

Predators and Gardens

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One of the books analyzed in this issue, Margaret Horsfield's *Cougar Annie's Garden*, inspires the title, as the realization dawned on me that all of the papers collected here deal with gardens or predators. Admittedly, the bear in Alice Munro's short story title, "The Bear Came over the Mountain," is epigraphic rather than real and the bear in Marian Engel's eponymous novel is for the most part quite tame. Indeed, black bears, unlike cougars, are only occasional predators, much preferring berries and insects. It is usually men who are the predators here: for example, George Elliott Clarke's George and Rue in *Execution Poems* and Michael Ondaatje's Billy the Kid and Pat Garrett in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. And Cougar Annie, named after the animals she shot for a bounty.

Having a bear in one's garden, rather than a snake, changes the allusion to the original human home place on the verge of total loss to something else. Gardens, after all, encroach on the bears' territory. Visiting a friend in Sooke on Vancouver Island, whose vegetable garden has the usual "deer fence," we found a huge and beautiful bear sitting under her nearby pear tree, legs splayed, happily eating the fallen fruit. Another friend in North Vancouver told of a bear who worked its way along a row of backyards, leaning on the small fruit trees until they broke to make it easier to harvest the fruit. These bears are at the fringe of "development"; in a few years, they will have been pushed back until bears and deer and cougars in these gardens are no longer even thought of. So who is the predator—fruit-eating bears, or we who refuse to see that we are in their territory?

Different ways of thinking about gardens, landscape, nature, and the wilderness are connected with different philosophical or cultural traditions,

as Karen Charleson's paper makes clear. That of the Western Enlightenment sees bears and humans as falling into different categories, and gardens as clearly demarcated from wilderness: these demarcations are as real to most of us as the electric fence my friend installed after a few more visits from the bear. And the gardens, in this tradition, belong to the settlers. John Locke, in *The Second Treatise of Government* (1690), states that "as much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labour does, as it were, enclose it from the common" (14). Private property begins with agricultural cultivation, and not just any sort, but one that accords with European methods. America was filled with "wild woods and uncultivated waste," Locke asserts (17). Because of such assertions, early explorers could not grasp that what they saw as wilderness in fact had been profoundly altered by human activities, primarily by burning to encourage berry growth and make hunting easier. And they did not believe their eyes when they saw actual gardens. Douglas Deur and Nancy J. Turner note that during a fur-trading voyage in 1789, "members of John Meare's crew saw evidence of cultivated plots—probably of tobacco—within Haida villages. In his official log, Meare's assistant, William Douglas . . . would assert that 'in all probability Captain Gray, in the Sloop Washington, had fallen in with this tribe, and employed his considerable friendship in forming this garden,'" although "Gray does not appear to have visited the village in question, and Meares was probably the first European to pull ashore there." In fact, "the precontact antiquity of Haida tobacco cultivation is widely accepted" (4). Despite the Enlightenment, Aboriginal peoples did not have to be taught how to garden, although their methods differed from Locke's stereotype of plough and enclosure.

For those in the field of Canadian literature, Northrop Frye's use of Margaret Atwood's phrase "the bush garden" from *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* as both a title for his first collection of critical essays about Canadian literature and a reference to "the Canadian sensibility" is highly resonant (xx). If read one way, it places Canadians between forest and city, ascribing to them a special relationship to the wilderness despite Canada's high level of urbanization. And, as does Locke, it connects garden, settler, and property rights. This is a colonial move, in a tradition that is only now becoming visible to its makers, mainly because of the work of Aboriginal scholars who see things differently. Linda Hutcheon reads Frye as seeing "the colonial mentality that had exploited the Native peoples of Canada" as "also responsible for exploiting the land upon which they had first lived" (xvii). However, he also

pointed out that “the creative instinct has a great deal to do with the assertion of territorial rights. . . . there is always something vegetable about the imagination, something sharply limited in range” (xxi). The question about what to do about colonial exploitation and the relations of literature to land is left hanging. As Cinda Gault points out, what to do about the bear in the Canadian bush garden is also left hanging at the end of Marian Engel’s *Bear*, a problem both for the woman who sought non-human and non-patriarchal love from the bear and for the nation that grounds itself on a “special” relationship with nature that in the end has been mostly a hollow betrayal. The degree to which women and Aboriginal people are seen as part of nature rather than as part of the *polis*, of course, enters this discussion.

Several papers in this issue connect particular characters to divergent views of nature. Anne of Green Gables lives in Prince Edward Island, also called “the garden province”—where she delightedly projects herself into nature: “I wouldn’t want to be picked if I were an apple blossom” (Montgomery 108). Where Marilla sees mess, Anne sees beauty: “You clutter your room up entirely too much with out-of-doors stuff, Anne. Bedrooms were made to sleep in” (Montgomery 177). Anne’s outlook—as Sean Somers shows—adapts easily to Japanese traditional ways of seeing the world. Perhaps that is why L.M. Montgomery characterized her as an orphan with unusual red hair—to highlight her different perspective. Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* deploys Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid to represent oppositional viewpoints and different forms of violence. Pat Garrett, as he trains himself to be an “ideal assassin,” develops a terror of flowers because, as Lee Spinks puts it, “they make no distinction between the primal force of life and its idea or representation” (73). Billy the Kid, in this account, appears to sense the primal force of life at times without even the initial separation required by projection. This frees him and the reader—however sporadically—from dominant ideas. A useful move, since Charleson explains how dominant ideas about even such apparently beautiful and harmless places as gardens are connected to a history of colonial violence.

Opening up to other philosophies, ways of seeing, sexualities, and aesthetics might allow us to live in a world where bears and people can move out of dominant and dominating conceptual frameworks. And not just bears and people, but people of differing outlooks, epistemologies, and dispositions. This is a point made in several of these papers. Jordana Greenblatt finds differing conceptual frameworks—and aesthetics—in Dionne Brand’s *Thirsty* and George Elliott Clarke’s *Execution Poems* that enact different

forms of violence and that have different effects on readerly hope. Robert McGill shows how adaptation can be negotiated through the assumption of a variety of personae—the daughter, the student-apprentice, the colleague, the legatee, the lover. He also shows how something as beautiful and harmless as children can foreclose on the future if they are used to represent a coercive hetero-normative reproduction.

Literature and the arts are vital locations for the analysis and construction of thought-worlds, as the critical papers included here make clear. The ways of being and acting enabled or required by these various thought-worlds allow us to reflect about our “real” world—another thought-world constructed for us, not necessarily by forces that love us. Although it is a world created by thought, it has real effects—and can underpin hope, violence or exclusion—a range of private responses and public acts. Hitherto, to paraphrase Marianne Moore, genuine poetry could be defined as imaginary gardens with real bears in them in a world that wanted real gardens and imaginary bears. Perhaps now we need to break this down, to include engardened bears, gardening for bears, bearish gardens or bears’ gardens—or perhaps non-bears in non-gardens. Who and where would that be? To put it in another way: “We are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it. Everything is vision, becoming. We become universes. Becoming animal, plant, molecular, zero” (Deleuze and Guattari 169).

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