

# Placing Ekphrasis

## Paintings and Place in *Stanley Park*

The places that haunt one's dreams and to some extent define one's character can range from versions of actual places to the utterly fictitious.

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In the end, what we see is neither the painting in its fixed state nor an artwork trapped in the co-ordinates set by the museum for our guidance.

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The opening pages of Timothy Taylor's *Stanley Park* reveal chef Jeremy Papier's preference for locally grown ingredients. They also reveal his desire, as proprietor and head chef of a Vancouver restaurant, "to remind people of something. Of what the soil under their feet has to offer. Of a time when they would have known only the food that their own soil could offer" (23). Throughout, Jeremy seeks a simple contemporary and local truth by resisting the fusion of globalized menus, but neither his obsession with local food nor his sense of place is simple; Taylor complicates what can easily be read as a clichéd local/global binary by writing the possibilities of place ekphrastically. Over the years, critics have sought to extend definitions of ekphrasis beyond the common notion of a literary representation of visual art.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as Tamar Yacobi notes in "Pictorial Models and Narrative Ekphrasis," "[c]onceptually, empirically, [and] genetically, ekphrasis makes an assorted and open-ended bundle of variables, all free except for the constant minimum of literary reference to visual reference to the world" (618). For my purposes, Claus Clüver's definition of ekphrasis as "the [verbalization] of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system" will suffice (35-36). Through the third-person narrator and Jeremy, Taylor alludes repeatedly to paintings—including real ones that hang in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, fictional ones by fictional artists, and an ostensibly fictional portrait by a living artist—which permits him to reflect on how the visual

arts function socio-ecologically and also to interrogate how “place becomes place by acquiring real or imagined borders” in both a local and a global sense (McKay 18).

Insofar as ekphrasis temporally expands visual images beyond the spatial restrictions imposed by canvas and frame, it foregrounds the uncertainty of individual interpretations by articulating a speaker’s (and/or an author’s) relation to the image being viewed. Following from James Heffernan’s argument that “the persistence of storytelling in ekphrastic literature shows at the very least that ekphrasis cannot be simply equated with spatialization” (“Ekphrasis” 302), I argue that Taylor employs ekphrasis to position the uncertainty and partial knowing of interpretation as a way to understand shifting notions of place. Paintings and place come together in *Stanley Park* to form complex questions about acts of reading and ideas of place. By alluding to both real and imagined artists and their works—Dutch masters, American postmodernists, Vancouver college students—Taylor raises questions about how we construct place by moving in the interstices between “real [and] imagined borders.” The references to paintings become narrative coordinates, enabling Jeremy to contextualize his culinary education in France as he returns to Vancouver to open his own restaurant, and inviting readers to appreciate the interconnections between art, food, and place. As Jeremy juxtaposes his obsession with local food with his global experiences, slippages between local and global, between knowing and not-knowing, inform the desire to know as precisely as possible where home is.

Centred as it is on a young restaurateur attempting to succeed in the competitive business world, the novel is in part about the financial difficulties of remaining local in a post-national world dominated by global market forces.<sup>3</sup> Art historian and cultural theorist John Berger acknowledges a similar market-driven shift in art critics’ responses to visual representations of nature: “Prior to the recent [circa late 1960s] interest in ecology, nature was not thought of as the object of the activities of capitalism; rather it was thought of as the arena in which capitalism and social life and each individual life had its being. Aspects of nature were objects of scientific study, but nature-as-a-whole defied possession” (105). While the particulars of Berger’s comments are debatable—he does not clarify by whom nature was not thought of in capitalistic terms; nor does he consider the nineteenth-century creation of national parks<sup>4</sup>—“nature-as-a-whole” connects to a capitalistic sense of *global* economy. The whole of nature now, the globe, has been commodified, the aestheticization of nature nudging nature-as-neutral-space into the

economic realm. Berger's comments, appearing as they do in his landmark guide to reading visual art, *Ways of Seeing*, are compelling for the way they illuminate Taylor's ekphrastic narrative: epistemological uncertainty takes place in the interstices between painting and ekphrasis, between metropolitan nostalgia for a primitivist past ("the soil under one's feet") and reticence in the face of expanding urbanization (e.g., the homeless community in Taylor's *Stanley Park*). Complexity, represented by Taylor's ekphrastic focus on partial knowing, offers more interesting narrative possibilities than the simple fact of knowing in *Stanley Park*.

### Novel Ekphrasis

Readers first encounter art in *Stanley Park* when Jeremy, having purchased the least expensive ticket home from Dijon, France, has a 24-hour stopover in Amsterdam. Seeking sanctuary from what he imagines to be "macroscale motion sickness that came from moving between St. Seine l'Abbaye and Amsterdam," Jeremy hides in the Rijksmuseum and keeps returning to "three paintings that combine . . . into a single lasting image of his entire experience in Europe" (44). Considering that his experience includes training at a culinary institute and an internship in Burgundy, two of the three paintings seem obvious points of interest: Joachim Beuckelaer's *Well-Stocked Kitchen* (fig. 1) and Jan Asselijn's *The Threatened Swan* (fig. 2). Carel Fabritius' *The Beheading of John the Baptist* (fig. 3), does not immediately reveal its relevance to the development of the narrative or of Jeremy's character. In this stunning and controversial painting,<sup>5</sup> Jeremy admires, primarily,

Fabritius' depiction of Salome, a frivolous aristocrat, which brought to mind the Audi or the Saab or the Benz that might as well have been waiting for her out front of the prison. But the image lingered as he moved on; Salome the patron had so airily inspected the proffered head as it dripped in front of her, held high in the hand of the workmanlike executioner, whose face reflected technical satisfaction in a distasteful assignment. (44)

The "proffered head" seems not to be held all that high in the executioner's hand, nor is there evidence that Salome has inspected it, "airily" or otherwise. So why *this* reading of the painting? What of Jeremy's interpretation can readers take to be a hint, a foreshadowing of things to come? The associative interpolation of European sports cars into the story of the beheading looks back to the customers who would frequent "the Relais St. Seine l'Abbaye in Burgundy, where he worked for a year after graduating from the institute," the "German and Swiss families [who] would park their Saabs and



Figure 1. Beuckelaer: *Well-Stocked Kitchen*. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 2. Asselijn: *The Threatened Swan*. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

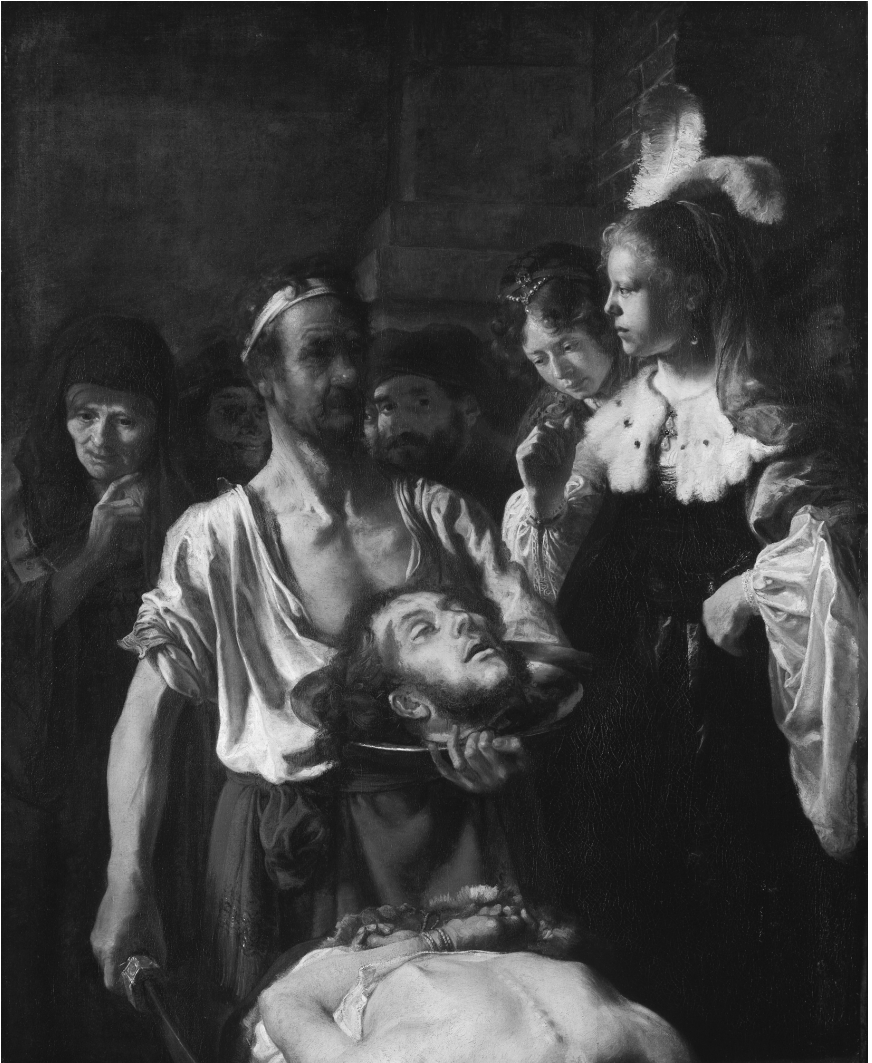


Figure 3. Fabritius: *The Beheading of John the Baptist*. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Audis and Benzes” outside while they partook of food at the roadside restaurant. Jeremy’s anachronistic reading also looks ahead to the role that Dante Beale, head of Inferno International Coffee, plays in Jeremy’s rise and fall as a restaurateur: Dante effectively becomes Jeremy’s patron. But it is wise, I think, to consider all three paintings in conjunction, as one image, since they function collectively to influence Jeremy.

The second painting at the Rijksmuseum that gives Jeremy pause is, fittingly, Joachim Beuckelaer’s *Well-Stocked Kitchen*:

It made him smile. A meta-image of thankfulness and plenty. Christ sat with Martha and Mary, surrounded by skewered game birds, Dutch hares, ducks, finches, pheasants, partridges, roosters, sandpipers, zucchini, cauliflower, tomatoes, grapes, artichokes, plums, cucumbers, lemons, apples, squash and blackberries. Jeremy imagined working with the large clay oven in the background. (44-5)

In fact, the clay oven is less in the background than are Christ, Martha, and Mary. It is strange that this reading of the painting foregrounds the relatively distanced, albeit centred, image of Christ but fails to mention the five humans actually in the foreground. The two kitchen maids and three customers occupy the left side of the painting, balancing the litany of kitchen stock that rolls off the page as though off Jeremy’s tongue. I expect the narrator to identify Jeremy with the foregrounded cooks in the image, despite the fact they are women. Instead, this identification acts perhaps as a clue to be as wary of the stock we put in Jeremy’s interpretations, his readings, as we are, by the end of the novel, of the stock Jeremy puts in his own kitchen. Jeremy Papier might be as concerned about allegory and symbolism as he is about food.<sup>6</sup>

As a case in point, Jeremy equates Beuckelaer’s *Salome* with the *Relais*’ customers. This is telling in more ways than one; the eye contact between executioner and patron, although the former’s eyes are mostly in shadow, is both violent and intimate.<sup>7</sup> Such tension is reflected in gender and sexual politics throughout (exemplified by the humiliation Jeremy’s lover, former barista Benny, will undergo at the hands of Dante later in the novel<sup>8</sup>). Indeed, such politics influence even the most simple-looking of the three images Jeremy views in the Rijksmuseum. Despite the singular and overbearing foregrounded image in Jan Asselijn’s *The Threatened Swan*, Jeremy is as selective and exclusive in his assessment of the larger-than-life swan as he is in his readings of the other paintings: “Standing like a boxer, beak set to jab, wings cocked, feathers flying. Jeremy admired the bristling stance the bird took towards the attacker, knowing that in Asselijn’s day, the threat

might well have been a rookie cook like himself” (45). Jeremy’s reading, despite its brevity and the relative simplicity of the Asselijn painting, is no less interpretive than his readings of the other two paintings. A reading of the large, erect swan as a phallic image, furthermore, helps explain the lasting effect Asselijn’s painting has on Jeremy, whose admiration for the bird foreshadows his response to the demise of his bistro, *The Monkey’s Paw*, and *Inferno’s* financial takeover and construction of the trendy, market-researched ristorante Gerriamo’s.<sup>9</sup>

During clandestine preparations for Gerriamo’s opening night menu—a menu which is to represent the culmination of Jeremy’s ideological treatise on the importance of local ingredients—Jeremy receives a special delivery that includes: “A dozen plump Canada geese, a dozen grey rock doves, six canvasbacks, four large rabbits, fifteen squirrels (greys, fatter and more plentiful than reds) four huge raccoons and a swan” (356). The inclusion of the swan bothers Jeremy, and he shouts at Chladek, the man who has procured the unusual assortment of foodstuffs: “I did not want swan! Why did you bring me swan?” Jeremy expresses anger, we are told, because “to Jeremy the swan was ominous” (356). Partly he does not want swan because he thinks it is not indigenous, a claim Chladek ignores—Trumpeter and Tundra swans winter along the north Pacific coast—while revealing an impressive knowledge of southwest British Columbian invasion ecology: “And the grey squirrel? These came from England in a boat.” Clearly, the indigeneity of the swan is “[n]ot the point” (356),<sup>10</sup> but the space Asselijn’s swan occupies in Jeremy’s version of himself is. At a time when the clarity of Jeremy’s vision seems unquestionable, protecting the swan’s gendered image becomes more important than the localness of food while he prepares his culinary treatise. Instead, Jeremy’s protective response to the swan and dismissal of the squirrels’ non-indigeneity confuses an understanding of his overall vision. His initial project to remind people “[o]f what the soil under their feet has to offer” is more problematic than he thought (23). In other words, despite all the talk of local knowledge, Jeremy prefers a wisdom gleaned from his experiences reading foreign artworks in a foreign land to situating himself unreservedly in his home place.

### **Triangulating Knowledge**

While in Amsterdam, Jeremy uses the past, as articulated by the three classical paintings, to help define himself in the present moment—those fleeting twenty-four hours in the Rijksmuseum—and to take his newly defined self



forward. Jeremy does what John Berger proposes could happen “[i]f the new language of images were used differently” from the way the masses, as opposed to “the cultured minority,” use it—to “confer a new kind of power” through access to knowledge (32-3). Jeremy uses the images to “begin to define [his] experiences more precisely” than words are able, namely “the essential historical experience of [his] relation to the past . . . of seeking to give meaning” to his life (Berger 33). Put another way, Jeremy frames the three Dutch paintings with what Alberto Manguel identifies in *Reading Pictures* as “apprehension and circumstances,” so that “they now exist in his time and share his past, present and future. They have become autobiographical” (14). Taylor’s writing about the impact the paintings have on Jeremy constitutes a meta-commentary on ekphrasis itself; as Cynthia Messenger writes in her essay about P.K. Page and Elizabeth Bishop, ekphrasis represents a “particularly important strategy” for the way “it acts as an intervention—and an intercession—between [people and] place” (103). In the final hours before departing for home, Jeremy returns “again and again to these three [images]. The patron, the kitchen, the swan” and finds “himself thinking . . . of his American friend who set to war the culinary Crips and Bloods.”<sup>11</sup> Reflecting on his return to Vancouver, Jeremy thinks his years in Burgundy “have made [him] Blood” (45), and thus “respectful of tradition, nostalgic even. Canonical, interested in the veracity of things culinary, linked to ‘local’ by the inheritance or adoption of a culture” (32). From the time he determines he is Blood to opening night at Gerriamo’s, Jeremy maintains his connection to the past as it is mediated through the three images; in the process, he enacts art historian Keith Moxey’s claim that “the past . . . offers the present an opportunity to articulate, by means of narrative, its potential for the ethical and political dilemmas we currently confront” (60). Jeremy’s penchant for local ingredients reinforces the Blood ideology he develops while in Europe. However, just as his response to Chladek’s swan suggests, Jeremy’s version of local knowledge—his version of place—is mediated by a knowledge made up of various cultural ideologies: French cuisine, Dutch painting, Western dualism. Once he returns to North America and puts his entrepreneurial skills to the test, these ideological implications unravel as tensions develop between his sense of self, his desire to cook local food, and the financial realities of the restaurant business.

The Monkey’s Paw Bistro, for all its success as “[a] restaurant other chefs would go to,” cannot succeed financially without a series of complex and barely legal strategies to keep Jeremy’s metaphorical kite under control

(Taylor 51). Jeremy must elicit the help of his father's neighbour, Dante Beale, whose financial clout is such that he can easily fund The Monkey's Paw. Jeremy refuses an initial offer of partnership, asking instead for help getting a line of credit (\$230 000.00) and a few credit cards. After the first few months, during which time Jeremy runs his line of credit and two of his credit cards (of which, by now, he has nine) to the limit, "[t]he Monkey's Paw kite [is] aloft and pulling hard, a ring of minimum payments chasing minimum payments" (55). The amount of money Jeremy requires to start his restaurant and keep it running acts narratively as an obvious introduction to the world of capitalism, a world to which Jeremy does not seem interested in belonging, and readers begin to understand that Jeremy's "passion for local ingredients" is perhaps "inefficient" (28). Financial success, especially as embodied by Dante, is necessarily a *global* endeavour in *Stanley Park*; the desire and ability to cross international boundaries are essential if Jeremy is to satisfy the head of Inferno International Coffee who, whether Jeremy likes it or not, has a significant stake in the restaurant, and thus in Jeremy's ideas, even prior to the official takeover.

Taylor resists what Tim Lilburn calls "[l]ate capitalism's nomadism, its own particular pursuit of homelessness, its sad, weary anarchy" (177) by pursuing the idea of the local and by challenging accepted notions of homeless people as having no agency and no culturally sanctioned relation to place. To this end, Jeremy's father (anthropologist and professor) lives among "the homeless" of Stanley Park and claims that he and his son are "working on parallel projects" (22), despite Jeremy's financial investment in the restaurant business, and his catering more to a cultured minority than to the masses. The Professor, as he has come to be called, is in Stanley Park "allowing the words of [the] wilderness to penetrate" him (23). He laments, as Lilburn does, the way that "[e]verything drifts toward money's unintended telos of placelessness," and concerns himself with the question, "how can we be where we are?" (Lilburn 177). The Professor claims that all people have "an innate polarity, a tendency to either root or move," and he makes the self-proclaimed trite observation "that in the West we are uprooting ourselves. We know the culprits: information flow, economic globalization" (Taylor 230). Neither Tim Lilburn nor the Professor, Timothy Taylor nor Jeremy, pretend that answers to these questions and problems are easily obtained, if they are attainable at all. While Lilburn and the Professor quite literally immerse themselves—the former in a root cellar dug "into the south face of a low hill" in Saskatchewan's Moosewood Sandhills (180), and the latter in

the dark recesses of Stanley Park—in an attempt to make an argument against the forces of globalization, Jeremy inhabits a middle ground. Influenced by the way his mother seemed to “put down roots [that] did not take” before she eventually “fell into a place of no places” (230-31),<sup>12</sup> Jeremy tries to define place with real and imagined borders, and the difficulties he faces throughout the novel are consequences of this attempt.

Despite being warned, albeit cryptically, by his godson, Trout, that “[y]ou have to move one way or the other. . . . Right or left. You can’t just stand there” (161), Jeremy confesses something to his best friend, Olli (father of Trout and husband of Margaret, Jeremy’s ex-girlfriend). Regarding Dante’s pending investment to save his restaurant, Jeremy admits that he is “on the fence, truthfully” (166). Conscious of his ideologically ambiguous position, Jeremy remains “triangulated[, f]ixed . . . like a crapaudine on the skewer of his own culinary training” by the three images he sees in the Rijksmuseum (45). He reiterates during a dinner conversation with Trout’s parents that he is “a bit nostalgic about roots,” that *The Monkey’s Paw* is “all about reminding people what it was like to be rooted in one place” (165). Olli, by this point, wants “to tell his friend to just cook and be quiet. That must be the beauty of cooking,” he thinks, “There [isn’t] much ideology behind it” (165-6). Ideology, it turns out, has a lot to do with it, and Jeremy finds himself having to heed Trout’s advice eventually. By the end, though, Jeremy’s choice “to move one way or the other” is a choice that enables a continuing sense of in-betweenness.

### **Local Ingredients, Local Art**

The degree to which Jeremy wants to succeed with his first restaurant, *The Monkey’s Paw*, reflects the degree to which he imports ingredients; he considers his menu to be “[l]ocal but not dogmatic. It [is not] a question of being opposed to imported ingredients, but of preference, of allegiance, of knowing what goodness [comes] from the earth around you” (51). Jeremy’s bioregional vision stems from a notion of allegiance he learns in France and Amsterdam. Wandering around the Rijksmuseum and reflecting on his experiences in Europe—both as a student of his craft and as a maturing individual—Jeremy develops an appreciation for the “true source of the region” (45) whether that region is Burgundy or Cascadia.<sup>13</sup> His preference for local ingredients, furthermore, is reflected in his preference for local art.

Although the visual trio in the Rijksmuseum significantly influences Jeremy, he makes no effort to import these images (or to reproduce them)

for display in *The Monkey's Paw*. Instead, he maintains the understanding of local he develops while triangulating his position in the midst of the classical paintings, and, despite the “[t]ables and chairs from Ikea” (52), which can be explained away by thriftiness, he decorates the bistro with local artefacts.<sup>14</sup> Rather than use the work of such iconic west-coast artists as Emily Carr, Toni Onley, Jack Shadbolt, or Jin-Me Yoon, Taylor opts for a different approach when writing Vancouver scenes. The art work in the *Monkey's Paw* is “haphazard, the product of piece-by-piece collection at local art-college auctions: etchings, woodcuts, off-kilter portrait photography and a large neo-classical still life with a menacing quality Jeremy couldn't identify” (52). The first fictionalized artist appears during the description of *The Monkey's Paw's* interior, introducing Taylor's narrative transition to what John Hollander calls “notional ekphrasis,” the poetic representation of imaginary works of art (209). Jules Capelli, Jeremy's culinary partner—“Of course, Jules didn't pay the bills” (53)—contributes “three metal sculptures by a fictional student artist named Fenton Sooner, who had gone on to enter high-profile collections” (52). Jeremy names the trio Heckle, Jeckle, and Hide, a combination of the popular cartoon magpies and Robert Louis Stevenson's famous novella; he considers the metal crows together to be “an image of perseverance” and “an emblem of gawky tenacity,” much like crows in the wild, whether rural or urban, in spite of the sculptures' obvious lack of biological fidelity (52). The sculptures, more so than the paintings, represent perseverance not just in the sense that Fenton Sooner “stuck with it” and succeeded, but in the way they embody a presence that two-dimensional images arguably do not. Like the plastic “bags full of other bags” that heap upon and hang from shopping carts in Stanley Park, the Sooner sculptures hold “emblematic power” by suggesting, especially in light of their unceremonious removal from Jeremy's kitchen after the *Monkey's Paw* fails, “the resilience of things discarded” (Taylor 5). These sculptures, however, do not elicit as much attention in the novel as still life paintings.

To include not only a large “neo-classical still life”—a glance back to the classical *Well-Stocked Kitchen*—but one “with a menacing quality Jeremy [cannot] identify,” is to introduce the ambiguity of interpretation. Why does Jeremy hang such a painting in his first restaurant? Despite his inability to identify more precisely the quality of the still life he and Jules hang in *The Monkey's Paw*, he does identify it as *menacing*, a quality that, because Jeremy does not describe the painting in any greater detail, is all readers can take from the text. That is, readers are not able to view this particular image in

the same way they can view, with a little effort, Fabritius, Beuckelaer's, and Asselijn's images and, consequently, cannot bring their own powers of observation and interpretation into play. Conversely, when Gerriamo's is decorated, readers are invited to consider, along with Jeremy, the pieces waiting to be displayed.

"Everybody loves Art Day," exclaims Dante upon entering his new restaurant and seeing Jeremy seated in the middle of the room (310). Unlike the artworks adorning the walls of *The Monkey's Paw*, Jeremy plays no role in deciding what adorns the walls of Gerriamo's; the paintings are already "[s]paced evenly around the room" when Jeremy arrives, "waiting to be hung, face to the wall" (310). The group effort evident on Art Day enables Taylor to examine and offer interpretations of each painting as he does with the images in the Rijksmuseum. Inside Gerriamo's are "twelve [paintings] in total, all still lifes but one, which [is] a grainy portrait of a naked skinhead" (311). The twelve gold-framed paintings are by four different artists and not, significantly, a triangular three. Significant also is the real/fictional and local/non-local mix of artists. As the only real artist included in Gerriamo's Art Day, Attila Richard Lukacs is the fourth artist in a novel so interested in binaries and multiples of three. As such, the Lukacs work represents a hinge between the three real paintings in the Rijksmuseum and the three fictional pieces in Gerriamo's.

Convinced *Inferno International Coffee* is local because he and his partners "thought it up [in Vancouver]" (269), Dante begins a conversation about the artistic choices for Gerriamo's:

"Four local artists," Dante said. "Are we not loyal?"

"Well ... ," Benny said. "Bishop and Nygoyen are actually from Seattle. Kreschkov is Toronto."

"Attila Richard Lukacs is Vancouver, sort of," Jeremy said, motioning to the skinhead. (311)

The confusion is typical of Dante's desire to commodify the local, a desire that compels his interest in Jeremy's ideas in the first place. But the confusion also suggests that local is difficult to determine, even for Jeremy, who claims that "Lukacs is Vancouver, sort of," the modifier emphasizing the tenuousness of the claim. As the only real artist among this group, Lukacs can more easily be researched in the world outside the text. Born in Calgary, Lukacs painted in Vancouver as a young adult and lived in Berlin for ten years (from 1986 to 1996) before moving to New York (Goodman 66); his localness is allowed, *sort of*, despite his itinerant ways, perhaps in much the

same way Jeremy develops his interest in the local while traveling in Europe. If readers take Benny's word—and why not believe a fictional character's knowledge about fictional artists?—the other “local artists” are not very local either.<sup>15</sup> Taylor's decision to include these fictional artists, however, and the notional ekphrasis that follows serve to redefine the borders place acquires, as Don McKay has it in “Otherwise than Place,” in becoming place.

Unlike the “neo-classical still life with a menacing quality Jeremy couldn't identify,” the fictional Kreschkov's paintings, “beautiful and menacing,” are carefully observed:

The food she depicted was raised on a shining black background, suspended at the top of a void. Much of it was also clearly rotting. The cheese had turned. The shank of meat revealed maggots. The fruit was bruised. But each silky patch of mould, each broken pit, each rejected mouthful was rendered in achingly precise strokes. (311)

Where the clean, robust images in Beuckelaer's kitchen signify Jeremy's unfettered, newly acquired optimism and confidence as a classically trained chef, the food depicted in these images signifies Jeremy's shift in perception—though not necessarily in ideology—and the realization that his dream of communicating the splendour of what British Columbia's local soil and sea have to offer cannot be fulfilled as he once envisioned. The depiction of spoiled food in the paintings simultaneously marks the rottenness of globally capitalistic enterprise but also of aestheticized rot as marketable commodity.

Nygoyen's images are different from Kreschkov's in that the former “at least paint[s] healthy fruit and plump vines” (311). The ordinariness of the subject matter, however, is offset by the “arbitrarily segmented” overall image, “multiple panels that assemble . . . to make the whole. One work consist[s] of four square canvases arranged in a row. Another involve[s] four canvases arranged in a larger square” (311-2). Each panel can represent segments of Jeremy's life to this point: clearly defined moments—in Dijon, Burgundy, Amsterdam, The Monkey's Paw—that have been arranged arbitrarily into an order beyond his control. Like Nygoyen's assembled wholes, though, the puzzle of Jeremy's life leaves gaps and fissures.

The third fictional artist's work is neither segmented nor spoiled. Bishop,<sup>16</sup> readers are told, makes “no attempt to conceal a debt to the Dutch Masters,” such as Fabritius, Beuckelaer, and Asselijn (312). Similar to the familiarity of Nygoyen's subject, Bishop's

arrangements[, too,] were familiar: fruit, vegetables, meat and cheese on tables,

slaughtered game birds on chopping blocks, even the conical twist of newsprint, out of which spilled a bit of salt and pepper. Still, they all seemed intentionally wrong somehow. The light glanced into the frame from no definite source, throwing shadow in unexpected ways. Perspective was skewed, enlarging a dill pickle until it rivalled a watermelon on the other side of the table. (312)

Bishop's skewed perspective indeed reveals a debt to a Dutch Master, namely Beuckelaer; in *Well-Stocked Kitchen*, Beuckelaer privileges a secular perspective over the more conventional religious one his mentor, Pieter Aertsen, typically emphasized. Jeremy's earlier focus on the deemphasized Christ in Beuckelaer's painting, though, can be seen as a warning to readers that they should not trust the protagonist. Jeremy's interpretations of the work of these three artists point toward an understanding he comes to shortly after Art Day. He realizes "that there [are] different paths into the same wood. Different views of the same familiar story," like a room full of "maps providing their various views of what [can] be known of the world around them" (335). After this realization, Jeremy begins planning the opening-night menu for Gerriamo's. On the wall between the doors to his kitchen is "a grainy portrait of a naked skinhead," hanging there "like a warning" (311). But the shaven-headed image signifies Dante's characteristics more than Jeremy's.

The portrait by Lukacs stands out amongst this group of paintings for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the actual existence of the artist. The portrait is apparently "vintage Lukacs, and [one] either [does] or [does] not like phallic National Socialist imagery" (312). While I am not certain whether the portrait—described with not nearly the detail as the others—actually exists or not, it is not difficult to discover what "vintage Lukacs" looks like. Lukacs "gained notoriety early on in his career for his erotically uncompromising portrayal of rough boys," and "it is hard to tell whether his bare-chested young men constitute a political statement or an extended meditation on skinhead allure" (Goodman 66). In *Stanley Park*, the presence of a skinhead portrait by Lukacs in Gerriamo's constitutes a political statement; the evocation of National Socialist position by the sheer force of Lukacs' image invites readers to consider the complex relation between this image and Dante Beale, Jeremy's capitalistic antagonist.

### **Place Cubed**

Dante's desire to place the Lukacs portrait "at the very back, between the kitchen doors,"—"Perfect," he says after Jeremy suggests that "[p]eople will think it's the chef. . . . Like a warning" (311)—reinforces many suggestions

throughout the novel that Dante represents a right-wing, global capitalism (311). During a conversation with Jeremy in which readers witness the first hints of the animosity between Dante and Jules, Dante asks Jeremy if he “suppose[s] she’s a dyke. . . . Dykes are difficult. It’s always politics with dykes” (66). If Taylor resists painting a simple portrait of global capitalism as evil outright, he paints Dante’s version of globalism as a difficult version to support because Dante’s language indicates prejudices and aligns them with prejudices typically associated with a conservative right-wing ideology. During a conversation, Dante tells Jeremy he “was thinking of ordering tofu” at a well-known Chicago steak house but was told “they don’t like faggots in the Windy City” (186); he goes on to describe Irish beer as “a couple of Mick lagers,” and he refers to the French chefs Jeremy studied with as “the frogs in the white hats” (188). This aspect of Dante’s character is revealed only when he knows that he will take over Jeremy’s restaurant, suggesting a juxtaposition of aestheticized local food and neo-capitalist fears and desires that are also reflected in the cost of the Lukacs’ painting: “Twenty-five thou” (311). Dante’s uni-directional, narrow worldview does not overwhelm the narrative,<sup>17</sup> nor does the novel endorse National Socialist ideologies and behaviours. The artworks themselves offer alternative ways of seeing, whereas Dante’s neo-capitalism allows space for only one story. By contrast, the multiplicity of paintings in the novel, and Taylor’s narrativized ekphrasis, nicely parallels the need for more than one point of reference when negotiating geographic location.

If Dante’s obsessive post-nationalism can be seen as an *acceptance* of other cultures, it can also, and perhaps more likely, be seen to enact a xenophobic desire to consume his fear of other cultures by consuming marketable vestiges of the cultures themselves. He devours foreign cultural commodities and is, for example, “Tai Chi-ed into lean perfection” (98). Most distressingly, especially from Jeremy’s perspective, Dante’s culinary preferences tend toward an ironic blend of inclusive fusion and bland placelessness, “[w]here the duck is twice-cooked New England mallard served in a restaurant in Moscow, and the salmon is Chilean-farmed Atlantic planked on Lebanese cedar in a restaurant south of Cork City” (270). For Jeremy, such fusion dishes are the epitome of Crip cuisine and thus are more likely to displace the person eating them in Vancouver than would, say, lamb raised on Saltspring Island or sockeye salmon caught in the Strait of Georgia and purchased on the wharf at Steveston. For all that Jeremy identifies with Blood cooking, though, his connection to the local remains problematic. In addition to



continually locating himself in relation to the three paintings in the Rijksmuseum, Jeremy maintains a strong connection to his Sabatier chef's knife, a gift from his father.<sup>18</sup>

So important is the knife to Jeremy that, after having lost it during a drunken trek through Stanley Park, Jeremy goes to "a high-end knife shop in the basement of the Hotel Vancouver" to have it appraised in hopes of finding another one of similar quality.<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Bloom, the shop's proprietor, tells Jeremy a story about L'Enfer, the "unusual factory . . . in the Thiers region of France" where his knife was made: "Rumour had it that the owners of the factory collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War. Bayonets, you understand. Their output was duly shunned afterwards, leaving a warehouse of unsold items to be discovered in later years" (130). Jeremy's knife connects him simultaneously to his father and to Dante through a familial bond and a historical bond, respectively. The history of his Sabatier further complicates Jeremy's relation to place as he attempts to answer the question, how can we be where we are? The knife's role in Jeremy's attempt to answer the question is made clearer during a scene in which Jeremy, in search of his missing blade, confronts Siwash, one of the Professor's homeless subjects who attempts to answer the question by *knowing* precisely where he is at all times with the aid of a global positioning system (GPS). Inside his bunker are "dozens of maps taped up, overlapping" and offering various projections (332). In attempting to know where he is at all times, Siwash comes to realize the limitations of two-dimensional representations of the earth, "that too much map is *problematic*" (333). Jeremy realizes that Siwash spends his days recording the number of people moving through his place—marked definitively on the GPS: N 49.18.32, W 123.09.18—in order to remind himself that he is "not in motion" (335). Knowing place remains a question of recognizing the ever-shifting boundaries that define place and the limitations of the tools we have to do so.

It is during his intense encounter with Siwash that Jeremy realizes that "different paths [lead] into the same wood," that there are "[d]ifferent views of the same familiar story" (335). These realizations enable Jeremy to question all that has come before, to rethink the coordinates of his life thus far, and to determine his position indefinitely. If place acquires real or imagined borders in becoming place, then no real limits to place exist. My attention to the role of paintings in understanding place in *Stanley Park*—like Jeremy's attention to the three Dutch paintings—represents a coordination of real and imagined borders, an appeal to place-making that positions me, and

potentially other readers, in relation to Taylor's novel and the various paths it offers into—and out from—itsself.

Siwash's maps provide "various views of what [can] be known of the world" (335) and likely inform Jeremy's final attempt at the restaurant business with the Food Caboose. The location of the Food Caboose "at the dead southern edge of Chinatown" reveals at the same time as it conceals Jeremy's comfort in an area of Vancouver that has "stopped being part of any neighbourhood at all. . . . A place stranded between other places" (418-19). He returns to an in-between place, a place of infinite possibilities, after having struggled to occupy a place he thought could be definite. Not surprisingly, the choice of artworks in the Food Caboose reflects a narrative preference for recognizing different paths into the same wood. Heckle, Jeckle, and Hide are back along with "half a dozen garage-sale Braque prints" (420). The inclusion of Georges Braque, co-founder of the Cubist movement, reinforces a preference for multiple viewpoints, even if—and in part because—Braque happens to have been born in Argenteuil-sur-Seine, a mere 300 kilometres northwest of St. Seine l'Abbaye, where Jeremy apprenticed in the *relais*. Still, by choosing a painter who helped revolutionize the way we visually perceive the world, Taylor shifts the narrative away from coordination to an abstract rendering of place. Like the difference between the Professor's interest in "how people move across" the earth's surface and "become stationary" and Jeremy's ex-girlfriend, Margaret's seismological interest in "how the surface beneath [people's] feet might choose to move first" (150), the novel counters Jeremy's ekphrastic attempts to locate himself with a Cubist recognition of infinite movement, albeit movement within a static place, the "ramshackle, barn-red" Food Caboose (418).

In addition to symbolizing the edge of Jeremy's culinary and personal changes, the Food Caboose functions on the periphery of the restaurant business proper. As the proprietor of a modern-day speakeasy, Jeremy ends the novel participating in a "punk economy" that is simultaneously at odds with the pop-art décor and thrifty Ikea cutlery he fills the Food Caboose with, and in keeping with Jeremy's shifting coordinates of self (421). Taylor's ekphrasis, far from prescribing criteria by which to define Jeremy as a character, provides strategies for negotiating Jeremy's developing, at times contradictory relations to other characters, to political ideologies, and to a sense of place. To locate himself in any definite way, Jeremy knows, is to fix himself "like a crapaudine" (45) on a skewer from which he is not likely to escape without being burned.

## NOTES

I would like to thank Maia Joseph, Eva-Marie Kröller, Maryann Martin, and Bill New for their insights and helpful comments on various drafts. This paper is for Maryann. Images used with the permission of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

- 1 Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005) 73; Alberto Manguel, *Reading Pictures: A History of Love and Hate* (Toronto: Knopf, 2000) 12.
- 2 For detailed accounts of etymological and theoretical histories of *ekphrasis*, see James A.W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993), and Tamar Yacobi, "Pictorial Models and Narrative Ekphrasis," *Poetics Today* 16 (1995): 599-649.
- 3 Taylor plays with this tension in complex ways by referencing various political ideologies throughout the novel. An exploration of the dynamics between each of these ideologies—e.g., National Socialism/Nazism, capitalism, socialism—would make a fine essay in itself. Unfortunately, such an argument lies beyond the scope of the present paper.
- 4 In "Ecological Integrity and National Narrative: Cleaning up Canada's National Parks," Catriona Sandilands links political and environmental concerns in the history of Canada's National Parks system, beginning with Banff (formerly Rocky Mountain Park), created in 1885. She argues that "national park spaces are only partly organized by their insertion into national—or state—discourses. It is equally important to understand that the demarcation of a park-space also represents a particular insertion of a landscape into relations of international capital" (139). While generally Sandilands' argument informs a reading of Jeremy's and Dante's contradictory notions of place, it can also be applied to a reading of Stanley Park proper. Though not a national park, Stanley Park, too, has been constructed for the "tourist-gaze" "as a unique and consumable 'locality'" (Sandilands 139).
- 5 Although it is currently attributed to Fabritius at the Rijksmuseum, Christopher Brown includes a discussion of the debate surrounding the artist's identity in his book *Carel Fabritius* (1981) under "Rejected Attributions."
- 6 This marginalization of the women from the painting in Taylor's ekphrasis might also provide reasons for Jeremy's interest in Fabritius's painting, for the relatively minor role women characters have in the novel, and for the complex, often under-valued roles they play in Jeremy's life.
- 7 This is the only eye contact depicted in the painting save for that between the bearded man behind the executioner's left shoulder and the viewer.
- 8 Dante humiliates Benny, whom he hires to work at Gerriamo's, by submitting her to an impromptu fashion show to highlight the new front-staff uniform, "a grey flannel suit, with many small buttons running up to a closed collar, and narrow-legged pants with large cuffs" (310). In a not-so-subtle retelling of the Nazi's desire for a pure Aryan nation, Dante asks Jeremy to "imagine a set of perfect clones. . . . A dozen perfect meat puppets" (313-4). This is another aspect of the novel that falls beyond the scope of the present essay. A number of references are made to Dante being evil and devilish—his nominal connection to Dante Alighieri, his ownership of Inferno International Coffee, and, later in the novel, the revelation that Sabatier knives were made in a factory called L'Enfer, the owners of which allegedly collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. Despite the abundance of evidence, however, I prefer to think of Dante in more complicated terms, as suggested in this exchange between Jeremy and his ever-so-wise godson Trout while standing before an image of the Inferno Coffee logo. When Trout asks what it is, Jeremy suggests "The

- Devil." The child shakes his head at the suggestion: "'Nahh,' he [says]. 'Too obvious'" (262).
- 9 This is by no means the only reading of Asselijn's swan. Though the bird is rigidly set to defend itself, its neck is the only part that might reasonably be considered a phallus, and not a particularly straight one at that. The swan also resembles an arabesque.
  - 10 Actually, neither the (European) rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) nor the rock doves (*Columba livia*) are indigenous to British Columbia, either.
  - 11 An allusion to well-known Los Angeles street gangs, in Jeremy's food world Crip and Blood symbolize innovative, post-national and traditional, nostalgic culinary ideologies, respectively. "Crip cooks [are] critical" while Blood cooks exhibit interests "in the veracity of things culinary"; moreover, "[v]egetarianism [is] an option for Crips but not for Bloods" (32). This binary functions as many others in the novel (e.g., local/global, good/evil, socialist/capitalist), namely to emphasize movement between seemingly static ideas.
  - 12 The novel opens with Jeremy and the Professor meeting on a bench on the edge of Stanley Park, "between two cherry trees" where a family portrait had been taken years earlier. The bench is near Lost Lagoon, "an in-between place" (3).
  - 13 Cascadia is an alternative name for what is commonly called the Pacific Northwest. According to Eileen Quigley, Cascadia, a watershed (or bioregion) that includes parts of Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California, "eschews national and state boundaries but respects that natural and socio-cultural history that have united the region for centuries" (3).
  - 14 I emphasize local in this case while acknowledging that neither Taylor nor I include First Nations artefacts or visual art in the present discussion. The closest we get to a First Nations character/perspective is the man, aptly called Siwash, who lives in an old pillbox by Siwash Rock, off the shore of Stanley Park; despite the nominal connection to the Native story about Siwash Rock, however, we are told that Siwash "had arrived . . . like so many others had arrived" at Stanley Park and "[c]rawled from the wreckage of an imperfect landscape onto these perfect shores" (24).
  - 15 Bishop and Nygoyen can be considered local if one uses bioregional, as opposed to political, boundaries to define local; Kreschkov can be considered local if one thinks nationally rather than municipally or regionally.
  - 16 Taylor is here likely paying homage to the upscale Vancouver restaurant, Bishop's (2183 West 4th Avenue).
  - 17 The Professor offers the novel's first assessment of Dante's character: "Dante is a price. Dante is a sale. Dante abhors anything that is not a commodity" (30).
  - 18 Sabatier knives are distinguished from other knives by their triangular blade.
  - 19 Jeremy ends up replacing his Sabatier with what Taylor presents as its opposite, a \$3200.00 Fugami: "A nine-inch chef's knife. Absolutely black from the point to the butt of the handle. It seemed to absorb the light" and would "not need sharpening until sometime early in the fourth millennium" (132).

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