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GRADE / DEGREE:	ANNÉE D'OBTENTION / YEAR GRANTED
M.A. (Translation)	2003
TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS: TRANSLATING THE WILDERNESS : A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF TOPOÏ FOR THE CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSFER OF CONTEMPORARY NATURE WRITING	

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TITRE DE LA THÈSE - TITLE OF THE THESIS

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**TRANSLATING NATURE:
A CORPUS-BASED STUDY**

by

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*Thesis submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies and Research
of the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of M.A. in Translation*

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*Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the great deep.
O LORD, you preserve both man and beast.
How priceless is your unfailing love!
Both high and low among men find refuge
in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.*

Psalm 36:5-9 NIV

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with gladness that I come to thank so many. First, thanks go to my supervisors, Luise von Flotow and Annie Brisset for directing me through this undertaking. Without your guidance my topic would never have been defined. Thank you for encouraging me to persevere.

My beloved parents, you have offered listening ears and precious counsel. I also thank you for sharing the house you have made a home. I can think of no place more beautiful for contemplation and composition.

The year I spent abroad was made possible through funding offered by HRDC; thank you. To Yves-Pascal, Suzy, Laurence and Catheline, I also extend my heartfelt appreciation— even across the ocean.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Brita and her kind generosity to share her workspace with me. Rachel, my dear sister, thank you for your delightful curiosity in my subject, the translation of the abstract and the encouragement you have been time and time again.

Thank you for the love that has been shown and the strength that has been provided through the prayers and cares of so many; Michelle, Karla, Marilyn, Amy, Jane, Wards, Zwiers, Ayers, Campbells, and many others I will have to thank in person.

Truly my deepest thankfulness is unto my God through the Lord Jesus Christ; thank you for holding me steadfastly by my right hand. To You be all the glory.

ABSTRACT

In contemporary nature writing, beauty can indeed be said to be "in the eye of the beholder". English-Canadian and French authors of such texts often perceive and describe their natural surroundings in very individual, though culturally shared, ways.

English-Canadian and French authors have developed quite different approaches to nature writing, and this difference becomes clearly apparent through a contrastive analysis of two corpora: nature writing intended for English-Canadian readers and similar texts addressed to French readers. Through the juxtaposition of these texts, the cultural topoi of each linguistic set are drawn out.

In an environment where forces of globalization are bringing more languages and cultures into contact, an analysis of this type sets forth the "culturemes" that practising translators need to be aware of and respond to. A sample text that takes the findings into account illustrates this.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans les récits de leurs excursions en plein air, les auteurs témoignent d'une diversité de goûts et de réactions. Chacun contemple le milieu naturel selon une perspective qui lui est propre. Pourtant, on observe qu'au-delà de leur diversité les descriptions partagent des traits communs et que ces ressemblances rapprochent les écrits émanant d'une même culture.

Français et Anglo-Canadiens ont ainsi développé des modalités d'écriture différentes pour le « récit de nature », que l'on peut considérer comme une variété ou un sous-genre du « récit de voyage ». La différence apparaît clairement dans les thèmes et leur traitement. Un ensemble de topoï ou stéréotypes culturels ont été mis en évidence au moyen d'une étude comparative portant sur un double corpus constitué, d'une part, de récits destinés à un public français et, d'autre part, de récits équivalents à l'usage d'un public anglo-canadien.

Le nouveau contexte de la mondialisation se caractérise par une montée en puissance des communications entre les langues et les cultures. C'est pourquoi, dans la perspective fonctionnaliste qui garantit l'efficacité des échanges entre les groupes humains, on s'est donné pour objectif de montrer qu'une meilleure connaissance des « culturèmes » propres à chaque public cible engage des pratiques de traduction différenciatrices. Un texte rédigé à partir des résultats de l'analyse comparative en fournit l'illustration.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the catchphrase *cultural turn* seems to have touched virtually every discipline of social studies and beyond, from history to sociology, from human geography even to translation. For translation studies, this has brought a focal shift, from language to culture and has opened new fields of research, such as gender and translation, and power and translation. This shift exemplifies a reflection on the impact of translation on the reader or on reader groups and includes translation and colonialism as well as translation and social discourse. Still, the role of culture is not a new issue to translation studies. On the contrary, it is a topic that has continued to develop, even beyond translation to include adaptation. Toury, Nida, Vermeer, Lefevere, Bassnett, and Schaeffner are just a few translation theorists who have addressed the implications of culture on the translation process already. This only goes to show that today, more than ever, “the concept of culture as a totality of knowledge, proficiency and perception is fundamental in our approach to translation.” (Snell-Hornby, 1988: 42).

Modern communication media, travel, and globalization have increased contact between cultures. However, these phenomena have neither neutralized cultural identity and ideology differences nor decreased the demand for translation. If anything, people are just as guarded, if not more than ever, when it comes to their national, and sometimes even regional identities—perhaps in an attempt to hold on to a “distinctiveness” in a world that seems to be shrinking with the ease brought on by telecommunication’s progress.

Despite the ubiquitous media, there remain clear distinctions between groups of people, apart from those of language. And the deep roots of culture come to the surface on

the most fundamental of levels. How a group of people views and interacts with their natural environment is one primary illustration of cultural difference. The way in which two groups of authors from differing cultures interpret and present *nature* in their writing confirms the necessity for attention to culture. At the same time, varying views of nature raise the issue of translating a genre such as *contemporary nature writing*.

Describing culture

Culture is a term that has come to cover a whole array of meanings. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on several useful and complementary descriptions.

First, Raymond Williams, specialist in language, culture and English-society, summarizes culture in terms of three categories of the word's usage:

- (i)... a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development...;
 - (ii) ... a particular way of life...
 - (iii) ... the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.
- (1983: 90)

From these categories one can retain that culture can be understood as collective social practices and the development of how one thinks or interprets various aspects of life.

Clifford Geertz speaks of culture as “webs of significance” which man has spun for himself and in which he lives (1973: 5). In this way, he presents culture as “what we need to comprehend a particular event, ritual, custom, idea, or whatever is insinuated as background information” (*Loc. cit.*, 11). This definition proposes that culture is a shared phenomenon; it can be referred to as a common approach to our understanding of experience. Such an understanding of background knowledge and points of reference permits a fuller awareness of the discourse on the part of the reader. A narrower, yet effective, definition is provided by translation theorist V. N. Komissarov, who refers to culture as common extralinguistic

knowledge within a linguistic community: knowledge about “[the] country, its geography, history, climate, its political, economic, social and cultural institutions, accepted morals, taboos and many other things.” (1991: 33-5). This last definition adds that culture includes a familiarity with the land and other aspects of life which show themselves influential in the study of contemporary nature writing as well.

These definitions are useful because they remind the translator of the virtually subconscious and ingrained aspects of culture for citizens. For the purposes of culture and translation, it is necessary to pinpoint discursive representations of culture and establish a method of cultural transfer into another cultural frame of reference. This is what I propose to do in regard to *nature* as a cultural phenomenon in English-Canadian and French writing.

On a practical level, eco-tourism writer Karen Berger (2001) gives a helpful example of varying cultural understandings in the area I will address when she writes:

Euro-style hiking and its American counterpart have evolved in two very different ways. While in America hiking is often synonymous with wilderness, in Europe hiking is a tamer, more civilized affair.

This citation demonstrates the different understandings one might have of *hiking*, due to cultural background. It follows that the views Canadians (as North Americans) and French have of nature may also vary. The clearest way in which to grasp contrasts in culture is to examine a corpus, as I do in the next chapters.

Background to nature writing

During a pragmatic translation course at the University of Ottawa I translated a French article on hiking into English, which gave me a good deal of food for thought. There were numerous cultural factors that posed challenges to my work and led to a second project,

on discourse and translation, comparing the text with a parallel American text and applying Vermeer's notion of *cultureme*. "A cultureme is a social phenomenon of a culture X that is regarded as relevant by the members of this culture, and when compared with a corresponding social phenomenon in a culture Y, is found to be specific to culture X." (Nord 1997: 34)¹. The analysis of the corresponding discourses evidenced that the function of *hiking* can differ considerably across the world.

As far as content was concerned, the texts resembled each other (Festraëts 2001; and Howe 2001); both articles discuss the early years of trailblazing by hiking enthusiasts and the foundational role they played in hiking, as it is known today. The writing style was also comparable, using several common literary devices, such as scenic description and the authors' personal exclamations, to include the reader in an outdoor escapade. While these support the parallelism of the articles, there were challenges to translation, not only in terms of lexical content, but also due to social and historical differences between populations. It became most evident that the articles were written in dissimilar contexts. One makes reference to *la marche*, *la promenade*, *la randonnée pédestre*, *la balade*, etc. illustrating a more leisurely approach to hiking, while the other speaks of a grueling activity in the *interior*. The article appealed to the French, presenting an escape from the city and an awakening of the senses. In contrast, the appeal for North Americans equated hiking with 'working out' or the challenge of wilderness survival. It seemed that the **function** of hiking was not quite the same, though there was some overlap, for example, in that both populations were solicited with fresh air and 'connecting' with nature.

Turning to Nord's use of "cultureme" to describe such discrepancies, I found however that though Nord's study is of interest, it offers few practical solutions for the

¹ Originally from Vermeer and Witte, 1990.

translator dealing with culture-related components of discourse. It is a fine start to attach the label of *cultureme* to a social behaviour such as hiking; however, where does one go from here? Nord does not say.

While the comparative study in question drew out similarities in writing style and content, it also revealed significant contrasts. Two things became clear: firstly, that Vermeer's notion of *cultureme*, clean-cut as it may seem in theory, is somewhat problematic in practice, at least as far as hiking is concerned. By this, I mean that, at a glance, hiking may appear to share a common **form** across the cultures, but upon closer examination there may well be different understandings of the activity. For example, in Europe, one is generally significantly closer, in geographic proximity, to the comfort and safety of civilization. Consequently, people prepare accordingly for the activity. This partly explains why Europeans might only carry snacks in their backpacks, anticipating dining in a restaurant in the vicinity. In the second place, the differing approaches to hiking led me to believe that culture plays an important role in how one views and experiences something as elemental as nature.

In the midst of the search for a parallel English text, references to a newly released book came up several times. Out of curiosity (and pleasure) I perused *Northern Wild* (D.R. Boyd, ed. 2001) and found it to be a rich compilation of some twenty Canadian writers from various parts of the country. This was my introduction to a literature becoming known as contemporary nature writing². Again, cultural aspects caught my eye, throughout the anthology... One's culture indeed does serve as a point-of-view, even of nature.

Nature writing strikes me as an interesting focus for the study because of the "universality" of the theme; it is a genre at the crossroads of literature, science, history,

² As referred to by BOYD, David R. (2001).

environmental studies, physical education, geography, and more. As I had found in the earlier comparative study of parallel texts on hiking, from France and Canada, there seemed to be distinctive approaches to nature, though they appear to expound a basic relationship: Man with nature. Yet, this writing can give a clear portrayal of culture in discourse in several ways.

It goes without saying that certain species of flora and fauna are more common to given regions, and for this reason, individual lexical equivalents will always be of concern to the translator. However, the translation of lexical items is not my focus. In examining culture on a macro level, rather than from a lexical point of view, I propose to compare and contrast cultural features in regard to how an author writes of his or her experience with nature. Variations in theme and style of writing will influence the potential for cross-cultural text composition.

To say that a text is “very French” or gives an impression of “Canadiana” will leave the translator guessing at creative ways to imitate mood. Therefore I find it much more useful to take a pragmatic and empirical approach looking at *topoi* representative of culture. By examining two corpora I will bring to light the common discursive elements of contemporary nature writing in both Canada and France. These analyses will be undertaken in the first and second chapters, respectively. The translator of nature writing can consider culture not only within the context of the source and target texts, but also in a broader scope, of how each culture views the natural world. In studying the *topoi* of contemporary nature writing it will become clear that general trends vary. This variance is not due to a great degree of differences in nature itself; in trees and trails, wind and water; rather, one’s

attention is called to the history, traditions and layout of the land contributing to the understanding and expression of many authors' contacts with nature.

Views of nature

So, though nature is essentially made up of the same general components in all cultures—earth, water, vegetation, wildlife, etc., each country has its own unique geography. In particular, the vastness of natural space and the population density in one's country can play a role in the culture's view of nature. A map of the *Grandes Randonnées* in France for example would show that while there are many areas for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy, the country does not really possess undiscovered territory. Historical landmarks protrude into the "natural" environment, due to the extended history of civilization in the country. But there is another noteworthy consideration regarding the view of nature. In *Histoire de l'environnement européen*, Robert Delort and François Walter address the expansion of the European concept of nature over history. They note that the understanding of *nature* has broadened in the present-day to include city-maintained parkland, beaches, mountains burrowed with tunnels and furrowed with mountain bike paths, public gardens, encaged animals, and so on (Delort and Walter, 2001: 20). This is typified by contemporary French nature writing in that authors are most frequently roaming groomed trails.

Conversely, since a large percentage of Canada's population hugs the border with the United States, this leaves a good deal of land mass virtually uninhabited. In this vast area to the north, landmarks are comparatively few and far between due to both the geographical size and the youth of colonized Canada. For the most part, Canadian authors prefer to write about more remote settings where nature remains as close to untouched as possible. While it

may seem that the Canadian wilderness has become an over publicized cliché, the writers tend to communicate personal experiences in nature. By researching topoï, I hope to demonstrate that nature writers also produce a discourse indicative of their country of origin's geography.

Another factor to consider is the author's experience in nature and how it is expressed. This raises the question: Is the author's view and experience of nature shaped by culture? For example, native spirituality in Canada has become popular in recent years and so Canadian writers would easily make native references or connections to nature in their writing.

The definition of the natural world, however, can vary, and does across cultures. As it would seem, Canadian authors consider nature to be landscape, which has remained untouched or minimally altered and in France, Fontainebleau and other established green spaces commonly set the scene for nature writing. The difference between one forest and other is significant in this regard: France's countryside, for the most part, has been developed to some extent. Though Canada's forests are under threats of environmental detriment, most landscape development takes place close to major cities. This is not the case in France, where the population is more evenly distributed across the country. Consequently, France possesses less undeveloped land. In addition, however, the concept of nature also differs. Landscape historian Alain Corbin comments in his book *L'homme dans le paysage* on the alterations made to nature in order to turn Fontainebleau, into a nature-like manmade park, according to the French aesthetic tastes of the Second Empire (2001: 162-3). Culture comes on the scene here, where there is human intervention in nature (Corbin 2001: 13), but the natural elements, in and of themselves, do not represent culture. This is necessary to point

out because though the components of nature are for the most part the same, Canadian nature writing is generally set in a more feral environment, and French nature writing in a more cultivated and picturesque one. The author's own personal cultural variables then enter the picture further as soon as the writer sets foot on the scene.

Contemporary nature writing

Nature-lovers may agree that the next best thing to gambolling out of doors is plunging into some good nature writing. A literature that is flourishing today, nature writing appeals even to those who rarely leave the confines of their urban surroundings and offers them an escape into a greener world. David Suzuki refers to nature writing as a genre that “demonstrate[s] a deep sense of connection with nature” and “provide[s] nourishment for our souls” (2001: viii). Canadian texts offer their readers a sort of virtual outdoor experience with personal and descriptive commentaries by their authors. Suzuki suggests that nature writing also meets a spiritual or emotional need in the reader that might otherwise be experienced in the outdoors. Modern urbanites who feel overwhelmed with the demands of work and the bombarding of materialism can find tranquility in reading. This idea will be expanded further on, in the study of the Canadian corpus topoi.

Some authors portray the natural world through rose-coloured glasses, intentionally or unintentionally, evoking pristine settings, with little to no mention of the ubiquitous Canadian mosquito, for example, or the masses of hikers on certain trails in France's Fontainebleau during “high-season”. Nature writer Chris Czajkowski suggests that in Canada people easily fall “in love with the romance of wilderness rather than the wilderness itself,” and then she presents the stark reality, “but it is also dirty, uncomfortable, itchy, and

cold, full of disinterested murder and terror, unnecessary cruelty, misery, and waste. To accept the wilderness you have to understand that both sides are valid, both are part of the intricate relationships that give us our water, air, all life-support systems, and sanity” (2001, 120). This true-to-life presentation of a rugged outdoor experience is most common to Canadian nature writing and represents ecosystems in which humankind has less dominion. Readers can join in an author’s experience, even if they would never set foot into the interior. This is only a portion of Canadian writing though, and for the rest, writers share the more “tame” side of nature, passing on their great discoveries, still reminding their audience that the living world relies on much more than human civilization.

Nevertheless, contemporary nature writing demonstrates resemblance between both populations. It can be described as a young literary genre in which the author shares experience with and reflection upon various elements of nature. Various styles are combined to entertain and educate the reader, including science, leisure, history, and geography. The texts share a literary style, as opposed to scientific reports or essays. One aspect of this genre is that it depicts the natural environment and the author’s contact with the outdoors. The writing style is generally emotional and the reader is easily drawn in by poignant sensory detail and the use of inclusive pronouns. Nature writing is comprised of non-fiction prose, with educational elements although often complemented with romantic flair. While nature writing is a genre of the past as well, ecological philosophers describe the contemporary genre as marking a new period of hope for the environment at the dawn of the millennium. It promotes environmental awareness related to socio-political issues and a “growing awareness of the interdependence of nature and culture”³. Finally, contemporary nature writing is also marked clearly with the author’s appreciation and love for nature. It is

³ http://www.erraticimpact.com/~ecologic/html/nature_writing.htm

common to a large majority of nature writers from both cultures to express the deep personal connection they attach to the outdoors.

Nature writing in France has much in common with Canadian nature writing, yet can be distinguished, among several characteristics, by its sensuous description. In his study of *L'homme dans le paysage*, Corbin explains that the modern trend for viewing nature involves all of the senses. The contemporary French view of the outdoors incorporates the individual's sense of touch, smell, and sound (2001: 9). French nature writing is also less distinguishable from travel writing than its Canadian counterpart. These aspects of novelty and others will be further discussed in the breakdown of *topoi* from the French corpus.

A tool for analysis

In order to assess if there are clear culture-based differences in how Canadians and French write about nature it is necessary to go beyond the two texts compared in the earlier project involving *culturemes*. A wider sample would be required. I would establish two corpora: one Canadian and one French. In the meantime, I considered matters of methodology.

Because a lexical analysis was too restrictive (I wanted to look at culture on a broader, discursive level), I considered using the notion of *topos*. The Greek notion of *topos* (plural *topoi*), denotes “a motif commonly found in literary works” (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms). *Le Dictionnaire d'analyse du discours* describes *topos* as “un élément d'une topique, une topique étant une heuristique, un art de collecter les informations et de faire émerger des arguments” (Charaudeau and Maingueneau 2002: 576). Both of these definitions contribute to the method of my research. François Rastier simplifies the notion,

distinguishing a topos from a theme in that its reappearance can be noted over the works of different authors (2001: 303).

I set out to distinguish a series of *topoi* commonly employed in the genre of nature writing as means to convey authors' cases to the reader. The *topoi* employed in the discourse development can be indicators of a culture's understanding of *nature* on the discursive level (as opposed to a lexicological level). The study of *topoi* will indicate common discourse premises across cultures as well. In this way a topos serves as a stereotype, in that it displays the shared representations underlying attitudes and behaviours (Charaudeau and Maingueneau 2002: 544).

Early in the reading of the texts I had collected for my research, I flagged what I considered potential themes. In the early stages, I admit being somewhat overzealous, but I was aware that as I went, I became more discerning. After going through this process with each of the texts I drew a chart of the potential *topoi*, making a list of page references and quotes under each topos heading. This process served as a sort of empirical data collection.

Objectives

My first objective was to find fundamental *topoi* representative of nature writing in each culture. In doing so, I hoped to obtain concrete examples which could serve as a basis for cultural comparison.

The second objective of the study was to compare and contrast the *topoi* of the two corpora so as to distinguish elements of culture. For example, many authors, both Canadian and French, make spiritual references in their writing. I hoped to look further, to see if the spiritual references of one corpus were distinguishable from the others.

Subsequently, my third and final objective was to demonstrate the greater suitability of contemporary nature writing to adaptation than to translation. Along these lines, a functionalist model was applied to establish a target text about a French region for a Canadian audience based on a series of texts from *Géo* magazine. A functional approach to interlingual and intercultural transfer proved to be the most adequate to reconcile contrasted topoï as exhibited in the corpus study.

Establishing the corpus

In compiling one Canadian and one French corpus, several sorts of texts were deliberately excluded, such as works of fiction. This seemed a logical decision, because works that tell a story with imaginary characters tended to be distinctly more imaginative than other discourse on nature. These texts often contained lengths of dialogue, which also led me to believe they formed a genre separate from nature writing. This decision was necessary because the corpus was otherwise split between fiction and a more documentary writing style. This downsized the corpora substantially and helped to delineate text-selection criteria. In addition, texts of the “adventure writing” genre were excluded from the corpus due to their substantial technical content and jargon (with regards to physical manoeuvring, specialized equipment, etc.); texts dealing with rock climbing, mountain biking, kayaking, and other activities were eliminated from the corpus. In fact, such texts focus very little on the author’s natural surroundings and more on the excitement of the activity in question.

Though many nature writers reach beyond the borders of their homeland, for simplicity’s sake and in order to limit variables for viewing culture in nature writing, this study only includes texts written in and about the author’s home country. This criterion also

made a distinction between *nature writing* and *travel writing*, which is considered a genre of its own: Travel writing is for the most part an author's commentary on a foreign expedition and the culture he encounters abroad.

The majority of both French and Canadian texts are written from a hiker's perspective. In fact, this perspective may well influence the authors' keen observances; they are less distracted by equipment and, at the same time, move at a slower pace, giving them time to survey the surroundings. I also decided to focus primarily on nature writing dating back to 1990. Making these restrictions produced a more condensed collection of texts that might all be considered *contemporary nature writing*.

There are two corpora involved in this project, each consisting of contemporary nature writing, from Canada and France respectively. In the area of translation memory (computer aids for translation) *parallel corpora* has come to refer to a bank of original texts stored side-by-side with their matching translation (also known as *bi-text*). The meaning that will be employed in this study, however, refers only to original language texts.

I use the term *parallel corpora* to refer to two compilations of comparable original-language texts; an English-Canadian corpus and a European French corpus. These texts are considered "parallel" as they share similar topics and serve similar groups of fresh-air enthusiast readers. In the hope of avoiding confusion, some will differentiate between parallel corpora and parallel texts. However, because this study makes use of two collections of texts there is no reason to complicate the matter by avoiding the proper term *corpora*. As Christina Schaeffner defines, "Parallel texts... are L2 and L1 texts of equal informativity which have been produced in more or less identical communicative situations" (1998: 83-90). In a study by John Laffling in the early 90s, it was found that "such independently

produced texts display a very high degree of similarity” (in Lichnerowicz, ed. 1994: 67). It only makes sense to define and clarify this notion before going further so as to set a foundation for comparability.

Texts of both corpora are aimed primarily at an audience of nature-lovers with active lifestyles. The publisher of *Le bonheur en marchant* states that the proposed readership for Yves Paccalet’s book starts with the millions of walkers and hikers using France’s countryside trails⁴. By the same token, Canadian nature writing addresses primarily a Canadian readership interested in outdoor pursuits and healthy living.

There are also noteworthy differences that arise, which can often be attributed to culture; for these some tolerance must be granted because cultural differences make it virtually impossible to attest to two readerships being “the same”. One such difference is illustrated by several French texts which are presented almost as local travel writing. By this, I am referring to the inclusion of maps and directions, or listings of addresses and telephone numbers for restaurants and accommodation following the article itself. When this is compared against the Canadian corpus it becomes evident that the function of the writing is essentially different: the French facilitate the adventures of their compatriots to the region in question whereas the Canadian foster an overall interest in and conscientiousness toward nature, wherever the reader happens to live. Some Canadian texts, however, do include maps. This may indicate a contrast of interest from outdoor enthusiast populations. These reasons give rise to the argument that nature writing would be better suited to adaptation than to translation.

⁴ www.editions-jclattes.fr/edlattes

Factors involved in the transfer of nature writing

Because translators always translate with an audience in mind (either consciously or unconsciously), I wondered what audience might be interested in the translation of nature writing. At first glance, it may seem nonsensical to translate local nature writing for a foreign audience, considering the wide success and availability of travel writing. Travel tales abound in French as well as Canadian bookstores. So what could a translation of a “native’s” experience add? It could go beyond touring, or presenting the traveller’s experience, in the sense that the *foreign* or *other’s* reality would be central. Because nature writing would in many ways become travel writing as it is translated for a foreign audience one must consider whether it could serve a unique purpose in relation to travel writing about the foreign country.

Consideration should also be given to the modern efficiency of travel and increasing popularity of organized theme trips. By theme trips I mean gastronomic cycling-tours of Provence or caribou tracking and sleeping in tee-pees in Canada’s wilderness; the sorts of travel packages geared to foreign vacationers. Here some light is shed on the potential appeal of travel writing with a foreign spirit. In the case of theme trips, locals are generally hired to escort foreigners—this is part of the trip’s charm; and this is precisely the foreign flavour travellers are interested in. Michael Cronin, describes “the beauty of accent” as having “the exotic thrill of difference without... the discomfort of incomprehension” (2000: 11). Tour guides who speak the language of the tourist group are necessary, but an added charm is offered by a local who speaks the foreign language (the language of the visitors). One can therefore anticipate an audience for the adaptation of contemporary nature writing on this basis: the inhabitant’s experience communicates his own culture first hand. It

introduces *other* ways of thinking and doing in an authentic manner. The travel writer has trouble imitating this local flavour, the spirit of the foreign culture, because though he knows much about the foreign land it is not his home. Travel writing can express the foreign nature experience in the spirit of the author's own culture. For this reason, the translation of local nature writing could satisfy interests in nature and travel from the viewpoint of another culture.

It is worth mentioning that although a foreign *accent* may be charming, some of the content of the foreign interlocutor's discourse may pose unforeseen cultural hurdles to the translator. For instance, one text from *Géo* mentions on several occasions the great number of tourists that flock to the Périgord region (Luneau 2002: 73, 74, 83). While the popularity of the various outdoor pursuits does bear witness to the beauty of the area, this information would undermine the purpose of a target text aimed at attracting Canadian nature aficionados. This is an example of cultural contrast. Canadian nature writing differs in its promotion of the outdoors, associating natural beauty with undisclosed destinations that are off the beaten path. The authors' difference of purpose provides a basis for considering the appropriateness of a functionalist approach to intercultural transfer.

CHAPTER 1

TOPOÏ IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN NATURE WRITING

Lumberjacks, snow, wolves, log cabins, skidoos, moose, tee-pees, canoes; the list of Canadian clichés linked to nature could go on and on. All of these do hold an element of truth for the country's heritage and culture. In turn, such elements contribute to the cultural backgrounds of Canadian authors who write about the outdoors.

The corpus of contemporary Canadian nature writing used for this study is drawn in large part from an anthology entitled *Northern Wild* (Edited by David R. Boyd, 2001). Boyd assembled works from nature writers publishing in Canadian magazines such as *Equinox*, *Nature Canada*, and *Up Here*. He also includes excerpts and essays from novels authored by Canadian writers. His choices of texts represent the “diversity of Canadian ecosystems” by authors from all corners of the country (Boyd 2001: 5). This work is a selection of Canadian texts dated mostly from the 1990s, written about various aspects of nature in Canada. To complement and enlarge the corpus I added several texts from magazines such as *Explore* (“Canada’s outdoor adventure magazine”) and *Canadian Geographic*. (The Royal Canadian Geographical Society publishes *Canadian Geographic*, with the focus of “imparting a broader knowledge and deeper appreciation of Canada—its people and places, its national and cultural heritage and its environmental, social and economic challenges” (www.rcgs.org/cip.index.cfm/main,42,en)).

Delimiting the corpus to Canadian literature meant the exclusion of American works such as those in the anthology *Soul of Nature Essays: Celebrating the Spirit of the Earth* (Edited by Michael Tobias and Georgianne Cowan, 1996), which also uses a highly

academic register and has a more global than local focus. Along the same lines, politically focused and scientific writing was also excluded because it would increase the number of variables involved in the study— using more academic language and structure. This helped to keep the focus of the corpus on the personal and literary style common to contemporary nature writing. Farley Mowat's work, while both well known and appreciated worldwide, did not find a place in the corpus due to publication date. His recent work, *Walking on the Land* (2000), was left out because of its topic and style; it is more a report of his interactions with the Inuit people and a history of their civilization. This book could have been added to the corpus, but in the end was not because though interesting and descriptive, it focuses primarily on human relationships.

This relatively young literary genre serves as an interesting case for study. The intent of this chapter is to take a closer look at topoï in Canadian nature writing so as to recognize how Canadian culture is expressed in the texts.

Childhood

Frequently, Canadian authors of nature writing make reference to their childhood in their writing. At times, this constitutes a brief glimpse into the author's past. On other occasions the author recounts an entire episode fixed in his memory. In virtually all instances however, there is a subtle, if not obvious illustration of the impact childhood experience has on later life. One such example can be found in Brian Payton's text "Grizzlies in the Mist":

From the time I was a child, popular culture has burned two competing images of the grizzly into my subconscious; the Disneyfied clown of the forest and the relentless killing machine that stalks the night. (Payton 2001: 36)

There is a misinformed message of duplicity in popular culture that is being brought to the reader's attention. Payton does not go into detailing early Disney cartoons but he does communicate the influence of media, even at an early age, in how nature is perceived. Evidently, the choice of words such as "burned", "clown", and "killing machine" express the opinion of the interviewee who further on shares how he has "come to unlearn all that and get a glimpse of who these creatures really are." (*Ibid.*, 36). There is a stark contrast which comes to the fore through this example: The impressions many people have of bears is misinformed and quite possibly the root of many misunderstandings between man and nature. (A secondary theme of misconceptions based on a lack of experience is also evident here). Payton recalls the impressionable disposition he had as a child shedding light on the truth he discovered through experience with the animals.

Similarly, nature writer Sid Marty makes quick reference to his early interest in chinook winds. He writes,

When I was a boy, a Montana uncle told me soberly that the wind was heated up by friction as it slid over the tops of the mountains. It seemed a reasonable explanation to my credulous ears back then. Now, however, I know that the Chinook is a foehn-type wind, a moving mass of air whose temperature is warmed in passing over an incline, though not quite as described by my uncle. (Marty 2001: 54).

While most of Marty's text centres around climatology, he supports the main theme with a variety of complementary details. In this brief example, the reader is given a glimpse of the author's early interest in natural phenomena and the clearer understanding he developed through his studies. Just as Payton's experience led him to study bears, here too the reader can see that Marty has been led to a more profound understanding of the chinook.

On other occasions, references are of a more nostalgic nature. Such examples display the strong connection many Canadians have with nature, beginning early in childhood, and

the lasting impact it has over their lives. As an adult, Sharon Butala writes, "I longed to see a field of wild prairie lilies as I had in my childhood in the north, but I never have, not even a single flower growing wild in the grass" (2001: 85-6). This is a magical childhood moment engrained in the author's mind. The reader can find Butala's sense of dreaminess, and even later dismay, associated with this memory. Later in her text, she again harks back to memories of her childhood, but this time, she lingers a little longer with more description:

Memories of my childhood came back to me: playing in the bush with my friends, with my sisters and cousins in our grandmother's garden, skating on frozen sloughs in winter till the pain from the cold became so bad even we kids couldn't stand it anymore and went home, the winter we had built a snow fort that lasted for months as we added on and made it more and more substantial so that it stood well into spring. I felt like a child again, had fleeting moments when I remembered how wonderful the world itself had once seemed... (*Loc. cit.*,: 88)

Although this is a memory from the author's childhood, many Canadians would share similar experiences of skating and building snow forts and surviving long cold winters before the arrival of spring. In this regard, Butala's writing, which is personal and experiential, conveys Canadian culture in a very natural style. This personal approach also illustrates the close ties Butala has had with the outdoors since childhood.

Other Canadian nature writers, such as Heather Menzies, share this tendency as well. "I walk between the trees I helped to plant as a girl. Every spring, beginning when I was eight, we planted trees here," she records (*Ibid.*, 167-8). And she extends, over 7 pages, the bond she now experiences with the trees and land she came to know so well as a child. Often, in these cases, the reader can detect the force behind the author's childhood relationship with nature and the direct bearing it has had on their focus.

It is similar with Canadian nature writer Pierre Béland, who expresses the roots of his history with whales. He is a whale watcher to the heart. In his text, "Book of the Dead" he notes:

I had had some exposure to belugas when I was a child drifting through the summer holidays... I remember vividly how my mother would call to me, excitedly pointing at some inconspicuous specks out there on the majestic river. *Do you see them? Do you see them?* ... I had become blasé about her constant wonderments, but being a respectful child, I would take a look at the oceanlike expanse of water... I would look at her, thinking of the innumerable everyday things that she kept pointing out to me, whales being only one of them. (2001: 214-5)

This was the response of a boy who since has become a scientist committed to saving belugas. It is clear that the experience in childhood has had a powerful impact on the author, even if at a young age he was not receptive to his mother's admiration.

Clearly, place is often given in nature writing to the author's childhood memories with the outdoors. Whether the episodes were viewed as beneficial, harmful or inaccurate, they are an integral part of the author's development. The change in attitude or vision that comes after childhood takes focus as well—such as the truth Payton learned about the grizzlies, or the connection Menzies has with the trees today after the chore of planting them years earlier. It is evident that the authors' experiences as children both played an important introductory role in their views of nature today and stimulated further investigation and a love for nature. Shining through in all of these illustrations is the influence of childhood experience on the development of the bond between the Canadian authors and nature.

Eco-awareness to instigate change

David Boyd, editor of *Northern Wild* (an anthology of Canadian nature writing), also has fond outdoor childhood memories. He asserts that the idea to bring together such a compilation was planted already at a young age, as he enjoyed “evenings spent poking around local neighbourhood parks, weekends at [his] uncle’s prairie farm, and summer holidays exploring the Rocky Mountains” (2001: 1). While Boyd does applaud excellent nature writing, his purpose is not merely to entertain the reader. His higher intention is to plead with the readership to wake up to the reality of Canada’s depleting wilderness and to persuade them to “change [their] attitudes and actions” (12).

Canadian nature writer and scientist Pierre Béland gives an account of his conversation with the Rivière-du-Loup ferry helmsman, making his point all the more emphatic:

He knows that the water flowing by his ship comes mostly from the Great Lakes and from the rivers that drain the farmlands and industrial areas of Québec. Like other members of the crew, he is alarmed. He tells me that these days, many fishermen no longer dare to eat some of the fish they catch. But the whales still do, he says, looking at me. *How could they know that the fish are chemically tainted? Even if they could tell that the fish are no good, what else would they eat?* The crustaceans, worms, and organic particles stirred up from the mud by the ferry are contaminated, too. Belugas do not have access to sterilized and toxic-free canned food from the store, although the helmsman is quite sure that the whales often do find empty cans down at the bottom of the river . . . (2001: 220)

Such a conversation speaks volumes to the reader. It is the author’s personal experience, told in a down-to-earth manner, which makes the content all the more clear to the audience. In addition, Béland’s thoughts in italics and the helmsman’s comment on finding debris from civilization in the water’s depths are remarks that ring of a need for change to be instigated.

By keeping his comments personal, Béland avoids questioning the reader directly. In turn, through the use of ellipsis he leaves the comments as food for thought. He carries on writing about his whale adventures, finally ending on a disdainful note, speaking personally again:

I am in no mood to say anything. I don't even have to listen: I know what [the captain] is going to tell me. He has just found a dead whale in the river, and he is towing it to shore. I will be there in less than an hour. And back on the road to the necropsy room in less than two, with the senseless guilt that comes from driving with a dead whale behind me. (Béland 2001: 222).

This very personal and sobering finale can be taken as more than merely an outlet for Béland's discouragement.

Other nature writers follow a similar model; communicating the serious condition of what is really happening in the Canadian wild. Even if the reader has no direct involvement in the degradation or destruction of plant or animal life, he could be moved to take action after reading such reports. Brian Payton writes about his experience meeting bears in the Khutzeymateen Grizzly Bear Sanctuary for Canadian Geographic:

"Now, can you imagine shooting [a grizzly] for a lousy trophy?" Ellison's rhetorical question hangs in the air like an insult. The same government that protects the 60 grizzlies in this estuary has been sanctioning the killing of five times as many annually throughout the province. Some 300 more are victims of poaching. Of those, many are killed only for their gallbladders and paws, which end up in Oriental apothecaries and in restaurants in Vancouver and around the world. (Payton 2001: 41)

Payton's use of facts and figures speaks volumes on the exploitation of grizzlies in British Columbia. In this case, the story ends on an up beat though, for Payton announces, "last December, 68 biologists called for a 10-year moratorium on grizzly hunting in B.C. to allow for long-term population studies." (44). Nevertheless, the reader is shown the responsibility taken by some to make a difference in the matter before it was irreversible.

Canadian authors often provide the reader with an educated view of the complex interconnectedness of the ecosystem. The authors seem to be aiming at educating the readership; so that an understanding of nature and the implications of individual behaviour will motivate their actions. Kevin van Tighem explains the disillusionment he and his wife experienced when they bought a house outside the city:

All that first summer I watched over the back fence as a developer eradicated one square mile of foothill landscape. As summer progressed, heavy equipment rebuilt it into a generic suburb that might have been anywhere in the western world: a placeless colony for domesticated humans. The northwest-southeast glacial scours vanished; branching, interlinked roadways replaced them. Bulldozers and earth-movers recontoured and dammed the coulee to make little ponds and terraces. The swales that once spilled spring runoff into the coulee vanished overnight. The new landscape had a new hydrology, buried in sewer pipes. Exotic shrubs and lawns of tame bluegrass replaced the native fescue, wheatgrass, silverberry, and pasture sage. (Van Tighem 2001: 260)

At first glance, Van Tighem appears a victim of the wicked developers; however, he is not hoping to receive pity from his readers. Rather, he shares his responsibility in the events. “I felt as if I had watched helplessly as vandals defaced my home—and then, as one turned, seen that he wore my face” (*Ibid.*, 261). Such convicting words bring glaring truth to the eyes of the reader: The destruction of Canadian landscape happens while many Canadians allow it to. This is the thrust of Van Tighem’s argument.

Interestingly, by taking personal responsibility Van Tighem shares the responsibility. By doing so, the reader is invited to reflect upon environmental destruction. Terry Glavin, author of “Hundreds of Little Jonahs”, shares the changes of the Byrne Creek ecosystem to reveal how he came to acknowledge his own personal involvement in its collapse. He retells tracing a stream of foamy water to its source up a nearby street: “It was just a man innocently washing his car in his driveway, killing fish.” (Glavin 2001: 198). Yes, ignorance is bliss;

this is exactly the mindset from which Glavin wakes his audience. Like van Tighem, he too shares in the responsibility. He concludes:

So it is not good enough to say it was the government, the greedy fishermen, the seiners and the gillnetters and the trollers and the trawlers and the Indians and the poachers, or the seals, or the multinational fishing companies, or the forest companies or the greenhouse effect. I killed Byrne Creek. Who didn't? (Glavin 2002: 202)

Here, Glavin takes responsibility and then immediately throws the issue out into the open with a rhetorical question. This *who didn't?* spreads responsibility to virtually the entire soap-using population and beyond, leaving the reader to consider his contribution to ecological breakdown. This is consistent with the topos of ecological education to instigate change.

Other authors, like John Theberge, speak of the connection man can experience with an animal. Time with animals in the wild gives humans a different perspective on their own role in nature. At the same time, such accounts, which are often personal, speak to the reader as an individual, calling one to question one's own contribution in a wildlife issue. Theberge has this reflective aspect in his writing when he describes his encounter with a wolf during a research project:

Locked in neural connections behind those eyes were ecological secrets we no longer remember, shared with the pines... and the beavers.... As a summit predator, the wolf ties species together, binds them into a marvellous functioning whole, provides the ecosystem glue... Burning in those amber eyes, too, were deep and unsettling questions. They were about the capacity to hate another species, about persecution and population genocide. They asked what kind of future we were creating for wolves and wilderness, indeed for species, ecosystems, the very biosphere itself. They were embarrassing questions; they made us ashamed. They brought tears to our eyes, changed the buoyancy of success into poignancy of self-recrimination. (Theberge 2001: 122-3)

This intimate account of Theberge's contact with one wolf in particular is extremely detailed in sentiment. He goes beyond educating the reader on the necessary role of the wolf in the ecosystem. Passages like this transport the reader into the mind of the creature and yield an emotional connection between them. Such examples undoubtedly heighten sensitivity towards human intervention with animals in the wild, putting emphasis on the defencelessness of even wolves before man.

Nature writers are also encouraging their audiences to take action without instilling guilt. Glavin propagates a love for the intricacies of the natural world. He applauds individual efforts that might lead to even the slightest mending of environmental conditions. The "little things", he says, are the ones that "make a difference, in the long run. It is individuals, and small groups of people, working on local initiatives, that end up making a difference" (Glavin 2001: 200). Words like these should give every reader a nudge to get involved. This is precisely what many Canadian nature writers are pushing for: putting awareness into action.

Wisdom in nature

A third theme recurring in nature writing concerns the insight man has to gain from the natural world. Some authors go into describing the intricacies of eco-systems and the harmony and balance that is visible in the untouched environment. Other authors forthrightly address modern-day values and beg the question: Have urbanites lost touch with the natural environment? But no matter how the writers refer to the inherent interdependence of flora and fauna they are all giving precedence to nature appreciation and

suggesting that man has much to gain by understanding as well as respecting the natural order of things.

Des Kennedy tells the reader the truth about slugs. Himself guilty of prejudicially considering these creatures “obscene” he considers taking a closer look. He begins his essay admitting his earlier ignorance, “I had met the nation’s biggest slug but little understood how much it had to teach me” (Kennedy 2001: 143). This prepares the reader to hear what Kennedy has to say in the pages that follow. He shares his findings:

I began to realize that these were forest slugs; I saw them in the dark conifer woods all about. Undoubtedly they’ve been here since the last ice age, part of the forest ecology, so who am I to slaughter them for my own purposes? Glancing through a magazine one day, I was alarmed to discover that the banana slug is not much of a garden pest at all. The real damage is worked by a half-dozen other species... Colossally ignorant, I’d been impaling benign natives, blaming them for the predations of distant relatives. (*Loc. cit.* 2001: 143-4)

Here again, one can see the author putting himself on display as the fool, calling himself “colossally ignorant”. This is not a direct confrontation of reader. By taking this approach, he nonetheless draws the reader in to gain a more conscientious comprehension of the great outdoors. For how many have an appreciation for the contributing role of the slug in a balanced garden community? Kennedy does not end here though. He goes a step beyond the slug’s role and looks at the role he, as a slug-killer, has taken in this chain. Clearly his choice of verbs, describing his “impaling” and “blaming” the slugs, draws attention to his acting violently and in ignorance. At the same time, he is questioning the authority of humans to intervene in the distinct harmony of the ecosystem.

Along these lines, Jamie Bastedo tells the truth about mosquitoes. In his text on bug protection he does not go into great detail on the importance of the mosquito to nature’s

equilibrium, but he does continue to unveil the pathetic fragility of those who plead for municipal mosquito extermination. The argument that comes across is as follows:

The whole city is sprayed with poison by ground and air crews... Some mosquitoes and all their predators are killed; infant birth defects and allergies increase; the chemical companies show a wonderfully healthy profit; and all bodies of water soon become perfect, predator-free mosquito incubators so that even more chemical poison can be sold to the suffering and gullible taxpayers the next year. (2001: 246)

Here it is not a case of proving the mosquito's respectable place in the whole. Instead, Bastedo identifies the nonsensical priorities of modern city dwellers: immediate comfort at any cost. He ridicules man's plans to exterminate the insects. And finally, he enlightens the audience with a glimpse at the final outcome of one northern community's bug-war:

The pro-spraying lobby won. But after a few springs of spraying yielded nothing but inconclusive results and large bills to the taxpayers (one estimate came to fifty cents per dead bug), the city decided to sell off its spraying arsenal and scrap the whole program. The wiser among councillors now knew that spraying insecticide to kill bugs in the subarctic is like trying to subdue a volcano with a garden hose. (*Loc. cit.* 2001: 247)

After such failure civilized man is cut down to size and the mighty mosquito is left standing tall. The outcome: Man and mosquito shall live together in perfect harmony.

Reality

In this regard, Canadian nature writing is often realistic. Of course, occasionally there are sentimental and nostalgic texts included under the banner of nature writing, which can emphasize the bright and beautiful and downplay the dark and dismal side of nature. On the whole, however, nature writers put pen to paper with matter-of-fact accounts of the outdoors. This is a method other types of writing that address the outdoors do not dare to take. In the

Ontario Parks brochure, for instance, there is no mention made of *bug season* until the autumn section, when Provincial parks can boast “bug-free fun” and celebrate that “mosquitoes and black flies have packed their bags for another season” (Ontario Parks Guide 2001: 15). Oddly enough, the guide only mentions insects in the preceding sections on spring and summer, by referring dreamily to “waterbugs danc[ing] around [the] canoe” (*Loc. cit.*, 2001: 13). Generally, nature writers do not avoid mention of “squadrons of deer flies” (Theberge 2001: 124) and “biting insects [that] buzz through the air in squadron strength through much of the hiking season” (Howe 2001: 43). Rather, these essayists relish in sharing humorous antidotes such as “[smoking] a Ritmeester cigar...to fend off mosquitoes” (Carpenter 2001: 177). This genuine approach to describing the outdoor experience is unlike the *dreamy* images presented in tourism publications, which fail to mention the ubiquitous and often pesky insects, so as not to scare off campers. By considering the contrast between the two types of writing it becomes evident that while their target audiences may not differ significantly the purpose of the discourses is clearly dissimilar. Ontario Parks is offering their campsites for rent while nature writers are giving readers a more genuine taste of the outdoors. Wilderness dweller Chris Czajkowski reports,

Nature is fascinating, beautiful, and uplifting to the soul. It is exciting, exquisite, and miraculous. But it is also dirty, uncomfortable, itchy, and cold, full of disinterested murder and terror, unnecessary cruelty, misery, and waste. (2001: 120)

This *full picture* of nature is often portrayed in contemporary Canadian nature writing. It shows an appreciation for the purposeful place of every plant and creature in the wilderness as a whole and wakens the reader from any possible delusion.

Another author who adopts this approach is nature writer Mark Hume. He goes to great lengths to describe the marvellous intricacies of ecosystems and the natural cycle found therein, which man can often misunderstand.

Snowshoe hares sustain many predators, including wolves, foxes, cougars, lynx, hawks, and owls. In a single winter up to 40 percent of the hare population is eaten by its hunters. Hares are prolific breeders, but their population rises and falls in a six-to-twelve-year cycle. At one time lynx were blamed for declines in snowshoe hare numbers, but studies have shown that the availability of food is a more important factor. Too many hares will overgraze their habitat, leading to starvation and a crash in the population. Not surprisingly, when snowshoe hare populations drop, lynx numbers decline soon afterwards. Over time the vegetation recovers, the hare population builds, and there is food again for the predators. It may be that ancient humans were once caught up in a similar rhythm, but now when a game or fish population declines, the number of people just keeps on increasing. (2001: 267)

The reader can identify the well-researched and educated style Hume employs to gain credibility. He presents a cycle in his description, educating his audience on the role of each creature, explaining the balance that continues to exist between predator and prey, in both the rise and the decline of the hare population. He describes this ecosystem independent of human hunters. Ending the paragraph though, he subtly contrasts the disproportion of the human population with the oscillation of animal populations. This is a theme that returns in Canadian nature writing: Decline in numbers of a species is not necessarily reason for panic; it can be part of a natural cycle, which will rise again.

One author warns of the risk of going to extremes with the preservation of wildlife at all costs. Wade Davis includes an excerpt from the *New Age Journal* which reads:

[There] is an advertisement for post cards featuring the faces of endangered species, prominent among them the harp seal. There are 5 million harp seals in the eastern Arctic, and their numbers have never been higher in this century. There are 7 million ringed seals, and it is upon this species that the Inuit have traditionally relied.

When in 1983 the Europeans banned the import of sealskins, they did not distinguish one species from the other, and Inuit families on Baffin Island saw their *per capita* annual income drop from \$16,000 to nothing. Simon asks, "How can they love a seal more than a human being?" (2001: 36)

The fact that Davis chooses to include such information in his text is telling of his compassion for people as well as animals. He is drawing attention to the importance of being correctly informed. At the same time, he is bringing up a compelling question: is it possible to go too far with environmental protection?

To add to the theme of the balance found in the natural order, examples from aboriginal culture are also recurrent. Interesting to note is that references to aboriginal ways speak of the harmony they have maintained with nature and the efficacy of this relationship. One author writes,

It appeared to me that the Crees, for example, developed the culture they developed because it was the best fit between themselves and the land. And it was the *land* that taught them that. They adapted to the land, and not the other way around as we Europeans so stupidly did, trying to force this arid western land to be, as government propaganda had for seventy-five years and more put it, "the breadbasket of the world." (Butala 2001:91)

Here again, the reader sees that the author can strike a deeper cord by including herself in the culpable group. Canadian nature writers do not frown upon aboriginal hunting and fishing, nor do they set out to transform the population into vegetarians. They pay tribute to a *simple* way of life that blends with nature. They commend their ways instead, and even draw attention to the wisdom they display in their conscientiousness towards the wilderness. Clearly, this theme has the purpose of teaching that the modern world has lost the harmony that the Aboriginals know and share with their natural environment. Nature writers are cutting down to size wildlife mismanagement and exploitation, announcing that the first step

towards reacquainting the modern world with the natural one is a lesson in humility (*Loc. cit.*, 2001: 97).

Mention of Canada's native peoples is frequent in nature writing. Such examples detail age-old Inuit customs, shedding light on their profound understanding of nature and the delicate cycle of which they are a part. Ethnobotanist Wade Davis writes of the Inuit hunting tradition:

When he killed his first bear at nine, with a harpoon made for him the night before by a favourite uncle, he could not stop smiling. His first seal was taken when he was still too small to lift it from the ice. But he knew that the animal had chosen to die, betrayed by its thirst for fresh water. So he followed his uncle's teachings and dripped fresh water into its mouth to placate its spirit. If animals are not properly treated, they will not allow themselves to [be] taken. But if they are not hunted, the Inuit believe, they will suffer, and their numbers will decrease. Thus the hunt is a reflection of balance, a measure of the interdependence of all life in the Arctic... (2001: 21)

This is a picture of the balance and harmony that the Inuit have known for years—part of what Davis calls “the genius of the Inuit”. It is part of a people who “did not endure the cold, they took advantage of it” (Davis 2001: 32-3). In presenting this theme, the authors are giving Canada an outlook of the harmony, which can and should exist between man and nature. The examples of Canadian communities that have survived for centuries serve as models to follow in this discourse genre. But most of all, these excerpts celebrate the intricacies found in the wild, while warning humans to step back into their place in the ecosystem in order to preserve this harmony.

Aboriginal peoples

The previous examples are not however the only way Aboriginal peoples are mentioned. In fact, Canadian nature writing contains frequent references to aboriginal legends and spirituality. This is another aspect that gives Canadian texts a flavour of their own, the underlying spiritual thread that weaves its way through texts.

Canada's Aboriginal peoples serve as role models for a sustainable and harmonious way of life with the natural environment. Various authors make reference not only to their way of life, but also to their outlook on the natural world. Beth Brant is one such writer. In her text *Prayer* she depicts a cherished relationship with the Great Blue Heron. Just as Butala writes of the humility modern man has to learn, Brant writes, "I am humble and small in your presence, Great Blue" (2001: 17), speaking of the sensation of being in proximity with the great bird. Going further, she writes, "I am blessed to come onto your territory and visit with you. You have taught me that it is possible to soar without benefit of wings...that faith can be as tangible as a bundle of feathers that lie on my altar." (2001: 17). Brant's reverent style of addressing the heron is typical of aboriginal discourse on nature. In the Six Nations Thanksgiving Address, for example, the "Animal life" all over the world is thanked, to which is added "they have many things to teach us as people" (Stokes and Kanawahienton 1993). The relationship Canada's native peoples have with nature has had a fundamental influence on many of the country's contemporary nature writers and the evidence is found in their writings.

Dreams

Likewise, the ancient importance of dreams to Aboriginals also comes through time and again in this genre. The reader learns that the heron sojourns in Brant's dreams (2001: 18) and the Beaver Indian hunters are "guided by their dreams to their kill" (Butala 2001: 93-4). Hume dreams of the fish he will catch (2001: 270) and Butala recounts how vivid her own dreams became when she moved to the country (2001: 92). The dreams they write about testify to the intensity of dreaming one can experience in natural surroundings. They describe a clear oneness with nature. And all of them display a regard for the importance of dreams to the Aboriginal people. Sharon Butala writes,

Aboriginal people around the world have nontechnological cultures and live in and by Nature—or at least once did...--and these cultures had developed the concept of dreamtime and took dreaming very seriously... surely it was Nature which, ... taught, allowed, gave them dreams as an instrument of knowledge. (2001: 96)

Commending them for the wisdom they have gained from listening to nature, she also exalts *Nature* by capitalizing it. In the same way, "white man" is derided for considering itself the omniscient source of knowledge. As nature is treasured, the natives are praised for the way in which they look up to it and live in harmony with it. This is all the more confirmed when Butala writes,

I am suggesting that these ways in which such a closeness affects us, from dreams to more subtle and less describable phenomena, are real, and that... we might try to shift our thinking in this direction so that we stop blithely improving the natural world around us, and begin to learn, as Aboriginal people have, what Nature in her subtle but powerful manner has to teach us about how to live. (2001: 97)

In excerpts such as this one, not only are modern ways affronted, but aboriginal tradition is raised high. This seems to be a trend, responding to the years of mistreatment and

victimization these people were put through in the past. Add to this the gravity of multiple threats to Canadian forests and wildlife. The writer remarks on the effectiveness of the native way of life; this way of life includes a greater significance given to dreams.

Canadian nature writers are not only writing of dreams of serenity and harmony in nature though. Brian Payton writes of dreams to awaken the reader to media representations of nature that perhaps explain all-too-well what has gone wrong:

I dreamt I was walking in the wilderness and saw something, or someone, sitting on a log in the distance. It had its back to me, but I knew it was a grizzly. It was wearing tattered overalls and was only slightly furrer than a hairy man. It turned around and acknowledged me with a grunt reminiscent of human speech. As I approached, I saw that it held a magazine in its handlike paws. It was trying to sound out the words as it squinted through old, broken spectacles. I sat down next to it and taught it how to read.
(2001: 36)

This recount of a Walt Disney clip is an image that supports the claim that many people have misconceptions about wild animals. The author is not describing his dream as an illustration of a personal spiritual experience. He does use this vision of the cartoon to put on display one of two ways in which man approaches a relationship with “wild” animals. This depiction of man teaching a bear to be “civilized” is amusing, yet it also compels the reader to consider who is adapting: man or animal. Indeed if nature writing on the whole is taken into consideration, this image depicts man as naïve and arrogant—taking it upon himself to bring nature up to his sophistication. Mention of dreams, and their influence and power recurs in Canadian nature writing in a manner that elevates the nation’s Aboriginals.

Legends

Another valued aspect of aboriginal culture that appears in these sorts of texts is the legend. Many Westerners may be unfamiliar with the extent to which legends are integrated in indigenous culture; however, in line with suggesting a return to the natural way of doing things, Canadian authors offer a good sampling of legends touching a variety of subjects. In Briony Penn's account of her favourite berry patch, for example, she shares the Chilcotin legend of the Salmonberry:

Raven once stole the only Salmonberries on earth from a sacred patch guarded by the people. He laughed so loud, thinking himself clever to steal them, that the berries all fell from his mouth and scattered over the land, springing up as new bushes wherever they fell (2001: 45).

Retelling this legend enriches the text with a cultural component and creatively illustrates the haphazard arrangement of the berry bushes. Penn cites the source of the legend as well, which demonstrates the importance of the legend to Canadian heritage. Brief interjections of legends make it apparent that Aboriginals are given high regard in the eyes of nature writers.

On other occasions, entire texts are built around legends. This is the case of Sid Marty's writing on the Creator Wind. He goes into great detail about the important role fulfilled by wind, particularly the chinook wind in the Prairies. He describes the wind's character, often personifying it, and justifying this by the wind's power. Marty refers to the wind as a great entity from the beginning of his text, recounting the wind's legacy:

The tribes living in Chinook Country had their own names for the wind. To the North Peigan, for example, it was *'aisiksop'u*, the oily wind, though according to two white authors who lived with the Peigan in early Montana, it was known there as the "Black Wind." Either description seems credible: the wind first turned the ground greasy with mud and slush, but might later turn the air black with dust. The Peigan or Piikani, my closest Indian neighbours, seemed to attribute the wind to the work of the Blackfoot trickster-creator

figure Napi, or Old Man. The expression was "*Napiua aisiksopumstau*"—the Old Man makes the oily wind. (2001: 60)

This rather factual account of the Blackfoot legend lends a contrast to Penn's usual style, communicating the folklore. This distinction goes to show that whether the author writes with a sentimental or a historical style, a common topic can be present in the content of their writing.

Throughout this literary genre there is a deep appreciation for the beauty of nature, which is strongly influenced by the tie that binds Aboriginals with the wild. They stress the value of a reciprocal relationship with nature: not only taking, but responding as well. As in the Peigan legend a broad creationist outlook is expressed. Marty refers to Napi, the Old Man (2001:60) who sends driving winds. In the Thanksgiving Address John Stokes speaks of "the works of the Creator" that give people a shared vision (Stokes and Kanawahienton 1993). Finally others, like David Adams Richards, writes of *God*, who gave the trout its impeccable colour: "the colour of nature itself" (2001: 66). Not all nature writers attend to a specific creator of nature, but nonetheless the question of the source of nature does come up in numerous texts, stemming either from aboriginal influence or simply from the awe and wonderment of creation.

The authors' love for the wilderness can be identified early on in most nature writing. As in the case of sharing responsibility for the preservation of wild lands, writers stress the contagiousness of the love for the outdoors. The close relationship Canada's indigenous peoples possess with the natural world is frequently given emphasis. Anishinaubae writer Basil Johnston speaks to his people:

There is no question that it is necessary for [the Anishinaubae] to return to the way that they used to worship, to again take up their ancient way of believing. At that time they will survive; they will

prosper. (2001:273)

This text speaks strongly to the Anishinaubae people and serves as a reminder of the greatness of the outdoors and the value of living off the land. It is a call, not to take nature for granted, and yet it is more than this. Johnston goes further, to stress the importance of rekindling a close, and even spiritual connection with the wild.

Spiritual harmony

This is also the apparent objective Butala has in mind. She speaks admiringly of her husband's intimate relationship with nature, a relationship enjoyed by *true rural* people:

It is one thing to come from the city and be overwhelmed by the beauty of Nature and to speak of it, and another thing entirely to have lived in it so long that it has seeped into your bones and your blood and is inseparable from your own being, so that it is part of you and requires no mention or hymns of praise. (2001: 79)

This peaceable oneness that Butala has observed she obviously considers to be of higher regard than flamboyant comments made by urbanites on excursions in the countryside.

Again, it is clear that these authors are applauding a quiet communion with the outdoors that is commonly associated with Amerindians.

Assorted spiritual themes come across in the corpus, which do not pertain to aboriginal heritage. These related but dissimilar examples from Canadian nature writing make reference to a variety of spiritual connections. One such example appears in Heather Menzies' writing of her reflections on tree planting. After describing the gentle planting of a seedling, she encourages it to take root with the words, "Take, eat. This is my body..." (2001: 170). There is no mistaking the origin of these words, the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. There is however a significant shift in meaning attributed to the context, for

Menzies does not use “body” in reference to the body of Christ, but rather in reference to the earth. The seedling is to find strength in the nutrients of the earth’s soil. Therefore the quote has been adapted to take on a more general meaning, personifying the earth.

By and large there are a good number of allusions to re-establishing harmony with nature—a harmony risking extinction in modern times. Frequently, authors give credit to aboriginal appreciation and respect for creation. Their heritage and traditional way of life along with the spiritual bond they hold with the earth provides a unique theme in Canadian nature writing. Occasionally, writers make mention of related spiritual elements from early colonizers, such as the hard work ethic of early Presbyterians (*Loc. cit.*, 2001: 171). Most evident though, is the value given to the indigenous peoples and the emphasis authors put on the spiritual connection they experience with the outdoors. David Boyd’s words to the reader serve to stimulate “moments of communion with the natural world that...ma[k]e [the] spirit sing” (2001: 11).

Escape

More than a few authors introduce the necessity of escaping the confines of the city and modern life as a precursor to experiencing oneness with nature. Along with this come descriptions of the alluring character of the natural world, which has charmed the writer. Finally, it is frequent to find instances of reference to the captivating mystery and wonderment of the outdoors.

At times, nature is defined by what it is not, rather than what it is. This is to say that the writer brings out elements of urban life in contrast with elements of rural life or life in the wilderness. Beth Powning does this in her description of a peaceful winter’s evening in the

country. "It is silent save for the dry shirring of snow on snow, shifting in a tendril of air", she writes. "No cars, no airplanes, no tractors... I watch the sun setting, feel it flushing my cheeks..." (2001:166). She shares this moment, devoid of the hum of engines, with her audience. The noises that often provide background noise for daily urban life, and even rural life (the sound of the tractor) are not present. By mentioning the absence of these sounds of civilization, the reader gets an idea of the stillness surrounding her, a peaceful tranquility.

The berry patch is another paradise, away from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Briony Penn explains her joy as she escapes into the berry bushes:

I stand in [the berry patch] for at least half an hour a day. I notice the odd motorist passing by, narrowing their eyes then accelerating quickly past. I wave and beckon them with my red-stained hands and they accelerate even faster. It is a pity because they might enjoy the odd foray into the patch. (2001: 42)

Present here, there is a distinct mockery of modern life, which depreciates natural beauty and simple pleasures in nature. Penn prods light-heartedly at the passers by, who, according to her cheery tone, are turning down a summer delicacy.

On a similar note, Wade Davis begs the question: Is today's society not tired of its ways? He expresses his fascination with the century-old mystery of the narwhal.

Throughout the Middle Ages, narwhal ivory sold for twenty times its weight in gold. In all of Europe, only fifty complete tusks were known, and they were a source of endless mystery. The beautiful animals still are. Nearly blind, their entire sensory world is based on sonar reflection, a clatter of clicks by which they communicate. Of their behaviour and ecology, the patterns of their migration, we understand little, for they live most of the year beneath the polar ice. No one knows where they go or what they eat in winter. There is something wonderful in this, a chance to be with a creature that has defied science and all our obsessions with systematizing the world. (2001: 41)

This entry is typical of Canadian nature writing, in terms of content and style. While being extremely informative, almost encyclopaedic, the author has a distinct purpose beyond informing the reader on the history and physiology of the narwhal. Enter the author's personal comment: The beauty and mystery of the animal that defies cerebral confines. The writing reveals how the author marvels at these creatures.

Repeatedly, nature writing brings across the author's motivation: an endless curiosity in the ever-changing natural world. Butala describes her enchantment with storms saying, "I liked storms for the way they changed the appearance of familiar places and for the sense of mystery they brought to them" (2001: 88). Later on she writes, "walking in [the rain] is exhilarating, imbued even with a touch of magic" (90). There can be no doubt in the mind of the reader that the author is clearly in love with the range of weather as well as the many facets of nature.

Mike Randolph is another author who does not hold back his urge to delve into the great outdoors. He describes the charm of the waters on a fishing trip: "The mystery of what lay beyond the next bend exerted, as usual, a powerful pull" (Randolph 2001: 38). In this case, the meandering river and the diversity of the landscape captivates and directs the writer.

Texts speak of the same sort of magnetism between man and beast. Payton shares a magical moment he lived with a grizzly:

The bear gets up again and starts moving in our direction. Ellison tells us to stay relaxed and close together. The bear will choose what to do next. I stop staring through the viewfinder and slowly rest the camera in my lap. As I take in the fantastical scene, it dawns on me that we are in a rare place in our modern world – at the mercy of a wild animal. (2001: 44)

A quiet moment becomes a focal point at the end of the article, stressing the value Payton attributes to such “moments of clarity”. “No words can convey what we have just shared”, he emphasises (*Loc. cit.*, 2001: 44). This is the mystery of the world outdoors that beckons writers to experience the outdoors and to write about even the wordless moments. The “call of the wild” that he submits to, following the bear’s lead, again demonstrates a concern for and adjustment of modern man’s overconfidence.

This is a part of the escape that nature offers to numerous authors—the chance to stop taking the lead, the choice to step out of the rat race of decision-making and into a different world. Like Payton, who waits for the grizzly to take the initiative, Butala describes how the land affects her movement:

I thought of how my friend and I had moved over the wet ground, where we had gone and not gone, what we had found ourselves doing, and suddenly I realized that it was the land—Nature—that had guided our steps, made our choices for us, and not the other way around...we had gone where the shape of the land had suggested itself to us; we had done what the land had made available to us. If it was too muddy or wet in one place, we went somewhere else...
(2001: 90-91)

Excerpts such as this whisper a quiet surrender of self. Nature takes over as the leader, and the individual becomes a keen follower.

Finally, there are instances in Canadian nature writing where nature takes such predominance that civilization nearly vanishes. This is of course part of the theme of finding refuge in forests and fields, on mountains and seashores—escaping the hustle and bustle of busy city life. Butala describes a precious moment saying, “I stand there for a long time, feeling myself blending into the night as the hills darken around me, as stars prick the sky” (2001: 166). What becomes apparent here is that the outdoors is so awesome that the writer

is struck by everything around her. In being consumed by the grandeur of the moment in her surroundings, she becomes virtually invisible.

Canadian authors know many different places in nature as havens. In this regard there is not a common ideal location or landscape for escape. Briony Penn escapes to her berry patch, “because it is a reassuring place to be... Sedatives by the thousands are out there for modern anxieties, but I prefer the berry patch” (2001: 44). Others head for the woods, to their favourite brook: “Fishing... could take me out of myself, far away from the worry of my life, such as it was, and into another life, better and more complete” shares David Adams Richards (2001: 66) as he reflects on his early fishing days. These moments and locations leave their marks on the minds of the writers. David Carpenter is no exception. He records:

The day I’ve been writing about was so entirely perfect it deserves to be set aside as a national holiday. May 22, 1993. The next day the fishing was just as good, the weather even warmer. The water beetles gathered beneath the cooler shadows of the fallen trees, and even the frogs moved languidly around the edges of the pond. Something was in the air. (2001: 188)

These are the moments that communicate the value Canadians put on their getaways, to places where they experience a bond with nature. For anyone who has not lived such an experience, Van Tighem advises:

It is time to come home. It is past time. It is time for each of us to rediscover the living landscapes of the wounded West and recognize them as the home places that make us who we are—no less than our families, the houses in which we live, and the ways in which we earn our livings. It is time to seek... moments of epiphany that transfigure our surroundings and transform us. (2001: 262)

In view of these numerous examples, one can see that the theme of withdrawing into nature to rekindle closeness with land and beast holds significant importance for Canadian writers of this genre.

Geo-history

An historical element appears time and time again in contemporary nature writing. In general, there are two sorts of historical content: first, several authors discuss the natural history of the land; second, there are references to people, who have influenced the country known today. While other historical notes are also made, these seem to be the most frequent subjects.

Canadian authors speak notably often of glaciers and geomorphology. Texts continuously communicate a fascination with changes in a landscape over time. Van Tighem writes:

From canoe-level I could see the way in which each range ended abruptly at the edge of the Athabasca River. Glaciers long ago shaved off and steepened the mountain ends. A few thousand years ago the glaciers melted back to where they wait, now, cupped among the highest peaks, poised to advance down-valley when the climate cools again. (2001: 252)

This passage is a glimpse into Van Tighem's train of thought as he takes in a view. His style however, gives the reader historical geographical information without being exhaustively scientific. The fact that he mentions his location (in the canoe on the Athabasca) sets a calm and picturesque backdrop for the reader; this also softens a potentially informative flavour the content might otherwise have had.

In contrast, other authors do not shy away from being informative and even scientific in their geo-historical explanations. Author Terry Glavin writes of how glaciers have made an impact on salmon migration:

... and it took [the salmon] less than 10,000 years to colonize or recolonize just about every river, stream, creek, and ditch between the coast and the Rocky Mountains, much of which remained covered under sheets of ice miles thick, for several centuries after the close of the last great ice age. (2001: 196-197)

In this case the author does not hesitate to be specific with time, location, and the size of the glaciers that melted to give the salmon new homes, presenting a separate style.

Other nature writers share this more academic style. Béland, for one, gives a detailed historical description of Beluga whale territory:

Around twenty thousand years ago, much of Canada and the northern United States was covered in glaciers, and arctic whales and seals fed at the ice edge in the Atlantic off the exposed continental shelf. Then, as the climate started to warm up, the Laurentian ice sheet melted away and the sea level rose over the continent, which had sunk considerably under the immense weight of ice. In the northeast, marine waters penetrated into and beyond the Gulf of St. Lawrence, filling a huge area west almost to the Great Lakes and southwest to New York and Vermont. (2001: 208)

This thorough description of the way things were is surely influenced by Béland's background as a scientist. Yet, at the same time, his writing is far from being exclusively scientific; he uses these elements of historical geography to appeal to the public for change.

Gayton writes along these lines as well:

Our northern prairies are relatively young landscapes, developing after the last late Pleistocene glaciers retreated and the southern forests collapsed in the face of increasing drought. The grassy vegetation that colonized this vast new niche did not evolve in place. Instead, forest understorey grasses slowly speciated outward from the eastern and northern fringes on to the new land, honing new mechanisms of survival as they spread. (2001: 226)

These authors are not content to merely present the landscape of today, but they seek to discover and share its development over history, giving the reader a more complete understanding of the complexity of the land.

This attention that is given to history also gives the reader an idea of the activities of another era. For example, Glavin describes the early Byrne Creek:

In the 1800s, Byrne Creek used to flow east toward the Fraser, through John Woolard's farm, and back then it was called Woolard's Brook. In 1893, Peter Byrne dug a new, straight channel to allow the creek to run due south to the river, and the Gilley Brothers' logging company cut the timber on the south slope, hauling the logs by oxen to Byrne Creek, to float the timber south to the river and then up the Fraser to the New Westminster sawmills. (2001: 192)

Through this example the reader has an idea of not only geography, but also the important role the stream played in a people's livelihood. These references give the reader a flashback of the history of a particular location, often showing how much a piece of nature can change over time.

Still other authors write of the history of a species. John Theberge looks into the early days of the wolf's relationship with man, making a closer examination of the competition that exists between them. He writes:

Through a long journey of over one million years, wolves have lived with humans... first in Africa, then Asia, Europe, and for the last forty thousand years or so in North America. As two species of large mammals, often hunting the same prey, it was inevitable that some ecological relationship would evolve between us. (2001: 128)

This historical insert emphasizes that the relationship between man and animal was at one time on more even footing. In a sense, it serves as a comparative point of reference to examine the treatment of wolves at present.

Even the notorious Canadian bug season has a recorded history dating back earlier than 1915. Writing from Yellowknife, Jamie Bastedo publishes the violent legacy of biting insects:

Besides molesting humans, insect assaults on domestic animals also checker historical records from the north woods. One account from northern Alberta describes cattle keeling over dead within fifteen minutes of a blackfly attack—from some sort of mysterious

shock effect, not from loss of blood... young calves and piglets were known to have died as a result of multiple attacks by bulldog flies and mosquitoes. (2001: 236)

Even this text incorporates historic elements that support the author's purpose of proposing solutions for the biting pests. At the same time, Bastedo's research and presentation are so convincing that the reader is left light-hearted in regards to the situation.

The slug has not been left untouched by Canadian nature writers either. Des Kennedy takes on the task of educating the readership on the truth about slugs and includes a brief and revealing history of the slimy creatures, which "were introduced here by Europeans in the first place!" (2001: 144). Again, a humoristic tone is evident.

To follow suit, there are more historical excerpts focusing on early explorers to Canada. Some authors search early journals for explorers' commentaries of their experience.

David Pelly writes:

In July 1822, during his explorations along the coast of Melville Peninsula in search of the Northwest Passage, William E. Parry wrote: "I cannot delay any longer to remark how valuable the geographical information received from the Esquimaux had now proved to us." (2001: 103-104)

The writer sets out a clear respect and fondness to the indigenous population, which is amplified due to a quote from Parry's 19th-century journal.

Sid Marty recalls journaled weather reports from 1792, in which Peter Fidler of the Hudson's Bay Company records that he "encountered "Light Airs from the Westwards" and found the day "clear & hot at 2½ PM"" (2001: 58). In this text, Marty employs historical data to substantiate his awe of the chinook wind today. This quote also comes to compare the trumpeted reactions of the Europeans with the quiet appreciation of the Blackfoot tribe.

A subtle disdain for European explorers can also be perceived in quotes of historical nature. “Hopes of fame and riches drove those who sought [the Northwest Passage],” comments Wade Davis regarding 17th-century explorers, “and certain death found the many who came ill-prepared for the Arctic night” (2001: 30). These elements of history help the reader recall the country’s beginnings, but also recall the folly of the “civilized” compared to northern natives.

Similarly, Menzies speaks nostalgically of her childhood summer getaway and places it within a historical context. “The 200-acre farm had been abandoned like so many others around here after the Second World War, when mechanization imposed its implacable choice: get bigger or get out.” (2001: 168). In one sentence she places the reader in the time frame both politically and industrially. It is also clear to the reader that Menzies’ quaint nostalgia of pre-war farms has been threatened and destroyed by modern revolutionary civilization.

Supporting texts with historical references, Canadian authors build up a cultural awareness within their readers. In the same way, by presenting these elements in an academic or encyclopaedic manner the texts are educative. Canadian nature writing is a genre unto its own that combines multiple literary styles, yielding vivid texts.

Gastronomy

A final topos found in nature writing touches on cuisine. Susan Bassnett addresses the influential role of travel writing in describing unfamiliar smells and tastes experienced in foreign kitchens (1998: 34). The mention of food in Nature writing however, often offers a local flavour, stemming from the author’s home. In this regard, the literature in question in

this study cannot be considered travel writing: the context is *home* and not some foreign land with foreign flavours to the palate. Canadians can at times experience a slight identity crisis when the question arises: what is authentic Canadian cuisine? (—moose? deer? beaver?...and then, the multicultural population of present-day Canada lends itself to a greater conglomeration of cuisines, without defining one in particular as “Canadian”). There is help offered for Canadians who have experienced a mental block when asked to define typically Canadian cuisine.

Nature writers do not plunge into fine cuisine for camping. Neither do they deny that the nature-lover, in general, does much light and simple snacking. What they do present is a full range of what enthusiasts consume on land and on water.

The simplest menu appearing in the corpus is the illustrious sandwich. In such cases there is not much detail given, however, the author includes the moment as part of the outdoor experience. Both Mike Randolph and David Adams Richards insert a brief note about a quick lunch: “I was alone. So I took out my sandwich and ate it. (It was in one pocket, my worms were in the other...)”, writes Richards of his childhood memories (2001: 67). In a second example, Randolph narrates, “... I climbed through thick limbs hairy with moss to a spot in the middle, sat down to eat the sandwich I’d packed, and watched the water boil around the rocks.” (2001: 38). Giving bare detail in regards to the menu, the scene is set and the human body is simply fuelled. The mention of the sandwich merely indicates awareness that the human body requires nourishment. There is no description of the food, its ingredients or its taste; the sandwich is tangential to the memory of the outdoors.

In other cases childhood memories of lunchtime are more marked or sentimental. Butala’s description of mealtime reads as follows:

The riders would dismount and hobble their horses or tie them to the fence, I'd park the truck, Peter would throw down a couple of hay bales for a table or for people to sit on, and I'd put out the lunch. We'd sit in the sun and eat sandwiches, and his mother's baked beans, the pot wrapped in layers of newspapers to keep it warm, and drink coffee from thermoses. Long before we reached there I'd have begun to look forward to that moment. (2001: 82-3)

She puts the mealtime in context, surrounding it with simple details that set the mood; details of the weather and the scenery and her own fondness for the moment. The menu is more substantial than the previous examples, but insofar as Canadian nature writing is concerned, Butala is by no means the most descriptive when it comes to trail menus.

The hippy student population makes an appearance on this topic as well. In *Backpacker* magazine Steve Howe harks back to the 70's, the early days of surveying the Great Divide Trail. This adventure offered limited gourmet cuisine, featuring a menu of, "hideous stuff, like textured vegetable protein," as interviewee Jenny Feick looks back (2001: 44). Though this seems to have left an unpleasant memory for the food consumed, there is no mistaking that this factor did not come close to ruining "that magnificent summer" (*Loc. cit.*, 2001: 44).

Kristen Hostetter and Susan Newquist could not put it in better terms than by saying, "Everything tastes better in the outdoors" (*Backpacker* 2001: 86). Up until this point, most readers would not put up an argument. Taking a glance further though, the feature of this article is uniquely North American: GORP—Good Old Raisins and Peanuts. The goal of these authors? —To discover the most original GORP recipes. They include recipes and even directions to the reader to "keep [the GORP] in a zipper-lock bag and dip in a cool trout stream to firm up the chocolate" if it heats up and gets messy (2001: 86). These casual descriptors provide scrupulous steps for serious snacking!

This topos is also introduced when writers make allusion to living off the land.

Firstly, there is a clear native influence to this type of example. “Over a dinner of narwhal soup, bannock, arctic char, and caribou, I learn that Olayuk and Martha were the first of their generation to marry for love,” reports Wade Davis of the local flavours he sampled while exploring (2001: 26). He sets the scene by describing this typical northern menu, but again, does not write exclusively of the fare. He employs the gastronomic detail as a complement to the content of his interaction with the Inuit. Sid Marty writes along the same lines of the first inhabitants of Canadian soil:

But days of famine, or omnivorous days of snaring rabbits and digging out camass bulbs and bitterroot with a forked stick, suddenly turned to feasting when buffalo, run into box canyons or decoyed over a *piskun* (jump), were crippled or trapped, and could more easily be killed with stone-tipped spears or war clubs. (2001: 64)

These examples present a natural and simple life, in harmony with the elements, living off the resources that are accessible to the people.

Briony Penn gives the reader a sampling from her berry patch: “I’ve been able to complement most evening meals with a modest dessert of sweet and succulent berries of varying size, hue, and flavour,” she shares. And she continues, “Day after day, month after month, I march down to the patch, open my mouth, and drop a few in.” (2001: 43). This moment of a simple pleasure is significant in that it communicates a sensory experience to the audience.

Furthermore, Richards contrasts sport fishing with fishing for ones livelihood:

I grew up with poor boys who knew when the smelt run was on, and when the Tommie cod came, because much more than me, they needed these things for their families to eat. We were wasteful—they were not. To them, fishing, and their fathers’ hunting, had a whole different perspective. Some I grew up with

ate more deer meat than beef, and relied upon it. And when they went fishing, it was less a sport than a part of their diets. (2001: 71)

This is an illustration of differing views of natural resources, which favours wise use of resources to supply for nutritional needs.

Authors also present food topoi in more detailed fashion, going as far as to pass on a recipe to the readership. This offers a personal touch along with a cultural one. Butala passes on that through contact with a fellow rancher's wife she learned that one could make jelly from cactus-berries (2001: 85). This is a step away from descriptive passages on wildlife and scenery; nonetheless, it is not the only mention of savoury treats in Canadian nature writing. Mike Randolph communicates his memorable taste of a west-coast fisherman's cuisine:

Back in Jim's kitchen, he plied me with beer. And fresh crab.
Then herring roe on kelp, deep-fried mushrooms, black cod and
a variety of homemade dipping sauces. He fed me until I
couldn't eat anymore. (2001: 39)

Though the excerpt is short, the essence of the passage is the natural taste of each of the elements, freshly caught or picked, and the homemade touch that sets the moment in a relaxed context.

Marion Harrison writes in a journalistic style, which gives the reader another point of view. She reports the details of the meal in such a way that it could be recreated, as from a recipe:

... we huddled under the tarp and tucked into a meal of "fish 'n brewis." This traditional Newfoundland dish consists of salt cod, boiled potatoes, pork scrunchions with fried onions and brewis, or hard tack—a stone-hard bread made palatable by soaking in water and smothering in molasses. Still, I preferred the smoked salmon, fresh shrimp and scallops, blueberry loaf and cinnamon buns we'd had for our other meals. (2001: 77)

There is no doubt left in the reader's mind as to whether Harrison ate well in Newfoundland. There is certainly an impact made by the food one eats in the outdoors. It is interesting to note that the ingredients and the taste of the food leave a lasting enough impression on the author to be included in the text.

In line with Canadian custom, the maple leaf cannot go without mention. Surprisingly, Brionly Penn goes even to lengths to explain the uses of the maple leaf in the kitchen. Who would have thought that one could, "use the stems to whip up Soopalallie-berry ice cream, and steam a fish in them." (2001: 47)! Even this light-hearted note has potential to be experimented with in the reader's kitchen or in the outdoors.

Finally, there are some authors, like David Carpenter, who leave the reader with no questions about how to prepare a good meal. "The trout grow fast and taste even better than wild chinooks and coho. The trout meat is moister and sweeter," states the connoisseur. He advises the reader to "... clean the little ones, dip them in egg and flour, line their bellies with fresh dill and lime, and fry them in butter. Add a dash of pepper." (2001: 178). Texts such as Carpenters provide the reader with much more than a descriptive scenic walk in the woods. They describe the entire sensory experience in nature and seek to communicate the experience, in its entirety, (recipes included!), to the reader.

Indeed the various styles and examples noted here are not an exhaustive list of references to food in Canadian nature writing. What they do represent is a cross section of the variety of ways in which the writers communicate the tastes they enjoy from the bounty of the earth. This is a theme that illustrates the wealth of information and style presented in contemporary nature writing.

Summary

The number of topoi found in Canadian writing of this genre is large. Certainly, it is not possible to name all of them. This chapter, however, covers a broad cross-section. Numerous authors write of their experience in nature during childhood, the environmental responsibility man must take, and the intense respect that one should possess for the outdoors. Spiritual enlightenment is another common recurring theme, regard for Aboriginals, along with the mysterious escape that the outdoors provides for weary souls. Another theme, which comes across time and again, looks at history (of both man and nature). Finally, there is a frequent appearance of references to food in nature writing. It is important to acknowledge the regularity of these occurrences for a heightened understanding of the trends in this literature genre and interests of its culture. This in turn provides a backdrop for intercultural transfer, which will be addressed in chapter three.

CHAPTER 2

TOPOÏ IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH NATURE WRITING

Over history, the French have demonstrated their love for nature in their literature. Jean Giono's writing has been well received both nationally and abroad, and Jacques Cousteau has become a household name. More recently, Nicolas Hulot is the name nature-enthusiasts are following (not only in his writing, but also on television) for the exploration and commentary of nature across the globe.

The last decade has seen resurgence in healthy living, with organic foods, and concern for the environment. Eco-tourism has taken off and Fontainebleau is more popular than ever, crawling with Parisians escaping busy subways on weekends. These trends may help to explain the popularity of contemporary French nature writing, especially in magazines such as *Terre Sauvage* and *Géo*. The recent release of the documentary *Arbres* by Sophie Bruneau and Marc-Antoine Roudil goes to show that this new literary genre has now entered the film industry as well.

An anthology of contemporary nature writing does not yet seem to have been established in France. After several unfruitful searches of Parisian bookshops and environmental stores as well as extensive searching on the Internet I came to this conclusion. For this reason, the French corpus is comprised of individual texts from French magazines and novels from the 1990s. The most helpful magazines were those focusing on geography and nature. Outdoor adventure magazines offered little to no assistance because of the general focus on modern equipment and adrenaline rather than nature itself.

As the corpus was being built, it was evident that it was unrealistic to expect the French genre to be a mirror image of Canadian nature writing. Interestingly, the contrasts arising between the corpora are not stark, and are well accounted for by cultural factors.

The same criteria used for the Canadian texts were followed for selecting the French corpus. Compiling the French corpus required much more time and effort because each text was individually chosen (—there was no anthology to look to). While Jacques Lacarrière contributed one article to the corpus, writing such as his book *Chemin faisant* (Ed. Fayard, 1992) could not be included because of its travel writing style. The same is true for Jean Giono, whose writing style leans more towards nature fiction, incorporating imaginary characters and interlocutory dialogue.

In the previous chapter the major topoi in contemporary Canadian nature writing were examined. The purpose of this second chapter is to study a French corpus of contemporary nature writing using the same method; in this way, cultural contrasts will become apparent, which can in the third chapter be considered in the light of interlingual transfer.

Gastronomy

The French are world-renowned for their love of good food and this is not an appreciation that they leave behind when then they venture into the outdoors. Authors of contemporary French nature writing portray this love for the taste of food in several manners.

Firstly, the simplicity in the enjoyment of food is apparent. In one text on hiking Romain Provang exclaims, “quel meilleur repas que celui que vous faites arrivé au sommet ? La fraise des bois cueillie dans la rosée, l’odeur des champignons dans le sous-bois, ... Quel

bonheur !” (Festraëts 2001: 65). The nature-lover expresses the simple pleasures that he appreciates all the more while he is on the trails. In a similar manner, a text on mushrooms details the importance of the mushroom in today’s society, even in everyday life: “[*Les champignons*] sont à la base de la pyramide alimentaire... *Le pain et le vin existent grâce aux levures.*” (Blanchard 2001: 19). Here the author points out the less obvious: how important a role the mushroom plays in the everyday French diet. Not only is there enjoyment of nature’s produce, but its benefit is also part of the author’s shared reflection.

A love for mushrooms comes back time and time again in the corpus. While in the previous example the author depicts the fundamental role of the mushroom in the food chain, other writers are less scientific and share the joy they experience in picking the fungi. Marie-Hélène Jacquier recounts one of her walks in the country:

«Vous allez voir, nous ont-ils prévenus, c’est le coin du champignon. » Le coin tient ses promesses. Sans nous coûter la peine de les chercher, des cèpes sont là, à portée de main. Halte, cueillette et nous repartons, les papilles titillées par le plaisir à venir. (2001: 119)

The mention of mushrooms in French nature writing goes hand in hand with their cultural appreciation for fine cuisine. It is worth noting that Jacquier goes into greater detail, identifying the particular type of mushroom, which would be recognizable to the average French reader as edible—and perhaps even inspire thoughts of specific recipes.

In a similar down-to-earth fashion, Festraëts reports Lucie Bogrow’s culinary adventures from her hiking days during the Second World War. Festraëts gives account of her conversation with Bogrow,

“...Un copain m’a même appris à faire cuire les escargots qu’on ramassait sur le chemin et qui s’évadaient des poches de nos sacs en bavant. N’essayez pas avec les gros : on dirait du pneu.” (2001: 64)

In a light-hearted tone, the enthusiast passes on the legacy of *escargots* and even throws in her culinary counsel that the smaller ones are the most savoury. These hikers had both the *savoir-* and the *vouloir faire* to prepare and enjoy a classic French delicacy, even in the midst of war and food rations. That such anecdotes find a place in nature writing goes to show the momentous importance of good cooking in French culture.

In the third place, recollections of lasting impressions created by appetizing moments make their appearance in this contemporary literary genre. Yann Queffélec recalls the sweet impressions Basque markets made on him:

De mini-marchés en plein air font apparaître sur des cageots des couffins débordants : pouce-pieds, piments rouges et verts, poissons, petits pains ronds... Du coup, j'avise une table en terrasse et déjeune d'une substantielle piperade (brouillamini subtil d'œufs et de légumes régionaux), de chipirons, de fromage au lait de brebis. Le rosé ne se fait pas prier, moi non plus. (1997: 74)

Queffélec has evidently been marked by the delicacies in this region and so, includes a sampling in his writing. It is important to note that the delicacies are specific to the region. To French nature writers experiencing the territory would somehow be incomplete without experiencing the *terroir*. The taste of local products and recipes are part and parcel of time in the outdoors.

Laurent Laduy writes about his hiking the French island of Corsica. His writing follows the itinerary of his trip and he takes time only to mention that at the end of a long day on rugged terrain he does partake in a meal: "*Au gîte d'étape, figatelli (saucisses de foie de porc) et vin de Patrimoine.*" (1995: 121). He whets the reader's appetite with just a brief mention of local Corsican fare. No sumptuous details or cooking tips for the audience this time.

In a final example, the contrary is the case; author Fabrice Nicolino could be labelled as a restaurant connoisseur for nature-lovers. The first and last paragraphs, surrounding the text describing a walk in Fontainebleau, are primarily dedicated to the grand description of *le chalet Jobert*, which has become a favourite restaurant. An excerpt reads:

On entre dans la grande salle du café : la cheminée, les tables de bois sont bien là, et de toute éternité. Sur la carte du restaurant, l'entrecôte sauce fromage, la terrine maison, le poulet fermier et sa poêlée de champignons agissent toujours autant sur les papilles linguales. (2001a: 102).

One might wonder whether Nicolino ventures out for the food or the forest! One thing is certain: The meals at the chalet have made a lasting impression. Through all of these examples, it becomes apparent that when the French head for the hills they do not leave their appreciation for fine food behind. In fact, they consider the food they enjoy, and its quality (—free range chicken!), as part of their experience of the pleasures of nature.

A sensory experience

The recounting of savouring tastes can also be seen as part of a heightened sensitivity in general. Indeed numerous contemporary French authors put words to their psychosomatic experience with nature. Festraëts conveys the strong euphoric sensation he gets during a mountain hike:

Un vertige délicieux. Il monte à la tête comme un alcool trop fort, trop vite bu... Il faut s'asseoir, boire, s'étendre un peu pour savourer l'ivresse. L'eau tiédie de la gourde fleure la ferraille et le renfermé... Fermer les yeux, déplier les jambes. L'herbe chatouille le creux des genoux. L'esprit effleure quelques pensées mystiques, troublées de loin en loin par le sifflement d'une marmotte aux aguets. (2001: 62)

He continues with a style that gives the impression that the reader is actually present. His use of the imperative and the present tense excluding pronouns subtly invites the reader into the scene. This highly descriptive passage covers multiple senses as well; taste, touch, even sound. And all the while, there is a dreamy quality rendered by precursory inebriation.

This contemporary genre also displays the poetic creativity authors find to relay the higher-level feeling they undergo in nature. Queffélec pens his emotions regarding the Basque country with these words:

Du Pays basque j'emporterais la sensation voluptueuse d'être venu pour souhaiter revenir. La sensation des grands voyages : grands par la distance et le changement qu'ils opèrent en vous. (1997: 75)

There is romanticism present in the text, portrayed in the lingering tone and word choices. And the author gives his writing a grandiose flavour in sharing the depths of the sensation such moments make on the individual.

Yves Paccalet gets completely absorbed by the delicious smells of nature. Not satisfied keeping the experience to himself he puts into words one of the things he enjoys most—the smell of flowers:

Je m'agenouille dans une corbeille de violettes. Leur parfum envahit ma narine, exalte ma cervelle... Chaque balade m'est un bonheur du nez. Chacune a sa signature chimique. Chaque nectar me hisse à l'altitude du songe, dans cette stratosphère où ne subsiste que la meilleure partie de l'homme. (2000: 32)

The author depicts his passion for the simple pleasures he finds in nature and the joy he finds in the moment.

There is a hedonistic foundation behind the senses described in the literature; this meaning that the sensual pleasures of life shine through. The interest in aesthetic pleasure is also evident when Festraëts comments on interviewee Julie Gospaard, "*A 23 ans... cette jolie*

filles athlétiques ressent le besoin d'éprouver son corps dans l'effort physique" (2001: 64)

[emphasis added]. This example displays an appreciation for the beauty of youthful appearance.

Weather sensations

It is also common to read detailed accounts of weather-related sensations. In some instances, the author describes first-hand experience with wind, rain, sun or snow. Such is the case of Nicolas Bréhal who recalls a childhood encounter with snow:

Je sentis que mes pieds s'enfonçaient dans une neige épaisse et fraîche, qu'un froid sec et douloureux se jetait sur moi de tous côtés, mais la fatigue du voyage et l'obscurité m'empêchèrent de réaliser ce qu'il y avait vraiment autour de moi. (1996: 61)

This consideration of the details of the situation, like the sensation of snow underfoot, gives the discourse a slower pace, a relaxed, pensive style that is characteristic of contemporary French nature writing.

Fabrice Nicolino is another author who delights in taking time in the forest, stopping to smell the flowers, and writing about the simple moments that leave an impression. He states, "*on respire: un vent du nord, vif et frais*" (2001b: 107), qualifying the wind with detail. A heightened sensitivity to the most common of things is a common feature.

Again to describe the wind, Laurent Laduy is descriptive and even poetic: "*je hume le vent marin épicé de maquis, caresse le tronc des chênes-lièges, admire l'argent des oliviers et le véronèse des chênes verts.*" (1995: 120). He pays acute attention to texture and colour, which adds a sensual element. This is a good representation of the lyrical French writing style employed in contemporary nature writing. Queffélec is just as evocative with colour

description: “*C’est beau, définitif, blanc sur le ciel bleu, d’une sérénité qui met en avant la force immuable des temps.*” (1997: 74). What makes a description of colour such as this unique is the consequential sentiment of serenity the author shares with his audience. This is the shared style of Bréhal as well; who makes poetic observation of weather and then goes a step farther, expressing its emotional effect. Of snow he writes:

Il faisait si froid que la neige tenait longtemps. Elle formait de longues guirlandes sur les trottoirs, sur les toits et le bord des fenêtres. La vie ralentissait : les voitures, les passants. Le silence des rues devenait presque étourdissant... et mon imagination vagabondait. (1996: 60)

Such descriptive moments of various sensations give the literature a slower pace while they also draw the reader into the dreamy outdoor setting. It is common in the French genre for authors to hone in on one or more of the senses, sight or smell for example, and treat the reader to a thorough yet poetic depiction of the experience.

Moment-by-moment narrative

With the slower pace that seems common to contemporary French nature writing comes a recounting of details that draws the reader into the text. This technique can be taken as a running commentary of the author’s outdoor adventure and is characterized by descriptions of immediate scenery. Outdoor enthusiast Laurent Laduy takes this approach in writing:

On descend dans les jardins et les vergers en terrasses, entre fruitiers et châtaigniers...je pique à gauche, dans la prairie où gambadent des chevaux, et me retrouve bientôt devant le fleuve... Le sentier conduit à une splendeur de gouille vert-jaune à reflets rouille, parmi les rocs de granit arrondis. (1995: 122)

He presents the reader with a detailed view, even giving the impression that the reader is participating. The scene is thoroughly described, as the author moves through the landscape.

By the same token Nicolino summons the reader to join him on a walk in Fontainebleau. It seems that he records as he walks: “*le chemin s’enfonce entre chênes et pins, serpente, grimpe légèrement, retombe auprès de jeunes bouleaux. Sable gris, ciel blanc, troncs rouges des pins sylvestres...*” (2001a: 102). The moment-by-moment account of walking the trail takes the reader around bends, up and down slopes, vividly imagining the colours sand and sky. Marie-Hélène Jacquier produces a similar effect. She writes, “*De l’autre côté de la route, le chemin descend vers le fond du vallon et l’ancien lavoir... À quelques mètres de là, les sentiers aussi. Nous prenons le raidillon.*” (2001: 118) taking the reader along on her adventure. Both authors accomplish this by descriptively reporting the scenery as it comes.

On occasion, the author’s presence is more apparent in the text. This is the case in Nicolino’s writing. He shares:

... on se perd un peu – mais avec délice – dans un dédale de petits sentiers qui courent dans une lande rase, entre mousses et callune, sur laquelle le pied rebondit parfois. On retrouve un peu plus tard un véritable chemin, en lisière d’un bois de pins sylvestres, au moment même où la pluie commence à tomber. (2001a: 103)

The commentary “*mais avec délice*” makes the author’s presence more apparent than in other illustrations of this style. Yet, the reader can still feel a part of the writer’s experience.

Similarly, Philippe Bardiau makes use of the pronoun *nous* and includes the reader in his experience, while still remaining present in his writing. In a text recounting the life of a tree-climber, he shares:

Nous marchons depuis quelques minutes, le nez en l’air. Des petites branches mortes craquent sous nos pieds. Parfois, les grimpeurs-

cueilleurs dérangent involontairement un chevreuil... (1992: 65)

Clearly, he is taking the audience on assignment to get to know the profession of these tree specialists. As he follows them, he takes the reader along, sharing the experience by going into detail about places, sounds and surprises.

Some authors even share their pace with the readership. Jacquier, for example, brings the reader up to date with where she is in her travels as she writes,

Nous voici à nouveau sur la petite route caillouteuse. Elle se taille maintenant un horizon entre une sapinière et des prés. À l'appel d'un fermier, des vaches au pis distendu disparaissent derrière une haie, en troupeau désordonné. Nous pressons le pas, apercevant déjà les lumières de Saint-Hilaire-Luc posé sur son mamelon rocheux. (2001: 119)

All of these details become a part of the text in nature writing: the terrain, the time of day, foliage, signs of civilization, wildlife (or cattle, as is the case in this example), and the greater geographical situation.

In all, this moment-by-moment approach includes the reader in the experience often by taking him step by step through select portions of the writer's adventure. This effect is achieved in a number of ways including describing the immediate scenery in detail and going to the length of commenting on the choice of direction on a path.

Spirituality

The slower pace that French nature writers take, observing detail and enjoying the beauty in the evidence of nature, can be seen as an attempt to counter the hectic pace of modern cosmopolitan life. An interview with Jacques Brosse, author and tree-lover reveals this point of view. He declares that the western world has seen a resurgence in spiritual interest largely because of "*le dégoût de la société matérielle et de cette totale absence de*

buts spirituels” (Nicolino 2002: 125). The truth is that the consumer age has produced a society of workaholics, many of whom are reaching burnout. This is a population seeking to establish equilibrium in its lifestyle. The spiritual topos quenches a thirst for harmony that man can experience with creation by employing a variety of approaches.

A word of wisdom in Nicolino’s telling of a forest walk cajoles any unconvinced reader of the virtue of taking in a breath of fresh air. He observes an older man along the path: “*Que fait-il? Il admire. Une fleur, une toute petite fleur*”, he explains. The man does not speak, but Nicolino shares the wisdom he imparts writing, “*Être capable de regarder, être capable de patienter: le bonheur est au fond de l’œil.*” (2001b: 109). It is unclear whether the encounter is fictitious or factual, nonetheless, the dreamy account of this wise old man points to the virtue of patience and observation, and the joy they bring.

Legends and folklore

This is not the only example that tickles the imagination. Another text, which looks into the geographical origins of legends and beliefs looks at the mysticism of spring water.

In this text Ancellin writes as follows:

L’EAU, tout à la fois don du ciel et des entrailles de la terre, symbolise parfaitement l’ambivalence des croyances. Le culte des eaux était d’ailleurs à la base de la médecine druidique et, de nos jours encore, plus de trois mille sources et fontaines sont toujours réputées pour leurs vertus. (2001: 93)

The intrigue of the source of water set the foundation for a folklore that has lasted centuries and finds a place in contemporary French literature as well. Ancellin writes about the rejuvenating characteristic of water: “*en Bretagne, l’eau de la fontaine de Barenton*

effacerait les rides, tel un baume de jeunesse” (2001: 93). It is made clear through this example that nature evokes man’s curiosity as well as a mysticism regarding its source.

Yet in another way, this genre speaks of the inspiration nature kindles. Historically, nature has been the source of numerous legends and fairytales over generations, acknowledges Jacques Lacarrière. He reminds the reader of the role forests have played in French literature:

En ces forêts, des princes ont combattu des dragons, des rois furent assassinés, des princesses s’y sont endormies en des châteaux secrets, des guerres s’y sont déroulées. (1992: 133)

This unspoken influence has contributed volumes to French heritage; this is Lacarrière’s argument for their preservation. Somehow, in an intangible way, nature inspires, pushes people to dream—to dream of princes and dragons and heroic battles. This elusive mention of the fascination of forests contributes to the unique variety of mystical references found in this genre.

Along the lines of folklore, Bréhal reminisces of children’s fairytale writer Hans Christian Andersen in his writing:

...je me suis rappelé ce conte d’Andersen qui raconte l’histoire d’une petite marchande d’allumettes, emportée par la fée des neiges, que la mort vient délivrer des cruautés de l’hiver. Lorsque j’étais enfant, ce conte me faisait pleurer, mais autour de moi on me disait que c’était aujourd’hui impossible : de nos jours, on ne mourait plus de froid. (1996: 63)

In this case, even if the reader does not immediately recognize Andersen’s name, his mind is briefly refreshed by the contextual information filling in some main ideas of the tale in question.

On a light note, even renowned cartoon characters find their way into French nature writing. In this instance however, there is a direct rapport with nature, as Bréhal seeks to

overcome his feeling of nostalgia for the mountains. He writes, “... *les aventures de « Tintin au Tibet » me permirent de renouer à distance avec la montagne et la neige.*” (Loc. cit., 62).

Because this Belgian comic strip is widely read, by French children and adults alike, it fits smoothly into the discourse because the readers are generally equipped with the necessary background knowledge. These examples demonstrate the inspiration of nature in French culture through myths and folklore.

Intimacy with nature

In some texts, the mysticism of nature is described more tangibly, yet romantically.

Novelist Nicolas Bréhal, for example, explains his spiritual bond with creation in these words:

En regardant simplement la neige tomber, je me sentais en communion secrète avec le ciel et l'univers. La légèreté des flocons me donnait des ailes. Et j'éprouvais le bonheur éphémère d'être en vie, l'extraordinaire fugacité des choses. Le silence me semblait aussi le plus beau son qui me fût donné d'entendre. (1996: 61)

He shares the time he spends taking in the spectacle. Here again, one can see the importance of the slower more pensive character taken on by many of these authors. Bréhal describes the impact of this connection with something greater and the beautiful mystery of feeling small in a marvelous universe.

In a similar way, Brosse shares why he and his wife make it a priority to live near a wood; they enjoy a special relationship with trees. In an interview with Nicolino he announces:

Les arbres, les oiseaux sont, pour nous, absolument essentiels. Un arbre peut donner des leçons de vie. Il est en fait rythmé par les saisons – surtout les feuillus –, mais avec une espèce d'adhésion à la chose. Pensez à la floraison ! Il y a comme une joie à y

participer. C'est de l'anthropomorphisme, je m'en rends bien compte, mais que sait-on vraiment des arbres? (2002: 125)

Brosse has found the tree to be his guru; in this regard, the spiritual bond he shares with nature is one of the most explicit in the French corpus. Trees have become the source of wisdom, teaching of changing times and seasons and annual blooming. The documentary film *Arbres* takes a comparable point of view describing the tree in this way: "*Il veille sur le monde comme un aïeul...*" (2001: 5). As earlier, here is an anthropomorphic example, in this instance, giving the tree vision (through the use of *veiller*) and giving it a place of honour and even pre-eminence (by referring to it as *aïeul*).

Another angle frequently taken by authors in the French corpus is one of spiritual revitalization in nature. Self-proclaimed catholic-Zen monk, Brosse supports this notion as well. He answers Nicolino's question regarding whether trees possess a soul in saying, "*mon épouse, et moi-même, allons très souvent embrasser le tilleul devant la maison et le prendre dans nos bras. Effectivement, la vitalité repart.*" (2002: 123). Clearly, Brosse is speaking of trees transmitting not only energy, and also of a deeper confidence, that trees possess a spiritual force that benefits mankind. This is an example of personification, illustrating the strong bond he feels with trees, like family members.

Affectionately, these contemporary writers often speak of their close bond with creation. As Brosse, Jacques Lacarrière goes as far as to consider a familial tie with trees especially. Lacarrière personifies the tree, calling it "*notre ancêtre arboricole*" and then gives it a voice:

"Je ne suis plus aujourd'hui que lais, sentes et coupes, mais jadis, j'ai abrité vos premiers pas, vos premiers jeux et vos premiers chemins. N'oubliez jamais que je fus votre verte enfance."
(1992: 133)

These trees are portrayed as guardians who have offered hospitality to generations. The purpose here is to move people to reconsider the tree's precious role in their lives. The tree, in fact, takes on a significant role in French nature writing, taking on symbolic value at times, representing a feeling individual.

As this contemporary trend goes, Festraëts includes similar comments in one of his articles. He addresses the increase in the number of hikers traveling the Saint-Jacques route of more than 800 kilometres. Combining the reports of several enthusiasts, he concludes that the greatest interest is for the sake of the solitary journey within the individual. These nature hikers seem to be interested in finding themselves and what really matters to them in life (2001: 65). They find this in withdrawing from their daily lives for a period of time and dedicating themselves to a single goal—Compostelle: the final destination.

Finally, there is the occasional author who is enthralled in a magic moment to the point of undergoing spiritual metamorphosis. Yves Paccalet gives an example: “[*Je*] *me soulève et me change en angelot pareil à ceux qui volent sur les retables des églises baroques de Tarentaise.*” (2000: 32). This fantasy-like element of the narration expresses both oneness with the natural surroundings and also fantastic escape from the confines of humanity. Such descriptions confirm the intense spiritual transformation an individual can experience, like taking on a heavenly body and flying.

Nature's balance

The spiritual search many French nature writers have undertaken with nature themselves is a reflection of a current trend in the West. Modern consumerism has driven many to the limit of disconnection with the natural world. People are now considering who

they are as individuals and what truly satisfies them. Rémy Michel puts it in this way: *[Les Nations souveraines] ont développé une connaissance de la nature que nous leur envions aujourd'hui... que nous avons perdue ou que nous n'avons jamais possédée...* (2002: 3). Is this desire for knowledge a by-product of the information-age? It probably stems from a lack of fulfillment therein.

Several authors address the satisfaction found in harmony with and appreciation of nature. Queffélec writes of this peaceful relationship saying:

... le naturel intact m'éblouissait. Des paysages où l'argent ne triomphait pas : où triomphaient l'horizon, les étendues, la lumière, où les fleurs triomphaient... Il m'apparut que j'explorais un pays trop grand pour mes pas, trop lent pour la visite éclair des autos. (1997: 75)

These could be the words of many people today. It seems too good to be true; this unadulterated beauty overwhelms the writer.

Bréhal is struck by the beauty of the snow and expresses himself in similar terms. He too, gives his attention uniquely to the intense relationship the author experiences with natural elements:

La neige, à perte de vue, me crevait les yeux, supprimant d'un coup toutes les couleurs du monde, ou plutôt les emprisonnant toutes dans une seule métaphore. Je n'avais jamais vu quelque chose qui fût à la fois éblouissant et uniforme, si ce n'est le ciel immense et bleu, certains jours d'été... je n'avais plus aucun repère. (1996: 61)

He is completely taken in by the snow, being overcome by it. This relationship is fresh and unlike anything he's known in the city. There is a bond developing as he is captivated.

There is also an unconditional love toward nature that arises in this genre. This relationship is evident in the author's acceptance of the full range of nature's exhibitions.

Nicolino is content to find peace in the woods regardless of what some might consider bad

weather. “...le temps, frais et venteux, n'est pas tout à fait amical. On s'en moque d'autant plus qu'on adore le vent, même lorsqu'il claque, même quand il devient fou,” he explains (2001a: 102). The enthusiast embraces the wind, despite its temperament, accepting the change it offers from city life.

In the documentary film *Arbres*, Bruneau and Roudil comment on an ancestral link between man and tree as well. “L'histoire des arbres est liée à l'origine du monde. L'origine des hommes est liée à l'histoire des arbres,” they announce. Due to the documentary presentation of the film, this is a statement which can come across to the spectator as factual genealogy. In essence, this is merely saying that man and trees are both created. They continue, “Pour beaucoup de peuples de la forêt, l'arbre est notre ancêtre. Comment ne pas le croire quand des yeux d'enfant pénètrent une forêt d'arbres géants sans visages ?” (2001: 6). This youthful enthrallment with the natural world speaks volumes. It addresses the simple harmony people can experience with nature, a closeness that brings one to feel at home among the trees.

As it is apparent that quite a few nature writers consider the bond between man and tree binding, it is easy to follow the emotional tie that such a relationship brings about. One convincing example of this closeness is evident in the making of *Arbres*. In the commentary, Bruneau testifies of the significant effect one tree had on the crew during the making of the documentary: “La mort de ce fruitier nous a émus profondément, d'une émotion primitive, comme si quelque chose en nous d'intime et de secret venait d'être touché.” (2001: 10). This speechless moment resembles the mourning of the loss of a loved one, signifying the intimate connection they experience with trees.

Up until this point man's point of view has been thoroughly voiced; but what about seeing things from the side of nature, with a more reciprocal view of the relationship between mankind and nature? The emotive Brosse does not leave this up to the reader's imagination. He has seen the personalities of his tree-visitors. As he explains to Nicolino, "*[Les branches du noyer] viennent cogner contre les deux lucarnes du perchoir où je travaille. Il veut entrer, voyez-vous. Il n'y arrive pas, mais il pousse contre la maison.*"

(2002: 125). Through movement, the trees communicate with Brosse.

Lacarrière, on the other hand, takes a different approach. He does not claim that trees have feelings but rather he describes the interdependency he sees between humans and trees:

[La forêt] éveille des sensations et des émotions endormies. En somme, elle vous réveille et elle vous rajeunit... Oui, nous avons besoin de la forêt mais la forêt, elle aussi, a besoin de nous. Elle ne peut plus aujourd'hui survivre économiquement sans l'homme car celui-ci, depuis des siècles, l'a entretenue, améliorée et modifiée même très souvent en ses essences, en sa croissance. Pour grandir et pour prospérer, elle a besoin de l'attention et de la protection de l'homme. (1992: 127)

This quote goes the farthest, in claiming that trees depend on man in order to survive economically! Here French nature writing is unique: environment preservation to promote man's own quality of life. While the former excerpt argues the intelligence of nature, this example seems to boast man's wisdom much more. (In the third chapter, the expression of this topos is compared and contrasted with regards to the approach in Canadian nature writing).

Civilization

This contemporary genre brings to mind that experiencing nature, to the French "is a civilized affair", as one North-American hiker expresses it. First of all, it is common to find

reference made to people one encounters while in nature. To the reader's surprise, suddenly in the midst of a peaceable walk, "*d'abord un cavalier, puis un cycliste, enfin une troupe adorable mais hurlieuse, mais frénétique de gosses*" (Nicolino 2001b: 107). In other instances, an interesting character crosses the author's path and finds his way into the discourse. Such is the case of the man Queffélec speaks to momentarily on one of his trails: "*Sur le chemin d'Artzain-Achéa, en pleine montagne, un randonneur me conseilla de lui acheter son makila... au bout d'un moment, je m'aperçus qu'il m[e] [l'en] avait fait présent*" (1997: 75). This chance encounter is another illustration of the enjoyment of simple pleasures as part of the outdoor adventure. At the same time, it testifies to the French idea of nature.

France's far-reaching history combined with its population density make it a country loaded with relics. For the reader, this makes nature writing rich in ancestral heritage. Jérôme Tubiana includes this fragment: "*voici les murs de pierres grises, percés d'ogives, d'une petite église. Ce sont les ruines de la chapelle de Fourche, édifiée au XIIe siècle.*" (2001: 114). In the same regard, Jacquier mentions the "*ancien Moulin à seigle et sarrasin*" in passing (2001: 119). Nature writers do not exclude these details from their writing (as though they took away from the beauty of the natural scenery). They include them as enriching historical assets, which enhance the landscape, and can be appreciated by the reader as well.

Figures in history

Though one might expect to find mainly traces of French history in their nature writing the historical topos covers a wider variety. In fact, it would be accurate to say that

French nature writing displays a cultural interest in world history while showing a preference for holding its own heroes in high regard.

Given the role that Louis XIV played in the history of France it is not surprising that his name arises several times in the corpus. In his text on the Basque country, Queffélec inserts this brief historical note triggered by a picturesque café:

Petit déjeuner place Louis XIV, sous la chambre du roi. Là, dans la nuit du 9 juin 1660, après un lâcher de pièces d'or, se conclut sur l'oreiller nuptial un traité de paix entre l'Espagne et la France, l'une représentée par l'infante Marie-Thérèse, l'autre par le Roi-Soleil. (1997: 73).

The inclusion of this comment is relevant to the region (as was illustrated with the gastronomy topos) and provides the reader with pertinent political history. This sort of historical anecdote is commonly part of French writing, shedding light on a variety of related subjects. Drawing a historical context for the early years of the Tronçais forest in the region of Auvergne, Jean-Claude Grenier writes, "*Une forêt de chênes centenaires puisqu'ils furent plantés au temps de Colbert pour alimenter en bois les constructions de la Marine royale*" (1992: 127). Along the same lines, Brosse discusses a *reforestation* movement which took place in 1824, "*notamment [après les] destructions de la Révolution française* (2002: 123). A note such as this is likely to serve the purpose of alerting the reader to the serious impact historical events such as the Revolution posed to forests.

Likewise, in Paccalet's illustration of the notion of destiny he makes use of two well-known historical figures. He writes:

Debout sur la Terre, l'enfant porte symboliquement sur ses épaules le destin de son espèce. Christophe Colomb entama ainsi son chemin d'Amérique, et Neil Armstrong ne débuta pas mieux son voyage dans la Lune. (2000: 39)

These historical figures take a place in Paccalet's text as monumental figures in world history. Paccalet's intention is not to bring up seafaring or astronomy but rather to draw attention to the intrigue of discovering the natural world and the benefits of physical activity to the human body.

Sometimes, nature writers will quote an axiom from a famous historical individual. Traveler and writer Gilles Lapouge quotes a proverb from Benjamin Franklin: “ « *Celui qui a réussi à faire pousser deux brins d'herbe là où il n'y en avait qu'un n'a pas vécu en vain* », dit [il].” (2002: 130). Using his words reinforces Lapouge's point that tree-planters gain a sense of purposefulness in life.

In the same article, Lapouge notes several other renowned individuals, primarily literary heroes, among whom are La Fontaine and Jean Giono (*Loc. cit.*, 130). Victor Hugo is another name that arises unsuspectingly in Queffélec's Basque text: “*Si j'en crois mes souvenirs, Victor Hugo a fait plusieurs séjours à Pasajes*” (1997: 74). One can see that this adds a little cultural flavour to the discourse.

Natural history

One variety of historical reference that recurs in French nature writing regards what could be referred to as natural history. In such instances, the author extrapolates a specific element of nature which is pertinent to the text. Most frequently, this follows weather, plants or animals.

Mention of previous crises in the text's setting often appears as an aid to setting the scene. On Nicolino's hike, for example, he describes the pine trees in the vicinity with greater detail by writing, “*Des pins ..., certains fièrement dressés tout là-haut, d'autres en*

bas, terrassés, brisés sans doute par la tempête de 1999, écrabouillés.” (2001a: 103). In the same way, Laduy comments on the lasting effects of a recent forest fire: “...*j’entre dans le village de l’Ospédale, non sans avoir maudit pourtant le terrible incendie de 1994 qui a détruit des dizaines d’hectares de cette forêt sublime.*” (1995: 120). These details give the audience not only an idea of the present state of the area, but they also paint a picture of the physical geography and its greatest influences. The added information in turn adds an educational aspect to the French texts.

The other main historical topos implicates living organisms in nature. Jean Blanchard demonstrates this in an article on mushrooms when he writes:

En matière de conquête, les champignons ont une solide expérience. Sortis de l’eau il y a plusieurs millions d’années pour aider les végétaux à prendre racine sur terre, ils ont investi tous les milieux, terre, eau, homme, animaux... (2001: 19)

This traces the history of the mushroom back to its earliest history and enriches the text.

This topos also appears in *Le bonheur en marchant*, by Yves Paccalet. A passage on tetrapods reads:

L’emblème des vertébrés à quatre pattes – des tétrapodes. Le modèle des amphibiens, ou batraciens, qui s’extirpèrent de l’onde voici trois cent soixante-dix millions d’années, sous la forme de l’ichtyostéga et du tulerpéton, et dont les héritiers furent les reptiles, dont naquirent les mammifères et les oiseaux. (2000: 94)

This interest in the early history and evolution of living things surfaces time and time again in contemporary French nature writing, reminding the reader of the great age of the earth.

Natural history does not take primary focus in the texts, but is often used to enrich them with educational information.

Environmental responsibility

Of course it would be difficult not to mention the multiple threats to nature in such emotive literature; and this too is a common theme arising in contemporary French nature writing. A technique commonly arising in the French corpus is a distant relationship of responsibility drawn between environmental concern and the liable party. This is the case in an article from the French magazine *Géo* and its presentation of the sad news about the water quality of the Mediterranean. The details read:

[La Méditerranée] a le désavantage d'être bordée de 40 000 kilomètres de côtes donnant sur des pays démographiquement et économiquement prospères qui ont fait d'elle leur tout-à-l'égout. Polluants chimiques, goudrons, métaux lourds troublent le milieu aquatique de quelque neuf cents espèces de poissons. Et menacent la santé des baigneurs. (1993:131).

First to note is that the language use is such that the responsibility is put on the countries themselves. This imprecision keeps the blame distant, as opposed to questioning individual responsibility. On the other hand, the quote goes beyond expressing environmental concern: it goes so far as to say that the environmental decline puts swimmers at risk. This argument persuades readers that seawater quality is a worthwhile cause not only because it affects hundreds of fish species, but also because it could impinge on swimmers.

In the same way, Nicolino describes the report of the destruction of a nature reserve in the *Gers* region:

« À l'improviste, des bulldozers sont arrivés, s'étrangle Henry, et ont creusé au beau milieu de la future réserve une piste de 4,5 m de large sur un kilomètre! Un étang a été comblé, un site de nidification du héron pourpré, le seul de toute la vallée de l'Adour... » (2001c: 84)

While the explanation seems at first glance to be straightforward there is little reference to the acting subject. Rather, the bulldozer acts as a substitute for the individual driver or

society responsible for the act. This use of metonymy also gives the impression that the machine itself is demolishing the natural environment. The comments of Jacques Brosse lean in the same direction. “*Je pense qu’il faut être clair. Qui exploite la forêt mondiale?*” he introduces. “*Des sociétés multinationales dépourvues de toute éthique, de toute préoccupation écologique, qui détruisent des forêts pour y récupérer quelques arbres précieux*”, he discloses (Nicolino 2002: 124). While this is a step closer, Brosse paints a rather nondescript culprit. Here multinational companies are responsible.

Finally, there is a change in tactic and man becomes responsible for his bearing on the environment: “*À Bleau comme ailleurs, l’homme a en effet asséché, drainé autrement dit détruit.*” (2001a: 104). In this example, there is more precision as for who is to be held responsible for environmental deterioration, however, “*l’homme*” is still a third party.

A second type of reference one finds to environmental concerns and accountability is more explicit than the former. In these sorts of examples, the cause and effect is more clearly defined. The text on water quality of the Mediterranean, for example, offers research findings from Corsica ferries: “*Trop souvent, équipages et passagers prennent la mer pour une poubelle!*” It goes even farther in explaining the mistaken philosophy behind the destructive behaviour: “*Tout le monde veut croire au pouvoir éternellement purificateur de l’eau.*” (1993: 13). In this case, the responsibility does not remain on board, but is plainly attributed to ferry crew and passengers.

In the film *Arbres* (2001), the audience need only see the ironic contrast between two scenes. In one, there is a whisper in the trees and one is mesmerized by their majesty as the camera pans slowly over a landscape; in another, there is the whirring of a chainsaw and the sight of an immense redwood finally cracking and then thundering to the ground. Though in

this case there is some conjecture, there is no ambiguity about who cuts trees down.

Humans enjoy the forest, and humans cut them down.

The greatest sign of responsibility that is displayed in French nature writing, however, is in the suggestion that a change in human behaviour is needed. Author Gilles Lapouge applauds one man he considers is making a difference:

Il cherche toujours un nouvel arbre [à planter] comme on cherche le matin le souvenir d'un rêve et peut-être voit-il, dans ses yeux si fatigués, les enfants qui, dans un siècle ou deux, joueront à cache-cache au fond des bosquets que, la veille, il a mis sur la terre? (2002: 130)

This author goes a big step farther than stating the problem and pointing a finger; he addresses the solution.

Rémy Michel offers the reader an occasion for reflection, to change their outlook and attitude. In speaking of western discourse on indigenous peoples across the world he writes:

Avouons-le, notre attitude est ambiguë. En cherchant, sincèrement, à protéger la diversité de leurs cultures, figées dans des expressions immuables, n'est-ce pas une fois de plus notre propre vision que nous tentons d'imposer? Nous les instituons gardiens de la nature, ultimes garants des équilibres écologiques. Ce sont là des mots qu'ils ignorent, des mots de Blancs. La notion de protection ou de respect de la nature leur est étrangère, ils disent humblement qu'ils appartiennent à la Terre. (2002: 3).

Through the use of *nous*, Michel's words do not come across as an attack. He admits that he is also part of misinformed "white man", and that in truth; the western notion that natives protect nature is an interpretation of what natives themselves consider merely as living in natural harmony with the earth.

So just what is the solution French nature writers propose? On the whole, most of them suggest living in deeper harmony with the natural environment. What does the forest want of people, asks Lacarrière. And the response:

Elle a besoin d'amis qui viennent à elle sans lui réclamer ni son bois ni ses bêtes ni sa résine ni ses écorces ni ses aubiers ni ses trophées. Des amis désintéressés : autrement dit des amoureux. (1992: 128).

Lacarrière's point is that forests are to be enjoyed, not abused. Uniquely however, this argument makes it seem as though the forest could not do without appreciative human visitors.

There is one other style nature writers use to draw the reader's attention to the decline of the environment and the need for change. This is through the use of statistics. In *Géo*, the truth about trash speaks volumes: "*Environ un demi-million de mètres cubes d'ordures sont ramassées chaque jour dans les villes de tout le littoral méditerranéen.*" (1993: 137).

Similarly, in the recent documentary film *Arbres*, it is explained that the palm tree has come to be known more for its consumer value than as a part of nature to be simply appreciated. There are nearly 3000 varieties of palm tree that serve for an extensive list of commodities (2001: 9). In this case as well, there is no direct advice to the reader; the facts remain distant (though the figures do hold their weight) and the relationship is left to be inferred. This is characteristic of contemporary nature writing.

All told, French authors do present a concern for nature today: Their case being that much of nature is under threat. On some occasions indistinct responsibility is given for areas at risk. On other occasions, the source of the environmental threat is more precise. But there is a second concern as well: man has become sidetracked with consumerism and has forgotten the rejuvenating pleasure and feeling of harmony he can find in co-existence with nature. Pierre Gilloire puts it this way:

Le retour à la montagne est fait d'une humilité saisonnière où prennent part la redécouverte de ses propres limites, la nécessité de suivre au mieux le profil du terrain, de respecter ses courbes et

ses aspérités, le sentiment qu'il est vain de forcer la nature, de s'arracher trop brutalement à la pesanteur des choses. C'est bien cela. (2000: 12).

Across contemporary French nature writing the hope to preserve nature shines through.

Authors offer subtle counsel as well, to reinforce the idea that the peace and harmony man can experience in nature is both perishable and cannot be filled by modern consumerism.

Summary

After examining a cross-section of contemporary French nature writing several main topoi have been detected as common to the genre. Most obvious is evidence of culinary appreciation; this is the reflection of an appreciation for *terroir*, for local flavour and refined tastes. Locally harvested produce and recipes are not to be passed by, but complement and complete the French experience of nature. This is related to another theme, a hedonistic experiencing of the sensual in nature; breathing, hearing, touching.

A writing style typical to this genre could be referred to as the “moment-by-moment” style; this entails detailed descriptions of what the author experiences, as though the reader were taking each step with him. This can be seen as a foretaste of the experience to readers, especially because maps frequently appear side by side with the French texts. It is evident that there is a distinction in the general purposes the genre serves to its respective readership. The French presentation, often giving the author's precise location and including a small map, facilitates the reader visiting the specific green spaces mentioned in the article. In contrast, the Canadian texts aim at environmental awareness and natural living. This idea will be further developed in the final chapter.

Another topos common to the French corpus describes the oneness authors develop with trees and other elements of nature. Authors display an emotional connection with nature on a personal level and often include the reader in the experience through the use of inclusive pronouns and the imperative. In French nature writing the relationship man has with nature tends to draw out a spiritual mysticism or mythological flavour. The spiritual references common to the French corpus are used to promote mental health and a balanced lifestyle. Nature is seen as a source of vital energy that rejuvenates the spirit. This topos, common to both corpora stems from distinguishable sources and serves independent purposes. Possible influences upon the author's approach are the religious history of the country and the place of spiritual beliefs in the governing of society. Such factors are influential to French authors, considering the anthropomorphic view common among them, and do not bring in divisive questions of religious affiliation.

It would be easy to stop short, concluding that some topos are unique, and others shared by both French and Canadian writers, however, this only skims the surface of cultural views of nature. While it is useful to be aware of similarities and differences in interpretations of the outdoors it is also beneficial for the translator to keep in mind what is appreciated in the foreign culture. For instance, should any one be denied the experience of French gastronomy for the tradition of packing a lunch? Before looking more directly into the translation of nature writing, I propose to consider cultural commonalities and variations among the aforementioned topos and others, such as environmental decline and the role of historical figures and events.

Contrasting expressions of nature

Following the general findings outlined in the first two chapters it is now crucial to compare and contrast the *topoi* of the corpora. In doing so, I intend to achieve a clearer understanding of nature in the two cultures. I hope to gain a more thorough knowledge of cultural subtleties and an awareness of implications to translation, in particular, beyond the lexical level. Similarities and differences in how one perceives and interacts with nature in one's own land will determine, to some extent, how one experiences nature beyond the borders of *home*. In practical terms, an analysis of *topoi* from the two corpora can grant a concrete observation of culture and nature. At the same time, this facilitates effective translation.

There are several *topoi* shared by the Canadian and French corpora, one of the most evident being a common mention of food. Whereas the French are renowned for their fine cuisine and appreciation thereof, it may seem surprising that this theme would arise in Canadian literature as well. However, there is clear distinctiveness to the illustration of the theme in each corpus. In the Canadian corpus, most authors refer to food with little detail. As demonstrated in the first chapter, Canadian nature writing makes brief reference to simple snacking, such as on GORP (Good Old Raisins and Peanuts), berries, or sandwiches. Occasionally there are references to local specialties like seafood dishes or mother's baked beans, but on the whole, meals are simple, hearty and portable. One reason for this might come from the substantial distances to cover in the Canadian wilderness. It is easy to understand, from Canadian geography and the vastness of the "wilderness", that foods most conducive to being outdoors include anything "off the land" (as in the case of berries and fish) as well as non-perishable foods (such as nuts and dried fruit) or simple meals (like the

sandwich). Carrying nourishment for physical activity is a Canadian tradition because the Canadian “interior” is far away from restaurants and gourmet food.

On the other hand, the French corpus displays a finer, more colourful flavour for cooking. When in nature, writers speak of gathering mushrooms and snails. Such references are distinctly associated to culture, to European culture at least, if not more specifically to the French. The texts also give greater detail to the smell and taste of food, lingering at times over succulent dishes prepared in neighbouring restaurants. This reflects the culture, which takes a hedonistic approach to life in several ways. To begin with, the lunch menu is often described in nearly as much detail as the natural surroundings in question. It is important to acknowledge that though both French and Canadian contemporary nature writing may share interest in a theme, they can have culturally unique ways of addressing it.

One characteristic theme of French nature writing is sensuousness. French authors revel not only in the taste of their food, but also in what they see, smell, hear and feel. Though Canadians do express the sense of harmony they feel in nature, they do not generally give as much detail to sensations such as grass tickling their legs or a deep breath amidst a field of flowers—as the French do. At times, this trend in French writing could be interpreted as heightened sensitivity because it seems the author can describe a single moment in minute detail for paragraphs and even pages. This method, extending one brief, reflective, moment in nature over paragraphs, and even pages, is a feature of French nature writing.

Here arises a potential misunderstanding between cultures, for the Canadian perspective is more distant. While the French step into nature, fine-tune their senses and present acute detail, the tendency in Canadian writing seems to be to take a step back. From

a distance, Canadian authors sooner give brief mention to simple pleasures, perhaps with the intent of whetting the reader's appetite. At times, the Canadian writer will not even disclose his location, like David Carpenter who writes, "I am going to call this hike-in-lake by its unofficial name. It is The Lake That Cannot Be Named." (2001: 182). French articles, on the contrary, may include maps. For this reason, the French reader may feel he is missing out on much of the Canadian experience. Because the Canadian practice is to take a wide-angle perspective, the illustrative French experience may seem considerably detailed to the Canadian reader.

There is a universal interest shown on the part of nature writers across cultures regarding spirituality. It is common to both sets of authors to speak of a sense of peace and harmony that man experiences in nature. New Age spirituality has found a market both in France and in Canada, promoting balanced living incorporating work and play, along with meditation. The spiritual examples found in the corpora testify that though the communities both possess a spiritual interest, each addresses the spiritual aspects of nature in its own way. The French authors frequently do this by making reference to myths and legends, drawing the reader into a fantasyland of fairies and castles. In Canadian writing, there is a strong influence from aboriginal spirituality, looking to birds and fish for example. This represents the history of the nation, an indigenous people known for their oneness with the wild. Yet, Canadian writers are not the only ones drawing attention to aboriginal peoples, for the French do as well but in a different way. These references are more to "tribal peoples" of the world, such as in Rémy Michel's article *Nations souveraines* (*Terre Sauvage*, April 2002: 3). The primary difference is that native spirituality is a part of Canadian heritage gaining appreciation; whereas France has suffered a history of conflict with Catholicism and has long

separated church from state. Yet, in recent years, there has been a resurgence spiritual interest. These differences in cultural background are valid contributors to distinct spiritual components of nature writing.

The differing pasts of France and Canada have an influence on nature writing as well. In general, there is a more marked presence of the history of civilization in the French corpus. Authors mention influential figures, such as Louis XIV, Victor Hugo, and Neil Armstrong in the literature. In addition, French trips to mountains or forests also frequently include the sighting of historical landmarks like castles or ruins of some kind. This is an indication of cultural variance, both in that Canada is a significantly younger country than France and also that Canadian writers tend to limit most historical comments to colonization, the early settlers and pioneer life. It is also worth mentioning that early years of primarily aboriginal occupancy left comparatively little trace, as far as monuments and the exploitation of land is concerned. This variation contributes the mention of civilization and historical figures in the corpora.

Both corpora display a historical element, referring to natural history. This includes changes in habitat or landscape occurring over years, or the progress of a species. Where corpora share a given topos, such as the natural history topos, there is little cultural disparity. In part, this might be because there is certain universality to weather damage and other environmental threats. At the same time, there are as many histories as there are natural settings, regardless the continent. This shared approach to a topos, however, is the exception to the findings at large.

As the content shows, primarily Canadian nature writers employ the childhood experience topos. There is only one account of a childhood experience in the French corpus

(Bréhal 1996: 21); as such, it cannot be considered a common French topos. In the Canadian literature, it is a theme that comes up again and again, but one must not discount the possibility of this being part of Boyd's selection criteria for the *Northern Wild* anthology (2001). Along this line, it was beneficial to include several Canadian texts from other sources to verify the occurrence of topos in a broader scope. The majority of authors of Canadian nature writing have been impacted by nature since childhood. While it is possible that French authors also have childhood memories in nature, they make little or no mention of it in their writing, whereas Canadian authors give it priority.

Another trademark of Canadian nature writing is its accurate display of the entire picture of what nature has to offer. This includes the good, the bad, and the ugly. Many of these writers express an overall respect for nature in all of its intricacies. That is, their picture of nature does not exclude poor weather and unbearable mosquito populations. Often, the authors will even go so far as to outline the delicate role of each player in a grander picture, fostering an all-encompassing appreciation for what really goes on in the wild. Part and parcel of this is a positive look at natives and the role of native hunting; man can contribute to a balanced ecosystem when he takes from nature only what he can immediately use. This idea runs counter-current with modern consumerism.

The pace of the western world today tends to be a driving force behind the attraction to nature and nature writing. Both sets of texts promote an escape from consumerism and hectic city schedules, taking the reader to green space and fresh air. Essentially, nature writing can also be considered, in and of itself, a temporary escape for the reader. Whether on the subway or in one's living room, the reader is transported into the literature of nature.

Canadian authors delight in nature as a connection with a different reality. What they experience in nature is a reconnection not only with the natural world, but also with the essence of life: unrushed, meaningful contact in a balanced environment. The escape offered in Canadian texts takes the reader to a place where experience is marked by moving moments of lucidity.

Along the same lines, French authors express the great impact of the natural world upon them and the incomparability of modern cities and lifestyles with nature's beauty. Especially for Parisian readers, this genre is an escape from horrendous traffic and bustling subways. For both audiences, the escape one experiences in the outdoors is one of significant spiritual rejuvenation.

Another common theme in both corpora is the vulnerability of the environment against various threats. Both sets of authors acknowledge the damage that has occurred to put natural resources, and nature at large, at risk. While it is a common theme, there is a distinction in how each culture goes about presenting issues.

The tendency of Canadian authors is to pinpoint environmental harm at the local level, which contributes to a bigger picture. In contrast, the approach of the French authors is to examine the bigger picture from the onset. The difference this makes on the readership is significant. Because Canadian writers discuss the "little things" like soap scum from immediate environments—Van Tighem writes about his back yard, they are in a good position to instigate change in their readers. Rather than pointing the finger, the Canadian author claims a portion of responsibility, indirectly asking the reader to examine his or her contribution to environmental decline in the same way.

The approach in French nature writing, on the other hand, refers more to large-scale environmental damage and governmental or commercial responsibility. Here there is a distinction in purpose which surfaces. French authors do not give evidence of possible intentions to change the reader's lifestyle or outlook. Nor do French texts instigate action. For this reason it is difficult to say the corpora are completely parallel. It is also clear that though this topos is common to nature writing in both cultures, contrasting views are observable.

The most obvious contrast, however, is evident in the views of mankind's relationship with nature. The hedonistic stance of the French directs their writing; they write of a dreamy, euphoric state one can find in nature. They write of nature as a pleasure to enjoy. Where Canadian and French authors meet across their cultures is in their reference to a serene, harmonious sense of personal existence within creation. The Canadian corpus however, reveals the point of view that wisdom is found in nature: Nature is a model that teaches man how to live. (This idea only comes across in French texts on a rare occasion, such as in Nicolino's interview with Jacques Brosse). Canadian authors generally give priority to the protection and preservation of nature.

There are two noteworthy conclusions to be drawn from the comparison. The first has to do with the topoi found in both corpora. Of course, it would be a terrible oversimplification to categorize common topoi as a sort of middle-ground for translating nature writing. As demonstrated, even a topos that appears in both French and Canadian writing takes on a culture-specific approach. This shows that a notion of finding "middle ground" or common experience that is easily understood in the foreign culture is inadequate, primarily

because it would neglect, in one way or another, the corpus-distinct *topoi*. Instead, even common *topos* can express individuality and should be considered by the translator.

The second observation drawn from this exercise brings the notion of *parallel text* into question. In selecting a writing genre, it is easy to pigeonhole a group of texts according to their authors, topic, and writing style. However, it is worth mentioning that classification can be executed with relative ease and only later brought under greater scrutiny. The question coming to mind after the comparative study of the *topoi*: do the texts serve a common purpose? All of the articles do share the nature experience and enhance the reader's appreciation for particular aspects of nature. They also appeal to comparable audiences of nature enthusiasts. However, the French texts overall seem to serve as nature guides as well, attracting readers to relive the recounted adventure. The Canadian texts, alternatively, can hardly be lent to such a purpose; neither is geographic location expressly mentioned nor are maps or tourist information regularly included (as the French articles often do). Rather, their general purpose leans more toward pleasure reading and environmental conservation. In this light, the authors' functions diverge, showing the notion of *parallel text* to be culture-sensitive.

Within the notion of parallel text would there be no room for cultural variance? In posing this question, I mean that some leeway should be granted between cultures, a margin of variance according to interests at heart. Canadian authors, for example, demonstrate a nation's love for *wilderness*. French authors display a love to discover the specialties of their homeland. These dissimilarities illustrate not only the intentions of the authors but also the interests of the readers. It would seem possible, and even probable, that the two populations of nature writers are writing for different purposes because the natural environment differs

and because nature itself serves a different purpose in each of the cultures. For this latter reason it is questionable whether the entirety of parallelism could exist between such corpora. For the purposes here, I will ask the reader's lenience in assuming a looser definition of what can be considered parallel.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSLATING CULTURE

Translation theories that address culture

It is crucial to consider the groundwork that has been done, especially over the last fifty years, in regards to cultural aspects of translation. The general trend has brought translation from *linguistic* approaches to *communicative* approaches, which include methods referred to as *functionalist*.

Linguistic theory

Around the middle of the twentieth century the prime concern was to match source and target languages. Terminology was of the essence. Structural linguists such as Roman Jakobson or Georges Mounin offered new perspectives on translating, which could be termed the *lexico-semantic* approach. These theorists also paid attention to culture, and its influence on translation, but focused more on language systems, stating that while grammars differ across linguistic borders, the lexicon of each language is so equipped as to express anything the source text does, even if in a dissimilar manner. So every language was considered capable of translating an original idea according to its own system.

This approach puts heavy weight on contrastive terminology and tends to reduce cultural aspects. This becomes all the more clear when one considers even a brief example, such as an extract from a French writer like Laduy. In his hiking chronicles, he describes some of the delicacies he enjoys: “*Au gîte d’étape, figatelli (saucisses de foie de porc) et vin de Patrimonio.*” (1995: 121). Following a linguistic approach, a translator must find the

lexical means by which to express the message and attention is given to finding equivalence of meaning. The main concern is to find lexical equivalence. So the translator would seek to translate the author's meaning into the target language (here, English). She might construct something along these lines: "Back at the lodge, pork liver sausage called *figatelli* and Patrimonio wine await." Taking a linguistic approach might give an account of the original. However, while the meaning is present, the greater context, the nuances, the ambiance are not so much as hinted at because lexical meaning is the translator's priority. While the message has been put in understandable terms, the reader would be interpreting the translation according to one's representation of the world. There is no question that where in France one would say *gîte*, in Canada one would say 'lodge', calling forth different connotations. This approach reduces translation to little more than transcoding. Either the Canadian reader would benefit greatly from having done some hiking in France or he will assimilate Laduy's experience with his own, picturing a lodge, as he knows it. The greater issue is that a linguistic-based approach would neglect the cultural variance illustrated in the discourse of contemporary nature writing.

Communicative theory

This difference in culture is something that Nida incorporated into his approach to translation. He acknowledges that it is unreasonable to expect that translation can accomplish absolute equivalence because of the direct rapport a language has with its culture. In fact, because of differences in culture, translating necessarily involves skewing, adding and/or subtracting information. So, he advises that the translator recognize this and consequently set out to produce a translation with the least "skewing" or distortion of the

original message possible while following target culture practices (1966: 13). In place of striving for “equivalence”, he suggests *dynamic equivalence*, which considers linguistic and cultural incongruence.

The role of culture is crucial in Nida’s eyes, because it impacts upon the reader’s interpretation of the text. The aim of translation is to preserve the original message in both the target language and culture. The translation should produce the same response in its audience as the original did (1964). The translator must be familiar with both the original’s culture and the culture of the target text in order to have a clear goal. He calls the schema he uses the *ethnolinguistic design of communication* (1966: 14). This is a shape-based illustration of how the original fits within the “shape” of its culture, and consequently, that the translation should fit within the shape of its own culture. This is not to say that he endorses compromise between the original and the target cultures; in Nida’s words, “Translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning and secondly in style.” (*Ibid.*, 19). This implies, first, that there is one easily discernible message and second, it can be fitted to the cultural context of the target language—without excessive loss.

What was new about this approach in 1964 was that the reader was considered as an active participant in two-way communication with the message. The reader’s response is of great importance. In this sense, it can be said that Nida has a double priority: the preservation of the original message **and** the functions of the text in the target culture for its reader. Nida’s main concern is to accommodate the target culture, fitting the original message into the target culture’s parameters. For this reason, Nida’s approach is a precursor to the functionalist approach to translation.

V.N. Komissarov criticizes the lengths to which Nida goes, from a source-text-oriented position, saying, “The dynamic equivalence concept results in the receptors getting a false impression that the source language culture does not much differ from their own. The procedure does not bridge the cultural gap but rather pretends that it never existed. The receptors get access to a different story set in a familiar environment” (Komissarov, 1991: 45). Though some question the validity of Nida’s target-oriented methods within and outside Bible translation, his approach would not be completely off base for the translation of nature writing. The central message authors are communicating is a relationship with nature. Considering Nida’s approach, the translator must recognize the cultural framework in which the text is composed as well as the framework (or “shape”) into which it is being translated. In many ways, this has been shown in the comparative study of the topoi of each corpus. It should be noted, however, that Nida’s method of translation is based on a grammatical analysis, which excludes “cultural translation” or adaptation.

Functionalist theory

Following communicative approaches came a “functional” wave in translation. Hans Vermeer developed the *Skopos theory*, succeeding Bühler and Jakobson’s model of functions of communication⁴. This theory arose at the end of the 70s and early 80s, proposing a goal-oriented approach to translation that recognized the inevitability, and even necessity of cultural shift. Where Jakobson spoke of the structure of verbal communication being established for a specific function (1960: 353), Vermeer applies the functionalist approach to translation. Driving this approach is the principle that a successful translation, as any other

⁴ Jakobson added three functions of linguistic communication to Bühler’s previous three (emotive, conative, and referential). To these he added a poetic function, a phatic function (serving to establish or maintain contact), and a metalingual function (1960: 355-356).

communicative act, has a distinct purpose to fulfill the needs of the client. As the *skopos* rule states:

Translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation/to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function. (Nord citing Vermeer in 1997: 29)

According to Vermeer, translation involves culture insofar as the sender and receiver are from separate cultures. The translator's task is to know the purpose the translation is to accomplish, and translate accordingly. This frees the translator from vague notions about equivalence and other prescriptive ideas. The translator's first priority is to adhere to the *skopos* rule, then for the translation to be coherent within the target culture, and finally, for there to be some correspondence between the translation and its original. (*Loc. cit.*, 32).

From the French school, Daniel Gouadec takes a parallel stance, advocating that there is not simply one translation for every original document. Like Vermeer, he suggests that the function of the final product be taken into consideration so that the translation is established with its objective clearly in view (Gouadec 1989: 21-22)⁵.

The particular advantage of taking this approach for the translation of contemporary nature writing is that the translator may make appropriate adaptations, according to the *purpose* or specifications of the translation. Due to the complexity and variety displayed in contemporary nature writing, a translation of a given text could be commissioned to serve one of any number of purposes (one possible example will be considered in the final chapter of the project). As Vermeer indicates,

⁵ Translation ranges from *Traduction signalétique*, where the translator would only make reference to elements of specific interest to the client and the client's purpose, to *Traduction absolue*, whereby the translator would translate all elements of the original, tending to detail such as terminological coherence and technical congruence.

A precise specification of aim and mode is essential for the translator . – This is of course analogously true of translation proper: *skopos* and mode of realization must be adequately defined if the text-translator is to fulfil his task successfully. (2002: 221)

The *skopos theory* is intended to entrust the translator with the task of producing the best-suited translation for the purpose it is to serve; to which the translator is also accountable. This approach re-establishes the parameters for both the client and the translator, with the intent of aptness and efficiency.

Practically speaking, this means that, were a French nature writing text to be translated for Canadian tourists traveling to France, there would be great attention given to preserving directions to the site in question: maps, parking details, even warnings of weekend crowds on forest trails (such as in Nicolino's "*La Dame Jouanne, sentinelle de grès*", 2001: 102). Under another *skopos* however, such as if the translation were to be for the pleasure reading of North Americans (who are seeking to be in touch with nature through literature and really have no intention of following a detailed route), the translator could be justified in excluding directions and the like. In such a case, the client would be more interested in the heightened sensitivities of the French authors who relish the sights and sensations of the outdoors, for example.

Of course it should not be presumed that the task of the translator is so simple as to translate for a uniform readership; this would be naïve. Nor is there ever one sole *skopos* or purpose of the translation. Indeed, it is not uncommon for translations to serve more than one purpose. Furthermore, while the client can outline a reader profile for the translation, to some extent each reader will be unique, even possessing an individual culture. In actual fact, it is impossible for the translator (or the client, for that matter) to know exactly who the audience is (Cronin 1996: 152-3). Neither could the audience of the original work be

presumed to be uniform. This, however, does not lessen the accountability of the translator to satisfy the requests of the client according to the predicted audience and purpose. The purpose of a translation can be established with the article's editor and/or publisher who has a specific target audience in mind (based on market studies).

The translatability of contemporary nature writing

In regard to the translation of nature writing, potential translation publications are numerous: They include tourism, environmental protection, health and well-being, even virtual outdoor adventure. In its own way, each of these purposes will influence how the translator will construct the new text.

After reflecting on the general similarities and differences between contemporary French and Canadian nature writing and considering the possible readership, the translator must ask how the genre can best be translated for a specific audience in the other culture. First of all, it is important to recognize that the corpora share common ground; the texts focus on the author's experience in nature; but they cannot be considered parallel. This is because neither the texts' readerships, nor their functions correspond. This has also become apparent through the study of topoï. In nature writing we can see both the variation in landscape of the countries in question as well as cultural variations in approach. The same applies to the translation of nature writing. A sentence-by-sentence translation of a Canadian work would not satisfy the purpose of French nature writing, just as such a literal translation of a French work would not satisfy the purpose of Canadian nature writing.

The texts are similar in their subject matter and even in writing style, but Canadian and French nature-lovers approach nature in different terms because they have distinct points

of reference. French and Canadian authors each promote their respective national cultural histories. French nature writing promotes national sightseeing. Canadians present a more rustic outdoor venture. To know what impact this has on translation one must consider the readership.

The notion of topos does not only serve as a tool to illustrate how cultures view nature, but it also reveals what appeals to an audience. This will be considered further in the upcoming target text development exercise.

Literary anthropologist Wolfgang Iser suggests the goal of translation today is to offer a “mutual understanding” whereby the two cultures can be seen on equal but different footing (1995: 30). The translator serves as a liaison between the cultures. In the particular case of nature writing, this would mean that a translation illustrate differences in culture, without claiming cultural hegemony—for either the source culture or the target culture. Establishing this sort of mutual understanding requires that a reader be able to grasp another’s view of the natural world through the translation; that the *other* be understood as having a viable viewpoint. The first-person narrative often used in the genre already accomplishes part of this aim, as it presents things personally and experientially rather than from an onlooker’s point of view. Therefore, a translation should also be written in this narrative style, so that the reader be drawn into the foreign setting and share in the *other*’s experience, hence coming to a closer understanding of it. With all of this in mind, I will now consider an example of contemporary nature writing for translation.

A target for nature writing

Up until now, nature writing has not been widely translated. This could be due to several factors. Firstly, it is possibly due to the relatively young age of the genre. Secondly, it could be that there has not yet been a demand for translation. It is not, however, the case that this genre has not been considered at all for translation. Recently, Air Canada's in-flight magazine *En Route* published a work of Canadian nature writing by Harry Thurston (1997: 48-51). This does show that nature writing is being translated. Interestingly, the writing is presented side-by-side, aligned with a translation, and there is no mention of a translator. This presentation resembles bilingual Canadian federal government documents, which in greater part are written in English and then translated into French (Covacs 1980: 7) for publication in both languages, with no sign of which is the original and which the translation. At the same time, such a one-to-one translation seems to identify a purely linguistic difference between cultures and for matter of convenience the document is presented in two languages. In the Department of Justice however, alternative methods to translation have been devised for drafting legislation.

The Department of Justice has employed several methods in response to the decline of good French in written legislation and for the preservation of French culture in the Canadian legal system. These drafting methods address bilingualism and serve to produce a French document and an English one, without treating one as the unalterable original (*Loc. cit.* 15, 23-24). The purpose of such methods is for language to remain authentic, and for it to pertain to the particular language-population it intends to address (*Ibid.*, 29).

As nature writing too appeals to the culture to which it is targeted, a similar approach, more along the lines of adaptation than translation should be considered.

After the *topoi* study in the earlier sections, it has become evident that there are distinctions in what constitutes *nature* in the mind's eye and how one writes of the personal experience. This is a case in point for considering not only language, but cultural practices also. Especially if a piece of nature writing is commissioned for a foreign target readership (as in the case of this study) the greater cultural approach must be considered in the hopes of achieving a mutual understanding. In fact, the culturally contrastive *topoi* in the previous chapters set a foundation for the adaptation of nature writing.

For example, Jean-Christophe Brisard follows a strict itinerary over the course of three days in the *Périgord*. "J'ai un quart d'heure de retard, il est 9 h 45. Gilles Ouardi et Louis Mouillac m'attendent déjà devant leurs canoës", shares Brisard (2002: 95). Portions such as this, from French nature writing, would go against the grain of Canadian nature writing, as has been shown in the timeless aspect of the *topoi* of escape. It takes away from the freedom associated with nature to English-speaking Canadian authors. Stefania Arcara, in her study of mass tourism and translation, recognizes this in a related vein:

Just as tourists cannot be offered motorways and Plexiglas buildings, so they cannot (and mostly do not wish to) be exposed to modern concepts such as feminist movements, underground or avant-garde art, environmental activism, etc. They do not wish to be presented with a fast-paced city life, ... (1994: 13)

Though Arcara is speaking in principle of travel writing, the same can be applied to nature writing. The trend of Canadian writing, which is slow-paced and does not divulge an actual agenda, would be contravened, were an author to specify an itinerary so overtly. Similarly, the Canadian authors' expression of personal responsibility for environmental endangerment would hardly be at home amidst French writing where this issue does not seem to be

addressed. This is why it is necessary and useful to be able to identify the literary representation of a culture's overall view of nature.

The *topoi* found in French and Canadian works of this genre partly demonstrate the cultural variance of readerships and social practices. And for this reason, adaptation (ie. applying the *skopos* theory) would be more functional than translation for differences in general purpose for the respective discourses.

Purposefully adapting French nature writing

Up until now a case has been built for the adaptation of nature writing. It has been clearly demonstrated that the corpora in question have both similar and distinctive views of nature. Unless a piece of French writing is to be translated for virtually the same purpose the original text was written, adaptation may be the only way to meet the requirements of a client.

For example, consider the translator who is asked to compose an English article of nature writing on France for a Canadian outdoor magazine. The magazine is geared toward nature enthusiasts and usually covers only domestic destinations. There is however an interest to add some foreign content to their publication. The magazine has an agreement with a geographic magazine publisher in France and has received permission to use some of their articles as the basis for the piece. Essentially, the translator, a specialist in "translational action" has the task of producing a transcultural communication, as an expert in the target language and culture, and with the direction of the commission: this responsibility is to yield a product suitable for the purpose and audience to which it is targeted. (Vermeer 2001: 222-223).

In the skopos method the action of translating can result in a “new” object in accordance with the purpose of the commission (*Loc. cit.*, 221). This new object, however, will incorporate the findings of the study on French and Canadian nature writing and consider the purpose of the target text. At the same time, using the purpose of the target text as guide, the translator can manage cultural distinctions, and fulfil the requirements of the target text commissioner.

Request for a target text

The Canadian outdoor magazine *Explore* has taken a turn in its articles over recent months and is now going beyond the borders of Canada to present its readers with articles on the outdoors of *other* countries. For example, in the September/October 2002 issue there is an article on canopy walkways (suspended pedestrian bridges) through forests in Costa Rica and Peru (by David Leach), and another article on the forgotten civil war in Sudan (by J.B. MacKinnon). The inclusion of such foreign destinations demonstrates an interest in other places and ways of life. These articles do not overtly promote tourism but instead, add exotic settings to the list of those covered by the magazine. Although the texts are written about foreign surroundings, they primarily inform the reader on the geography, temporal and political climate of the area. Following this new broadening in the geographic areas covered by the magazine, a scenario concerning French nature writing can be invented for the purposes of this thesis.

The commission for *Explore* magazine with regards to the French *Périgord* would be something like this: Based on the appended texts (see Appendix A) develop a target text in English—an article for *Explore* magazine, approximately one page in length. The purpose is

to give the Canadian reader a taste of the region and appeal to his or her interest in nature. It is desired that the text also strike the interest of potential travellers and accordingly, at the end there will be reference to the regional tourism office where one can obtain further information on visiting the area.

The primary purpose of the text is to entertain Canadian nature writing aficionados. Secondly, it serves to draw visitors to the Perigord; to solicit the reader to consider taking an eco-tourism trip in France. The target audience would include nature-lovers of all ages, but target healthy adults in the 50-60 year age bracket (pre-/early retirement) in particular for travel. Because traveling in France exposes one to multiple cultural interests, such as gastronomy and history, the target audience for tourism would be of a certain socio-economic standing and level of education. Since the outdoor experience requires stamina for walking, cycling, canoeing and caving, the text is not particularly aimed at adventure tourism but offers more of a cultural outdoor experience.

The use of topoï in the development of a target text

A writing assignment such as this can benefit greatly from the earlier analysis of topoï presented in this study. Thanks to an understanding of the similarities and differences in the cultural interests represented in the Canadian and French texts the writer/translator can approach the task methodically. The proposal is for a meshing or blending of topoï in the target text, so as to envision the region, from the standpoint of what appeals to Canadians (according to topoï in contemporary Canadian nature writing), while retaining the individual appeal of selected French topoï.

In order to best appeal to the Canadian audience, the translator needs to assess the source texts, deciding which topoï should be included in the target text for optimal representation of the region and the fulfilment of the translation commission. French gastronomy and the *terroir* are not to be missed, since they are well-known aspects of the country's unique attributes. Alternatively, presenting statistics that boast of the great number of visitors to sites of interest, the way Gilles Luneau (2002: 73) and Jean-Christophe Brisard (2002: 95) do in *Géo*, would quickly spoil the appeal for the Canadian who would usually associate nature with solitude and going off the beaten path (as is demonstrated in contemporary Canadian nature writing). In addition, because the target text is to be of significantly shorter length, it would be logical to select the elements of greatest interest and choose not to include those that may hinder its purpose.

As far as writing style and format are concerned, the Canadian texts demonstrate no recognizable pattern in the composition of texts of this genre. One possible explanation for this would be that the definition of nature writing focuses primarily on content and purpose. On the one hand, this lack of explicit structure gives the translator a good deal of freedom in the organization of the target text. On the other hand though, it also poses the challenge of producing creative writing, using the source as a basis for content, along with the understanding of topoï common to each of the cultures. If there were a common writing style among the Canadian texts, it would be the use of the first-person narrative. On the following pages is an example of a target text responding to the commission.

FRANCE: Périgord – where nature meets history

1 IN THE LAND CALLED PÉRIGORD NOIR
 2 IN SOUTHWEST FRANCE, there is a place I
 3 know well. No one can say for sure where
 4 Black Périgord begins and ends, but its pulse
 5 beats fastest in the triangle between the great
 6 Dordogne River and its tributary to the north,
 7 the Vézère.¹

8 The place I call home lies on this
 9 branch of the river, deep and narrow, dark and
 10 wooded, lined with limestone rock shelters.
 11 There are more prehistoric sites here than
 12 almost anywhere on earth. This knowledge
 13 seems to blur all sense of time; secrets, myths,
 14 and legends from centuries past merge into
 15 strange history in the Vézère Valley, as black
 16 a part of Périgord as you can ever find.

17 I feel alive. Generations have been
 18 raised here. Working the land, loving life. I
 19 embrace it now, following in the footsteps of
 20 my ancestors. Living off the land. Caring for
 21 it.

22 Setting out in the morning mist I take
 23 it all in. I greet the sheep, several of them
 24 dazedly turning my way. But the mysterious
 25 dark beauty of the oak forest and the currents
 26 of the river beckon me.

27 The vines are doing well this year, as
 28 are the walnuts, and the *truffle* mushrooms are
 29 almost ready to be picked. No one knows
 30 why this strange subterranean tuber attaches

31 itself to the roots of only certain oak trees, but
 32 you'll hear no complaints; after all, this
 33 mushroom, also known as the "black
 34 diamond" (or the "black pearl" to chefs), has
 35 become the most famous ingredient in
 36 Périgord cooking.

37 Every year, starting in December,
 38 locals come out in multitude to these woods,
 39 each with their own sure-fire method of
 40 finding truffles; some come with a dog, others
 41 with a pig, but all come with a sole mission: to
 42 sniff out *tuber melanosporum*.

43 We'll know they are ready when we
 44 notice the rust-red midges hovering over the
 45 ground at the base of the oak tree—also a
 46 giveaway to their location.

47 I cannot help but linger over the
 48 thought of my favourite recipes featuring local
 49 produce. These are passed down. Such
 50 delicacies as the truffle omelette... Succulent.
 51 How can I possibly imagine smelling such
 52 tantalizing aromas so early in the day... and
 53 perhaps a glass of Bergerac, to accompany
 54 it... not to mention some *pâté de foie gras*.

55 I climb up onto a ridge overlooking
 56 the river. There is such variation in the
 57 landscape I could never tire of it. But rock
 58 always remains the common element. It has
 59 served great purposes as our primary building
 60 material—since ages ago. A large old
 61 farmhouse made from golden limestone adds
 62 colour to the rich meadow it occupies along

¹ This introduction is cited from Julia Wilkinson's essay
Black Périgord.

63 the river. Russet limestone slabs called *lauzes*
 64 cover the roof. Each window has berry-red
 65 wooden shutters that also help deal with high
 66 summer temperatures.

67 The cliffs on either side of the rushing
 68 river below are breathtaking. Most of them
 69 were carved out during the Hundred Years'
 70 War (1337-1453). Then over years, the
 71 numerous waterways served as trading routes,
 72 with the region of Bordelais to the west.
 73 Today they can be enjoyed for their natural
 74 beauty.

75 I continue on the rocky path along the
 76 crest. What memories this place holds. The
 77 wind seems to whisper tales of the past...tales
 78 of kings and battle, conquest and surrender.
 79 *Chateaux* from the 12th century, on either side
 80 of the river, have stories of their own to tell.
 81 Too many to count.

82 But underneath the ground we walk
 83 on there is history dating back even longer—
 84 to the prehistoric ages. This is where every
 85 farmer digs up Stone Age flints in his fields
 86 and every child scrambles in the dwellings of
 87 cavemen. A lingering breeze passes. It was in
 88 these crags and crevices that in 1940 four
 89 teenagers were out exploring some caves
 90 when they came across the vastest series of
 91 Paleolithic drawings in Europe. These early
 92 artists sketched cattle for the most part, bison
 93 and cows (continuing over the span of one
 94 kilometre underground). Today the caves
 95 allure spelunkers and historians from all over.
 96 But that's not what keeps me here.

97 It's a combination of so many things.
 98 So much has taken place here. Forests and
 99 farmhouses, village markets selling *foie gras*,
 100 goat cheese, and walnuts. It's the sound of
 101 crickets in the evening, having picnics under
 102 the lime tree, or a simple walk in a meadow of
 103 willows and wild orchids. I take a deep breath
 104 of fresh morning air. This is home. A
 105 kingfisher lands next to me surveying the
 106 water below for a wandering trout for lunch.
 107 The serenity of the moment takes me in.

108 Walking back to the village I trace my
 109 path between the looming oaks. Admiring the
 110 walnut trees. These rocks have built our land
 111 and our homes. The river rushes, following its
 112 meandering way. I take in a breath of fresh
 113 air. What more could one want?

114 — "Won't you come for some sweet nut wine,
 115 later?" calls out Madame Estardier from her
 116 garden.

117
 118 For information on visiting Périgord see [www.](http://www.****)
 119 **** for maps, itineraries, day-trips, tours and
 120 on-site information.⁶

⁶ Text adapted from Luneau (2002: 73-74, 83);
 Brisard (2002: 95-96); Maigne (2002a: 98-100),
 (2002b: 104-106), and (2002c: 109); Wilkinson
 (2002: 305-314).

Discussion of the target text

The commission for this writing is a particular task. To begin, it demonstrates one end of the wide spectrum of tasks that can be asked of a translator. As mentioned earlier the objective is to develop a text for Canadians by blending the main applicable topoi from the French source texts and incorporating Canadian topoi which would serve as an asset. Naturally, for this specific case, I am only attempting to illustrate an example, and by no means is this intended to emulate a commented translation (which would be another undertaking).

Keeping the purpose of the work for *Explore* in mind, the composition of the target is directed. Topoi from the French texts to be included are those, which are paralleled, in the Canadian corpus or those, which might appeal to a Canadian reader. A complementary approach is to consider the Canadian topoi and frame the French content in a corresponding way. This will be explained, as the purpose of the translation guides the strategies undertaken.

To start with, the Canadian corpus was studied again, in order to establish whether there is a common blueprint for the structure of the text. Initially, it was hypothesized that authors often start out with a childhood memory, but upon further investigation this was only the case for a few texts. In fact, the variety of ways in which the authors introduce and arrange their texts confirms the vastness of the genre of contemporary nature writing. I did not go on to analyze the French corpus in this way since the commission was to target a Canadian audience. Because there was no set structure demonstrated in the layout of Canadian texts, starting off the text was a challenge. So, to begin, I wanted to situate the reader.

The introduction emulates the start of Jacques Maigne's text (*Géo* 2002b: 105) (see Appendix A), a personal account of life in the region. This opening seemed suitable for Canadian addressees as well because it follows Beth Powning's prose, entitled *Home*. This Canadian writing begins: "Home, this place where I live..." (2001: 156). This is also in agreement with the French Périgord texts in that they are written from the point of view of nationals.

I used a work of English travel writing (Wilkinson 2002: 305-314, see Appendix B) as inspiration for the adaptation. This facilitated the creative writing aspect of the assignment. Wilkinson's work also served as an added resource and answered questions such as how to employ French references, such as *truffle* and *foie gras*. On a few occasions, such as the first two paragraphs, Wilkinson's work follows trends of nature writing and where this is the case, and it suited the purpose of the target text, her work was incorporated to the new text.

Lines 17 through 21 reflect the beginning of Maigne's text (2002b: 105), indicative of rural life over generations and its simplicity. The mention of ancestors (also in line 20) parallels the Canadian aboriginal topos and the value assigned to the passing down of family traditions.

Along similar lines, one of the French source texts' authors employs a personal writing style, describing the bond he experiences with the land of his home. This is a theme commonly set forth in Canadian nature writing too. As addressed in the first chapter, the tendency in Canadian writing seems to be an emphasis put on the reciprocity of the relationship between man and nature. This is evident in the environmental and ecological concerns presented throughout the corpus as well as the many references to the traditional

aboriginal way-of-life. For this reason, lines 20 and 21 communicate the relationship of harmony with nature.

Then, lines 25 and 26, there is a mystical expression of the magnetism, the inexplicable “drawing force” of nature, which arises in both corpora, and comes across in the latter half of one of Maigne’s texts (2002b: 106). This sentiment is also present in the second paragraph, including descriptions of the Périgordian forests as in Gilles Luneau’s article (2002: 73).

Truffles are brought into the picture in French texts because they are one of the region’s claims to fame. For this reason it was clearly out of the question to exclude their mention. This information was presented succinctly so the Canadian reader might gain a full picture of the effort and care that is put into French meals—which they could enjoy, were they to make a trip to the region. The mushrooms come up in Luneau’s text (2002: 73) and then further on, there are vivid descriptions of various regional recipes (Maigne 2002c: 109). The idea here is to present an ingredient of regional cuisine, bringing across the Périgord *terroir*, a topos of the French corpus. To do this, the truffles are presented first in nature and then make their way to the plate. This also touches on the idea of living off the land, a common theme in both Canadian and French writing.

Finally, a few delicacies are presented from the menu, following the French style, appealing to the senses. The writer’s mind lingers on memories of pleasant tastes in a French fashion (line 47-54), similar to Nicolino, who digresses as he reviews the menu for the Chalet Jobert, before recalling the purpose of his visit to Fontainebleau; “Ah, il faut un courage d’acier pour se mettre en route, on vous le jure!” (2001a: 102). The reader is reminded of France’s universal reputation for fine cooking and the cuisine component of a

holiday there. It cannot be assumed that the average person in the target readership would be well versed in truffle-hunting or wine regions, and for this reason, the content is presented informatively. It is a topos that adds to the appeal of the region and would contribute significantly to what the visitor would experience. A final taste is left on the reader's palate at the end of the translation with the mention of other homemade specialties (Luneau 2002: 74).

On line 55 there is an example of physical movement of the author to make the text experiential. It was a conscious decision to exclude meticulous detail of time and position, such as is present in parts of Brisard's text (2002: 95). The focus is on an awe-inspiring experience away from schedules and routine.

An effort is made to present at least some of the diverse geography of the region in Lines 56 to 58, which sheds light on some of the resources used in construction as well (line 59-66). These lines are established in large part from a brief section in Wilkinson's text (2002: 306) and Maigne's literary account of life in Périgord's neighbouring region, Quercy (2002b: 105).

From here some historical elements are brought in, speaking of the war, which affected the region most significantly (line 69-70) and leading up to the viewing of historical monuments, such as the *chateaux* around line 79. The French historical topos is realized in these lines and is based, in part, on Luneau's contribution (2002: 74). The historical topos deserves attention for two reasons; because content of this nature appear in both corpora, and also because France has a rich history, which is present in many natural settings and will draw the educated Canadian reader.

The target readership is also kept in mind for the presentation of one of the oldest historical sites of the region: Lascaux. The main points of interest are presented between lines 85 and 91, not failing to mention the potential for combining the historical interest in the caves with active pursuits (line 95).

The last paragraphs emphasize the multiple sources of enjoyment for locals that would also draw visitors. The focus comes back to nature, with a bird sighting (line 106-108) after underlining some of the specialties to be found at local markets (line 101 - 102). In closing, the reader is cajoled to visit (“Won’t you come for some sweet nut wine?”) and left with a brief image of the region: trees, rock, leisure activities, fresh air, and the experience of France—the good things in life.

Contributing cultural factors

For several different reasons some topoï were not included in the translation. Probably the most deliberate decision was in regard to environmental threats. The environmental awareness promoted in Canadian nature writing decided this. Because the Canadian texts generally solicit reflection on personal responsibility in the destruction of nature, this text is not the place to note that the fish on the menu is one that is almost extinct (Brisard 2002: 95); even if it is true. The purpose of the text is to attract nature-loving visitors to the region; this could be disturbed if the kayak enthusiast was reminded that the introduction of the activity to the area saw the fish population plummet.

The target text would also not be the place to cite impressive tourism statistics (as in Luneau 2002: 73, Brisard 2002: 95, Maigne 2002b: 106). Boasting about the popularity of the region with foreigners (hordes in the summertime) will take away from the attraction of

nature. Furthermore, for the sake of the interested anglophone visitor it would be unwelcoming to include that English real estate owners in Périgord are frowned upon for their closed-in gardens (Luneau 2002: 83), or as Wilkinson puts it, “It was many years before we felt we were accepted.” (2002: 306). The same goes for the mockery made of the English (and Parisians) in regard to *foie gras* consumption (Brisard 2002: 95-96).

Historical references to civilization, such as the transportation waterway, would likely be of interest to a Canadian visitor. However, aspects of the civilization topos to avoid would include references to highways (Maigne 2002b: 106) and airports (Luneau 2002: 83). This information could be posted on the website, along with maps, pricing, and the like.

The length restrictions placed on the target text certainly limit what can be included. The source texts are rich in information, much of which would be an asset to the readership. The fact of the matter remains that the translator is limited to one page and this of course means that some things will be left untold. So instead of packing in as much as possible in the translation some things will be left as surprises to those who pursue a holiday.

The detailed decisions above made in development of the target text support the skopos for the work for *Explore*. It is a leisurely and informative one-page text, under the banner of nature writing specifically devised for Canadian readers. Topoi found in the adaptation are both Canadian and French, combining to serve the intended purpose. This text exhibits the functionality of the skopos method to give the translator the freedom to make decisions leading to a text that suits the purpose of the final product. Under a different skopos the approach would obviously lead to a completely different outcome.

If the target text were to serve as an itinerary in a tour book of the area, such as “Walks and Tours in France” (1993) by the Automobile Association and the Institut

Géographique National de France it would be developed differently, yielding another text.

Such a text would need to be adapted to suit the format of the book, where each destination is assigned one or two pages. The text would be in the set format of the guidebook: a documented commentary on things to see in a specific area. There would also need to be an accompanying map with directions and distances, along with details of a physical difficulty rating (for walks) and duration. Since part of the purpose would be to provide the reader with necessary information to function relatively independently, information on hotels and restaurants should also be provided. In books such as these, and for the purpose of English travelers visiting France, it is also customary to include estimated costs. This is just one other possible skopos or purpose for a target text based on nature writing.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of this paper a number of notions have been identified as relative to the study of the modern nature-writing genre. Elements of discourse and culture have been brought to the fore to demonstrate that even on the most fundamental level, nature can be understood and approached from various viewpoints.

This paper has developed from the identification of *topoi* in nature writing to the consideration of issues in composing nature writing for a foreign audience. Finally, in response to the vast difference in *topoi* and presentations of nature writing across the cultures in the study, adaptation, as in the *skopos* approach, seems the most adequate method of preparing a text for a foreign audience. Due to the richness of the contemporary nature writing genre any number of purposes could be attributed to a target text; this is why the *skopos* or purpose of the final text defines the method of approach, as established in the previous section.

The study of *topoi* in both Canadian and French nature writing offered tangible examples of shared and distinct experiences in nature. On the one hand, it showed that there is a common experience of bonding with the outdoors. On the other, it clearly demonstrated distinctive factors which constitute the “outdoor experience” in each cultural group. This can serve as a tool for translation on a broader scale as it illustrates the similarities and contrasts between two populations. While this requires a considerable amount of discursive analysis it can greatly benefit translation, in substantiating that one-for-one translations are often not the most adequate way of handling discourse which involves cultural transfer through the translation process.

The preparation and writing of this research paper has been both a challenging and rewarding experience. It has forced me to consider and reconsider *culture* in a different light. During the process I have also come to recognize that there is a common oneness with nature, no matter how nature is represented in writing: people seek something extraordinary in nature and experience something unique enough that even writing cannot replace. The hundreds of hours I have spent relishing pages of nature writing of all kinds have also shown me that no matter what is at our fingertips in this *virtual* age, nothing compares to an *actual* breath of crisp, cold air on a walk in the stillness of a winter forest.

On another note, I have been surprised to find two seemingly opposed reflections on the environment. The first was more commonly viewed in the Canadian corpus, and expressed extreme care for all things natural, to the extent that human life takes second place to the rest of the natural world. It could be that this mind-set is a pendulum shift, which contrasts with the “*monarch of all I survey*”⁷ position, found more commonly in the French corpus. This latter attitude seems exploitative of nature at times. My experience over the course of the project was to consider the integral role these opinions play in authors’ writings, as well as how and why this demands a case for adaptation.

This study also gives reason to reconsider the simplified approach, which has virtually become second nature, especially in Canada, that there are little to no grounds for the two “versions” of a text to appear different from one another. Such an approach often fails to acknowledge the extent to which cultural factors distinguish readers from different linguistic populations. While this idea was explored to some extent in earlier

⁷ This expression is used by Mary Louise Pratt in reference to British colonialists to Central Africa in the middle of the 19th century.

references to Covacs' study, it would be interesting to research the attention given to cultural variance in bilingually published documents in Canada.

Now having established that there is a case for cultural variance in nature writing internationally, the next step could be to investigate cultural variance purely within Canadian writing. How do English- and French-Canadian topoi compare? Depending on the results, such a study could substantiate an argument to give more freedom to translators, to present texts that reflect a greater acknowledgement of cultural identities.

Ultimately, in demonstrating cultural contrasts on a fundamental level, this study draws attention to translation pedagogy. The findings lead me to suggest that more instruction on text creation be incorporated in curricula for translator training.

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APPENDIX A

Excerpts from *GéoPartance; Périgord et Quercy, pays nature.*

(*Géo*, July 2002)

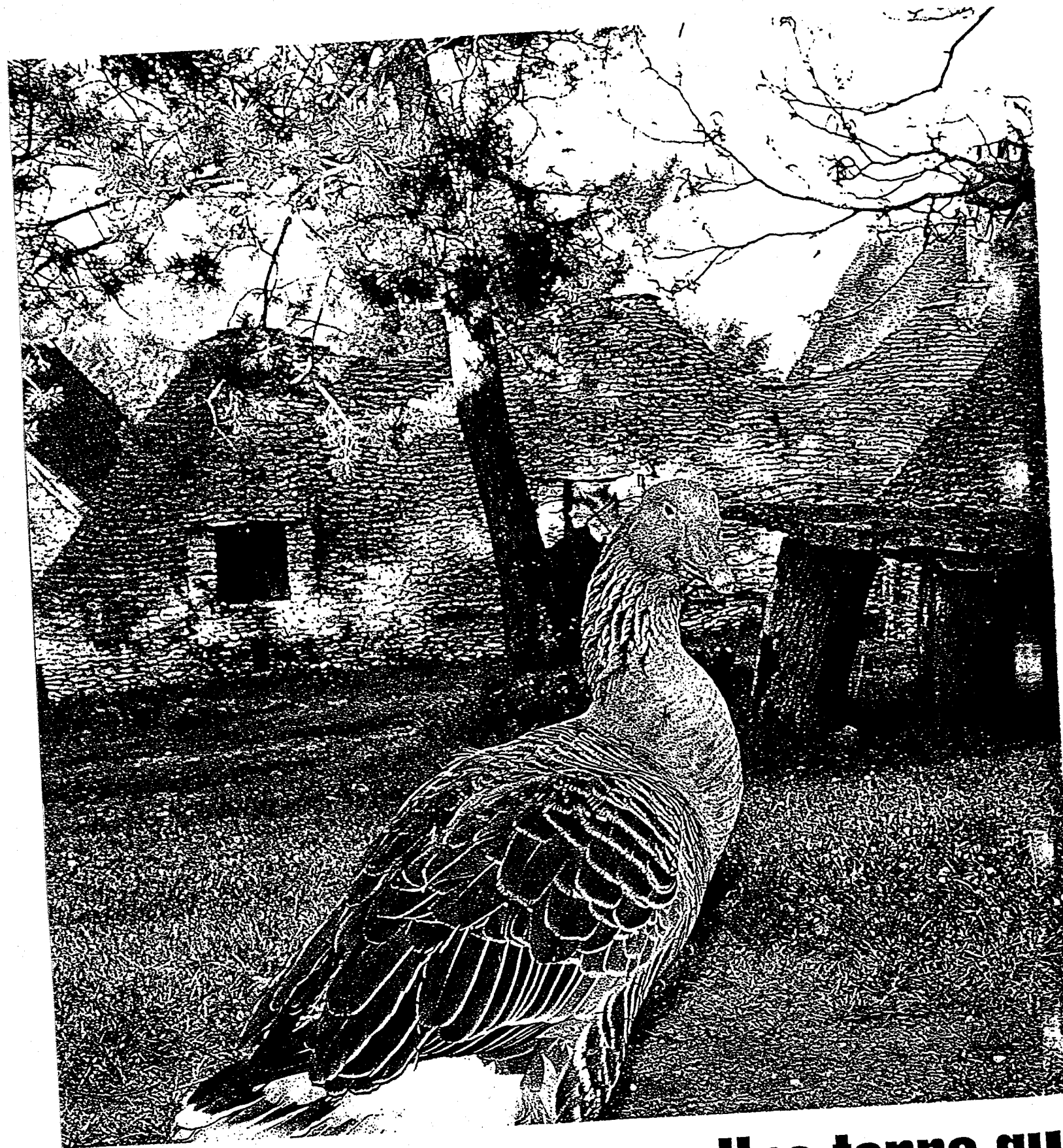
“Périgord; Une terre qui nourrit tous les sens.” by Gilles Luneau

“Remarquables paysages pour promenades sportives.” by Jean-Christophe Brisard

“Préhistoire : attention, chefs-d’œuvre !” by Jacques Maigne

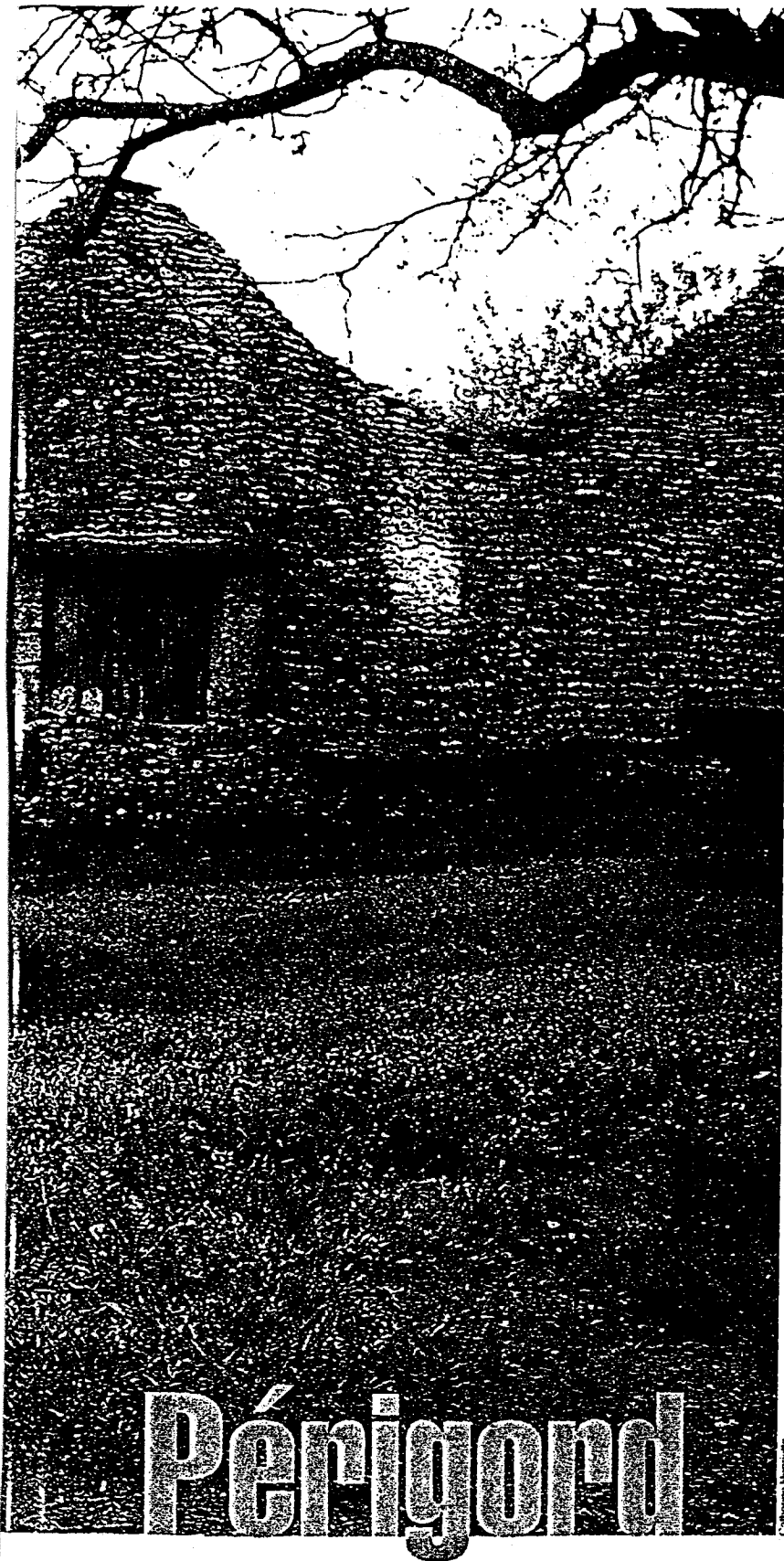
“ «Jacques, je veux te raconter le causse... » ” by Jacques Maigne

“Gastronomie; une nature roborative.” by Jacques Maigne



Une oie toise l'intrus dans une ferme qui a conservé des bijoux d'architecture rurale : les cabanes du Breuil, en Périgord noir.

Une terre qu



Périgord

nourrit tous les sens

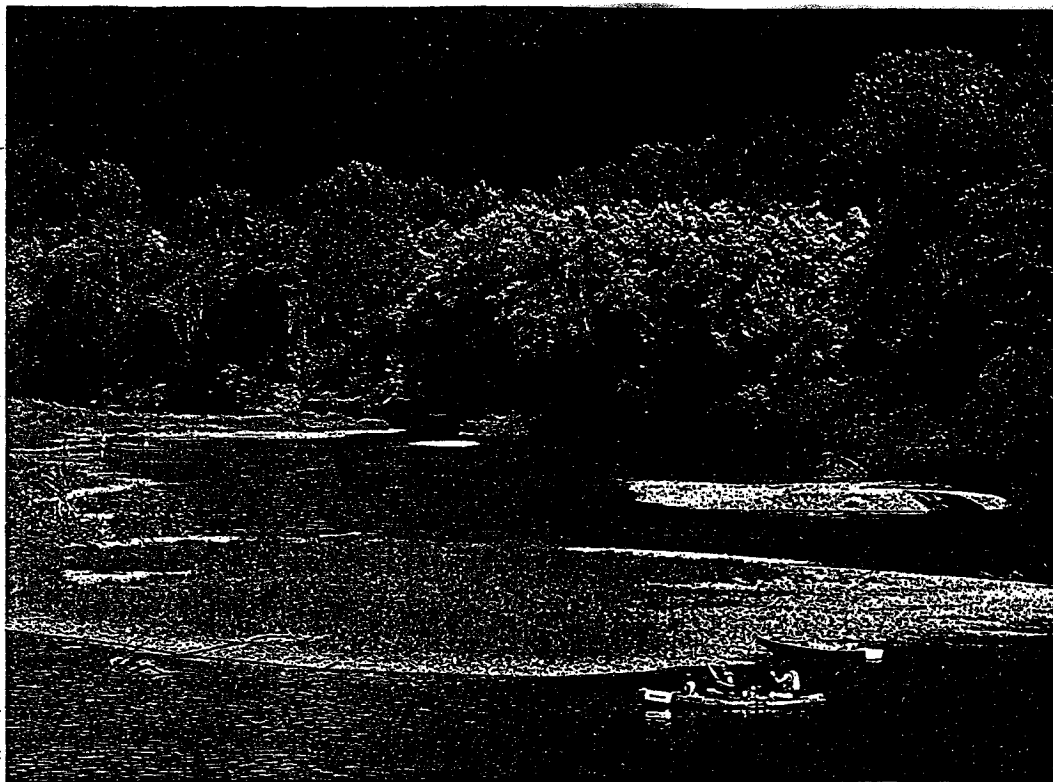
Identité. *Aux deux millions de visiteurs qui le parcourent chaque année, le Périgord offre son hospitalité et une kyrielle de paradis préhistoriques, naturels et architecturaux.*

Des forêts épaisses comme la nuit : en Périgord, elles dominent encore le territoire rural. Longtemps, elles ont inspiré la crainte des gendarmes qui, jusqu'en 1914, touchaient une solde d'expatriés aux colonies en raison des risques de malaria dans la forêt de la Double, près de Bergerac. Aujourd'hui, que le sol soit blanc ou ocre, le ciel humide ou sec, les bois toujours profonds, le vert prospère en Périgord, et l'on se prend à penser que, vu d'oiseau de proie, ce coin de France a des allures d'Amazonie. Mais fréquentée, celle-là. Deux millions de visiteurs viennent chaque année goûter à l'harmonie des verts pâturages et des forêts hirsutes, du bon air et de la bonne herbe, des hommes et de leur préhistoire, et des menus gourmands. Et apprécier un état d'esprit qui tient du tiers état : l'âme périgourdine s'est forgée dans l'habitude, très tôt prise, de décider de sa vie face aux féodaux et au pouvoir central.

Un siècle et demi avant la Révolution, les paysans sont entrés en lutte contre l'Etat. Ils ont levé une armée, organisé le Périgord, levé l'impôt, résisté à l'occupation culturelle française. « Cette commune du Périgord (1637-1642) et ses conseils du pauvre peuple ruiné étaient, dans chaque village, une révolte pour avoir le droit de vivre sa différence », raconte Jean-Paul Salon, membre du conseil régional et auteur d'une histoire des soulèvements populaires. Derrière la truffe, le foie gras, les noix, les fraises et le tabac contemporains, il y a donc les croquants, immortalisés en 1969 par « Jacquou », la série télévisée de Stelio Lorenzi, tirée de l'œuvre d'Eugène Le Roy, natif de Haute-Forêt. Les croquants ont semé une mentalité mêlant révolte et républicanisme qui a levé comme le pain dans toutes les couches sociales. Un fonds culturel sur lequel a germé une ouverture aux autres dont les touristes peuvent aujourd'hui se rassasier : « Que voulez-vous, dit modestement Jean-Bernard Lavau, cuisinier à Saint-Léon-sur-Vézère, on a tout sous la main, on est plus hospitalier que d'autres car on a plus de choses à donner. »

Ainsi les Périgourdins ouvrent-ils leur porte et leur garde-manger au voyageur. Les chiffres sont là. En Dordogne, cinq cent soixante-deux fer- ▶

Le département est un incident historique : ici, on est d'abord en Périgord, traversé par un fleuve, la Dordogne



Philippe Bony / H&Ouf

La Dordogne entre bancs de graviers et promenade aquatique : le fleuve a dessiné un Périgord de carte postale.



Dominique Ripert / H&Ouf

Parmi les innombrables castels, beaucoup sont à restaurer ou en cours de travaux, comme ici, dans la vallée de la Beune, où jaillit le château de Commarque (XII^e-XIV^e siècle).

► mes en activité offrent des hébergements, cent trente de la restauration, mille neuf cent quarante-quatre de la vente de produits « maison ». Autant de haltes qui constituent des havres. Alors, même si les géologues parlent d'une terre de transition (entre granit corrézien et plaine aquitaine) pour expliquer que, d'un Périgord à l'autre, on passe de la rudesse du Massif central à la souplesse méridionale, même si les sociologues glosent sur la retenue du Nord face à l'exubérance du Sud, même si l'on oppose catholiques, protestants et cathares, humidité atlantique et froid continental, tous, en leur singulière cohérence avec le lieu et un art de vivre, font que les Périgords forment une terre où l'on pose volontiers sa valise et ses tracas, submergé par le sentiment d'un petit coin de paradis.

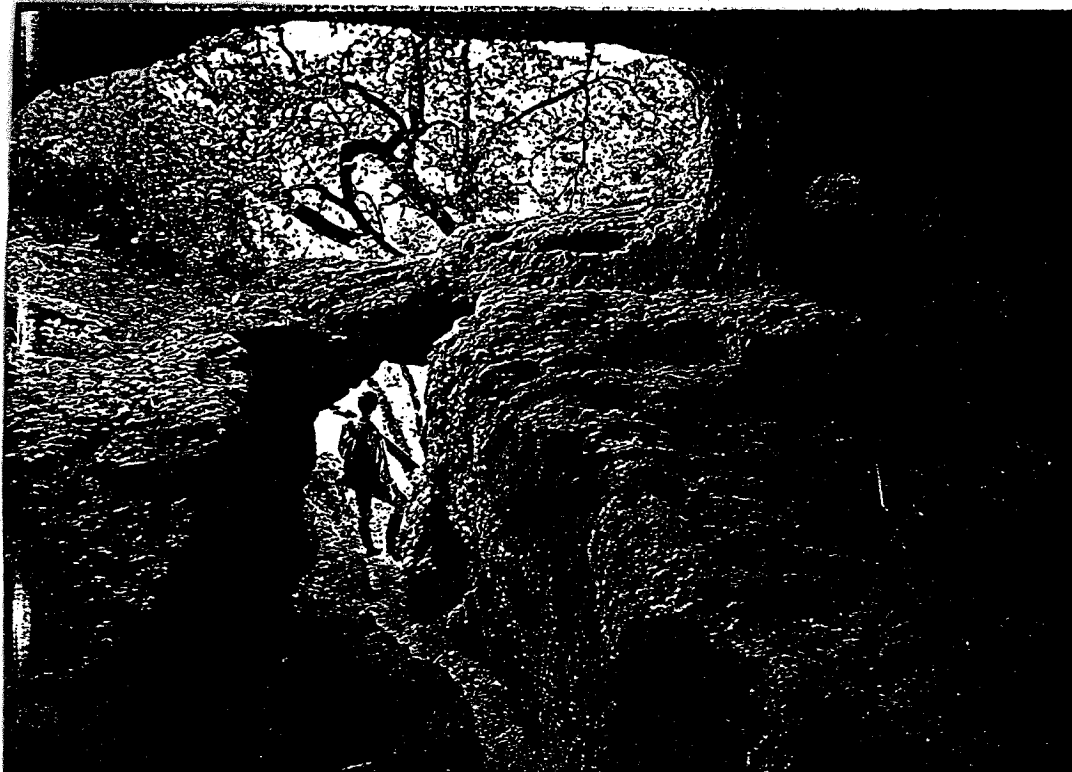
Un éden dont les habitants prononcent rarement le nom républicain : Dordogne. Là-bas, du nord au sud et d'est en ouest, on est « en Périgord ». Les autochtones, comme les nouveaux venus de France, d'Europe ou d'ailleurs, habitent le Périgord, non la Dordogne. Le département est un incident historique digéré par cette contrée à l'identité forte, soulignée par la langue d'oc. Et la Dordogne demeure ce qu'elle est : un fleuve. Elle naît de deux ruisseaux auvergnats, la Dore et la Dogne, dévale les pentes du puy de Sancy pour, 490 kilomètres plus loin, rejoindre l'Atlantique via le bec d'Ambès.

La Dordogne entre en Périgord du côté de Souillac et le quitte à Castillon-la-Bataille, qui vit la fin de la guerre de Cent Ans. Elle a sculpté le paysage en falaises, cirques et cingles dans tout le sud du comté et fut longtemps une voie de communication avec le Bordelais où accostaient des gabarres grosses des produits agricoles de sa vallée et de celle de son affluent, la Vézère. Poissonneuse, elle l'est, au dire des martins-pêcheurs et des cormorans qui la peuplent. Les migrateurs comme l'esturgeon, le saumon, l'alose et la truite

de mer remontent volontiers ce corridor tortueux qu'aujourd'hui seules descendent les embarcations de loisirs, dont des répliques de gabarres.

Un jour de 1921, dans le vallon des Roches, le monde ancien surgit sous la pioche de Marcel Castanet, paysan à Castel-Merle, commune de Sergeac (à un jet de pinceau de Lascaux). Il vient de mettre au jour des objets néolithiques qui ne l'avaient pas vu depuis trente-cinq mille ans. Le vallon est celui d'un ruisseau issu de la Vézère : il cache sous les éboulis naturels et la végétation une ligne d'« abris », comme les nomment les paléontologues. Marcel, puis son fils René vont mener de pair le métier de paysan et celui de préhistorien amateur. Une passion qui les mène à la découverte de pièces essentielles, aujourd'hui dans les musées, et à des recherches toujours en cours, souvent suspendues faute de crédits : bison sculpté, cheval gravé et le premier atelier de bijoux connu. Les fêrus de Cro-Magnon et de Neandertal accourent du monde entier faire escale à Sergeac : « Quand mon père trouvait les gens sympathiques, il leur offrait un coup à boire au robinet de la barrique et parfois à manger », raconte René Castanet, abrité derrière sa moustache. Sa femme Andréa comprend le parti à tirer de la situation et voilà le couple qui ouvre, dans les années soixante, une des premières fermes-auberges de France « pour nourrir les amateurs de préhistoire », tout en continuant à pousser la charrie. L'exemple a fait recette.

René, qui « grattait la terre à l'âge de 5 ans », a rassemblé une partie des découvertes familiales dans son musée personnel, qu'il ouvre gentiment sans droit d'entrée et commente savamment, faisant osciller la durée en fonction de l'intérêt des visiteurs. Sans supplément, on peut aussi jeter un coup d'œil sur une extraordinaire collection de nids d'oiseaux, assortie des remarques du paysan-paléontologue-ornithologue. Cet homme passe



Jerry Topalen / Hoo Qui

Un abri préhistorique dans la vallée de la Vézère : il reste encore des centaines de cavités à dénicher.

ainsi sa vie à marcher dans les bois, les yeux en l'air pour les plumes, et à arpenter les champs, les yeux en bas pour les pierres taillées. Sur le site proprement dit, on découvre les neuf abris préhistoriques comme leurs fouilleurs les vivent. Et René de choisir soigneusement deux pierres pour les tailler sous vos yeux. Sous les gestes sûrs, le silex devient burin, dièdre ou grattoir, faisant de notre homme un chaleureux passeur d'éternité humaine.

Des moines bouddhistes tibétains se sont installés à la Côte de Jor

Est-ce l'isolement périgourdin ou la beauté transcendante de la Côte de Jor qui a décidé de l'implantation bouddhiste en Dordogne ? La réponse est dispersée en ce matin où le soleil peine à percer la brume, libère déjà les fragrances des buis et laisse encore le ciel se fondre dans la vallée de la Vézère. En cette hospitalière contrée, des bouddhistes tibétains, installés à flanc de colline depuis 1977, initient les stagiaires et guident quelques élus sur le chemin des lamas. Moines occidentaux, ils s'interrogent sur leur possible contribution à la vie quotidienne et tentent «d'inventer un mona-

chisme qui intègre la sagesse sociale occidentale à la théocratie tibétaine», explique Lama Dordje Puntso. Et les lamas de sortir en ville en jean et baskets, par souci de discrétion.

De discrétion, les Anglais et autres Européens qui se sont installés par milliers en Périgord n'en manquent pas. A peine remarque-t-on leurs journaux sur les présentoirs des kiosques et les accents aux terrasses ensoleillées de Sarlat. Souvent retraités, ces nouveaux Périgourdins ne le sont qu'à mi-temps. Le pays leur doit de dynamiser l'économie, mais regrette leur propension à clôturer des jardins qui ne le furent jamais jusqu'ici.

Qu'importe, le pays reste généreux. Jusqu'à se payer deux capitales. Périgueux, préfecture officielle et catholique, et Bergerac, sa rivale huguenote. Les Périgourdins mettent tant de foi à marquer leur différence avec le centre administratif que ce dernier semble n'exister que par défaut. «L'apogée de cet antagonisme a culminé au XVI^e siècle, nous conte Bernard Lesfargue, poète et traducteur du grand écrivain espagnol Juan Goytiso-lo. Quand les troupes de Bergerac s'emparèrent de Périgueux et la mirent à sac, elles envahirent l'abbaye de Saint-Front et, outrage ultime, brisèrent l'ampoule contenant un éternuement du Saint-Esprit.» Depuis, les flots du nectar rouge ou blanc des coteaux de Bergerac ont adouci les mœurs, mais demeure une indéfinissable rivalité qui explique les deux chambres de commerce et les deux aéroports. Afin que chacune preserve sa liberté. ■

Gilles Luneau

Des rapaces dans le parc

Autour de sa «capitale» Abjat-sur-Bandiât, le parc naturel régional Périgord-Limousin s'étend sur 180 000 hectares et regroupe soixante-dix-huit communes, dont cinquante en Périgord. Ce massif vallonné, très boisé, au riche réseau hydrographique, permet de surprendre quelques curiosités de faune et de flore protégées au plan national et parfois européen. Outre les rencontres ordinaires comme les biches et les cerfs, dont on entend le brame le soir, début octobre, les grands rapaces comme le balbuzard pêcheur migrateur et le circaète jean-le-blanc sont moins faciles à observer. Témoin de la pureté des eaux du Bandiât, de la Tardoire et de la Dronne qui baignent le parc, la présence d'une variété rarissime d'huître perlière, du cincle plongeur (sorte de merle au plastron blanc) qui se nourrit de petits mollusques et de loutres, au territoire de chasse très étendu (30 kilomètres). Régal des botanistes, une trentaine de variétés d'orchidées sauvages, dont l'orchis punaise, assez rare, fleurissent sur les landes où l'on recense aussi une plante... carnivore. E F



Henry Audouin / Elin

Le circaète jean-le-blanc est un des hôtes du parc.

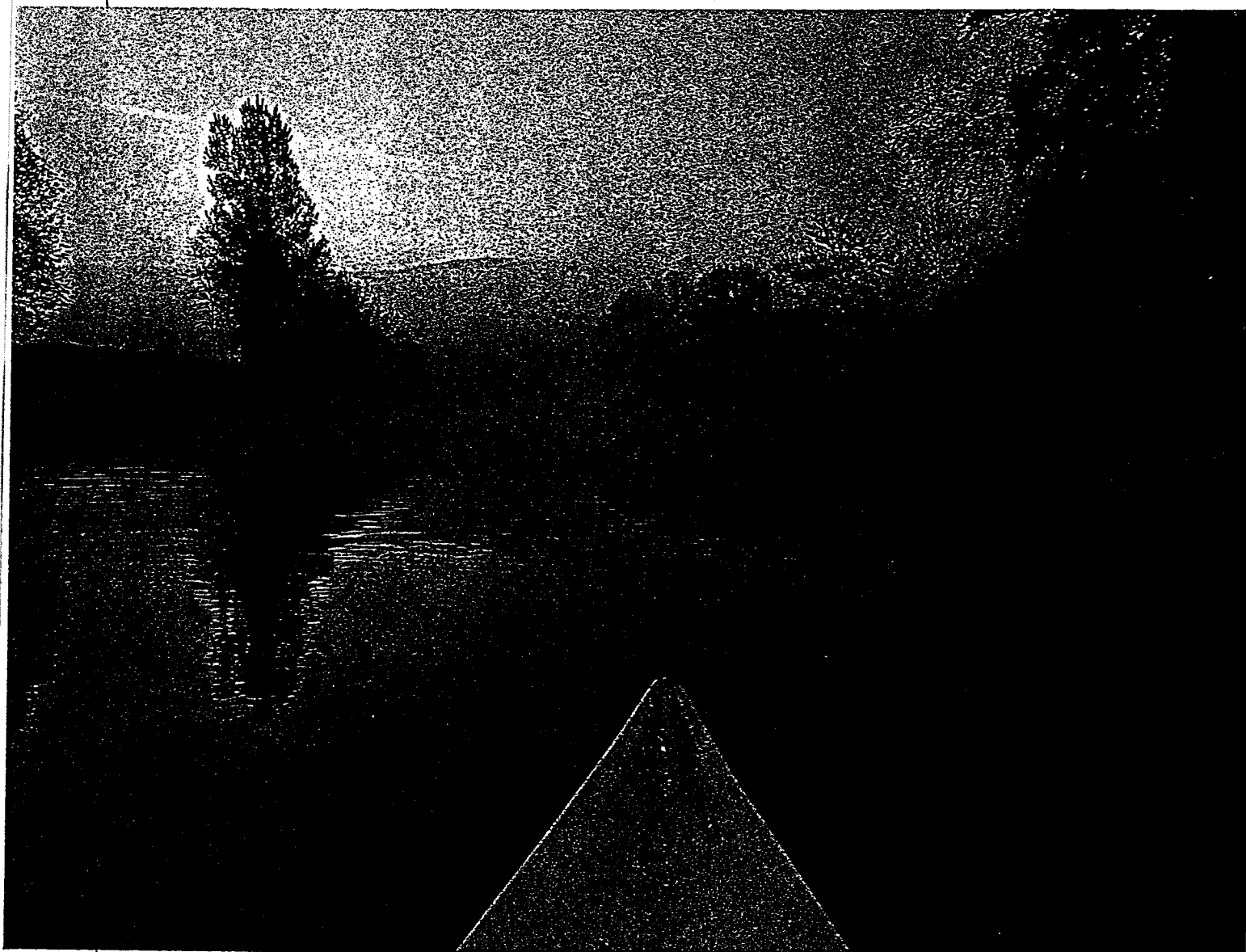


L. Diederichs / Image du Sud

Le marché de la place de la Clautre, à Périgueux, vend les produits du cru qui réjouissent les estomacs du monde entier.

Remarquables paysages

PHOTOS DE CATHERINE HENRIETTE



La Vézère au fil de l'eau, au petit matin, à l'heure où seuls les oiseaux troublent le silence du fleuve endormi.

pour promenades sportives

Carnet de route. Notre reporter s'est donné trois jours pour sillonner le Périgord avec les moyens du bord : en canoë, à cheval et en vélo. Les surprises n'ont pas manqué...

Vitrac, à une vingtaine de minutes de Sarlat-la-Canéda. J'ai un quart d'heure de retard, il est 9 h 45. Gilles Ouardi et Louis Mouillac m'attendent déjà devant leurs canoës jaunes empilés sur des remorques. Une poignée de main, trois mots de bienvenue et direction la rivière. «Jamais fait de canoë ? Pas de problème, c'est enfantin et sans risques.» En enfilaient le gilet de sauvetage réglementaire, j'écoute d'une oreille distraite les derniers conseils. Oh ! rien de bien fondamental tant la Dordogne paraît docile. Grossière erreur ! Louis raconte : «Les cinq gros barrages EDF qui se trouvent en amont, dans le Massif central, faussent tout. Selon qu'ils ouvrent ou non les vannes, le niveau de l'eau peut monter ou descendre de plusieurs mètres. Et toujours sans nous prévenir. Pour les canoës, ce n'est pas bien grave. Mais pour les poissons, c'est leur survie qui se joue. Les endroits où ils fraient, souvent près des berges, peuvent se retrouver d'un instant à l'autre à l'air libre. Et leurs œufs n'y résistent pas.»

Installé à l'avant, une pagaie entre les mains, je suis le mouvement imprimé par Louis. Sur la rive gauche, Castelnaud, mon premier château périgourdin : XII^e siècle, un donjon à mâchicoulis, des remparts percés de meurtrières. A quelques coups de rames en aval, sur l'autre rive, le château de Beynac : XII^e siècle aussi, un donjon à créneaux, une double enceinte et des échauquettes. Comme dans un duel, les deux forteresses se font face. Pendant la guerre de Cent Ans, le premier fut anglais, l'autre français. Joyeusement, ils échangeaient boulets, coups d'arquebuses et autres mitrailles sans parvenir à se départager. Aujourd'hui encore, on ne s'aime guère. Et c'est à celui qui attirera le plus de curieux dans son enceinte. Compte tenu du nombre de visiteurs dans le département, jusqu'à deux millions par an, on peut comprendre l'animosité qui règne entre les deux concurrents fortifiés.

12 h 30, à Beynac, dans un petit resto, une surprise m'attend : une friture d'ablettes et de goujons pêchés dans la Dordogne. «Goûtez-la bien, ça devient rare. Extrêmement rare», me souffle, avec un soupçon d'envie, la serveuse. Jacques Maleville et Annie Janaud, alias la Loutrou, deux des quatre derniers pêcheurs professionnels de la rivière entre Domme et Allas-les-Mines m'ont rejoint à table et racontent longuement leur déroute, à mots pudiques. Toujours la faute à EDF et un peu aux canoës, trop nombreux l'été. «Finis les gardons, les truites, les perches et les carpes, mon pauvre !» Plus rien et, pour la Loutrou, une quasi-faillite, accompagnée d'un début de déprime.

Bientôt 16 h, et je tourne le dos aux histoires de châteaux et de poissons absents pour m'éclipser à l'intérieur des terres. Juché sur un gentil cheval dont le nom m'a échappé, je me fraye un chemin sur les pentes caillouteuses des sous-bois périgourdins. La lumière peine à pénétrer les feuillages des chênes frêles, des châtaigniers et des noyers. J'ai oublié qu'on parle ici de Périgord noir, à cause de cette sylve sombre et persistante. «Il n'existe qu'un seul Périgord noir, le reste n'a été inventé que pour les touristes.» Louis fait allusion au découpage «arc-en-ciel» et marketing du département : vert au nord, blanc au centre et pourpre au sud-ouest. Histoire sans doute de désengorger ce fameux Périgord noir qui capte à lui seul un bon million de visiteurs et comptabilise la moitié des hébergements.

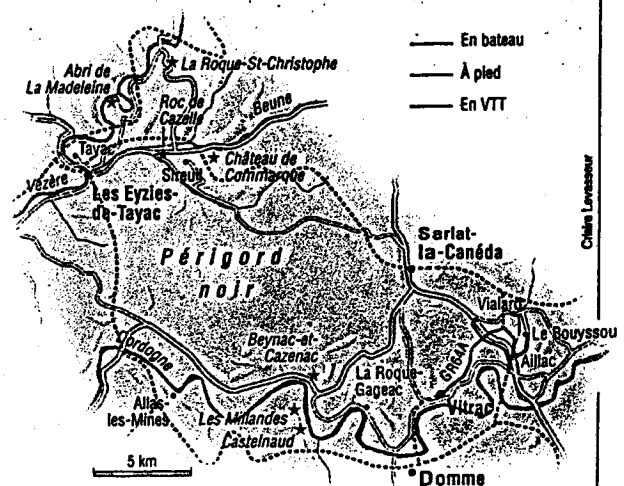
Il commence à faire diablement faim et soif. Je pense déjà à ma fin de journée qui s'annonce animale, version palmipède : les incontournables oies. Elevage, gavage, abattage... Denis Mazet, la quarantaine, me montre tout, m'explique en détail le fonctionnement de sa ferme. Un verre de bergerac moelleux dans une main, une solide part de foie gras dans le bec, je l'écoute me faire part de ses cadences infernales : «J'en ai un peu marre des heures passées à gaver ces centaines de volatiles.» D'ailleurs, c'est promis, cette année, il va ▶



En bateau sur la Vézère, moins fréquentée que la Dordogne. Elle peut devenir capricieuse après de fortes pluies.



En voiture le long de la Dordogne. Prudence de ne pas déranger les pêcheurs solitaires qui taquinent le goujon.





A pied, en suivant la Vézère, on croise la chapelle du village troglodytique de La Madeleine, vieille de dix siècles.



Arrêt devant La Roque-Gageac, bourg fortifié qui se dresse sur son rocher dans un méandre de la Dordogne.

Joan Pau Verdier, troubadour occitan

Joan Pau Verdier, ça ne vous dit rien ? Mais oui, la chanson occitane des années soixante-dix, celle qui, dans le sillage de Claude Marti, portait l'étendard régionaliste de ceux du Sud. Verdier était le Périgourdin de la bande, mais aussi le plus original, le plus rebelle, qui osait chanter autant en oc qu'en oil et ne se reconnaissait pas à tout coup dans les certitudes bétonnées des militants purs et durs de l'Occitanie en marche. Epoque révolue. Verdier a poursuivi sa route et continue à chanter, à écrire, ici même, à Sarlat, sur sa terre, en occitan ou en français, toujours sensible au rock, au folk, toujours fana de Ferré, auquel il

a consacré un disque. De fait, il est ici l'un des chefs de file d'une culture occitane active, qui n'a plus besoin de crier pour se faire entendre. Il anime des émissions en langue d'oc très écoutées sur Radio France Bleu Périgord, tourne dans la région, a joué un rôle clé dans l'expérience du groupe Bigaroc (formé avec les anciens de Peiraguda), et vient de vivre avec ces derniers une série de concerts en hommage à Brassens qui ont fait salle comble. Le troubadour libertaire a bien tenu son cap. J. M.



Christiane APPEL

Chaque méandre de rivière raconte les luttes et les croyances des premiers hommes

► réduire la production. Les Anglais et les Parisiens en auront un peu moins à acheter, tant pis... Même si la production départementale, cinquième derrière les Landes, fournit encore 92,8 tonnes de cette gourmandise.

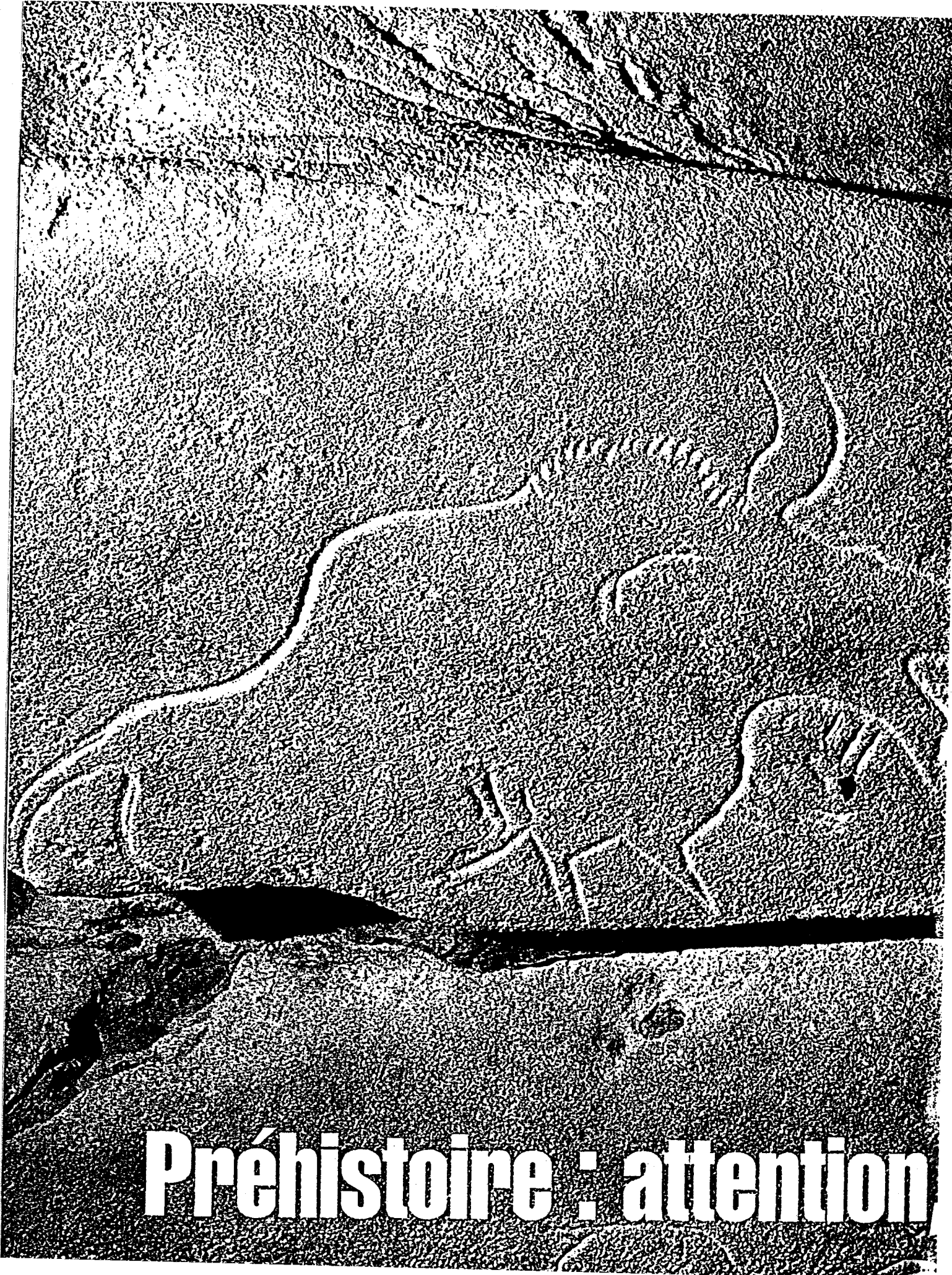
Au deuxième jour, VTT dès 10 h sur une ancienne voie de chemin de fer transformée en piste cyclable. On la récupère à hauteur de Vialard, au sud-est de Sarlat. A son terminus, au village d'Aillac, une vingtaine de kilomètres plus bas, on traverse les restes d'un château (encore un) qui a été éventré autrefois pour laisser passer le train. Avec les moellons du donjon, les habitants du coin ont méthodiquement construit leurs maisons. Rien ne se perd...

Mi-journée, adieu la Dordogne, la rivière, pas le département. Je file en voiture vers la vallée de la Vézère, classée patrimoine mondial de l'humanité par l'Unesco et destination rêvée des maniaques de Cro-Magnon. Les Eyzies-de-Tayac, neuf cent vingt-neuf habitants l'hiver, au moins dix fois plus l'été. Il pleut. «C'est rarissime, me confesse Francis Beusse des Canoës Vallée Vézère. On ira sur l'eau demain. Par rapport à la Dordogne, la Vézère est une rivière sauvage et calme.» Sauvage et calme ? «L'été, ici, pas "d'autoroutes" à canoës, continue-t-il. Bien sûr, la Vézère est capricieuse, son niveau peut monter très vite après de fortes pluies. Et pourtant, elle reste calme car moins connue.» Traversée au pas de course des multiples sites préhistoriques et troglodytiques qui pullulent dans le coin (La Roque-Saint-Christophe, La Madeleine, les grottes du Roc de Cazelle...) manifestement toujours habités, du moins par des «Homo sapiens touristicus» pendant les heures d'ouverture. Le soir, entre deux apéritifs, avec des amis de Francis, échos de chamailleries sur la place à donner au tourisme (40 % de l'économie locale) et la présence massive d'Anglais et de Hollandais qui rachètent tout à tour de bras, jusqu'aux vieux séchoirs à tabac. Pas pour y vivre à l'année, juste pour les vacances. Le vin aidant, je tente d'apprendre quelques rudiments d'occitan. Difficile. Je n'arriverai qu'à retenir la base : «Périgord, meita se, meita porc», moitié chien, moitié porc (vieux dicton local censé résumer le caractère fouineur et débrouillard des Périgourdins) et l'inévitable «O lo teüno !» (A la tienne !). Le reste n'est pas racontable. Même en patois...

Le lendemain, ciel dégagé, tête lourde. Promesse du jour : ne plus faire chabrot, cette délicieuse manie de verser du vin dans son restant de soupe. A la sortie du village de Tayac, je passe près d'un rocher dit «de Gontran». C'est une vieille légende : «Il y a bien longtemps, à cet endroit, un homme surnommé Gontran tua sa femme. Il l'avait assommée à coups de pierre, lui avait arraché le sein droit avec un couteau et l'avait poussée dans le ravin. Depuis, on dit que, de ce rocher, on peut entendre le vent répandre les gémissements de la pauvre femme.» Je tends désespérément l'oreille. Rien...

«La Vézère, c'est très joli mais ça ne vaut pas la vallée de la Beune. Suivez mon conseil, visitez la Beune, surtout la petite commune de Sireuil, à une dizaine de kilomètres à l'est des Eyzies.» Claude Vilate, fier Périgourdin, sait de quoi il parle. Petit affluent de la Vézère, la Beune se trouve à l'intérieur du Périgord noir. Là où la vie n'a pas encore été tourneboulée par le tout-tourisme. Là où se cachent quelques traces des forges qui livraient les meilleurs canons aux troupes de Louis XIV. Mais la pluie redouble. Aux refuges préhistoriques, je préfère la chaleur contemporaine d'un bistrot. J'y retrouve des visages familiers, ceux qui, l'autre soir, m'ont initié à l'occitan. Les mêmes qui, taquins, soutiennent mordicus que les «vers de terre du Périgord filent comme des fusées quand on veut les attraper et qu'il n'y a rien de meilleur qu'un bon gros rat des champs». Taquins, décidément...

Jean-Christophe Brisard



Préhistoire : attention

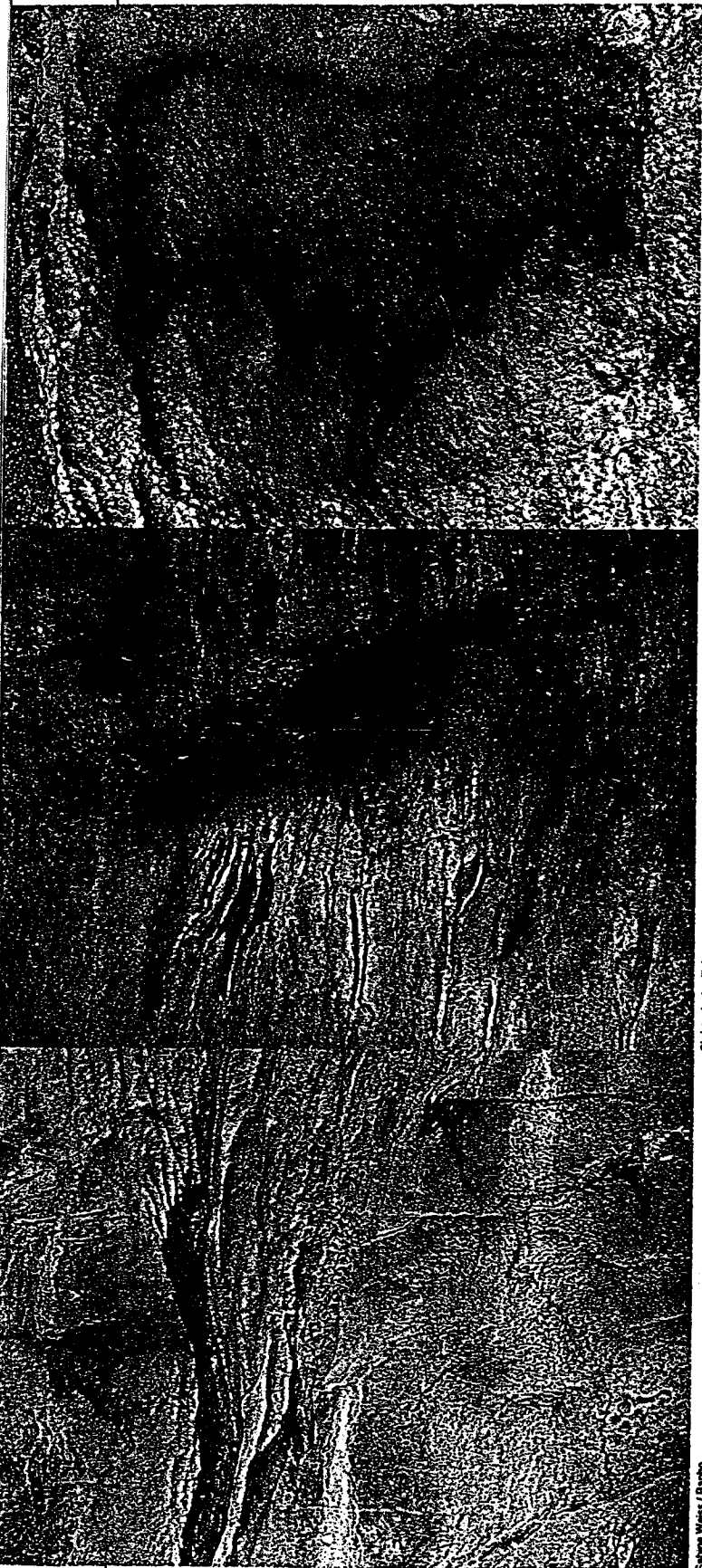


Cussac (Dordogne) Découverte en 2000 et fermée au public, la grotte abrite 1 kilomètre de gravures vieilles de plus de vingt-deux mille ans : des bisons, des chevaux et... une femme !

Art pariétal.
Les entrailles du Périgord et du Quercy renferment des centaines de grottes ornées qui suscitent autant de vocations de spéléologues.

Photos Sud-Ouest / Max PPP

chefs-d'œuvre !



COTL 04

Christophe Lewillain

Sabine Weisz / Ripho

Cognac (Lot)
Révélée en 1949,
la grotte appartient
à un vaste réseau
de couloirs rami-
fiés. Elle mêle
des concrétions
et des dessins
estimés à plus de
dix-sept mille ans.
On y contemple
un ensemble de
bouquetins d'une
facture stylistique
homogène.

Spéléologues et agriculteurs rêvent toujours de mettre au jour d'autres Lascaux

Cette grotte, je l'avais visitée quelques mois plus tôt sans rien remarquer. Cette fois-là, j'ai senti le souffle d'un courant d'air. Alors, j'y suis retourné pour tout déblayer, et quand j'ai pu me glisser de l'autre côté, ma lampe frontale a éclairé sur la voûte une gravure de bison. C'était le 30 septembre 2000. J'ai eu un moment de panique. J'ai prévenu un de mes proches et on a tout exploré ensemble, sur plus d'un kilomètre, dans une galerie d'au moins 20 mètres de large et 8 mètres de haut. Magique, ahurissant... Des dizaines et des dizaines de gravures, dont un immense panneau dans la partie centrale avec un bestiaire et même quelques silhouettes féminines !» Un an et demi après sa découverte au lieu-dit Cussac, sur la commune du Buisson-de-Cadouin, du «Lascaux de la gravure», Marc Del-luc est encore sous le choc. Lui, employé modeste à Bergerac, membre depuis l'adolescence du spéléo-club de Périgueux, a tout simplement réalisé ce jour-là le rêve de sa vie.

C'est ainsi depuis le 12 septembre 1940, fameux jeudi où quatre adolescents ont découvert par hasard Lascaux, la chapelle Sixtine de l'art pariétal. Marcel Ravidat, Jacques Marsal, Georges Agnel et Simon Coencas ne sont pas seulement devenus des figures locales. Sur ces marges de la façade ouest du Massif central qui recèlent la plus vaste concentration de grottes ornées paléolithiques d'Europe, ils ont inoculé un virus qui n'a jamais faibli. A deux pas de Lascaux, Roger Constant a passé cinquante ans de sa vie à creuser au pied de sa ferme, le Regourdou. Il rêvait de débusquer la véritable entrée de la célèbre grotte et a fini par exhumer le squelette d'un homme de Neandertal et les signes d'un rare culte de l'ours.

A La Mouthe, sur les hauteurs des Eyzies, c'est encore un paysan, Edouard Lapeyre, qui a mis au jour, à deux pas de sa demeure, une petite caverne ornée de belles gravures que seuls quelques rares privilégiés ont pu visiter. Il y a ainsi, notamment le long de la Vézère, des dizaines de sites plus ou moins connus, en général privés, qui perpétuent le mythe. Chaque semaine, des spéléos, souvent fins connaisseurs de la préhistoire, reprennent discrètement leur chasse au trésor, leur rêve secret. Dans les entrailles du Périgord, il y a d'autres Lascaux, d'autres Cussac. Ils en sont sûrs. ■

Jacques Maigne

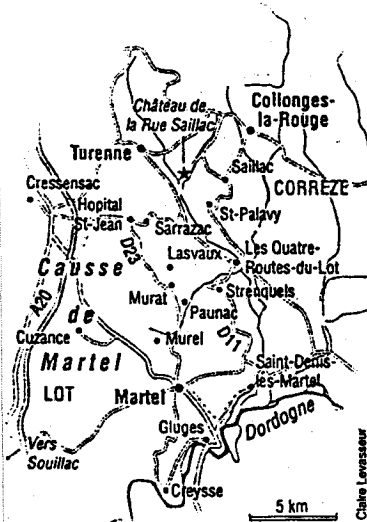
«Jacques, je veux te raconter»



ILLUSTRATIONS DE SOPHIE LADAME

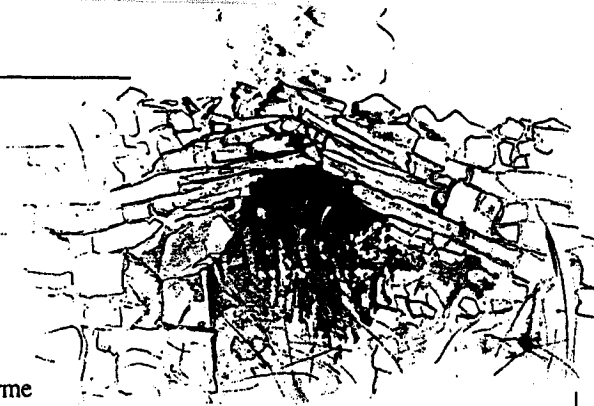
le causse...>>

Témoignage.
Le causse de Martel est le plus secret du Quercy. André, 90 ans, y a passé sa vie. En son nom, Jacques Maigne, son neveu, en parcourt les lieux clefs.

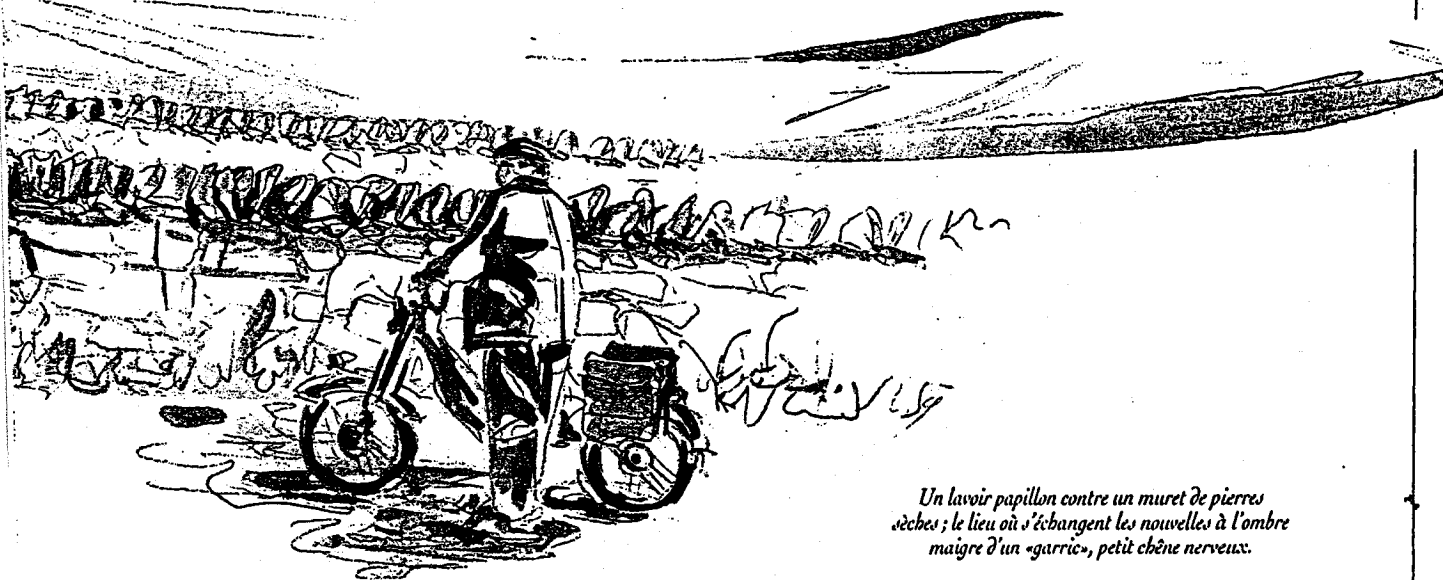


J'ai 90 ans, je suis chez moi, dans la ferme où je suis né, là où ont vu le jour mon père et mon grand-père, dans ce hameau de Brouillac, proche de l'Hôpital-Saint-Jean, au cœur du causse de Martel, qui a balisé ma vie, et je suis au bout de la route, voilà tout. Jacques, je suis content que tu sois venu me saluer une dernière fois, moi André, de Brouillac, héritier d'une civilisation qui s'éteint jour après jour. J'ai vécu comme vivaient mes aïeux et j'ai aimé ma vie, j'ai aimé cette terre. Pour moi, avec moi, refais donc le voyage, reprends le fil, tu verras, ça en vaut la peine, car on est dans un repli profond de la France des campagnes, celle d'avant, celle de toujours. Le causse, ici, il ondule en secret dans un mouchoir de poche, et se modifie sans cesse, de coteaux en combes, de bois de chênes secs et rêches en vallons ruisselants d'eau. C'est l'aube du Sud, cette terre, une porte du Midi enclavée comme une île aux confins de la Corrèze et qui vient buter sur la rivière Espérance, la Dordogne. Tu dois partir de Martel, notre capitale, notre chef-lieu, et t'imprégner de la force des pierres. Oui, la pierre. Ici, elle est partout, elle affleure dans nos champs, elle délimite nos territoires, elle a sculpté nos maisons, nos granges, nos églises, nos bergeries ou nos abris primitifs – les gariottes – qui renvoient à ces bâtisses de pierres sèches qu'on retrouve dans la garrigue languedocienne ou en Provence. C'est ainsi, notre causse est un pays de pierre, tordue, trouée, grise ou claire, et les grands bois qui courent d'un vallon à l'autre et cimentent les combes qu'on a pu préserver au fil des générations ne connaissent que "lou garric", ce petit chêne sec et nerveux, ou les noyers. Ces arbres-là ont résisté à tout, au froid, à la sécheresse, aux tempêtes, et ils sont nos totems, nos miroirs. Grâce aux noix ou aux truffes on a pu survivre, car c'était le seul moyen de rentrer un peu d'argent frais, et, pour le reste, on élevait des bêtes, des moutons, surtout, et quelques chèvres pour nos fromages.

Oui, Martel, c'est notre ville, si l'on peut dire, et il faut voir son marché du samedi, sous la halle du XVIII^e siècle, à l'ombre du palais de la Raymondie, l'ancienne résidence des vicomtes de Turenne. C'est beau, Martel, c'est un lieu qui a de la force, du souffle, et, la nuit, c'est même un peu étrange. Ce gros bourg, je crois qu'il ressemble aux gens d'ici : il a la noblesse un peu farouche ou pudique, et il faut du temps pour en saisir la profondeur. Fais un saut jusqu'à l'église, pour admirer le vitrail du XV^e siècle qui surplombe le chœur, perds-toi dans les ruelles, ou jette un coup d'œil au petit musée gal-

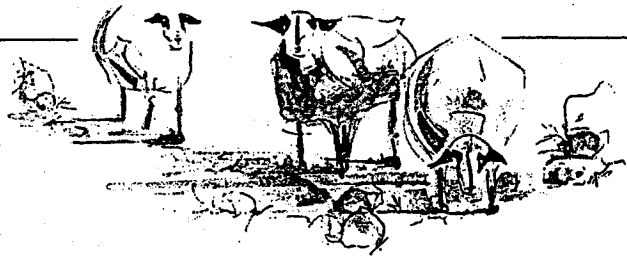


Entrée d'une bergerie en pierre ; elles jalonnent le causse aride comme autant de repères.



Un lavoir papillon contre un muret de pierres sèches ; le lieu où s'échangent les nouvelles à l'ombre maigre d'un «garric», petit chêne nerveux.

C'est beau Martel, c'est un lieu qui a de la force, du souffle et qui ressemble aux gens d'ici



*Les élégants
moutons à lunettes
noires ont permis
la survie de
générations de gens
du causse.*

► lo-romain des fouilles d'Uxellodunum, siège de la dernière bataille de Jules César. Tu verras, il y a une qualité de silence, d'intimité, et ce sentiment que, malgré le tourisme ou les accélérations du temps, on est encore sur d'autres rythmes, d'autres points de repère, comme sur un fil. Martel, c'est là où on portait nos truffes, des paniers de truffes qu'on cherchait avec nos chiens. Tous ces chiens que j'ai dressés, élevés, autant pour les truffes que pour garder les brebis... Tu te souviens de Bobby ? C'était un champion, une merveille, qui me regroupait cent bêtes en deux minutes à Combe-Ronzière, cet endroit que tu aimes tant. J'ai eu la passion des chiens, c'est vrai, et ils me l'ont bien rendue. Les bêtes, c'était ma vie, ma manière à moi de dialoguer avec le causse, avec la terre, avec le ciel...



*La maison Fabri, au
centre du bourg de Martel, qui
doit son nom à Charles.*

Près de Martel, vois le père Castagné qui a remonté un étonnant moulin à huile de noix et, si tu aimes ça, en direction de Figeac, il y a aussi la collection de reptiles de François Gouyoux, un fou du Mexique, qui rêve de jumeler Martel et Tequila ! N'oublie pas, non plus, de faire le circuit à bord du petit train entre Martel et Saint-Denis ; ils ont fait venir une loco à vapeur de Pologne, et ça vaut le coup d'œil. Après, tu dois aller à Creysse, au bord de la Dordogne, et puis rejoindre Gluges par la petite route coincée entre la falaise et la rivière. Superbe. Au cimetière de Gluges, il y a une église semi-troglodyte médiévale, belle, insolite, qu'on promet de restaurer depuis des lustres. Continue à te perdre, choisis les routes de traverse, comme cette D 11 qui remonte jusqu'à Strenquels, Saint-Palavy et Saillac. L'église romane de Saillac et son tympan polychrome, c'est un joyau du XII^e siècle, une oasis de silence, de quiétude, et, dans la campagne, les fermes de pierre claire sont plus belles encore. Enfonce-toi dans les sous-bois, imprègne-toi de ces paysages intacts, dessinés par la main des hommes, par le travail des hommes, et puis file jusqu'à Collonges, le village taillé dans la pierre rouge, rouge griotte, et qui est un lieu magique, un peu étouffé par le tourisme. Je préfère l'élégance un peu austère de Turenne, dont le château embrasse tout le causse et qui fut le siège de l'une des vicomtés les plus puissantes de France.

Ensuite, file jusqu'à Cressensac, en te glissant sous la nouvelle autoroute qui nous a rapproché de Brive et de Souillac, fais halte à Cuzance et redescends vers Martel. Là, en reprenant la direction des Quatre-Routes, engage-toi sur la gauche vers l'Hôpital-Saint-Jean, c'est la D 23 je crois, qui longe le ruisseau de la Doue, puis le Rionet. Une route magique, secrète, la plus belle de toutes celles qui tournoient dans le causse, une route qui se perd vers les hameaux de Murel, Paunac, Murat, frôle la belle église de Lasvaux, se hisse sur le coteau qui sert de promontoire à l'Hôpital-Saint-Jean, puis se dérobe jusqu'à l'écrin vert et apaisé de Sarrazac, village intact, lové autour de sa somptueuse église romane. Brouillac est tout près, avec les bergeries, la vieille grange aux vaches, et puis ma maison, notre maison. Tout a changé, tout, mes terres sont maintenant cultivées par les frères Foucher, des Bories, on ne trouve pratiquement plus une truffe et j'ai vendu mes dernières chèvres il y a longtemps ; ils sont même en train de bâtir un grand centre de vacances à l'Hôpital. Je sais bien qu'avec moi, c'est toute une époque qui s'efface, mais le décor, lui, n'a pas bougé, il n'a pas bougé d'un pouce. Sors, sors de la maison et parcours les bois de chênes, admire les grands noyers en contrebas, touche la pierre des chemins et des granges, respire l'air et la lumière de Combe-Ronzière, écoute le cri des geais. Je n'ai rien d'autre à transmettre, juste cette mémoire, une manière d'être et la force d'une terre, la terre de mes ancêtres.» ■

Jacques Maigne

(André Maigne, mon oncle, est né à Brouillac, en 1912, et s'est éteint le 24 avril dernier)

Un faux Goncourt dans le Quercy

Paul Pavlowitch habite le causse depuis trente ans. Il fut cet Emile Ajar qui obtint le prix Goncourt pour «La Vie devant soi» (1975). Pourtant, signataire de complaisance, il n'était que le neveu de Romain Gary, véritable auteur du roman. La supercherie déclencha une tempête médiatique. Romancier, Paul est l'observateur du temps qui passe sur le causse. Bourlingueur depuis l'enfance, mais Quercynois de choix et d'esprit, il ne se contente pas de ressasser les légendes du plateau. Dans «Victor» et le récent «Céline» (Fayard), il dresse l'histoire des «riens du tout». Il a trouvé dans un coffret des dizaines de lettres de Victor, ce paysan qui, en 1914, crapahute à la cote



Christine Henricot

147, entre Reims et Verdun : «Un petit pays qui devint champ de bataille, abattoir permanent pour ceux du Midi, et particulièrement de Cessac (son village), un lieu de tueries jusqu'à la fin de la guerre.» Infatigable dépouilleur d'archives, l'écrivain-enquêteur restitue le sort de ce soldat blessé, déraciné, réduit à rien, qui retrouve sa petite place dans le destin immobile du causse. A. D.

2 La gastronomie, voilà, à quelques variantes près, un langage commun au Périgord et au Quercy, qui se retrouvent de fait reliés au grand ensemble du Sud-Ouest. Ici, on sait et on aime manger, d'abord parce qu'on a gardé en mémoire le temps, pas si éloigné, où l'on se nourrissait de peu et où les vrais et bons repas étaient réservés aux grands moments de la vie : mariages, baptêmes, vendanges, moissons... Ces jours-là, dans les campagnes les plus reculées, on voyait beau et grand, et les femmes, toutes générations mêlées, rivalisaient de savoir-faire et de talent.

Soupe trempée de pain et chabrot (vin rouge mêlé au bouillon, bu à même l'assiette-calot), charcuteries, foie gras, salade à l'huile de noix, omelette aux truffes, haricots verts du jardin ou poêlée de morilles, girolles ou cèpes généreusement aillés, agneau, chevreau ou poulet de la basse-cour, confits d'oie ou de canard, gibier selon la saison (lièvre, perdreau, palombe), parfois quelque poisson pêché dans la rivière voisine, écrevisses ou cuisses de grenouilles, fromage de chèvre (le cabecou lotois), tartes aux pommes, gâteaux de noix ou omelette flambée à la vieille pru-

ne, le tout arrosé de ratafia (apéritif à base de vin et d'eau-de-vie), de « piquette » maison et de belles rasades de marc de raisin ou d'alcool de prune. Hormis les condiments de base, la farine et parfois le pain, les hôtes de ces ripailles savoureuses n'achetaient rien et puisaient dans leurs réserves. C'était la règle, dictée par l'économie, mais aussi par un attachement profond à cette aurtarie vécue comme une forme de liberté.

Le repas était d'abord un rituel convivial et identitaire, une mise en scène des fruits de la terre et du travail. Et c'est bien ce patrimoine qui se perpétue aujourd'hui et irrigue toujours l'art culinaire du Quercy et du Périgord. Mais attention aux (pâles) imitations ou aux falsifications.

Outre les restaurants haut de gamme, susceptibles de vous servir des moules de bouchot au jus de noix en guise de spécialité du cru (authentique !), les vraies auberges qui pratiquent l'art de la table à l'ancienne (en refusant, par exemple, les conserves industrielles) se font rares. En fait, c'est encore au hasard des maisons, dans les familles, que survit la tradition et se renouvelle le miracle du goût, de cette saveur sans égale que certains recherchent depuis l'enfance.

Jacques Maigne

Adresses saluaires

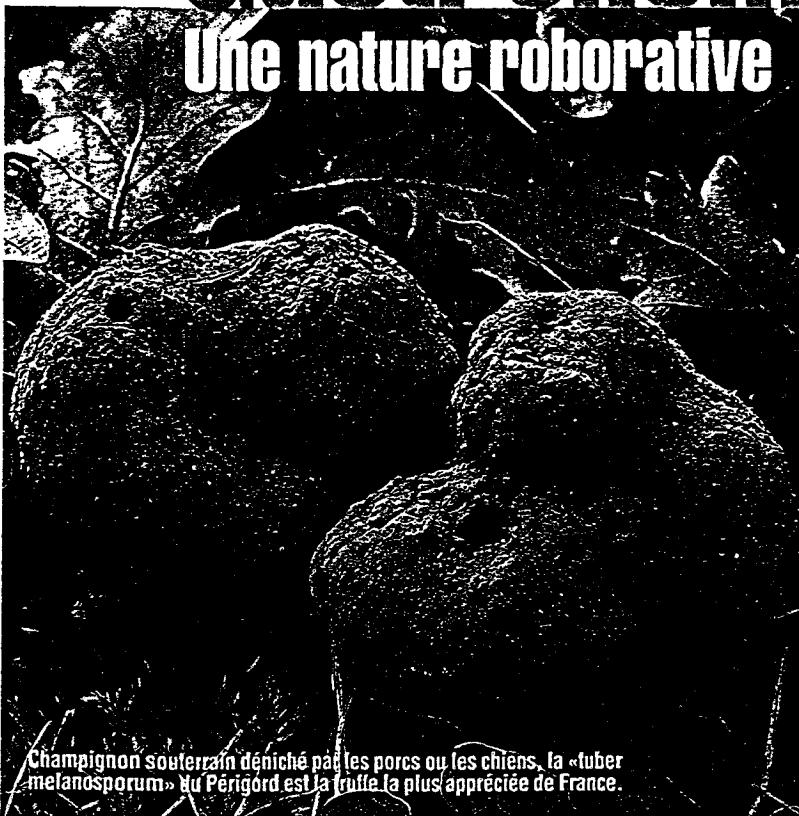
On retiendra, au sommet, Le Centenaire, aux Eyzies, où le chef Roland Mazère fait toujours merveille (tél. : 05 53 06 68 68), le château de la Treyne, à Lacave, dans le Lot, où explose le jeune Stéphane Andrieux (tél. : 05 65 27 60 60), et Le Gindreau, à Saint-Médard, au nord-ouest de Cahors (tél. : 05 65 36 22 27).

COUP DE CŒUR

Hors institutions, il existe des auberges modestes et généreuses, d'une authenticité irréprochable. En voici deux, testées avec émotion : La Bonne Famille, à Sarrazac, canton de Martel, dans le Lot, pour l'huile confite au poivre vert (tél. : 05 65 37 70 38), et la ferme-auberge Le Bareil, à La Chapelle-Aubareil, près de Sarlat, où le rapport qualité-prix est proprement sidérant (tél. : 05 53 50 74 28).

Gastronomie

Une nature roborative



Champignon souterrain déniché par les porcs ou les chiens, la « tuber melanosporum » du Périgord est la truffe la plus appréciée de France.

Cèpes, morilles, truffes font toujours leurs nids dans les omelettes, les confits et les gibiers

APPENDIX B

Black Périgord

by Julia Wilkinson

JULIA WILKINSON

* * *

Black Périgord

*In a region of truffles and foie gras, they still talk
about the Hundred Years War.*

IN THE LAND CALLED PÉRIGORD NOIR IN SOUTHWEST FRANCE, there is a village that I know well. No one can say for sure where Black Périgord begins and ends, but its pulse beats fastest in the triangle between the great Dordogne river and its tributary to the north, the Vézère.

My village lies not on the more famous, open-hearted Dordogne, but on the Vézère, deep and narrow, dark and wooded, lined with limestone rock shelters. There are more prehistoric sites here, between Montignac and Les Eyzies, than almost anywhere else in the world. That knowledge has blurred the people's sense of time: secrets, myths, and legends from centuries past merge into strange history in the Vézère Valley, as black a part of Périgord as you can ever find.

Périgord is an old Celtic name, not as well-known among tourists as the new term for the region, Dordogne. But no one in my village would dream of calling themselves "Dordognais." They are true "Périgourdins" from the nation of Gascons south of the Pyrénées: a brave, expressive people, warm-hearted and always hospitable.

"Of course," says Monsieur Estardier, the unofficial *Monseigneur*

and wise man of the village, "it is possible we may have some English blood, too. For a while, during the war, the entire Périgord region was in English hands."

"Oh? I didn't realize..."

"Ah, mademoiselle, pardon. It was before your time. I refer to the Hundred Years War. In the 14th century."

Ah, of course, The War.

We always make a point of seeing Monsieur Estardier first when we arrive. In the more than twenty years we have owned a cottage in the hills above the village, we have learnt how delicate is the fabric of relations in a place where nearly everyone is related and where customs are carefully honored. It was many years before we felt we were accepted.

The village itself is small and very old, with narrow, medieval lanes still hugging the wall of a Renaissance château, and creeping out into one main street that for years has hosted nothing more than a post-office, grocery store, butcher, baker, and two small *auberges*. The fine Romanesque church lies at the very edge of the Vézère.

It's by the rich meadow along the river, away from the village, that Monsieur Estardier lives. His farmhouse is typical of the area: a huge, old place made from the golden limestone that gives the Dordogne region its special colours. Russet limestone slabs called *lauzes* cover the roof. Each window has berry-red wooden shutters; summers here are fierce, but air-conditioners would be considered an appalling and unnecessary indulgence. More important is the cellar on

The Dordogne is not for the trend-setter or the action-seeker. It is a timeless place, charged with history. You can feel the past in the mysterious dark beauty of the landscapes and in the currents of the rivers. Eleanor of Aquitaine married Henry Plantagenet here and set off the chain of intrigues that led to the Hundred Years War. Richard Lion-Heart roamed these hills, and the resistance fighters of the Second World War hid in these forests. I felt grace to live, even for a brief time, in the security of such solid tradition and among so much beauty.

—Phyllis Raphael, "An American in Périgord," *Vogue*

ground-floor barn, where vegetables, animals, farm tools, preserves, and wine can be kept. And most important is the kitchen, on the first story, accessible by outside stone steps, and the first room you enter. This is the heart of the house, where one of the finest regional cuisines of France is created, and where family and friends gather to talk, eat, and drink.

"*Entrez! Entrez!*"

Madame Estardier bustles us inside, sits us down on the long wooden benches by the long, oak table, and quickly brings out apéritifs. Pernod—or *eau de vie* if they can take it at this hour—for the men. Sweet nut wine for the women. Little biscuits to nibble. "*Eh bien!*" says Monsieur softly, his round face breaking into a smile that reveals a row of gleaming golden teeth. "So! How are you? How have you been? How is all the family?"

We talk of this and that, of children and grandchildren, births, marriages, and deaths, as people do in the country. We come to the weather. Madame throws up her hands.

"Oh, what a winter that has passed! Snow in April! Such a thing is unheard of. We live like cattle, hardly able to get out at all. *C'était terrible, terrible!*"

In her excitement, Madame begins to slip into the local patois, the ancient *languue d'oc*, halfway between French and Spanish, used in the Middle Ages and by the greatest troubadours in French history. You don't often hear *languue d'oc* these days, but when you do, the rich sound is unmistakable and, to all but the true Périgourdiens, totally incomprehensible.

But we understand Monsieur Estardier well enough. He turns the conversation to happier topics. The tobacco crop is doing well; the vines, too. It'll soon be time to kill the geese and look for *cèpe* mushrooms. "Ah, madame," Estardier turns to my mother, "I know you like them. I will bring you a basket. And walnuts, too, of course, when they are ready. Our walnuts should be excellent this year."

A pause. "And in England," Monsieur Estardier asks quizzically, "do you have nuts?"

The Dordogne region produces more walnuts than anywhere else in France. The Périgourdiens cook (and dress salads) with wal-

nut oil, make wine from walnut leaves, and use the fresh nuts as one of the most characteristic ingredients of *la nourriture périgour-dine*. Other local culinary treats are *cèpes* (the name comes from the patois for the large berets worn by the men) and *trompette-des-morts* mushrooms. But the most famous ingredient in Périgord cooking must surely be the truffle, the "black diamond of Périgord."

No one knows why this strange subterranean tuber attaches itself to the roots of only certain oak trees. But everyone in our village insists that their method of finding truffles is the best: look out for the rust-red midges hovering over the ground, says Estardier. Get a pig to snuffle them out, says Malery. No!—pigs eat the truffles! exclaims Manouvrier. Use a dog. Buy them in the Sarlat market in December, laughs Jardel. Or ask Estardier, whispers Gonzales.

Gonzales lives up the road from Estardier. His Spanish blood has given him an unpredictable, fiery temperament. But his wife—dark, small and round—always wears a smile. "Come in and have an aperitif! Some nut wine perhaps? No? What can I offer you—do you want to buy some pâté, confits, *foie gras*?"

Madame Gonzales makes the best *brou de noix* in the village; and some of the best goose and duck preserves and the richest liver pâtés in Périgord. Her barn below the house contains a secret horde of tinned and fresh *foie gras*, and preserves of goose and duck in the great jars of lard. Sometimes, she will take them to sell in the local markets: Montignac on Wednesdays, Sarlat on Saturdays (and at the *marché aux gras* before Christmas), together with baskets of fresh vegetables grown in her back garden.

It takes only a taste of Madame's *pâté de foie gras* to understand why this rich specialty has made Périgord famous among gourmets throughout the world, and why a certain Reverend Sydney Smith

described his idea of heaven as "eating *pâté de foie gras* to the sound of trumpets."

The method of making *foie gras*—force-feeding



Truffles

geese and ducks to fatten their livers—is still done by hand, the old, traditional way, by many women in the village.

"*Ah, on est cruel, n'est-ce pas?*"

laughs Gonzales's neighbour, Madame Malery, as I grimace at her forcing ground maize down a duck's throat. "*Mais!*" she cries, "*le goût est si bien!*" It tastes so good!

The Malerys are our closest, oldest friends in the village. They never seem to change, though Camille has long ago retired from his work as a carpenter. When we first arrived, he made us a solid wooden kitchen table. We woke one morning to find it outside our door; he had brought it from half a mile away, carrying it up the hill on his back. Now Camille stays at home and makes his wine, picking the grapes at the end of September and mixing them with sugar in huge wooden barrels in the cellar. After a week, the smell is so strong you can hardly enter.

Her apron splattered with walnut oil or goose fat, her face red and flustered, Marie-Louise Malery is nearly always cooking. But everything stops for guests. Ricketty wooden chairs are pulled out and Camille gets the drinks: aperitifs for us, wine for him. An old grandfather clock, made in nearby Montignac, chimes the hour—twice every hour! Périgourds have a habit of forgetting the time.

Marie-Louise is garrulous; Camille warm-hearted but shy. During the war (the "other" war that is so often mentioned here: the Second World War), Marie-Louise's first husband was killed, and Camille was captured and sent to Germany for four years. The war left many scars in this part of France, where the Resistance was

France is not one society then but many societies.... Of all these societies, the village is the most basic, the smallest in size, and the oldest—pre-dating by far either the church or the feudal system. As a unit, the village had its own territory, its own collective property (the jealously-watched and defended commonaux). Economically, it was virtually self-sufficient. It had its own customs, festivals, songs, its own way of speech which was not necessarily the same as that of the next village. It had its own assembly, its elected officers with titles that varied (mayors, syndics, consuls), its own legal identity.

—Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France*, translated by Siân Reynolds

strong. Close to the Malery's house is a memorial plaque—typical of many in the region—to "*Victimes de la Barbarie Nazie 29 June 1944.*" Someone still leaves flowers there.

Camille is a die-hard Périgourdin. His beret hardly ever leaves his head, and his patois is so strong that Marie-Louise has to act as interpreter. When we join the Malerys for one of their family banquets, Camille leaves the talking—and the fine wines—to his ex-trovert son-in-law, Jean-Marc. For himself, he is content with his soup and bread and rough red wine—all of which come together when he stirs a little wine into the last of his soup, picks up his bowl and drinks the dregs. Marie-Louise looks on disapprovingly.

But she is too busy talking to stop him. The village gossip is all about the wedding of the Parisian girl, whose mother owns the old garrison tower next to the chateau.

"Two hundred guests have been invited!" exclaims Marie-Louise, as she serves us *pâté aux truffes*. "And 3,000 white paper flowers have been made to decorate the trees outside the church and in the home. Can you imagine the cost of this? The wedding feast alone..."

The *pâté* finished, a plate of melon slices appears. Jean-Marc opens another bottle of wine, "A Bergerac," he says loudly, "crisp, dry, white. One of the region's best wines, I think, though the Romans preferred Cahors."

"Of course, there will be musicians outside the church," continues Marie-Louise, "brought all the way from Périgueux. And everyone in the village has been invited to drink champagne with the newlyweds after the service. You must come, too! I invite you! If only to see *les belles robes*..."

She brings out the next dish—*tour farci*, stuffed goose neck—an old regional specialty rarely served in restaurants. Jean-Marc produces a bottle of Pécharmant, which he labels as "rich, red—you've never heard of it? Quick! Finish the Bergerac. Try it!"

We eat and drink and talk for hours: the next dish is *petits pois* then guinea-fowl and walnut-oiled salad with another bottle of Pécharmant. The conversation turns to *la chasse*, the hunt, every Périgourdin's passion (though there is little left to shoot), to the

forests of Périgord Noir where wild boar once roamed, and to the glory that was once Languedoc and Aquitaine.

Finally, a plate of cheeses signals the start of the end of the meal: a huge apple tart, with Jean-Marc's *pièce de résistance*, a sweet 1959 Monbazillac—"ah, this is truly the finest of wines! The best-kept secret of Périgord!"—coffee, Armagnac, and pink champagne. We stagger up the hill, the sound of crickets and cicadas throbbing in our heads.

Given such hospitality, we find it hard to venture far beyond our village. It has taken us years to see even a little of the treasures that exist, tempted as we were at every stop, from *apéritifs* at the Malery's or plum wine at Madame Barrière's in the heart of the village, to picnics by the river and simple walks in meadows of willows and wild orchids.

Sometimes we stop to see old Jardel (young Jardel is the village electrician) making baskets in his yard by the chateau. He grumbles jovially about his slow fingers and aching limbs: "*Ah, je suis né trop tôt*."—I was born too soon. It's only later that we ponder the curious poetry of what he has said.

But we always make it to Montignac market on Wednesday, to wander among stalls of strawberries or *cèpes*, goat's cheese, and Périgord honey, *pâté* and peaches, meat, fish, and vegetables. On the way back, we visit the trout farm at Plazac. The same old man has served us for years, hobbling out, back bent, apologizing for the smallness of the

That evening we sat and rather drowsily talked about the hunt: our natural sorrow and empathy for the stag that all but the most moronic hunter feels for his quarry, but also our sympathy for the hounds, also noble beasts in whose blood runs this ancient urge for the quarry—dogs that had begun anyway as predators and had their instincts refined by man to hunt a particular beast, just as a good bird dog singles out his grouse. The sport is nearly a millennium old in France and in some parts of the world dates back five millennia, as in the stele I had seen in a museum of the great Abyssinian lion dogs upon their own quarry. There is no apology now for hunting except that the desire is in us.

—Jim Harrison, *Just Before Dark*:
Collected Nonfiction

trout. "I have been ill—my heart, my blood, my lungs—everything!" He potters off to get his net. "Ah yes, I am getting old...I have grown old too quickly."

But he is still agile with the net, tapping the water to drive the trout to one end of the narrow channel, plunging the net in suddenly to catch our four fish, catching one, two and yet another two fish. "Take five," he says, "for the fourth is very small." And he nods his head and hobbles away.

Growing old comes as a sad surprise to the Périgourdin. How can it be otherwise in a land where man has lived so long; where every farmer digs up Stone Age flints in his fields and every child scrambles in the dwellings of cavemen? I have done it myself, as a child, at Castlemerle, an area of dense population in Palaeolithic times, yet better known now among the locals as the site of their favorite restaurant.

But the most famous prehistoric site is Lascaux Cave near Montignac, with its 15,000-year old paintings (though the original cave is closed to the public, there's an excellent facsimile) and the dozens of *grottes* and rock shelters around Les Eyzies. The best of them is Font de Gaume, with its extraordinary polychrome mammoths, bison, reindeer, and horses.

Atmosphere is all in Périgord Noir. Along the Vézère, passing the fairy-tale chateaux of Losse, Belcayre, and Clérans, it is sparkling and brilliant. The bastions and castles of the Dordogne at Domme, Beynac, Castelnaud, or Montfort are grander by far. But it's Périgord's own dark, deep atmosphere that has always drawn me: the ruins of Château de l'Herm with its murderous history or the awesome remains of Château de Commarque, reaching down through forest-tangled stones, to a troglodyte fort and a cave with Magdalenian engravings.

In the woods around Montignac there is the sombre, decaying bastion of Coulonges which once belonged to the Knights of the Order of St. John, and not far away, tucked in a gentle valley, the astonishing fortified church of St-Armand de Coly, once the home of 200 Augustinian monks.

There are *grandes randonnées*—marked footpaths—everywhere, to

lead you to such discoveries; roads with as many curving *cingles* as the river itself or sometimes simply tracks—like the one I took once to the elegant Château de Puymartin—through pine forests carpeted with giant cones, purple heather, and sloe bushes.

The region's most popular atmosphere is in Sarlat, center of Périgord Noir. Its old cobbled streets and golden-stoned Renaissance houses with their sculptured doorways and stairways, mullioned windows, turrets and bell towers are the delight of every visitor. In summer, the place is so full of English tourists that it's almost as if the 1360 Treaty of Brétigny (which gave Périgord to the English crown) had never been superseded. The Saturday market in Goose Square is an event that can't be missed, with its street musicians, jewellery-sellers and profusion of Périgourdin produce.

"Ah, but the December market is better," says Madame Malery. "That's when the best truffles and *foie gras* are sold. Come then, come back for the market!"

When we celebrated twenty years of living above the village in the Valley of the Vézère, we had a dinner under the lime tree and invited all our friends: Estardiers, Malerys, Gonzales, Manouvriers, Barrières, Jardels.

They came dressed in their best, standing nervously at first, refusing drinks. But once we all sat down to eat, the candlelight flickering on the tables, the atmosphere relaxed and the wine began to flow. Someone sang a snippet of an old Périgourdin song. Madame Barrière, bright red spots on her wrinkled cheeks, started to hum.

"Did you ever dance *la bourrée*, madame?" asked a guest from Bordeaux.

"Ah yes, indeed, monsieur!" cried Madame with delight, who tells us of the barrel-organs, the hurdy-gurdies, and *la bourrée*, which she would dance all night.

Monsieur Barrière smiled. In those days, he told me, he was a hairdresser, his father a basket-maker. He has lived all his life in the village. Oh yes, times have changed. There was more comradeship and togetherness then. Even more than now, oh yes!

The evening grew lively, everyone talking at once. For hours we sat under the lime tree until gradually a calm descended. "Listen to

the crickets!" murmured Madame Barrière in a moment of silence. "We don't have those in the village."

They all left together, at the same time, in a flurry of kissing cheeks and shaking hands. For a long time afterwards, we could hear voices in the valley and see lights flickering by the river. And then the village fell asleep, and even the crickets were quiet.

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