Kirsten Alm

"The mountain's neck moans"
Mourning Places in Robert Bringhurst's "New World Suite No. 3" and Tim Lilburn's *Assiniboia: Two Choral Performances and a Masque*

At the end of "Breathing Through the Feet: An Autobiographical Meditation" (1985), the poet and typographer Robert Bringhurst addresses and dismisses his readers in one rhetorical flourish: "I ignore you, reader, for something larger than you, which includes you or not, as you choose—though of course, in another sense, whatever you choose, it includes you. And you include it, and our fate rests not just on our own feet but in one another's hands" (15). With the stealth of a Trojan horse and the heft of final words and last lectures, Bringhurst uses the autobiographical genre to engage and exploit the interest of his readers; under the guise of self-reflection and revelation, he aims to conscript their ethical and moral agency in his canny project of attending to and preserving "salvageable wisdom" ("Breathing" 10). In the three decades that have followed this statement, Bringhurst has continued a politically charged attention to and preservation of the pre- or as-yet-*un*-colonized aspects of the local place as a response to what he sees as the cultural impoverishment and environmental destruction in North America. For Bringhurst, this act of attention to guardianship of the pre- or uncolonized is an appropriate response to centuries of settler-colonial failure to recognize the existence of a plurality of ecologies, of which Indigenous cultures are a part, that exist in each place. Bringhurst's poetry, prose, and translations demonstrate his belief that heeding Indigenous languages and stories is a critical part of an ethics of attention.

These linked concerns are also observable in the writing of the western Canadian poet Tim Lilburn. The alarm about environmental degradation and the destructive nature of the settler-colonial relationship with Indigenous

peoples that Bringhurst and Lilburn share is expressed in the sometimes markedly political element in both poets' writing about place.[1] Such concerns lead both authors to what can be seen as a form of hybrid writing that blends philosophy, literary criticism, sociology, environmentalism, and spirituality. In their work, the relationships between the settler individual entrenched in Western philosophy, the places of Canada, and Indigenous cultures form a test case for a much broader critique of Protestant Christianity and post-Enlightenment Western philosophy, as well as the applications of these systems in the realms of anthropology, sociology, and resource use and abuse.

Both Bringhurst and Lilburn have advocated in their poetry and prose for learning the oral stories of the Indigenous cultures in North America as a means by which the inheritors of colonialism can begin to address the injustices of the colonial past, though Bringhurst's writing has done so perhaps more pointedly than Lilburn's. Bringhurst's and Lilburn's writings suggest that becoming learners of Indigenous stories and languages is a sign of respect and acknowledgement of the sophistication and value of Indigenous cultures and world views. Despite differences in their approaches, the two poets' emphases on becoming students of the teachings of Indigenous cultures suggest their belief that, in doing so, settlers might begin to establish new relationships with Indigenous peoples and nations and reform attitudes toward the physical space of Canada to enable a transformative encounter with place. Both writers have faced critique in this process as a consequence of their manner of approaching Indigenous oral traditions and/or members of Indigenous communities. After publishing *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* (1999),[2] Bringhurst was criticized by some for what they argued was a violation of Indigenous intellectual and cultural property.[3] Lilburn has been criticized for his treatment of Métis ontology, particularly for seeming to subsume it into a global mysticism. The responses to Bringhurst's and Lilburn's work suggest the potentially vexed nature of settler-colonial desire to use Indigenous oral tradition to revise the nature of the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples after centuries of violent colonial displacement that Daniel Wildcat describes in terms of "geographic, social, and psycho-cultural" attempts to remove Indigenous peoples from their "indigenousness" (*Red Alert* 3).

Bringhurst's "New World Suite No. 3" (1995)[4] and Lilburn's *Assiniboia: Two Choral Performances and a Masque* (2012) are examples of the poets' efforts to "unsettle" the settler-colonial world view. Both of the poems explicitly combine an environmentalist ethics with a critique of settler-colonial

exploitation and abuse of Indigenous peoples. The poems recollect the inequities and injustices of colonialism, but also attempt to bring Indigenous ontology—the understanding and explication of the nature of being as expressed in cultural values as well as oral literatures—into conversation with all inheritors of colonialism. Both poems suggest that mourning is an ethical response to colonialism in North America and its mistreatment of Indigenous peoples and of the physical environment. Through mourning the dis-remembered history of North America, "New World Suite No. 3" and *Assiniboia* attempt to create a place and space of textual and performative witness—a place of mourning wherein the scattered or forgotten are gathered and made "grievable" (Butler 25). While the poets are ambitious in their aims, the attempts at decolonization in these poems reveal the complexities of disentangling ecopoetics from colonial ideology and the difficulties inherent in making settler mourning central to decolonization.

Of course, these poets are not alone in commenting on the relation between Euro-American ideology and destructive cultural practices. Indigenous authors, scholars, and activists have written extensively on this topic for many years and have demonstrated how Indigenous peoples have been used as symbols of Romantic primitivism in colonial discourse and how these symbols have continued to affect contemporary cultural life. Furthermore, many Indigenous writers in Canada have written about the significance of place to identity, showing how relations with place are "part of an Indigenous response to social justice" (Gray 511). Given their position as direct inheritors of colonialism, the interest of non-Indigenous writers in Indigenous world views and traditions has sometimes seemed a repetition of the appropriation and fetishizing of Indigenous cultures that were a part of colonialism. Still, silence from the Euro-American inheritors of colonialism seems inadequate, especially in light of the silence that has surrounded this history. Rita Wong writes that there are "cases where silence also seems to be an equally and perhaps even more unsatisfying complicity with—and perpetuation of—this violence" (332). Instead, there is a need for humility, dialogue, and "[attention] to how material conditions and existent power relations" continue to shape the present (332). Bringhurst and Lilburn strive in these long poems for the kind of remembering Wong describes, attempting something similar to what Smaro Kamboureli describes as a practice of "negative pedagogy" that acknowledges complicity while "negotiating [their] position in relation both to the knowledge [they] have and to the knowledge [they] lack" (25).

Bringhurst's and Lilburn's poems demonstrate that such a negotiation is not only rational; it also involves the emotions, in particular sorrow that leads to mourning. Still, foregrounding settler mourning introduces its own difficulties, posing questions about the difference, if any, between mourning and "white guilt." As such, the poems force consideration of the question: can mourning be made productive or is it a means for non-Indigenous people to appropriate guilt and continue to disempower those who have been wronged, as Deena Rymhs has argued (117)? Is mourning, or can it be, different from what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call settler "moves to innocence" that seek to "reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" apart from difficult conversations about land rights or governance (3)?

I. Mourning and Remembering in Bringhurst's "New World Suite No. 3"

Bringhurst's prose clearly demonstrates his strongly held belief that there exists a right—and ethical—way of living in the world. He defines this way of living partly through critiquing the "wrong" way of life associated with the "cadaver of western culture" ("Breathing" 7), which he argues emphasizes human supremacy and humanity's right to endless consumption. According to Bringhurst, alternatives are found in Indigenous ontologies as well as in cultures "in the tangled roots of the European tradition" (14). Using an analogy of a web, he argues that the "moral fibres" that once guided society have been "cut or snarled" (193). Consequently, much of Bringhurst's writing attempts to reconstruct new webs of "relatedness and obligation" (193-94) by cultivating an awareness of the other—"gods, plants, animals, strangers, stones"—that is also committed to "subjugating nothing" (193-94). Bringhurst's poetry suggests his belief that the colonial past—and its present legacies—must be acknowledged and mourned before new webs of interrelation can make personal or cultural change possible.

The polyphonic poem "New World Suite No. 3" is a definitive work of mourning in Bringhurst's poetic corpus thus far. In the poem, Bringhurst revises theories of musical counterpoint for a trinity of speaking voices as an expression of resistance to the monolithic voice of Euro-American culture (*Everywhere* 24). The title of the poem's first movement, "All the Desanctified Places," immediately signals a possible concern with place, spirituality or religion, and secularization. The movement makes connections between the Judeo-Christian religious tradition and the Hegelian logic of historical necessity showing how they were used by settlers to justify the use and abuse of environments and peoples. The movement suggests that the influx of

people into the "New World" has also led to the arrival on the continent of systemic "Old World" class violence along with its patriarchal system. As a part of this analysis, the poem links the patriarchal system with capitalist development (movement 1, lines 7-8). The movement also describes the newcomers' subsequent devaluation and destruction of Indigenous cultures, arguing that this violence was sanctioned by the dominant culture's philosophy and religion. After a choral litany-like recital of Indigenous place names written to include all three voices, voice three takes the role of critique and lament. The voice states:

> At Cuzco, Tenochtitlan, Acoma, Kitwancool,
> the churches squat on the ruins
> ....
> Visitors gnaw at the moth-eaten light
> with mechanical eyes.
> Whole towns are trussed up in the webs
> of our fences and parking lots,
> guardrails, turnstiles, interpretive signs. (1, 23-25)

The "squatting" churches suggest unlawful occupation of places once belonging to Indigenous groups, while the description of the visitor's "gnawing" and "mechanical" eyes suggests that the newcomers' appetite for Indigenous cultures is at once unnatural and carnivorous. The dominant Euro-American civilization ignores indications of the vitality of Indigenous cultures and peoples and identifies them as relics. The poem's guardrails and fences confine vital Indigenous settlements in a manner evocative of both a zoo and a prison. In final assessment, the movement suggests that the degradation and destruction of the non-human environment goes hand in hand with the dominant culture's treatment of Indigenous peoples.

While acknowledging colonial violence, the movement also shows how easily ecopoetics' attempts at decolonization become recolonization. By connecting the damage done to Indigenous peoples and damage done to the environment, Bringhurst's poem flirts with the same Romantic tropes which equate what Tuck and Yang have called "the wild land and [the] wild people" (6). According to the Romantic line of reasoning that was a part of settler-colonial logic, Indigenous peoples served as a symbol of primitivism, humans existing in a state of nature and serving as a foil to Euro-American notions of expansion and development. This trope as employed by Euro-American settlers allowed those settlers to ignore the sophistication of the Indigenous civilizations they encountered in favour of a narrow Lockean understanding of the connection between agricultural practices, land ownership, and nation building. As

Camille van der Marel observes, since the Indigenous cultures encountered by Euro-American settlers did not cultivate and develop the land according to the narrow definition of these terms familiar to Euro-Americans, settlers felt justified in arguing Indigenous people did not "own" the land, which, in turn, allowed settlers to lay claim to that same land (19). The destruction of the cultures of these romanticized "peoples of nature" was mourned as an inevitable part of the progress of settlement, an act which, notwithstanding his critique of historical necessity, Bringhurst's poem might seem to repeat. The absence of consideration of contemporary Indigenous presence and agency exacerbates this and repeats the violence of colonial logic that suggests that contemporary Indigenous people, by stint of their difference from those living in the past, may be less "authentic" (Wildcat 37). In short, while gesturing towards the Indigenous past, it does not acknowledge present Indigenous cultures, repeating thereby the colonial tendency to expunge Indigenous presence from the land the settlers have claimed for their own (Tuck and Yang 6).[5]

The poem goes on to suggest that satisfaction, sustenance, and even a salvific experience are found in a return to the local, yet it mourns in response to the seeming dearth of inhabitants who truly understand their local place. Continuing the theme of consumption, the first voice observes that people eat food which "has come 2000 miles in bottles and cans" (1, 65), arguing that few know how to live on what the land itself provides. In effect, it claims the residents of this teleological, history-worshipping, apocalyptic culture are cut off from the nurture they are meant to receive from attachment to place. Imported bread made of nothing more than "eggwhite and sugar" (1, 73) is a synecdoche for the figurative—even Eucharistic—bread of the monotheistic religions which "have been brought in a book / from a place without caribou, moose, wolf, lynx" (1, 68-69). The poem argues that only the local can sustain life, both physical and spiritual. This is a conversion to a poetic attention to place that enables the individual to attend, in the full sense of the word (even the French sense of *attendre*, to wait, to attend) to what is present. One sees here how Bringhurst inverts Freud's theories of mourning by making *re*attachment to the lost the primary means of healing instead of finding substitutionary attachments.

The latter three movements, following the musical form of the fugue, take up the theme of living rightly in place that is introduced in the first movement to imagine and capture participatory attention to place. In order to do so, Bringhurst incorporates elements of various wisdom traditions

that counter post-Enlightenment European and Euro-American philosophy while also subverting any perceived hierarchies between these systems. Bringhurst incorporates Indigenous mythologies into the second movement; Daoist philosophy and mythology into the third; and Greek, Iranian, and Indian mythology into the fourth and final movement. In these three movements, Bringhurst resituates these myths in the landscape of North America, making his poem a new, blended mythology, itself a space wherein the individual might meaningfully encounter the stories.

Ultimately, the poem becomes a synecdoche of the reattachment that is a necessary part of the work of mourning. However, the reattachment and the combination of local ontologies and traditions with foreign ideologies seemingly contradict the poem's earlier claim that it is the local that must sustain life.[6] This might be charitably explained as Bringhurst's attempt to redefine the meaning of "local" to gesture to global interconnectedness, though this possibility gestures to the privileged ease of movement that too easily leads to appropriation of various cultural traditions.[7] On the other hand, Bringhurst's expansion of the idea of place might also be seen as turning away from the notion of the local as geographical to emphasize instead its temporal dimension. Here, the "local" could be understood as "concurrent," which could then include traditions existing at the same time in different places, almost in the manner of stratigraphic layers surviving the erosion of time in different locales. Given Bringhurst's interest not only in Indigenous oral traditions but also in traditions from Greece, India, and pre-Enlightenment Europe, this is not a far-fetched notion, though the focus on temporal simultaneity as a point of connection and similarity could also lead to colonizing acts which occlude difference.

As "New World Suite No. 3" demonstrates, Bringhurst's writing insistently acknowledges a depth of violence to non-Western cultures at the hands of the West, initiating a change in the colonial culture's assumed hierarchical relationship with Indigenous peoples and the environment. Indeed, Bringhurst's mourning affirms that avoiding a truthful retelling of history is another form of violence, invading the past and disavowing what should rightfully be mourned. In his examination of his own culture and its complicity, Bringhurst's poetry addresses one of the concerns Leslie Marmon Silko had about poets who demonstrate the desire to "obliterate (one's) white, middle-class ancestry and origins" (213) in order to claim a new identity and inheritance. The criticism of Euro-American colonial culture and history in "New World Suite No. 3" counters the tendency to amnesia about the violence

of colonialism in Euro-American cultural remembering. Mourning—in addition to the poem's "polyphonic effect" (Kane 185) that speaks of multiple stories and ecologies—creates openings in the text that invite non-Indigenous readers to discern their own implication in the colonial violation of spaces and Indigenous cultures. This is not the false sense of "mutuality based on sympathy and suffering" that occludes differences between sympathetic oppressor and the actually oppressed (Tuck and Yang 20), but a personal accounting. Certainly, Bringhurst's poetry and prose suggest that this act is prerequisite for any possibility of being reoriented by non-Western ideology and practice. Still, the absence of reference to present and contemporary Indigenous cultures and people raises troubling questions about the part they might conceivably play in the attachment imagined in Bringhurst's mourning.

II. Sorrow and Desire in *Assiniboia*

As in Bringhurst's work, Lilburn's writing also suggests that there is a fundamental problem with the manner in which Euro-Americans live in the spaces of Canada. This problem is a product of "what we are: detached long ago, while still in Europe, from that part of the Western tradition that would have taught us the suitability of 'living undivided from one's earth,'" and "[w]hat we did: we met the new land as conquerors and subjugated it" (*Going* 10). Elsewhere, he describes the worldview that enabled this state as "an arrogant, anthropocentric Christian ontology, a Baconian, privateering union of experimental science, technology, and human enrichment" ("Philosophical" 96). According to Lilburn, this history and heritage have integrally affected the ability of the settler descendants of colonialism to be "at home" in Canada. "We aren't from where we are . . . we've yet to take out chthonic Western Canadian citizenship" ("Philosophical" 92). Lilburn's writing suggests that what follows from this realization is shame and mourning. In an interview, he states that "the shape, or spirit of the age we're living in, will next move . . . to compunction, to apology, tears, sorrow . . . for all of the imperialisms we have engaged in" (Whetter 141-42). For Lilburn, poetry, when it shares the "*telos*" of contemplation ("Thinking" 162), involves "the loss of the sense of language as a tool, the loss of thinking as an explanatory power, the loss of the image of oneself as a knower to whom the world is presented" (162); it might then allow an "interior alteration" (163) that would lead to an ontological, "chthonic" knowledge of place.

Assiniboia is, in part, a polyvocal enactment of this movement to compunction and sorrow, but it is also an attempt to reimagine the past

in order to find a way to be "at home" here. The opening section, entitled "An Argument," begins with an accusation about the ills of colonial history including "the theft that founds our nation," or the sale of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory to Canada in 1869 (ix). "An Argument" condemns the armies from central Canada who ended the hope held by "members of the revolutionary government, Louis Riel and the others" for the possibility of a "polyglot (Cree, French, Assiniboine, Blackfoot, English, Michif), local, mixed race, Catholic-mystical" government (ix). It also explains the political aspirations of the book:

> It is surprising how many of the old imperial gestures remain still vigorous among us. One way to move against them, from the settler side, is to bring forward, in a certain insistent way, the occluded mystical imagination, chthonic, convivial, in the Western cultural tradition itself, and fix it to this continent by first allowing it to wander freely. The army that wins, indeed, is a mystical one. (ix)

Here, Lilburn states his intent as effecting an anti-imperialist "homecoming" by searching the roots of the Western tradition, which he defines in other places as "the underside of the old tradition" (*Going* 172). The mixings and combinations of traditions in *Assiniboia* are intended, in part, to be a "recital . . . applied to the wound" of colonial injustice (27). They are also intended to reimagine a new kind of place and a new future, "an aspirational, theophanic land" (*Assiniboia* ix) that deviates from the narrative of imperial history. Indeed, the book creates an alternative future based on what might have been: an *apokatastasis* or "[r]estoration, re-establishment" ("apocatastasis"), as Lilburn calls it elsewhere, that is "a 'remembering' of a community beyond imagination, yet within the scope of desire" (*Living* 99).

The "other tradition" that Lilburn incorporates into *Assiniboia* stands opposed to those world views that "produce solipsistic practices, ways of standing apart from the world" (*Going* 179), and enables a "convivial" dwelling. The word "convivial" is critical to *Assiniboia*'s political purpose, especially in light of the military metaphors prevalent in "An Argument." The word *convivial* is rooted in the Latin words *convīvālis* and *convīva*—relating to joyful feasts—and *convīvěre*, or the notion of living together in joy ("convivial"). In spite of the martial metaphors of wandering mystical armies, the "convivial imagination" *Assiniboia* introduces is not the conqueror's totalizing, controlling knowledge, but the guest's arrival at the feast. In the book, this notion is symbolized in the figure of the Stranger, revealed to be Dionysos in the fourth section of the book, subtitled "Songs of Clarity in Final Procession." In Euripedes' *Bakkhai*, from which *Assiniboia*'s epigraph is

taken, Dionysos is the "strange and potent divinity . . . at the city gates" who offers a "liberating surrender of self that . . . offers the restorative blessings of festivity, collective enjoyment, and the exhilarating release of barriers between oneself and others" (Segal 3, 4). In *Assiniboia*, Dionysos is again a symbol of arrival, this time of the Greek tradition in North America—though this is the part of the Greek tradition that embarrasses reason by challenging its hegemony (*Living* 6). Dionysos' arrival leads to the possibility of connection between the Greek god and the Métis woman Sara Riel (Louis Riel's sister) through the symbol of the feast; in a poem entitled "House," Sara Riel describes a synesthetic moment of looking that becomes like feasting:

> there someone, or perhaps some trees
> Or a slope perhaps,
> Has laid out a long meal down a narrow pine table
> ....
> A meal that changes you as you eat it
> Lifting its antlers in. (13)

Dionysos' wandering in western Canada leads both on an arc toward conversation but also to a new vision of place, one which "drags you and angles you into soil" (74), and perhaps the soil into you, as "House" suggests. However, this connection and new experience of place, *Assiniboia* suggests, necessarily begin in mourning. Indeed, "The Revised Bill of Rights as Drawn by the Executive Council of the Provisional Government at Fort Garry, 1869," which lies almost exactly at the halfway mark of the book, represents one major source of this mourning. The twelfth point of the bill, which explains the unity of the diverse community of Assiniboia as a justificatory basis for its geopolitical territory, speaks to the failure of the Dominion of Canada to respect difference.

However, mourning in *Assiniboia* is always blended with joy and the potential satisfaction of desire, which then turns back to mourning when the desired proves unattainable. This is aptly expressed in the poem "War Preparations" from the "Exegesis" section of the book. The poem is spoken by Odysseus—the un-homed figure *par excellence* of the Western tradition—who balances the Dionysiac figure of celebration and connection in *Assiniboia*. Adding to the mourning symbolized in the presence of the Weeper, the land itself mourns for Sara Riel—"Still, alone, for her, for her, / the ice torque on the mountain's neck moans / for Sara Riel" (19)—but the poem moves from mourning to frustrated sexual desire between two male characters named Ibn 'Arabi and Utah Phillips, whose phallic symbols are

"a stalk of devil's club" and "a black berry wand" (19).[8] While these names suggest another meeting of cultures, the meeting does not lead to conclusive fulfillment; though they "become instantly *single*," still "their loaned tongues elide, / their loaned tongues fall through / one another, early snow in air" (19). The sexualized complex of passions in the poem, exemplified in this part of the poem by the male longing for the lost Sara Riel that shifts again toward unsatisfied sexual desire, suggests a straining at the limits of emotion that is rooted in the experience of a place that is not entirely knowable. For Lilburn, desire to know the "otherness" of the other, "an eros for union with the world building from awe" (16), is unachievable and thus a cause of mourning. Still, the perpetual state of desire leads to a winnowing of self, to being "shaved and narrowed" by the other (*Moosewood* 16). This is a transformation through desire and mourning that relies on the ultimate unknowability and difference of the other, where desire leads not to union but to "intensely felt differentiation" (*Living* 5).

Like "New World Suite No. 3," *Assiniboia* calls for a stance that opposes a colonial mindset. To create this, Lilburn sifts the Western philosophical and religious tradition for ways of thinking and believing that call the individual and community away from domination and imperialism. Particularly important to the shift in world view Lilburn seeks is his rejection of the notion that the world is ultimately knowable or coherent, a notion which is rooted in the contemplative tradition. Here, "the apophatic knowledge of the contemplative is the essence of the *via negativa* . . . the core of the 'dark' mystical path to a relationship with the heart of the universe" (*Living* 29-30). But perhaps more challenging is Lilburn's suggestion that "[to learn] to be in western North America . . . what we must learn is not geography, not an environmental ethics, not a land-benign economics, not a history, not respect, but a style that is so much ear, so attentive, it cannot step away from its listening and give a report of itself," a style that itself cannot be taught but "can be participated in" (*Going* 177).

III. The Ethics of Mourning

Assiniboia was not universally well received. In one review, Sonnet L'Abbé criticized "the way [*Assiniboia*] equates 'reason' with a dominant, guilty Anglo conscience, and a Western idea of mysticism and myth with a Métis worldview" (R.4), a criticism with some merit. In a particularly derisive review of the book, Michael Lista accused Lilburn of being "unself-conscious" and "[prescribing] as the balm for our colonial wound a kind

of nebulous Catholic mysticism, whose eschatological esurience played no small part in colonialism."[9] These criticisms have some validity, though Lista fails to acknowledge the hybrid Catholicism of many participants in the rebellion—including Louis and Sara Riel—and thus denies the possibility that *Assiniboia*'s foregrounding of a "Catholic mysticism" is not entirely inappropriate.[10] However, it is also impossible to ignore the complicity of the Catholic Church in the colonial project that led to discrimination and genocide. As Jenny Kerber observes of the healing capacity of language and stories, "our attempts to implement a new vision of how to live together in this place" depend on "acknowledging the traumatic effects of European mythologies on First Nations peoples and the environment" (*Writing* 10). While it does not ignore these traumas, neither does *Assiniboia* address this history directly, an oversight which might be seen to undermine what seems to be the piece's intended ameliorating effect.

Furthermore, while both *Assiniboia* and "New World Suite No. 3" critique parts of Western thought and traditions, their efforts to "resettle" other elements of these traditions within the space of North America threaten to repeat past settler-colonial attempts to recreate European culture in the New World while also appropriating the beliefs and practices of other cultures. As texts, then, they risk the dangerous metaphorizing of decolonization of which Tuck and Yang warn. Beyond the hope of claiming a place, Bringhurst and Lilburn also look with desire at the inheritance of Indigenous traditions in North America, which are defined by their opposition to "colonialism." Casting Indigenous people as the positive example in opposition to a supposedly ecologically unwise settler-colonial culture risks perpetuating the racist discourse that romanticizes Indigenous people. Furthermore, focusing as they do primarily on the past without consideration of contemporary manifestations of Indigenous cultures, the poems risk resurrecting the image of the "iconic stoic noble savage," a symbol which can "obscure real Natives living, working, and sometimes struggling in contemporary society to maintain unique tribal lifeways and knowledges" (Wildcat 20, 36-37). This is at least a partial failure of the poets' apparent desires for a decolonized poetics of place. The desire for knowledge of Indigenous ontologies and lifeways that is expressed in each poem, though it may stem from respect for and admiration of Indigenous cultures, moves toward assimilation of the Indigenous into the non-Indigenous poetic metaphor of hybridity championed in both poems, leaving little room for the agency of Indigenous people living today. Clearly, Lilburn's and Bringhurst's poems take political

risks and suggest some of the difficulty inherent in writing in the vexed political, cultural, and environmental realities of contemporary Canada. Indeed, notwithstanding the poets' apparent desires to distance themselves from imperialistic ways of thinking and acting in order to encounter the local, they repeat some of those same colonial patterns.

Despite these difficulties, the stance of mourning, with the added component of unrequitable desire in Lilburn's poem, suggests if not decolonizing then at least "unsettling" possibilities for both poems. While there are dangers and difficulties introduced into the poems by the authors' turn to Indigenous knowledge and oral literature, the imperfect act of mourning or the desire for reparation that both poems present demonstrates "the thrall in which our relations with others [hold] us . . . in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control" (Butler 13). In this context, mourning "resists a purely emotional or affective feeling of grief that lends itself to settlers simply 'feeling bad' for colonial violence" (Park 274). Both poems register the "affective dissonance" experienced by their poets' grappling with knowledge of local history and current reality—"the impossibility of undoing the harm and suffering that has taken place" (Zembylas 394). As such, the poems are more than a rehearsal of injustices or an expression of desire for chthonic being. They are a movement to mourning that has the potential to be fundamentally different from guilt or sorrow over lamentable histories, though of course the poems cannot force this type of reader response. Certainly, mourning is often accompanied by affective response and, if this response were all, it would be indistinguishable from what Tuck and Yang call the "feelings of guilt or responsibility [that] conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege" (21). However, the nature of mourning as *work* carries with it a latent potential that differentiates it from this settler-colonial affective paralysis, demanding psychic labour that leads to changes in patterns of attachment instead (Woodward 85). As Augustine Park argues, "[it is] a political resource that calls for an agenda of decolonising structural justice" (274). Whether the invitation to mourning inherent in the words of the poems can produce the kind of decolonizing or unsettling work that Bringhurst and Lilburn seem to hope for is not clear, but the two authors' bodies of work suggest they believe in this possibility. The "thralldom" to which these poems attempt to lead their readers moves past acknowledgement of the history of abusive colonial practices towards a hoped-for encounter with colonialism's "other," whose response the mourner cannot predict or force.

In other words, the personal and situational mourning in the poems *may* present the beginning of a movement toward justice, even difficult justice that acknowledges and supports political change. It gestures towards what might be required to make a "convivial" dwelling possible out of the learning and alliances that both poets imagine and, it appears, desire. However, in the same way that Rymhs observes that "asking for forgiveness does not imply the granting of it" (108), expressing the desire to become an ally or a learner is not the same as being accepted as one. Indeed, the assumption that one's allegiance is desired or welcomed by Indigenous communities can be another expression of settler-colonial privilege.

While failing to offer the authors' seemingly desired decolonized poetics of place, these poems suggest some possible decolonizing possibilities for environmental literature. The poems show the benefits of textual spaces of mourning—a "textual sepulchre" or monument that gestures to the absence and grief caused by the recognition of settler-colonial violence and its profound impact on Indigenous cultures and the continent's environment. The polyphonic intertextuality of the poems as well as their calls to the work of mourning do carry the potential of leading some readers past metaphor or affect toward responsible thought, practice, and support of political change. Turning toward the past and present with sorrow and the *eros* of longing, these imperfect poems encourage the reader to participate in welcoming and incorporating dis-remembered history into the present.

NOTES

1 I follow the general trend among those writing about the subject by defining place as any site that has been invested with significance or meaning by its inhabitants. According to Lawrence Buell, "placeness implies physical site, though site alone does not constitute place. It also implies "affect" that is in part "constructed . . . by collective standards as well as by physical terrain and personal proclivity" (60). It can also include an awareness of the passage of time, which "brings a fourth dimension to the contemplation of landscapes by exposing the history and projected future of the 'conflictual interpenetration of industrial and natural temporalities'" (69).

2 For those unfamiliar with the history of this publication and the debates which followed, Nicholas Bradley's "Remembering Offence: Robert Bringhurst and the Ethical Challenge of Cultural Appropriation" provides a précis.

3 Bringhurst has also been criticized for his use of the word "myth" to describe the knowledge and stories of Indigenous cultures. There is evidence in Bringhurst's writing about myth and story that his use of the word myth refers to a less commonplace definition of the word as "ageless truth," which stands in sharp contrast to the more commonly understood definition of the word as a justificatory story akin to a lie,

such as the justificatory story told by settler-colonials about Indigenous land use and land ownership (see Bringhurst's "Myths Create" C1, or his *Prosodies of Meaning* 37). Bringhurst's retrieval of this former definition in his use of the word may create problems for some readers, but his choice to do so is consistent with his practice.

4 "New World Suite No. 3" was first performed in 1990 and then published in his collection entitled *The Calling* in 1995. The text of the poem used for this paper was the one published in Bringhurst's *Selected Poems* (2009).

5 Thank you to one anonymous peer reviewer for pointing out the danger of this "rhetorical collapse" of Indigenous cultures and non-human environment.

6 Thank you to one anonymous peer reviewer for pointing out this contradiction.

7 Thank you to one of the anonymous peer reviewers for this observation.

8 Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240) was a Muslim scholar who emphasized the importance of intuition and revelation, divine and otherwise, in addition to reason in knowledge (Chittick). Utah Phillips (1935-2008), on the other hand, was a self-described anarchist and folk singer who was also known as a lover of the American landscape (Russell).

9 He also claims Lilburn uses traditional European cultural forms—the masque and the choral performance—without acknowledging the way these forms have been implicated in historical power structures, a criticism that might be directed equally to the symphonic or sonata-like elements of Bringhurst's "New World Suite No. 3." However, Lista's critique does not take into account the paradoxical nature of the masque, which was related to the anti-authoritarian and transgressive history of mumming (Welsford 9). Similarly, the polyphony of "New World Suite No. 3," which Bringhurst claims is "non-Newtonian or non-Aristotelian or both," allows for at least the idea that "two bodies can occupy the same space at the same time without ceasing to be two" in a manner which resists being co-opted by the state (*Everywhere* 38). Polyphony is a "relational hymn" (Higgins 42).

10 Louis Riel and many of the residents of Batoche were Catholic and, thus, Catholicism might have made up part of the world view of the rebels, though there is also evidence that Riel wanted to renovate Roman Catholicism, which he believed had become corrupt (Flanagan 81).

WORKS CITED

"apocatastasis." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, Jan. 2018, oed.com/view/Entry/9239. Accessed 6 Mar. 2018.

Bradley, Nicholas. "Remembering Offence: Robert Bringhurst and the Ethical Challenge of Cultural Appropriation." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2007, pp. 890-912.

Bringhurst, Robert. "Breathing Through the Feet: An Autobiographical Meditation." *Canadian Literature,* no. 105, Summer 1985, pp. 7-15.

—. *Everywhere Being Is Dancing: Twenty Pieces of Thinking*. Counterpoint, 2008.

—. "Myths Create a World of Meaning." *The Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1988, p. C1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1237227952?accountid=14846. Accessed 9 Jan. 2018.

—. *Prosodies of Meaning: Literary Form in Native North America.* Voices of Rupert's Land, 2004.

—. *Selected Poems.* Gaspereau, 2009.

—. *A Story as Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythtellers and Their World*. 2nd ed., Douglas & McIntyre, 2011.

—. *The Tree of Meaning: Thirteen Talks*. Gaspereau, 2006.

Buell, Lawrence. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*. Harvard UP, 2001.
Butler, Judith. "Violence, Mourning, Politics." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality,* vol. 4, no. 1, 2003, pp. 9-37. *Taylor & Francis Online*, doi:10.1080/15240650409349213.
Chittick, William. "Ibn Arabi." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2014, plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/ibn-arabi/>. Accessed 28 Apr. 2018.
"convivial, adj." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, Jan. 2018, oed.com/view/Entry/40856. Accessed 6 Mar. 2018.
Flanagan, Thomas. *Louis 'David' Riel: 'Prophet of the New World.'* U of Toronto P, 1996.
Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, edited by James Strachey, translated by James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson, vol. 14, Hogarth P, 2001, pp. 237-58.
Gray, Nelson. "The Dwelling Perspective in English-Canadian Drama." Soper and Bradley, pp. 511-26.
Higgins, Iain. "Bear Bones." Review of *Ursa Major: A Polyphonic Masque for Speakers & Dancers*, by Robert Bringhurst. *Books in Canada*, vol. 33, no. 2, Mar. 2004, p. 42. *ProQuest*, search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/215190240?accountid=1484. Accessed 12 Apr. 2017.
Kamboureli, Smaro. *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*. Oxford UP, 2000.
Kane, Sean. "Polyphonic Myth: A Reply to Robert Bringhurst." *Canadian Literature*, no. 156, Spring 1998, pp. 184-92.
Kerber, Jenny. "'Looking with care and desire seemed a political act': Environmental Concern in the Poetry of Tim Lilburn." *Canadian Poetry*, no. 55, Oct. 2004, pp. 86-97.
—. *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2010.
L'Abbé, Sonnet. "Assiniboia: Punishing dreamland." Review of *Assiniboia: Two Choral Performances and a Masque*, by Tim Lilburn. *The Globe and Mail*, 24 June 2012, p. R4. *ProQuest*, search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1021963479?pq-origsite=summon&accountid=14846. Accessed 9 Apr. 2017.
Lilburn, Tim. *Assiniboia: Two Choral Performances and a Masque*. McClelland & Stewart, 2012.
—. *Desire Never Leaves: The Poetry of Tim Lilburn*. Edited by Alison Calder, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007.
—. *Going Home*. Anansi, 2008.
—. *Living in the World as if It Were Home*. Cormorant, 1999.
—. *Moosewood Sandhills*. McClelland & Stewart, 1994.
—. "Philosophical Apokatastasis: On Writing and Return." *Thinking and Singing: Poetry and the Practice of Philosophy*, edited by Lilburn, Cormorant, 2002, pp. 95-119.
—. "Thinking the *Rule of Benedict* Within Modernity." *The Fiddlehead*, no. 228, Summer 2006, pp. 155-63.
Lista, Michael. "Michael Lista, On Poetry: *Assiniboia*, by Tim Lilburn." *National Post*, 27 Apr. 2012, Afterword, news.nationalpost.com/afterword/michael-lista-on-poetry-assiniboia-by-tim-lilburn. Accessed 30 Aug. 2017.
Park, Augustine S. J. "Settler Colonialism and the Politics of Grief: Theorising a Decolonising Transitional Justice for Indian Residential Schools." *Human Rights Review*, vol. 16, no. 3, Sep. 2015, pp. 273-93, doi:10.1007/s12142-015-0372-4.

Russell, Tony. "Utah Phillips." *The Guardian*, 24 June 2008, www.theguardian.com/music/2008/jun/24/obituaries.culture. Accessed 28 Apr. 2018.

Rymhs, Deena. "Appropriating Guilt: Reconciliation in an Aboriginal Canadian Context." *English Studies in Canada*, vol. 32, no. 1, Mar. 2006, pp. 105-23. doi:10.1353/esc.2007.0068.

Segal, Charles. Introduction. *Bakkhai*, by Euripedes, translated by Reginald Gibbons, Oxford UP, 2001, pp. 3-32.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. "An Old-Time Indian Attack Conducted In Two Parts: Part One: Imitation 'Indian' Poems; Part Two: Gary Snyder's *Turtle Island*." *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature,* edited by Geary Hobson, U of New Mexico P, 1980, pp. 195-216.

Soper, Ella, and Nicholas Bradley, editors. *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context*. U of Calgary P, 2013.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40, decolonization.org/index.php/des/issue/view/1234/showToc. Accessed 4 Jan. 2018.

van der Marel, L. Camille. "Unsettling *North of Summer*: Anxieties of Ownership in the Politics and Poetics of the Canadian North." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 44, no. 4, Oct. 2014, pp. 13-47. dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1353/ari.2013.0026

Welsford, Enid. *The Court Masque: A Study in the Relationship between Poetry and the Revels*. 1927. Russel & Russel, 1962.

Whetter, Darryl. "Listening with Courtesy: A Conversation with Tim Lilburn." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1997, pp. 135-44.

Wildcat, Daniel R. *Red Alert! Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge*. Fulcrum, 2009.

Wong, Rita. "Decolonizasian: Reading Asian and First Nations Relations in Literature." Soper and Bradley, pp. 329-59.

Woodward, Kathleen. *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions*. Indiana UP, 1991.

Zembylas, Michalinos. "Theorizing 'Difficult Knowledge' in the Aftermath of the 'Affective Turn': Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy in Handling Traumatic Representations." *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol. 44, no. 3, Jun. 2014, pp. 390-412. *ProQuest,* dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1111/curi.12051.