points out, educational institutions, dictionaries, and grammar handbooks all enforce a certain

type of language, in this case Standard English, which is “legitimate” while all other dialects must be compared to this official language (45). The narrating voice in *Rockbound* is an educated one with knowledge of Chaucer and Shakespeare that uses proper grammar and a varied, extensive vocabulary. The third-person omniscient narrator even directly refers to Rockbound as “that primitive community” (Day 206), emphasizing not only that he is speaking from an outsider’s perspective but also that the island’s inhabitants are socially inferior. Meanwhile, characters speak in a strange dialect, offering phrases such as the one David offers to Uriah when he is looking for permission to marry his daughter: “I’se tired o’ bein’ a sharesman. I bin sharesman now fur six year, an’ I’se ketched more fish than air Joe, Martin, or Casper. I’se got to git on in de worl’ same as you an’ yer fader did afore ye” (Day 96). According to Davies and Bevan, Day’s use of dialect is the result of research and observation of the “Lunenburg Dutch” dialect found on Ironbound Island and throughout Nova Scotia’s south shore. Through the narrator’s authoritative lens and the apparatus of the critical introduction or afterword, readers are directly and indirectly encouraged to experience the text as virtual tourists going back in time to Canada’s origins and “heritage” (Lochhead, Preface v) to gaze upon these inhabitants of Rockbound who speak in an “other” language, a local dialect. McKay notes that Day’s use of dialect “provides an economical way of Othering the Folk primitive by establishing through language a sense of cultural strangeness and difference” (*Quest* 245). The authority in the text is thus given over to the Standard English narrator; he is the one who possesses the symbolic power, and he lends it to the reader for the duration of the narrative. The island in the novel is seen as “other” to the narrating voice, the voice which adheres to a central standard that exists outside of the island and relegates this version of the region to the margins of cultural power.

Through the recent endorsement by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, readers continue to encounter *Rockbound* as an authoritative representation of an “other” and more primitive place identified with the Maritimes. The novel became very popular in 2005 as a result of winning CBC’s “Canada Reads,” a contest where celebrity panelists defend their choice of a book in a series of broadcast debates. When Bevan suggested that “Perhaps some enterprising Canadian publishing house will give us a new edition [of *Rockbound*], thus making this admirable book available to a new generation of readers” (“Revisited” 347), surely he did not imagine that the text would become as widely read as it has. Whereas Bevan’s recuperation only increased readership among academics, winning this contest has brought the text beyond its academic audience to a much larger public readership. The novel’s publisher claims it has been enjoying sales in the tens of thousands of copies since the win, far more than the two hundred per year that it sold before Donna Morrissey defended the book on the radio.<sup>i</sup>

Creelman, Danielle Fuller, Laura Moss, and Susanne Marshall have all expressed concern over the CBC’s power to influence and determine widespread and popular interpretations of *Rockbound* for twenty-first century readers who first encounter the text as radio listeners. Fuller notes that readers regard the CBC as a trustworthy cultural authority (“Listening” 30) that can lend them insight into the text; Marshall points out that “[t]he CBC is quite literally what Louis Althusser has termed an ‘ideological state apparatus’” (83), presenting a state-endorsed ideology from which to read the text, an ideology subjects are already hailed by, which encourages them to read the text in ways that favour the narratives of the nation that the dominant groups in the state would sanction. Creelman notes that in choosing *Rockbound*, the CBC focused on the essentialist regionalisms and folk qualities of the text as a selling point, rather than any of the novel’s other notable features such as its

“emerging modernist sensibility” (“Two Undervalued” 68). Evidently, and as these critics point out in their discussions of *Rockbound* and Canada Reads, this national organization consciously or unconsciously selected panelists to defend the text who perpetuate the stereotype of the Maritime region as a rugged place where hard-working seafarers must fight against nature to survive.

The CBC’s endorsement presents *Rockbound* as part of a state-sponsored literary archive; like the census, map, and museum in Benedict Anderson’s discussion in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, the support from this government-funded national organization exhibits “the way in which the colonial state imagine[s] its dominion—the nature of the human beings it rule[s], the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry” (Anderson 164). Through the Canada Reads contest, the CBC is complicit in favouring a specific narrative of Canadian nationalism. The toil of Euro-settler fishermen labouring away on a set of rugged islands in this isolated world favours the settler definition of regional and national life that Bevan and Davies support in their critical assessments of the text. Moss describes her own uneasiness with the Canada Reads “game” which comes partly from the fact that the “winning titles reinforce certain popular notions of Canadianness” (7). In the case of *Rockbound*, that popular notion extends to the role of regions in Canada, which are perpetually demoted to the margins of the nation’s more powerful central authority and, like the inhabitants of *Rockbound*, cannot speak for themselves. The novel’s position as *winner* of the Canada Reads contest, which resuscitates it as an “essential Canadian novel” from the perspective of national public broadcasting, in a sense, renders the region powerless.

While Canada Reads seems to be a populist and democratic contest, its panelists disseminate the same ideas about the Maritimes already laid out by the twentieth-century critics of regionalism whose work I have discussed. For instance, by echoing the ideas of Bevan and Davies, Morrissey effectively conveys those readings and the idea of regionalism in them to a much larger public readership through the radio and internet archives. In her broadcast discussion with Canada Reads 2005 host Bill Richardson, Morrissey relates *Rockbound* to her father's past as a fisherman and to the love he had for the work that he did:

I really related to the realism in this novel and how it related to my father's past. And my father is a very beautiful man and he's always talking about the past with such love, and not nostalgia, just love, because he spent so much time alone up in the woods and on the sea, that when he talks about it, his eyes soften and there's such love in him for those days. And I remember some of those nights where we worked until four in the morning gutting squid, we had to do that as a child. And sometimes I'd say to him, Dad, you were froze to death half the time, you didn't have boots on your feet and you didn't have lunch, how could you want to go back to such a time? And he'd say, I'd go back there tomorrow, lovey. [...] I was a child of my father's house and it was a house of love. My father, ah, these were a different kind of men. These were the kind of men that built nations. I would just want to share with Canada these proud Atlantic Canadian men from our past. (Richardson)

Morrissey characterizes the novel as an archival project which preserves the "proud Atlantic Canadian men" who, through their selfless hard work, helped to build the nation of Canada. She portrays the supposedly unique and very localized regional workers as workers for the

larger nation; indeed, Morrissey credits these workers as founders of Canada, as settlers who have contributed to the identity of the nation. She makes a case for the novel's apparent accuracy through a comparison with her father, whom she treats as an extension of the novel's characters. In the radio interview, Richardson adds his own interpretation of the novel's ability to preserve a way of life in his description of a scene in which the men work through the night gutting herring. He comments that "You get such a visceral sense from that scene about the back-breaking community-driven labour of this place. [...] It really is a kind of window into a world that I guess is just not there any longer" (Richardson). Both Morrissey and Richardson contend that the novel is important for its ability to impart historical information about the fishing industry in the Maritimes. Treating the novel as a "window into a world" of the past, Morrissey and Richardson, like Bevan, Davies and Creelman, reiterate the case that *Rockbound* is an accurate representation of Nova Scotia's past, rather than a fictional fairy tale.

Contemporary readers have accepted this now-popular interpretation of the text offered most recently by the CBC programme, an interpretation that defines it as a historical document that lends readers an understanding of the region. Consider the reader whose post on *Goodreads* states, "After reading this book I understand the lifestyle on the opposite coast to mine better than before" (Bonny); another reader notes, "Since this book was set in the same part of Nova Scotia that my family is from, it felt like a look back into my family history. My grandfather and great-grandfather were fishermen on the South Shore; their lives were likely quite a bit like this" (Dawn). Another reader claims, "Rockbound by Frank Parker Day helped me to understand the culture of Eastern Canada. When speaking to recent residents of Newfoundland I discovered that the book, altho' written over 70 years ago is still true to form" (Yvonne). These readers have taken for granted the interpretation of the text offered by

Morrissey and Richardson as they accept the elements of natural history and ethnography that Bevan, Watson, and Davies have put forward in their critical commentary on *Rockbound*. Readers approach the text as informative about the Maritimes, a reading that serves to perpetuate longstanding stereotypes about the region and one that reiterates the notions of regionalism disseminated by *The Fiddlehead* editors as well as Day's foremost critics.

Responses to the text that claim it is "real," true to life, or authentic mark the text as depicting the region with authority; however, authority in the text is aligned with the text's narrator, a voice coming from outside the community the novel allegedly describes.

Paradoxically, then, claims of the text's authenticity place the authority to narrate the region in the hands of an outsider, an outsider aligned with the nation. Day's establishment as a regional authority and his ability to accurately represent the region is ironically tethered to arguments that assert the region's autonomous uniqueness as well as arguments that contend Day is a contributor to national identity. As the novel's appearance in the venues of *Literature of Canada: Poetry and Prose in Reprint* and the Canada Reads contest attest, its presentation as a "document" of the country's "heritage" perpetuates stereotypes of the Maritime region as fundamentally a settler place in ways that apparently convince critics and readers alike. These national venues describe the text as a portrait of an authentic nationalism, using the same kinds of evidence to support a reading of the text as a tributary to a strong national identity that some critics of literary regionalism use to name *Rockbound* as a novel of regional distinction.

### **Ernest Buckler: A "Native, But Trained, Ear"**

Critics portray Day as an ethnographer coming from the outside of Ironbound Island and conducting what other scholars and writers would characterize as accurate research informed by his native birth and formal training. These components of his identity give him more authority to represent the people of Ironbound than the inhabitants themselves have. Critics

attempt to establish Ernest Buckler as an educated native whose ability to write about a rural way of life comes from his identity as a farmer, someone who has lived the same lifestyle that he depicts in his fiction. Critics read Buckler's novel *The Mountain and the Valley* autobiographically according to a certain understanding of Buckler's identity as a second-generation farmer, and they emphasize the idea that Buckler and his protagonist David Canaan share an "authentic" claim to Nova Scotian farm land through their long-term residency. As in *Rockbound* and its attendant criticism, such claims in the criticism of Buckler's novel present the rural inhabitants of Nova Scotia as unable to speak for themselves; instead, they are able only to exist and be discovered by others able to speak for them. Such discovery can only be made by a trained native who purports to speak on behalf of the supposedly primitive people to whom critics grant the right to be "authentic." Buckler's critics locate this educated elite in the voice of the text's articulate narrator, a figure many critics see as a conflation of Buckler and his protagonist. Like the third-person omniscient narrator of Day's novel, Buckler's narrator holds a supposedly objective and knowledgeable point of view.

Ernest Buckler was born in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia in 1908 and later attended Dalhousie University and the University of Toronto for education in liberal arts, mathematics, and philosophy. Upon graduation, he worked in Toronto for five years for Manufacturer's Life Insurance Company, and then returned to the Annapolis Valley in 1936, apparently for health reasons. He then began to farm and to write. During his literary career, Buckler published essays and short fiction in North American magazines such as *Macleans*, *Saturday Night*, and *Esquire*. He wrote two novels, *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) and *The Cruellest Month* (1963), a memoir, *Ox Bells and Fireflies* (1968), and eventually published collections of his short stories and essays, *The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories*

(1975) and *Whirligig* (1977). Buckler also wrote the text for a book of photographs of Nova Scotia by Hans Weber, *Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea* (1973), which depicts rural homes and sea imagery. The book's title suggests an essential Nova Scotian identity that can be viewed by observing photographs, photographs treated as "windows" on a place and way of life, encouraging readers to approach the province from a tourist's perspective.

Buckler's first novel *The Mountain and the Valley* has attracted most of the critical attention that his work has received, and it is the novel for which Buckler is best known. Critics focusing on language in the text point to the juxtapositions of speech and silence. Bruce MacDonald posits that "Buckler defines his characters through their particular modes of perception and thought and distinguishes them into two major groups—the articulate and the inarticulate" (195). John Van Rys makes a similar claim in his employment of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia to trace David's voluntary isolation from the "polyphonic world of the valley," an isolation brought on by his desire for "transcendence through a meta-language divorced from the dialogue of life" (69). Here Van Rys uses "meta-language" and "dialogue of life" instead of "articulate" and "inarticulate" to describe characters' language use. Reading the two sets of terms together as an analogous pair suggests that "articulate" language, modified by the prefix "meta," is beyond the lives of the rural characters who are engaged in a "dialogue of life," a language concerned with mundane day-to-day tasks but lacking in philosophical reflection.

According to these readings, as the articulate observer of his community, David is separate from the people in the rural world; for example, David is preoccupied by a strong conviction that a "perfect word" (299) exists, whereas other characters have more practical day-to-day concerns. The novel centres on David's desire to articulate the rural, since, in David's

view, the rural people cannot articulate themselves. They are instead like objects embedded in the land, and like the land, they are silent and without speech. In one scene, several men come to visit David's father on a Sunday, and the narrator describes their thoughts as

[sprawling] drowsily, like a cat asleep. Later they'd all stroll to the barn to look at Joseph's stock. They'd slide their hands lazily over the cows' flanks or feel the oxen's coos. They'd turn their backs to urinate against a manger, watching the operation meditatively and speaking over their shoulders; then make a slow motion rump-withdrawal after the moment of finishing and, turning again, patiently manipulate their buttons. They'd take their leave so haltingly it was like a rope fraying apart. They would seem, beside himself, like people tied. (57)

In contrast to these "people tied" to the land who cannot see outside their own experience, the narrator and David share an identical vocabulary and point of view, and the narrator is third-person limited, so readers are not usually able to see beyond David's perspective. Like Day's *Rockbound, The Mountain and the Valley* is written in what Kulyk Keefer refers to as "a language of educated consciousness" (165) that seems to have an academic audience in mind, or at least readers who share the perspective of an educated outsider to rural life.

Marta Dvořák contends that "Buckler's intense preoccupation with language" (192) is reflected in David's attempt to observe and shape his world with words in his mind. Of course, it is also reflected in the novel's writing style. Scholars often criticize Buckler's "dense and poetic" (Pell 15), "philosophically burdened prose" (Kulyk Keefer 165) as well as his "overly 'poetic' passages" (Creelman 88). Laurie Ricou describes the novel's style as a trance: "Buckler's massed similes and metaphors move the mind in so many directions at once that the reader is left [...] almost entranced. [...] Images should make an idea or an abstraction more

precise and concrete, but paradoxically, Buckler's images are often of the most 'ephemeral' kind" (68). The most prominent example of Buckler's "excess[ive]" (Ricou 68) writing style is a sentence about Christmas in which he composes a sentence using fifteen adverbs to describe the arrival of Christmas Eve: "In that instant suddenly, ecstatically, burstingly, buoyantly, enclosingly, sharply, safely, stingingly, watchfully, batedly, mountingly, softly, ever so softly, it was Christmas Eve" (65). The narrator employs many unnecessary words in this sentence in a gesture that shows off his arsenal of vocabulary, an arsenal that the rural characters do not possess.

In contrast to David and the narrator's superfluous language, there is the inarticulate relationship to land that Buckler portrays in Entremont residents. Characters in tune with the land are supposedly more authentic, more real, and more integrated with the material world. David's parents Martha and Joseph often do not need any words, as their traditional roles are portrayed as conversations in themselves. For example, Martha's domestic tasks within her kitchen allow her to think "the slow thoughts that come and go silently when you are working alone, without speech" (*Mountain* 23). Martha's traditional day to day domestic life is also a silent dialogue: "when she was alone in her own house, her tasks were like a kind of conversation" (*Mountain* 24). Joseph's own thoughts are not "word shaped and clear, but he felt the earth he owned contained in the touch of his feet" (*Mountain* 115). When Martha and Joseph gather potatoes together, "[t]hey scarcely spoke [...] But their thoughts seemed to hum together in the cidery light, like a bee over clover. Speech broke, rather than forged, the quiet contact between them. The silences between speech spliced it together again" (*Mountain* 126).

These silently communicating rural folk are a group who are better off not speaking since their speech mars their connection with the land upon which they depend. Implicit in this vision

is that a cultural insider, an educated (yet authentic) superior is required to articulate their experience to the outside world because the folk cannot articulate it themselves. That educated superior is Ernest Buckler, who supports this notion in a brief essay reflecting on *The Mountain and the Valley* in which he identifies himself as a rural farmer, as if his origins and residency in that particular environment give him the authority and ability to write about it. He writes, “What I happen to be is a farmer who writes, not a writer who farms” (“My First Novel” 22), linking his occupations and the rural environment in which he works. He explains that his writing does have autobiographical elements; he knows and loves only one particular place very well, and it is the place in which he grew up and later resided as an adult. He explains that Entremont, the fictional village in *The Mountain and the Valley*, is based on the same community: “By the way, this novel—though it did try to show the texture of life in a village not altogether unlike the one I do know—and love—best, was not literally *autobiographical*. Except as all writing is—between the lines—autobiographical” (“My First Novel” 24).

Indeed, critics including Gregory Cook, Claude Bissell, and S. Morgan Powell all believe that Buckler is similar to his protagonist David. Both share long-term residency in the Annapolis Valley and a corresponding intimate knowledge about the place and its residents. As they celebrate the text’s authenticity, initial reviews of the text expressed an interest in the many links between David and Buckler. Bissell’s review argues that it is semi-autobiographical because David is based on Buckler’s own life experiences. Bissell notes the novel’s “fierce and unrelenting” realism (37) and the conflation between Buckler’s “hero” (37) and himself, both of whom “[try] to say things exactly” (37). Bissell also contends that Buckler uses “the countryside of Nova Scotia” as a pretext to “the historical and social background” of the province (37), and that Buckler uses his intimate knowledge of “the local scene” of “Nova

Scotia and the people who live there” (38) as “rich material for the creative artist” (37-8). S. Morgan-Powell’s review similarly contends that Buckler’s identity as a farmer is significant to his ability to produce an accurate “picture as a whole” within the novel: “The author, *Ernest Buckler*, is the son of a farmer, was brought up on a farm, and has run his own farm for the past twelve years” (32). This experience allows Buckler to tell “the story of a little farming community” (32) and affords him special knowledge that only living on the farm would provide. Morgan-Powell further explains that

Mr. Buckler [...] has been a farmer for twelve years and lived on a farm for much longer than that[.] [...] He presents the picture as a whole, with its virtues and its defects, the qualities that make farm life worth living and those that cannot be grasped on first contact in their real significance or their inevitability [...] There must be many farmers’ sons like him, just as there are many who, having grown up with the soil, feel that it has its advantages and its attractions, as well as features recurrent and inevitable which must be dealt with. (33)

Morgan-Powell seamlessly switches the description of Buckler to a description of David, as if the figures of Buckler and his protagonist were one and the same. In these statements, there is an implicit contrast between Buckler’s deeper knowledge and the cursory knowledge someone who has not lived in the place so long would have. That is, the longer one has lived on the land, Morgan-Powell presumes, the more legitimate his knowledge is; no writer could grasp the land’s full significance “on first contact” (33). Buckler’s possession of this point of view is proof to critics such as Morgan-Powell that the writer speaks from personal experience of the life he describes.

Morgan-Powell further notes that the members of David's family reflect the kind of attitude that certain historians attribute to Canada's first settlers, who helped to form the nation's identity: "To David's father and mother, and to his brother, farming was a vocation. It is the men who regard farming in this way who are the backbone of the farming industry upon which this Dominion has been founded and developed" (33). Again, Morgan-Powell seamlessly moves between descriptions of characters in the text and actual individuals, as if the novel were an accurate reflection of history. He celebrates the farmers who, he claims, developed an industry that in turn founded the nation, and he implicitly includes David (and by extension Buckler) within this group.

In a case study of Buckler's fiction, Gregory Cook echoes many of the comments made by these first reviewers about the similarities between David and Buckler. He also reiterates the two levels of linguistic "authenticity" that these critics portray as corresponding to the educated elite and the rural folk. Cook writes:

If the ultimate goal of Buckler is to portray the soundness of the natural country people, and that 'however inchoate their expression sometimes was, they were charged with depths and intricacies of thought and feeling as the more sophisticated,' then (like David) [...] he must perfect the 'supreme gift' of evocation of '[...] impressions' which are the product of the disciplined innate ear and mind. With a native, but trained, ear for dialogue and the secret senses of the human spirit, his immersion in mathematics and philosophy (so integral to his prose style) works hand-in-hand to seek the symmetry of exactness and equation of truly 'the way it was.' (16)

According to Cook, it is Buckler's responsibility to "perfect" his ability to interpret and convey.

Buckler's capacity to know the "natural country people" of his home town comes from being a native of the place, but his ability to depict them accurately comes from the combination of that intimate knowledge with his "disciplined [...] train[ing]," which includes his advanced degree in philosophy. Like Day's, Buckler's position as a "trained" professional in possession of a "disciplined innate ear and mind" (Cook 16) affords him an exclusive position with artistic and cultural authority over the rural Nova Scotian community and way of life that he portrays. However, in contrast to Day, who had to enter the community from the outside, Buckler's access to the community comes by means of his historical connection to the land as the descendant and heir of its European settlers. As such, Buckler can make claims about his own ability to describe a "real" way of life.

There is an increasing number of more recent critics like me who are skeptical about the kind of legitimacy that critics claim for Buckler and that Buckler claims for himself. Indeed, in his updated twenty-first-century edition of *Canadian Literature in English*, W.J. Keith believes there is perhaps something inauthentic about the kind of authenticity Buckler and his defenders tout. He writes,

As a sophisticated writer portraying the lives of simple, down-to-earth, uncomplicated people, [Buckler's] authorial stance is inevitably a delicate one. This is evident in the rustic mask he assumed when interviewed by urban journalists or literary critics. Thus he once described himself as 'a farmer who writes, not a writer who farms'—but the farmer in question held a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Toronto! He could describe with extraordinary immediacy a way of life that few have experienced, one that has

now passed away; but he could do so only by using artistic methods alien to the people about whom he wrote. (49)

Keith identifies an element of performance in Buckler's "rural mask" that he dons when it suits him. Yet even though he is skeptical about Buckler's authenticity, he still believes some elements of the authentic regional mythology that critics who praise Buckler have helped to weave: that the way of life Buckler describes in the novel corresponds to a reality, that there is indeed a way of life that has recently "passed" away that he is able to impart to readers, that he is an expert on this way of life, and that there is a group of local people to whom Buckler's more articulate "methods" of representation are "alien."

The conflation of David and Buckler that occurs in many critical assessments of the novel reinforces the critical apparatus of Maritime regional literature, established in *The Fiddlehead* and elsewhere, that suggests that good regional literature is based on a tangible reality that is only accessible to those with the authority and expertise to depict it. Consistent with the critical reception of *Rockbound*, critics of *The Mountain and the Valley* suggest that occupancy confers the main and most authentic form of ownership and legitimates a sense of possession over land. Conflating the author with his main character—a character who has never left the region—also serves to generate a sense of Buckler's own connection to a place with which he has a sustained relationship, and it glosses over the fact that Buckler left for a long period of time to live an entirely different life. It leaves readers instead with an image of David Canaan who figuratively melts into the landscape in his death at the end of the novel and is never able to leave. Indeed, in the novel's final scene, David is as firmly rooted in one particular place as a character could be, just as critics suggest Buckler is.

### ***The Channel Shore*: “A Simple and Natural Background”**

Charles Bruce was born in Port Shoreham, Nova Scotia in 1906. He was educated at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick and eventually moved to Toronto where he worked for the Canadian Press as bureau chief for many years. Despite his time living in Ontario during his writing years, he sets the majority of his poetry and prose in the Maritimes, and critics consider him a Maritime regional writer. Bruce wrote five collections of poetry, a novel, and a set of short stories. His poetry was well received during his lifetime; his collection *The Mulgrave Road* won the Governor General’s award for poetry in 1951, and A.J.M. Smith included some of his poems in his highly regarded anthology *The Book of Canadian Poetry: A Critical and Historical Anthology* (1943). Bruce’s novel *The Channel Shore* (1954) has received the most critical attention of all of his works, and it offers an opportunity to examine notions of environmental determinism in Maritime regional literature and criticism of the period.

Critics of *The Channel Shore* interpret the characters of his fictional Nova Scotian community as possessing an authentic connection to place. Similar to the regional philosophies I locate in the scholarship on Day and Buckler, critics argue that Bruce establishes the “authenticity” of this relationship by portraying characters whose identities are linked to their settler ancestors, ancestors who made their living in connection with the land or sea within the novel. Interestingly, however, unlike the critics of *Rockbound* who interpret Day as a knowledgeable and scholarly arbiter of place, or the critics of Buckler who cite the primacy of his long-term residency as key to his intimate knowledge of place, Bruce’s critics believe that Bruce achieves his regionalism without requiring a privileged position from which to write. Instead, Bruce develops his characters “against a simple and natural background” (Bennett

319), an objective background that is timeless and cyclical, a setting that he merely “reproduces” (Seaman 28) rather than invents as an element of the fiction itself. This reading assumes that the land and subsequent rural way of life in *The Channel Shore* is self evident; it requires no analysis or explication because it simply “is.” By arguing that Bruce has simply *recorded* an incidental spatial environment, Bruce’s critics in effect neglect the political and social implications of his depiction of a physical environment that seems to dictate the lives of its inhabitants.

*The Channel Shore* is a multi-generational saga set in a fictional farming community near the sea in Nova Scotia. It takes place in the years following the First World War through the end of World War II and is organized into three sections according to time: Summer to Fall 1919, Winter 1933-4, and Summer 1946. Between each section is a brief episode from the end of the Second World War. The reader moves with the narrative back and forth through chronological time and gains a sense of how events and people influence one another. The plot culminates in the romantic relationship between adoptive siblings Margaret and Alan Marshall. Alan is the biological child of unmarried couple Hazel McKee and Anse Gordon; Anse left the community after Hazel became pregnant, but he was unaware of the pregnancy. Hazel, pregnant and unwed, moved to Toronto to have her child. Meanwhile Grant Marshall has fallen in love with Anna Gordon, Anse’s sister and a Catholic. When Uncle James, Grant’s adoptive father and a strong Protestant, forbids their relationship on the basis of religious differences, Grant explains those reasons to Anna, prompting her to rebel by moving to the city of Halifax to find work as a housekeeper. Anna is run over by a streetcar in the city; and Grant—in his own act of rebellion and mourning—eventually leaves the community in search of Hazel, whom he marries and takes back to the Shore. When Alan is born, Hazel dies and Grant raises

him as his own son, a “fiction” that some characters see through, but that Grant maintains. Alan is raised with his sister Margaret, not related by blood, with whom he falls in love. Even though Alan eventually learns he is not Grant’s biological son, he keeps up the appearance for his father’s sake. It is only by breaking away from Grant’s fiction that he can marry his adoptive sister, the woman he loves.

As Lisa A. Chalykoff has aptly pointed out in her assessment of *The Channel Shore*, “[m]ale characters [in this novel] rely on knowledge of who their fathers are to tell them who they are” (“No Place”). Both Grant and Alan are raised away from their biological fathers in a novel that privileges the patrilineal line and the patriarchal cycle of sons taking over in the roles laid out by their fathers. Even minor character Adam, for example, moves back to The Shore from Boston to take over his father’s position as mailman (*Channel* 46). The valorized adoptive father figures of Uncle James and Grant Marshall, and of course the European settlers who first founded the colony, are important to the narrative because they have the power to inform future generations.

The relationship between James and Grant is especially useful in illustrating the patrilineal connection to a piece of land that unites male characters to first European settlers. When Grant offers the explanation to his beloved Anna that Uncle James refutes the possibility of their marriage, Grant “tried to find the words that would make understandable to Anna that brief conversation [with Uncle James]. [...] You couldn’t communicate the meaning of Uncle James without going back for generations” (*Channel* 107). It is important to the narrative that Uncle James’s personality and perspective has been informed by the settlers who are in turn informed by their own working of the land. The narrator explains how James’s family is set apart from the labourers of the pioneering Nova Scotian colony and how this isolation dooms

James to a life of separation from the rest of the community and an inability to be properly understood:

The Marshalls came down from English officials who had followed the first settlers to Nova Scotia when the province was still a colony. They had never worked under circumstances that demand continual adjustment to the never-quiet pulse of the moving sea, nor experienced the thing known to every fisherman or seaman, however unimaginative: the sense of flesh and bone shifting with that immeasurable movement, of kinship with all others whose lives are tensed or relaxed to meet it. (*Channel* 104)

Not only do the forefathers inform the present community's identity, then, but that structure is based on the formation of the land itself. These legendary settlers are honoured figures in the text who are continually celebrated along with the great-grandfathers who were responsible for the "differences [that] were matters of inheritance, something a man couldn't help and which couldn't be held against him" (*Channel* 34).

Critics argue that the sense of connection to land and to rural life in *The Channel Shore* is so straightforward that it requires no analysis or explication. In his overview of Atlantic Canadian fiction for example, Andrew Seaman argues that critical focus on the text should rest on the characters and not on place because the "[o]ne essential ingredient which defies second-hand exposition, is the constant presence throughout the novel of sun on skin, wind on face, sound of the channel muttering on gravel beaches, smells of the kitchens, all the minute paraphernalia of rural life which Bruce reproduces with unselfconscious skill" (28). Seaman believes that critics should bypass any analysis of the way that Bruce presents the setting, arguing that instead, "the insight into character and human values deserves analysis" (28). By

extension, there are no political or social implications to this straightforward documentation, and in Seaman's view, Bruce's depiction of place simply describes an organic and natural phenomenon.

Bruce's most prominent critic and biographer J. A. Wainwright contends that "Bruce creates a 'timeless country' [...] in that the barriers between past, present and future disappear so that planes of perception flow through *all* time and not simply in straightforward, chronological fashion" ("Days"). His notion that elements like the land and sea are "time made visible" ("Days") and that the past, present, and future convene upon topographical areas like the beach, where the community picnic has taken place annually for eighty years, depends on the paradox that the physical environment makes time invisible because Bruce portrays the landscape as a mere backdrop that never seems to change. In his literary biography of Bruce, Wainwright also contends that the place depicted in *The Channel Shore* shares strong parallels with Bruce's home community of Port Shoreham, Nova Scotia:

The lived experience of the transient in Port Shoreham, like that of the permanent residents, includes a future that is affected by the tangible qualities of the sea and landscape and an equally visible heritage of moral, practical, and imaginative worth. The result, as [Bruce] made clear in the best of his poetry and fiction, is a recognition of 'yesterday, today, and tomorrow [as] part of a continuing whole [that puts] things in balance.' Virtually all of Charles Bruce's creative prose and a good proportion of his poetry [...] draw[s] upon his experience and knowledge of life along the north shore of Chedabucto Bay.

(*Words* i-ii)

In Wainwright's own description of the place of Bruce's origins, he draws it as paradoxically

static and timeless, and yet simultaneously as transcendent into the past and future through the town's changing populations. Wainwright claims that the material features of the place, what he calls the "tangible qualities" of the land, communicate timelessness and transcendence, whereas one would expect the opposite to be true: that it conveys a sense of transience and impermanence as it changes over time. Wainwright believes that the inhabitants of Bruce's home village blend with the land itself, where their past and future can be traced in the physical material of the land, land that has tremendous power over them. He continues, "There are farms along the road, just as there were when Charles Bruce was a boy [...] [A] remarkable blending of time past and time present occurs [in this place]" (*Words* i). While places may have a history attached to them, the landscape's supposed effect on the inhabitants is to produce their sense of cycles repeating themselves naturally, like the repetition of waves in the nearby ocean.

Paradoxically, the idea of repeating cycles in a place creates a sense of a land without history, as the history of the past blends seamlessly and invisibly with the present and with the future. Events in time are repetitions of events that have already happened. Ultimately, however, such reasoning presents a fascinating inconsistency in the commentary of Bruce's critics; if on the one hand critics argue that a settler-based connection to land directly defines what it means to belong to the Maritimes, then they cannot on the other hand simultaneously argue that in Bruce's novel this relationship is revealed as timeless and cyclical: one needs history to have the settler-based connection to land that Bruce gives his characters, but one needs timelessness to assert that that connection (and the authority that comes with it) is "natural" and thus simply transcribed, not created, by Bruce.

Wainwright is not the only critic to read the land in Bruce's text as the land of Nova Scotia. An early review by Charles L. Bennett contends that the Nova Scotian land determines

the community within the novel, just as the land has determined the author's production of the novel through Bruce's ability to tap into it. Bennett argues that Nova Scotia holds a special power that it shares with only certain writers. As do the critics of other regional writers I have examined throughout the chapter, Bennett believes that Bruce's intimate connection with the land is vital to the success of the work as regional literature. Bennett puts forth the notion of a self-evident and straightforward relationship between author and land:

Nova Scotia has shown her power to impress upon her writers—whether native or adopted residents or expatriates—the resources of a self-contained area providing, in unity but with variety, a rich historical background, scenery which, if never spectacular, is seldom devoid of strength or charm, and clearly defined areas of population each with its distinctive marks of character, outlook, and personality. Far from all of the small province has been covered, but portions of the tapestry have been woven by Thomas Raddall, Hugh MacLennan, Ernest Buckler, Will R. Bird, and E.M. Richardson, each with a sympathetic approach to a familiar locality and its people. (319)

Bennett believes that the land is simply “covered” by literature that accurately represents it. By extension, the land is a stable unit of geography and topography that writers are capable of giving an accurate representation in words. An author's supposedly authentic connection to the land aids in his ability to, as Bennett puts it, “[portray] [...] characters that grow naturally from their soil without requiring or suggesting the use of a topographical survey” (Bennett 319). Bruce apparently develops these characters “against a simple and natural background” (Bennett 319) that serves as a stable “tapestry,” a term which Bruce himself inserts into his novel *The Channel Shore* to describe the small town of The Shore and its surrounding area.

Bruce's narrator continually refers to the Shore as a "pattern" and a "fabric," a "tapestry" that is made up of land, sea, and generations of fathers and sons. The fabric is tightly woven and the idea of the visible pattern within it posits predictability, recurring events, cycles, repetition, and symmetry. By using the word "tapestry," Bruce and his reviewer Bennett call to mind a stable single physical product into which all aspects of the setting are woven. Bruce's presentation of The Shore's landscape suggests that the land itself establishes a "pattern" and that the land unifies every person in the community through its material composition. When Grant first returns home from the war, for example, he realizes that the town "was all a pattern, growing clear again, and even the background threads of it were pleasant" (*Channel* 69). Grant remarks that even though "Most days there was nothing new [...] now and then there would be a change in the pattern of the usual" (*Channel* 46). Even bad "things had a way of [...] being accepted and absorbed into the pattern of the place. Even sin and remorse, heresy and regret and failure, were dark colours in the pattern" (*Channel* 50).

This idea of Maritime land as a stable and determining product continues in more recent interpretations of Bruce's poetry in *Arc Poetry Magazine's* online column "How Poems Work." In his analysis of "Back Road Farm," David Kosub uses a similar approach to describe a line of Bruce's poem as "a wonderfully evocative line that captures perfectly the feel of a Nova Scotia land and seascape." There is a sense in Kosub's comment that aspects of Nova Scotia and the sea remain true and stable, and that Bruce has a special ability to impart these because of his authentic connection to the land; the poem "Back Woods Farm" apparently "captured perfectly" a sense of place apart from its act of interpretation or social production.

By interpreting his depiction of land as natural, Bruce's critics subscribe to an impoverished notion of space that Henri Lefebvre articulates as an "illusion of opacity." This

notion affirms that space has a “natural simplicity” (Lefebvre 29) that does not need to be interpreted because, as Chalykoff notes in a discussion of Lefebvre and Canadian regionalism, it “speaks for itself” (“Two Solitudes” 161). In his important work *The Production of Space*, the influential spatial theorist contends that there is a “double illusion” of space, containing two elements; each “refers back to the other, and hides behind the other. These two aspects are the illusion of transparency on the one hand and the illusion of opacity, or ‘realistic’ illusion, on the other” (27). While the illusion of transparency offers a sense that space is simply an inconsequential backdrop for the more significant individual, “within [Lefebvre’s concept of the] illusion of opacity society is thought to play no role in processes of spatialization—such as regionalization—because spatial divisions are not believed to be produced at all, but are rather thought to be ‘found’ in nature” (Chalykoff, “Two Solitudes” 161). According to Lefebvre, neither illusion provides a complete enough explication of the ways that space is actually produced through social interaction.

Bruce’s twentieth-century critics neglect the idea that a place could be produced by the society that inhabits it and instead accept Bruce’s description of the place in the text as a unified “pattern,” a compelling enforcement of the ideology that a society’s structure, like the space it inhabits, is natural and inevitable. Within a supposedly predictable pattern in the world of the novel, there are corresponding “natural” gender roles and naturalized roles among groups who have different religious affiliations. The “pattern” also encourages an impression of belonging by default: according to this ideology, no one new can come into the place from elsewhere unless there is already a space for them in the pattern. In the novel, absent characters’ names remain tied to some tracts of land even though the land may have changed hands over time. For example, “Katen’s Rocks” are named for Felix Katen’s great grandfather

(*Channel* 34); the Marshalls bought land from the Scotts “who had gone away” (*Channel* 57); the “[a]reas of almost unbroken woods, unmarked except for the grey scar of a corner-blaze on an ancient beech [were] still known by the names of men who had planted life and left a crop of winter firewood. Lowries...Kilfyles...McNaughtons...” (*Channel* 13). The structure of the narrative as a multi-generational saga centring on Alan, the illegitimate son of Hazel and Anse brought up by Grant, presents an implicit argument that in order to understand Alan, readers have to first understand the foundation of earlier generations in his own family and the structure of the settler community that came before him. That apparent need to understand a place in terms of its past generations aids in imparting a sense that place is determined by generations of forefathers, and that land in turn determines the structure of people’s lives. After all, the people who first settled the area lived in “continual adjustment” (*Channel* 104) to the land and sea of the area. The supposed reciprocity between land and people suggests that aspects of the social world of the novel seem to originate from the lay of the land. The so-called “pattern” of *The Shore*, a description that the majority of critics accept as self evident, makes invisible other possible narratives of place and space in the Maritime region’s literature beyond a unilateral connection to European settlers and the ways of life that stem from the connection to a family homestead.

## **Conclusion**

The critical apparatus that I identify in this chapter continually validates and disseminates a specific notion of “authenticity” in regional writing as deriving from a Euro-settler experience. Further, the critics I describe all establish that the writing they discuss offers an “authentic” portrait of Maritime place. In doing so, critics of “authentic” writers may focus on the patrilineal line connected to a piece of land and may assert an ownership link between

people and land. Those connections are taken to represent elements intrinsic in the land itself. In order to access an allegedly true-to-life portrait of a place, critics turn to the notion of the trained expert, the academic who can, by virtue of his expertise, speak for the people of a region and assert himself as the arbiter of the “authentic.” This expert's training may manifest through education, long-term residency, or what critics deem an extraordinary combination of both. He and the critics who praise and disseminate his work see the people he allegedly “represents” as not being able to represent themselves. Instead, these “folk” supposedly live in organic harmony with the land, and for that reason, they would lack the ability to articulate their own experience. This model of “authenticity” puts the power to recognize and describe the supposedly “authentic” in the hands of very few. It creates a sense that there is one true approach to the region in literature. In the next chapter, I turn to an examination of poetry and prose by contemporary mid twentieth-century writer and traveler Elizabeth Bishop to consider how her writing on Nova Scotia from a distance departs from the concepts of regionalism that I have just explored here.

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<sup>i</sup> “UTP had been selling around 200 copies of the book per year, until Donna Morrissey selected [*Rockbound*] for the Canada Reads debates. Since then, UTP has sold over 35,000 copies and it has been reprinted three times! The University of Toronto Press would like to thank Donna Morrissey for her superb defense of the book and all of the people at the CBC for their support and encouragement” (“*Rockbound*”).

## Chapter Three

### Elizabeth Bishop's Simultaneous Regional and Global Perspectives

It is funny to come to Brazil to experience total recall of Nova Scotia—  
geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even. (Bishop, *One Art*  
249)

In this chapter, I take up a modernist, worldly figure, Elizabeth Bishop. In addition to her international *oeuvre* and residencies in Brazil, New England, and Key West, Bishop has family ties in Great Village, Nova Scotia, and a long history of travel to and from that place. Recognizing that she is associated with many distinct places very distant from each other, this chapter considers Bishop as a regional Maritime Canadian figure. Reading her work as “regional” challenges a long-standing definition of regional literature—and one strongly promoted by mid-twentieth-century scholars in the Maritimes, as I contend in Chapter Two—as writing that describes characteristic features of a region that stake claims of belonging and possession. Rather than cling to a single regional identity, Bishop and her speakers identify with many communities simultaneously. Her speakers embrace multiple divergent geographic affiliations with the Maritimes and with communities in other nations such as Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. These multiple geographic identities present an opportunity to critique mid-twentieth-century definitions of Canadian literary regionalism that define regional identity mainly either in contrast to an allegedly singular, unified national identity, or as an expression of regional residents’ supposedly authentic connection to local land. Bishop’s *oeuvre* provides a way to rethink Maritime Canadian regionalism through her use of modernist aesthetics, in particular her creation of a constantly-shifting individual, subjective perspective. The perspectives that

Bishop unfolds through her poetry and prose neither reject the region as parochial, nor accept that the region has a fixed opposition to the nation, but rather raise questions about the relationship between the speaker's specific locality and the rest of the world. Rather than affirm the absolute uniqueness or superiority of the region, Bishop's aesthetic asserts the distinctness of the region through the speaker's unique, highly individual, subjective view while at the same time locating the region within a larger global context.

Bishop's work provides an important alternative to the Maritime literary regionalisms that I identify in the previous chapter and that critics even quite recently continue to identify as the "authentic" voice of the region. By "authentic" I refer to the assumptions of critics like David Jordan whose monograph *New World Regionalism* (1994) privileges a settler culture in its definition of belonging to a place by highlighting isolation and opposition as hallmarks of regionalism. He argues that a region begins "with an author's privileged access to a community that has evolved through generations of interaction with a local environment, and whose identity is defined in opposition to a larger world beyond regional borders" (8-9). As I argue in Chapter Two, this established model of regionalism has privileged male authors and patriarchal perspectives, to say nothing of the settler discourse of authenticity that implicitly and explicitly asserts ownership of the land on behalf of Europeans and their descendants in the Maritimes. Such writing limits the possibilities of literary depictions of place by presuming that there is only one true way to approach this type of writing.

I argue that Bishop's work disputes such restrictive notions of authenticity and persistently defines the region in relative terms as one unique place among many. Bishop identified herself as originating from Great Village, Nova Scotia in her 1934 college yearbook, which she edited herself, while all her fellow graduates listed themselves as originating from

American states. Yet at different times in her life Bishop places herself on both sides of the apparent opposition Jordan sets up for regionalism: as an “insider” to many places, including the Maritimes. In many of her works, moreover, she neglects Maritime affiliations altogether by constructing other place-based identities or finding other ways of defining identity that do not rely on place. As Brian Bartlett notes, Robert Lowell’s description of Bishop in one of his letters to her as “Half New-Englander, half fugitive/ Nova Scotian, wholly Atlantic sea-board,” is reminiscent of a description she gives of herself: “New-Englander-herring-choker-bluenoser” (qtd. in Bartlett “Herring Choker”), a hybrid of New Englander and Nova Scotian. In pieces like her prose memoir “Memories of Uncle Neddy” Bishop presents her narrator as both an insider and outsider to Nova Scotia as well as to Rio de Janeiro.

Through analysis and exploration of spatial and geographic perspectives as well as surrealist techniques in Bishop’s poems “The Monument,” “12 O’Clock News,” “In the Waiting Room,” and “Poem,” and in her prose memoirs “In the Village” and “Memories of Uncle Neddy,” I contend that Bishop’s “regionalism” makes its defining feature not a particular place but the speaker’s perspective on place from an ever-changing position between a local community and the globe. By “local” I refer to a particular place, such as Great Village, Nova Scotia, in which Bishop or her speakers have some interest, or to which they have a connection. By “global” I mean a world that is made up of a number of distinct places that are far from one another. “Region” occupies the shifting position between the local and the global. Bishop does not put forward a prescriptive relationship between the two poles because her speakers’ and narrators’ perspectives are ever-changing and therefore cannot be fixed in any way. Bishop situates the region between these two poles, emphasizing transition, and a continually-altering experiencing subject, in her representations of the Maritimes. When considered in context of

the motif of travel in her work, Bishop's depictions of the Maritime region challenges the longstanding model of regions in Canada as limited to aspects of a single geographic place, or as a marginal place tied to a national centre. Reconsidering regionalism through Bishop's *oeuvre* opens a door for postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist readings of the region that invite readers to see region and regional identity as products of relations between people and places across national borders. Binary definitions of region as the nation's other make this view of the region difficult, if not impossible. In short, Bishop is working against a dominant definition of regionalism.

In the sections that follow, I examine Bishop's nuanced Maritime regional perspectives. Because Bishop is most often categorized as an American poet, and because her connections to Canada and the Maritimes are important components of my inclusion of Bishop in this study, I begin with a section that establishes Bishop as a significant Maritime Canadian figure by reviewing the scholarship linking her work with the Maritimes from the beginning of her career to the present. I next explain how Bishop inscribes her connection to the Maritimes from a distance through an analysis of her prose memoir "Memories of Uncle Neddy" and descriptions of her personal and familial connections to Great Village. Bishop's regionalism is not only established through poems and prose about Nova Scotia but also through her use of visual aesthetics that play with perspective. To demonstrate these aesthetics, I analyze Bishop's techniques of miniaturization and surrealist juxtaposition. While some critics have claimed that Bishop's Nova Scotian-set works exemplify a derisive, reductive, and colonizing "drive to miniaturize" (Axelrod) as a means of putting her subject down, I argue that in her best-known Nova Scotian pieces "Poem" and "In the Village," as well as "The Monument," "In the Waiting Room," and other works, the miniaturizations of Nova Scotia are instead consistent with

Bishop's overall poetics, which refuse to reconcile two simultaneous but differently-situated perspectives on her subjects, one near and one far away. The combination of two views does not reduce Nova Scotia's importance; rather, it complicates Bishop's depiction of place and argues the need to form theories of regionalism in relation to Bishop's work.

### **Categorizing Elizabeth Bishop as a Maritime Canadian Writer: A Literature Review**

In their introduction to *Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art* (1983), a collection of essays, interviews, and reviews they put together shortly after her death, Lloyd Schwartz and Sybil Estess note that Bishop "came to be regarded as one of the major voices of [the twentieth] century" (xvii). During her fifty-year writing career, she published four collections of poetry and a number of individual essays and short stories. While it is not a prolific oeuvre, her body of poetry earned the prestigious Pulitzer Prize (1956), two Guggenheim fellowships, and an appointment as Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress, a position now called Poet Laureate of the United States (1949-50). She also won the Houghton Mifflin Award (1945), the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award (1951), the Shelley Memorial Award (1952), the Partisan Review Fellowship (1956), the Academy of American Poets Award (1964), the National Book Award (1970), and the Order of Rio Bronco (1971) in Brazil. The years following her death saw the publication of many previously unpublished poetry and prose pieces, as well as three substantial volumes of letters. While her writing was recognized by awards and fellowships, the scholarship on Bishop's work has grown most substantially since her death. Only one full-length study by Anne Stevenson and a handful of brief articles and reviews make up the scholarship on Bishop contemporary with her life. In 1988, Thomas Travisano published the "first comprehensive study of her career" (Travisano 3), *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development*, a monograph that sought to characterize larger patterns in her complete *oeuvre* and that would have been impossible to complete during her lifetime.

Since then, full-length critical studies or articles have appeared on gender, memory, the body, place, psychoanalysis, description, loss, Christian faith, postcolonialism, ecocriticism, feminism, and many other topics in Bishop's work.

If acknowledgement of influence and inclusion in anthologies constitutes a proof of Bishop's literary achievements, there is much evidence to support the claim that Bishop plays a significant role in Maritime Canadian literary history. Numerous Maritime writers have directly acknowledged Bishop's influence on their work in odes, elegies, epigraphs, essays, research, and interviews. Creative tributes to Bishop by Maritime writers include the poem "On Listening to Elizabeth Bishop Read Her 'Crusoe in England'" by Sue Goyette in her collection *Undone* (2004), the poem "Geography: On First Discovering Elizabeth Bishop in a Used Bookstore in Manhattan" by Harry Thurston (2009), "on listening to a first-year student read Bishop's 'One Art'" (2008) and the haiku series "In Elizabeth Bishop's Village" (2011) by Brian Bartlett, Donna Smyth's play *Running to Paradise: A Play About Elizabeth Bishop* (1999), and Anne Simpson's essay "World at Play," in *The Marram Grass: Poetry and Otherness* (2009), to name a few examples. In addition, over half of the poets whom Anne Compton interviews in her book *Meetings with Maritime Poets: Interviews* (2006) mention Elizabeth Bishop as an influence on their work.

Bishop's poetry has appeared in two twentieth-century Atlantic Canadian anthologies: *Coastlines: The Poetry of Atlantic Canada* (2002) and *Poetic Voices of the Maritimes: a Selection of Contemporary Poetry* (1996). In the introduction to her anthology and book of interviews *Words Out There: Women Poets in Atlantic Canada* (1999), Jeanette Lynes begins her introduction with a reference to Bishop as an Atlantic Canadian poet whose work transcends geographical boundaries: "Like Elizabeth Bishop's traveler, these poets remain

vigilant, alert, on their journeys into various landscapes. These landscapes are not determined by regional boundaries; nor are they defined exclusively by geography. Ancestral and historical dimensions of place often play an equally important role [for the poetry of Atlantic women writers]” (9). Lynes thus affirms a direct connection between Atlantic Canadian writers and Bishop in this statement as she introduces the first anthology of contemporary poetry written by women in the region. That she felt the need to include Bishop at the very beginning of such an endeavour suggests that she sees Bishop as a significant figure for the literatures and writers of the region. Despite these acknowledged connections between Bishop’s life, work, and the Maritime region, however, there has so far been no sustained study of Bishop’s work in relation to Maritime literature. Moreover, critics have not yet considered Bishop as a “regional” writer, a writer whose work has implications for the theory of regionalism in the Maritimes.

Scholarly interest in the role of Nova Scotia in Bishop’s work began early in her career when she had published only a single volume of poetry and a couple of short stories. A 1955 article “Nomination for a Laureateship” published in the Nova Scotian journal *Dalhousie Review* by Thomas Chandler Haliburton scholar Victor O. Chittick unofficially “nominated” Bishop for a position as Poet Laureate of the province. He points out that although “Nova Scotia is of little more than sporadic concern in Miss Bishop’s verse. [...] It is the almost exclusive concern of her prose” (153). Her posthumously published *Collected Prose* (1984) and *Prose* (2011) contain “In the Village,” “Memories of Uncle Neddy,” “Gwendolyn,” “The Baptism,” “Primer Class,” and “The Country Mouse,” all of which are set in and around her grandmother’s house in Great Village. Many more poems set in Nova Scotia may be added to Chittick’s list, including “Sestina,” “First Death in Nova Scotia,” “Poem,” “Filling Station,” “The Moose,” “Manners,” and “Large Bad Picture” to name only a few. While Chittick made

the case for Bishop as poet laureate on the grounds of her fiction, her later poetry could be used to make the same case.

Chittick contends that his admiration of Bishop's work stems from her rendering of a place he knows and loves. He notes, "I know of nothing else written that conveys with such an impact of nostalgia the essential Nova Scotianness of Nova Scotia—or at least those aspects of it manifest along the inner reaches of the Bay of Fundy during the years of my boyhood there" (153). Chittick uses the vocabulary and sentiment of essentialist Maritime regionalisms to establish Bishop's connection to a place that he claims she can conjure in fiction very clearly, bringing him imaginatively back in time to his childhood. This description of her connection to Nova Scotia is characteristic of the very type of regionalism that Bishop's work counters through her use of shifting perspectives. While Chittick's assessment is problematic because it risks defining the region too narrowly, his emphasis on Bishop and Nova Scotia as a place is significant because the vast majority of her critics at the time—before the publication of her second collection—most often focused on her use of modernist aesthetics or the similarities between her work and that of Marianne Moore (Bogan; Jarrell; Lowell; Mizener) rather than her interest in place.

Scholarly interest in Bishop's Nova Scotia connections remained dormant until after Bishop's death, when critics Peter Sanger, Sandra Barry, Jonathan Ellis, and David Staines drew attention to Nova Scotia's role in her life and work. Sanger's article "Elizabeth Bishop and Nova Scotia," a review of the posthumous publications of *The Complete Poems 1927-1979* and *Collected Prose* in *The Antigonish Review*, draws attention to Bishop's biographical and literary connections to the region. Barry also published two full-length books on Bishop's historical connections to Nova Scotia. The first, *Elizabeth Bishop: An Archival Guide to Her*

*Life in Nova Scotia* (1996), surveys the photographs, medical records, and other maternal family papers currently housed at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. The second, a biography entitled *Elizabeth Bishop: Nova Scotia's "Home-Made" Poet* (2011), presents a comprehensive compilation of Bishop's historical associations to Nova Scotia and includes archival photographs and other ephemera as illustrations. Barry argues that "in spite of [her] sophisticated and far-reaching perspective, Elizabeth's artistic sensibilities and achievements were first and foremost a result of what late in life she called a home-made aesthetic. Her life and art were initially and enduringly shaped by the environment of her childhood home, Great Village, Nova Scotia, Canada" (8). Barry also notes that Bishop's Maritime travels—her excursions to Cape Breton and Sable Island, for example—were primarily motivated by her mother's and great grandfather's personal histories (*Home-Made* 74, 77-8) and that Bishop depicts Nova Scotia in ways that affirm her affiliation with and sense of a relation to her extended maternal family. Barry contends that Great Village was the stable home of Bishop's childhood, a home she associated with her mother, and a residence that fostered the sense of home that Bishop carried with her throughout her life. Ellis agrees that "Bishop's sense of home was conditioned and informed by her experiences as a child in Nova Scotia" (83). Ellis observes that "She once described herself as '3/4ths Canadian, and one 4<sup>th</sup> New Englander,' yet she still tends to be seen as an American rather than a Canadian author even by some Canadian critics. While Bishop was a citizen of the United States, her imagination always pointed north towards Nova Scotia" (83-4). In a literary obituary published in *Canadian Poetry* shortly after Bishop's death, Staines, who briefly taught at Harvard during Bishop's tenure as an instructor there, also argued that one of Bishop's "homes" was her Nova Scotian one: "Located near the head of the Bay of Fundy, Great Village offered Elizabeth Bishop a first world of family

affection, simple dignity, and life close to the soil and the sea.” Bishop had many homes, not only one. Staines believes Great Village offers her a “first world,” that is, one world among the many others she would come to inhabit.

In citing these examples of critics who claim that her experience of Nova Scotia was formative to Bishop’s life as well as her literary work, I am wary of “claiming” Bishop strictly as a Nova Scotian writer or using any assertion about the land or sea to establish an authentic belonging. It is necessary to explain Bishop’s history in Nova Scotia in order to justify her inclusion in this study and at the same time use that relationship to challenge the deep-seated notion of authentic and historical settler belonging in Maritime literary regionalism.

Rather than make a case for Bishop’s “essential Nova Scotianness” (Chittick 153), scholarship by Peter Sanger, Carole Kiler Doreski and Brian Robinson point to the complexity of her allegiances as a writer highly attuned to place in all of her work whether it is set in Nova Scotia or not. Sanger, Doreski and Robinson treat Bishop provisionally as a Maritime writer, examining her work in a Maritime or Canadian literary context while at the same time acknowledging her far-reaching and complex allegiances to many places. Sanger remarks on Bishop’s relation to Canada, noting that “It would be absurd to claim Elizabeth Bishop as a ‘Canadian’ writer. [...] Nevertheless, the present Canadian reaction to Bishop, which apparently is either largely indifferent or ignorant, is unjust not only to her but to ourselves” (15). Carole Kiler Doreski conducts a thematic reading of Bishop’s poetry as Canadian literature, granting her “honorary status of Canadian writer” (“Back” 151). Doreski argues that Bishop should be “at least [an] honorary [...] Canadian writer” (“Back” 151) because she depicts the Canadian landscape and struggles with ideas of Canadian identity, just as preeminent Canadian literary scholars Margaret Atwood and Northrop Frye do. Brian Robinson

takes a similar position. In addressing the question of her regionalism, he argues that “It is not necessary to place Bishop in some regional canon. As her surreal city poems attest, her poetry resists being tied down, even by ‘geographies’ she has become famous for” (131). Robinson believes that Bishop’s writing resists placement in a regional canon because of the many separate regional geographies it imagines; certainly, Bishop’s multiple geographic identities challenge the definition of “regional” writers such as those who dominate discussions of Maritime regionalism. Yet, rather than reject “regionalism” altogether, it is time to reassess Bishop’s espousal of many place-based identities and to reject instead the definition of regionalism as a category of writing that limits geographical representations to only one place.

While she is most often treated as an American poet, then, and even though most of her early critics focused on Bishop’s modernist aesthetics and similarities to Marianne Moore, there is a significant body of scholarship on Bishop’s literary relationship to the Maritimes that extends from early in her career to the present. Many critics agree that Bishop has a strong creative connection to the Maritimes, yet until now no critics have considered Bishop a “regional” writer. Many argue that she and her work share complex and fascinating connections to the region that warrant examination of her writing within Canadian and Maritime literary contexts. Yet the implications for Bishop’s connection to Nova Scotia for regionalism have not been explored, and they should be, considering that she writes at the same time that writers and critics such as Fred Cogswell were establishing the more received narratives of Maritime regionalism in the early and mid-twentieth century. Contemporary with an emerging celebration of regional writers such as Ernest Buckler, Bishop’s *oeuvre* offers an account of a different emergent regionalism, one that develops through travel and through the sustained

juxtaposition of Nova Scotia with places completely unlike it. The example *par excellence* of this type of juxtaposition can be found through analysis of “Memories of Uncle Neddy.”

### **“Memories of Uncle Neddy”: An Inscription of Place Through Distance**

“Memories of Uncle Neddy” provides a literary illustration of Bishop’s connection to Nova Scotia that she draws as simultaneously near and far in time and space. My reading of Bishop’s regionalism in this memoir is not a matter of the place names or local settings she uses, but of the movement between at least two geographically separate and distant places, a movement that becomes visible via the narrator’s changes in perspective on the places. Rather than deploy a narrator that sees herself as belonging to a small Maritime village, the narrator shifts between two locales unlike each other in many vital respects, Rio de Janeiro and Great Village. This model of regionalism breaks away from the idea of a region as a grouping of local places within a geographic region and in close proximity to one another. Bishop’s adoption of distance and her use of multiple perspectives help to establish an ever-present and ever-changing relationship between local places and a corresponding global world.

This piece is one of Bishop’s lesser-known memoirs, and it has not garnered a substantial amount of attention from her critics. Bishop’s biographer Brett Millier categorizes it, along with “In the Village” and “Gwendolyn,” as “slightly fictionalized autobiography” (252). The memoir tells the story of a narrator’s contemplation of two painted portraits she receives in the mail, while she is living in Brazil, from her aunt in Nova Scotia. The portraits depict the narrator’s uncle Arthur, or “Artie” (Bishop, *One Art* 406-8), whose name she changes to Neddy in the memoir, and her mother as small children. The narrator focuses her description on the images’ many ironies: in the children’s demeanor and appearance, in the portraits themselves, and in her possession of them. For instance, everything about Neddy has

“an extraneous look”: his clothing, his setting, the presence of his image in Brazil, and his depiction as a child at an age the narrator could not possibly have known him. His face, even, “could almost have drifted in from another place, or another year, and settled into the painting” (*Prose* 148). Everything about the image is unfamiliar to her, even though it depicts a person whom she loved as a child and as an adult. Other ironic details include the way that

[h]is semi-disembodied head seems too big for his body; and his body seems older, far less alive, than the round, healthy, painted face which is so very much in the present it seems to be taking an interest in it, even here, so very far away from where it saw such a very different world for so long. (*Prose* 149)

In repeating the word “very” to emphasize “much,” “far,” and “different,” this passage emphasizes the distinctness between Neddy’s former home and the irony of the location of his portrait in Brazil. The two local places that connect through the portrait are distant from one another. When one place is close, the other is far away; however, for a moment while contemplating the picture of Uncle Neddy in Brazil, the Maritimes seem simultaneously near and distant. “Uncle Neddy,” Bishop’s narrator says from Brazil,

that is, my Uncle Edward is *here*. Into this wildly foreign, and to him exotic setting. [...] he is here, on the other side of the Equator, with his little sister, [...] Uncle Neddy will continue to exchange his direct, bright-hazel child’s looks, now, with those of strangers—dark-eyed Latins he never knew, who never would have understood him, whom he would have thought of, if he ever thought of them at all, as ‘foreigners.’ How late, Uncle Neddy, how late to have started on your travels! (*Prose* 146-61)

Another irony that the narrator points out in the passage is that Uncle Neddy never left his

home community during his lifetime. When she sees her uncle's portrait in this new context, however, as Brazilian people, and even a Brazilian cat, gaze at the portrait, she finds that these other gazes estrange her uncle, making her see him anew. Through telling the story of Neddy's "late travels," Bishop puts the Maritime region into a relationship with Rio de Janeiro so that regions previously separate in her mind introduce themselves through this portrait and memoir.

The ironies Bishop's narrator addresses in her meditation on her uncle are just as easily applied to the author's own position in Brazil; she too is very far away from the childhood home she knew for a brief period with her maternal grandparents in Great Village, whence the portraits were sent. The significant distinction between her own life and that of her uncle Artie as she describes it in the memoir is that Bishop's constant travel means that in many ways she is always far from "home." Even when she was not abroad, Bishop was constantly on the move, travelling from Florida to Maine to Washington, DC to Boston, and often back to Nova Scotia. Evidence of her constant movement can be found in two published volumes of Bishop's letters, *One Art: Letters* and *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*. In these letters, Bishop informs her correspondents of changes in address, clears up uncertainties about where to send follow-up letters, and sends frequent postcards from various locations. From March through December 1951, for example, she sent letters from places as far flung as the Hotel Winslow and Hotel Grosvenor in New York, Maryland, Maine, and "Somewhere off the coast of Brazil," and Petropolis (*One Art* 217-226). Her constant travels suggest that her notion of home may indeed involve remaining in constant motion, continually gaining new perspectives on her many "homes" by travelling away from them, juxtaposing perspectives of one home from the location on another.

While in Brazil, Bishop produced pages of prose and poetry set in Nova Scotia. Many

critics have remarked on the shift in subject and tone in Bishop's writing during this period. Some speculate that her physical distance from her childhood home in Nova Scotia enabled her to finally explore that period rather intensely in writing through pieces like "First Death in Nova Scotia," "Sestina," and "Filling Station," and her prose works "In the Village" and "Gwendolyn." Ellis suggests that the reason Bishop began to write about Nova Scotia in Brazil was that "Bishop's sense of being an outsider in Brazil reawakened her childhood sense of always being a 'guest' in other people's homes. [...] Her experience of living in Brazil somehow made writing about childhood exclusion easier" (92). Millier notes that she "found it odd that she should have 'total recall' about Nova Scotia in its geographical mirror image, Brazil" (252). In fact, Bishop's letter to friends Kit and Isle Barker suggests that her memory of Nova Scotia resurfaced when she was in a place very distant from it: "It is funny to come to Brazil to experience total recall about Nova Scotia—geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even" (*One Art* 249). As this letter suggests, Bishop inscribes her attachment to Nova Scotia through her distance from it. As Steven Gould Axelrod notes, "In Bishop's texts the far and the near [...] intertwine" and "the childhood home was never closer, never more familiar, and never more strange than in Brazil." Travisano calls this phenomenon "the homely exoticism of [her] childhood" (*Artistic* 168). The stimulation that distance provided her altered Bishop's writing about her childhood in Nova Scotia.

Bishop tends to explore her childhood home in writing while she is away, as a way to sort through past events and come to a better understanding of them, and her work suggests that even from a distance the region constrains her view. Mary Goodwin suggests that she "addresses themes of relocation and exile as a way of coming to terms with the past, the memory of the original home" (103). Bishop compares places throughout her *oeuvre*. Upon

arrival in Brazil, the speaker of Bishop's poem "Questions of Travel" makes comparisons to another place as a way to become habituated to the place where she has arrived. She laments, "There are too many waterfalls here" (*Complete* 93), implying that some place exists where there are just the right amount of waterfalls. In "In the Village," the skies are ones that "travelers compare to those of Switzerland, too dark, too blue" (*Prose* 62). The traveler, her work suggests, must continually compare the place of arrival with the place of departure. Even as Bishop's speaker has arrived at one destination through the act of travelling there, she can only see the new place by comparing it to the one(s) she has left.

A pertinent question in Bishop's poem "Questions of Travel," one of the many pieces she wrote in Brazil, is: "Should we have stayed at home, / wherever that may be?" Jeffery Harrison argues that the second part of that question—"wherever that may be"—highlights Bishop's condition of homelessness. He suggests that "By setting out on trips, it seems, Bishop was both escaping and enacting her essential homelessness" (22). However, she once remarked in an interview that she felt neither homeless nor "particularly at home. I guess that's a pretty good description of a poet's sense of home. [She] carries it with [her]" while she is on the move (*Conversations* 102). Ellis has argued that Bishop "wanted readers to believe" that "she possesses ties to certain geographies, she is tied down by none," and yet at the same time she actually "always thought of Canada as home and Nova Scotia as the motherland" (107). But it also seems possible to argue that instead of being without a home at all, and rather than being "tied" to one home, Bishop belongs to at least two distinct homes at any one time. In this memoir, she espouses two: one in Great Village and one in Rio de Janeiro.

The fifteen years of her life that she spent in Brazil was the longest period of time she ever resided in one place. By contrast, her character Neddy may have stayed in one place for

his entire life; as she notes in the memoir: “I don’t believe that Uncle Neddy ever went anywhere in his life except possibly two or three times as far as Boston after his daughters had moved there and married, and I’m not sure of that” (*Prose* 161). Bishop’s narrator explores the possibility that Uncle Neddy’s portrait was, like herself, forcibly removed from Great Village: “His married life was long-drawn-out and awful; that was common knowledge. Can his presence here be Aunt Hat’s revenge? Her last word in a fifty year battle?” (*Prose* 229). The portrait of Neddy may never return to its former home because its home is now with the narrator. The author may not be able to return home, especially considering a related event she describes in her memoir “The Country Mouse” in which she was “saved” (*Prose* 89) as a child from her maternal grandparents’ home in Great Village by her paternal New England grandparents. In the short piece, published for the first time in the posthumous *Collected Prose* (1984), Bishop’s narrator describes her forced removal from her maternal grandparents’ home as a traumatic kidnapping:

I had been brought back unconsulted [sic.] and against my wishes to the house my father had been born in, to be saved from a life of poverty and provincialism, bare feet, suet puddings, unsanitary school slates, perhaps even from the inverted *r*’s of my mother’s family. With this surprising extra set of grandparents, until a few weeks ago no more than names, a new life was about to begin. (*Prose* 89)

Bishop began a new life with a new set of people when she was removed from Great Village as a child. The interrelations between places that Bishop draws in her works may be tied, as some critics believe, to the early disruptions in her childhood that occurred against her will, especially her mother’s disappearance from her life (for Bishop did not see her mother again after she committed herself in 1916) and her removal from her grandparents’ home. Travisano,

for instance, affirms that “with [her] early and involuntary travels [...], Bishop developed a fascination with geography. This may also explain the rapid juxtaposition in her letters, and in her poems, of sharply different peoples, cultures, and perspectives” (*Words* xxii).

In her 1966 critical study of Bishop, Anne Stevenson suggests that “Nearly all the poems in [Bishop’s] first book are [...] connected with her travels. [...] They are concerned [...] with Miss Bishop’s own sense of place. They present a view of the world as [...] a set of visible surfaces which, in their shifting relationships, sometimes reveal momentarily, obliquely, a kind of truth” (43). Instead of centering on the kind of singular depiction of place that tourist brochures promote, Bishop’s type of “travel writing” provides readers with her “own sense of place” (Stevenson 43), which suggests that an individual’s perspective on one place is constrained by, or filtered through, the perspective on another place, or “visible surface” as Stevenson calls it.

The motif of comparison between places is in line with what Sara Meyer has called Bishop’s inherent “cartographic logic,” which is centred not on maps but on the ways that human beings may act, think, or find meaning in a given geographic area. She affirms that

the cartographic logic [in Bishop’s work] searches for meanings and identities not within members of a net but in their interrelations. Such logic of spatial arrangement defies selfhood and autonomous, self-regulating economies because it places the subject at a junction of diverse foci of meaning—allowing fluctuating, multiple interpretations, as boundary lines and acts of positioning are constantly changing. (238-39)

Meyer suggests that Bishop exaggerates boundary lines and acts of positioning to show how they constantly change, offering multiple perspectives to readers in the small space of a poem.

Rather than use the concept a “net,” a whole unit such as a region, the “meanings and identities” of places are determined through “interrelations,” that is, through their relationship to other places beyond their own boundaries.

At the end of the memoir, Bishop’s speaker exclaims: “How late, Uncle Neddy, how late to have begun your travels!” because Neddy spent his life in just one region, but now, his portrait is on the move. It is the first time this piece of art representing him has left his village, province, country, and continent. As I have established above, Bishop’s extended family history, her childhood experiences, her travel, and her writing all contribute to her complex senses of Maritime place. “Memories of Uncle Neddy” introduces and endorses belonging to more than one place: the portrait of Uncle Neddy belongs in its new Rio de Janeiro home with the narrator as well as in Great Village. The narrator also belongs to two separate places, and her Maritime regional identity becomes informed by her experience of Rio de Janeiro. The narrator’s description of and reflection on the picture offer multiple distinct perspectives on the region.

Bishop is part of the Euro-settler community from which other writers were asserting that truly regional writing had to be written from and in place as well as about it. Yet, Bishop’s treatment of Nova Scotia as one of two different places juxtaposed defines Nova Scotia in relative and cosmopolitan terms. Those terms preserve the affection and nostalgia for the place that critics generally associate with essentialist regionalism, and at the same time they reject the idea that an individual must reside in the place in order to understand or appreciate it. This comparative treatment of place evoked through her presentation of multiple simultaneous perspectives on a given area undermines the land claim implicit in Euro-settler regionalism in the Maritimes.

### **Bishop's "Miniaturist Gaze" and "12 O'Clock News"**

Multiple perspectives on home and region, such as the ones I have examined in "Memories of Uncle Neddy," can be best understood not by studying the Nova Scotian-set pieces in isolation from Bishop's other work but by considering her regional Maritime affiliation in the context of her *oeuvre*. One particularly significant motif is that of a speaker's movement in space, especially when that movement creates corresponding shifts in perspective for the reader. Readers are offered a perspective on a space from an elevated vantage point that renders aspects of the scene described in small scale. Bishop's dramatic descriptions of objects as though they are in constant motion from one place or time to another emphasize speakers' and readers' changing relationships to space and place. The spatial and geographical perspectives in her poems often zoom in and out between a global view and a local one; by extension, the "regions" in Bishop's *oeuvre* come to consist of ever-shifting perspectives on place that travel between these two poles. Her interest in the miniature and her juxtaposition of perspectives emphasize a sense of unlimited possibilities, yet Bishop's simultaneous interest in depicting clear, detailed images through precise description also emphasizes a distinct, nuanced particularity. These juxtapositions challenge the idea of regional literature and criticism contemporary with Bishop in the Maritimes by introducing the idea of relativity. The idea of a regional distinctiveness remains intact, but that distinctiveness, rather than an "isolation" or "opposition" (Jordan 8) becomes through Bishop's work an exploration of how places relate to one another.

"12 O'Clock News," "The Monument," "In the Waiting Room," and "Crusoe in England" provide apt illustrations of these contrasting perspectives and the complexities they suggest. "12 O'Clock News" presents the top of a desk as a miniature tableau in which cigarette butts in an ashtray become fallen bodies, a transformation that corresponds to the

speaker's imaginary shift from viewing objects up close to seeing them as if from far away. Small details such as frogs' eggs, envelopes, and typewriter keys in these scenes suddenly alter, becoming larger-scale islands, sign boards, and fish scales. Mimicking a newscast anchor, the poem's speaker employs an omniscient voice to describe the scene. Each stanza of the prose poem is accompanied by a corresponding word in the left column beside it that acts as both headline and gloss for the stanza. Some critics have read this poem as simply a "clever" exercise (Millier 526), while others have focused on the poem's more serious implications, including links to Bishop's thoughts on the Vietnam War (Rosenbaum, *Theatre* 74). My interest here is not primarily in the subject of the poem, but its aesthetic: its simultaneous depiction of two perspectives that the poem refuses to reconcile.

The poem's arrangement on the page is part of its play with these different perspectives. The two-column structure consists of sections of prose in the right-hand column describing the top of a desk, sections that double as an episodic newscast. In the left-hand margin beside each stanza of prose is the name of a corresponding ordinary desk item such as an ashtray, lamp, and typewriter eraser. The following passage offers an illustration:

	At last! One of the most elusive natives has been spotted!
	He appears to be – rather, to have been – a uni-
	cyclist-courier, who may have met his end by falling
<i>typewriter</i>	from the height of the escarpment because of the
<i>eraser</i>	deceptive illumination. Alive, he would have been
	small, but undoubtedly proud and erect, with the
	thick, bristling black hair typical of the indigenes.
	( <i>Complete</i> 175)

All the images in this stanza evoke comparisons with the typewriter eraser, and these comparisons constantly shift the reader's perspective from a close-up view to a distant one. The poem allows readers to interpret one object of the stanza as both a nearby typewriter eraser and as a far-away unicyclist courier. Bishop's ironic use of the term "indigene" is not racist, rather the speaker is satirizing the idea of an ethnographic journalist reporting the observation of a "native" in his or her "natural" habitat.

Bishop continues to satirize the imperial newscast-voice of "12 O'Clock News" throughout the poem. It speaks so assuredly at times, and yet—if we assume the voice is observing the desktop as suggested by the list of items in the left hand column—is incorrect: "From our superior vantage point," the voice says of an ashtray, "we can clearly see / into a sort of dugout, possibly a shell crater, a 'nest' / of soldiers. They are heaped together" (*Complete* 175). In her work *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Susan Stewart attests that the miniaturizing gaze, contrary to the imperial gaze associated with looking down upon a complete space to define it, makes a move away from hierarchy and narrative because the miniature is open to "a multiplication of ideological properties" and possibilities (47-8). The poem contains many references that make it difficult to locate a single vantage point in the poem for the speaker: "visibility is poor," there is a "deceptive illumination" and an "undisclosed distance" which make locating the speaker's and one's own perspective increasingly difficult if not impossible.

The "deceptive illumination" and the height of the "escarpment" in the poem suggest that the view the speaker presents is merely one of many possible perspectives, and as it shifts and changes, all perspectives are incomplete. The typewriter eraser is placed within a network of desktop items—ashtray, ink-bottle, envelopes—and their accompanying descriptive stanzas,

which further complicate the topography of the desktop and readers' relationship to it. In shifting between two vantage points, the speaker of "12 O'Clock News" asks readers to consider the desktop simultaneously from above and from below.

In Rosenbaum's analysis of Bishop's interest in depicting miniaturizations, she notes that "[nature's] capacity to overwhelm the boundaries of human perspective as a basis of understanding [...] is most powerful not when the natural object is vast but when it is small" (82). The small size that Bishop depicts in descriptions of objects and spaces in poems such as "12 O'Clock News" unexpectedly represents a vastness because the miniatures the speaker describes become larger objects or landscapes in another part of the poem. This aspect of her writing, which Rosenbaum refers to as Bishop's "miniaturist gaze" (72), demonstrates that size is a matter of perspective, a dynamic perspective that is always changing. This gaze plays with size and scale by emphasizing how the very large—such as the group of islands in Bishop's poem "Crusoe in England" that transform into frogs' eggs—is also very small when the viewer adopts another perspective on it. The miniature, the portrayal of a vast space in a small object, is usually understood by critics as "represent[ing] a mental world of proportion, control, and balance" (Stewart 74) because it "appears that the observer can own or possess it, hold it in her hand" (Rosenbaum 82). Gaston Bachelard writes in his well-known text *The Poetics of Space* (1958) that "The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it" (150) because in miniaturization the world becomes small enough to be held, or even placed in a pocket where it can be watched over and controlled. However, as Stewart suggests, "We are able to hold the miniature object within our hand, but our hand is no longer in proportion with its world; instead our hand becomes a form of undifferentiated landscape, the body a kind of background" (70), and subjects can thus be rendered unsettlingly gigantic in descriptions of the

miniature. Bishop's depictions of miniatures throughout her *oeuvre* are unstable. A shift in scale or perspective in relation to one of her miniaturizations may render it gigantic, then miniature, then gigantic again, suggesting that there are always many possible perspectives on a place.

There are many other examples of Bishop's "miniaturist gaze" that appear in poems that play with the perspective of an elevated vantage point in order to render aspects of the world into small scale. In "Night City: From the Plane," for instance, the speaker gazes down on a city from a plane and sees small lights. In "Paris, 7 A.M.," the speaker looks "down into the courtyard" (*Complete* 26); in "Sleeping on the Ceiling" the speaker says that "It is so peaceful" (*Complete* 29) looking down at her room from above; and the poem "Five Flights Up" describes the happenings in a yard from an upper balcony (*Complete* 181). These poems depict objects in miniature, the speaker both distant from and physically higher than the objects under discussion; but small details such as frogs' eggs, envelopes, and cigarette butts in these scenes suddenly alter, becoming larger-scale islands, sign boards, and fallen bodies. Such dramatic shifts involve not only a shift in physical distance, but also a shift in imagination. Moreover, the power that may be implicit in gazing from above disappears when the perspective alters to become the gaze from below. Bonnie Costello notes that Bishop's use of many perspectives helps to "affirm visual thinking. [...] [H]er active displacements of perspective keep the mind open and affirm the presence of a creative subject. Mastery by perspective gives way to engagement by constant readjustment" (14).

In colonial discourse, an elevated vantage point is often associated with control because what the colonial subject sees from this vantage point can, in his or her view, be owned and managed. In his essay "Imperial Landscape," W. J. T. Mitchell draws the connection between

landscape painting and imperialism by arguing that the colonial ability to see an area of land denotes the colonizer's belief that he or she has knowledge of that land, as well as power over it. Similarly, as postcolonial theorist Bill Ashcroft affirms in relation to Michel Foucault's analysis of the panopticon as an automatic structure of power, "one of the most powerful strategies of imperial dominance is that of surveillance, or observation: because it implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point, it suggests the power to process and understand that which is seen, and it objectifies, and interpellates, the colonized subject in a way that fixes its identity in relation to the surveyor" (141). Indeed, Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth-century plan for a panopticon penitentiary was based on the principle that when a person is isolated and constantly visible, he or she is guaranteed to respect his or her subordinate position. Foucault explains that "the major effect of the Panopticon [was to] induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (*Discipline* 201). In his plans for such a building, Bentham prescribes a central tower with special one-way blinds on the windows to ensure that prisoners would not know when they were being watched; the constant threat of being seen guaranteed that they would be kept under control. As Foucault explains, "The Panopticon is a marvellous machine, which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogenous effects of power" (*Discipline* 202) because high and all-seeing vantage points make these unilateral power relationships automatic.

Unlike the imperial hegemonic gaze, Bishop's "miniaturist gaze" (Rosenbaum 72) is not concerned with establishing power relationships; rather, a key feature of Bishop's miniaturist gaze is that frequent shifts in scale produce a disorienting effect, requiring the speaker constantly to negotiate and redefine his or her relationship to the world. The fantasy of objectivity that Foucault, Ashcroft, and Mitchell discuss as an inherent part of an elevated gaze

is thrown into relief because the disorienting shifts in distance from subject to object in “12 O’Clock News” and other poems by Bishop challenge that sense of objectivity. Even though her miniaturist gaze begins with the speaker adopting vantage points that seem to place her above and at some distance from the objects they describe, Bishop refuses to sustain that perspective for the duration of an entire work. Her writing challenges the idea that there can be one authoritative perspective on knowledge on a given area. Essentialist notions of place such as those found in mid twentieth-century Maritime regional literary criticism suggest that there is a singular and inherent land-based identity that people living in a particular region can grasp; Bishop’s miniaturist gaze challenges that idea by positing that many simultaneous, relative positions exist, and therefore many other perspectives on a given area are always possible. The shifting perspectives in Bishop’s descriptions make it impossible to assert the dominance or control that inheres in colonial surveillance. By extension, the colonizing discourse of literary regionalism enacts a degree of power over an area of land that Bishop’s interest in the miniature and the juxtaposition of perspectives call into question.

**“Two Opposing Factors”: Surrealist Juxtaposition in “The Monument”**

Bishop’s engagement of this gaze that shifts its focus from close up to far away, and the corresponding gaze at more than one geographic and culturally distinct region such as the one she deploys in “Memories of Uncle Neddy,” are contingent on her poetry’s juxtaposition of disparate objects, entities, and visual perspectives that find their roots in part in the modernist aesthetics of surrealism. Lorrie Goldensohn acknowledges surrealism’s influence on the way that Bishop uses techniques of defamiliarization and shifting spatial perspectives: “In that estrangement of the familiar, she invites comparison with the surrealists. [...] Inversions and enlargements of scale, sudden and surprising shifts in point of view through personification,

and as always subtle, but persuasive emphasis on dreamscape, mark her work from first to last” (120-21). André Breton’s “Manifesto of Surrealism” (1924) offers a useful definition of the movement: he explains that surrealism is “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any moral concern” (26). Many critics have pointed out that Bishop differs fundamentally from the surrealists in her approach because she does not necessarily separate ideas of consciousness and unconsciousness (Mullen 64; Pickard 38-57; Stevenson 58); as Anne Stevenson puts it, Bishop’s poems may be more “Surrealist-like” than surrealist (58). However, these critics have overlooked the ways that Bishop’s work is influenced by the surrealist aesthetic of juxtaposition.

Andre Breton’s theory of “systematic moving out of place” (qtd. in Ernst 77) points out the goal of this surrealist aesthetic, which he calls “the marvellous [sic.] capacity to grasp two mutually distant realities without going beyond the field of our own experience and draw a spark from their juxtaposition” (qtd. in Ernst 77). As Breton explains, the “spark” produced by comparing two distinct realities has a “surrealist” effect. He insists that

it is not within man’s power [...] to effect the juxtaposition of two realities so far apart. [...] We are therefore obliged to admit that the two terms of the image are not deduced one from the other by the mind for the specific purposes of producing the spark, that they are simultaneous products of the activity I call Surrealist, reason’s role being limited to taking note of, and appreciating, the luminous phenomenon. (“Surrealist” 37)

Breton continues to explain that these bizarre realities may lead one to a “supreme reality” that can only be accessed when one’s reason is tamed; with these kinds of unexpected, perhaps illogical connections between disparate things, “[t]he mind becomes aware of the limitless expanses wherein its desires are made manifest” (“Surrealist” 37). Through juxtaposing two distinct perspectives, Bishop employs one facet of surrealism that asks viewers and readers to contemplate possible connections between disparate perspectives, objects, or even geographical places. Bishop’s surrealist poems point to a bizarre reality, a reality that does not make logical sense. Through the juxtaposition of perspectives, the poems “tame” reason by forcing readers to suspend it in order to apprehend the often wild descriptions the speakers present.

In a passage from her prose memoir “Primer Class,” a story about Bishop’s first year of elementary school in Great Village, the poet offers an anecdote about her experience of interpreting two classroom maps in the school house: “over the blackboard, were two rolled-up maps, one of Canada and one of the whole world. [...] I got the general impression that Canada was the same size as the world, which somehow or other fitted into it, or the other way around, and that in the world and Canada the sun was always shining and everything was dry and glittering” (*Prose* 11). For Bishop’s speaker, the two representations of geography, when juxtaposed, create a strange and unique way of thinking about scale and relationships between places. When taken separately, the two maps are mundane. When presented beside one another, a paradoxical interpretation of the land arises for the speaker. Suddenly, the former colony transforms into a container for the whole world. The two maps undermine the concept of relative importance that an adult might assign to them because the child speaker does not know how to separate the meaning of the two maps.

In Canadian philosopher and poet Jan Zwicky’s terms, the anecdote of the two maps

performs a gestalt shift. In *Wisdom & Metaphor* (2003), Zwicky posits that “[t]he experience of understanding something is always the experience of a gestalt—the dawning of an aspect that is simultaneously a perception and re-perception of a whole” (2). Zwicky uses Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit figure to illustrate this idea; when they perceive the figure, observers must shift between the two images—duck or rabbit—so that “in the awareness of one is always the shadow of the loss of the other” (56). Zwicky’s use of “gestalt” in her definition of metaphor is an apt way of describing how Bishop represents places simultaneously from more than one perspective. While only one perspective may be experienced or represented at a given moment, that perspective also encourages an awareness of others that the subject holds in her mind during her experience of place. Zwicky’s term is a reminder that the shifting of perspectives requires elements of memory and imagination in the act of perceiving objects and spaces; imagination and memory must work to maintain the “shadow” of the other possible perspectives Bishop makes available in a single work.

Multiperspectivism in Bishop’s surrealist poem “The Monument” provides an example of this gestalt shift by juxtaposing two different perspectives and their corresponding interpretations of an object, a pile of boxes upon boxes that sit on a shore. “The Monument” sets up a dialogue between two speakers who gaze at the physical structure and debate its meaning. The two speakers provide corresponding distant and near points of view, as well as literal and abstract perspectives of the monument. One speaker begins the poem by asking, “Now can you see the monument?” and after some description of the angles of boxes sitting on top of boxes says,

The view is geared  
(that is, the view’s perspective)

so low that there is no 'far away'

and we are far away within the view. (*Complete* 23)

This speaker describes a curious view that shifts from the monument itself to a view that brings both the monument and gazer(s) into view from another vantage point even further away. In this moment the speaker is both apprehending the view and seeing herself within the view. She is both near and far away until, as she says in the poem, "there is no 'far away.'" The speaker is far off from where she currently is, and simultaneously, paradoxically, sees herself in her imagination in that far-off place, in the act of gazing. In the line, the speaker reflects on her position as both the observer and the observed. She is both outside the scene described, observing it, and somewhere inside it, one of the objects being observed. This imaginatively challenging exercise requires the reader to reflect on the incompatible spatial positions of simultaneous proximity and distance; this challenge overwhelms the second speaker, who would rather try to make sense of a precise physical location and what she is doing there by asking questions that require specific and concrete answers: "Why does that strange sea make no sound? / Is it because we're far away? / Where are we? Are we in Asia Minor? / Or in Mongolia?" (*Complete* 23). The second speaker cannot fathom the simultaneous perspectives that the first speaker describes, and is mentally stuck on the concept of "far away." In her confusion, the second speaker perhaps stands in for readers; her task and ours is to grasp the first speaker's more abstract, less literal, interpretation of the monument.

Both speakers continue to disorient readers throughout the poem by describing the monument in two very different ways. Costello refers to the conversation between these speakers as "the dialogue of art in the poem. Art exists in a process, to which certain attitudes are preliminary[.] [...]. The monument exemplifies the artichoke-like unfolding of the life of a

work, its making, its beholding, and its history” (*Questions* 219). Indeed, the unfolding process of shifting the scene and location performs a surrealist juxtaposition of discrete entities. There is no single or authoritative way to interpret this monument partly because there are two different speakers engaged in its description. The poem suggests, then, that there is a process to interpretation, a process that requires the comparison of at least two perspectives.

Bishop’s notes on the poem in her journals and letters suggest that “The Monument” takes its inspiration from the surrealist “frottage” technique created by Max Ernst. A “frottage” is made by rubbing paper with black lead to reproduce a textured imprint of the surface under the paper. Viewers may interpret the patterns or images that arise within the texture in highly individual ways. The interpretation of the patterns therefore varies from individual to individual, as that interpretation depends on the individual viewer’s perspective. Any reading of the patterns is therefore relative and inconclusive. When translated into a poetic technique, frottage thereby places meaning in the hands of the reader and takes that power away from the poet. Jonathan Ellis’s archival research of Bishop’s papers uncovered a notebook she took to France in which she drew a sketch of boxes along a seashore—which he interpreted as the “monument” depicted in the poem—in the middle of a page accompanied by the note “take a frottage of this sea,” as well as an early draft of the poem (67). Bishop also mentions Ernst in letters to her first biographer Anne Stevenson in the early 1960s. In one of the letters, she claims that “as it happens, THE MONUMENT was written more under the influence of a set of frottages by Max Ernst I used to own called *Histoire Naturel* [sic.]” (*Prose* 393). However, Ellis argues that

While Bishop was obviously attracted to Ernst’s theories about creating art, it seems unlikely that she would ever want to give up ‘mental guidance’ of the

poem [as Ernst believed the frottage technique would do for a work of art].

What we find in ‘The Monument’ is not the loss of ‘conscious [...] guidance’ but the conflict between two perspectives, two ways of approaching the same thing. (67)

While Ellis does not believe that Bishop is adopting all of the invocations of a true frottage in Ernst’s definition, he does believe that Bishop emphasizes at least one surrealist trait in the poem: the juxtaposition of two distinct, conflicting points of view. We can see the differences between these perspectives in the ways that the speakers each approach the monument, and in the line “far away within the view,” which asks readers to contemplate two divergent perspectives on an object, one from a single, literal distance (the viewer’s physical distance from the object) and one from the multiple distances that her imagination suggests to her. The line “far away within the view” seems to support Ellis’s argument that Bishop does not give up the idea of “mental guidance,” since juxtaposition in “The Monument” is not necessarily a vehicle for the unconscious mind but for the conscious mind and the connections it makes.

Bishop may have been attracted to Ernst’s collages and “frottages” because of their dream-like and dissociative qualities. Ernst insists that frottage reduces “the active part of what has been called up to now ‘the author’ of the work to the extreme” (Ernst qtd. in Pickard 42). The poem’s speakers mention the figure of the artist-prince in “The Monument,” a figure whose “bones may be inside / or far away on even drier soil” (*Complete* 25). The presence of the artist-prince in the speakers’ minds leads Susan McCabe to postulate a link between the poem and Michel Foucault’s postmodern treatise “What is an Author?” (McCabe 60). In this influential essay, Foucault notes that the author has absented himself from literary works of the twentieth century: “[T]he essential basis of writing,” Foucault suggests, “is not the exalted

emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears” (102). The frottage technique is meant to give power to the viewer, or the reader, in a similar way. Instead of the artist or author having control over the meaning of the work, a meaning may be suggested to the reader or viewer through the work itself. The implied reader of “The Monument” is in a dreamlike state, apprehending the dreamlike qualities of the poem and the far-flung images the speakers present. The poem’s beginning question and description, “Now can you see the monument? It is of wood / built somewhat like a box. No Built / like several boxes in descending sizes / one above the other” (*Complete* 23), mimics the sensation Ernst describes when images begin to present themselves to him as he looks at his first frottage of floor boards. Ernst describes seeing visions and images within his first frottage: “Then I see human heads, many different beasts, a battle ending in a kiss” (74). The reader and the first speaker do not follow a conscious guide to the work. Instead, that conscious guide is suggested by the absent figure, the artist-prince whose bones the second speaker believes may be locked inside the monument.

Bishop's use of surrealist juxtaposition as an aesthetic permeates her *oeuvre*. Robert Lowell’s comment in his review of *North & South* that “[t]here are two opposing factors” (186) in each Bishop poem makes a claim about the recurring combination of two “distant realities” (Breton qtd. in Ernst 77) in her work. These two distinct "realities" can refer to places, as we find in "Memories of Uncle Neddy," or any perspective on those places.

### **“In the Waiting Room”: Shifts in Imagined Perspectives**

The poem “In the Waiting Room” offers an opportunity for further insight into the shifting perspectives that enact the idea of “far away within the view” as I explicate it here.

The poem consists of a description of a six-year-old girl's trip to the dental office with her Aunt Consuelo; while waiting, she reads a *National Geographic* magazine and the pictures of the people and places from all over the world change the way she sees herself and the world. During a moment in the poem that Zachariah Pickard refers to as an epiphany (68), the young speaker realizes: "you are an *I*. You are an *Elizabeth*, / you are one of *them*" (*Complete* 160). Critics have read this moment in the poem as a "discovery of one's gender" (Curry 117), or as a reference to "the social obligation of being human" (Doreski *Restraints* 56). The most significant element of the poem for my argument is the way that shifts in visual perspective catalyze the child speaker's ability to see herself in the world; those shifts in perspective enable her to see herself from a distant vantage point, relative to an entire world, as well as a close-up vantage point which reveals a position that continues to evolve. This is significant to the theory of regionalism because it encourages the notion that the region is a place within the world; regional citizens are also global citizens, and their perspectives on the place in which they live may continually adjust as they act their roles as global and local subjects. Analogous to the shifting perspectives between close up and far away, the perspectives on a place between local and global perspectives on that same place produce two vastly different possibilities for place-based identity and understanding. The juxtaposition between local and global perspectives in "In the Waiting Room" suggests a relativist view, one that embraces a more global perspective on a world made up of many places. The region, by extension, would be one place among many and may be defined in relative terms rather than fixed, authoritative terms.

The poem begins in a specific place easily located on a map in fixed relationship to other places: "In Worcester, Massachusetts." In the poem, as the six-year-old speaker sits in a dentist's waiting room while her aunt endures an appointment, a *National Geographic*

magazine and its photographs of people and places from around the world leads Bishop's child speaker to the realization "I scarcely dared to look / to see what it was I was" (*Complete* 160). During this disorienting moment, she must talk to herself and hold the magazine to prevent the sensation of losing her sense of fixed local geographic perspective; she describes "the sensation of falling off the round, turning world into blue-black space" (*Complete* 160). Her ground has suddenly shifted; she does not know who or what she is because she had never negotiated her relationship with a world of such scale before. As the magazine leads Bishop's child speaker to see a miniaturized "round, turning world [...] [in] blue-black space," she sees herself as a miniature woman on that world, again "far away within the view" (*Complete* 23). As she suddenly sees the world itself in miniature, at the same time this world is also "cognitively gigantic" (Stewart 63). In Stewart's study, dollhouses are "cognitively gigantic" because they are small in size, but represent something very large; in the mind, a dollhouse is larger than life. Like Stewart's description of the dollhouse, the world Bishop apprehends in "In the Waiting Room" is at once miniature and gigantic. The task of orienting herself in such a world is daunting because she sees herself as at once distant and near. This experience favours the individual perspective and denies that there can be any one governing perspective from which to view a specific place, much less the entire world. Bishop's work conveys an interest in the multiple available viewpoints an individual might take on a subject, especially if a person has travelled to other places, or is exposed to ideas from other places, as the child speaker is in "In the Waiting Room" when she reads the *National Geographic* magazine.

As the magazine leads the child to see a miniaturized "round, turning world [...] [in] blue-black space," she also sees herself as a miniature woman, noting the "horri-fying" breasts of adult women in the photographs. Stewart claims that renderings of childhood are

miniaturizations because “we imagine childhood as it if were at the other end of a tunnel—distanced, diminutive, and clearly framed” (44). Imagining her child speaker holding the magazine, Bishop has complicated this idea. Instead of seeing this moment from childhood “clearly framed,” we see the child’s unstable relationship to the two simultaneous positions she occupies, one specific and one general, one local and one global. As large and small scales shift in the child speaker’s perception, she needs to name herself through specific material and measurable locators. She makes observations such as “three days and you’ll be seven years old” (*Complete* 159), and “The waiting room was bright / and too hot” (*Complete* 161). The poem ends in the specific, local place that it began: “in Worcester, Massachusetts.” Time and space are mapped out to organize the speaker’s relationship with the immediate geographical world at the close of the poem once again. The speaker says,

Then I was back in it.  
The War was on. Outside,  
in Worcester Massachusetts,  
were night and slush and cold,  
and it was still the fifth  
of February, 1918. (*Complete* 161)

But that seemingly stable relationship in the end is a provisional one, one that has required she see her world from simultaneous and dynamically shifting local and global perspectives.

In his discussion of “In the Waiting Room,” Jahan Ramazani claims that Bishop’s fall off the planet “is in part due to her initiation into becoming a global subject, once anchored to a part of the world by the illusion of its completeness, but now unmoored and floating free among cultural and racial differences” (63-4). Ramazani emphasizes the important connection

between destabilizing space and “destabilizing the naturalness of her own cultural world” (63). The unmooring is not a permanent and default position of abstract placelessness. Rather, the unmooring encapsulates the short period during which perspective shifts between two definite points. Bishop’s descriptions of objects from a distance, and more importantly the shifts in perspective from close by to far away that enable these distanced descriptions, have a disorienting effect on speakers and readers that extends to her depiction of relations between subjects and objects more generally. By extension, disorienting spaces in which the speaker’s view changes from close up to far away in Bishop’s poems have a similar effect on the experience of perspective as travel between places does; both produce a sense of bewilderment that requires the speaker and reader to constantly renegotiate the “fixed points” (Schweizer 35) of place and time.

By analyzing “12 O’Clock News,” “The Monument,” and “In the Waiting Room,” as well as imagery and patterns throughout her *oeuvre*, letters, and biography, I have described an important feature in Bishop’s poetry that one critic has named her “miniaturist gaze” (Rosenbaum 72). This change in the speaker’s position that creates a corresponding shift in spatial perspective in the poem produces a juxtaposition of at least two distinct points of view. The “miniaturist gaze” may emphasize not only these different spatial perspectives, but also subjective perspectives, chronological perspectives, and imaginary ones. When the perspective zooms in or out between a local view and a global one, it takes a similar symbolic and ever-shifting perspective on place that Bishop writes about and that she has experienced or imagined in her life. In the following section, I apply these notions related to the “miniaturist gaze” to two of Bishop’s most prominent works set in Nova Scotia, and I argue that these constant,

extreme shifts between distance and proximity in her poetry and prose characterize her complex connection to the Maritimes, and to a regionalism defined by shifting perspectives.

### **“[Hanging] Over That Nova Scotian Village”**

Earlier in the chapter, I established that in her prose memoir “Memories of Uncle Neddy,” Bishop creates a connection between Nova Scotia and Brazil, framing her speaker’s perspective on the Maritime region from a distance in both time and space. I have argued that this particular view from a distance that attempts to draw space and place as simultaneously near and far is not isolated to “Memories of Uncle Neddy” nor Bishop’s Nova Scotian works, as it is thoroughly connected to a common motif in Bishop’s *oeuvre*. However, at least one critic reads Bishop’s view of Nova Scotia from Brazil in a different, and more limited, way. In his essay “Elizabeth Bishop: Nova Scotia in Brazil,” Steven Gould Axelrod notes the high vantage points and miniaturizations in Bishop’s Nova Scotia-based work, charging her with attempting to “[colonize] her past” by creating diminutive and pejorative views of Nova Scotian places and objects from her childhood. He claims that “some impulse like derision exists in her drive to miniaturize” Nova Scotian scenes and objects. “Because Bishop systematically reduced and made ‘other’ the people and places of her Nova Scotian childhood,” he argues, “she found herself able—at least for a while in Brazil—to wedge open the doors of a dystopic past.”

Contrary to Axelrod’s insistence that the miniaturization in Bishop’s Nova Scotian works has a narrowing effect, I argue that her Nova Scotian pieces actually present a combination of miniature and gigantic depictions. The juxtaposition of the two scales does not “reduce” but rather complicates Bishop’s portrayal of the past and the place she depicts. While Axelrod may be correct that Bishop has miniaturized aspects of Nova Scotia in her work, his

comment that Bishop's miniaturizations of Nova Scotia are acts of colonization and derision is debatable. After all, miniaturization is a technique that appears consistently throughout her *oeuvre*, so it could not possibly always consist of derision unless he is making a general claim about Bishop's poetics, which he is not. Limiting the consideration of her miniaturizations to only selected scenes of her Nova Scotian works out of context with her *oeuvre* as Axelrod does only reduces the scope of those works to bitter memories and the technique of miniaturization to the diminutive. Further, the miniaturized scenes that she describes in "In the Village" and "Poem" are not colonial gestures because the speaker's or reader's vantage point changes. Shifting perspectives make it impossible to assert dominance or control through an elevated vantage point associated with colonial surveillance. Bishop complicates her childhood memories by combining the distant and the near, the small and the large, the past and the present. By refusing to reconcile a single interpretation of the village, or of her childhood past, Bishop also refuses to deploy the unifying descriptions of a place that received regional writers in the Maritimes did. While writers like Charles Bruce took pains to "accurately" describe every part of the topography of the Shore in *The Channel Shore*, Bishop combines at least "two looks" (*Complete* 177) upon the village she describes. In what follows, I counter Axelrod's readings of Bishop's Nova Scotian miniatures by explicating "In the Village" and "Poem," illuminating multiple and simultaneous views on Bishop's descriptions of a particular place.

I begin with Bishop's short story "In the Village," a piece she wrote when she was in Brazil and published in *The New Yorker* in 1953. According to Bishop's letters, and observations from some critics, the events of the story are based on Bishop's memories of the years she spent with her maternal grandparents in Great Village in 1916 and 1917 at the time of her mother's hospitalization in the Dartmouth Sanatorium. Since Bishop's mother died in that

hospital in 1934, the memories she writes about in this memoir include those of the last moments she had with her, as she was never able to visit the hospital, and her mother was never released. As Colm Tóibín summarizes it, “the references to what happened, to the circumstances that effectively left Bishop an orphan, were managed in [“In the Village”] obliquely and, of course, in prose, a medium that was not Bishop’s natural one.” “In the Village” follows a similar pattern to the one I’ve discussed earlier in the chapter in relation to many of her poems. It begins with a description of an elevated vantage point, an aerial view of a small Nova Scotian village. The village is made miniature from the description in the first paragraph, which is set apart from the rest of the narrative by a small amount of white space. In this framing section, the church steeple is small enough to flick with a fingernail, and yet it looms large in the story, hovering above the village. Above the steeple hangs an “echo of a scream,” a scream that “came there to live, forever” (*Prose* 62). An omniscient narrator focalized through a child takes over, and the story then moves to a dress-fitting scene, and then through the village, following that child on various missions including walking a cow to her pasture, and mailing packages to her mother in the hospital.

“In the Village” is not like the realist prose fiction that I discuss in the previous chapter. Even though in her letters Bishop shows a desire to represent her childhood with some amount of accuracy in the story (*One Art* 271-91), she does not wish to present the events or the narrative in a straightforward or chronological way. Instead, she characteristically refuses to reconcile the different interpretations of the village that she offers readers. The poetic prose form of the story lends itself well to the kinds of surrealist traits I’ve noted above in relation to her poetry: there is a general sense of “estrangement of the familiar” and “sudden and surprising shifts in point of view” (Goldensohn 120) as well as dreamlike qualities in the

imagery and its presentation. The verb tenses may change suddenly, or the narrator may refer to associations between sounds, smells, and colours as well as vague memories that may not make logical sense to readers. Fiona Green refers to the dream-like associations in “In the Village” as “puzzles”: “The puzzles in Bishop’s story have to do with whether ‘here’ or ‘there’ are times or places, its disorienting gaps emerging from the child’s half memory of having herself been sent from somewhere else, from a past she hardly recalls” (Green 36). As an illustration of the swift changes in tense and different senses, consider this brief section that juxtaposes the sounds of a scream and a blacksmith hammer, as well as a woman trying on a dress that seems to result in a child disappearing:

*Clang.*

The pure note: pure and angelic.

The dress was all wrong. She screamed.

The child vanishes. (*Prose* 63).

The short lines are separated into their own paragraphs; each lays out a different and separate detail of the story from a different perspective, sometimes from different senses. These details summarize the narrative and the child’s perception of her mother’s pain from the perspective of herself as both a child and an adult. André Furlani points out that in the above passage, “the anvil song has no tense,” and yet “the scream restores the immitigable past tense from which the child literally escapes into the present tense and into the forge. The story remains in the historic present from that point on” (155). The line “The child vanishes” is particularly mysterious because the perspective has been the child’s until that very point. The child is the one describing the “pure and angelic” note of the blacksmith hammer a moment earlier. The switch in tense from the present to the past back to the present again, along with the two sounds

and the mysterious vanishing child and a terrifying dress all combine to create a surreal passage.

Bishop comments on the presence of surrealist and dissociative qualities in the story indirectly in a letter to her friend Pearl Kazin while the story was in the editing stage with *The New Yorker*. Bishop writes,

They really do want it, but I refuse to put in enough ‘he said’s’ and ‘she said’s’ and ‘it was 4 p.m., a very hot summer, August 16, 1917, Great Village, Nova Scotia, and my father’s name was William Thomas Bishop’s. [...] The idea underneath it all seems to be that the *New Yorker* reader must never have to pause to think for a single second, but be informed and reformed comfortably all the time, like newspaper writing a little. (*One Art* 254)

Bishop wishes her readers to “pause to think,” to encounter the story and interpret its aesthetics, rather than its plot. For example, Bishop combines sensory perception in the beginning aerial view of the village:

A scream, the echo of a scream, hangs over that Nova Scotian village. No one hears it; it hangs there forever, a slight stain in those pure blue skies[.] [...] The scream hangs like that, unheard, in memory—in the past, in the present, and those years between. It was not even loud to begin with, perhaps. It just came there to live, forever—not loud, just alive forever. Its pitch would be the pitch of my village. Flick the lightning rod on the top of the church steeple with your fingernail and you will hear it. (*Prose* 62)

The memory of the scream is so prominent that it threatens to take over the view; it lives in silence, otherwise, like a buried memory. Screams are loud, high-pitched noises made when the

screamer is in distress. However, Bishop uses synesthesia to describe the scream as a visual object, a stain in the sky; she explains that this scream is not only “unheard” and “not even loud,” but that it “hangs over that Nova Scotian village,” and will do so forever. The village is haunted by the invisible and inaudible scream, one that is alive in the child’s memory, and one that hovers over the place until it is silenced at the end by the sound of the blacksmith’s “Clang [...] pure and angelic” (*Prose* 63). From the highest point of the village, even from that distance, the scream may be let loose from the church steeple. The clang of the blacksmith’s hammer, the other significant sound of the story, seems to make the scream disappear briefly. When at the end of the narrative the speaker asks Nate the blacksmith to “strike [his clang] again!” (*Prose* 78), she is asking him both to silence the scream and to make a sound she associates with the joyful part of her “pure and angelic” childhood. She wants to experience the true sound of the village, the note of the clang, and to stifle the painful sound of the village that lives in her memory, what remains an “echo of a scream.” She longs for the village in the moments when the scream is silenced, otherwise the scream that hangs over it colours her experience of her childhood memories, memories which are both “cozy and familiar” (Tóibín) and yet extremely painful. If screams are high-pitched noises, it coheres with the high vantage point of the viewer, and of the memory, which Bishop as she writes the story in Brazil as an adult experiences from a distance in time and space.

The scream encapsulates the whole village, which is rendered in that opening paragraph as something small enough to hold with one’s hands. Indeed, Katherine Whyte, one of the *The New Yorker* editors working with Bishop to prepare the story for publication, notes the story creates an “effect” of “the miniature world” (Whyte qtd. in Green 31). Like other miniaturizations in Bishop’s work that I explore above, in this story she juxtaposes the

perspective on an object as miniature with a perspective on the same object as large. To this end, the small child engages with the people and animals of the village; to her, the village itself is a whole world superior to the one pictured on village post cards because it is “where we live, full size and in color” (*Prose* 65). It is so large that even though she was born elsewhere and has been to other places, she cannot remember them: “So many things in the village came from Boston, and even I had once come from there. But I remembered only being here, with my grandmother” (*Prose* 64).

Far from the “derisive” “colonial” view of the past and of a place that Axelrod claims Bishop renders in the miniaturized church steeple at the beginning of “In the Village,” the story establishes a tentative sense of belonging to a past home that is both “cozy” (Tóibín) yet painful, strange yet familiar. With shifting verb tenses, aerial views, and the synesthetic description of a lingering scream, Bishop draws this Nova Scotian village as both distant and near, miniature and gigantic, far in the past, and yet immediate and present.

#### The “Two Visions” of “Poem”: Reinforcing Connection Through Distance

The final work to examine in this chapter establishing Bishop’s multiple views of the Maritime region is her poem entitled “Poem,” an ekphrastic work focusing on a description of a small landscape painting that the speaker inherits. The point of view in “Poem” shifts between two definite places as the speaker describes the painting, a Nova Scotian landscape created by a great uncle, while the speaker is in another undisclosed location. Her distance from the Nova Scotia scene again inscribes her speaker’s relation to the place from a distance, challenging the notion in Maritime literary regionalism that an individual must be in the place in order to truly understand or appreciate it. “Poem” shares many affinities with “Memories of Uncle Neddy;” both negotiate relationships to space, place, and family through the speaker’s engagement with

a painting. The poem is concerned with Nova Scotia from the geographically distanced perspective of an exile, and the speaker describes her memory of a place in relation to a physical object, a piece of artwork that has travelled from Great Village to share its “look” (*Complete* 177) with her and to help her look anew at that Maritime place. Because the speaker interacts with the place the art object represents from afar, Bishop constructs the art object and the shared “visions” (*Complete* 177) it symbolizes in relation to a second local allegiance, forging a relationship over a great distance.

Contrary to Axelrod’s assertion, the object of “Poem” is not a painting of the “entire Nova Scotian landscape reduced to the size of a dollar bill;” it is instead a representation of a village landscape. Bishop owned a small painting by her great uncle George Hutchinson, given to her by an aunt years before she began to compose the poem. Bishop’s biographer Brett Millier suggests that in some ways this painting, like other “objects came to stand for places and times, [and] Nova Scotia ‘things’ turn up in New York or Brazil and draw connections straight back” (19) to the place of her childhood. As the narrator does in “Memories of Uncle Neddy,” in “Poem,” Bishop’s speaker uses a piece of art to reconnect to Nova Scotia from a distance. In the poem, Bishop’s speaker does, as Axelrod suggests, “[inspect] the painting, in the manner of a tourist or a detective, [and] she discovers both content and medium”; however, “Poem” is not part of Axelrod’s imagined colonizing project wherein “Bishop systematically reduces and makes ‘other’ the people and places of her Nova Scotian childhood.” Rather, the poem reinforces Bishop’s connection to Nova Scotia through her distance from it.

The poem may at first seem “reductive” (Axelrod) in its miniaturizing diction:

It must be Nova Scotia; only there  
does one see gabled wooden houses

painted that awful shade of brown.  
    The other houses, the bits that show, are white.  
    Elm trees, low hills, a thin church steeple  
    —that gray-blue wisp—or is it? In the foreground  
    a water meadow with some tiny cows,  
    two brushstrokes each but confidently cows;  
    two miniscule white geese in the blue water,  
    back-to-back, feeding, and a slanting stick... (*Complete* 176)

The church steeple is “thin,” a “wisp” that may or may not be there at all. Cows are “tiny,” composed only of a couple of brushstrokes, and houses consist of mere “bits.” While the geese are “miniscule,” a word that at face value may speak the derision that Axelrod insists appears in Bishop’s Nova Scotian pieces written in Brazil, the tone of the poem does not allow the discerning reader to interpret it this way. The speaker describes a tentativeness in her interpretation: “[T]his little painting” may or may not be “(a sketch for a larger one [...])” (*Complete* 176). The painting is a representation of a place at a particular time, one that puts forward a memory that is larger than life and leads the speaker to a striking realization: “Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it! It’s behind—I can almost remember the farmer’s name. / His barn backed on that meadow. There it is, / titanium white, one dab” (*Complete* 176). The speaker is genuinely delighted to realize that even though she never met the painter, and though she did not know “[t]hose particular geese and cows” who were “naturally before [her] time” (*Complete* 177), she and the painter “both knew this place, / apparently, this literal small backwater, / looked at it our years apart. How strange. And it’s still loved, / or its memory is (it must have changed a lot). / Our visions coincided” (*Complete* 177). There is no

colonizing gesture here in the acknowledgement of two separate views of Great Village, views that are “years apart” in two separate memories. There is no attempt to control the view, as the speaker recognizes that the place has undoubtedly changed and evolved over time. Indeed, as many postcolonial theorists will agree, “Colonization allows the colonizers to view the world from their standpoint” (Eisenstein 28), not the several standpoints that this poem contains. There are after all two views of the painting, and three time periods represented—the time the painting was created, “naturally before [Bishop’s] time,” (*Complete* 177), the time of Bishop’s speaker’s memory of the place, and the time of the village’s current state, “it must have changed a lot” (*Complete* 177).

Bishop’s descriptions of the scene in “Poem” suggest her “*belonging to place*,” the mark of a regional writer that Canadian literary critic W.H. New describes as “an attitudinal identification with a particular locale, a determination of self through a relationship with site, and potentially with land” (117). But that “particular locale” is far away rather than immediate. Unlike the literary regionalism New describes, Bishop affirms her relationship and identification with a particular locale through distance in space and time rather than through proximity. The memories of Uncle Neddy she describes in her memoir are rooted in one community, but she experiences them in another place. Her relationship to Neddy and her care for him connects her to Nova Scotia and connects Neddy to Brazil. She and the painter of the dollar-bill-sized painting in “Poem” also share “two looks”:

...We both knew this place,

[...]

Our visions coincided—“visions” is

too serious a word—our looks, two looks... (*Complete* 177)

By extension, the idea of “two looks” represents the juxtaposition of perspectives that happens within Bishop’s writing about Nova Scotia. Bishop never offers just one “look” in her Nova Scotian works, nor throughout the rest of her *oeuvre*, because even from a distance, the region always informs a speaker’s perspective. The high vantage point the landscape painting evokes is juxtaposed to a second perspective. That second perspective is a subjective one, as the speaker meditates on the “two looks” of the speaker and the painter, two looks they share when remembering the place. There are also many other “looks”:

art ‘copying from life’ and life itself,  
life and the memory of it so compressed  
they’ve turned into each other. Which is which?  
Life and the memory of it so cramped,  
dim on a piece of Bristol board,  
dim but how live, how touching in detail. (*Complete* 177)

The combination of these two (or more) views on place produces an ever-present and ever-changing subjective perspective on place that is not limited to a singular regional identity inherent in the land. After all, as the many simultaneous perspectives on place in Bishop’s work suggest, the notion of an inherent land-based identity only arises from one perspective on place. Other perspectives on the same place would offer a vastly different sense of the same location. Instead of one vision of place, Bishop presents a malleable sense of place, one that shifts and changes through that ever-changing and subjective perspective she develops through the poetry and prose I discuss above.

## Conclusion

Instead of relying on a sense of authentic connection to place in characters or speakers who never leave the region, Bishop foregrounds her literary explorations of the Maritime region through speakers who leave it or who are physically removed from it and look at it from a distance. The multiple geographic identities evoked in Bishop's body of work can serve to critique twentieth-century definitions of Canadian literary regionalism that define regional identity mainly either in contrast to an allegedly singular, unified national identity, or as an expression of regional residents' supposedly authentic connection to local land. Perhaps Bishop's modernist influences led her to ignore the nation in her understanding of the region; her surrealist roots are thus perhaps the better guide to her regionalism than her declared affiliation with Nova Scotia. Whereas the nation can provide a sense of a fixed relationship between a national identity and its regional tributaries, and as a mediation between global and local identities, Bishop's use of some surrealist aesthetics drops this relationship and instead lets places of various sizes and scales inform the Maritime region and Maritime identity as she represents it. Through Bishop's miniaturizing aesthetic, she situates the speaker's and reader's perspectives between the local and the global, while establishing that the places and spaces in view may shift in scale depending on the individual perspective that filters them.

This shifting perspective suggests that there is no governing or fixed connection between the viewer and the viewed; instead, the experiencing subject makes that connection as an individual who travels and inhabits spaces and who continues to move. As such, Bishop's "Memories of Uncle Neddy," "In the Village," and "Poem" offer a version of Maritime regional identity and belonging that does not present the subject as strictly belonging to Nova Scotia; instead, these works make up a version of regionalism that focuses on a perspective that

shifts between more than one locale. Bishop's adoption of distance, the disorientation created in both speakers and readers when she combines distance with proximity, and her use of multiple perspectives in her poetry and prose all help to establish an ever-present and ever-changing relationship between local places and a wider world.

## Chapter Four

### Regionalism and Black Identity in the Maritimes in the Works of

#### George Elliott Clarke and Maxine Tynes

I am from this community;  
this Maritime, Halifax, down home Nova Scotia Black community. (Tynes,  
*Woman* 60)

I can only look to the vast expanse of Africa, that black mother continent, and  
say, that is who and what and where I am. (Tynes, *Borrowed* 8)

I do own land here [...] and that psychologically anchors me very much to the  
soil of Nova Scotia. (Clarke qtd. in Wyile “On Identity”)

This chapter compares the poetic philosophies of two Black Nova Scotian poets, Maxine Tynes (1949-2011), and George Elliott Clarke (b. 1960), who engage each other in debate about the relationships between regionalism and Black identity in the Maritimes through their literary and critical work. Clarke is a prolific creative writer who is also a scholar; the production and reception of his writing is shaped by the academic environment in which he works. Tynes, on the other hand, was a popular poet whose work is formed by personal experience, familial heritage, and social protest rather than a career in higher education. Clarke has written numerous volumes of criticism and award-winning poetry focused on Black identity in the Maritime region and has established a theoretical model for understanding it, manifested

in his vision of “Africadia.” While Clarke’s is the better known approach to Black Nova Scotian writing, Tynes’s pushes Maritime regionalism in other directions. My main goal in this chapter is to examine the ways that Tynes’s poetry complements and moves beyond the philosophical framework of Black identity and regional belonging that underpins Clarke’s concept of “Africadia.”

To achieve this goal, the chapter will begin with brief introductions to each writer’s *oeuvre*, and then analyze selections of each writer’s poetry. After a detailed analysis of Clarke’s writing and the ways that Black regional identity arises in his depictions of “Africadia,” I turn to Tynes’s *oeuvre* and embark on the comparison between their different models of belonging. The distinction between these two writers’ approaches to regional identity arises most sharply in their treatments of Africville, a Black community in Halifax that was razed in the 1960s. For this reason, the final sections of the chapter will be devoted to a brief history of Africville and an explication of the two poets’ different responses to the physical destruction of that community.

Both Tynes and Clarke ponder the notion of ancestry and land possession implicit in Euro-settler models of regional belonging, and through their differing emphases, they offer remarkable new ways of thinking about regional identity. Clarke expands the idea that land possession and a sense of regional belonging go hand in hand by asserting the idea that non-Euro-settler Maritimers can stake the same claim to the land that Euro-settlers make. For him, the land holds the history of the people, and the history of African Nova Scotians who have also cultivated the soil and gone to sea has been excluded from the history of Nova Scotia. Tynes’s work, however, challenges the notion that there is an intrinsic connection to land that grants any particular group control over it. At the same time, she asserts that people can

develop a deep sense of connection to specific lands, a sense of connection that influences their ways of seeing the world around them. In Tynes's *oeuvre*, she describes association to lands through family and community history, and through the collective memory of a larger group that produces a sense of connection to lands that are no longer within reach. These lost lands are sometimes located in Africa, and Tynes's speakers make an intuitive connection to an elusive African ancestry. At other times, these lands are located in the region, specifically on the former site of Africville. To Tynes, a common experience of land dispossession unites "all Black experience" (*Woman* 60) and draws connections between the people dispossessed of lands and seemingly disparate places all over the world. For her, a deep sense of connection to place can be fostered through dispossession because dispossession is part of the collective history of the African diaspora writ large, and this collective history informs her speakers' sense of identity. Tynes thereby presents a stark challenge to Euro-settler models of Maritime regionalism because that kind of regionalism defines the region in terms of belonging and ownership, not alienation. Her poetry also provides a subversive departure from early Maritime critic Fred Cogswell and more recent scholar David Creelman, opening up its implicit assumptions about the regional subject as property owner to query and critique.

Tynes establishes a Nova Scotian "home base" for her speakers in a larger global network of places associated with the African diaspora. This "home base" gives her a way of thinking of Nova Scotia as the primary locale in a constellation of global locations that her poetry draws close together. Rather than focus on the Maritime region as an isolated place defined in opposition to other regions, as dominant models of twentieth-century Canadian regional writing often define it, Tynes frequently draws connections between the region and other places around the globe. Tynes does not fit the white, folk, or masculine models of more

received twentieth-century regionalisms. Through her African ancestry and feminism, Tynes espouses identities that originate outside, and extend beyond, the geographical region. As I suggest throughout my argument, regionalism need not be conceived as limited to land in a single place; it can be rethought to demonstrate the important intersections between aspects of a local community and the wider world. As Ella Shohat urges feminists “to deploy a multiperspectival approach” to feminist movements across borders (42) and not to accept only local feminisms or global feminisms—the former “surrenders all dialogue to the dead-end of an overpowering relativism” and the latter often treats feminist groups around the world as homogeneous (42)—so should regional scholars reject a definition of place-based writing that is primarily centred on land. A multiperspectival regionalism that takes into account global identities as well as local ones and that defines both as irreducibly heterogeneous allows readers to adopt multiple perspectives on local places and to develop relationships to a larger world outside the region. Such perspectives help to remove restrictive concepts of regional identity that tend to tie the notion of belonging exclusively to Euro-settler models of land ownership. Moreover, Tynes’s multiperspectivism highlights the importance of global history to her notions of place and place-based identities.

In contrast to Elizabeth Bishop’s adoption of distant vantage points that allow her to gaze at Nova Scotia from a position outside it, Tynes adopts vantage points within Nova Scotia in order to look at geographically distant places, places in Africa and places associated with the African diaspora. These vantage points allow Tynes to reflect on concepts of belonging to the region. Tynes associates the dispossession of Africville to global dispossession of Black people all over the world without relinquishing her Nova Scotian identity. For Tynes, distance offers her new opportunities for taking up her Maritime identity by embracing an identity that extends

far beyond the geographical region. Her *oeuvre* suggests that regional identity does not only concern those who occupy the region but also the history of those people and groups in other places and times.

Nova Scotia-born Tynes establishes a personal and familial connection to the Maritimes through her poetry and interviews. Most significantly, she creates an identity that espouses a firm connection to Nova Scotia through the body. Even though connection to land through ownership or habitation is not a requirement to inherit the identities Tynes's speakers espouse in her poems, the land nonetheless makes up an important component of African and African Nova Scotian identities in Tynes's *oeuvre*. A lifelong resident of the province, she described herself as "one of those Maritimers who will never move very far away from home" (Fraser). In several poems, her speakers describe a "homestead" (*Woman* 60; *Borrowed* 47) that the Tynes family lived in for generations in Nova Scotia. Using the word "homestead," Tynes evokes the Euro-settler model of land-based identity that requires long-term residency in order to secure a sense of belonging. At the same time, rather than cling to a singular regional identity based on one piece of land, Tynes creates a simultaneous sense of longing for a lost home outside Nova Scotia, for return to an origin that dates back further in her speakers' family histories than a few generations. Tynes engages the Nova Scotia in which she lives as a home base from which to view or experience Africa, African history, and by extension, African Nova Scotian history. Her *oeuvre* challenges Euro-settler notions of regional identity that tend to treat land as a stable source of identification and as an unchanging entity that determines the lives of its residents. No matter where her speakers are situated, Tynes asserts that the singular geographical region is just as important as the history of the people in that place, including their collective family or ethnic history in many other places. The ethnic histories of people in a

given region continue to be relevant to those people after they resettle from other places to the region. In her body of work, Tynes posits that descendants of Africa all over the world, including those in Nova Scotia where she lived all her life, are united not by a secure connection to land or control over it, but by disenfranchisement, the experience of racism, and their dispossession of land they once called their own. While critics may hesitate to label Tynes a “regional” poet because of her espousal of multiple identities, exploring her work under the “regional” umbrella draws attention to significant assumptions implicit in the notion of race and regional identity and opens them to further analysis.

### **George Elliott Clarke Introduction**

As a prolific writer and critic, and as the pioneering force behind contemporary African Nova Scotian and African Canadian literary theory, Clarke exerts tremendous influence over interpretations of Black writing in the Maritimes. Clarke began publishing poetry to high acclaim in the 1980s when he was in his twenties, and his work as a critic began in 1991 with the two-volume *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*. Born in Windsor Plains, Nova Scotia, Clarke grew up in the North End of Halifax, an immigrant and working class neighbourhood, and later left the province to attend university in Waterloo, Ontario. After a brief return to Nova Scotia in the 1980s to conduct social work and earn his Master of Arts degree from Dalhousie University, Clarke travelled to Kingston, Ontario where he earned his doctorate in English Literature. Since his literary career began, Clarke has published nearly a dozen collections of poetry, two librettos, a novel, more anthologies of Black and African Canadian writing, and two substantial volumes of criticism, *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature* (2002), and *Directions Home: Approaches to African-Canadian Literature* (2012). Clarke is an Officer of the Order of Canada and has won

numerous awards including the Governor General's Award for Poetry and the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award. At the University of Toronto, he teaches courses in African Canadian Literature; currently, as I write this chapter, he is a visiting professor at Harvard. He holds five honorary doctorates and has held numerous fellowships at universities and other institutions in North America and Europe. Clarke has national and international bonafides that Tynes and many other writers lack.

Clarke believes that African descendants in the Maritime region have a unique history and experience that differentiates them from other African populations in Canada. Clarke's coinage "Africadian," first iterated in the introduction to *Fire on the Water*, combines the adjectives "African" and "Acadian" into a new term to describe Black Maritimers. In one interview, he notes: "I really wanted a term that was going to ground Black people in a space. [...] [N]one of [the available] terms really make it clear that there is a group of us who have a connection to this land going back two hundred years, [...] and so I think we need a term that captures that" (Dominguez 191). Many Maritime and Canadian literary critics have adopted Clarke's term, but not all critics agree with Clarke's characterizations of the nature of Black experience in the Maritimes. For instance, Clarke's efforts to define a particular group of Black Canadians whose history is distinct from Black Canadians in other regions has also been criticized for portraying "the current Black Nova Scotia cultural flowering as more homogenous than it in fact is" (Stone 243).

Moreover, Clarke's land claim for Africadians resembles the one that twentieth-century critics such as Fred Cogswell and Gwendolyn Davies make for many other Maritime Euro-settler writers. Instead of considering the ways "Africadian" literature may challenge essentialist regionalisms grounded in Euro-settler notions of belonging, then, Clark's umbrella

term fits that body of writing within the existing theory and criticism of Maritime regionalism. Clarke does not appear to offer a model for rethinking Maritime regionalism that distinguishes it from the dominant Euro-settler idea of belonging as land possession. However, Clarke's land claim is different from the Euro-settler assertion of "authentic" belonging. Rather than pretending the land is empty of peoples or histories, Clarke seeks to add to those histories without claiming that his is the only one. By adding Africadian history to the land, Clarke invalidates the Euro-settler position that Euro-settlers were and are the only legitimate heirs to Maritime land. In one description of "Africadia," Clarke explains that he wishes to rename places in Nova Scotia after Black families and to "reclaim the province because we have been disenfranchised" ("Mapping" 76). Tynes shares the view that Black families have been disenfranchised. But by contrast, she focuses on mapping the land in non-traditional ways: through the skin, bodies, and talk of family and community members.

Many critics place Clarke and Tynes in opposition to one another, pointing out some significant differences in the ways they explore and portray Black identity in Nova Scotia. Alexander MacLeod terms the "debate" between Clarke and Tynes a "family feud" wherein "Tynes especially has made a clear effort to carve out her own place in Black Nova Scotian writing and to distance herself from Clarke's poetic and political agenda" ("Little State" 100). Clarke reveals his awareness of Tynes's opposition to the term "Africadian" and chooses not to "apply it to her or her work" in his most recent examination of her *oeuvre* (*Directions* 264). However, he also gives himself the last word on its validity *vis à vis* Tynes's writing. In the footnotes to the same article he concedes that while he does not use the term "Africadian" in that treatment of her writing out of respect due to her recent death, "the reader should know that I do position Tynes within *my* Africadian rubric" (*Directions* 264).

Clarke's review of Tynes's *Woman Talking Woman* is especially harsh and includes the critiques that it comprises "a collection of heartfelt clichés" and that many of the effects of any poetic techniques she deploys are "dissipated by [...] trite lines" (*Odysseys* 298). He argues that "Her rhetoric [...] is always attractive; but, often, there's more volubility than virtue, more sensationalism than sense, in her work" (*Odysseys* 298). Fuller attributes the divergence between Tynes and Clarke to Tynes's emphasis on a feminist perspective and "everyday" emotional qualities to her poetry that provide a stark alternative to what MacLeod calls the "masculine, textually privileged, and more self-consciously 'literary' aesthetic standards" ("Little State" 101) of Clarke's theoretical model and creative practice ("Raising" 106-7). As I see it, these debates about the term "Africadian" suggest that regional identity is not only inclusive but heterogeneous and contradictory, a site of contestation and debate in its own right. The disagreement as these critics articulate it may be true enough, but it fails to express the defining difference between the two writers' concepts of Black writing and Black identity in the region, which lies in their manner of depicting those ideas. Ironically, when Clarke and Tynes are approached as opposites, a nuanced idea of the ways regionalism relates to, and may be changed by, a Black diaspora may be lost. Both writers place African diaspora at the centre of the region, but they do so in different ways.

In this discussion, I choose not to characterize Tynes's work as "Africadian" because the term reflects a definition of regionalism that does not accurately fit her work. Clarke's term glosses over the significant distinctions between Tynes's *oeuvre* and Black Nova Scotians' claims to Maritime land. Moreover, Tynes foregrounds these distinctions, overtly seeking an alternative model of an identity linked to local place but not to land ownership. Even though Tynes's poems do affirm a historical link between Black Nova Scotians and land, and question

belonging to Maritime place, she is also equally interested in other places where Black Nova Scotians' distant families live or have lived. Her poems demonstrate that for African-descended residents of Nova Scotia, local Maritime place belongs to a global network of local places that share an experience of discrimination and dispossession. By contrast, Clarke's concept of Africadia does not move far enough away from a theory of land-claiming regionalism to describe the nature of Tynes's work or her idea of region.

### **Maxine Tynes Introduction**

Tynes was a popular poet, teacher, and activist who lived all her life in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Born in Dartmouth in 1949, Tynes also died there in 2011 of post-polio syndrome. Tynes's poetry has sold well all over the country; she earned such accolades as the Milton Acorn People's Poet Award and an honorary doctorate from Mount Saint Vincent University (Wyile et. al., "Maxine"). She was the first person of African descent to serve on Dalhousie University's Board of Governors, and a room in the Alderney Gate Public Library in Dartmouth was dedicated to her when it opened in the 1990s (Fraser). As an activist and poet, Tynes used her poetry as a vehicle through which to speak out on issues of disability, race, and gender. She wrote four collections of poetry, each of which includes a piece or two of short fiction. *Borrowed Beauty* (1987) begins her career introspectively with personal explorations of her identity as a Black woman, a Nova Scotian, and a descendant of Africans. Examining themes of identity and family history through poems such as "Mirrors," "Family Portrait," "Womanskin," "Black Teacher: To this World, To My Students," and "The Profile of Africa," this first collection takes into account multiple simultaneously affirmed identities and affiliations to different geographic places. Tynes's second collection *Woman Talking Woman* (1990) expands upon many of the same themes that she treated in *Borrowed Beauty*, adding the

element of feminist activism to her *oeuvre*. For instance, she addresses the anniversary of the Montreal massacre of female engineering students in 1989 in “For the Montreal Fourteen Who Lived and Died in the Heartbeat of Woman,” and a march for violence against women in Halifax in “Nightsong.” This collection includes a section dedicated to the question of Black identity in Nova Scotia, “Black Song Nova Scotia,” a group of poems that represents the core of Tynes’s exploration of regional identity in a global context. Mid-career, Tynes wrote *Save the World for Me* (1991), a collection intended for children and young adults. Tynes’s third and final collection intended for adult readers, *The Door of My Heart* (1993), continues to explore her experience as a Black woman, and it adds a focus on disability with poems “Sugarcane,” “Gait Gait Gait Gait,” “Post Polio,” and “Fear of Falling” that survey Tynes’s experience of contracting polio as a child and subsequently requiring a cane to walk throughout her adult life. The poem “We Demand the Right to Pee” brings back Tynes’s activist voice with a protest poem advocating for societal awareness of many types of physical disabilities.

Tynes’s espousal of multiple simultaneous identities—Black, female, disabled, African, Nova Scotian—makes her writing an appropriate avenue for an exploration of regional identities that are not grounded in land ownership. Tynes’s placement of the dispossessed Nova Scotian community of Africville in the global African Diaspora calls for a regional identity that takes into account global geographic and historical contexts. Christian Riegel and his fellow editors of the conference proceedings *A Sense of Place: Re-Evaluating Regionalism in Canadian and American Writing* (1998) call for such plural readings of North American regions, contending that “The relationship between ethnicity and region is an important one, highlighting the complex connections between place, subjectivity, and culture, and pointing to the need to define the writing of particular regions in more pluralistic terms” (xiii).

Many editors include Tynes's work in African and feminist anthologies in Canada and the Atlantic provinces, but they rarely do so in anthologies that claim to focus on Maritime regional writing. For example, her work appears in Lorris Elliott's *Other Voices: Writings by Blacks in Canada* (1985), *Celebrating Canadian Women: Prose and Poetry by and about Women* (1989), George Elliott Clarke's *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing* (1992) and Jeanette Lynes's *Words out There: Women Poets in Atlantic Canada* (1999). It was not selected, however, by the editors of *Coastlines: The Poetry of Atlantic Canada* (2002), *Landmarks: An Anthology of New Atlantic Canadian Poetry of the Land* (2001), nor in *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature* (2011), all regional and national anthologies that purport to contain representative collections of regional writing. When Tynes's work is included in a regional anthology, the anthology always specializes in writers of colour and women writers in the region.

As Marjorie Stone points out, critics in general tend to address Tynes and her work in separate conversations and anthologies about one narrow topic at a time. She believes that Tynes enacts "a dialectic of otherness to those in current and emerging sites of power" (231) that academics and editors find difficult to classify; that is, Tynes's espousal of a plurality of identities that oppose white able-bodied male power, including disability, feminism, and a Black identity, make it difficult for academics to approach her work (230, 240). Her writing indeed embraces a pluralistic view in Enoch Padolsky's sense of the term "plural": "a 'plural' view of the world has no trouble accompanying a focus on 'Blackness' and 'race'" (31), or for that matter gender and disability. Tynes's gaze, according to Stone, "contains and constitutes the multiplicity of others that is herself and the world" (233-34).

In all of the academic conversations about Tynes's writing, only two have made a case for considering Tynes's *oeuvre* as significant in relation to the theory of regionalism. Kirsten Sandrock focuses on how recent articulations of the region in writing by Tynes, Rita Joe, and Antonine Maillet can help to decentralize postcolonial literatures by shifting the focus away from the nation as a central organizing locus. Her argument implies that these writers also provide different ways of articulating the region, ways that "write back" to hegemonic power structures. Sandrock argues that Tynes's Africville poems "[counteract] the prominence of nationalist attitudes and stresses instead the importance of personal politics in the imaginative reconstruction of Africville" (87). She believes that "personal politics" informs Tynes's regional vision, and that she "reconfigures the [...] region" (85).

In *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada*, Danielle Fuller argues that Tynes is among the Atlantic women writers who provide a significant challenge to literary regionalism by "demand[ing] that it include multiple perspectives that frequently refer to (and sometimes prefer) non-regional communities" (*Writing* 31). Fuller notes that "this writing prompts literary critics to reject old-style literary regionalism altogether and to reconfigure the Atlantic region as a cultural space that is open to articulations of difference" (*Writing* 30), which they do by developing a "resistant or strategic regionalism" (*Writing* 40).

Some of Tynes's more recent critics note not only is there an absence of landscapes in her poetry but also that the poet dissociates her work from geography and topography altogether. Herb Wylie argues that Tynes deterritorializes the Nova Scotian community of Africville, representing it as "a persistence of spirit, a less territorially circumscribed sense of community" (*Anne* 121). Further, Clarke notes that there is a "disappearance of any precise—

realistic or idealistic—landscape or seascape from her poetic” (*Directions* 165). Instead of deploying landscapes to provide illustrations of Black identity in the Maritimes, Clarke argues that Tynes’s poems use various multi-media “scapes” such as television scenes and collages of other places to do so. He defines these “abstract ‘scapes’ of media” as “television, magazines, paintings, mirrors, photographs, and car windows,” claiming that Tynes’s “Atlantic Canada exists centrally within a globalized electronic media and publishing industry” (*Directions* 165). For Tynes, he argues, “Africa—imaginary and distant—is [her] most ‘real’ landscape” (*Directions* 169). His critique suggests that in embracing a pan-African identity, Tynes’s work fails to acknowledge the history and specificity of Black identity in the Maritimes. By favouring the narrative of African diaspora over local and specific regional scenes, Clarke’s comments suggest, Tynes perhaps minimizes the important and concrete aspects of Maritime life in favour of emphasizing the similarities of Black experience across borders.

Despite the lack of “landscape *qua* landscape” (Clarke, *Directions* 165) in her work, however, Tynes finds other ways of expressing connection to Maritime lands and place without describing Maritime topography at any length. Instead of using traditional landscapes, she establishes a regional identity by engaging with her own and others’ family history and by naming in her poems the places where her speakers are located. She describes Nova Scotian community with the signifiers of specific people, actions, occupations, and the preoccupations of daily life in the region. In drawing connections between Africville and a pan-African identity, Tynes does not dismiss Black Nova Scotia, its many other histories, or the land as less important. Rather, she acknowledges that Black Nova Scotian identity is part of a larger whole, a world history of a group that has experienced prejudice, racism, and dispossession of their lands. Possession of land is important to Tynes, but not in the sense of “ownership” in Euro-

settler land claims where individuals “own” specific pieces of land. Tynes’s regionalism takes up a vantage point in Nova Scotia that she deploys to gaze upon distant places; this vantage point represents her way of embracing the Maritimes and her corresponding Maritime identity. One reason why topography is not important to Tynes is that her gaze is fixed on a farther point.

### **George Elliott Clarke’s Africadian Regionalism**

In this section, I will take issue with some of Clarke’s critiques of Tynes’s poetry by demonstrating the significance of land ownership to his creative vision of Africadia. Delineating Clarke’s position on Black identity and regional belonging in the Maritimes will allow me to properly demonstrate ways that Tynes’s model of regionalism offers a subversive departure from established models of belonging—Euro-settler and African Nova Scotian. In the introduction to Clarke above, I began to argue that his model of regional belonging makes a similar land claim for Africadians as the one non-Africadian twentieth-century critics stake on behalf of Euro-settler writers. Clarke’s stance on regional belonging asserts a historical connection to the land for Maritime descendants of Black Loyalists. Like the critics I discuss in earlier chapters who take the position that occupancy is the only authentic form of ownership and legitimate basis of possessive feelings over land, Clarke’s work stakes a personal and collective claim to the land through generations of family who work, live on, and therefore (in this view) own the land. For him, it is important to rename the land as a settler, to take it and mark ownership over it on behalf of a specific community. There is an individualistic basis to the notion of land ownership wherein individuals and not groups own land.

MacLeod has argued that

Read in a certain way, Clarke can easily be classified as a traditional regionalist. He is deeply committed to his role as an anthropological recorder and museum curator for black Nova Scotian history. The omnipresent photographs in his books, the archival material, the recipes, the music, the newspaper clippings [and so on] [...] all indicate that Clarke sees himself as a figure charged with a near-religious, but definitely political, responsibility to collect, protect, and nurture the cultural artifacts of his community. (“Little State” 107-8)

Indeed, these actions resemble those of an ethnographer seeking to draw a historically accurate portrait of people and place. Clarke explains in an interview a “need to commemorate” that “has fuelled my writing since my youth. I try to struggle against the general absence and repression of the existence of Black Nova Scotians or Africadians in every major discourse in this province. [...] We have a history here, [...] and there is just no legitimate way that we can be excluded from the history of this place” (“Mapping” 73). For MacLeod, Clarke imagines Africadia as much as he reconstitutes it via archival research, and that suggests to him that Clarke’s Africadia is both real and imagined. Clarke’s ability to imagine new names for places in Nova Scotia suggests to MacLeod a potential for invention, as “the fixed facts of Nova Scotian geography become more flexible: Weymouth Falls can turn into Whylah Falls, and Digby County can change its name to Jarvis County” (“Little State” 109). In my view, Clarke emphasizes the merits of a land-claiming regionalism for a population dispossessed and erased in the region. He renames the land in order to signify that the land holds the history of the people who have been excluded from the history of Nova Scotia.

In his interview with Maureen Moynagh, Clarke contends that “it’s important to claim the place for ourselves, and to rename, reorder, rethink the whole thing” (“Mapping” 77). In

doing so, he has produced several creative works set in or centred on the Maritimes, including books of poetry *Saltwater Spirituals and Deeper Blues* (1983), *Whylah Falls* (1990), *Lush Dreams*, *Blue Exile: Fugitive Poems 1978-1993* (1994), *Execution Poems: The Black Acadian Tragedy of 'George and Rue'* (2001), the drama *Beatrice Chancy* (1999), the novel *George and Rue* (2005), as well as the aforementioned anthologies of Black Nova Scotian writing. His efforts as a critic of African Canadian literature also continue to carve out a significant body of criticism for African Maritime literatures.

Clarke's first work *Saltwater Spirituals* begins his commemorative project with the inclusion of archival photographs of Black Nova Scotians in rural settings. The photographs are separated from the poems in distinct sections, and the individual relationships between the photos and poems are left to the reader to discern. Since there are no direct relationships between any poem and photo, the effect of the images is to imply that they give the poems a historical context. The photos help to articulate and characterize Africadian history in the region. One of the first images depicts a man and woman standing next to each other; the man wears an apron and the woman holds a ladle or otherwise large spoon. Their faces are expressionless, a common feature of photos taken with a long exposure time. The caption reads simply, "A Black married couple—1880 s" (*Saltwater* 27). Another image depicts a group of men assembled in front of a clapboard building. The caption notes, "A Tupper Warren Pulp and Sawmill Crew, Weymouth, N.S. early 1900s" (*Saltwater* 30). Clarke explains that "involving history and photographs in my creative work [...] is a means of contesting [...] constant erasure, which has led ultimately I think to racism, to the idea that 'you folks do not count; you're not even a fit subject for history'" ("Mapping" 73). The presence of the photographs attempts, then, to add some actual historical evidence for the longtime existence of Black

culture in Nova Scotia.

Many of the poems in *Saltwater Spirituals* make this same gesture. The first section, “Soul Songs,” is comprised of thirteen poems each named after a specific Black church in Nova Scotia and each creatively engaging with the history or present state of that church. The second section, “Blues Notes,” includes many poems set in Nova Scotia such as “East Coasting,” a poem that extends Clarke’s attempt to recuperate the lost history of Black presence in Nova Scotia by depicting the Black community as possessed of an intimate knowledge of the land via the land’s inherent music:

bagpipe jazz hymns sermonize  
sunday air; oh amazing  
grace of sounds, maritime  
music; ocean voices  
washing away sand-bound  
cities’ blues; silver-tongued  
gravity seducing virgin  
apples to fall...  
we know this land’s language,  
its beach broken speech,  
of spitting water, roaring rocks;  
aye, we know its taut tune:  
saxophone sea spirituals,  
moaning blacks in clapboard churches,  
bagpipe jazz hymns

testifying their atlantic genealogy. (*Saltwater* 49)

Bagpipes are an unlikely instrument for Jazz music. In the Nova Scotian context, the bagpipe is a traditional Scottish instrument dating back to that group's settlement of the region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By mixing bagpipes and jazz, the poem maintains that Black Nova Scotians have been part of the area just as long as Scottish settlers. The speaker marks a specific "genealogy" known through "this land's language" (*Saltwater* 49), a language that is found in the water, earth, and in the traditions of the settlers as they celebrate at churches on Sundays. The music in the poem is made from the many words that evoke it directly. The words bagpipe, jazz hymns, voices, blues, roaring, tune, and moaning all work to evoke this sense of sound.

Alliteration of the sibilants "s" and "z" throughout the poem imbues a musicality within the structure of the piece itself. The first line propels the poem forward with a cluster of accented syllables as well as a tight group of these "s" and "z" sounds. The "s" sound mimics the spitting water and the sound of the retreating ocean water over rocks evoked in the lines. Those sounds pulse regularly in the poem, and become the most consistent in the thirteenth line where they accentuate "saxophone sea spirituals." In this strongest alliterative line, the sibilants help to aurally describe a seascape, an instrument, and a type of song. The "spiritual" appears twice in the poem, occurring elsewhere as a hymn, specifically "bagpipe jazz hymns." That phrase, a tight group of accented syllables, begins the poem and repeats at line fifteen, maintaining the momentum of the poem's rhythm. While each line has its own metrical character and its own distinct sound, the poem favours metrical feet that begin with an accented syllable, plunging the phrases and lines forward quickly and emphatically. It is as if the speaker

is shouting at the reader, perhaps like the “testifying” “moaning blacks” of the congregation Clarke evokes here.

In addition to “bagpipe jazz hymns,” there is another important instance of alliteration in the poem signified by accented syllables, one that further illustrates this confident, concentrated stance: “we know this land’s language.” What have heretofore been evoked as musical sounds are portrayed now as a language in itself, a set of signifiers that represent this particular place. The “we” who know it so well implicitly stake a claim to the land and the language that the poem works so hard to describe in detail. In the following line, that language changes to the “beach-broken speech / of spitting water.” Rhyming “beach” and “speech,” the speaker suggests another relationship between landscape and language; this time the rhythm of the waves and the particular “speech” of this land yoke together. That yoking appears in the next line in images of “spitting water, roaring rocks” and then changes back again to a “taut tune,” returning to the evocation of music through the poem’s final lines.

“East Coasting” reappears in *Lush Dreams*, but in very different form from the poem above. In this altered version, it has been cut down to only seven lines from sixteen, and only one line is recognizably reproduced from the earlier version: “its beach-broken speech” (*Lush* 54). Here is the full poem:

Poets sigh this land’s brogue  
its beach-broken speech...  
Wharves slouch in fog,  
Tractors slump in fields.  
Butterflies issue  
from dark chambers of fruit.

Skeletons people these white fields. (*Lush* 54)

In this iteration of the poem, Clarke abandons the more obvious reference to Scottish culture of the bagpipe in favour of the more subtle reference to a brogue, a type of leather shoe bearing a name that derives from Scottish Gaelic. The land in the poem thereby evokes a Scottish step, an object of lament for the poets to whom the speaker refers. Brogue also refers to a Scottish or Irish accent in speech, maintaining the aural component of the poem. However, the poem drops all of the references to music that appear in the first published version. Whereas the first version focuses on music that arises into air, this second version instead focuses more intently on the land: its tread and its hidden contents. In the poem's final line, the speaker imagines long-dead bodies as the land's population; these are hidden under the otherwise snow-covered earth of the fields. Significantly, the focus on the land itself in the poem coincides with Clarke's deliberate focus on Africadia in this collection. Clarke had not yet introduced the idea of Africadia at the time of the previous collection's publication.

The placement of the poem within the collection helps to inform its interpretation. It appears as the second poem in the "Africadia" section of *Lush Dreams*, a section about that specific Black community and culture, so the reader can make a number of assumptions that were not available when the poem first appeared. Most importantly, there is no need to directly name Black people as the residents of the area since "Africadia" denotes a place where Africadians live. In the poem's earlier version, Clarke did not yet have the vision of a larger collective and historically established Black community, and he had to explain within "East Coasting" that the population he referred to was Black. In this later poem, his project is to do both: to characterize the community and to declare its existence. This is the same kind of

gesture implicit in the many archival photographs of *Saltwater Spirituals*, an argument he repeats, that the Maritimes have a long-term history of Black settlers and residents.

The poem appears prior to a section of poems that deal with the history of slavery in the province, “The Book of Jubilee.” That placement encourages a reading of those skeletons in the fields as dead black slaves embedded in the land, perhaps the true people of the land since they are literally deep inside it. Whereas the land appears “white,” both with snow and as peopled by a visible white population, the speaker suggests that under the surface lies a hidden Black history, a long regional history tied directly to the land. It is a sad and difficult-to-bear history, as the posture of the tractors and wharves suggest to the speaker who personifies them in their “slump” and “slouch” (*Lush* 54).

Even though many aspects of the poem have been altered in its second appearance in print, the general argument in both poems remains the same: in a land that has a supposedly well-established and accepted Scottish history, there is a group of people who have lived there just as long. They have experienced pain and toil in their relationship with the land, and as a result, they are fully integrated with it. They know the land, and they also know the “land’s language” (*Saltwater* 49) and “its beach-broken speech” (*Saltwater* 49; *Lush* 54), knowledge of place that takes time to acquire.

Clarke’s volume *Whylah Falls*, a collection of poems that narrate the life of a small fictional Africadian community in Nova Scotia in the 1930s, continues to stake this claim to the land. Textual elements inform the reader very early in the work that the poems are set in a place that bears a resemblance to an actual village in the province. First, the preface immediately describes the setting and its history: “Founded in 1783 by African-American Loyalists seeking Liberty, Justice, and Beauty, Whylah Falls is a village in Jarvis County, Nova Scotia. Wrecked

by country blues and warped by constant tears, it is a snowy, northern Mississippi, with blood spattered, not on magnolias, but on pines, lilacs, and wild roses” (*Whylah* 7). This description of the land distinguishes it from American communities where some Black Loyalists have migrated, and it idealizes and romanticizes the emotional pain and the physical hardship of working the land while foreshadowing the murder of Othello Clemence later in the work. Mentioning specific plants that are native to the geographic area also helps to ground the work in a specific place. Moreover, the archival photograph below the description lends a sense of documentation, as does the precision of the year 1783, the date marking the immigration of the first African American Loyalists to Nova Scotia (Clarke, *Fire* 10; Walker, *Black* 18). These two prefatory sentences reveal the speaker’s attitude toward the land. First, the speaker emphasizes that the village was “founded” by a particular group, suggesting that members were the first to arrive in the place, to settle it, and make it their home. Those founders sought “Liberty, Justice, and Beauty,” three virtues that idealize the first settlers as valorous and noble, and they sought to realize those virtues in the land where they established their community.

The “Admission” section following the preface also suggests that the author makes efforts to document a history. Instead of the expected note that accompanies many works of fiction, a disclaimer stating that any resemblance to actual persons or places is entirely coincidental, Clarke writes, “These poems are fact presented as fiction. There was no other way to tell the truth save to disguise it as a story” (*Whylah* 8). This note continues to support an interpretation of *Whylah Falls* as a documentary effort. In an interview with Margery Fee and Sneja Gunew, Clarke discusses the genesis of *Whylah Falls*, which began when he returned home after earning his BA from the University of Waterloo. During his time doing social work for an organization he helped to found in Nova Scotia called the Black United Front, he started

to record the way people spoke in Weymouth Falls and tried to make poems based on the stories they told him (Fee and Gunew). He also explains that he wanted to commemorate the memory of Graham Jarvis—the other name for Graham Cromwell, the person to whom *Whylah Falls* is dedicated—a young black man who was murdered in Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia in 1985 and whose killer was acquitted by an all-white jury. Based on Clarke’s commentary and the work’s prefatory elements, it is clear that the poems comprise an effort to commemorate and establish black presence on the land of and around Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia.

Turning to two of the poems in detail will provide more of a sense of Clarke’s vision of Africadia as it appears in this collection. “The Ballad of Othello Clemence” commemorates the recently murdered Othello through a blues song. The ballad form of the poem suggests an oral tradition for the community of Whylah Falls, one in which the story of Othello could be recounted and passed on to others. The ballad form also allows Clarke to transform Othello into a mythic and legendary character, a tragic community hero whose memory will be honoured in song in times to come. The poem appears in *Ottava rima*, an eight-lined stanza in iambic pentameter that English poets derived from Italian forms in the sixteenth century (Adams 81-2). Clarke not only nods to this established English literary history with a stanza revived by the Romantics and later Yeats (Adams 81-2), he also uses what prosodist Stephen Adams calls the “Afro-American blues form” that “always assume[s] a three-part pattern, having two repetitions (with variations) of the original statement, plus a conclusion” (99). That pattern appears here in the three stanzas—the first two repeat the problem of Othello’s murder, and the third offers a gesture toward a conclusion. With this poem, then, Clarke skillfully places himself in two traditions: first, canonical English literature, and second, African American musical practice.

The second of the three verses reads:

O sang from Whylah Falls and lived by sweat,  
Walked that dark road between desire and regret.  
He pitched lumber, crushed rock, calloused his hands:  
He wasn't a saint but he was a man.  
Scratch Seville shot him and emptied his skull.  
Tore a hole in his gut only Death could fill.  
Now his martyr-mother witnesses in cries  
Over his corpse cankered white by lilies. (*Whylah* 108)

The poem contains three stanzas, and all three name Whylah Falls as the setting of Othello's, or "O's," murder. Above, the speaker describes ways that Othello interacted with the land during his life and how he worked it until his hands were marked by that labour with calluses. The song celebrates Othello's relationship with the land as much as it celebrates his life, suggesting that his identity and the land are intertwined. As Dorothy Wells points out, *Whylah Falls* is influenced by the pastoral tradition:

the celebratory attitude toward the natural world, and human social life in touch with that world [...]. Clarke's interest in the daily lives of simple country folk, and especially in the courtship of young lovers; in the idealization of a timeless rural setting; in the apparent easy-going languorous life of characters whose world is filled with music, beauty and love, is essentially an interest in the concerns of the pastoral. (57)

She also argues that Clarke undermines the pastoral tradition by bestowing harshness on the environment, as characters must endure hard physical labour in order to survive, and their surroundings sometimes seem as hostile as welcoming (57). Certainly, readers can find that

hostility in Othello's relationship with the land, as he gave his life to hard work only to end up murdered and left on the same ground. Wells makes an important point that Clarke undermines the traditional pastoral form by depicting this level of harshness in the environment; but at the same time, the text celebrates the characters who work hard and live on the land. This celebration of hard physical labour and communion with the land is in keeping with Nova Scotian folk narratives and literary tradition. As I discuss at length in Chapter Two, according to interpretations of several critics including David Creelman and Gwendolyn Davies, having physically worked on the land gives characters in Frank Parker Day's *Rockbound*, for example, the basis of their "authentic" knowledge of that land.

David Chariandy has also commented on the addition of violence and "messiness" into an otherwise pastoral world in Clarke's creative works. He sees a difference between Clarke's scholarly commentary on the concept of Africadia and his poetic representations of this semi-real, semi-imagined place. He suggests that Clarke's creative works leave behind the tradition of Maritime antimodernism and that they contradict his scholarly gestures by allowing the impurities of the modern world to seep into his antimodernist critical stance. However, allowing violence and antagonism into his texts does not distance the works from the category of antimodernism, nor the tradition as it takes course in the Maritimes. Instead, the violence of the modern world helps to create and support the antimodernist sense of longing for a separate state of innocence, a state that could potentially exist and may have existed at one time. The poem about O's murder celebrates his life as a pure interaction with the land, innocent of the evils that await O at the end of his life. The evils of modernity nonetheless help to characterize Africadia as pure and untouched, since—as in the murder of Othello—that evil comes from outside the Africadian community. Africadia remains, then, to borrow Chariandy's phrase, in

an “antagonistic confrontation with modernity” (Chariandy 79) through that contrast with the external source of evil.

The piece in *Whylah Falls* that most lucidly reflects Clarke’s thesis of Africadia as Maritime land long populated by African descendants is “Responsive Reading,” a poem spoken by the omniscient narrator near the end of the work. The poem consists of several stanzas arranged in a litany describing the cultural and historical facets of Nova Scotia that should be accounted for in order to establish an accurate “song” of the province. The lines of the poem stretch to the margins of the page. Strong enjambment runs throughout the poem, visually breaking up phrases and building the momentum, providing a sense of speed and urgency. The first stanza begins: “To sing Nova Scotia” (*Whylah* 126), and the rest of the stanzas respond, naming all of the things that “[t]here must needs be” in order to truly sing the province. First, “there must needs howl an angry train and the / sharp-toned voices of African Baptist choirs, those Black saints / swaddled in snow-white robes of *Glory*” (*Whylah* 126). The placement of the line break between “and the” and “sharp-toned” not only increases the momentum of the angry train invoked in the line, it also forces a comparison between the image of that train and the sound of the African Baptist choirs who are singing. More sounds and voices add to this speedy chorus as the poem continues, enacting the song of African history on this land.

In the second stanza, “there must needs roar *Freedom’s* passionate urgency, the / revolutionary cry of the Atlantic’s surf storming a barricade of rock, / and the revelation cry of Black angels, wailing for *Justice*, scorching / heavens above Paradise!” (*Whylah* 126). With the “revolutionary cry” of the ocean and the “revelation cry” of “Black angels,” the sense of urgency the speaker alludes to is illustrated by an increasingly loud and more varied sound along with the poem’s fast pace. These lines hail the movement of the water of the Atlantic

ocean, evoking it as a “revolutionary cry” for the ideal of freedom for Black Loyalists who came to the province, as the preface points out, “seeking Liberty, Justice, and Beauty” (*Whylah* 7). An obvious theme develops quickly, as all elements that “must needs be” added to the song of the province are details of Black history or culture. The speaker infuses these elements with the landscape itself. The sound of “the Atlantic surf” is juxtaposed to the cry of Black angels crying for “Justice.” In the overall narrative that the poetic sequence relays, these angels cry because Othello’s killer has gone unpunished and his family mourns his death. In the context of the single poem alone, they cry for general justice for the Black population of Nova Scotia. As the poem continues, it includes the voices of general workers of the land and sea: “There must needs be the soiled yell of the fishman, [...] / the earthy growl of the greens man, ‘I got cabbage / and lettuce for pennies’” (*Whylah* 126). These lines populate the poem and land with people in the wider Africadian community beyond the main characters in the text, and provide a sense of a larger, vibrant, diverse, and—most importantly—well-established culture.

The final stanza reads, “These are the seeds of song, after the campaign bottles of / rum, the liquored sentiments, the gospel-hurt sermons, the / potato patch and hogfarm testaments, the coloured prophets / and Beautiful Ones who kneel before the Atlantic to voice / that endless chorus of fire, ‘I wish, oh Lord, I wish that / *Truth* and *Liberty* might flower in this stony soil under these / cold, hard stars’” (*Whylah* 127). The strong enjambment of this final stanza does not allow the poem to slow to a stop near its end; instead, it continues full speed, maintaining the urgency it establishes at the beginning. The poem’s many voices and sounds are like the “endless chorus of fire” that makes its appeal here. By kneeling in front of the Atlantic ocean to pray, the founders of Whylah Falls who came to the area first treat the ocean like an altar, infusing the landscape with religious significance. The prayer reinforces the hopes of the Black

Loyalists for their ideals of Truth and Liberty, and informs readers in its chronicling of the “stony soil” that Black Loyalists were allotted in their land grants, often the poorest lands that were undesirable, far away from populated centres, or difficult to work (Walker, *Black* 18). That final line of the poem includes as much of a reference to Black Loyalist history in Nova Scotia as it does to maintaining the narrative of the work.

In my brief examinations of *Saltwater Spirituals and Deeper Blues*, *Whylah Falls*, and *Lush Dreams*, *Blue Exile*, I have attempted to provide a sense of Clarke’s concept of Africadia as it arises in his creative work. Some readers may challenge my view that Clarke’s model of an Africadian regionalism can be extrapolated from his earliest poetry and criticism, work he produced twenty years ago, particularly since Clarke has continued to develop and publish as a scholar and creative writer to this day. I concede that Clarke’s most recent creative work is not as focused on the region as it once was, yet interviews as recent as 2008 suggest that Clarke’s views of regional belonging have not changed in any fundamental way; he continues to maintain that regional belonging and connection to land are inextricably linked. Clarke explicitly says so in his commentary about living in Toronto and his tendency “to speak of Nova Scotia as home” (Wyile, “On Identity”). In an interview that took place in Kentville, Nova Scotia, Clarke tells Wyile, “I do own land here, I am very proud [...]. It’s in the Annapolis Valley and it’s part of my familial heritage, so I feel very good about that, and that psychologically anchors me very much in the soil of Nova Scotia” (Wyile, “On Identity”).

Throughout Clarke’s career, then, in his poetic works and commentary on Africadia, he stakes a personal and collective claim to the land through generations of family who work, live on, and own Maritime land. For him, it is important not only to stake the claim, but to rename the land as a settler, to take it and mark ownership over it for the community. This is a

significant move for a Black Nova Scotian critic to make on the one hand because, as Ian McKay argues, dominant Euro-settler narratives of Maritime identity are rooted significantly in notions of “the folk.” Mythologies of this European-descended group have historically excluded and marginalized the presence of minority writers; as McKay puts it, “the folk” “could be members of any ethnic group, significantly excluding, for the most part, natives and Blacks” (230). And, as Moynagh summarizes the Maritime folk as theorized by McKay, “The quest of the folk was, quite clearly, also a quest for whiteness” (“Africville” 17). Clarke’s pride in land ownership is part and parcel of his position that the history of Black Nova Scotia has been erased, and part of that history is land possession.

On the other hand, as important as it is for regional scholars to acknowledge and embrace the history, literary culture, and daily life of African Nova Scotians, there is nothing new about the model of regional belonging found in Clarke’s *Africadia*. His espousal of this model may be the only way to recuperate a specific part of Black Nova Scotian history—namely, that Black people were free landowning persons and that therefore the notion of an authentic regional identity grounded in Euro-settler ownership is not only exclusionary but also historically inaccurate. MacLeod believes that in Clarke’s “*Africadia*” both the real and imagined places can coexist and that that represents a new addition to the theory of regionalism which normally attributes literary representation as deriving somehow directly from the land. However, the re-imagined vision of the Maritimes-as-*Africadia* is a place where names are changed or bestowed in order to reflect the people living on the land, who are also claiming ownership and control over it. Ownership and access to the land affect the way *Africadians* see the world and their own place in it; specifically, this ownership gives *Africadians* a sense of belonging to the region. Possession of land is based on working and living on the land, as well

as the idea that an ideal regional subject is a land-owner or inheritor, a person who has roots in the place dating back several generations. Clarke wishes to recuperate this idea because when properly understood, it includes racially diverse Nova Scotian identities. He affirms that developing a relationship to land is not exclusive to Euro-settlers. Clarke's approach to regional belonging, when read next to Tynes's, helps to highlight her subversive notions of regional belonging, as Tynes's work ventures away from the claim that belonging requires this sense of land possession.

### **Tynes's Maritime Regionalism as a Connection to Africa**

Whereas ownership of land is the most important factor in regional belonging and Black Nova Scotian identity for Clarke's concept of Africadia, Tynes's approach to regionalism establishes the Maritimes as a home base from which her speakers ponder a global African identity. Her poetry highlights not an authentic connection to just one place, but a collective history of land dispossession for Black Nova Scotians as well as African-descended people around the world. Tynes's *oeuvre* imagines a collective and global Black community that belongs in many geographical places including the Maritimes. She thereby begins to break away from the established conventions of Euro-settler literary regionalism while at the same time maintaining that place is important to identity.

In the poems "Mirrors," "Family Portrait," and "Borrowed Beauty," Tynes's speakers claim a Nova Scotian affiliation and identity as a position from which to imagine their ancestral past, a family history stemming from a continent on the other side of the Atlantic. Tynes creates a regional identity that demonstrates that even generations of family history in the Dartmouth "homestead" (*Borrowed* 47; *Woman* 60) do not uproot her speakers from their distant connections to Africa. Tynes notes in an interview with Sharon Fraser that her family history

has roots in Africa, but the specific places on that continent are unknown to her and her speakers. Her speakers' evocation of the African diaspora necessitates their espousal of a pan-African identity because they lack records and knowledge of the specific details of their ancestry, and the corresponding specific African places or cultures that make up that history. These speakers "look to the vast expanse of Africa" (*Borrowed* 8) from Nova Scotia, not to compare two places, but rather to imagine and explore their possible origins.

In his important study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy theorizes ways to think about African diaspora in the West, proposing a model that imagines Black identity as a continual course of travel and exchange. He uses the metaphor of travelling ships

in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise and as [a] starting point. The image of the ship — a living, microcultural, micro-political system in motion — is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons [...]

Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artifacts... (Gilroy 4)

The ship operates both inside and outside of national boundaries, and it moves between two sides of the Atlantic and to various points in between. The ship is always in one specific place, but is simultaneously en route to another point. Thus, its position exists continually in transit between two points, creating relationships between spaces and places as it moves and exchanges passengers, information, and various items.

In applying Gilroy's ship metaphor to Tynes's poems, readers might imagine that Tynes's speakers are contained on a ship docked in Nova Scotia, awaiting a return trip to an imagined and distant origin. As Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg write, diasporic identity in the twentieth century attempts to strike a balance between two place-based loyalties, those "connections to the space [individuals] currently occupy and their continuing involvement with 'back home'" (14). For Tynes, her Black Nova Scotian identity is the only geographic identity that she can pinpoint, and her speakers often consider the Maritimes home. Because these speakers occupy Maritime space, notwithstanding their desire to connect with the places that their distant ancestors came from, one should begin to consider Tynes's writing "regional" even though it has an international scope. By examining the intersections between undocumented African history and Nova Scotia, Tynes opens up important lines of dialogue in Maritime history and identity about what it means to be part of a Black Nova Scotian community that is simultaneously a global Black community. At once rooted in Maritime place, yet cut off from places of origin in another larger and more distant continent, Tynes's speakers strive to balance these two ways of being in the world.

Consider the poems "Mirrors" and "Family Portrait" as illustrations of the absence of knowledge about distant family and community in Tynes's *oeuvre*. "Mirrors," a prose poem written in paragraphs, introduces Tynes's first collection *Borrowed Beauty*. The prose form, the casual, intimate tone and the speaker's use of the personal pronoun give the reader the sense of encountering a confessional letter that serves as a thorough reflection on and description of the speaker's poetry and her identities as Black woman and writer. In the poem, the speaker begins with a generalization about women who "are always looking into mirrors" (*Borrowed* 7) to find and know themselves. The speaker refers to herself as one of these women, one who has to

qualify what she knows about herself since it is not “tangible, [nor] documented” (*Borrowed* 7). She describes herself as “(at least) a fourth generation Black Canadian” but she “cannot possibly say [...] that I am a woman descendant from the people of the plains—the Serengeti, of Kenya, of Ghana, the Gambia or of Zaire—the heartland. I can only look to the vast expanse of Africa, that black mother continent, and say, that is who and what and where I am” (*Borrowed* 8). Since she does not know the country of her origins and the place where her distant family may reside, the speaker assumes a distant vantage point in Canada where she is able to “look to [...] Africa” (*Borrowed* 8).

A mixed metaphor arises in the following prose paragraph: “For me, a Black woman four generations hence on these shores, that is a lament into the mirror of the map of that place. Africa” (*Borrowed* 8). These dense lines require some careful attention. First, the speaker names herself, her current location, and the approximate length of time her family has been in Nova Scotia, “on these shores” (*Borrowed* 8). That time spent represents a lament because of the vast distance it creates in time and space, distance that moves the speaker further away from a perceived origin. The lament gets delivered “into the mirror,” in the first instance toward her own reflection, as she notes earlier in the poem that “women are always looking into mirrors. [...] We’re looking at ourselves; looking for ourselves” (*Borrowed* 7). But this mirror does not only reflect the speaker’s own visage; it is also “the mirror of the map of that place” (*Borrowed* 8); that is, the mirror represents a reflection of a map, rather than an actual one. The image of a map of Africa found on the speaker’s own face and body recurs throughout Tynes’s *oeuvre*. This map of Africa does not show geographical space, but instead the historical movement of bodies to and from Africa. In other words, Tynes’s speaker’s body is a map of the diaspora, a metaphorical map of history, space, and place.

In her monograph *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text and the Black Diasporic Body*, Hershini Bhana Young rethinks theoretical models of African diaspora, contributing to them the metaphor of a body. She inscribes the concept of the black body as “a *collective, remembering body*. [...] It is a body that bears the brunt of history, a body in need of redress. For if we accept this body as a retheorization of the collective movement of black peoples across the Atlantic, then the recognition of its wounded status necessitates that we (re)dress its wounds via some form of healing” (2). As in Gilroy’s ship metaphor, the body is similarly located in a single position, yet it is capable of movement through space. More importantly, the body represents a more immediate and personal (yet for Tynes simultaneously collective) account of identity and memory. Many of Tynes’s poems interrogate the mapping of colonies and emphasize the autonomy of African descendants who, even as they experience displacement and dissociation from Africa, depend on their bodies for their sense of connection to ancestral past and identity. In Tynes’s *oeuvre*, Africa is not only a place, it is a global identity that shows up on and is carried within the body. As Fuller suggests, Tynes “concentrates on the black female body as a visual and sensate passport that permits travel into the past, away from her ‘down home Nova Scotia Black community’ and into the diaspora of black experience” (*Writing* 186). In many of Tynes’s poems, the body becomes the location of history as the speakers experience and respond to their immediate surroundings. Young posits that within the diaspora, “[w]e are constructing a New World *and* African genealogy— everywhere are traces of Africa that have been passed on as embodied memory, Africa as contemporary reality, Africa as it is reinvented and mediated in other locations in noncontinuous ways” (4). Certainly, an important place in Tynes’s *oeuvre* where her speakers demonstrate ways that African identity is “reinvented and mediated [...] in noncontinuous

ways” is in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. As I discuss, many of Tynes’s speakers recount their youth or mention their ancestry from the “home base” of this Nova Scotia city.

Throughout her *oeuvre*, Tynes’s speakers search for the “tangible, documented traces of who we are” (*Borrowed 7*) first evoked in “Mirrors,” and while speakers are able to find these on the body, other ways of knowing that they are not able to experience also become important. Tynes writes in “Mirrors”: “For people of colour, for Black people, for this Black woman in particular, the search is the same, but different. We are constantly looking for who we are. So many of the signals have been lost, historically and culturally along the way” (*Borrowed 7*). Here, the speaker refers to the search for identity in a large displaced community and culture. The speaker concedes that “The laments for lost heritage are there; but, then, so are the feelings of having found a centre and a self-acceptance and an identity in this Black and woman’s skin that I so joyfully wear” (*Borrowed 8*). At the end of the poem, she finds the identity that she initially sought in an external, “tangible” source, on her own body. The speaker begins to claim a subversive type of knowledge that rests in this very personal and subjective resource.

In “Family Portrait,” Tynes employs a speaker who directly introduces herself and offers her own family history, this time through a “little gallery” (*Borrowed 46*) of family portraits. The poem consists of short lines with sparse punctuation. Most of the phrases are complete syntactical units, and they are isolated from one another by the line breaks. Since the enjambment is weak, each line can be read as a whole grammatical unit, suspended on the page from the rest of the sentence just as the portraits in the poem are separate and slightly distant from one another on the wall. Like the portraits, then, each line presents an image among a group of images that supply a bigger picture for the speaker (and reader) to sort through. The

poem begins:

that little gallery on my wall

you

long Tynes

Tynes

Tynes years past:

my daddy (now dead) at 7 or 10

his mama Nellie

so much like me

and all my sisters.

I walk down my hallway

seeing, and not seeing her with

my eyes

my lips

my apple cheeks in smile

I am her namesake. (*Borrowed* 46)

The lack of punctuation in the briefest lines, “my eyes” and “my lips,” presents an embodied sense of familial connection through the speaker seeming to “see” with a part of her body other than her eyes. The two lines appear parallel, as if the speaker may see, or perhaps interpret, with each item in the list of “eyes,” “lips,” and “apple cheeks in smile.” The lips, part of the face that holds the most expression, are the part of the body that speaks and communicates. Surely, they are also the source of an affectionate kiss that cannot be given because the speaker’s grandmother is long passed away. The other instance of enjambment in this section

comes before another repetition, this time of the word “Tynes.” “[L]ong Tynes,” and “Tynes” make up their own complete poetic lines, drawing attention to the word “Tynes” as the poet’s last name, her identity, and as a symbol of the speaker’s familial history, the “Tynes years past.” The poet’s suspension of the word “Tynes” in these lines also suggests a stable, unitary familial identity populated by the people depicted in the “little gallery” by repeating “Tynes” in different ways even as the name occupies the same position in each line. Maintaining that position in the line suggests stability.

The portraits contain elements that are both visible and invisible to the speaker who addresses them; she writes near the end of the poem, “I see you / and, I don’t” (*Borrowed* 47), a repetition of the idea in the first stanza where the speaker walks down the hallway “seeing, and not seeing her” grandmother. The caesura separates the first word and emphasizes the present state of the speaker’s ability to see at all, as she is alive and represents the current living iteration of “Tynes.”

While she can view the material images that lie before her, the speaker does not know the details of her ancestors’ histories. The background of one photograph, behind the image of the speaker’s “great-grandma Mary / all starched apron white-white-white / great-grandfather Thomas” is the “homestead house” (*Borrowed* 46) of the Tynes family; for the speaker, it’s “the start of the girlhood home of / my North Street Dartmouth youth / my beginning” (*Borrowed* 47). The speaker sees this Dartmouth home as her personal beginning, and as an influential part of her upbringing and life.

As much as the photo gallery documents her family history, it raises questions for the speaker and the reader, since the invisible parts of the family history further in the past also seem to take up wall space in the imagined gallery. “Mirrors” has set the stage in this collection

for the expression of a longing for knowledge of a more distant family past that dates back further than the few generations the speaker evokes in “Family Portrait.” As Tynes explains in an interview, her unknown familial connections to Africa bring up

a feeling of being connected and disconnected at the same time. It’s a sense of having a foot firmly in the past and feeling [...] rage that the disconnection has been made for me. This thing was done to me generations ago without any sense of cultural control and so I look at a map and I see this continent that is truly mine and there’s another sense of displacement that moves in—the continent is mine but where and when will I be able to claim it? (Fraser)

Tynes expresses an affiliation with and disconnection from Africa while simultaneously claiming that she is “one of those Maritimers who will never move very far away from home” (Fraser). Tynes establishes a similar identity to the one that her speakers take up in the poems. This identity calls the Maritimes “home” and simultaneously longs for a lost home in Africa, one that is distant in her ancestral past, distant in space, and ultimately out of reach. This does not mean, however, that Tynes dismisses her Nova Scotian identity as less important than the pan-African identity that she feels connected to despite her lack of access to the family she imagines in Africa. Instead, Nova Scotia becomes the home base for the poet, a place where she can reflect on these unknown origins and explore through her poetry possible connections to her past.

Tynes’s speaker may embrace the “down home” Nova Scotian identity and even grasp the “five-generation [...] homestead” (*Woman* 60) as a way to establish a firm hold on Maritime place. “Homestead” is a trope that, as I argue in Chapter Two, Euro-settler writers often deploy to the same ends—and “Homestead” takes on ironic meanings in Tynes’s poetry

owing to its Euro-settler usage. Yet unlike Clarke and the Euro-settler writers for whom critics (like the writers themselves) tend to claim an authenticity linked with generations of family located in one area, Tynes's purpose in hailing the "down home" identity for her speaker is not to root her writing to one place, nor to attempt to express a singular regional distinctiveness. For the local Black identity with which her speakers affiliate themselves, there is a constant sense of connection to other geographic communities that Tynes draws as further components of the same community, all of which are part of a vast network all over the world.

For instance, in "Borrowed Beauty," the speaker imagines a single female descendant of Africa, one who personifies the connections I have just established between the idea of "home" and a pan-African identity in Tynes's *oeuvre*. Like "Family Portrait," this poem also appears in short lines with very little punctuation. The first stanza begins:

we've come full circle  
from turban/headed women (hiding cornrows)  
in servitude; cooking  
suckling  
cleaning  
everlasting cleaning  
cooking  
suckling  
cleaning  
from turban-headed women (hiding cornrows)  
to precious, time-driven 'dos  
to free-form Afros

nocturnal braids escaping into  
beautiful, magical,  
free-flying cloud Afros at  
dawn, dusk, midnight  
to our cornrows earning some woman named “10”  
magic money in flickers of  
light and colour. (*Borrowed* 42)

The first nine lines describe the condition from which “we’ve come,” and the final nine lines describe the present condition of beauty. At first, women wore turbans to “[hide] cornrows,” and Tynes uses parentheses to mimic a turban itself, hiding the phrase from the rest of the line. By isolating the actions of service into their own lines and then repeating them, Tynes calls attention to each task and forces the reader to bear in mind that these tasks were all-encompassing and repetitive. By using the present participle, Tynes evokes a sense of the truly “everlasting” nature of these chores as they continue without any apparent end. The structure of the second half of the stanza escapes from the repetitive cycle of the first into new vocabulary and phrases, and new line lengths, just as the women the speaker describes escape aspects of their “servitude.” Words like “free-form,” “escaping,” and “free flying” imbue the poem with a sense of freedom and invoke the history of slavery as the poem celebrates the movement of African descendants in the Americas from slavery and “servitude” to life as free and independent citizens. The final part of the poem suggests this sense of freedom most evocatively:

Do you know, Africa’s child, woman,  
black brown tan;

with our corn rows?  
you are nobody's beauty but our own  
and named Sahara, Zaire, Zimbabwe, Cairo,  
Nefertiti, Cleopatra or Nigeria.

this is no borrowed beauty,  
this is home. (*Borrowed* 42)

In referring to the singular female listener as “Africa’s child,” the speaker takes on a maternal role, reassuring the figure that she is “our” beauty, a beauty that not only represents African feminine beauty, but also embodies a physical appearance that stems from a multitude of places all over the continent of Africa. While some of Tynes’s critics mark her use of lists and repetition as a weakness of her poetry (Fuller 183-84; Rayner 138), offering these names of places and women in a list is an effective technique that creates the sense that all of them are components of a larger vision. The idea that manifests through the list of African countries and the names of African figures like Nefertiti is that these places and iconic women somehow become embodied by the poem’s subject. Tynes offers a way to think about pan-African identity in individual and immediate terms. Each of the place names can be just as important as any other in Africa because “the continent is [hers]” (Fraser) through history even though she has no access to it in terms of specific knowledge. Each country constitutes a part of that continent, and in naming them, Tynes’s speaker builds a more complete map of her elusive past. The poem ends with the significant lines: “this is no borrowed beauty, / this is home” (*Borrowed* 42). Here, “home” signifies a concept not only of one geographical place to which she belongs, but also of a common ancestry that links women and children from many far-flung

places together. “Home” is the condition of the person that the speaker is today and her share in the collective identity as woman and African descendant. She does not merely take that beauty from elsewhere; she lives it out in her current state and location in the world.

“Borrowed Beauty” does not offer a cut and dried sense of an identity linked to African diaspora. The idea of “home” as presented here is not an easy or comfortable one. “Home” is symbolized by beauty, beauty that derives from elsewhere. “Home” may signify the final place of residence as well as the historic development from slavery to freedom, and the related recognition of African descendants’ unique beauty symbolized in the poem by their hair. Cornrows, a hairstyle that connects the women in the poem to their ancestral home, no longer have to remain hidden, and indeed in this new home, they may be celebrated.

In Clarke’s reading of “Borrowed Beauty,” he suggests that “‘home’ has nothing to do with Nova Scotia and everything to do with skin and blood” (*Directions* 168). In his analysis, Clarke distances the themes and images of “land and sea; farm, mine, woodlot, and fishery; lumberjacks, miners, steelworkers, and lobster trappers; and a hardy lot of transplanted Europeans” found in dominant Maritime literary discourse (*Directions* 165) from the contents of Tynes’s poem. Clarke’s reading is valid, since “home” for Tynes does not in any instance explore a single landscape as its final end; however, “home” for Tynes nonetheless concerns her speakers’ recent ancestors in the Maritimes and is not divorced from the area altogether as Clarke seems to suggest. The image of a single female figure in “Borrowed Beauty” embodies the collective beauty of Black women that not only represents African feminine beauty but also the beauty that stems from that multitude of places, all over Africa. “[H]ome” is not a geographical place in the poem, rather, it is the condition of an emergent sense of beauty that links all women descended from Africa. “Home” therefore can and should include Nova Scotia

as part of its definition for Tynes's poetry, as the "beauty" from Africa lives within her speakers and in the "down home Nova Scotia Black community" (*Woman* 60) where many of her speakers live. This depiction of "home" as located within the individual who is connected to a network of geographical places, rather than a single geographical place, challenges the notion of the "Home Place" found in the scholarship on Maritime regional authenticity that seeks to establish "home" as one physical place—and perhaps also one race.

The notion of a home as connected to many places is analogous to the idea of an individual woman connected to many women in the poem "Womanskin." The speaker addresses global female Black identity, deploying repetition and anaphora to create a strong and consistent rhythm at the beginning:

we keepers and sharers of ancient secrets  
of loving  
and making homes of houses  
of loving  
and making love  
of loving  
and making life  
of loving  
and making our men whole  
of loving (*Borrowed* 9)

The constant rhythm in the poem's form represents the constant and consistent roles that women take on in their families' lives. As the repeated phrase makes clear, a defining role of women is that "of loving." The phrase repeats five times and then disappears from the poem,

leaving a sense of its absence in readers' anticipation of the line's possible return. This anticipation maintains through the remainder of the piece until the word "loving" reappears in a set of lines marked by epistrophe: "strong in / alive in / free in / loving in / working in / laughing in / sharing in / mothering in / growing in / aging in / this skin" (*Borrowed* 9-10). Now "loving" is something that women do with their skin, only one action among so many others. "Loving" becomes both a role and an action, one that underpins the poem and the concept of "womanskin" and female identity developed here.

The poem portrays Black feminine identity as multifaceted, as Black women are also "wives, mothers sisters, daughters, lovers, strong, aunts, free, grandmothers, constant, nieces" (*Borrowed* 9). This list of women's attributes and roles lacks parallel structure, breaking away from grammar and syntax conventions, just as the women the speaker describes have multiple and varying facets to their identities. The black feminine identity the speaker names also has multiple possible origins: "we women of colour / distant daughters of / the Nile, the Sahara, Kenya, Zaire, Sudan / the Serengeti" (*Borrowed* 9). The "womanskin" of the outer layer of women's bodies connects the women to many places in Africa, embodies their history, and unites them as people with common plights and strengths. In the poem, all women share the same skin, the same external surface of the body which contains them and in which they live their lives. Skin itself also has many meanings: it is a "night shade of many shades" (*Borrowed* 10), and each woman "share[s] the palette spectrum / the obsidian sunshade / burnished blue-black brown tantan sepia / coffeecoffee cream ebony" (*Borrowed* 9). All the different colours on the spectrum of Black feminine identity that the speaker lists emphasize that Black women are united by a singular global identity, yet the identity cannot be summarized in a single or unified way. Moreover, this organ of the body is varied.

In “Africa in the World,” Tynes presents a speaker who both personifies and embodies Africa and African history. As in “Womanskin,” this speaker names herself as a “daughter” of many African counties; this time, she is “This daughter of the Nile, Limpopo, Sudan, Zaire, Zambezi, Senegal and Zimbabwe” who “walks the Diaspora” (*Woman 66*) wherever she goes. The poem’s inscription indicates that it was “*Written to commemorate the opening: VISUAL VARIATIONS / AFRICAN WORLDS,*” a visual art showing at the Dalhousie University Art Gallery in Halifax Nova Scotia in 1988. It begins:

I am Africa in the world.

I cast my shadow long and wide and Black and everywhere

[...]

it is said that you all share the beat of my blood.

A powerful legacy.

This daughter of the Nile, Limpopo, Sudan, Zaire, Zambezi, Senegal  
and Zimbabwe

walks the Diaspora;

I talk Africa.

I walk with her rhythm and her strength.

I shout Africa when I give you my profile. (*Woman 66*)

In the second stanza, among the otherwise short lines, the longer one above demonstrates how expansive Africa’s reach really is as it runs out of room and spills to the next line. The images that follow all present the many ways the speaker can communicate “the Diaspora” with her body. She may “talk Africa,” walk with African attributes, and show the profile of her face,

presenting a loud cry, a “shout” that communicates through her appearance rather than her voice. In this poem, the speaker embodies the continent, and she expresses that connection with her movement and speech. Each action or word also communicates the speaker’s simultaneous connection and lack of connection to her place of origins.

Tynes’s inscription of the art show’s title “*VISUAL VARIATIONS / AFRICAN WORLDS*” encourages a reading of the poem that sees a speaker engaged in viewing an art exhibit inspired by African culture, responding to that artwork through ideas about the continent it signifies. The speaker declares in the middle of the poem, in a line separated from other stanzas: “I see with you, here, my icons” (*Woman* 66). These must be the icons of African history, what the speaker calls the “sights and sounds and images / of old Africa” (*Woman* 67). Specifically, she lists these items, using the first person singular pronoun, to claim them for herself: “my neck coils / my breastplate / my talking / talking / talking stick / my mango, and / my breadfruit” (*Woman* 66-7). Tynes plays with the idea of the talking stick, repeating the name of that item to allow her to include “my talking” and “talking” as independent lines as well as items in the list of vestiges from another continent that connect directly to the speaker and link back to her earlier declaration “I talk Africa” (*Woman* 66). As she emphasizes her own connection to Africa, beginning and ending the poem with the title reference “I am Africa in the world” (*Woman* 66), Tynes’s speaker maintains her African identity as she stands in a Halifax art gallery, apprehending images and artifacts from the other side of the world.

In the poems I have just discussed, Tynes establishes a Maritime “regional” identity connected to unknown lands in Africa, another continent several generations back in her speakers’ family history. The fact that they have been dispossessed of “tangible, documented” (Tynes, *Borrowed* 7) traces of history keeps Tynes’s speakers looking toward maps of Africa

that do not show geographical space, but instead bodies and their movements to and from Africa in a metaphorical map of the diaspora. Community and family relationships, and the sustained metaphor of a body as a symbol of heritage that recurs in her poetry, all provide ways of reclaiming connections to place even if speakers have no physical access to those places. In conflating the Black female body and Africa, Tynes creates a link between individuals and a place. Their bodies can point to the place even if they are otherwise cut off from it.

### **A Brief History of Africville, Nova Scotia**

Both Clarke and Tynes place a Black diaspora at the centre of the region. They both demonstrate, through very different ways, that the migration of multiple groups over a long duration of time must change the sense of what it means to be a “Maritimer.” Both show how visible differences are erased from the dominant idea of who belongs to the region, and both insist that visible difference does and should mark the region. Both Clarke and Tynes are interested in claiming Africville as the site of a Black Maritime community that was dispossessed and dispersed, and both affirm that the place is closely tied to a community that should rightfully possess it. In both *oeuvres*, Africville becomes a locus for the Maritime region, a central point around which the concerns of race and belonging circulate. To provide some important context, I turn to a brief synopsis of Africville and some of the discussions relevant to regionalism that have emerged from it.

Africville originated in an area on the Bedford basin in the north end of Halifax, Nova Scotia that was home to a Black community of several hundred citizens for two centuries. Africville’s first population was made up of Black Loyalists who were given land grants in Nova Scotia in return for fighting on the British side during the American War of Independence (1775-1783) and the War of 1812. The community grew in the same location until the 1960s.

As Halifax developed as a city, its government did not extend sewage, power, or other services to Africville, and Africville, though a firmly established community, remained just outside of city limits. As James Walker has pointed out, in the years directly following the settlement of Africville, the community was constantly infringed upon by the least desirable industrial developments. A railway was built through the middle of the community, followed by the nearby construction of “[a] prison [...] in 1853, night-soil disposal pits in 1858, an infectious diseases hospital in the 1870s,” and in later years “a fertilizer plant, two slaughterhouses, a coal-handling facility, a tar factory, a leather tannery” (Walker, “Allegories” 157), and a trachoma hospital (Africville Genealogy Society). In the twentieth century, police did not include the area in their surveillance, and Africville attracted “bootleggers and their customers” (Walker, “Allegories” 157), who gave it a bad reputation as a home to criminals.

Of course, to many Africville residents, their homes and community were points of pride despite these infringements and the lack of basic services. Residents built their homes and buildings themselves, and families continued to live on specific plots of land for generations. In the 1960s, the city of Halifax coerced families to move from their Africville houses to city-owned public housing. Families were offered \$500.00 and help with moving, which consisted of their furniture and belongings getting shipped by city garbage truck to the new housing units (*Remember*). As each family moved out, their home was taken down immediately to encourage neighbours to leave as well. Soon, the population of Africville was dispersed to various housing projects all over Halifax, thus destroying the largest and longest-standing Black community in the country.

Africville is a local and relatively recent instance of racism manifest in city politics and the arrangement of topographical space. After all, topographical representation tends to reflect

the values of the dominant discourse. In her article “The Space of Africville: Creating, Regulating, and Remembering the Urban ‘Slum,’” Jennifer Nelson argues that Eurocentric laws that privilege the rights and interests of a single race, white Europeans, created Africville as a space that would reinforce white racial superiority. For example, Halifax city officials placed the dump beside Africville, and the media later characterized Africville as a settlement of scavengers living off of the dump, even though the community had been established over a hundred years before the dump came into existence. For a period of time in the late twentieth century, the former site of Africville was merely an empty green space renamed Seaview Park, a place name that obliterated the history of Africville. During the writing of this chapter, the current city of Halifax renamed the site “Africville Park” in an agreement with the Africville Genealogical Society (AGS). The AGS has also built a replica of the Africville Baptist church, a church that was at the centre of the Africville community, and a museum is now housed there. In the summer of 2013, the Africville Museum officially opened to the public.

Despite these recent and ongoing efforts to renew the space and acknowledge its history as an African Nova Scotian settlement, the extended history of the community is not well known beyond the community of Africville itself. Online CBC news coverage of the reversion of the name Seaview Park to Africville, for example, reports that the community of Africville was removed in order to build a bridge (“Halifax Park”), which comprises only a small fraction of the history of the park and community. The news story ignores many aspects of the removal of the community and makes it seem natural and inevitable that the community should be removed to make way for a bridge that many current citizens of Halifax and Dartmouth use on a daily basis. The area of Africville was indeed rezoned as industrial land in the late twentieth century, but it was not necessary to remove the community entirely in order to build the nearby

bridge. This national news story's angle seems complicit with the actions of the former city of Halifax in the name of industrial progress and offers no glimpse of the complicated history of the community or the many reasons given at the time of the demolitions for its removal. The news story also neglects to mention any reason why the decision to remove people from the land was highly contested, that the decision continues to be questioned to this day, that it is considered racist, or that the community existed for nearly two hundred years before the city leveled it. Instead, the report offers a single, seemingly simple and straightforward reason for the removal of Africville citizens, a reason that in itself perpetuates the erasure of the community's history.

Africville is not the only Black community destroyed in Canada in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Rinaldo Walcott suggests that the erasure of Black communities in this country is symptomatic of larger discourses of the nation such as multiculturalism, which have rendered "Black presence absent" (129); he believes that national history tries to write Black Nova Scotians out of the national narrative. Walcott offers examples of other communities with similar outcomes to Africville:

The long and now broken silence in St. Armand, Quebec, concerning the slave cemetery almost ploughed over, which the locals call 'nigger rock'; [...] the demolition of Hogan's Alley in Vancouver in the 1960s; in Ontario, the changing of the name of Negro Creek Road to Moggie Road in 1996 all suggest a willful attempt to make a Black presence absent. ("Caribbean" 128-29)

West Coast poet and critic Wayde Compton echoes Walcott's concern over the destruction of racial minority neighbourhoods like Africville and Hogan's Alley. In an online interview in 2008, he noted that "'urban renewal' strategies in the 1950 and '60s, which put freeways

through Black neighbourhoods [...] [,] were a North America-wide phenomenon. [...] This happened so often that in America Black folks sardonically call it ‘Negro removal’ rather than ‘urban renewal’” (Compton). Hogan’s Alley has a remarkably similar history to Africville in that it was also rezoned as industrial land while there were people still living on it and while it was “mainly residential” before its residents were removed (Compton). After being rezoned, the city of Vancouver began development of a viaduct for a nearby highway. Compton believes that “Hogan’s Alley was altered as a black urban space more by the urban planning for the freeway, rather than the final building of the viaduct. By the time they built the viaduct itself (c. 1970), the black community had almost completed its exodus” because of the community’s knowledge of the pending freeway and viaduct construction (Compton).

These “urban renewal” projects were promoted by modern discourses that emphasized moving forward with industrial progress and to modernize city spaces. The people who wanted to get rid of Africville promoted values contrary to those enshrined in “antimodern” discourses. As Walker points out, many people perceived Black ghettos across Canada as unhealthy and unsightly following the Second World War. Halifax city officials at that time believed that destroying the homes and buildings of Africville would benefit the people living in them and save them from a life of poverty as well as the health hazards around them. “[I]t became a positive symbol,” writes Walker, “in the mind of white Canada for slum clearance and urban renewal and racial integration, as the population of about 400 were removed from their homes ‘for their own good’” and the physical community of Africville was bulldozed to the ground” (“Allegories” 155). In this discourse, racial integration was represented as a step forward toward a more modern and progressive state, one that would keep the population of Africville from its “marginalized, impoverished, dependent” condition (Walker, “Allegories” 155).

Interestingly, the types of discourse that arise in artistic commemorations of Africville throughout Nova Scotia's black communities have strong antimodernist elements that attempt to counter the discourse of progress. According to Maureen Moynagh, Africville writers and artists deploy antimodern techniques to combat the modernizing discourses that portrayed progress as the removal of Africville. Moynagh argues that the antimodern and folk elements so prevalent in Nova Scotian writing and criticism in the twentieth century not only extend to the literature about Africville but also to the folk narratives which have excluded black voices and populations. She affirms that "the construction of Africville as a lost Eden, a pastoral community independent of the institution of modernity with their attendant bureaucracies [...] transforms Africville into a metaphor for the kinds of social relations not possible under modernity" ("Africville" 19). Such social relations include face-to-face communication, an element of rusticity, and a pastoral, idealized time and place.

As I have established in earlier chapters, antimodernism in Nova Scotia can be manipulated for the purposes of profit because its users portray the region as a simple homogeneous community of "folk." The idea put forth in early twentieth-century Maritime works such as Charles Bruce's novel *The Channel Shore* that Euro-settler groups authentically belong to the region and have a greater stake in the land stems from an antimodern discourse that tends to identify authenticity with patrilineal inheritance and with land ownership and residency. Moynagh's analysis of antimodern discourse in writing about Africville brings to light ways that writers of African descent in the Maritimes, like Tynes, can use the same discourse to stake a claim on land of which they have been dispossessed. As Moynagh also suggests in her analyses of the art, film, and literature about Africville made after its destruction, antimodernism can be used to resist the very eradication of minority groups

implicit in that representation of “folk” as white fishermen and farmers. In this discourse, generations of family residency in one place do not provide descendants of Africville the same claim to the land that critics imply it does for Euro-settler groups.

Africville offers a proximate and relatively recent instance of racism as a dominant discourse that establishes and sustains the arrangement of topographical space. The long history of dispossession and colonization of Africville dates from the beginning of its settlement to the present day. The way that the city of Halifax formed over time suggests an implicit racism in the arrangement of the space around Africville and manifests the eventual demolition of the community. The discourse that promoted its dispersal and destruction has also promoted racially biased ideas of progress, ideas that complement the antimodernist discourses of “authenticity” in novels such as *The Channel Shore* and its criticism. In the following section, I compare the ways that Tynes and Clarke treat Africville in their work in order to illustrate that a new idea of regionalism emerges in their illustrations of a deep history on the land as well as an immediate everyday presence for Black Maritimers. While Clarke defines Africville in terms of the people who inhabit or who have inhabited the space, Tynes focuses on how the resilience of the Africville community resists erasure through the “talk” of community members and their connections to places of the global African diaspora.

### **Clarke and Tynes on Africville**

In his essay “The Death and Rebirth of Africadian Nationalism,” a review of Shelagh MacKenzie’s film *Remember Africville* (1991), Clarke takes the opportunity to discuss his response to the destruction of Africville. The film not only portrays the life and times of Africville through archival photographs and film as well as interviews with former residents, it also chronicles the decision-making process by city officials and members of the Africville

community toward the destruction of Africville as it unfolded through city council and public hearings. Rather than blame these officials, Clarke places the blame for Africville's destruction squarely on all Africadians who, according to him, allowed it to happen:

Africville was lost because we Africadians refused to sufficiently value our right to exist. If we had held fast to our faith, [...] we would have laid our bodies before the bulldozers. Our leaders of the 1960's allowed themselves to be seduced into thinking of Africville as a slum rather than as a potentially strong Africadian community-neighbourhood in a prime location on peninsular Halifax. Had they been strong enough to resist the temptations of progress, Africville might have become the spiritual capital of Africadia, the conscious annunciation of our existence. (*Odysseys* 294)

To Clarke, Africville has been lost because the title of the land has been lost and the homes and buildings destroyed. Clarke recognizes the destroyed Africville's value as a "symbol of [Africadians'] displacement" (*Odysseys* 295), and "a cultural myth, the product of romanticism and nostalgia, a *pays* to mourn, a source for collective rituals, a focus for communal politics" (*Odysseys* 295). He notes that the importance of rejecting the arguments made to the community about why they should leave are not legitimate arguments and do not represent the community accurately.

Clarke has most often addressed Africville in his critical work and commentary. His poem "Campbell Road Church" from *Saltwater Spirituals*, reprinted in *Lush Dreams* in slightly different form, offers one of his very few creative reflections specifically on Africville:

at negro point, some forget sleep  
to catch the fire-and-brimstone sun

rise all gold-glory  
over a turquoise harbour  
of half-sunken, rusted ships  
when it was easy to worship  
benin bronze dawns,  
to call "hosanna" to archangel gulls . . .  
but none do now.  
rather, an ancient, CN porter lusts for africville,  
shabby shacktown of  
shattered glass and promises,  
rats rustling like a girl's loose dress.  
he rages to recall  
the gutting death of his genealogy,  
to protest his home's slaughter  
by butcher bulldozers  
and city planners molesting statistics.  
at negro point, some forgot sleep,  
sang "oh freedom over me,"  
heard mournful trains cry like blizzards  
along blue bedford basin . . .  
none do now. (*Saltwater* 15)

A literal interpretation of the first half of the first stanza suggests that it once was "easy" to get up early and take pleasure from this particular view of the sunrise, but this is no longer true

because there are no people in the area. The poem's title focuses readers on the image of a particular church in Africville, and Clarke's word choices like "fire-and-brimstone," "worship," and calling "'hosanna' to archangel gulls" imbue the poem with a sense of Christian celebration. Rather than a church service, this is a celebration of the immediate environment of Africville, the land around Campbell Road Church and Negro Point. The line "benin bronze dawns" evokes the West African country of Benin, calling forth a similar play with distances and proximities as that found in Tynes's *oeuvre*. Topographical elements like the "turquoise harbour" and the native seagulls provide the setting for celebrating the "glory" of a golden age of this community, an age that is now in the past.

Violent action words in the second part of the poem, such as "shattered," "rages," "gutting death," "slaughter," and "butcher" all evoke the intense anger of the single individual that the speaker names as having lost his home in Africville. Many of those words are emphasized by alliteration, and they follow the poem's longest line, the line with the fewest accented syllables: "rather, an ancient, CN porter lusts for africville" (*Saltwater* 15). This long line offers an explanation for the emotional heave of alliteration that follows in the next four lines of tightly grouped accented syllables: there is the "shabby shacktown of / shattered glass," and "rats rustling [...] he rages to recall" (*Saltwater* 15). In the second printing of the poem, instead of a "shabby shacktown," Africville appears as a "beautiful Canaan of stained glass and faith, / now limbo of shattered glass and promises" (*Lush* 73). The poetic voice appears much calmer without the alliteration that underscored the anger and the frustration of the first published version. The change invokes antimodernism in order to idealize Africville's past. Instead of centering on anger, the second poem focuses on longing for the idealized past state of Africville's innocence.

The loss of lands and community that the first poem's persona feels is intense and personal. It is *his* family history and *his* home's destruction that he mourns the most. The implicit notion of belonging to this land, then, is that of an individual's sense of ownership. While it illustrates the sense of loss attendant upon the destruction of Africville by profiling a single male character with whom the reader can sympathize, Clarke has not completely left out the community, as his speaker repeats the lines "at negro point, some forget sleep" and "none do now" (*Saltwater* 15). These lines bookend the poem, providing a surrounding structure for the solitary male figure. The first instance of "some forget sleep" occurs in Africville's past, when community members lived on the land and could gaze upon their surroundings. The second instance of the line occurs in the present, at a later time in Africville history, after the village has been destroyed. This time, "some forgot sleep" because they were in mourning, intensified by the sounds of the nearby trains, and they feel sadness evoked by the colour of the nearby blue water. The speaker presents this stanza in the past tense, demonstrating that those "at negro point" used to forget sleep, they used to sing, and they used to hear the sound of trains. The final line of the poem, a repetition of "none do now," evokes a sense of silence in the place. Separated from the rest of the poem by a white space between the final stanzas, its echo of the earlier line carries a sense of finality because of its isolation from the rest of the poem on the page. The second repetition provides a sense of closure, and this absolute conclusion to the poem emphasizes the utter absence of community left on the land.

Clarke believes Africville's destruction helped to fuel the renaissance of Africadian literature in the 1970s and 1980s, and he explains this theory in his introduction to *Fire on the Water*, where he also notes that Africville "has become a symbol of what happens to a culture which does not vigorously assert its right to exist" (*Fire* 11). To Clarke, defending the land in

the 1960s would have meant defending the culture itself. For Tynes, however, Africville is a continuing and vital part of Black Nova Scotian identity, an identity that also extends beyond Nova Scotian borders. As one of her speakers believes, the global community of the African Diaspora also “is Africville” (*Woman* 62) through a shared experience of land dispossession, disenfranchisement, and a common historical origin dating back many hundreds of years. While Africville may no longer have a geographical centre, Tynes’s poems avow that the memories and “talk” of the people in the community continually reaffirm the existence of that community. In her poem “Africville,” the collective personal pronoun “we” hails an entire community, the “We who are Africville / we are the dispossessed Black of the land” (*Woman* 62). This group “carr[ies] / Africville on [their] backs / in [their] hearts / in the face of [their] child and [their] anger” (*Woman* 62). The memories of Africville live not only “on [the] backs” (*Woman* 62) of the descendants of Africville residents in the poem, but also in the talk of people who hold the memories and who lived there, a talk that, when shared, can create the sense of the past community “stand[ing] and liv[ing] again” (*Woman* 62). As Moynagh points out, Tynes’s Africville poems “focus [...] less on what Africville was than on what it has become” (“Africville” 24). The reason for Tynes’s emphasis on current social community in the poems about Africville is that that current community is all that is left—the speaker has no access to the land or place except through the collective memory of the community, formerly of Africville. She has only the dispersed population, which can articulate and rekindle a sense of regional belonging. The citizens of Africville are now “carrying, always carrying / Africville” (*Woman* 62).

In the first of her trio of poems about Africville in *Woman Talking Woman* entitled “Africville Spirit,” Tynes’s speaker introduces herself directly, by using the name Tynes and by

situating herself physically in the Maritimes. The speaker emphasizes a “Western world Black reality” of which Africville and every other black community in the West is a part. Tynes’s speaker acknowledges the specificity and history of Africville, Nova Scotia, while at the same time espousing a pan-African identity:

I am Maxine Tynes.

I am not from Africville, born and bred.

But Tynes is a Black community name

and I am from this community;

this Maritime, Halifax, down home Nova Scotian Black community.

[...]

I grew up knowing about Africville and hearing

of Africville through the family talks

[...]

I believe what I learned at home

[...]

that it is important to recognize

Black community and to own community and all Black experience.

That there are no borders, no boundaries, no frontiers that matter

in the Diaspora, in this North American,

Western world Black reality.

That disenfranchisement

and racism is the same everywhere.

That Soweto is Chicago is Toronto

is Detroit is Montreal is New York is Halifax is Dartmouth is  
Africville. (*Woman* 60)

While she claims a position in the “down home Nova Scotian Black community” of Africville, the speaker at the same time connects herself with “World Black reality,” a global African identity that has no geo-political borders since “disenfranchisement / and racism is the same everywhere” (*Woman* 60). Tynes does not actually stake a claim to being from Africville; rather, she self-identifies with the community attached to the geographic place while making a point of saying that she is not from there. While the speaker’s physical body has a history and origin that she names and that she asserts as valuable, she contends that she also belongs to the numerous communities with which she identifies her body via its race and sex. Tynes’s embrace of a pan-African identity in “Africville Spirit” is not necessarily made because she believes that all places of Africa and African diaspora are equal to one another, but because she sees the pan-African identity as the one best suited to a speaker who lacks the specific knowledge of the individual places of her family history.

The poem reads as a personal and community manifesto for Tynes’s speaker, who is a Black woman not from Africville herself. Its role in the series is to establish that what happened to Africville is symbolic of the racism in Nova Scotia, and to posit that the racism it stands for is neither new nor particular to that place. The speaker claims that “all black experience [...] is Africville” since “racism is the same everywhere” (*Woman* 60); Africville is connected to many other places in the world that transcend borders because Africville residents share an experience of disenfranchisement. Tynes’s speaker connects herself to the place not by claiming to have descended from Africville, but by asserting that she is part of the wider Black community of the Maritimes. She also establishes her memory of witnessing the “talk” of

Africville citizens and family friends. Her connection to the place manifests partially through the oral histories of the local community in which she grew up.

In “Africville Spirit,” the speaker’s local experience of Black community and the global worldwide experience of Black identity cannot be separated from one another. The larger community of the African “Diaspora, this North American / Western world Black reality” (*Woman* 60) refuses to forget what Tynes’s speaker affirms as the core of Black identity throughout the globe: “disenfranchisement / and racism” (*Woman* 60). By rejecting geo-political borders to emphasize the pervasiveness of racism globally, however, Tynes affirms the significance of local experience of place to Black identity and belonging. Her speaker contends that she is “from this community,” named in specific terms: “Maritime, Halifax, down home Nova Scotia Black community” (*Woman* 60). That community bridges connections to other communities in the world that share a common experience. While Africville began, in part, as a physical location, it is also part of a larger world, as Tynes emphasizes in the longest line of the poem that seems to run out of room in the margins: “Soweto is Chicago is Toronto / is Detroit is Montreal is New York is Halifax and Dartmouth is Africville” (*Woman* 60). Like other lists of place names in Tynes’s poems that spill to the next line, this technique implies that the reach of these places is expansive; the long line poetically demonstrates that the places extend beyond the borders that try to contain them.

Fuller notes that in the poem “Tynes not only situates Africville at the centre of her personal experience, but also, in her rejection of colonialism’s geo-political borders and maps, she relocates the personal and collective experience of Africville to the centre of her diasporic vision” (*Writing* 189). While I agree, to a certain extent, with Fuller’s point that Tynes creates Africville as a “centre of her diasporic vision” (*Writing* 189), it is important to note that

Africville is not really centred in Tynes's speaker's personal experience. As the speaker has noted, she was "a kid growing up in Dartmouth" (*Woman 60*), a nearby community. She grew up in a "four or five [generation]" family "homestead," "knowing about" and "hearing of Africville" (*Woman 60*) indirectly from her family and friends, members of the broader Nova Scotian Black community. While Africville forms a knowledge base that she carries with her throughout her life, the speaker has not grown up there, nor lived in that specific community. That Tynes is "not from Africville" (*Woman 60*) is central to the idea she promotes in the Africville poems: that she has not lived there, yet she is from Africville by virtue of her identity as a Black woman from anywhere.

Linking Black history and experience to places throughout the world does not mean that Tynes also draws "all Black experience" (*Woman 60*) as a homogenous, non site-specific phenomenon. If that were so, there would be no need to commemorate the individual names of the first Black settlers that Tynes lists in the second poem in the series, "Africville is My Name." This poem is structured in two main parts, first a section of free verse lyric poetry, and second, a three-column list consisting of eighty-two surnames. Anaphora structures the first part of the poem with the word "to":

To own one's community.

To voice its name with history and with pride.

To map that community with a litany of community names.

[...]

To sing, to say, to shout the names of Africville like a map,

like a litany, like a hymn and a battle-cry (*Woman 61*)

The anaphora provides a framework of verbs and actions for citizens to take as part of their

communities. The speaker next encourages readers to apprehend Africville in three different times: “To etch Africville into the Past, the Present, and relentlessly / into the Future” (*Woman* 61). The poem emphasizes the importance of the social aspects of the place and characterizes Africville as first a geographic place and second a group of people. The poem rebels against the many ways that colonialism unilaterally charts its territory, and seeks new ways to map community. For instance, the map of Africville drawn in the poem is aural, rather than material. It requires the speaker to talk out loud “again and again” in order to “own one’s community” (*Woman* 61). The poem is an anthem for Africville’s community, a community that is comprised of a “litany” of names. The speaker wants to “shout the names of Africville like a map” (*Woman* 61), and by “names” Tynes’s speaker does not refer to the place names that are normally recorded onto maps along with territorial borders and boundaries. Instead, the “names of Africville” are the “First Black Settlers,” a noun phrase that Tynes capitalizes like a place name. For the speaker, shouting the names of the former citizens of Africville becomes a way to map the social connections of a place, and it is a way to bear in mind the relation of residents’ connection to the land of which they were dispossessed.

The Africville “that was” refers to a site-specific community of people who lived on the Bedford Basin and whose surnames make up the latter part of the poem. The Africville “that is” refers to the site of this former community as well as the surviving people who lived on the land, their descendants, and their many other community connections. The Africville “that always will be” refers to the memory of Africville that must be carried forward. It is a vision of a community of individuals and their historic connection to a piece of land that has been so altered as to erase the physical evidence of that connection. The idea of Africville in the future is a more hopeful vision of Black community, one that the speaker recognizes and

commemorates with “a hymn and a battle-cry” (*Woman* 61).

The three-column list of “First Black Settlers” surnames in Africville that comprises the second half of “Africville is My Name” is followed by a line made up of four words separated by periods: “Personhood. Community. Family. Africville” (*Woman* 61). The periods suggest that each of these words consists of a sentence in the poem, making the poetic line not a list, but a progression of complete ideas unto themselves, each parallel to the others. The speaker wants to “map that community with a litany of community names” (*Woman* 61), thereby making a connection between topography and individuals, a connection she seeks to commemorate because it is erased from the present. Singing the names helps to map the place out loud while it affirms the community’s history on the site.

In her poems about Africville, Tynes does not need to draw a picture of the landscape, buildings, or any physical aspect of Africville’s environment. She creates a sense of the local and particular without these things. Tynes maintains that despite dispossession, the community still has some cohesion, and more importantly, it maintains its resilience. The land, while important, is no longer the centre of the community. If it were, Tynes would present the community as a loss, as Clarke does in his poem “Campbell Road Church.” Instead, Tynes finds present and current ways to characterize local and specific place and its history. “Africville Spirit” establishes that Tynes’s speaker has an indirect connection to Africville, and so does anyone who is part of “Black [...] community and all Black experience” (*Woman* 60). Yet Tynes does not leave the connection to Africville completely “deterritorialize[d],” as Wyile has argued (*Anne* 121). Even while the speaker may acknowledge that the community is no longer directly connected to the land, she also acknowledges the community’s connection to the land on which Africville once stood. And even though the “49<sup>th</sup> Parallel or the Atlantic Ocean

or the Pacific / does not matter or make a difference” (*Woman* 60), the specific place names that are associated with Black community in Nova Scotia still matter to Tynes and her poems.

In “Africville,” the final poem in her Africville triptych, Tynes extends the comparisons between places that she begins in “Africville Spirit”: “Africville is man/woman/child / in the street and heart Black Halifax, / the Prestons, Toronto” (*Woman* 62). She affirms that dispossession did not turn into defeat for the broader Black community. To make this point stronger, the speaker names nearby Black Nova Scotian communities, North and East Preston, communities that continue to exist and thrive today as primarily Black communities. By making the connection to Toronto in the passage, as the speaker does with many other cities of the world in “Africville Spirit,” Tynes does not treat Toronto as a more powerful symbol of national authority. Instead, she portrays that city as part of the network of local places all over the world that connect through their inhabitants’ experience of community and an espousal of racial identity as well as a shared history of dispossession. For Tynes, regional identity is more about the shared experience and shared pasts across borders than it is about any piece of land, even as land is important to the people Tynes represents in her poems.

“Africville” solidifies the case Tynes began to make in the other two Africville poems: in being dispossessed of land, the people who lived in Africville as well as their descendants and other individuals connected to them were not completely dispossessed of community, of memories, nor of a socially-connected future. Tynes writes, “we are the dispossessed Black of the land / creeping with shadows [...] creeping with pain away from our home” and

This park is green; but  
Black, so Black with community. I talk Africville  
to you

and to you  
until it is both you and me  
till it stands and lives again. (*Woman* 62)

The speaker stands in the place of the lost community while conjuring its past. She stands on markers of the past, a place she infuses with a specific history, a place that is currently “green,” yet “Black with community” (*Woman* 62). The people of the community are able to bridge its existence into the future notwithstanding the loss of their homes. The site paradoxically has a “forever / Black past,” and yet Africville is “no house [...] No road, no tree, no well” (*Woman* 62). In asserting that no matter where they are, the community of people who once inhabited the place represents a continuation of that specific site, Tynes’s speaker emphasizes the invisible yet visible Blackness in the history of the green space. The Black community is visible, but the changes in the site of the former community erase the visibility of the history of that site as the roads and buildings are gone. The newer more recent constructions of the church replica have brought back these aspects of the actual place that attach a specific history to it, but at the time of this poem’s composition, when the former site of Africville was merely a greenspace, that history was visibly severed from the site.

The speaker of “Africville” says “Wherever we are, Africville, / you and we are that Blackpast homeground” (*Woman* 62) in order to emphasize the social aspects and continuity of a lost community. The community is no longer located in a particular geography; instead, it exists within the people. As the speaker of “Mirrors” notes in relation to Black female identity, “laments for lost heritage are there; but, then, so are the feelings of having found a centre and a self-acceptance and an identity” (*Borrowed* 8). The fact that the community of Africville comprises “no house” and “[n]o road” (*Woman* 62) is similarly both a lament and a celebration.

On the one hand, the speaker expresses sorrow for a personal and communal loss of a physical home, a place where individuals can live among the community to which they belong and for which they feel a strong connection. Instead, the people are dispersed and no longer live together. On the other hand, the core of Africville can never be taken from the population, since former Africville residents and their descendants do not need material topography or landmarks in order to recognize and celebrate heritage and identity, even though they are still important.

Using the name of Africville to refer to the absent community in the poems I have just discussed may seem no different than the placeholders of the family names in *The Channel Shore* by Charles Bruce, a novel I examine in Chapter Two. In that work, tracts of land are named for those who left the community, those who inhabited the land and are now absent from it, as if those people can never be forgotten. In the case of the historic community Africville, however, families have not left by choice but by force. The people of Africville do not leave on purpose for new horizons out of boredom or in search of adventure, as characters do in Bruce's novel. Instead, they are ordered to leave by an impending bulldozer and a set of city rules. In Tynes's poems, the place name of Africville marks not only the piece of land but also a connection to numerous global incidences of disenfranchisement and of racism against African descendants. Tynes represents both Africville and Africa as places to which she belongs even though she does not physically inhabit them. Africville is experienced locally, and yet it has a global reach.

Whereas Clarke's definition of Africadian regional belonging is inextricably linked to land ownership, land possession is perhaps even more important in the idea of regionalism as Tynes develops it because Tynes focuses on the ways that Africville citizens build a strong sense of community notwithstanding their lack of access to the lands on which Africville once

stood. As she links the disenfranchisement of Africville citizens to African descendants all over the world, she bridges Maritime regional identity with African history. For Tynes, as her trio of poems about Africville make clear, Africville *is* arguably, to borrow Clarke's phrase, "the spiritual capital of [Black Nova Scotia], the conscious annunciation of [their] existence" (Clarke, *Odysseys* 294). It persists as a "spiritual capital" beyond the loss of the land.

### Conclusion

Even though a direct connection to land is not a requirement to inherit the identities Tynes's speakers espouse in the poems, the land nonetheless makes up an important component of African and African Nova Scotian identities in Tynes's *oeuvre*. Those identities are contingent not on possession, but on dispossession of land, dispossession that African communities experience through the history of slavery and displacement, and the dispossession that the African Nova Scotian community experiences in local and recent instances like the demolition of Africville. Dispossession of land in Tynes's poems about Africville and Africa is comprised of the loss of a community's access to a particular area of land that corresponds with the way a community is set up and lives. Dispossession of lands brings about a dispersal of African communities on both the macrocosmic level—of the broader African diaspora—and the microcosmic level of small individual communities. Dispossession of land in Tynes's *oeuvre* rests in the broader collective community, a community that began its existence on the basis of loss of lands and culture; throughout history, that community has reencountered further losses as well as racism. Tynes's poetry suggests that dispossession is a fundamental part of the African diaspora; it is a product of a history that repeats itself.

Tynes's *oeuvre* effectively and subversively disrupts the dominant discourse of Maritime regional belonging as land possession by evoking the dispossession of Black Nova

Scotian culture. The sense of dispossession begins with the loss of historical and ancestral knowledge at the violent removal of Africans in the institution of slavery; thus, Tynes's *oeuvre* suggests, descendants of Africa anywhere in the world are always already dispossessed, belonging anywhere and nowhere. In her Africville poems, Tynes's speaker claims *wherever* "we are Africville" (*Woman* 62) because the community, or body, of the African diaspora has already experienced dispossession, and they unite within that experience, finding new ways to relate to the places that are important to them; specific place still matters and is a continuing part of the larger community.

Whereas Clarke's model of Africadia espouses a regional identity for Black Nova Scotians that values land ownership and an identity linked closely to one geographic area, Tynes's *oeuvre* establishes Black identity in Maritime regionalism as a Nova Scotian home base in a larger network of places of the African diaspora. Her speakers view the region through multiple perspectives as a place that they can access through the communal memory of family history and the broader African Nova Scotian community. Tynes focuses on embodied history rather than a buried history as Clarke does. Her multiperspectival regionalism, which takes into account global identities as well as local ones and that defines both as irreducibly heterogeneous, allows readers to adopt multiple perspectives on local places. These many perspectives help to remove the restrictions on regional identity in discourse that tends to limit it to Euro-settler models of land ownership as a requisite to belonging. Tynes's placement of the dispossessed Nova Scotian community of Africville in a context of global African Diaspora calls for a regional identity that takes into account multiple global geographic and historical contexts, not one authentic one. In Tynes's poems about Africville, she draws connections between the former site of Africville and global African identity so that the identity of the

community is based as much in local distinctiveness as it is in global African history and experience.

Even though critics tend not to categorize Tynes as a “regional” writer, I argue that her work has significant implications for the theory of regionalism. Even as she leaves out physical descriptions of landscapes or the sea, and the many dominant characteristics of Euro-settler regionalisms, her treatment of the Maritime Black community as part of a vast network of places that share a common experience of disenfranchisement, racism, and African ancestry, gestures toward regionalisms that have varied and multiple narratives of belonging and that trace connections to global identities. Through her poetry, Tynes makes visible the histories of a Black Nova Scotian population that have been erased, and she reconfigures the relationship of the local to larger areas and geographies in ways that disrupt the dominant discourse of regionalism and Black identity in the Maritimes.

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<sup>i</sup> The community of Priceville, Ontario also bears mentioning here as another former Black community in Canada with a buried history. Priceville’s namesake was a Black settler who arrived in Canada after the War of 1812. Film makers Jennifer Holness and David Sutherland document the largely unknown history of Black settlers in this community and the story of the town’s excavation of a nineteenth-century Black graveyard in the film *Speakers for the Dead*.

## Chapter Five

### Region as Ecology in the Works of Rita Joe

I want to tell you about me

The Indian of today

The lonely stranger to her own land. (Joe, *Song of Eskasoni* 17)

This chapter explores how Rita Joe, a Mi'kmaq<sup>i</sup> writer of the Maritimes, negotiates space and place in Nova Scotia while simultaneously feeling a “stranger to her own land” (*Song of Eskasoni* 17). Joe is distinct from the settler writers I have examined up to this point. She is the first writer who is not a settler or a descendant of settlers. Rather, she is an Aboriginal writer in a settler-invader nation. The structure of European society imposed on Mi'kmaq people during exploration and settlement comes with attendant settler concepts of belonging. It is very tempting to read Joe's poems, which articulate an ancient connection to the land, as evidence that Mi'kmaq people comprise the most “authentic” group in the Maritimes since they have the longest history in the region. “Authenticity,” however, is the first myth of regionalism that critics should reject because Euro-settler writers and critics have used it to assert a regional canon that is homogenous and excludes all but very few writers. Settler concepts of “authentic” belonging to land accept that occupancy is the only “authentic” or “true” form of ownership and the only legitimate basis of possessive feelings for the land. That idea of authenticity is itself colonial because it imposes a European model of authenticity—essentially a European way of thinking—onto Indigenous peoples and ways of life, and Indigenous worldviews do not express the same need for dominance over land. If regionalism

may be treated as a diverse body of writing that presumes no single notion of the region or its inhabitants, then these Eurocentric ideas associated with “authenticity” must be put aside.

While it is true and significant that the Mi’kmaq occupied the region first, it is the way that critics and readers characterize that connection to place that matters here. Joe’s connection to land is one of longer standing and greater legitimacy than those of Fred Cogswell or Ernest Buckler, but I do not characterize it as “authentic” because a single authentic Maritime identity remains problematic owing to the vast diversity of experience in the region.

Joe and her speakers maintain claims to the land that date back much farther than the several-generation land claims of the Euro-settler writers and their critics that I examine in Chapter Two and the Africadian writers I consider in Chapter Four. Joe’s treatment of Maritime land as an area where Mi’kmaq people live and where they feel excluded even though their ancestors occupied the same sites for centuries exposes implicit assumptions in settler writers’ and critics’ constructions of the Maritimes as a territory unoccupied before Euro-settlers arrived. For if long-term residency on the land were the key to true “authenticity,” then presumably the group who has the longest history on the land would be the most “authentic”; yet the term “authentic” is not the appropriate term to describe the relationship between the Mi’kmaq and the land, as it presumes a unified, essential identity for a group of people. Trinh T. Minh-ha challenges the idea of “authenticity” in her postcolonial feminist scholarship for many of the reasons I name above. She argues that attempts to describe “*authenticity* reflect a need to rely on an ‘undisputed origin,’” which is impossible to do (53). Minh-ha criticizes the detachment in so-called “objective” studies such as anthropological science since there is no “object” in anthropology; instead, there are people who cannot be described as objects.

In earlier chapters I have argued that the discourse of literary regionalism in the Maritimes has favoured a settler perspective, one that values long-term residency and land ownership as key to belonging. In order to justify settlement, colonists developed a “fiction” (Findlay 309) of the land as “*terra nullius*” or “*empty land*.” Len Findlay notes that “The legal, religious, political, and cultural armatures of colonization constantly circulated the notion that Canada was an *empty land*—empty, that is to say, in the sense of being largely uninhabited, or empty of any social organization capable of meeting European standards” (309). As Alan Lawson points out, such narratives of the land affect conceptions of First Nations people because envisioning the land as empty also means that there is no room in that imagined space for Aboriginals. He notes that “For epistemological reasons, [...] the colonial explorer had to empty the land of prior signification—what is already known cannot be discovered, what already has a name cannot be named. For the settler, too, the land had to be empty. Empty land can be settled, but occupied land can only be invaded. So the land must be emptied so that it can be filled, in turn” (155). Mi’kmaq scholar Bonita Lawrence notes that in addition to the imaginary erasure of Indigenous nations and their histories in this process, and “in order to maintain Canadians’ self-image as a fundamentally ‘decent’ people innocent of any wrongdoing, the historical record of how the land was acquired—the forcible and relentless dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the theft of their territories [...] must also be erased” (23-4). The dominant discourse of regionalism in the Maritimes, as a set of narratives focused on maintaining settler possession of land, has worked to maintain the colonization of Mi’kmaq people by affirming that the settled land of the region was previously “empty” in these ways, and by using *terra nullius* as the basis of the concept of “authenticity” that informs their own claims to know and speak for the region.

Joe's speakers describe their ancient bond with the land, a bond that debunks a myth closely related to *terra nullius* in Maritime literary criticism, the myth of "the Folk" as a group that seems to have always lived in the region. As Herb Wyile explains it, "[t]he Folk paradigm is complicit in the colonial tactic of constructing the land as an unoccupied territory, because it cultivates the impression that the Folk have always belonged there" (*Anne* 107). In many of her poems, Joe affirms a longer-term presence of Mi'kmaq people in the region, modifying the colonial narratives that have distorted that history. Joe's poetry about local geographic formations affirms a connection to the land that began long prior to European exploration and colonization. Some of Joe's poems demonstrate that a relationship with a place necessitates a direct experience with the land as well as the plants, animals, humans, and spirits of that land. These poems resignify Maritime space as continually inhabited from past to present by Mi'kmaq people, challenging settler narratives of the region that depict it as empty. Moreover, they also depart from an anthropocentric version of regionalism that situates human beings at the top of a hierarchy of living things as their masters by demonstrating relationships to land beyond possession, control, and occupation, and emphasizing a collaborative, interconnected, and ongoing relationship between all living things on the land that belies European notions of belonging. In the context of this interconnected relationship, there is no need for a human-made claim over land, and there is no need for a claim of a certain group occupying the land first. Instead, Joe's poems frame connections between all living things that coexist in an area and have done so over time.

Critics Kirsten Sandrock, Danielle Fuller, Wyile, and Sam McKegey all argue that Joe's poetry proposes reconciliation and a peaceful understanding between the groups who currently live on the region's land. According to these critics, Joe wants not only to reclaim and

affirm the historical connections between the land and her own people, but also to promote understanding between the settlers who currently live on the land and First Nations more generally. Wylie argues that “Joe’s philosophy is very much a positive, conciliatory, and healing one, stressing the need for Native peoples to assert their presence, their story, and their culture, but gently rather than radically or polemically” (*Anne* 107). He reads Joe’s work as attempting to encourage healing between Natives and non-Natives, arguing that in her poems, “[t]he gulf between Native people and the dominant culture is not to be decried so much as bridged” (*Anne* 108). He also notes that she seeks to be “mutually constructive” rather than “condemnatory” (*Anne* 108). Compared to other First Nations women writers whose work has often been seen as bolder and more overtly political, “Joe’s engagement with the legacy of colonialism in Canada seems mild” (*Anne* 110). I agree with this assessment, and I can understand why Wylie, McKegney, Sandrock, and Fuller all wish to apply the term “conciliatory” to Joe and her writing, since the term suggests a desire to forgive and move forward. This scholarship on Joe’s writing provides a succinct characterization of some of her poems and interests, but it tends to overlook her critiques of European colonizers’ uses of land. I would like to test the term “conciliatory,” as well as “gentle,” and question the possible limitations of these descriptions when applied to her work. Critics who share these views that Joe’s poetry is “gentle” or “conciliatory” may risk confining their interpretations of her writing to Joe’s dust jacket statements, such as her characterization of one of her volumes of poetry in her autobiography: “In this second book, I was at war—but it was a gentle war” (*Song of Rita Joe* 128), or the characterization of herself provided on the dust jacket of *We are the Dreamers*: “I was only a housewife with a dream.” In my argument, I wish to move beyond these readings of Joe and her writing in order to describe the subversive ways Joe resists and disrupts the

dominant discourse of Maritime regionalism through her affirmation of traditional ways of knowing based in a holistic approach to place as ecology.

Both Fuller and Sandroock argue that Joe's work presents a viable challenge to essentialist literary regionalisms. Sam McKegney coins the term "affirmativism" to describe Joe's "gentle" stance, explaining that it "is neither a trite attempt to 'look on the bright side' nor [a] stoic Christian endurance. Joe [...] actively pursues a scenario in which she can achieve some joy" (107). Sandroock sees Joe's "nonviolent" stance as resistant to standard approaches to both postcolonial and regional discourse; she explains how this stance "challenges us to rethink [...] continuing paradigms of power in postcolonial and gender criticism by pointing the way towards a nonviolent revolution" (90). She sees Joe's writing as taking a different approach to the postcolonial method of "writing back," which she sees as actively resisting colonial powers, noting that Joe had a "dictum of kindness" in her personal life and a "[p]attern of being a good girl" evident through her relationships especially in her marriage (88). Sandroock believes that Joe's kindness kept her from asserting her stance against colonizing power structures in Canadian society. As Joe discusses in her autobiography, she endured years of physical and emotional abuse by her husband Frank, who beat her (*Song of Rita Joe* 73, 85) and cheated on her (*Song of Rita Joe* 82); as Sandroock sees it, Joe "excuses" the abuse from her husband (88). Using this example as a guide to Joe's poetry, Sandroock suggests that Joe's "narrators are not the active and assertive rebels that voice their anger over imperialist and neo-imperialist crimes" (88). Her form of resistance, according to Sandroock, "is more akin to Mahatma Gandhi's maxims of nonviolent resistance than it is to the dictums of postcolonial resistance. Graciousness, kindness, and consideration are the leitmotifs of her writing" (88).

Stephen Slemon points out that the kind of argument Sandroock makes problematically

“assumes that literary resistance is simply somehow *there* in the literary text as a structure of intentionality” when instead, scholars should look for literary resistance “in the *multiple* and *contradictory* structures of ideological interpellation or subject-formation—which would call down the notion that resistance can *ever* be ‘purely’ expressed in representational or communicative models” (145). Literary resistance, then, is “never simply a ‘reversal’ of power [and] never *simply* there in the text or the interpretive community, but is always *necessarily* complicit in the apparatus it seeks to transgress” (146). In my argument as I attempt to outline Joe’s methods of resistance, I heed Slemon’s description of the subtleties of literary resistance as “complicit in the apparatus it seeks to transgress” (146). The implications of Slemon’s advice for my interpretation of her work are that Joe’s readers should read between the lines of her “gentle” poetry and consider the power structures that may shape her ability to speak within “the *multiple* and *contradictory* structures of ideological interpellation” and the limits of her subject position within the colonial structure of colonizer and subaltern.

So far in my dissertation I have argued that the *oeuvres* of both Elizabeth Bishop and Maxine Tynes undermine the notion that one has to live on Maritime land in order to write about it knowledgably and in ways that offer new insights into “place-based” identity. Bishop and Tynes reconfigure regionalism through speakers who experience their connection to place from a distance. These speakers relate the Maritimes to global contexts, identities, and histories, and open up regional history, identity, and discourse to African and feminist identities, and to modernist aesthetics that critics often consider separate from Maritime regionalism. In their poetry, Tynes and Bishop demonstrate ways that speakers experience connections to land from a distance. Conversely, Joe’s poetry demonstrates ways that colonizing Europeans and present-day Canadians attempt to create a sense of distance between

her speakers and the land by changing the landscape and trying to eliminate the Mi'kmaq language. The ideas of land and history on the land that inform her work fundamentally alter the land as defined by *terra nullius*. Her ecological approach rejects the notion that people can make claims over lands. Her “regional” writing focuses on an integrated and holistic Mi'kmaq “ecology” that sees all living things as interconnected and non-hierarchical.

### **Postcolonial Indigenous Thought versus Postcolonialism**

Given the colonial history of First Nations and European relations in Canada, I deploy the term “regional” as a referent for a Mi'kmaq writer tentatively, provisionally, and with some important caveats. First, Mi'kmaq “regions” do not equate with Canadian or Maritime regions, as they have different political, cultural, and geographical boundaries. Mi'kmaq territory, called Mi'kma'ki, overlaps with the lands that I have heretofore referred to as the Maritime provinces, and it extends beyond them into Quebec, Newfoundland, and the American state of Maine (Battiste, “Socialization” 146). In a recent essay on literary regionalism and First Nations literature on the Prairies, Mareike Neuhaus explores the idea of studying Native writers within a regionalist critical framework. She argues that

Indigenous nations of the Plains are distinct peoples with distinct literary and intellectual traditions that need to be read from within those very traditions in order to adequately address the particular concerns and forms of these literatures, particularly as they relate to the politics and histories of specific tribal or national communities. To subsume these literary traditions into the body of prairie literature therefore amounts to colonialism. (88)

As Neuhaus also points out in relation to Prairie regionalism and Cree writing, the “Prairies” refers to a “region whose very political, cultural, and social specificities always also imply a

colonial project. More specifically, the word conjures up the politics of regionalism in a modern settler nation-state and, by implication, the histories of colonialism and settlement” (89). Certainly, “the Maritimes” invokes a similar political region with an analogous history of violent and coercive invasion, settlement, and forced assimilation. According to Neuhaus’s reading, I too may be engaging in a colonial activity by writing about Joe in a dissertation on Maritime regionalism, where “Nova Scotia” may not be the region with which Joe identifies. Yet the dissertation’s aim is to discuss writing by women that moves beyond the dominant critical frameworks of literary regionalism in the twentieth-century Maritime provinces. It is not possible to discuss Maritime writing by women in this period without Joe and the interrogation, indeed transformation, of “the Maritime region” in her affirmation of belonging to Mi’kmaq territory.

Daniel N. Paul uses the term *genocide* to describe the actions British colonials took against First Nations people in the Maritimes; as he explains, Nova Scotia Governor Edward Cornwallis issued a bounty on the scalps of Mi’kmaq people in 1749 as “an attempt to exterminate the Mi’kmaq” (113). In his proclamation, Cornwallis “authorize[d] and command[ed] all Officers Civil and Military, [...] to annoy, distress, take or destroy the Savage commonly called Micmac, [...] [for a] reward of ten Guineas for every Indian Micmac taken or killed, to be paid upon producing such Savage taken or his scalp” (qtd. in Paul 116). In 1876, shortly after the Confederation of the Canadian colonies, the Maritime region implemented the federal “Indian Act,” which imposed assimilation on First Nations people in part through the residential school system, a system that many critics such as Marie Battiste (“Socialization” 160) also label cultural genocide. The United Nations General Assembly Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide declares that “Forcibly transferring

children” from one “national, ethnical, racial, or religious group” to another is genocide if it is done with the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part,” the first group (United Nations). The documents of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission<sup>ii</sup> report that First Nations children across Canada were forced away from their homes and families, forbidden to speak their native language, sexually, emotionally, and physically abused, and subjected to medical experiments (Canada, “Indian Residential Schools”). This history provides an implicit warning for myself as a European-descended critic to be vigilant not to impose any form of cultural assimilation in my treatment of First Nations writing in a dissertation that discusses Joe’s work after having analyzed that of numerous settler and Euro-settler Maritime writers.

Many of Joe’s contemporary Mi’kmaq writers discuss in detail their horrific experiences at residential schools, and their stories are difficult to encounter. By comparison, Joe offers very few details of her experiences. Yet the absence of such details does not necessarily indicate that Joe and her writing are “peace-loving” (Sandrock 88). Along with the established ways of reading Joe and her work I have described above, it could be useful to read her so-called “conciliatory” stance (Fuller 179; Wyile, *Anne* 109; McKegey 130) in terms of Homi Bhabha’s definition of mimicry and mockery. It is possible to argue that Joe speaks in the discourse that is allowed to her through her position as a subaltern. The point of “mimicry” in colonial practice is to produce colonial subjects who are “*almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 126)—that is, subjects who take on traits of the colonizers, but who are not colonizers. Most importantly, this not-quitenedness can be a means of self-empowerment for colonized peoples, as they can manipulate the dominant discourse to create new meanings. Mimicry poses a threat to “the authority of colonial discourse” (Bhabha 126) because as Bhabha puts it, mimicry “emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal”

(126), and it is “at once resemblance and menace” (127). When read as mimicry, Joe’s statements about being a stranger in her own land, and even her much-remarked-upon gentleness, become powerful tools for resisting the settler view of regionalism and affirming Mi’kmaq culture, identity, and belonging in the region. The notion of mimicry allows readers to interpret Joe’s “gentle” voice as mimicking a Eurocentric worldview, a worldview imposed on her during her residential schooling. She was instructed there to act politely, appear benign, and treat the European culture as superior. Her “gentleness” may be a mimicry and mockery of the role she was expected to play through assimilation.

Concepts of mimicry and mockery come from postcolonial theory, a theory many First Nations writers reject, since, as Thomas King points out, the term *postcolonial* “is an act of imagination and an act of imperialism that demands that I imagine myself as something I did not choose to be, as something I would not choose to become” (190). He refers to the role of the subaltern within the postcolonial framework. Unlike King, Battiste accepts the term under modified conditions; she identifies a distinct field of inquiry called postcolonial Indigenous thought, which she argues

should not be confused with postcolonial theory in literature. Although they are related endeavours, postcolonial Indigenous thought also emerges from the inability of Eurocentric theory to deal with the complexities of colonialism and its assumptions. Postcolonial Indigenous thought is based on our pain and our experiences, and it refuses to allow others to appropriate this pain and these experiences. It rejects the use of any Eurocentric theory or its categories.

(“Unfolding” 212)

Twentieth-century literary regionalism has been and is a colonizing discourse. Reading Joe's work as "positively" portraying the past risks containing her writing in a position of subordination to a settler-defined region and the larger nation. Further, it restricts interpretations of her work to a Eurocentric theory and reinforces the worldview of what James Sake'j Youngblood Henderson and Battiste have named *diffusionism*. Summarizing the work of geographer J.M. Blaut, Henderson explains that Eurocentric diffusionism is based on the idea that there are only a "few human communities (or places or cultures) [that] are inventive and thus remain permanent centres of cultural change or progress" ("Mi'kmaw" 21). Diffusionism provides a view of the globe that portrays it as having a single centre (Europe) in relation to which the rest of the world is on the periphery; it reinforces a belief that European civilization is superior to all other societies ("Mi'kmaw" 21-2). Battiste has added in a recent talk that "Diffusionism [...] depicts a world divided into two categories. One category (Greater Europe, the Inside) is historical, invents, and progresses; the other category (non-Europe, the Outside) is ahistorical, stagnant and unchanging, and receives progressive innovations by diffusion from Europe" ("You Can't" 6-7). Eurocentric interpretations informed by diffusionism could only approach Joe's works through Eurocentric categories and criteria and could not be used to read her work as "progressive," "innovative" or "inventive," since it is so informed by non-European traditions.

If critics apply see a "gentle" and quiet understanding of dispossession and injustice in Joe's work, then they may risk silencing a voice that dissents from the rest of Maritime literature and literary regionalisms, a silencing that would reproduce the discourse that sought to assimilate First Nations people and to "civilize" them. In my analysis below, I argue that Joe speaks in a voice that still operates within the dominant discourse in some ways. To borrow

Slemon's words, Joe's "literary resistance is necessarily in a place of ambivalence: between systems, between discursive worlds, implicit and complicit in both of them" (146). Reading Joe's work in this way opens up a new and significant means of approaching Mi'kmaq identity and regionalism for a non-Native researcher on these subjects. As McKegney has argued, Joe "claims a degree of power in a non-threatening, conciliatory yet determined position" (130), and in that position, I would add, she is able to disrupt the dominant discourse of regionalism in the Maritimes and to demonstrate the continually unequal power relations between the Mi'kmaq and Euro-settlers.

### **Biographical Introduction to Rita Joe**

Rita Joe was born in Whycomagh, Cape Breton in 1932, and died in Eskasoni, Cape Breton in 2007. She was orphaned at a young age; her mother died when she was five years old, and afterward her father placed her in several foster homes until his own death five years later. Shortly after her father died, Joe enrolled herself in the Shubenacadie residential school in order to escape the difficulties of living in various foster homes (*Song of Rita Joe* 24). Upon her graduation, she worked in a hospital in Halifax and later moved to Boston to work as a labourer picking blueberries. There she met her husband Frank Joe. The two eventually moved back to his home on the Eskasoni reserve in Cape Breton, where they raised their eight biological and two adopted children.

Joe explains in her autobiography that she began writing poetry in her thirties for "therapy" as she explored her "own situation, past and present [and] the situation of my children and my people" (*Song of Rita Joe* 96). She also wrote a regular column, "Here and There in Eskasoni," in a Mi'kmaq publication called the *Micmac News*. While she was still actively writing the column, she sent a submission of poetry to the Nova Scotia Writer's

Federation annual poetry contest and won an honourable mention. She then edited and published that group of poems as her first collection, *Poems of Rita Joe* (1978). In this book, many poems appear in both Mi'kmaq and English versions, and others use Mi'kmaq words for which the author includes an English glossary at the end of the book. The poems explore identity and history as Joe's speakers struggle to live a Mi'kmaq identity within a European society. After publishing *Poems of Rita Joe*, Joe pursued her high school diploma and continued to write and publish more volumes of poetry as well as an autobiography entitled *Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet* (1996) that features poems and photographs interwoven with a prose text about her life. She co-edited and contributed to *The Mi'kmaq Anthology* (1997), a collection of poetry, short fiction, memoirs, and essays by Mi'kmaq writers; a second volume of *The Mi'kmaq Anthology* dedicated to her was published following her death. *Song of Eskasoni: More Poems of Rita Joe* (1988), Joe's second volume of poetry, continues to investigate Mi'kmaq culture and heritage as well as the speakers' personal identities. *Lnu, or Indians We're Called* (1991) explores the notion of an ancient connection to the land through illustrations of Mi'kmaq rock drawings, or petroglyphs, on the front cover and throughout the text, as well as a brief write-up on the historical significance of the petroglyphs by Mi'kmaq artist Theresa MacPhee. *We are the Dreamers: Early and Recent Poetry* (1999) is the last book Joe published during her lifetime. It makes available her first collection of poems, which had gone out of print, combining it with another collection of new poems.

Joe received many accolades for her advocacy work and writing. She was named Mi'kmaq Poet Laureate, and she was inducted into the Order of Canada. She also received many honorary Doctorates including an honorary Doctor of Laws from Dalhousie, an honorary Doctor of Letters from Cape Breton University, and an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

from Mount Saint Vincent University. She is possibly the best known Mi'kmaq writer in Canada, though as Wyile points out, Mi'kmaq writers have not had as much exposure or critical attention as Western Canadian First Nations writers (*Anne* 105).

In my reading of Joe's *oeuvre*, I interrogate one of Fuller's central claims about Maritime regional writing by women. Fuller argues that "women's narratives prefer social rather than physical geographies as a means of mapping communities or understanding identity. Their terms of reference do not delineate a coherent geographic space, and they should not be forced to do so" (*Writing* 37). I contend that Joe does map community through material elements of the land. She describes a specific topography and even geology, and she uses images of petroglyphs in specific geographic sites as a sustained metaphor for her culture's connection to land in several poems. In witnessing changes to the land and adapting to them, Joe's speakers characterize the Mi'kmaq as "gentle people" (*Song of Eskasoni* 54) who live under the power of a separate culture that ignores them and that fails to understand them. This sets up a division between the two groups Joe depicts as living on the land: Mi'kmaq and European, groups that speakers claim may one day live harmoniously among one another in an ideal future. I do not see this harmoniousness as a final goal of her poetry as many other critics do. Instead, I argue that the purpose of these gestures is to expose the difficulty of true understanding between Euro-settler and Mi'kmaq groups. For, if Joe's people were to live in partnership with the opposing group on the land, the partnership would necessitate that Euro-settlers also alter their perceptions of the land and the people who live there. The motif of an unmet, outstretched hand in many of Joe's poems suggests that this change in perception may be a distant reality. In the final parts of the chapter, I analyze Joe's speakers' characterizations of the limited ways that they are able to operate and communicate within the English language

imposed on them during colonization. By self-consciously describing the limits that the colonial language places on Joe's speakers' ability to think and create, Joe rejects diffusionism and opposes the idea that a European language and related worldview is the most appropriate way to apprehend reality.

### **Ecosystems and Indigenous Knowledge**

There is a transgressive element in Joe's treatment of the land and history on the land as an ecology. Joe's concept of "regional belonging" manifests in her steadfast adherence to Indigenous ways of knowing. By demonstrating how her traditional knowledge connects her to the Mi'kmaq ecosystem, Joe disrupts colonial claims to the land and exposes the fallacies of their logic. Her seemingly gentle demeanour and apparently "conciliatory" (Fuller 179) or "affirmative stance" (McKegney 107) are more than efforts to forgive settler-invaders and move on. They are assertions of Joe's traditional ways of knowing and being in the world, ways that affirm her belonging even in a landscape that seems to reject her presence owing to the topographical and physical changes that have occurred through colonizing forces over the last two centuries.

Leroy Little Bear has noted that the concept of "Space/place is a very important referent in the Aboriginal mind" (9). In their collaborative work *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*, Battiste and Henderson prefer to use the term "ecology" rather than "place" because

[t]he ecologies in which we live are more to us than settings or places; they are more than homelands or promised homelands. These ecologies do not surround Indigenous peoples; we are an integral part of them and we inherently belong to them. The ecologies are alive with the enduring processes of creation itself. As

Indigenous peoples, we invest the ecologies with deep respect, and from them we unfold our structure of Indigenous life and thought. (*Protecting* ch.1)

This idea of ecology differs significantly from the ideas of place settlers use. Whereas settlers stake a claim to land that they perceive as previously unoccupied and without history, Mi'kmaq people need not stake a "claim" to land that is part of a system with which they are already integrated. This model is not one of possession or control, rather, it is centred on a relationship with land and all of its inhabitants and elements. In applying this idea of ecology from Battiste and Henderson's explication of Indigenous worldviews to an understanding of Joe's poems, one might consider that she, unlike her Euro-settler predecessors in Maritime literature, does not need to make a "claim to the land" because she already belongs to it. In contrast to a Eurocentric view, which dictates that humans and nature are separate (Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting* ch.1), Indigenous peoples maintain a sense of connection to lands no matter how those lands have changed. Maxine Tynes maintains a similar sense of connection to altered lands in her poetry about Africville. When Africville was physically demolished, its destruction represented a second dispossession for a group that had been displaced from African homelands, but at the same time, the site of the community remains linked in Tynes's poetry to the community itself. For Joe, whose familial connections link to one specific area of land, she must reconcile the changes to that land and adapt to the evolving ecology all while remaining on the same territory. Dispossessing Mi'kmaq people from their lands was and is part and parcel of destroying their ways of life and knowledge base, as traditional practices may seem to become less possible after changes are made to the land. Battiste makes this point in her essay "Structural Unemployment: the Mi'kmaq Experience." She argues that the beginnings of "reserved" lands [...] acknowledged as exclusively for the use of Indians" coincided with

changes in the Maritime economy and Mi'kmaq economy that occurred at a "point that the traditional Mi'kmaq way of life was no longer possible at all" (139). Yet, as Joe demonstrates in her poems, changes to the land cannot destroy her culture, identity, or her sense of belonging.

Within the Indigenous worldview Battiste and Henderson describe, the ecosystem is "the ultimate source of knowledge" (Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting* ch. 2); it is located in a particular geographic area, and everything within that area is interconnected and impossible to understand separately. As Battiste and Henderson explain, "traditional ecological knowledge is highly localized and it is social. Its focus is the web of relationships between humans, animals, plants, natural forces, spirits, and land forms in a particular locality" (*Protecting* ch. 2). Flux and change are part of the world, and no ecosystem remains the same over time. The structure of Indigenous knowledge allows Indigenous people to "reunify the world or at least reconcile the world to itself" as a way to deal with "flux, paradox, and tension," and they do so through applying their traditional knowledge in the understanding that all living things are on equal footing (Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting* ch. 2).

Murdena Marshall, Anne-Christine Hornborg, and Joe describe how all living things in the Mi'kmaq ecology are interconnected. Marshall explains,

Given the Mi'kmaq view that all things in the world have their own spirit, and all things must work in harmony with each other, Mi'kmaq show respect for the spirit by extending certain rituals to our interaction with nature. Just as we send off the spirit of our dead with proper rituals and ceremony, we extend a certain amount of recognition of the spirit of the tree, animal, plants, and elements we disturb for our own use. When we cut a tree for basket weaving or a Christmas

tree, take the roots from the ground for medicines or our lodges, there are gestures we must follow to keep our minds at ease. We do not apologize for our needs but accept that interdependence of all things. (53)

Joe notes that in her first sweat lodge purification ceremony, she “prayed for the two-legged and the four-legged; my prayer included everybody and all things who may benefit, to see and experience everything that is good” (9). Hornborg refers to the Mi’kmaq’s “sacred ecology” as a “biocentric worldview” in which humans, plants, and animals are all socially equal (23). She offers some examples to illustrate: “a woman sees bloodties between her and the plant she is cultivating, a hunter approaches the prey as an affine, and shamans can look upon animal and plant spirits as allies or enemies” (23).

Much of the “flux, paradox, and tension” of the Mi’kmaq ecosystem has come as a result of European contact with Mi’kmaq people. Since European colonization of the Maritimes, lands have continually changed through settlement, the reservation system, and many industrial developments. As William Wicken observes, Mi’kmaq family groups in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wintered inland together, using inherited knowledge of the animals and the land to gather food and materials including furs (30-33). After European contact, which brought about opportunities for trading furs for practical materials like guns and knives that made hunting easier and more efficient, these “winter migration patterns” changed (Wicken 33). Perhaps they evolved “in response to the trade in furs with Europeans,” as families spent longer periods of time in certain areas in order to gather more furs for trade (Wicken 33). By the early nineteenth century, Mi’kmaq populations did not have the same access to their lands, since British Loyalists, Irish and Scottish immigrants, and other settlers from Europe had begun to move to the Maritimes in large numbers (Hornborg 8). Battiste

explains that “[a]s more and more land became settled, the Mi’kmaqs’ accustomed freedom of movement, their seasonal migrations, became impossible to maintain. Without access to their different seasonal hunting and gathering territories, their traditional economy collapsed” (“Structural” 138). With the Indian Act of 1842, a Nova Scotian Law “To Provide for the Instruction and Permanent Settlement of the Indians,” the Mi’kmaq were offered “economic aid, and a house [...] built on the reserve for the chief, as well as a school and a church” if they started a farm and stayed in one place (Hornborg 9). By the end of the 19th century, most Mi’kmaq people lived on reserves (Hornborg 9). The creators of this system dispossessed Mi’kmaq populations of traditional hunting grounds and fundamentally altered ways of life they had practiced as nomadic family groups that moved often throughout the year.

In her brief history of Mi’kmaq social conditions since European contact, Battiste explains that the federal government took over the colonial reserves at Confederation. In the 1930s, the Department of Indian Affairs sought to centralize all Mi’kmaq people in Nova Scotia to only two reserves: Shubenacadie on the central mainland and Eskasoni on Cape Breton Island. To coerce unwilling residents to move, the Department destroyed schools and farms and threatened to burn churches; they also promised housing and jobs (“Structural” 141). Indian Affairs kept none of its promises. People lived in tents while they waited for housing, and there was no employment available in the places where the government relocated them. The Department then created a welfare system to provide financial support for families, generating dependence on the government’s aid. Battiste argues that “The department’s vision of centralized reserve life was a failure, destroying the Mi’kmaqs’ small farm, trade and craft economy, but not providing any replacement” (“Structural” 141). By the early 1990s, most Mi’kmaq people were confined to reserves and had limited access to their traditional territories.

## Mi'kmaq Ecology and Changes to the Land in Joe's Poetry

In Joe's poem "Malikewe'j," Joe conceives the area of Malagawatch, Cape Breton as a Mi'kmaq ecology. Within that ecology, her speaker affirms her connection with animals, plants, spirits, histories, and ways of knowing. Malagawatch is home to a Mi'kmaq burial ground and has been a traditional gathering place for Mi'kmaq people, and Mi'kmaq Grand Council, for hundreds of years ("Mala"; *Mi'kmaq Family*). The poem describes a family that inhabits the land together. Members apprehend the visual and aural scenes before them through time:

In the wooded area of the balsam trees  
We were sitting on the welcome earth  
We heard the gentle waves on shore  
And the lullaby of birds, our bond  
The scenes that never fade  
Near the grotto church of Malikewe'j.

We see Niskam as great  
Our ancestors are home with him  
And we know  
That if childlike rewards are totaled same  
My grandsire leads the way  
These are the scenes that never fade  
Near the grotto church of Malikewe'j.

We are part of the blessed earth  
The balsam is always near  
The spirits there,  
We are them  
Unforgettable is love,  
The link remains  
These are the scenes which never fade  
Near the grotto church of Malikewe'j. (*Lnu* 49)

The end of the second stanza makes readers aware of a two-line refrain, the contents of which place the poem in a specific geographical setting. For the third stanza, then, readers anticipate the return of the refrain, aware that each line in the poem takes place within the ecology the speaker describes “Near the grotto church of Malikewe'j.” In the first stanza, the speaker uses the first person plural pronoun with the past tense to establish a connection between a group of people and the particular landscape that surrounds them. The earth, water, and animals all comprise a “bond” for them as they commune with the land in the past. The second stanza “bond[s]” a second, current group with their ancestors who are “at home with Niskam,” the Mi'kmaq word for God, as Joe indicates in a gloss on the page, and who now “lead the way” (*Lnu* 49). The third and final stanza unmistakably confirms the connection between past and present groups on the same geographic site. Through its repetition, the refrain demonstrates that the speaker's immediate connection to the land maintains and shares the relationships that her ancestors had with that land. It affirms that these images, tableaux of Mi'kmaq people interacting with the living things in Malagawatch, continue to repeat past to present in a never-ending cycle.

The poem suggests that connection to land is both physical and spiritual, as well as individual and collective. The presence of balsam fir trees and their distinct fragrance is “always near / The spirits there” (*Lnu* 49), mingling the scent of the trees as well as the sense of the ancestors’ presence. The links formed between the lines “We are them” and “The spirits there” connect the speaker to the present-day group as well as the ancestors who also occupy and commune with the site. The several three-word lines that follow closely upon one another create a steady rhythm as the poem comes to a close, reminding readers of the steady presence of ancestors and the present-day Mi’kmaq in this place. “The link [that] remains” (*Lnu* 49) refers equally to the link between the ancestors and the current generation of Mi’kmaq, as well as the link between Mi’kmaq and “the grotto church of Malikewe’j” (*Lnu* 49). Each image of the poem makes up one of the many “scenes that never fade” (*Lnu* 49) from this site of historic and cultural significance. These “scenes” represent a permanent knowledge of history and ancestry embedded in the people and the land. In this poem, Malikewe’j is both a geography and a way of thinking about relationships between past and present, and between ancestors and the current generation.

“Malikewe’j” portrays how many elements interact with each other in a Mi’kmaq ecosystem. In “Graphics of Life,” the speaker affirms her Aboriginal identity through viewing and interpreting changes that have occurred in the ecosystem through forces of nature. She reflects on ancient Mi’kmaq “sketches” in the land, rock drawings that Mi’kmaq ancestors created to depict Mi’kmaq history and legends. She affirms the resilience that traditional ways of knowing provide for Mi’kmaq people while also making implicit arguments about written Aboriginal history. The speaker describes how the land has changed over time, erasing any obvious visual presence of the Mi’kmaq history of that place:

The graphics of life are firm  
Identity comes from view  
Brothers we are  
The honoured Micmac of Nova Scotia.

The erased trail across the deep  
Dry sea where people once lived.  
A rooted dream  
Taken away and rewritten.

The sketches of life show  
those who lived  
arose by toil  
their shade left behind in picture-writing. (*Song of Eskasoni* 33)

The poem is brief and spare; the short lines indicate a careful and attentive voice. Lally Grauer believes that Joe's "pared down syntax and diction [and the] plainness of [her] language create a penetrating directness" (xxv). The placement of line breaks obstructs the poem's sentences, slows down the pace, and encourages the reader to carefully contemplate one small portion of the poem at a time. This highlights the poem's imagery of a trail slowly changing over centuries. Each line of the poem offers only a portion of the bigger picture and depends on those before or after in order to gain a more complete image, reflecting a slow change in the landscape. Moreover, the "penetrating directness" (Grauer xxv) of the short lines brings readers in contact with the ancient history of the land, a history that seems to mingle with the land's

present state. “Graphics of Life” gestures toward the length of time the Mi’kmaq have inhabited this area, as people who have been part of the ecology since the sea was dry.

In the poem, Joe’s speaker recounts nature’s erasure of a trail over centuries of shifting and changing earth, as a sea becomes a dry land over time beyond the control of any human. Yet the words “erased” and “rewritten” imply an active agent behind these phenomena. As the movement of the sea rewrites the people’s dream, it suggests that the people and nature share the same dream, affirming the ecological approach that Battiste and Henderson describe. As Joe writes in her introduction to *The Mi’kmaq Anthology*, “I have often told my children that if we recorded our own history through writing, it would be different. Who knows, maybe someday a record will be discovered written by Aboriginals in the many lands they lived” (8). In her creative work, including “Graphics of Life,” Joe refers to this written Aboriginal history as one inscribed directly on and in the land itself.

Her affirmation is situated in a history of arguments that Indigenous peoples have long possessed the technology of writing. George Copway/Kahgegahbowh (1818-1869), an Ojibwa writer of the nineteenth century, describes the complexities of the Ojibwa language for a European audience in his book *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation*. He explains that others before him have “followed too much the English idiom in forming a grammar of the Ojibway language” (126). He refers to what critics call Eurocentrism, a dominant worldview that permeates “many smaller historical, geographical, psychological, sociological and philosophical theories” (Battiste, “You Can’t” 6), and specifically to twentieth-century Eurocentric theories on the supposed superiority of written and alphabetic languages over oral and pictorial ones. In Walter J. Ong’s monograph *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (1982), Ong describes oral cultures as “no

longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche” (14), as if the superiority of writing permanently displaces the usefulness or relevance of oral cultures. In her 2012 study of Indigenous literatures, Brigit Brander Rasmussen points out that the many Indigenous literary traditions such as picture writing and birch bark scrolls continue to remain

outside the purview of American literary studies because writing often has been defined primarily as alphabetism. But that equation is flawed, as a number of scholars have demonstrated. During the colonial process, literacy became a signifier, as well as the ‘sine qua non’ of civilization, and ‘writing’ became a crucial dividing line between colonized and colonizer. The ways in which literary scholars have constructed their object—and abject—of inquiry remain deeply entangled with the history of European imperialism. As long as literary scholars continue to think about writing predominantly as the alphabetic system used by Europeans, we uphold that legacy by defining other forms of recording knowledge and narrative out of existence. (3)

In the history of relations between Mi’kmaq people and European colonizers, the Mi’kmaq were at one time barred from learning written alphabetic language because French colonists believed it could reduce French dominance over the region. In 1735, clerical leader Pierre Maillard argued that the Mi’kmaq should not be taught the alphabet because “they inevitably would abuse this knowledge through [a] spirit of curiosity... which hurriedly drives them to know bad things rather than good” (qtd. in Edwards 34). Maillard echoes the belief Ong and Rasmussen describe, the belief that alphabetism is superior to oral tradition and that it provides power to those who employ it, a power that Maillard did not believe the Mi’kmaq ought to possess. His fear was that they “would surely emancipate themselves...if they could make use

of our alphabet...; they would not hesitate strongly to persuade themselves that they know much more than those who are intended to instruct them” (qtd. in Edwards 34). Maillard’s statements reflect the tenets of diffusionism through his assertion that the Mi’kmaq are in need of instruction by a more advanced civilization, one that possesses the tools of a written alphabetic language. It also registers insecurity about it in his fear that the Mi’kmaq would soon master the language and use it for purposes outside of European control.

Copway describes in detail the many forms of written records of community history “written on slate rock, copper, lead, and on the back of birch trees” and deposited in certain locations where they are regularly updated by knowledgeable community elders (132). He argues that “An Indian well versed in [written Ojibwa figures] can send a communication to another Indian, and by them make himself as well understood as a pale face can by letter” (132)—that is, that written Ojibwa language is just as effective as written European languages. The point disputes the prevailing belief that Indigenous peoples lacked the technology or ability to produce written histories, a belief that Joe challenges through “Graphics of Life.”

The speaker of “Graphics of Life” describes the written and rewritten “dream” of the people who once lived on the land as physically “rooted” in the ground like a plant, signifying a historic connection between Mi’kmaq people and specific land. Even though their trail is altered over time, it still manages to leave remnants of marks upon the land, a “shade [...] in picture writing” (*Song of Eskasoni* 33), evidence of the past that appears in written form. The idea that the people had “a rooted dream” established for a long period of time that was later “taken away and rewritten” emphasizes the change in the land and its inhabitants over time and a continual evolution of Mi’kmaq people in relation to their ecosystem and its changes, including the presence of Europeans and their alternative histories. It also emphasizes a

fundamental Mi'kmaq stake in the land established in part through a written Mi'kmaq history. Writing is not simply a metaphor for Mi'kmaq presence on the land in this poem. It is a technology that Mi'kmaq people possess. Since the alleged lack of such technology is often part of the justification for displacing and dispossessing Indigenous people, Joe's contention that it exists rejects this rationale for dispossessing Mi'kmaq people in the first place.

### **Buildings, Structures, and an Alien Landscape**

In poems about Euro-settler-constructed buildings and physical structures that visibly and physically alter the land, Joe's speakers comment on the experience of their community losing land from under its feet while still standing on it; the "alien [...] culture" (*Song of Rita Joe* 113) represented in "Your Buildings" and "Hated Structure: Indian Residential School, Shubenacadie" by colonial architecture temporarily disorients speakers on the land even as they continue to inhabit it. Images of modern buildings highlight the dissolution of a way of life distorted by the altered landscape of "alien" (*Poems* 4) architecture and building materials. Joe's poems about physical structures show how the buildings are a human-made change that has serious implications for the Mi'kmaq; this change, however, does not destroy the ecology Joe describes in her poems. Even though they physically bar speakers from direct contact with the land and temporarily dislocate and disorient them by drawing other boundaries over Mi'kmaq territory, the speakers' traditional ways of knowing nonetheless connect them to the ecosystem no matter what changes occur. The buildings in the poems are material reminders of Canadian society's racism and intolerance toward Mi'kmaq people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The buildings may fall in the future as the speakers suggest, but as they have not yet done so, their power to evoke pain remains palpable for those who had to live and work in them.

In the poem “Your Buildings,” Joe’s speaker treats land as a permanent and stable source of knowledge, yet she also sees that the landscape has changed with the addition of the buildings and structures. The poem contains four stanzas, each shorter than the last, and each reflecting changes in the speaker’s attitude toward the buildings as it shifts from reverence to indifference. In the first stanza, the speaker establishes that she has no affiliation with these buildings—distinguished as “yours” as opposed to “mine” or “ours”—but she nonetheless seeks a connection to the land underneath them. She addresses the group of people that the buildings represent, European others:

Your buildings, tall, alien

Cover the land;

Unfeeling concrete smothers,

windows glint.

Like water to the sun.

No breezes blow

Through standing trees;

No scent of pine lightens my burden

I see your buildings rising skyward, majestic,

Over the trails where once men walked,

Significant rulers of this land

Who still hold the aboriginal title

In their hearts

By traditions known

Through eons of time.

Relearning our culture is not difficult,

Because those trails I remember

And their meaning I understand.

While skyscrapers hide the heavens,

They can fall. (*Dreamers* 59)

The poem delivers Joe's characteristic concrete visual imagery in short lines. The line breaks and commas introduce a staccato effect as they interrupt the poem's sentences, mirroring the disruption within the speaker's ecosystem, as the speaker finds herself blocked from land in part by the presence of concrete and skyscrapers. The first stanza offers a stark contrast to the image offered in "Malikewe'j" of a cyclical relationship with the land through generations of ancestors in one location. In the images here, the land is instead "cover[ed]" and "smother[ed]" by the physical structures placed on top of it. The buildings deflect by "glint[ing]" the light, as well as any living thing in their vicinity, away. The "glint" keeps viewers from seeing inside the building, and by extension, it represents a barrier to the building and the power it represents. Joe's speaker portrays the structures as barriers between her and the land and nature. They not only "cover the land" (*Dreamers* 59) but stifle the area surrounding them. There are no breezes, and so, unlike the speaker of "Malikewe'j," this speaker has no access to the scent of trees to comfort her because if there are any trees, their scent does not carry, and "[n]o scent of pine lightens [her] burden." Evoking a sense of claustrophobia and suffocation in the speaker, the buildings seem to suppress the sense of nature for which the speaker longs as she

visits the site; and the building materials appear to block her connection with the many elements of the ecosystem.

In the second stanza, however, the poem begins to turn. The speaker acknowledges the “majestic” power of the buildings and seems to express reverence for them in the stanza’s first line, “I see your buildings rising skyward, majestic.” Yet in the following line, she adds that the buildings have been erected on previously occupied lands, lands owned by “significant rulers” who mark their title in ways more permanent than the physical structures placed on the land’s surface. They “hold the aboriginal title / In their hearts / By traditions known / Through eons of time.” The “traditions” of land title can last for “eons” but, unlike the large and obtrusive buildings that mark an implicit claim over the land they cover, the aboriginal title does not require any physical material to affirm. Through the poem itself, in articulating her traditional knowledge, the speaker begins to restore harmony to the disruptions to the ecology, disruptions that have led to a sense of “disharmony.” Even though the ecology is always present and indestructible, elements of the ecology may be pushed out of balance. As Battiste and Henderson explain, “Indigenous peoples view harmony as a dynamic and multidimensional balancing of interrelationships in their ecologies. Disturbing these interrelationships creates disharmony; balance is restored by applying appropriate actions and knowledge” (*Protecting* ch. 2).

The speaker is in possession of the knowledge and memory of her culture through the land under and around the buildings. In applying her knowledge to the presence of buildings in the ecosystem, the speaker emphasizes ways of thinking about changes in the ecology and its effects on her sense of identity and belonging. Even though land is covered, all of its meaning and power are still present. At the poem’s end, the speaker suggests that the structures, while

large and seemingly all-encompassing as they “hide the heavens,” “can fall” (*Dreamers* 59). The buildings have not robbed her of her identity because she carries that within herself, within her ways of knowing, ways that inherently connect to the ecosystem. In this vision, even though the land is completely changed, and even though Mi’kmaq identity and the ecology are linked, the speaker’s identity, culture, and history are unshakable. While the land is still important, it is not important that it stay the same in order for Joe’s speakers to feel a connection or sense of belonging to it.

The poem configures belonging as a way of remembering and experiencing Mi’kmaq memory and culture. While it may seem as if the buildings have barred the speaker’s access to land, the speaker’s argument is that they do nothing to alter her identity or heritage. The buildings reflect an aspect of the Eurocentric worldview of human beings’ separation from nature. As Battiste and Henderson explain about this Eurocentric view, “people do not have a predetermined place in the natural world, their knowledge of the natural world is necessarily incomplete, and they must overcome the separation between self and the natural world using subjective, artificial structures” (*Protecting*, ch. 2). In the poem, the buildings act as the “artificial structures” that Maritime Euro-settlers have created in order to justify and overcome their sense of separation from the land.

By contrast, the speaker’s significantly different understanding of her relationships within nature allows her to experience connections between Mi’kmaq knowledge and heritage and Mi’kmaq lands in the post-contact world she inhabits. In fact, the poem offers a much more sophisticated land “claim” than the buildings implicitly do, even as they cover the land and “deflect” everything around it. The speaker’s connection to the land is patient, confident, and permanent. Even though the topography is completely changed by “you”—the “you” who have

built skyscrapers and covered over ancient trails with concrete—these are only superficial changes to the site. Belief in the power of skyscrapers to alter a landscape would reflect a fallible and transient mentality. As the speaker suggests, the buildings will not last forever; they are merely impermanent physical objects. In negating the impact of the buildings on her worldview, Joe also strips away some of the power the buildings implicitly claim for the people who built them and their artificial assertion of control over the land.

Reading Joe's poems through the ecological approach described by Battiste and Henderson suggests that Joe's connection to land is based on a deep, inherited knowledge and ways of knowing informed by a complex web of the many interrelationships of plants, animals, humans, and forces within this given geographic area. The Mi'kmaq ecosystem extends to the boundaries of Mi'kmaq territory and makes up what may be called a "region." She is so connected to an ecology that she will address and seek to reconcile any changes that occur within the ecology, whether those changes occur by forces of nature, time, or human beings from other geographic areas with entirely different worldviews. As a result, her land "claims" reveal that she does not need to stake a "claim" in the first place. This is the Mi'kmaq ecosystem, the area in which her ancestors lived, from which her knowledge of the world originates, and to which her knowledge applies. Joe's intrinsic partnership with the land is so much part of the ecology that it immediately forces a rethinking of other kinds of regional land claims, such as the implicit claim in "Your Buildings" of the physical structures placed on top of land that mark it in a gesture of ownership and control.

Joe continues to create complex land "claims" in other poems about buildings, such as "Hated Structure: Indian Residential School, Shubenacadie," a poem concerning a former residential school building in Nova Scotia. In her autobiography, Joe explains that she and her

daughter both attended school there, the only residential school building in the province of Nova Scotia (*Song of Rita Joe* 145). The speaker begins by innocently beckoning the reader to imagine “If you are on Highway 104 / In a Shubenacadie town / There is a hill / Where a structure stands” (*Song of Eskasoni* 75). She locates the structure first and then moves in the next stanza to describe how this otherwise nondescript structure is “A reminder to many senses / To respond with demented ones” (*Song of Eskasoni* 75). The reader becomes aware of a shift in tone, as the building is suddenly much more menacing than it first appeared. After all, the nature of a “demented” sense and ways that a building could inspire it seem sinister and threatening. The speaker continues to describe her connection with the building and the disturbing emotional meaning it has for her:

I for one looked in the window  
And there on the floor  
Was a deluge of misery  
Of a building I held in awe  
Since the day  
I walked in the ornamented door. (*Song of Eskasoni* 75)

The speaker reflects on her conflicted senses of the building as on one hand an object of “awe” and beauty, and on the other a house of unspeakable pain and despair. This sense of awe is double-edged; as the poem progresses, the speaker encourages readers to reflect on the type of people and society that could allow, even endorse, the horrific injustices of child abuse and cultural genocide that occurred in the building and others like it. She gives the reader access to the pain of the past by peering inside the structure herself first, and then inviting the reader to join her. As the speaker looks into the structure, she is also peering into her own personal

memory, and the collective memory of the children who lived there “in laughter, or abuse” (*Song of Eskasoni* 75), again evoking two opposite experiences within her memory. In the final stanza, a zeugma ties two more experiences together with another specific inference drawn by the speaker’s memory:

I had no wish to enter  
Nor to walk the halls  
I had no wish to feel the floors  
Where I felt fear  
A beating heart of episodes  
I care not to recall (*Song of Eskasoni* 75)

The zeugma occurs at the line break between “fear” and “A beating heart,” where the speaker uses the word “beating” to refer to both her heart as it felt the fear, as well as the beatings of children that occurred on those floors every day. Like the opposites of despair and awe, laughter and abuse, the poem ends with two more opposing reflections on the power of the structure to affect memory: “I remind / Until I fall” (*Song of Eskasoni* 75). This line links through rhyme to “halls,” and the speaker’s “care not to recall.” With the rhyming words, the poem suggests that the building’s power to evoke memory is related closely to its power to evoke the fear and pain of the traumatic past events that occurred in its walls. At this point, readers are better able to understand the so-called “demented” senses the building inspires at the poem’s opening.

McKegney interprets this poem as hopeful and in line with what he calls Joe’s “affirmative” stance (107). He contends that

With the absence of the physical structure that embodied the regimented

disciplinary impulse of the system, gone is the compulsion to relive the traumatic experiences that system produced. [...] Yet the potential freedom augured by the building's eventual demolition asserts its relevance throughout the poem, even in the building's presence. [...] 'Hated Structure' executes Joe's positive literary methodology by liberating the speaker-poet to render history and memory in a manner consistent with the ideals of an empowered future. (46)

In McKegney's argument, Joe's "positive" emphasis on her residential school experience has a significant impact on Mi'kmaq culture and identity in that it inspires hope and redemption despite a bleak picture of the past. His argument seems especially compelling if we read the building as a metaphor for forced assimilation with the colonizers of Canada and as a symbol of the broader barriers to land use and access that Mi'kmaq people have faced throughout their post-contact history. As the speaker affirms in the final stanza of the poem, "The structure stands as if to say: / I was just a base for theory / To bend the will of children" (*Song of Eskasoni* 75). When the building falls, as the speaker suggests it will, not only does the "compulsion to live traumatic experiences" disappear (McKegney 46), but so too does the whole "theory" behind the building itself, as it serves as a foundation of the cultural divisions between Mi'kmaq people and the dominant cultural system that produced the school.

The poem offers past, present, and future visions of the geographic site; the speaker posits that none of the three perspectives on that site is the only way from which to understand its significance or its historical context. In the poem, the physical structure of the residential school building stands as a marker of a collective colonial past, and it serves as a reminder of the terrors of the specific past that Joe and her daughter Phyllis experienced in the residential school. Joe affirms in her autobiography that "Still, today, I do not regret going into the

Residential School” (*Song of Rita Joe* 49), perhaps because of her desire to write positive depictions of Mi’kmaq history and literature for her children and other young members of Native communities. As she notes in an interview with Jeanette Lynes, she believes that positive affirmations of her culture serve as a kind of activism that she can practice for her children’s sake: “I worked and created beauty so my children will see that it was not all bad” (Lynes 130). But “Hated Structure” certainly does not paint a completely positive portrait. Despite the “empowered future” that McKegney imagines awaits the community when the building falls, the building that stands empty in the poem nonetheless serves as a painful reminder of the horrors that took place within its walls. The speaker refuses to enter the building and must face its continued existence. The poem “Hated Structure” comprises part of Joe’s ongoing effort to “[apply] appropriate actions and knowledge” (Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting* ch. 2) to restore balance and harmony to the Mi’kmaq ecology. The building no longer exists in physical form today, and it was destroyed in a fire during Joe’s lifetime. By choosing to keep it standing in the poem, Joe affirms that aspects of the ecology remain out of balance, and this part of the land’s history still needs to be reconciled with her speaker’s traditional Mi’kmaq knowledge.

### **The Ecological Consequences of Losing Mi’kmaq Language**

The residential school building represents a significant source of disharmony in the Mi’kmaq ecosystem not only for its presence on the land, but also for its symbolic and practical role in the destruction of Mi’kmaq language. Correspondingly, the need to restore balance and harmony to Joe’s speakers’ ecology emerges not only in the descriptions of changes to the ecology, but also to these speakers’ ability to operate in the Mi’kmaq language. In the poems “I Lost My Talk” and “The Art of Communication,” the speakers’ self-conscious use of the

English language draws attention to its limited capacity to articulate their experiences and worldview. Moreover, Mi'kmaq language is fundamentally a part of the ecology, and it is a means by which Mi'kmaq people maintain their relationship to it. As Murdena Marshall explains,

We believe our language is holy and sacred. The Creator gave it to the Mi'kmaq people for the transmission of all the knowledge our Creator gave to us and for our survival. Our language has its origin in the Maritimes, in the Land of Mikmakik, and it is here that it must remain to flourish among the people or we become extinct. The sacred knowledge within our language provides wisdom and understanding. It focuses on the processes of knowledge, the action or verb consciousness, and not on the nouns or material accumulation. It has no curse words, but rather only words to describe all of nature. When one wants to curse or damn anything or anyone, they must use the English language. (54)

Marshall's description also alludes to the significant differences in the structures of English versus Mi'kmaq, as the concept of cursing or damning is not part of Mi'kmaq language or worldview at all. The difference highlights the respect for all living things inherent in Mi'kmaq language, and the contrasting hierarchical structure of the English language and the Eurocentric worldview it reflects.

Joe's speakers point toward a need to move beyond that Eurocentric discourse and language toward new ways of including, decolonizing, and "dealienating" (Henderson, "*Ayukpachi*" 249) Indigenous peoples through speech. Henderson notes that

the colonized must break their silence and struggle to retake possession of their humanity and identity. To speak initially, they have to share Eurocentric thought

and discourse with their oppressors; however, to exist with dignity and integrity, they must renounce Eurocentric models and live with the ambiguity of thinking against themselves. They must learn to create models to help them take their bearings in unexplored territory. (“*Ayukpachi*” 249-50)

The “ambiguity of thinking against themselves” is part of Eurocentric diffusionism, the idea embedded in Eurocentric culture that Indigenous people are inferior and in need of European guidance in many facets of their existence. It is also an idea embedded in Eurocentric language and thought (Henderson, “*Ayukpachi*” 253). Thus even speaking in English can be difficult because the thought patterns and logic that the language uses negates the Aboriginal worldview that Joe’s speakers hold and distances them from their ecology by doing so. Even though this approach may counter Eurocentric thought, it does not come without a price. The English language still distances Mi’kmaq people from their own language. As Battiste and Henderson explain, “we carry the mysteries of ecologies and their diversity in our oral traditions, in our ceremonies, and in our art; we unite these mysteries in the structure of our languages and our ways of knowing” (*Protecting* ch. 1). In other words, the ability to access a Mi’kmaq worldview in relation to the ecology is found first and foremost through Mi’kmaq language. Without that language, Mi’kmaq people lose the knowledge that they pass down through oral tradition, and the structure of a distinct worldview. Importantly, they lose understanding of the Mi’kmaq ecology. Retaining and maintaining language, then, is perhaps the most crucial way that Joe’s speakers can name their “regionalism” or connection to the ecology.

During her years in residential school, Joe was not permitted to speak in Mi’kmaq. Part of the purpose of residential schools across Canada, according to the researchers for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was to assimilate and “civilize” First Nations children

(Canada). Teachers forbade First Nations languages and enforced English as the only language of the residential school in Nova Scotia. As Isabelle Knockwood writes in her memoir about her experience in the Shubenacadie residential school, “someone telling the nun in charge that you’d been heard speaking Mi’kmaw was a way to ensure that ‘you’d get the shit beat out of you’” (174). Knockwood relates the story of Joe Julian, who remembers getting “hit over the head” for speaking Mi’kmaq (qtd. in Knockwood 180). Knockwood also remembers that “[w]hen little children first arrived at the school we would see bruises on their throats and cheeks that told us that they had been caught speaking Mi’kmaw. Once we saw the bruises begin to fade, we knew they’d stopped talking” (182).

In “I Lost My Talk,” Joe’s speaker addresses her time at the Shubenacadie residential school, a time in her life when authorities there forced her to speak only in English:

I lost my talk  
The talk you took away.  
When I was a little girl  
At Shubenacadie school.  
You snatched it away:  
I speak like you  
I think like you  
I create like you  
The scrambled ballad, about my world.  
Two ways I talk  
Both ways I say,  
Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,  
Let me find my talk  
So I can teach you about me. (*Song of Eskasoni* 32)

The short and fragmented lines call attention to the speaker's use of very simple, basic phrases. They contrast visually with the poem's longest line, a line that describes the poem as a "scrambled ballad, about [her] world." It is "scrambled" because the speaker cannot use her own language to describe her point of view. The self-referential title and first line of the poem serve as reminders that all of the poems the reader encounters are written in Joe's second language, and many are addressed to members of a culture outside of her own. The "two ways" the speaker talks represent not only the words she is capable of using but more importantly the two distinct ways that the speaker may perceive and describe the world. As Henderson notes, "The discord between Aboriginal and Eurocentric worldviews is dramatic," and the configuration of those worldviews is embedded in differences in European and Aboriginal linguistic structures ("*Ayukpachi*" 261). Many linguistic theorists have discussed the direct links between the structure of a language and a corresponding way of perceiving reality. As one discourse theorist puts it, "realities are constructed through language" (Birch ch. 1). Henderson explains how the English language imposes a worldview inherent in the language. For instance, "In Eurocentric thought, there are two origins of knowing: curiosity and control. Both ways of European knowing create polarities of the self as knower and the world as the known, with training or education as the mediator. This corresponds to the ideal English sentence: subject-verb-object. The self is the subject (agent/character) seeking to know (verb/action) the object (goal)" ("*Ayukpachi*" 267). Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and seeing the world are vastly different from this European model, and they correspond to a distinct language structure. Without access

to that structure, Joe's speaker's ballad becomes "scrambled," as it must make use of the logic of a worldview she does not share in order to describe her experience.

Joe's use of a European language is strategic in this poem, for she uses it to deploy the rhetorical strategy of mimicry. In "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," Bhabha defines mimicry as "a form of colonial discourse that is uttered *inter dicta*: a discourse at a crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them" (130). With mimicry, a subaltern may still speak with the words of a European language and in a Eurocentric discourse, but she does so with an attitude that mocks those words and their intended meaning. A new meaning emerges from the speech that allows the "subaltern" to resist the colonial power and counter it with another point of view. Before she reaches out to the colonizer at the end of the poem, the speaker reminds readers of the voice in which she actually speaks. There are "Two ways I talk [and] / Both ways I say / Your way is more powerful" (*Song of Eskasoni* 32). These "two ways" represent the dominant, Eurocentric discourse, and her position within that discourse as a subaltern or the other. The voice readers encounter is not the speaker's own voice; she speaks in the voice of an other. She establishes through epistrophe that she speaks, thinks, and creates "like you," "you" being the colonizing instructors at the residential school. In speaking "your way" in the final stanza where she "gently [...] offer[s] her hand" (*Song of Eskasoni* 32), Joe's speaker operates within the discourse she was taught when her own voice was taken from her. She now speaks in the discourse that instructed her to act politely, appear benign, and treat the Eurocentric worldview and language as superior. This voice speaks "*inter dicta*: [...] both against the rules and within them" (Bhabha 130). It uses words and phrases acceptable to a Eurocentric worldview, and

sets up a division between two groups, one “more powerful” than the other. Yet, the speaker is able to draw attention to the gaps and flaws in that worldview when it comes to Mi’kmaq people because although she speaks words that indicate she needs help from the group she addresses, she simultaneously proves that she has the agency and capability to speak without any help at all. The ending of the poem mocks the Eurocentric group, as it implies that there is no way it can give back what it took from the Mi’kmaq. Instead, the speaker’s final remarks expose the injustice of the colonizing Europeans’ abuse of power over Mi’kmaq life. It is important to read Joe’s speaker’s speech simultaneously within and against the “allowed” or Eurocentric discourse even if one does not accept the entire framework around the idea of Joe as a “subaltern.” King’s point that the postcolonial framework fits Indigenous people into a false binary is valid. Within a Eurocentric framework, Indigenous people are understood as inferior and in need of guidance, as Battiste (“You Can’t” 6-7) and Henderson (“*Ayukpachi*” 253) have indicated. Joe’s speaker acts out this false binary in the poem, calling attention to the polarity between herself and the implied reader as an illusion created by Eurocentric power.

The poem’s final lines reveal a speaker who appears anxious to reconcile with those who “took” her ability to communicate in her primary language. In the gesture of holding out her hand, she explains that she wants to not only have her “talk” back, she also wants to use it to “teach” those who were unjust to her. In her exploration of the poem, Sandrock argues that Joe “turns the broken dreams of the colonial past into a dream for a genuinely post-colonial future. What Joe does, then, is not simply reverse existing hierarchies. Rather, she tries to counteract the very existence of cultural and linguistic hierarchies and to illustrate that the region belongs to everybody equally” (Sandrock 89). Fuller also interprets the final stanza in the poem as “conciliatory” (*Writing* 179). She believes that by the end of the poem, Joe

“[invites] her oppressor to be a listener rather than a stealer of ‘talk,’ a partner in dialogue and self-recovery” (*Writing* 179). By focusing on the latter part of the poem in their analyses, Sandrock and Fuller overlook the tension between the “Two ways I talk” (*Song of Eskasoni* 32) and the corresponding double meaning to the speaker’s seemingly gentle plea.

The poem encourages readers to consider two other “talks”: the surface “talk” being spoken and the absent talk that might have been spoken instead if the speaker still possessed her own “talk.” Silence is a powerful element of the Eurocentric discourse that the speaker can use for self empowerment. American novelist and Kiwi author N. Scott Momaday remarks on the silencing of Indigenous people in the United States. He notes that “One of the most perplexing ironies of American history is the fact that the Indian has been effectively silenced by the intricacies of his own speech, as it were. Linguistic diversity has been a formidable barrier to Indian-white diplomacy. And underlying this diversity is again the central dichotomy, the matter of a difference in ways of seeing and making sense of the world around us” (qtd. in Henderson, “*Ayukpachi*” 263). Joe’s speaker cannot say what she wishes to say in English because it has a completely different linguistic structure and corresponding worldview. If she cannot speak her experience in the shared discourse, it will also prove difficult to share her perspective with others who operate in that language, even if they do want to listen.

In “The Art of Communication,” Joe’s speaker implores the reader to “help” her learn how to communicate properly:

Come share with us

See the expression of kindness toward you [...]

The cry for help is there.

Teach me the art of communication

Because, I want to tell you about me  
The Indian of today  
The lonely stranger to her own land.  
But always willing to meet halfway.  
Don't disregard my hand if it is offered in friendship.  
I was only a child yesterday  
But I am expected to be mature and brave  
On the battlefield of assimilation.  
Please help me. (*Song of Eskasoni* 17)

The lines of this poem are longer and the vocabulary more extensive and articulate than in “I Lost My Talk.” Through that articulateness, the speaker demonstrates her ability to practice the “art of communication” without any of the “help” she asks for in the poem. Reconciliation and mutual understanding do seem to make up the speaker’s goals; however, while she may say the words “[p]lease help me,” she only appears to be asking in the gentle way that many of Joe’s critics ascribe to her and that Joe ascribes to herself. Readers must also consider the relationship between the speaker and the implied reader, a colonizer and non-Native person. The speaker invites this reader to join her, to “share,” “teach,” and “help” her to navigate their current society, actions that perhaps a proper education should take in guiding young people. The implied reader already knows this “art of communication” because she is on the other side of the so-called “battlefield” and complicit in the colonization of First Nations people. In order to be “heard” by the implied reader, then, there are only so many options for Joe’s speaker. She begins by sharing the discourse of Eurocentrism. She acknowledges the colonizers while at the same time chiding them for “disregard[ing] [her] hand” held out in friendship, and for

otherwise ignoring her cries for help. In an untitled poem in *Lnu, and Indians We're Called*, Joe's speaker extends another request for understanding using the same extended-hand gesture, addressing the groups who have settled on the land. The poem is brief, and worth quoting in full:

The offered hand is still in place  
Extended to you since time began  
And from where you came I honour your stay  
My welcome,  
From our sacred voice to your motherland. (*Lnu* 16)

In these lines, Joe presents the perspective of a historical Mi'kmaq figure who lived when colonists came to settle the area and has held his hand out since. That outstretched hand, a symbol of peace and understanding between two people or groups, is a motif that appears in many of Joe's poems, including the ones about communication that I discuss above. The hand remains outstretched and unmet. Fuller notes that in at least one of her poetry performances, while reading "I Lost My Talk," Joe held out her hand when the image came up in the poem, which "made passive listening more difficult because it broke through the spatial brackets created by the chair arrangements" (*Writing* 174). In "The Art of Communication," Joe's speaker says that she cowers like a child "On the battlefield of assimilation," but it is the colonizing other who maintains that space as a "battlefield." In presenting the image of the unmet and outstretched hand, Joe's speakers may appear to ask for friendship; however, there is an unmistakable tension as these speakers also implicitly accuse the implied reader of injustice and cruelty. They operate within the allowed discourse here, but also against it.

There are significant consequences to the loss of Mi'kmaq language that the poems above indicate, and one is a disruption to Mi'kmaq ecology. If, as Battiste and Henderson explain, reconciling disharmony in the ecosystem must be done by applying traditional knowledge, and if, as Marshall argues, traditional knowledge is built into the Mi'kmaq language, then a significant barrier to a sense of connection with the ecology and the knowledge that Mi'kmaq people are an important component of the ecology is the loss of language. The poems about communication, then, are just as crucial to an understanding of Joe's "regionalism" as poems about lands or sites. In the same way as Joe's speakers in "Your Buildings" work toward regaining a sense of access to lands, and coming to terms with the buildings and other changes to the landscape, speakers in "I Lost my Talk" and "The Art of Communication" seek to regain their own language, a "talk" that carries knowledge of the Mi'kmaq ecosystem with it.

## **Conclusion**

Joe's "regional" writing is centred on a holistic and interconnected sense of territory as ecology. This ecology informs Mi'kmaq knowledge, language, and life. Mi'kmaq people belong to Mi'kmaq territory, and they are integrated with all the living things contained within it; they can maintain that connection through the application of their knowledge and use of their sacred language. In poems about changes to the land, and changes to Mi'kmaq access to their language, Joe outlines the dangers and fallacies of an idea of an anthropocentric "region" that sees (some) human beings at the top of an artificial and destructive hierarchy. The significance of Joe's ecological approach for Maritime regionalism is that it exposes how settler narratives that focus on maintaining certain human beings' possession of the land has worked to maintain colonization of Mi'kmaq people by imagining the land as previously empty, and by using *terra*

*nullius* as the basis of the concept of “authenticity” that informs their own claims to know and speak for the region. The ideas of land and history on the land that inform Joe’s work fundamentally alter the land as defined by *terra nullius*. Her ecological approach rejects the idea that human beings can make claims over areas based on a moment when they decide history has begun, or the moment of first contact with a piece of land. Further, Joe’s approach rejects the anthropocentrism of the settler claim and exposes the ways in which it is used to exclude some human beings from that claim altogether.

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<sup>i</sup> Following Mi'kmaq historians including Daniel N. Paul, I use the spelling Mi'kmaq as opposed to the anglicized "Micmac." As Paul notes, "The term 'Mi'kmaq' rather than 'Micmac' [...] is now the preferred choice of our people" (4). Anne-Christine Hornborg also notes that "Mi'kmaq" is "the phonetically most authentic spelling," and it has also become the standard since the Nova Scotia Museum introduced the spelling in the 1980s (3). Hornborg argues that for some Mi'kmaq people, the English spelling "Micmac" represents a disregard for Mi'kmaq culture, practices, and territory (3). The term Mi'kmaw is the singular noun, whereas Mi'kmaq is the plural form (Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq 2).

<sup>ii</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement between the Canadian Government and the Assembly of First Nations in 2008. Its goals are to document and make public the experiences of former students of Indian Residential Schools and their family and community members in order to find healing and to move forward (Canada, "Indian Residential Schools"). The Commission is a welcome effort by many, but it has also garnered criticism from those who believe its gestures are not doing enough. Margery Fee contends that "[a]lthough apologies are important, they are just the first step if the long-standing effects of racism and colonization are to be overcome at the human level. It seems paradoxical that reconciliation will be managed as a bureaucratic and state-run process, the same process that caused the problem in the first place" (8).

## Conclusion

In this dissertation I have argued that the dominant concept of Maritime literary regionalism that emerged in the mid-twentieth century is informed by a Euro-settler definition of belonging, one that prescribes an author's long-term residency and family history in a single place as prerequisites for an authentic regional identity, as well as descriptions of actual settings and locales that readers can unmistakably recognize. Possession of and control over the land are inherent aspects of this set of criteria for regional identity and belonging for authors and their characters. These aspects of literary regionalism have created an exclusionary set of criteria for literary regionalism as well as notions of regional belonging. I have sought to counter these models of literary regionalism through detailed examination of the *oeuvres* of three twentieth-century female poets who conceive of the region in ways very different from these Euro-settler notions, and whose works call those exclusionary ideas of regional belonging into question.

When I began this project, I saw women writers as powerless to articulate their own senses of belonging within the dominant discourse of Maritime literary regionalism. I thought that the central and overarching definition of Maritime literary regionalism had to change in order to accommodate other points of view, particularly those of women who do not identify with the notion of regionalism as writing about one particular area, and the singular, unified sense of identity that Euro-settler writers of the middle twentieth century describe in their works. However, my thinking on these issues has transformed through the process of composition. Through reading and thinking about Maxine Tynes and Rita Joe in particular, two writers who were not initially going to be part of my dissertation, I have come to see that this dominant discourse of regional belonging, what it means to belong to a particular place, should

be recognized as an always limited, ever provisional discourse that can never accurately describe all of the diverse and multifaceted ways that various groups and individuals espouse aspects of the region in their sense of belonging to it. This is not an inherent fault of a discourse that has to be reconciled, but it is the responsibility of critics who use or encounter it to acknowledge its impoverished ideas of belonging and to recognize its many limits. Herb Wyile suggests a similar approach in his grappling with the term: “regionalism can play an important role if it is denaturalized and recognized as a critical construct, and if it is used in a provisional, nuanced, modulated fashion in conjunction with other terms – for instance, place, locality, anti-centrism, topography, province, etc. – rather than in an essentialized fashion to assert autonomous, integrated discursive formations” (“Historicizing” 274).

I was initially fascinated by the way that American poet Elizabeth Bishop played with the boundaries of the Maritime region by writing about Nova Scotia from Brazil. The implicit interrogations of regional borders were unlike anything I had encountered in my study and research of Maritime literature. I was confounded by her simultaneous ability to write “regionally” and internationally, and I saw that as a way to interrogate the centrality of the nation-state in defining its regions. Bishop’s widely accepted definition as an American writer complicated these issues and brought about a perplexing set of questions with which to begin the dissertation. In the project’s very early stages, I had planned to take up aspects of Bishop’s work in each chapter, from her aesthetic use of shifting sizes, scales, and distances in her writings, to her material family history in the region, and her use of travel and map imagery as a way to negotiate relationships between a locality and the larger world. Because of these many facets of her work that make interesting connections to the discourse of regionalism in the Maritimes, I saw Bishop as an anticipatory figure for feminist subjectivities in the region.

As I undertook my research and writing of the dominant models of regionalism in the twentieth century, I began to see that it would be important to offer not only an exploration of one writer as a seeming exception to the rules, but an exploration of a plurality of writers who do not fit into the critical apparatus around twentieth-century Maritime regionalism and its dominant Euro-settler discourse categories either in terms of their own identity or in terms of their literary representations of the Maritimes. I chose to limit the scope of the dissertation to the twentieth century, and to women working primarily with poetry, an underrepresented genre in the field of Maritime regionalism. In choosing depth over breadth, I have offered a study of only three writers who do not fit the dominant critical apparatus of Maritime literary regionalism. In making different methodological choices, I could have considered many more writers. Missing from my study is an exploration of many writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially many novelists and short fiction writers including Lynn Coady, Anne Marie MacDonald, Christy Ann Conlin, Susan Kerslake, Donna Smyth, and Carol Bruneau, who have in their own ways interrogated, or at least articulated from different points of view, ideas of belonging to the region. There has been a burgeoning of articles and chapters written on the ways that these women writers, who deploy realist prose fiction over the last two decades, have articulated aspects of regionalism, regional belonging, and gender that I have not had the space to address properly within the scope of this dissertation. There are also many more poets I could consider in relation to the questions I have begun to ask here, such as M. Travis Lane, Liliane Welch, Lynn Davies, Elizabeth Brewster, and Anne Compton.

The relationships between ethnicity and race and region were initially only smaller side notes to the central questions of travel and global perspectives on regionalism; however, I began to see the all-encompassing perspective of Eurocentrism as an influence on the values of

literary regionalism and definitions of belonging. Joe and Tynes, who explore belonging to the region through their ethnic and racial identities, expose the fallacies inherent in the relationships between Eurocentrism and concepts of belonging that have dominated the field of literary regionalism in the Maritimes.

This does not mean that writers to whom ethnicity is important to their identity only write back to Eurocentric discourses. On the contrary, their use and manipulation of Eurocentric discourses can offer important ways to understand their resistance to that sweeping worldview and its attendant prescriptions for belonging. For example, antimodernism can be manipulated for the purposes of profit by portraying Nova Scotia as a simple homogeneous community of “folk.” The idea put forth in twentieth-century Maritime literary criticism that Euro-settler groups authentically belong to the region and have a stake in the land stems from antimodern discourse that tends to identify authenticity with patrilineal inheritance, and to conflate regional writing and ethnography. Maureen Moynagh’s analysis of antimodern discourse in writing about Africville brings to light ways that African Nova Scotian writers can use the same discourse to stake a claim on land from which they have been dispossessed. As Moynagh also suggests in her analyses of the art, films, and literature about Africville made after its destruction, antimodernism can be used to resist the very eradication implicit in that representation of “folk” as white fishermen and farmers. Generations of family residency in one place has not been represented in the dominant discourse as providing descendants of Africville the same claim to the land that critics imply it does for Euro-settler groups, revealing that the type of “authenticity” mid twentieth-century critics argue for writers like Ernest Buckler and Charles Bruce is based not on a long-term connection to the land, but on the race and ethnicity of the writer.

The topic that comes to the fore as an important issue for Tynes and Joe is land control and land ownership, and this topic continues to fascinate writers in the twenty-first century. As I close this study, George Elliott Clarke's play *Settling Africville* has just been staged for the first time, chronicling the families who came to Halifax after the War of 1812 to settle in Nova Scotia. As well, Sylvia Hamilton has just published her first collection of poems, *And I Alone Escaped to Tell You*, which addresses the many waves of Black Loyalists and other African descendants' settlement in the Maritime provinces. These writers continue to mark the history of African descendants in the region as settlers and land owners. One reason that land-owning is perceived as a Euro-settler privilege is not because it is or has been, but because all other non-Euro-settler landowners are erased from Maritime history. A male folk and Euro-settler perspective has dominated the literature of the Maritime provinces, and has silenced or marginalized the experiences of African and First Nations Nova Scotians in touristic and literary regional tropes. By extension, related concepts of geographic belonging have played a significant role in excluding African and Mi'kmaq Nova Scotians from historic, literary, and touristic narratives of the region, even if their families and ancestors have inhabited land in the area for centuries.

I initially read Joe's poems about land dispossession as a critique of the dominant myth that Euro-settlers naturally belong to the region because they have been long-term residents. Through writing the chapter on her work, and contextualizing it with scholarship written by Indigenous researchers and especially Mi'kmaq scholars, I began to interpret Joe's poems as not about total dispossession and displacement, but about changes to access to lands to which her speakers belong. Euro-settlers changed the landscapes, and they imposed an all-encompassing worldview with attendant laws and linguistic structures on Indigenous people in

Canada. For all of the seeming power these gestures hold, they do not alter Joe's speakers' senses of identity or belonging. By encountering her perspective as it emerges through her poetry, I came to see Euro-settler narratives of regional belonging as a dismal story of injustice, cruelty, and failed attempts at control.

Writing by Bishop, Tynes, and Joe justify and support a regional approach to literary study in a globalizing discipline. Their work calls for an examination of "global" relationships and intersections with regionalism in order to interrogate concepts of Euro-settler regionalism as a localized and unified identity. Alison Calder describes these globalizing forces in relation to the ways in which postmodern conceptions of space and place relate to literary regionalism. Calder defends regionalism as an antidote to neoliberalism:

One of the things that neoliberalism seeks to do is to iron out nuance, to insist that the world is the same for everybody. Specific places introduce nuance, because of their unique makeup. Places—regions or otherwise defined—are both porous and unique. A place is not stable; it is always in flux. Postmodern conceptions of place suggest that it is composed of simultaneously intersecting complementary and competing forces that shift constantly depending on an individual's relation to them. That relation to place, what place means, is determined by race, class, gender, and a host of other factors. These factors combine uniquely in particular locations. ("What Happened" 114)

At the conclusion of my dissertation notions of place, region, and identity are still very particular, nuanced, and localized. That does not mean that these concepts can be defined in a unified way. That evasion of a single definition is what makes the topic of "regionalism" and

the subtopics of “regional identity” and “belonging” continually captivating and worthwhile topics of inquiry as I move forward in my research.

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