

## **MLA 2015 Canadian Literature Discussion Group Panels Details & Abstracts**

### **Session #322: Coastal Canada**

**January 9, 1:45-3:00, 114 VCC West**

#### **“Coastal Zones: Canadian Writing and the Eco-Critical Imagination”**

**- Alessandra Capperdoni, Simon Fraser University**

The increased speed of economic global processes, digitalization of communication and knowledge, and mobility of people is represented in contemporary neoliberal discourse as an index of global modernity, whereby ‘global’ becomes synonymous with the borderless and the production of a transnational space imagined as interconnected, fluid, and universalized. Within this model, the ‘global’ has superseded the ‘national’ and locality has been rewritten into a pre-packaged sign of the beneficial effects of neoliberal politics (“Think global, act local”). What remains obscured in this discursive strategy are the material effects of neoliberal politics on land, people, and social relations: the unprecedented technological and financial investment on land resources fostering the extraction economy; the conditions of labour allowing for the global circulation of capital and commodities; and the disruption of the welfare state and the fragmentation of political communities to enable a culture of social ‘atomization.’ The inability (and unwillingness) to address the larger effects of neoliberal ideologies is apparent in the way in which the signifier of ‘crisis’ is often employed in public discourse to read the most visible signs of such materiality as ‘exceptional’ rather than ‘constitutive’ to the operations of global capital.

This paper discusses texts from Canadian literature that challenge the neoliberal injunction to become participants in the territorialization of space in order to enjoy the immediate ‘benefits’ of the commodification of nature. It re-reads works by Canadian authors emerging from key historical junctions in Canadian cultural production through the lenses of what artist Allan Sekula has termed “critical realism”: Daphne Marlatt’s *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now*, and *Steveston*; Roy Kiyooka’s *October’s Piebald Skies and Other Lacunae*; Rita Wong’s *Forage*; and Marie Clements’s play *Burning Vision*. These works shed light on the way in which coastal zones are contested sites of different forces (ranging from aboriginal land claims and relation to the natural world to labour, diasporic flows, resource industries, and government policies) and complicate the understanding of ‘the Coast’ as the western vector of nation-based and transnational corporate politics. Different meanings and desires are shown to operate historically and spatially. Contrary to the Enlightenment belief that knowledges and technologies are instruments exterior to the subject, the ‘coastal’ becomes a critical site of cultural and political intervention to make visible the material effects of territorial

exploitation on land, social relations, and individual lives, thus unhinging the grip of neoliberal discursive closure that subsumes geography to the imperative of 'historical progress' and making possible the production of a new eco-critical imagination.

**“Performing Coastal Space as Ethnic History: Vancouver’s Chinatown in Wayson Choy’s *Paper Shadows*”**

**- Jason Wang, York University**

As space is at the centre of many textual constructions in Chinese-Canadian literature, Wayson Choy’s autobiography *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Memoir* (1999) evokes the interpretive exchange between ethnic history and coastal geography via an overt affiliation with WWII Canadian modernism. This paper delves into how Choy’s *Paper Shadows*, a discursive and cultural production of Vancouver’s Chinatown, generates new possibilities for the elucidation of Chinese diasporic culture in mid-twentieth-century coastal Canada. It critically considers the way in which the nature of an urban place resonates with the lives of those who dwell in it. Choy’s childhood memory of the 1940s — Chinese opera, food, festivals, family relations, and other cultural practices — indicates that the everyday collective performance deployed by Chinatown inhabitants who are not in positions of power affords them some control over the space of their daily lives. Informed by Michel de Certeau’s concept of “spatial stories,” emphasizing the interdependency of textual narratives and spatial practices, this paper maintains that Choy’s narrative transforms the institutionalized racial urban place, Chinatown, into individualized in-between spaces that empower Chinese coastal denizens — racially segregated — in the urban alienation of Vancouver. Through Choy’s evocative literary tour brimming with vividly detailed itineraries, coastal Chinatown is no longer a passive locus of social relations (Lefebvre), but one that spatializes everyday activities, facilitating a re-imagining of an active and legitimate community that fosters multicultural integration. Ultimately this paper argues that Choy’s *Paper Shadows* performs coastal space as ethnic history, and offers a central consideration of generative “Costal” aesthetics in Canadian literature.

**“Godzilla versus Northern Gateway: Indigenous Cartography as Counter-mapping Coastal *Terra Nullius* in Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*”**

**- Brendan McCormack, University of British Columbia**

Coastal Canada is inextricably bound to histories of settler cartography, one of the myriad Western ‘scientific’ discourses through which colonization continues its articulation. Coastal maps are paragons of the fiction of ‘discovery,’ indebted to a colonial logic that both legitimizes territorial claims and underwrites neocolonial representations of unceded Indigenous lands. What is literature’s relationship with this map-making history? Can fiction work to decolonize cartography, offering what Stephen

Slemon terms a “way out of disempowering cognitive legacies of imperialism”? Indeed, the historical link between colonial mapping and CanLit is intimate, but often underexplored. From the fertile ideological soil of *terra nullius*—the settler designation of “empty land” devoid of “human” tenure—grew Moodie’s haunted wilderness, Frye’s garrison, and Atwood’s malevolent north; a genealogy of ‘Civ/Sav’ literary dualisms informed by deeply cartographic spatial imaginaries.

My paper turns to Haisla-Heiltsuk author Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* (2001) to interrogate how Indigenous literary cartographies offer a decolonizing representational politics. *Monkey Beach* draws explicitly on the rhetorical power of maps in its tracing of the Douglas Channel and traditional Haisla territory surrounding Kitamaat Village on BC’s northern coast—a port of entry/departure currently making headlines as the proposed terminus of Enbridge’s Northern Gateway pipeline. Robinson’s novel re-maps this coastal *terra nullius* as topography sedimented with cultural memory and alive with traditional knowledges, what Mik’maw scholar Marie Battiste calls a “web of relationships within a specific ecological context” integral to sustaining kinship and Indigenous place-based epistemologies. The politico-cultural and eco-critical stakes of this literary counter-mapping will be realized by reading *Monkey Beach*, published before the Enbridge debate, against the pipeline proposal’s contemporary cartographies, which demonstrate a neocolonial investment in (re)presenting coastal Canada as empty land.

## **Session #459: Visual Cultures and Young People’s Texts in Canada** (Collaborative Session with the Children’s Literature Division)

**January 10, 10:15-11:30, 113 VCC West**

**“Everybody calls me Roch: *Harvey, The Hockey Sweater* and the Invisible Québécois Child”**

**- Cheryl Cowdy, York University**

However much actual children are prevented from meaningful participation in Canadian political discursive practices, “the child” as a figuration and as a nostalgically recalled self the adult ‘once was’ is no stranger to identity politics. When Roch Carrier first used his child self in “Une abominable feuille d’érable sur la glace” (1979) to answer the question, “What does Quebec want?”, the child and its multiple nostalgic configurations has been a site of competing discourses surrounding Québécois identity and the province’s status with Canadian Confederation. The translation into English and adaptation of Carrier’s text into Sheldon Cohen’s short film of 1979, *The Sweater*, and as a picture book, *The Hockey Sweater* (1984), has ensured the iconic status of the (male) child within articulations of Québécois and Canadian national identity, through the collusion in children’s culture of verbal narrative and visual representation. This may be

unsurprising given that, as Claudia Casteñeda argues, “the condition of childhood finds its value in potentiality” (4).

Nearly thirty years later, Hervé Bouchard and Janice Nadeau return to the collusion of children’s picture books, life writing, and the figuration of the child with *Harvey: Comment Je Suis Devenu Invisible* (2009). In contrast to Carrier’s story of the Québécois child’s self-assertion and the ubiquitous function his remembered child self carries as a representation of Quebec, however, Bouchard’s text and Nadeau’s illustrations promise to tell us how one particular child “became invisible.” Through its use of the conventions of sequential comic storytelling, *Harvey* resists the child’s value as potentiality and the symbolic burden of representation. What it offers instead is a tale of one particular child’s unbecoming. Using Claudia Casteñeda’s work on figuration as a methodology that “entails simultaneously semiotic and material practices,” my paper will explore Bouchard’s and Nadeau’s strategic turn to graphic life narrative as a vehicle for exploring the relationship between the child and the discursive construction of Québécois selves from the 1960s during the Quiet Revolution to the present moment.

## **“Daughters of a Single Parent: ‘Lives of Girls and Women’ in Quebec Cinema Today”**

**- Miléna Santoro, Georgetown University**

Beginning in the earliest decades of its commercial cinema, Quebec has had a fascination with child protagonists, many of whom were orphans, like Aurore, martyred in immortal fashion in Bigras’ 1951 melodrama, or Benoît in Jutra’s 1971 classic *Mon oncle Antoine*. Since the mid-1990s, however, orphans have been replaced by children in a single parent household, no doubt a reflection of the rising divorce rate and social changes Quebec has seen since the days of the Quiet Revolution.

While boys are not absent from this trend, it seems that girls are more often the focus: from Léa Pool’s *Emporte-moi* (1999), *Lost and Delirious* (2001), and *Maman est chez le coiffeur* (2008), to the more recent features *Avant que mon coeur bascule* (Sébastien Rose, 2012) and *Une jeune fille* (Catherine Martin, 2013), we note a series of girl protagonists who, perhaps because of their absent parent, struggle with their identity and/or sexuality, go “off the rails” and even slide into delinquency. Although such portraits of girls in crisis could claim as their predecessors Mankiewicz’s Manon in *Les bons débarras* (1979) or the suicidal girls in Lanctôt’s *Sonatine* (1983), it seems that these more contemporary portraits are less symbolic avatars of Quebec society’s identity issues, and more portraits of a generation whose natural mistrust of their elders must be overcome or at least mitigated. A new sign of generational reconciliation or submission, or the expression of a growing insecurity among Quebec’s (young) women for whom feminism no longer offers a touchstone or source of self-affirmation? Such sociological and theoretical questions will guide my reflections on the cinematic portrayals of (pre-) adolescent girls by Léa Pool and others over the past fifteen years.

By examining the desire for independence and/or the acceptance of responsibility in the face of absence that this new generation of female protagonists displays, I hope to unpack both the social attitudes and the aspirations that they embody, and illuminate aspects of the evolving symbolism and representations of youth in Quebec culture today.

### **“Marie-Louise Gay’s *Stella and Sam*: A Canadian Case Study of Transmedia Storytelling with Picture Book Narratives”**

**- Naomi Hamer, University of Winnipeg**

Contemporary North American picture books are increasingly informed by the practices of transmedia storytelling. Within the context of a transmedia narrative, the visual and verbal elements of print picture books are not only adapted across multiple media platforms, but the design of each affiliated text (e.g. an interactive mobile app) meaningfully extends, informs, or potentially subverts the central discourses of the picture book narrative. Marie-Louise Gay’s *Stella and Sam* series (*Stella and Sacha* in French-language texts) exemplifies a distinctively Canadian case study of transmedia storytelling through the cross-media adaptation, design, and franchising of a picture book narrative that includes: print picture books (Groundwood) such as *Stella, Star of the Sea* (1999); an animated television series (Radical Sheep Productions 2010-2014); a stage adaptation, *Stella, Queen of the Snow* (Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia 2014); collectible Canada Post stamps (2013); and interactive mobile applications (zinc Roe Inc.). Each text contributes to the cross-media representation of Stella and Sam as hyperbolically curious explorers involved in a series of whimsical adventures in natural settings. This analysis explores how transmedia storytelling offers interactive engagement with these picture book narratives, but also may reinforce utopian discourses of childhood play and learning that underscore the history of Canadian children’s book publishing.

The analysis of *Stella and Sam* is situated within a limited history of picture book adaptation in the Canadian media context with a focus on the *Franklin and Friends* animated television series (Nelvana 1997-2014), based on the *Franklin* picture books by Paulette Bourgeois and Brenda Clark (Kids Can Press). Framed by theories of multimodal discourse (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; Burn 2008), remediation (Bolter and Grusin 2000), and transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 2006), the paper presents a critical discourse analysis of Gay’s print picture books, the animated series, the stage adaptation, and interactive platforms. The *Stella and Sam* discourse is also linked to the recent emergence of several Canadian companies that primarily develop interactive children’s content including the Vancouver-based Loud Crow Interactive. The analysis reveals the influential role played by these new Canadian media producers in the design of transmedia picture book narratives.